SEND DATA IN ENGLAND
Exploration of the latest SEND data

Attention in autism:
Understanding how attention relates to young people with autism.

Challenges of remote learning:
A tutoring agency’s perspective.
WHITEBOARD ROOM

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The Whiteboard Room has a range of interactive resources for students with severe and profound learning difficulties. Although targeting interactive whiteboards most resources are equally useful at the desktop.

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EQUALS is committed to improving the lives of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities through supporting high quality education.

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FORMAL CURRICULUM

- Non key stage specific, so that pupils work at levels appropriate to their developmental stage
- Each licence covers an entire school/centre thus affording all teachers easy access to these curriculum schemes of work

The Equals' Formal Curriculum is supported by MAPP (Formal) a brand new and bespoke assessment schema.

Prices start from £49+VAT per scheme of work

For pupils engaged in subject specific learning but working consistently and over time below age expected levels
Welcome to the September 2020 edition of nasen Connect.

This edition comes at a time of ongoing turbulence for us all. Those working in and around schools have played a pivotal role in sustaining the educational offer for learners with SEND. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who has supported learners with SEND during these strange times.

For the third year running, nasen is collaborating with Bath Spa University to conduct the National SENCO Workforce Survey. This is your opportunity to share your experiences and to help shape priorities at a national level. If you haven’t already, I would encourage you to lend 15 minutes of your time to complete the survey https://bathspa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/sencosurvey

Here at nasen, we are always thinking about what more we can do to ensure that learners with SEND have access to as good an educational experience as those without SEND. As part of this commitment, I am delighted to share the news that from January 2021, nasen membership will be free for everybody in the UK. By removing the financial barrier to membership, I hope that every school can benefit from the resources and support that nasen has to offer.

Alongside this, we will also be launching a suite of new paid-for SEND services: the SEND CPDL Annual Webinar Pass, an exclusive SENCO Support Service and the nasen Publication Subscription. You can find out more on page six.

Follow Adam on Twitter: @AdamBoddison
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Thank you all, as members of nasen, for everything you do for children and young people with SEND. Your work is very much appreciated.

PROFESSOR ADAM BODDISON,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NASEN
After almost 30 years of supporting and championing those working with, and for, children and young people with SEND and learning differences, in January we will be making nasen membership free for everyone in the UK.

This exciting change to membership forms part of our commitment to ensuring that our expertise in SEND is available to every school and setting.

Since the early 1990s, nasen has proudly worked in partnership with more than 7,000 schools and settings and 25,000 education practitioners to break down the barriers that prevent children and young people from participating in education and ensure they are able to thrive.

After months of uncertainty and disruption in 2020, it is more important now than ever that every part of the education workforce is equipped to understand, identify and support those with SEND and learning differences.

We want to ensure that our work helps make a difference and improves outcomes for children and young people across Early Years, schools, post-16 and wider settings. By opening access to our membership, we can contribute to the national debate together and champion the SEND workforce – a workforce nasen is proud to represent.

What do these changes mean for you?
If you have Bronze, Silver or Gold Membership, you will continue to be able to access your current subscription until 31 December 2020. Following this, your subscription will automatically transfer over to a free individual membership.

From January onwards, you will benefit from:

- Access to the most up-to-date knowledge and support rooted in research and evidence-informed best practice through our fast-growing SEND community
- Exclusive online access to nasen Connect magazine (six issues a year), for up-to-date advice, analysis and opinions on national SEND developments
- Information at your fingertips through our bundle of e-communications including a weekly update of topical resources and articles, resource news blasts, a sector newsflash featuring policy news and DfE updates, and a monthly newsletter featuring news, discounts on training and CPD
- Updates from the Whole School SEND Consortium, hosted by nasen. Via the Whole School SEND Community of Practice, you can access free resources, research and CPDL training programme including webinars
- In addition, you can access attractive partner discounts and incentives, use your voice to ‘shape your nasen’ and influence government policy alongside full use of our comprehensive SEND Gateway a one-stop-shop for all things SEND.

In addition to this free membership package, nasen will continue to lead targeted programmes and projects, offering a structured programme of professional development, accredited training and conferences.

Our new package of SEND services includes:

- The SEND CPDL Annual Webinar Pass (available NOW) – guaranteeing a minimum of 15 webinars per academic year on essential SEND topics, such as ‘The Identification of SEN Post Lockdown’. Cost: £200 per annum – less than £14 per seminar.
- An exclusive SENCO Support Service (from January 2021) – supporting anyone in a SENCO role from Early Years to FE; for answering questions or tackling issues around SEND in education. Cost: £200 per annum.
- The nasen Publication Subscription (from January 2021) – encompassing online access to three well-established, respected SEND journals, plus hard copies of nasen Connect magazine. Cost: £85 per annum.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support and we will work collaboratively with you as we take forward these changes in the months ahead.

For more detailed information and FAQs, please visit www.nasen.org.uk/membership.html or email membership@nasen.org.uk

AN EXCITING DEVELOPMENT FOR 2021:
NASEN MEMBERSHIP WILL SOON BE FREE FOR EVERYONE.
Have Your Say... 

We would love to hear from you so please send any comments or ‘letters’ to nasenconnect@nasen.org.uk
In case your letter is chosen for publication, please do include your name and setting.
Don’t forget, you can ‘Have Your Say’ via Facebook and Twitter too.

Have Your Say gives you, the reader, a forum to share your thoughts and opinions about current issues in the world of education and SEND. It is also the place to share your reactions to, and thoughts about, what you have read in previous editions of nasen Connect.

Moving forward

I sincerely hope that the Government, Ofsted and the Local Authorities (LAs) take the Covid-19 pandemic as a brilliant opportunity to take a real look at our education system with regard to inclusion, and think about what should be put in place to meet the needs of all children and young people including those with SEND. There has been much that has been put in place due to the pandemic that has been good: all the amazing CPD has been put online and been so easily accessible, virtual meetings have taken place without the need for travel and wonderful lessons have been created as part of an online curriculum. It just shows, ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ as they say!

Assistant Headteacher, Wiltshire

Reflections of a SENCO

I would just like to say how much I enjoyed the article from Claire Race which appeared in the July edition. It was good to hear someone acknowledge that, as professionals, teachers and SENCOs certainly do their best for the children and young people in their care and that we need to make sure that we acknowledge this ourselves. As she said in the article, we can spend a great deal of time second-guessing and doubting ourselves. At the end of the day, we are all in the job to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and we need to have faith in our abilities to do so.

Secondary SENCO, London

Editor: It certainly was a heartfelt article. As you say, it is important that we recognise that despite the challenges that we face, not just in these particularly challenging times, but also before Covid-19, we all do our best and that we have knowledge (including of our children and young people and professional networks) and experience to draw on to help make sure that provision is the best it can be.

Keeping up to date

Thank you nasen for your up-to-date Covid-19 information and guidance on your website. It has been a lifetime during a time when heads, SLTs, SENCOs and teachers have been deluged with new guidance, often released on a Friday to be implemented the following Monday! As a teacher governor, I really enjoyed your ‘Governance of SEND’ webinar and found it very informative. Thank you again!

Teacher Governor, Leeds

Editor: As one of our main roles is to support professionals working with children and young people with SEND, we feel it is essential to keep them up-to-date with the latest guidance, data and government legislation. We have tried hard during the pandemic to keep everyone informed during a period of rapid change.
EEF’S FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS ON SEND IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

The attainment gap between pupils with SEND and their peers is twice as great as the gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers. However, pupils with SEND are also more than twice as likely to be eligible for free school meals.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has produced a guidance report offering five evidence-based recommendations to support pupils with SEND. It provides a good starting point for schools to review their current approach to meeting the needs of pupils with SEND and practical ideas they can implement.

They have produced a ‘summary of recommendations’ poster for your staffroom and additional tools and resources to help implement the guidance which are well worth a look.

+ To read the full guidance and access the poster and resources, go to: https://bit.ly/3ftfHva

New publication: Tomorrow’s Leaders – A World Beyond Disability

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and Council for Disabled Children have collaborated to publish ‘Tomorrow’s Leaders – A World Beyond Disability’.

This new publication profiles the achievements of over 30 inspirational young people who are leading in their communities, with ambition, hard work and dedication to improving society.

Tomorrow’s Leaders recognises the remarkable achievements of different young, disabled people, giving them a chance to share their personal stories and inspire others. Each individual describes the impact they have made, not just on their own life, but also on those around them and barriers they have overcome to succeed.

Teresa Carroll, National Head of Inclusion at the Education and Training Foundation, said: “When I talk to young disabled people, they tell me that far too often members of society focus on their disability rather than recognising their talents and aspirations – they tell me ‘they can’t see beyond the wheelchair’. We are all so much more than one characteristic and nobody wants to be defined by one part of their existence.

‘This important and inspirational publication aims to address this narrowed focus. Tomorrow’s Leaders showcases that by changing how we view disability, we open the door so that our young people can excel and make a difference to their own lives and to wider society. I encourage everyone to start seeing ‘beyond the disability’.”

