My Ideal School: Using a Personal Construct Psychology Technique to Explore and Understand the School Constructs of Children and Young People Identified as Having Selective Mutism.

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Summary

This document contains three sections: a review of the literature regarding the subject area, an empirical paper, and a critically reflective account. Firstly, a review of the existing literature highlights the limited research eliciting the views of the individuals with Selective Mutism (SM) whilst drawing together key themes relating the educational experiences of children and young people (CYP) with SM.

The empirical paper encompasses a qualitative study carried out with a sample of ten CYP whereby a non-verbal adaptation of a technique based on Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) was used to explore the participants' views of school following in-depth semi-structured interviews. The section concludes with recommendations and future directions for research.

Finally, the critically reflexive account provides a personal reflection of the research experience and journey from identifying a research question through to analysing and interpreting the participants' accounts.

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A dedication written by a parent to their child
(a participant in this study)

I imagine that in a past life, you were Irena Sendler. Using your ability to be quiet as a superpower alongside your palpable desire for fairness and equality. You seek out the correctness, you strive for the right and good answers, where nobody is left behind. I imagine you helping those with no voice to escape across borders, your only defence being your own inability, or fierce determination, not to speak, not to give anything away. To save those with no voice with your own special quiet.

The pain in your eyes when the news tells you anyone at all has suffered. The Manchester arena bomber was "too young to die", you said, despite his actions that killed and hurt so many. It "wasn't fair that he had been brainwashed". You're right, of course. You were once again absolutely correct. But at 9 or 10 years old, you out-did even my socialist-at-heart compassion.

You feel for all of humanity, and yet are the person who asks the least of anyone. In true big sister style, you try to be so self-sufficient. Try to fix all your own problems without making a fuss. And secretly believe that you can.

At twelve you are so big and so little; 6 years away from being 6, and 6 years away from being 18. Right there in the middle is 12, with your big feelings, big questions, and big understandings in a little body.

You are less bothered about how someone presents themselves than how light or dark their energy is. You sense their goodness or otherwise quicker than most. You already have the ability to turn discomfort into comedy, what else are you gonna do with so much anxiety? Go under? Not you. You use it to make another person laugh if you can.

Stay this way. You have the purest heart, you want all the good for everyone and my socialist heart sees and honours that very stubborn quest in you, for things being better in the world for all of us.

You have taught me the power of quiet. I just had to listen.

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List of Abbreviations

ASC	Autistic Spectrum Condition
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-fifth edition
EM	Elective Mutism
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
ICD-11	International Classification of Diseases-11th revision
PCP	Personal Construct Psychology
RQ	Research Question
SALTS	Speech and Language Therapy Service
SEMH	Social Emotional and Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SM	Selective Mutism
SMIRA	Selective Mutism Information and Research Association
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UEA	University of East Anglia
YP	Young People

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Literature Review Summary

This literature review exists in two parts. Initially, a themed narrative review introduces the broader context of Selective Mutism (SM) from an outsider perspective before a systematic literature review 'gives voice' to the individuals by presenting key themes from the limited research capturing their perspectives. Findings are presented through the lens of education and psychology, providing key implications for the field of educational psychology before illuminating gaps in the current SM literature-base. Firstly, it is prudent to situate SM within its legislative and social context thus forming a rationale for the decision to present two separate literature reviews.

Introduction

Selective Mutism is a condition which is characterised by a consistent pattern of speaking in some situations (e.g., home) and a 'failure' to speak in others where speech is typically expected (e.g., school) (Muris & Ollendick, 2015). Research suggests that SM typically develops between the ages of two and four (Elizur & Perednick, 2003; Ford et al. 1998) with needs becoming more apparent when a child starts school (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

SM is complex phenomenon, usually poorly understood and vastly under-recognised (Keen et al. 2008). Ten years after its predecessor, The Bercow Report (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008), an independent review of provision for CYP with Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN) in England revealed that many commissioners have insufficient understanding of low incidence, high-need conditions including SM (ICAN, 2018). For these individuals, the report highlighted an absence of available support and difficulties in accessing clinical specialists such as speech and language therapists (SaLT).

The complex and multifaceted presentation of SM means that needs frequently intersect both the 'Communication and Interaction' and 'Social and Emotional Mental Health' needs within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice

(SEND Cop, 2015) (Lawrence, 2018; Shipon-Blum, 2007). Consequently, CYP with SM may not fit within the remit of one professional group (Keen et al. 2008). This a key concern amplified by the Selective Mutism International Research Association (SMIRA) (2020) which stipulates that:

> *"An experience all too commonly reported, is that children are moved around from one waiting list to another, without actually receiving the help they need."*

Together these may contribute to inconsistencies in understanding, practice and a 'postcode lottery' of support for CYP across UK Local Authorities (LA). In recognising the irregularity of support for CYP with SEND, the government recently set out ambitious plans to implement national standards for CYP with SEND so that support is "determined by their needs, not by where they live" (DfE & DoH, 2022 p.5). However, at present there are currently no UK, national guidelines or quality standards regarding the training of professionals and support of CYP with SM. Consequently, these individuals may be susceptible to 'falling through the net' in terms of appropriate support and provision.