+ To access the publication, go to: https://bit.ly/2U2UJhm
Wider Engagement for Making Participation Work

The Making Participation Work programme is jointly delivered by the Council for Disabled Children and KIDS and funded by the Department for Education. They are delivering a national strategy: a participatory programme with a disabled child and young people, and children and young people with special educational needs.

Making Participation Work focuses on five key elements including: scoping work on children and young people’s participation, to build a clear picture of the breadth and depth of local area engagement with children and young people.

For more information please visit https://bit.ly/35r6RvZ

DATA ON EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS
PUBLISHED BY DFE

This information, published by the Department for Education on 7 May 2020, provides data on the number of children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan in England.

It also provides data on the administration of EHC plans. Data is presented for both the caseload as at January 2020, for example number of EHC plans, and for activity during the 2019 calendar year, for example number of new EHC plans in the calendar year.

KEY STATISTICS INCLUDE:

- The total number of EHC plans has continued to increase. There were 390,100 children and young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans maintained by local authorities as of January 2020. This is an increase of 36,100 (10 per cent) from 2019. The total number of children and young people with EHC plans has increased each year since 2010.

- The number of new EHC plans made in the calendar year has also continued to increase. There were 53,900 children and young people with new EHC plans made during the 2019 calendar year. This is an increase of 10 per cent compared to 2018. The number of new EHC plans has increased each year since their introduction in 2014.

- The proportion of new plans issued within 20 weeks has remained stable. In 2019, 60.4 per cent of new EHC plans were issued within 20 weeks. This shows a small increase from 2018, when 60.1 per cent of new EHC plans were issued within the 20-week time limit.

To access the full publication please go to: https://bit.ly/303r4Ue. Also see the article on page 20.
This document, which was updated on 24 June 2020, sets out Ofsted’s consideration of how the new initial teacher education (ITE) inspection framework 2020 will enable them to fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

The PSED requires Ofsted to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

Ofsted state: “We have clarified within our inspection handbook the need for inspectors to establish the extent to which trainee teachers are prepared to be able to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language.

“Rather than assessing SEND as a stand-alone strand or focus of inspection, we have made clear within the handbook that trainees’ competence in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND must be appropriately woven in and meaningfully integrated throughout any ITE curriculum.”

To read the full consultation outcome go to: https://bit.ly/3gUsozk

A Recovery Curriculum

As mentioned on the Evidence for Learning website, “the Recovery Curriculum is an essential construct for our thinking and our planning”. The idea of a Recovery Curriculum was developed by Barry Carpenter, CBE, Professor of Mental Health in Education, Oxford Brookes University, UK and Matthew Carpenter, Principal, Baxter College, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, UK.

It is based on five levers: relationships, community, transparent curriculum, metacognition and space.

The Recovery Curriculum came about in response to the situation children and young people found themselves in because of school closures caused by Covid-19.

Barry Carpenter said: “For most children, their daily goal in going to school is not just to learn but to see their friends and to feel a sense of self-worth that only a peer group can offer. You cannot underestimate the impact of the loss of that social interaction. It is as key to their holistic development as any lesson. Human beings are fundamentally social creatures, and the brain grows in the context of meaningful human to human interaction.”

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THE DFE IS CONSULTING ON A REVISED VERSION OF THE SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS CODE

The current school admissions code means that some schools are able to reject pupils with SEND, as places can be refused on the basis of ‘challenging behaviour’, even when such behaviours may be attributable to pupils’ SEND.

There have been concerns around the numbers of children and young people with SEND without a school place, and it is hoped that the proposed changes will help to rectify this.

The aim of the proposed changes is that schools can admit pupils with SEND under Fair Access Protocols at any point in the school year. The intention is to introduce a maximum 20-day time limit for a school place to be allocated to a child where it has been agreed they will be considered under Fair Access Protocols.

The Draft School Admissions Code states: ‘Admission authorities must not refuse to admit a child thought to be potentially disruptive, or likely to exhibit challenging behaviour, on the grounds that the child is first to be assessed for special educational needs’ (para. 3.12).

Schools must also comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the requirement to put reasonable adjustments in place to support needs.

The proposed changes seem likely to have a positive impact for children and young people with SEND and we recommend that you contribute to the consultation if possible.

To access the draft School Admissions Code, go to: https://bit.ly/2CuAMqq
The consultation can be found here: https://bit.ly/2Dx3xDj

Third SENCO workload survey

The SENCO Workforce Survey, which is a collaboration between nasen and Bath Spa University, was first conducted in 2018, three years after the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

It was important to have what most of us already knew about the realities of being a SENCO, backed up by research. As well as the findings, the resulting report also made a series of recommendations.

The survey was also conducted in 2019. Now entering its third year, it is more important than ever to develop our understanding of the workload of SENCOs.

This year the effect of the Covid-19 lockdown and transition back to school this month for all pupils will be captured.

In the first instance, the survey will be open until 5 October. You do not need to have taken part in the previous two surveys and all responses are anonymous.

Complete the survey at: https://bathspa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/sencosurvey
Each year, nasen hosts an awards campaign, which looks to celebrate the achievements of individuals and organisations within the SEND sector. Each year we round off the campaign with a special banquet ceremony, which takes place in October, in central London.

Due to the current circumstances surrounding Covid-19, the decision has been taken to cancel this year’s ceremony.

Of course, it is still really important for us to ensure that all the winners get the recognition they deserve, therefore we will be moving the celebration online. This will include a video announcement of this year’s winners, a dedicated social media campaign using #nosenwinners2020 and a dedicated area for announcements on the nasen website.

All winners will also receive an award and an invite to next year’s ceremony, which will be taking place on 15 October 2021 at the WLAarf in London.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of nasen and thank everyone who has taken the time to send in a nomination for this year. We would also like to wish everyone the best of luck ahead of judging.
Oak National Academy: Developing specialist SEND content

Anne Heavey talks about Oak National Academy and how it will be developing its offer for the new academic year including specialist content for pupils with SEND.

Oak National Academy was formed by a group of around 40 school leaders and teachers in the 2020 Easter holidays. The initial offer was built at pace with lessons for the week uploaded each week. Now Oak has launched a curriculum plan for 2020/21 and is creating 10,000 lessons ready for the next academic year.

Oak National Academy does not have a separate SEND offer, as we believe that it is important to design a core offer which is as inclusive and accessible to as many children and families as possible. Our steps to inclusion provide:

1. Subtitles in lessons
2. Careful sequencing of content within and across lessons
3. Use of direct delivery and clear descriptions and pause points
4. Thoughtful design of lesson PowerPoint slides to reduce visual clutter and cater to those with visual impairments
5. British Sign Language for KS1 lessons and assemblies
6. The ability to pause and repeat content and easily re-visit previous lessons.

From the third week of Oak’s creation, our original offer for pupils who usually attend special schools was integrated under the leadership of Karen Wespieker, former Director of Operations at Driver Youth Trust.

A coalition of special schools, including many from the Specialist Teaching Schools Network created an entirely new offer across the following subject areas:

- Communication and Language
- Numeracy
- Creative Arts
- Independent Living.

We also created sessions covering physical, occupational, and speech and language therapies. The specialist offer caters to three starting points, which we have described as: Early Development, Building Understanding, and Applying Learning.

Our teachers, therapists and subject leads built this offer around their existing commitments in schools and the NHS. The scale of the task here shouldn’t be underestimated; without a National Curriculum to lean on we had to agree the language of the curriculum and the starting points before filming any content.
This was a wonderful opportunity to explore different approaches and possibilities, and then create a pragmatic plan with the time and technology constraints of filmed lessons!

We’ve been developing our content for September based on four areas of feedback from schools, families and children.

1. Releasing a full curriculum map and offer in one go would allow schools to plan how to use the resource.
2. Clear curriculum building blocks that could support and align with the school’s existing offer, would be useful.
3. Integration with virtual learning environments would make it easier to send the content home and monitor engagement.
4. Downloadable resources would enable pupils without devices and internet access to use the resource and for schools to edit them if needed.

More specific feedback on how the specialist content could be improved included:

- Target videos and resources at family members working with the child in the home to create learning activities, rather than directly to the child
- Place all Early Development content together on the site so it is easier to locate
- The creation of a new subject domain area called Physical Development and Therapy for sensory impairment
- Removing references to year groups in videos across the whole Oak curriculum so teachers can direct the right content to the child without sigma around age-related content.

The biggest shift for Oak as a result of this feedback, has been moving away from creating videos for pupils to engage with independently to creating videos and resource packs for schools and families to use at home with supporting videos explaining activities and the content to families.

We’ve worked hard to ensure that the learning activities suggested are authentic and replicable in typical home environments. No additional resources need to be purchased, and we hope that these activities will support meaningful development using every day and ordinary activities.

There is only so much a remote learning resource bank can do however. We have not created a virtual school that can fully replace every element of the school offer. For this reason, we haven’t attempted to create sp-cific content for pupils with SEN directly, as we believe that schools and families will know the appropriate path is best. We have also not attempted to create curriculum intervention activities as, again, we believe that schools are best placed to understand how to closely tailor individual interventions.

We encourage teachers and SENCOs to explore the offer we have created and use what is useful. We have heard examples of teachers mixing content from across the specialist and mainstream offer to build a personalised programme for their children.

We have also heard examples of ‘blended’ support for pupils through lessons. Some special schools have held Zoom introduction sessions on the lessons to support families to deliver it in the home. Others have held ‘online office hours’ to allow pupils and families to ask questions around misconceptions and feedback on their experience following the lessons.

This resource has been designed to support and help the system respond to Covid-19 during an unprecedented and unpredictable time. Whilst all pupils are now back at school, the possibility of local lockdowns, pupils self-isolating and a second wave loom large.

Our aim is to serve and support the sector, and we hope our contribution is useful and supports children to continue learning.

Up to the end of July, the Specialist Curriculum Content had been accessed by around **70,000** individuals.
See your brand featured in our next edition of nasen Connect!

With a print run of over 3,500, this glossy magazine is sent to all of our silver and gold members. Members can also view the publication online via the nasen website. It contains the latest news and features, including interviews with SEND professionals, practical resources and reviews of the latest products available on the market.

Advertise in this magazine from as little as £150! To find out more and to secure an advertising space call Alistair Gilbert on 01827 311 500
We continue to support our SEND learners during the Covid-19.

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In essence, we support learners from Key Stages 2 to 5 and help create pathways to further education and employment through personalised learning.

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We support learning barriers through innovative education that is accessible and affordable. We provide a holistic experience for learners with SEND and other learning difficulties.

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Inclusive values for excluded pupils: Riverside Education

In this article, the second in a two-part series, Professor Philip Garner, talks about how ‘Riverside Education’ put the principles of integrity, honesty and respect into practice to make this Alternative Provision setting effective for young people.

In the July edition of nasen Connect, I highlighted some of the exemplary practices that were apparent in supporting children and young people who are either at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools or had actually been excluded. I used as my evidence base a dataset secured from narratives with school leaders and observations from a small sample of case-study sites.

I am a strong believer in serendipity, sometimes being a helpful trigger to research activity. Out of the sample settings selected to illustrate promising features of alternative provision in England, one of them, ‘Riverside Education’, was of particular interest to me. About 10 years previously I had supervised a PhD student, Abide Zemenga, who is the both the founder and principal of Riverside. Having completed his Doctorate on ‘Fathers and Sons in Education’ whilst working in another specialist school for excluded students, Abide had acted on his commitment to ‘making a difference’ by establishing his own school (Riverside) in which he sought to reflect his values and vision.

My research identified six themes which define ‘promising practice’. Amongst these, the

PHILIP GARNER
Philip Garner is Professor of Education at Brunel University London. He has taught in mainstream and specialist schools and has also worked in teacher education for many years and undertaken research relating to SEND and Inclusion. He is also the Editor of the nasen research journal ‘Support for Learning’.

www.nasen.org.uk
The school operates in a way which reflects Abide’s key leadership drivers – the principles of integrity, honesty and respect.

The importance of ‘leadership’ was consistently mentioned as the cornerstone of effective provision. As Riverside had recently secured an ‘Outstanding’ judgment from Ofsted for its leadership and management, it seemed an ideal illustration of some of the characteristics of this theme.

Riverside Education is one of the fastest growing providers of alternative specialist education in the UK and around 8,000 students. Since 2015, the school has grown from 40 to 100 students on two sites, with plans already in place for a third one. It offers alternative education to a range of young people from 4 to 19, including many experiencing SEND. The school operates in a way which reflects Abide’s key leadership drivers – the principles of integrity, honesty and respect. These are not just words picked randomly from a virtue-signalling lexicon. Each has practical manifestations in the way that Riverside operates. For example, great emphasis is placed on the role of student voice at Riverside, this is actively encouraged across all aspects of school life including such things as student self-assessment and creating leadership roles for students.

Riverside has four staff members whose primary job is, in Abide’s words, “talking to young people and nothing else, sitting and talking and listening so to change all those negative experiences that they’ve had’.

Taking account of the views of others is a core part of the way that Abide operates as a leader. This is seen as an essential feature of the way that learning and teaching operates. Hence, a highly individualised approach is adopted, which ensures that young people who have often had very negative experiences in formal education can flourish and take charge of their own learning. This is very much a model of Abide’s observation that “…we don’t standardise an approach for all our students …we structure it according to their needs depending on their history and what experiences they have gone through”. As he says emphatically, “I’m totally onesized-fit-all approach”. As a result, the school’s curriculum is enriched in its breadth, content and diversity.

Building relationships across the entire Riverside community – i.e. students, teachers, support staff, parents, families and local businesses and services, is a further defining feature; it is viewed as an essential ingredient to successful learning. Talking to Abide and his colleagues, it is apparent that healthy relationships, built around those three words (integrity, honesty, and respect) prevail amongst all of Riverside’s stakeholders. Importantly, the strength of such relationships is best demonstrated in times of challenge, when a student has a problematic social or learning encounter. In other words, a positive relationship is not just for the good times.

Abide Zvenenga has very distinct views about what it takes to be a Riverside teacher. He wants well-qualified subject specialists of course. But there is a focus on what value is likely to be realised in appointing a new member of staff. “As an example, Abide mentions, “If I’m looking for a science teacher, I...”
work placements or follow programmes around animal care, media, construction, horticulture, music and to develop skills in other specialist areas. What is refreshing about this approach is that Riverside is seeking to highlight the importance of growing as a ‘community of professional practice’, so that all staff members broaden their knowledge and skill sets. This is a continuous strategy, not an ad hoc or incidental process. Riverside makes the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers a priority. All those directly involved with the students are either completing additional teaching qualifications to develop their teaching skills or leadership courses to strengthen their leadership skills. These inputs are informed by several non-negotiable objectives:

creating an ethos, pedagogy, and appropriate assessment to support learning for all. Abide indicated that the community of practice is enhanced by ‘Teaching and Learning Observers’ (TLOs), which he views as ‘professionally collaborative ways of assessing the quality of teaching to drive improvement’.

He stated, ‘Their main focus should be to ensure quality learning takes place; therefore, all teaching activities should be evaluated based on their impact on learning.’

Abide’s experiences as a PG student have given him an insight into the value of applied research, so that Riverside practice is based on research evidence generated within the school. Great emphasis is placed on ‘participatory action research’, which is seen as integral to the Riverside ‘learning community’. He summarises the process as follows: ‘if it’s not working you stop doing it or you change it. If it is working you look at what you’re improving, and what you can improve even more. This is what we have to do with young people at risk.’

The last word belongs to a parent, whose words are a fitting indication that Riverside is ‘making a difference’: ‘Thank you for everything. You truly are my heroes. If I could stand and shout from the rooftops, I would say how amazing you all are … for all the world to hear.’

Abide and his colleagues would say that they are just doing their job and that this is what they are there for. Moreover, he would argue that, if we care to look, there are many similar examples of settings across England, all committed to making the ‘alternative’ an exciting yet effective option.
Alex Grady, Education Officer at nasen, outlines the latest data published by the Department for Education and raises some questions and points for consideration.

Three data summaries were published by the Department for Education (DfE) over the summer term, and each contains interesting information which can broaden our understanding of the current picture of SEND in England. We will look at each and consider the implications.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:**
If you would like the opportunity to hear more about the SEN Data in particular, we will be running a webinar on 24 September ([https://bit.ly/2ZLCVah](https://bit.ly/2ZLCVah)) which you can also access through our new Annual Webinar Pass ([https://bit.ly/3fO0Dsg](https://bit.ly/3fO0Dsg)).

A recording of the webinar will be available for those who are unable to access it at this time.
‘EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS’, MAY 2020

This summary focuses specifically on Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans across the whole age range, whereas the SEN data (discussed later) focuses on schools, and so it does not include data on children and young people with EHC plans who are not in school.

There has been a 10 per cent increase in the total number of EHC plans since 2019 (up to 390,109 in 2020), following a trend of year-on-year increases in numbers since 2010.

There were 53,899 new EHC plans granted, almost half of which went to 5-10 year-olds, 23 per cent went to children under five, this being reflected in the increase in plans in non-maintained Early Years settings (up from 1,798 in 2019 to 2,024).

There has been an increase in the number of state special schools (there are now 993, up by seven since last year). There has also been a 5.3 per cent increase in the number of pupils attending state special schools, continuing a trend from 2006. This means 6,400 more pupils are attending state special schools, contributing to an increase in the average number of pupils at each state special school (up to 129, from 120 in 2019).

There has been a 10 per cent increase in the total number of EHC plans since 2019 (up to 390,109 in 2020), following a trend of year-on-year increases in numbers since 2010.