Situating this in the wider legislative context of SEND, The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Children Act (1989) provides a rationale and legal basis for children's rights to a voice. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms in England highlighted the importance of considering CYPs' views and adopting a more child-centred system (Children and Families Act, 2014). Despite these movements, minimal progress has been made in valuing the perspectives of CYP within SM research (Roe, 2011). As such, the literature currently underrepresents the voice of individuals with SM and offers a predominantly medicalised understanding of the phenomena as it exists from "observer interpretations rather than experiential accounts" (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.457). Walker and Tobbell (2015) warn that failing to consider the perspectives of those with SM risks presenting a "misleading or partial representation of SM" (p. 456). Whilst the nature of the condition and the silence by which it is characterised poses a challenge for researchers, exploring the experiences of individuals with SM is vital to ensuring an accurate and co-constructed account of the phenomena (Strong, 2019).

Further providing scope for the current literature review, research has surprisingly paid only "cursory attention" (Stone et al. 2002 p.15) to the educational implications of SM. Whilst SM has been broadly explored across the contexts of school, home/family and public/social (Bergman et al. 2008; Ford et al.1998; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019) little has been written specifically about the school context in which the behaviour occurs (Cline & Baldwin, 2004).

This literature review aims to present a holistic understanding of SM. The intention to present two separate literature reviews derives from the researcher's personal epistemological perspective, with an interest in understanding the scope of studies 'giving voice' through the exploration of individual experience. Separate reviews allowed the views of the individuals to be amplified rather than potentially lost when 'merged' within the wider 'outsider' literature base.

Firstly, a themed narrative literature review illustrates the broader issues and debates around the subject of SM, before drawing together key themes to provide an educational understanding of SM from an 'outsider perspective'. As the review progresses, it becomes clear that theory and literature solely reliant upon an outsider perspective may provide an inaccurate understanding of SM. This sets the scene for the subsequent review which systematically examines the limited literature exploring the experiential accounts of SM through an educational and psychological lens. The key themes are situated within Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) conceptualisation of SM, with a particular focus on the role of maintaining and protective factors in school. This enables a theoretical framing of the literature through the lens of educational psychology for critically analysing existing evidence eliciting the voice of individuals with SM. The review reveals implications for future educational psychology practice highlighting the role EPs can contribute to the field.

Themed narrative literature review
This literature review aimed to provide an overview of the key issues in the field and contribute to a more informed debate. Extensive literature searches carried out between September 2020 and January 2022 initially focused on Google Scholar before including other academic databases (ERIC, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR,

PsycINFO). Various search term combinations were utilised based upon key words applying synonyms and truncations for Selective Mutism (selective mut*/elective mut*/aphasia voluntaria/situational mut*) school (edu*/school*/learn*) and outsider perspectives (parent*/teach*/psy*). In the interests of developing a rich understanding of the contextual and evidential landscape of SM, this review includes both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to enhance the analysis and enable evaluation. Research published and peer reviewed within the last 20 years was preferable however the limited literature resulted in the inclusion of older studies contributing insightful perspectives.

Brief History of SM

Dating back to the 19th century, the terms Aphasia Voluntaria (Kussmaul, 1877) and subsequently Elective Mutism (EM) (Tramer, 1934) described children who, 'elected' not to speak in certain environments, despite the ability to do so. Early work presumed the condition to result from the will and active choice of the child. This was reflected in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III-R) (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), under 'Other Disorders of Infancy, Childhood and Adolescence,' where it was referred to as a "persistent refusal to speak" in one or more social situations. Signifying a shift in thinking, the concept of 'refusal' was replaced with 'inability' and the condition henceforth became known as 'Selective Mutism' (DSM-IV, APA, 1994). This challenged early assumptions of SM whilst emphasising the role of anxiety and social phobia preventing speech in particular contexts (Rapoport & Ismond, 1996). Further highlighting the role of anxiety and the possible implications in adulthood, SM was later reclassified from a disorder of 'Infancy, Childhood and Adolescence' to an 'anxiety disorder' (DSM-V, APA, 2013). DSM-V also introduced the term 'low profile' SM to account for individuals who may speak minimally but not in a reciprocal manner during conversation.