Around 60% are still completed within the 20-week timescale (despite the increase in numbers).

21% of all plans belong to those aged 16-19, and six per cent to 20-25 year-olds.

There are 12,700 children and young people classified as not receiving provision or awaiting provision, a further 8,100 are NEET (not in education, employment or training); 2,300 are ‘other’, and 2,983 are receiving ‘elective home education’.

Twenty-three per cent of requests for statutory assessment were refused, and 94 per cent of assessments resulted in a plan being granted; a quarter of mediation cases were followed by appeals to tribunal, and of these, 1,000 went to tribunal.

5.2% of all EHC plans have a personal budget in place.

You can access the data at https://bit.ly/2WJE2pk

You can access the data at https://bit.ly/2Bj203d
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN ENGLAND: JANUARY AND JULY 2020

This summarises data about SEN in schools in England and is based on information submitted for the January 2020 census; this means that some of the data are different to that in the EHCP report described above.

The data has been presented by the DfE in a different format this year i.e. as webpages rather than a PDF. This makes it easy to read and digest but the usual spreadsheets containing national and local tables are not available. This means that we have not been able to compare, for example, local authorities to see how much variation from the mean there is, or to look at the data for particular areas of need in relation to age.

1. The percentage of pupils with an EHC plan continues to increase and is up from 3.1 per cent in 2019 to 3.3 per cent of all children and young people in schools. This is a 6.5 per cent increase since, which is slightly lower than the overall increase shown in the EHCP data above because it only includes pupils in schools.

2. The number of pupils with an EHC plan has risen from 271,000 to 294,800.

3. The number and percentage of pupils at SEN Support also continues to increase and is up from 11.9 per cent in 2019 to 12.1 per cent; the number of pupils is now 1,079,000.

4. This means that overall, 13.4 per cent of all pupils in schools are classed as having SEN, which is a total of 1,373,800.

5. The most common need for EHC plans continues to be Autism Spectrum Disorder (now 30 per cent), and for SEN Support it is speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which stands at 22 per cent.

6. The percentage of pupils identified as having Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) has decreased from 10.7 per cent to 10 per cent of EHC plans and from 20.8 per cent to 19.6 per cent of SEN Support.

7. The number of pupils with SEMH needs has also increased: the percentage with an EHC plan has risen from 12.8 to 13.5 per cent and for those at SEN Support, the rise is from 17.3 per cent to 17.9 per cent.

8. There has been a large increase of EHC plans in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), whilst the overall population in PRUs has decreased: 16.4 per cent of pupils in PRUs have an EHC plan (up from 13.4 per cent) and 64.9 per cent receive SEN Support (down from 67.6 per cent).

9. 9.3 per cent of all pupils with SEN attend state-funded special schools (up from 9.1 per cent).

10. SEN Support decreases from the age of 10, where it hits a peak of 15.2 per cent, decreasing to 11.4 per cent of 15-year-olds.

11. 34.6 per cent of all pupils with an EHC plan also receive FSM, compared to 29.9 per cent receiving SEN Support.

12. 12.6 per cent of pupils speaking English as an additional language (EAL) are also identified as having SEN, compared to 16 per cent of pupils with English as their first language.
WHAT MIGHT IT ALL MEAN?

Analysis of these data sources generates some questions and points for us to consider (while bearing in mind that we must be cautious about drawing conclusions from any data).

- What is the capacity of the specialist sector to meet the ever-increasing number of pupils? This is a concern both in terms of physical accommodation and staffing, both of which have been under pressure for some time. The recently announced new special schools, which are due to open in September 2021, while welcome, will not meet the demand indicated by the data. In addition, they will need to be staffed by experienced sector leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants.

- Is there sufficient supply within the Early Years sector to meet the increasing number of young children with EHC plans? Having L3 qualified EY SENCOs will certainly help, but they need to be supported by Area SENCOs and other professionals such as speech and language therapists, early support as well as identification is crucial to the long-term outcomes of young children with SEND.

- What is happening for the thousands of children and young people who are not currently receiving any or the appropriate provision? Most of these pupils are in the EHC plan data but not in the school-based SEN data — we must ensure they are not forgotten.

- What support are parents who are home educating children with SEND receiving? We expect that these numbers are likely to increase following the COVID lockdown as many parents have reported improved wellbeing in their children with SEND from not attending school, and so they continue to home-educate, so this will become ever more important over time.

- Given the prevalence of SLCN in children and young people receiving SEN support, how confident and skilled do mainstream staff feel in meeting these needs, particularly in secondary schools?

- Does the fact that the identification of SEN for pupils with English as an additional language is lower than for English first pupils mean that needs are going unrecognised in this group? It can be difficult to distinguish 'EAL' from 'SEN' (and EAL is not SEN in itself) — does this lead to professionals being wary of identifying SEN in pupils with EAL?

- Why do only 52 per cent of all EHC plans have a personal budget in place? Do parents and young people know what they are entitled to? It would be useful to hear from people with experience of personal budgets about their views on this.

There are certainly challenges here, but there are positive too if you look hard enough:

- The decreasing identification of Moderate Learning Difficulties coupled with increases in the identification of SLCN and SEMH suggests that many pupils’ needs may be being more accurately identified, which should lead to their needs being met more effectively. It would be interesting and useful to find out more about this trend and whether this is in fact the case.

- The increase in EHC plans and increase in SEN. Support for pupils in PRUs suggests that these pupils (often a disadvantaged and sometimes neglected group) are having their more significant needs identified and are being given the security of an EHC plan, which will help to ensure appropriate provision continues in whatever kind of setting they go on to from the PRU.

- Local authorities are maintaining their completion rates for EHC plans, even though the numbers are increasing — this could suggest that systems are becoming well-established and processes more effective.

Analysis of the data, as is often the case, throws up more questions than it answers. For SENCOs and other SEN professionals, it is useful to consider your own data, how it relates to the national picture, and what questions it makes you (and other leaders in schools and settings) ask, relating this to previous years where appropriate. You can then use this as one way of determining whether your identification and support systems are effective and relevant, and what you may need to do differently over time.

You may have some thoughts about what the answers to some of these questions might be — let us know by emailing education@nasen.org.uk

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n 2018, nasen – in conjunction with Bath Spa University and the National Education Union – undertook research into the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Specifically, the research sought to explore the breadth and depth of the role and considered factors which both enabled and hindered the execution of the role. Over 1,900 SENCOs responded to the initial survey, with a further 1,806 responding to the follow-up survey published in January 2020. The findings from the initial survey illustrated that 70 per cent of SENCOs felt that they did not have enough time allocated to the role. In particular, the research suggested that the majority of SENCOs (74 per cent) felt that they did not have enough time to ensure pupils with special educational needs (SEN) were able to access the support that they needed. Whilst the report made a number of recommendations, including that SENCOs should have legally protected time to effectively manage the demands of the role, the report also highlighted that there were some voices within the world of SEN which were underrepresented, particularly Early Years SENCOs who accounted for only 3.7 per cent of the respondents in 2018. As a consequence, nasen commissioned research to explore the perspectives of Early Years SENCOs, and to specifically examine the process of early identification in the role. Dr Helen Curran from Bath Spa University shares some of the findings from the ‘Identifying SEN in the Early Years: The role of the SENCO’ report, which was published July.
settings. The research culminated in the report ‘Identifying SEN in the Early Years: The role of the SENCO’.

A key consideration when undertaking the research was the appreciation that the Early Years, as a phase, are diverse. Within the private, voluntary and independent sector there is a broad range of possible provisions, from ‘pack away’ settings, to large chain independent nurseries. This, in addition to the findings from the previous SENCO workload research, suggested that the experience of SENCOs in Early Years settings is varied. Yet within such variance, SENCOs are expected to follow and apply Chapter 5 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015). The research endeavoured to explore the approaches Early Years SENCOs took when identifying SEN, as well as factors within which they felt influenced the process.

The research took a two-phase approach. Initially, a broad-based survey was conducted in October 2019, exploring key priority enablers and barriers in relation to identifying SEN from the SENCOs’ perspective. 214 Early Years SENCOs responded in early 2020, interviews were carried out which explored the emerging themes from the survey. 16 SENCOs and three early years SENCOs took part.

The findings suggest that whilst Early Years SENCOs felt there are several factors which aided the identification of SEN in their settings, the development of secure family relationships was fundamental to the process. SENCOs described how the Early Years setting was often the parents’ first experience of education for their child; as a result, the development of relationships took time and expertise. In addition to this, the development of such relationships enabled the SENCOs to develop a holistic picture of the child, to ascertain additional factors which may be impacting on the child’s development. Early Years SENCOs were emphatic that their role was to support and advocate for parents during the process of identifying SEN, indicating that training in this area was required.

Whilst 86 per cent of SENCOs (n=160) stated that they felt either extremely or very confident with regards to identifying SEN in their setting, they were less confident in the ability of their staff, with 45 per cent of SENCOs stating that they were either extremely or very confident in their area. However, SENCOs reported that taking an evidence-based approach was important, coupled with staff knowledge and experience. The theme of determining the difference between typical development and a potential additional need was prevalent, a balance between what was termed as ‘watchful waiting’ and ensuring that support is put in place in a timely manner. This indicates that the area of identifying additional needs is important for Early Years practitioners, not just the SENCO.

Whilst the research highlights some of the powerful and innovative practice currently being undertaken by Early Years SENCOs, it also highlights some of the frustrations felt by practitioners. Early Years SENCOs felt that the process of assessing children and subsequently accessing the appropriate additional support, could often be hindered.

A lack of regard for the professionalism of the SENCO role, or challenges accessing external agencies and funding, was cited by SENCOs as contributing factors. Yet in addition to this, the uniqueness of the Early Years played a part. SENCOs reported that they felt in the Early Years setting they could be more responsive to individual needs, in part due to the flexibility that they have. The ability to meet children’s needs inclusively in the Early Years meant that for some children, their needs became more apparent in a more formal school setting, where there were different expectations, different staffing levels and potentially less flexibility with provision.

In addition to this, SENCOs voiced concerns that Early Years settings were often not understood by others, including schools. Children may attend Early Years settings full or part time, for short periods or attend multiple settings. Settings may be for children from birth, or from three years old. This can impact on the time it takes to identify SEN, access support from multiple agencies, develop relationships with parents as well as impacting on transition to school.

Early Years SENCOs shared concerns that this could lead to the perception that children and their potential needs have been missed upon transition either due to a change in provision or to factors outside of the Early Years SENCO’s control.

The early years are a unique and important phase in a child’s education. Early intervention is essential to ensure that children access timely, appropriate support to enable them to reach the best possible educational and other outcomes’ (Code of Practice, 2015 p.19). While the research suggests that there is scope here to develop our understanding of the SENCO role in the Early Years, there is an equally a call to develop our understanding of Early Years provis or. The report recommends
that sharing of good practice in the Early Years across phases is facilitated, particularly in relation to developing fair, healthy relationships and inclusive environments. Yet the research also recommends that the role of the SENCO, and the part they play in supporting identifying SEN in the Early Years, is given greater prominence, through wider understanding of the role across health and social care, with a greater regard for the professionalism of the role. Central to this is not only extended guidance in the SEND Code of Practice taking into account the diverse nature of Early Years settings, but also training for Early Years practitioners, SENCOs and those who work with early years settings.

“Early intervention is essential to ensure that children access timely, appropriate support to enable them ‘to reach the best possible educational and other outcomes’.”
Migrant children with SEN – an under-explored area of research and practice

Graeme Dobson, Clara Jørgensen and Tom Perry reflect on some of the issues and findings in their recently published review entitled ‘Migrant children with Special Educational Needs in European Schools – a review of current issues and approaches’.

Graeme Dobson
Graeme is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham. Amongst other roles, he currently leads the NASENCO programme and Language, Literacies and Dyslexia programme at the university.

Perceptions of disability and inclusion often vary significantly between the home and settlement country of migrants.
any of us welcome children who are migrants into our schools. Some may have been identified with SEN in their country of origin, and some may be referred for assessment for SEN whilst in an English school. The experiences of migrant children with SEN, their families, and schools are a little explored area. As part of a research project at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, we conducted a literature review of school approaches towards migrant children with SEN in Europe. In this article, we share a selection of our findings.

Migrant children currently constitute around four per cent of the under 15 population in Europe (Janta and Harte, 2017). They are a highly diverse group, whose reasons for migrating and experiences of education in their country of origin vary significantly. They come from different socioeconomic, cultural, and economic backgrounds and have different language abilities. Common challenges encountered by migrant children in schools include having to settle into an unfamiliar educational system, learning a new language, making friends, understanding the culture and curriculum, the school and encountering discrimination and/or racism (Hamilton, 2013; Jørgensen, 2017; Ryan et al., 2010). For migrant children with SEN, these challenges may be more pronounced, emphasizing the need for a better understanding of their specific experiences and the approaches adopted by European schools to support such children.

**SEN, INCLUSION, AND MIGRATION**

Perceptions of disability and inclusion often vary significantly between the home and settlement country of migrants. Dominant perceptions of SEN in the country of origin may affect migrant parents’ views of disability and inclusion (Caldin and Cinotti, 2018). Their expectations of education, and the extent to which they engage with and share information about their children with school professionals (Hamilton, 2013).

The migration journey of families often involves leaving extended support networks behind. Migrant families who have children with SEN may experience a two-fold source of stress: derived from a new disability diagnosis alongside their migration (Caldin, 2014) and may be less able to reach out for valuable support from disabled parents’ associations and the community (Panagia, 2015; Caldin, 2014; Papoudi et al., 2020).

**HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Schools play a supportive role, not only for education, but also for inclusion more broadly, acting as ‘hubs’ or a first point of call for families accessing the complex system of services available for their disabled children (Caldin, 2014; Oliver and Singal, 2017). Trust, communication, and relationships between families and schools are of key importance; our review found, however, that home-school communication and collaboration are also areas susceptible to misunderstanding, at least in the early stages following migration (Oliver and Singal, 2017). Lack of proficiency in the language of school often complicates the communication between migrant parents and schools and makes it difficult for parents to navigate the educational system. Migrant families do not always understand the teachers or the interventions that are suggested for their children (Panagia, 2017; Caldin, 2014). Furthermore, schools need to carefully consider the wider family contexts within which the children are situated.

Parental involvement in school is a key way to support the children (Caldin and Cinotti, 2018), but circumstances such as transnational caring arrangements and parental employment may impact on migrant parents’ ability to get involved in school (Oliver and Singal, 2017). In our review, schools were found to sometimes blame parents for their lack of involvement and position parents as ‘deprived’ or ‘not able’ (Panagia, 2015), rephrasing the importance of a more culturally reflexive and
contextors’ tive approach towards migrant children with SEN and their families.

**SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND ASSESSMENT FOR SEN**

Schools in Europe have different experiences of diversity and multiculturalism, and varying approaches to the identification of SEN. The assessment of migrant children with SEN is complex and languages often a key issue. In the English context, Oliver and Sng (2017) have warned of the problems of children being inaccurately placed in settings such as special schools because of difficulties in separating language issues from SEN. Similarly, teachers interviewed in a Spanish study (Paniagua 2017) described problems in working out whether children had SEN when they also lacked proficiency in Catalan or Spanish.

In the Italian context, Migliarini (2018) and Migliarini et al. (2019) commented on the arbitrariness of the SEN identification process and warned of the problem of what they call the ‘SENitization’ of migrant children – the process whereby migrant children’s illiteracy and disrupted schooling is defined as a disability. (Migliarini et al. 2019). A similar issue was identified in Spain, where Paniagua (2017) showed how SEN is often either interpreted as a consequence of being from a linguistically, culturally and socially diverse family, or cultural background in itself becomes understood in terms of special needs. Separating linguistic and cultural difference from SEN was a clear issue across many contexts, often connecting with the policy and practice around SEN in the system.

In the German context, for example, Gabel et al. (2009) described how language difficulties may result in transfer to special schools, as this provides a way to secure additional resources for disadvantaged students. In England, Hamilton (2013) has commented on the prevalent practice of seating migrant children with lower ability students and argued that this may lead some teachers (and perhaps children themselves) into assuming migrant learners as having special educational needs” (p. 208).

Finally, some of the studies identified more systemic issues, such as a rigid, packed curriculum and stringent accountability measures, which allows little flexibility, to meet the migrant children’s SEN (McIntyre & Hall, 2018; Paniagua 2015; 2017). This highlights the importance of not only considering the actions of particular schools or school professionals, but also the wider mechanisms for funding, as well as direct and indirect systemic barriers.

Parental involvement in school is a key way to support the children.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The emerging research illustrates some of the challenges faced by those who work with children with SEN in diverse contexts. Importantly, it also illustrates the difficulties faced by migrant children and their families when having to navigate disparate and different systems and the issues arising in the communication between families and schools. Key issues emerging from the review were:

- Parental perceptions and experience of SEN and inclusion in their country of origin
- Separating SEN and language needs
- The need for a culturally reflexive and context sensitive assessment and communication approach.

We hope that these initial findings will help SENCOs and others working with migrant children in making reflexive and sensitive judgments to ensure that all children are supported, whatever the complexities of their background. We are continuing this work and hope that our focus on migrant children with SEN will produce new insights, help draw more attention to this specific group and support calls for more training for SENCOs, teachers and schools to assist them in their work.
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Understanding attention in autism

Dr Carmel Mevorach, from the University of Birmingham, considers what we mean by ‘attention’ and how this relates to children and young people with autism.

Autism or autism spectrum disorder (sometimes called autism spectrum condition) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder that is primarily associated with difficulties in social interaction and restricted and repetitive behaviours.