Despite good intentions, critics warn that these changes have been insufficient in shifting other's perceptions and SM continues to be misunderstood as a choice on the part of the child (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015). Arguably underpinning this is the equation of 'selective' with selecting and thus choosing, rather than the intended

meaning of 'specific,' leading some to propose 'Situational Mutism' as a more appropriate term for evoking a sympathetic response and understanding (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015).

Prevalence

Whilst SM is considered a 'low incidence' condition (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016), the literature presents an inconsistent understanding of prevalence likely owing to insufficient knowledge about the phenomenon (Schwartz et al. 2006) and the variable application of approaches used to obtain figures (e.g., diagnostic criteria) (Viana et al. 2009). Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain an accurate prevalence of SM. Brown and Lloyd (1975) proposed that 7.2 per 1000 children under five years were affected by the condition, however, these figures reduced to between 0.33 and 0.66 per 1000 at a 12-month follow up, leading Kolvin and Fundudis (1981) to question the criteria for defining the condition. Using the definition of non-speaking, persisting beyond the age of seven, a study of children in Northeast England estimated 0.8 per 1000 children (Fundudis et al. 1979). However, the accuracy of these findings was likely undermined by reliance on parental reports (Kolvin & Fundudis, 1980). More recent estimations suggest that SM affects approximately 1 in 140 CYP (NHS England, 2022). However, the rate decreases to 1 in 550 when older children are included (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) and these figures likely exclude 'low profile' SM. Furthermore, a misunderstanding of SM for "excessive shyness" (p.46) (Camposano, 2011) and parents not seeking advice until concerns are raised by teachers (Kopp & Gillberg, 1997), could lead to an underestimation and inaccurate representation of SM (Cline & Baldwin, 2004). Consequently, Kopp and Gillberg (1997) warn that many CYP present with "hidden" SM, meeting the diagnostic criteria with no formal diagnosis or support in place. Whilst an accurate understanding is difficult to ascertain, "it is a condition that all teachers can expect to encounter" (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016, p. 36) therefore awareness in schools is critical in ensuring timely identification and appropriate support for CYP with SM.

Gender and cultural differences in prevalence

Twice as many girls are thought to be affected by SM (Bergman et al. 2008; Steffenburg et al. 2018) and there appears to be a higher incidence amongst

children who have migrated from their country of birth with reduced second language proficiency (Bradley & Sloman, 1975; Lesser-Katz, 1986; Steinhausen & Juzi, 1996). Viana at al. (2009) estimated prevalence rates of 0.47% and 2.2% amongst native and immigrant families respectively. In attempt to explain these findings, Elizur and Perednik (2003) postulated the 'Diathesis Stress Model' whereby speech anxiety may arise due to the confluence of internal (e.g., sensitive and anxious temperament) and environmental factors (e.g., the stress of migration, joining a new school with different language requirements). Moreover, Toppelberg et al. (2005) proposed that a "silent period" (p.592) can be expected during second language development, warning that in such cases specific factors (in addition to the diagnostic criteria [Appendix 53](#)) must be considered before any diagnosis of SM is made. These included prolonged mutism, that is disproportionate to second language knowledge and exposure, occurring across both languages, and/or concurrent with shy/anxious or inhibited behaviour. The importance of separating English as an Additional Language (EAL) with SM are also set out in the more recent revision of the ICD-11 (2019) diagnostic criteria for SM, which specifies that:

> *"Failure to speak is not due to a lack of knowledge of, or comfort with, the spoken language required in the social situation (e.g. a different language spoken at school than at home)."*

SM and Comorbidities

SM & Autism Spectrum Condition
Until recently, the DSM-V was the preferred diagnostic criteria for SM (SMIRA, 2018). In 2019, the ICD-11 came into effect and under the new criteria, SM and Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) could be classified separately. This contrasted with the definition of exclusions used in DSM-V as 'does not occur exclusively,' thus a person with SM cannot have ASC and vice versa. SMIRA, (2018) propose that 'excluding' SM as a comorbid diagnosis may have a detrimental impact on a proportion of individuals, especially those with ASC. The changes to ICD-11 are pertinent given that SM and ASC has recently attracted interest in the literature with research suggesting that an increasing number of CYP with SM also meet the

criteria for ASC (Andersson & Thomsen, 1998; Kristensen, 2000; Steffenberg et al. 2018). Caroll (2019) warns that a lack of understanding as well as the similar emerging behaviours of the two conditions may give rise to inaccurate diagnoses and inappropriate support. Illuminating this, when ASC is recognised in absence of SM, the adoption of ASC 'friendly' strategies may have the inverse effect of helping, serving to maintain or exacerbate the mutism (Caroll, 2019). Therefore, consistent with the ICD-11, authors in the field stipulate that SM and ASC should be considered separate but comorbid needs (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Smith & Sluckin 2015)