While attention capacity in autism is not considered a diagnostic criteria, or a defining feature, attention atypicalities are highly prevalent in autism. Indeed, some investigations suggest that around 50 per cent of children with autism also meet diagnosis criteria for ADHD or at least show high prevalence of ADHD-like symptoms. It is therefore important to understand these attention atypicalities and their possible impact in autism.

But let’s take a step back for a moment and try to understand what it means to have a typical attention.

“Everyone knows what attention is” quipped William James (one of the fathers of modern Psychology) in 1890 – while we can appreciate the notion, let us consider what attention is in more specific terms.

When asked about attention, people normally say things like ‘focus’, ‘avoiding distraction’, ‘effort’ and it is of course all relevant. Attention is a cognitive resource that ultimately enables us to deal with a fundamental problem we constantly face; there is too much information out there! Too much input is streaming into our senses at any point in time, not to mention our internal thoughts and emotions. We cannot possibly process it all and act upon it all simultaneously.

Attention is there for us to manage this problem: it helps us ‘focus’ and deal with a small subset of the available information which we need in order to achieve our current goal.

When we spell it out like this, it is starting to become clear why attention is so important in our life. Consider a dysfunctional (or atypical) attention system and you can already imagine how this might impact our ability to engage effectively with our environment and peers. It might be clear in our mind now what the purpose of attention is, but what it actually does is a bit more complicated. Let us consider now what we know about the mechanisms of attention.

Since James’ reflection in 1890, the fields of cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience have made considerable strides in advancing our understanding of the attention system. The scope of this article is not big enough to provide a full-fledged summary of decades of research, but I would like to focus on two key issues – the multifunction nature of attention and the functional independence of different attention mechanisms.

The first is the idea that different attention mechanisms are at play and are called upon in different scenarios. Consider for instance, an air traffic controller poring over their screen – they might need to do this over a prolonged period of time and may not be required to act upon the information until a critical moment. Here the attention requirement involves maintaining the ‘focus’ over time – or sustained attention.

Consider on the other hand what you are doing right now – that is, reading. You
must be able to select one word at a time in order to extract its meaning and you need to then shift your focus to the next word, moving from one position on the paper/screen to another. Here the attention requirement involves being able to select information from a specific area in space – **spatial selective attention**.

Finally, consider a noisy classroom scenario. A child in the classroom will need to focus on the teacher when they speak but at the same time inhibit other sources of information such as the action or sounds a fellow student is making (and even smells, or emotions they currently feel). They may also need to quickly switch their focus from the teacher’s face to the white board or to their book, and then switch back if required. Here the attention requirement involves a strong element of control, manipulating what information is attended to and what is ignored as well as flexibly changing this – **control of attention**.

The second key issue is the concept of independence of these different attention mechanisms. Research has repeatedly shown in behavioural studies that our performance in one attention mechanism does not necessarily relate to our performance in a different attention mechanism. This is also supported by brain imaging studies linking different brain structures (or networks) to different attention mechanisms. A simple implication of this is that some of us can be quite efficient in our ability (let’s say) to sustain attention but at the same time not necessarily that good at switching our attention, while others might find switching between different sources of input much more effortless than staying focused over time. Importantly however, as we normally rely on all of these functions simultaneously, we may come across as having similar attention problems even though our core difficulty resides in different attention mechanisms.

Some investigations suggest that around 50 per cent of children with autism also meet diagnosis criteria for ADHD...
These concepts are important because different attention mechanisms may be linked to different behavioural difficulties, which can be demonstrated in children's academic skills.

For example, studies with young children have demonstrated that their attention ability to select targets and avoid distractors correlates with their ability to learn and successfully test on new knowledge. Furthermore, children and adolescents' ability to sustain their attention on a simple non-verbal computer task has been shown to be linked to their performance in a reading comprehension assessment.

Finally, one of the better-established links is between children's ability to control their attention and inhibit distractors and their mathematical skills (as measured in maths tests). In other words, different attention mechanisms contribute to different academic skills. We can therefore also understand what the impact of impaired or atypical attention mechanisms might be on academic attainment.

It's time to go back to autism – I mentioned at the beginning that attention is often atypical in autism. Of course, we need to remember that autism is extremely heterogeneous, and we should not expect all children with autism to present with a similar profile. Nevertheless, group studies have highlighted attention atypicalities across the board in autism. For example, some children with autism may demonstrate difficulty in staying focused over a prolonged period of time (sustained attention).

Another classic finding (which can be exhibited from a very early age) is for children with autism to show difficulties in disengaging attention from a specific location and shifting it to a different location in space (spatial selective attention). And there are also studies that highlight the difficulty in autism to switch attention between different sources (control of attention).

Moreover, such attention atypicalities in autism have also been linked to academic performance – for example, the link between attention switching abilities in autism and maths. But we should not focus only on academic performance. Attention is so fundamental to our behaviour that it can affect the entire range of complex behaviours – there is even some suggestion it may be linked to anxiety, which can also be high in autism (although more research is needed here).

Understanding attention atypicalities in autism can therefore help us to better understand the challenges children with autism face, but also the opportunities – both in terms of scenarios and environments that could be helpful, and for developing effective interventions.

In our current research we demonstrate the positive contribution of training attention in children with autism to academic attainment and behaviour more broadly and in an Erasmus+ project we are currently running (together with nasen) we further test how training attention can be implemented in educational settings by educational professionals. Such research and practice can pave the way for better understanding and better prospects for children with autism within educational settings.

"Understanding attention atypicalities in autism can help us to better understand the challenges children with autism face, but also the opportunities..."
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WORKING WITH GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER CHILDREN

The 0-11 SEND Advisory Group considers the education experiences of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full-time education, but children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school, and are not known to education services (e.g. alternative education or elective home education) are considered to be Children Missing Education (CME) (DFE September 2016).

CME could be at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) (DfE: September 2016). CME can occur for a number of reasons, one of which is movement across different local authorities, which is common amongst the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities and these children can be at an increased risk of missing education. Local Authorities’ Traveller Education Services do not exist in every Local Authority but, where they do, these services can advise on strategies to ensure continuous education provision.

Problems with attendance in education settings can begin around transition to secondary provision, with some families starting to disengage with the secondary phase. This translates into significantly lower educational outcomes than the majority of the school population with just over 10 per cent of Gypsy and Roma children, and 21 per cent of Irish Traveller children achieving GCSEs at the end of KS4. Ofsted has recognised this challenge and sets out expectations for schools (HMI 455, 2003), saying that schools should promote and affirm the culture and lifestyle of GRT pupils in a way that reflects recent legislation on race equality, and urges schools to take greater responsibility for promoting and sustaining links with GRT families.
DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALISATION
In a survey undertaken by the Traveller Movement (2017), 91 per cent of the respondents cited experience of discrimination and interviews with young adults from the GRT community indicate that despite schools having robust anti-bullying policies in place, they have suffered racist taunts in the playground and isolation in the classroom. They cite that they are often blamed for thefts inside school or in the local community as well as citing that school expectations may differ from the value systems of their community, and cause them conflict, such as the wearing of a headscarf, punctuality or behaviour in class.

Younger children whose whole life has been spent in the relatively cramped conditions of a caravan or trailer may not know how to approach play areas, playing with jigsaws or building with lego, and this disadvantage will be very apparent to their peers. Older children may lack home access to WiFi and laptops, and digital poverty has become more apparent during lockdown, when many of the best resources for home learning rely on access to the Internet. Lack of internet connectivity also has an important bearing on the life chances of young adults who have left school but have the potential to continue their studies online. The lack of internet connectivity, and access to a laptop could also affect regular communication with much school information and services provided online, such as admissions and newsletters.

ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL
The mobile lifestyle of GRT families can be exacerbated by the shortfall in site provision, and families will often have substantial periods of time on the road to take up seasonal employment. GRT children have a home school, known as their base school, where they are registered and where they are expected to spend at least 200 days of education. It is the responsibility of the base school to track families forward to the schools where children may be temporarily resident.

In practice terms, this often proves impossible and children may be away from their base school, and so be missing their education, for significant periods of time. But it is critically important that GRT families feel welcomed and comfortable in their base school and in temporary placements.

GOOD PRACTICE SCHOOLS
Research undertaken for The Traveller Movement’s Good Practice Guide (April 2019) identified some key findings in schools which have successfully worked with their local GRT community:

- **These schools make extra effort in building relationships and welcoming the parents of GRT pupils, including working with families to find a common understanding of expectations regarding punctuality, uniform etc.**
- **They are aware of topics that GRT parents might be sensitive about and are willing to discuss these with them.**
- **They take care to accommodate parents with low literacy skills and proactively think about effective ways to communicate information.**
- **3/4 of these schools have had TAs from the GRT community or interns who act as a link between the school and the families (there are some real success stories with schools which have been able to follow this pattern).**
- **They include GRT history and culture in their curricula.**
- **These schools tackle bullying proactively, and GRT children are not disproportionately targeted than any other children in these schools — including the use of exclusions.**

THE CHALLENGE FOR US IS TO...

- **Make sure a GRT family new to your area feels welcome and comfortable in your school — this will pay dividends as tricky issues of expectations come up and need to be discussed.**
- **Find out the base school and contact them for the children’s educational background. You can be confident that they will have missed many of the building blocks of education but, once you know the child, you will understand their needs and also recognise the individual skills and knowledge they have gained from their own community.**
- **Don’t expect them to fit in — but do expect your school community to value them. Watch out for playground challenges.**
- **In the COVID pandemic, personal hygiene requirements must be enforced — make these clear, but leave aside any wedges.**

CME could be at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation and becoming NEET
Challenges of remote learning: a tutoring agency's perspective

John Salmon, from Bright Heart Education, reflects on how support for tutees had to be adapted during lockdown and how tutees responded to a new way of working.

Unlike schools, tutoring agencies arguably experience closer contact with the everyday reality of many households as they directly partake in both the academic and emotional vicissitudes of families. Our first-hand knowledge has shown that adapting to online schooling has been an onerous challenge for families (as well as schools), but at the same time it has offered a more personalised learning opportunity for many students, especially those with SEN.

As a tutoring agency that supports many students with SEN, we have naturally been concerned about the emotional and academic impact of lockdown. Lately, we have received a number of calls for help from concerned parents, which shared a common pattern: their child had lost interest in writing, reading and numeracy and no longer tried to fulfil school expectations. Parents reported unattainable assignments amidst mounting levels of frustration, anxiety and disengagement. The lack of structure left children fending for themselves, with minimal assistance, save for that provided by their parents — who cannot be expected to play the role of trained teachers.

Traditionally, our agency had focused on in-person tuition, so we had to transition to online tutoring to adapt to the lockdown. ...many tutees with SEN embraced online sessions.
For some, the physical presence of a facilitator was necessary, but many tutees with SEN embraced online sessions and realised that, with the right guidance and nurturing support, much could be gained. Far from being emotionally affected by the lack of traditional schooling, many felt perfectly at home (no pun intended) with the new situation, as social interaction at school was often a cause of anxiety.

**CASE STUDY**

One such case was a Year 7 tutee with ADHD, who was not affected by feelings of isolation, but by lack of motivation when faced with the sudden prospect of doing all his work without the solid support system provided by school. Worse still, he was being asked to complete assignments using the very electronic devices that distracted him in the first place. Overstimulation led to distraction, which in turn led to frustration and eventually refusal to work.

Our adaptation to remote learning with him proved to be fruitful. First and foremost, as a student with ADHD he was less prone to distractions at home, as opposed to the myriad of stimuli in a school setting. Restricted internet access was necessary, but technology allowed for better differentiation, by addressing individual learning events; one specific topic could be delivered in multiple ways and be adapted to his unique style. Thus, a multimedia history session could include videos, downloadable materials, audio and interactive games. He was also able to work at his own pace, being free to view lessons and materials at his convenience, allowing for maximum flexibility. Since deadlines were relaxed, he had extra time to complete tasks. Additionally, his workspace was adapted to suit his preferences, creating an environment conducive to learning.

He liked technology because he found it more impersonal and nonthreatening. There were no peers there to judge him, no teachers there to pressure him with impending deadlines. He dreaded the idea of completing mammoth projects under severe time constraints, but smaller chunks no longer seemed insurmountable. His innate curiosity for technology developed into a learning opportunity, as he experimented with the different features in PowerPoint, Word or Google Drive, mastering the subject matter in the process. He learned to be less dependent on text-based learning when using audio books and videos online and felt at ease with no one watching over his shoulder.

**A WAY FORWARD**

This experience has taught us that the value of direct support from well-qualified teachers is irreplaceable. But we also know that online learning is here to stay, not only for children who are home schooled full time, but also as an integral part of school life. The technology industry takes giant leaps much faster than most industries, to the point where it permeates all human activity, including education. Lockdown prompted an impromptu trial for teachers, tutors, parents and students and learning from this can surely guide us when moving forward, but not by simply replicating lessons in the shape of online lessons, with ensuing workloads that must be completed by students autonomously. When managed appropriately and combined with optimal support in the hands of capable, well-trained instructors, applying technology in a student-centred learning environment can bring forth a wealth of benefits, including for those with SEN, as it provides the flexibility and sense of ownership that can be lacking in traditional classrooms. However, a balance must be struck between digital and screen-free activities and independent and teacher led activities. With the right support, combining pedagogical and technological expertise, students with SEN can meet learning targets in nonthreatening, customised environments.

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**JOHN SALMON**

John is currently a director at Bright Heart Education, a London-based tutoring agency that specialises in students with SEN. John has devoted most of his professional life to education, with experience as a tutor, teacher and head teacher. He has significant experience working with a wide range of students but is particularly passionate about helping those with special learning needs. www.brightheart.co.uk/
Supporting SEMH needs through wordless picture stories

Jo Egerton, Barry Carpenter and Sheila Hollins share the work and findings of The Open Book Project, Phase 2.

Beyond Words, through the externally funded Open Book Project, investigated how teachers would use their wordless books to support the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs of pupils with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.

The March edition of nasen Connect featured the Phase 1 (2018/19) outcomes of a whole-class approach. This article reports on Phase 2 (2019/20), in which teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) supported individual pupils with specific SEMH needs.

Nationally, 4 in 10 young people with learning disabilities experience mental health problems (Emerson and Hatton, 2007). However, the SEMH needs of pupils diagnosed with learning disabilities are often overlooked due to “diagnostic overshadowing” – when mental health needs are treated as integral to learning disability, instead of as secondary disabilities arising from unrelated and treatable causes. The most frequent needs of Open Book pupils were around emotional difficulties (46 per cent), social communication/interaction (45 per cent) and behavioural self-regulation (37 per cent); least common was high-level social and environmental risk to or from others (8 per cent).

Ensuring parental consent, the 22 project schools were each asked to support four pupils through one-to-one or small group sessions; 84 pupils (75 per cent secondary age) completed Phase 2. Each pupil attended 3-15 Books Beyond Words sessions, although some were cancelled due to lockdown. Phase 1 teacher leads cascaded their Books Beyond Words/SEMH training to 18 teacher and 67 TA colleagues, and Beyond Words donated up to three copies each of six Books Beyond Words titles chosen by schools to meet their pupils’ SEMH needs. Each TA supported at least one pupil.

Beyond Words picture stories follow book characters facing a range of issues affecting their SEMH (including Covid-19). All 22 schools chose to work with Making Friends and/or Hug Me, Touch Me (male/female stories following a young person as they try to find friends in safe and unsafe ways), Feeling Cross and Sorting It Out was read in 16 schools. The next frequently read group of book titles (in four to five schools a piece) were associated...
with preparing for and coping with adulthood. For example:

- **Speaking Up for Myself** — **focus**: building self-confidence, self-esteem and advocacy skills
- **Peter’s New Home** — **focus**: life-changes, making new friends, and missing family
- **Cooking with Friends** — **focus**: living healthily and enjoying life with friends
- **Belonging** — **focus**: overcoming loneliness and isolation
- **Ron’s Feeling Blue/Sonia’s Feeling Sad** — **focus**: overcoming depression linked to specific issues.

The most challenging titles were chosen by a single school only with specific relevance to a particular pupil’s situation, such as: a parent dying; escaping from, or recovering from, abuse; or an imprisoned family member.

**Evidence was collected in several ways:**

- Pupil response — a half-termly Reflective Diary and Engagement Profile (Carpenter et al., 2011, 2015) monitored individual pupil learning, session engagement and informed forward planning.
- Three key SEMH issues forms logged priority discussion points that emerged during sessions and noted each pupil’s most important learning and comments.
- End-of-project Experience and Confidence Questionnaires (ECQs) surveyed teachers’ and TAs’ ideas and opinions about project outcomes for their pupils and themselves.

As in Phase 1, teachers and TAs found that pupils experienced:

- Books Beyond Words as motivating — evidenced by high/increasing levels of participation and initiation.
- Deeper understanding of social context and risk
- Opportunities to consider their own behaviours and to discover alternatives in a non-personal way
- Adult encouragement to articulate and apply what they had learned.

Teachers were asked for their perceptions of the impact on case study pupils of using Books Beyond Words in relation to their SEMH needs. Apart from one teacher (who reported ‘no impact’), 36 rated the impact as ‘positive’, of whom 67 per cent (24) stated this was ‘very positive’.

**PUPIL ENGAGEMENT**

TAs recorded Engagement Profile observations against the seven indicators: responsiveness, curiosity, investigation, discovery, anticipation, persistence and initiation (Carpenter et al., 2011, 2015). Based on these, 83 of 84 pupils showed positive engagement, including 16 who maintained a consistent positive engagement e.g. recalling what had happened in the previous session, anticipating story events, asking questions, relating the story to their own experience, initiating responses and ideas. Sixty-four pupils increased their level of engagement with 27 of these demonstrating a high level of increase. For example, this was one pupil’s experience:

**NOVEMBER 2019**: Responded negatively to sessions, struggling to cope with the change of routine.

**DECEMBER 2019**: Still sitting outside the small group, he gradually started listening in.

Towards the end of the session, he joined the group and contributed to the discussion.

**FEBRUARY 2020**: Participating and responding positively to one-to-one sessions by asking probing questions and showing consistent interest in books.

**FINAL PROFILE**: He related his own feelings and experiences to book scenarios. Most sessions were one-to-one with staff, but at times he would join the other pupils by ‘just taking himself to the group’.

Only one pupil showed an overall negative outcome, despite encouragement from staff. Due to her perception of her physical difficulties and accompanying negative self-talk, she was unable to engage with the chosen story, Rose Gets in Shape.

Most teachers (27 of 34) said that their confidence had increased during Phase 2 through training and supporting colleagues; 59 per cent (16) felt it had increased ‘a lot’, others (7) already felt confident.

TAs valued formal training cascaded by teachers and took confidence from the support provided by the books’ structure and guidance. Those using the Books Beyond Words e-learning modules rated them highly.

All responding teachers (N=34) believed their school was very likely (94 per cent) or fairly likely (6 per cent) to continue using Books Beyond Words to support pupils’ SEMH in future.

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**www.nasen.org.uk**

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**BIO**

**PROF. BARONESS SHEILA HOLLINS**

Sheila is Convener of the Open Book Project. She is founder and Chair of Beyond Words, and editor and lead author of the Books Beyond Words series. She is Emeritus Professor of the Psychiatry of Disability at St George’s, University of London, and sits in the House of Lords as a crossbench peer.

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**Hear how one project school worked with Books Beyond Words https://bit.ly/2YdpsHl**
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There is always a steady stream of questions arriving at nasen House and, of course, the Education Team answers them as soon as possible. But, while many of them are specific to a particular context, the answers to a number of them could be helpful to the wider nasen membership. ‘Ask the team’, formerly ‘Connect with Us’, provides the space to share these questions and answers.

If you have a question, the answer to which you think would be useful for everyone, please submit it to nasenconnect@nasen.org.uk

Of course, you can always give nasen House a call too.

**TRANSITION FROM EARLY YEARS**

I’m an Early Years SENCO in a large private voluntary independent (PVI) day nursery. I’m really concerned about our children with SEND who will be moving up to primary schools in September. I want to send all the details I can about them for their new teachers but I don’t want to send so much that it will be too much to read and they will just not look at it. What do you suggest?

*Early Years SENCO, Doncaster*

This is a good question and a valuable point you are making. nasen has just added three new webcasts on ‘Transition to the Early Years Resources’ to the website. Webcast 1 includes some suggestions for what to pass on for children with SEND which you may find useful (https://bit.ly/38V4YXT). There are also some resources including ‘Pen Portraits’ and examples of pen portraits in the ‘resources’ area of the website; pen portraits and one-page profiles provide a useful one-page summary of a child’s strengths, areas of needs and effective strategies of support.

**RETURNING TO SCHOOL**

As a Primary SENCO, I am feeling a little apprehensive about the number of children who will be returning to school in September with special educational needs, and the wide range of needs that we will be presented with after the long period children have had away from school. I feel that I, as SENCO, will be expected to have all the answers to questions from staff as well as parents. How can I begin to prepare myself and the staff?

*Primary SENCO, Manchester*

This is certainly an issue that all SENCOs are facing, and you are not alone! There are a number of online webinars being provided by organisations in the special needs sector at the moment and some will continue throughout the autumn with the aim of preparing practitioners for the identification of and provision for children with long and short-term additional needs. nasen will be providing four webinars in the autumn term covering ‘High Quality Teaching to Support Pupils with SEND’ (https://bit.ly/2DajsaQ). The Communication Trust will also have a free, short half-day course ‘An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication’ https://bit.ly/2AXJg97. Please also see the three new webcasts on transition from the Early Years for your EYFS and Key Stage 1 teachers https://bit.ly/38V4YXT.

**ONLINE CPD**

Although lockdown has certainly had its challenges, one positive has been the amount of online CPD available. I was never keen on attending online courses before. But I have to admit that now I have got to grips with how it works, I can certainly see the benefits of it moving forward, as it saves having to take time out of school and is usually cheaper than attending face-to-face sessions. Is it likely that nasen will continue to provide online CPD?

*Secondary Inclusion Manager, Worcestershire*

As you are probably aware, nasen provided a number of online CPD sessions over the summer term and the feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive including from those that hadn’t taken part in online CPD before. As we are very likely to still be working with restrictions for quite some time, nasen has developed a comprehensive online programme of CPD for the autumn term. In addition, moving forward, nasen recognises the flexibility offered by online CPD and, as such, is committed to providing a range of sessions over the coming year [the webinar pass will give you access to the majority of the content: https://bit.ly/3glm6w]. If there is anything in particular that you would like to see included in the programme, do let us know by emailing education@nasen.org.uk.
SUCCESSFULLY TEACHING AND MANAGING CHILDREN WITH ADHD

This resource for SENCOs and teachers covers an area of need with which we often feel less confident in our approach. The title itself needs some discussion before moving on to the content, however, due to the use of the word ‘managing’ in relation to behaviour.

This is a controversial way of describing approaches to behaviour, as it does not explicitly indicate the need to understand children’s behaviours and what they may be communicating to us. We will leave this to one side for the purposes of this review whilst remaining cognisant of this controversy.

This second edition contains more case studies than the first, as well as updated information regarding medication for ADHD and new advice on ADHD in girls and adults, all of which are very useful. It provides an excellent, readable background on ADHD, with references to further research for those who wish to find out more. The description of what ADHD is, is very clear and is particularly helpful in understanding how ADHD may present in girls.

Despite the word ‘managing’, the advice on behaviour is clear, simple and balanced, and the emphasis on the importance of having a whole school approach is valuable. The chapter on professional development contains ideas to support SENCOs delivering staff training, and the chapter on transition is particularly pertinent at the current time.

THE BIG BOOK OF EVEN MORE THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

The first thing you may notice about this book, which is a follow-on to The Big Book of Therapeutic Ideas, is that it is aimed at the American market. That said, apart from some minimal differences in language and spelling (‘organize’ rather than ‘organise’, for example), the content of the book is very much relevant to UK context.

Following the three-page introduction, the rest of the book is dedicated to practical activities and strategies designed to promote and develop positive mental health. Themes covered include character education, social interaction, self-esteem, coping skills, healthy expression of feelings, self-care and so on.

The first chapter of the book contains ‘10-minute’ ice-breaker activities which help put young people at ease and prepare them to engage with the main activities. Activities include those with a visual and expressive arts focus, activities based on well-known children’s books e.g. The Little Engine That Could and The Very Hungry Caterpillar, and hands-on activities.

A clear purpose and focus are given for each activity followed by a list of the materials needed (including photocopiable resources). Clear explanations are given for each activity followed by suggestions for variations and a series of questions to prompt discussion.

This book is easy to access and offers a good selection of activities to augment a PSHE or RSE curriculum.
Read&Write literacy software has features to support a diverse range of learning styles, across in-class teaching or at home learning.

Find out more: text.help/nasen

**Dyscalculia Framework**

The NumberSenseMMR™ Framework has been developed from research in neuroscience, dyscalculia, early childhood development and education.

It is validated by the University of Oxford to provide support to children at risk of dyscalculia and children performing significantly below in maths.

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*Recordings of all sessions will be available after they have taken place
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Headteacher, Priory Rossendale School

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SEND pupils: Provision Map can help with the return to school

The disruption of lockdown will have had an even bigger impact on students with SEND. Getting them into a new, different school routine and making sure they feel safe and supported will be a top priority and huge challenge for Sendcos and staff. Our Provision Map software will help your Sendcos to plan interventions and map provision. Through the School Robins tool all staff working with SEND pupils can collate information about children in one place and keep up-to-date with provisions put in place, even if they’re working at home or on different school sites. You can also use parent accounts to communicate with your students’ families. You can share student’s current plans and one–page profiles, along with a list of their provisions.

Supporting SEND pupils

- **Core pupil data/SEND Register:** May not be able to access SIMS sever at home but schools admins can access core pupil data in Provision Map along with any other aspects added into the system.

- **Parent Accounts:** Communication tool to send & receive messages from families. Also share current plans, one page profiles & list of provisions they are involved in.

- **External Agencies:** Share pupil plans with external agencies.

- **COVID 19–Funding Stream:** Additional costs during COVID–19 may have been incurred relating to SEND provision, you are able to track this here.

- **School Robins (communication tool):** Support and collate communications with staff regarding pupils in one place.

- **Safeguarding submissions by guest staff:** Staff being stationed in different schools may need to place a safeguarding concern.

Book a Provision Map Demo > [www.provisionmap.co.uk/demo](http://www.provisionmap.co.uk/demo)