SM & Externalising needs

When considering the emotional and behavioural presentations of CYP with SM, evidence regarding comorbid externalising difficulties is conflicting, with some noting associations with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Arie et al. 2007) and oppositional, aggressive and delinquent behaviours (Alyanak et al. 2013; Diliberto & Kearney, 2016; Manassis et al. 2007), whilst others emphasised the rarity of such comorbidities (Cunningham et al. 2006; Ford et al. 1998; Vecchio & Kearney, 2005). Highlighting the contextually dependent nature of SM, Cunningham et al. (2004) observed discrepancies across parental and teacher reports. In the home context, CYP were observed by parents to display difficulties with social cooperation, responsibility, control and increased oppositional behaviours. However, these behaviours were less severe than those found in oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or conduct disorder, and in school CYP with SM presented as more inhibited. Consistent with this, behavioural inhibition has been found to play an important role in the aetiology of SM, and distress to novelty could be a core aspect of this temperament feature (Kagan et al. 1984; Schwenck et al. 2021).

SM & Internalising needs

Research has noted that children with SM display significantly more internalising (anxiety, depression, and somatisation) than externalising (hyperactivity, aggression and conduct) and behavioural needs (hyperactivity, aggression, depression, attention, atypicality and withdrawal) (Klein et al. 2019). These align with previous findings identifying higher levels of internalising need in CYP with SM (Bergman et al. 2002; Carpenter et al. 2014; Diliberto & Kearney, 2016; Vecchio & Kearney,

2005). In a longitudinal study of 33 children with SM and matched controls, Steinhausen et al. (2006) found that SM co-occurs with various specific anxiety disorders such as social phobia, separation anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Other studies have identified a comorbidity profile of children with SM showing an elevated rate of agoraphobia in adolescence (Gensthaler et al. 2016). Moreover, researchers have observed heightened anxiety levels for children with SM (Bergman et al. 2002; Black & Uhde, 1995; Cunningham et al. 2004; Dummit et al. 1997) in addition to other needs (e.g., obsessive tendencies and somatic complaints). The findings illuminate the significant role of anxiety in the presentation of SM.

SM and Social Anxiety

Whilst a wealth of evidence suggests links between SM and anxiety (Black & Uhde, 1995; Bogels et al. 2010; Yeganeh et al. 2003), the nature of this relationship remains unspecified. Some suggest that SM is a form of social anxiety thus it should be subsumed under Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) in the DSM-V (Black & Uhde, 1995). However, this has received criticism for lacking an evidence base and providing an inaccurate account of SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015). Challenging the view of SM as an extreme form of SAD, recent research illuminated a specific anxiety pattern (e.g., speech demanding situations) in SM (Schwenck et al. 2019). This aligned with other conceptualisations of SM as a fear associated with the act of speaking rather than the wider social context, leading to proposals of its reclassification as a Specific Phobia of Expressive Speech (Johnson & Wintgens 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008). This conceptualisation may account for the context-dependent nature of SM whereby CYP with SM are not always anxious (Sharkey et al. 2008) and aligns with the DSM-V criteria that CYP with SM 'may be willing or eager to perform/engage in social encounters when speech is not required.'

Aetiology of SM

Whilst an association with anxiety has been identified, a comprehensive and uniform aetiology of SM does not yet exist. Research suggests involvement of multiple factors including genetics (Kristensen & Torgersen 2001; 2002; Segal, 2003; Stein et al. 2011), temperament (Cunningham et al. 2006; Kumpulainen et al. 1998; Vecchio

& Kearney 2005), environmental influences (Black & Udhe, 1995; Hayden, 1980; Kolvin & Fundudis, 1981; Kopp & Gilberg, 1997; Viana et al. 2009), neurodevelopmental variables (Arie et al. 2007; Manassis, 2007; Nowakowski et al. 2009) and avoidance (Scott & Beidel, 2011; Young et al. 2012). Using the principles of 'equifinality', Muris and Ollendick, (2015) propose that SM arises from complex interactions among various vulnerability factors, unique to each individual child. Together these increase the 'risk' of developing SM (figure 1). Similarly, Lawrence (2018) argues that a multifactorial aetiology (multiple perspectives and theories) is considered the most appropriate framework for conceptualising SM. Likewise, Johnson and Wintgens (2016) stipulate that no single cause exists, and SM arises from a unique interaction of genetic and environmental factors (figure 2).

Figure 1

Developmental psychopathology model for the aetiology of SM
(Muris & Ollendick, 2015 p. 162).
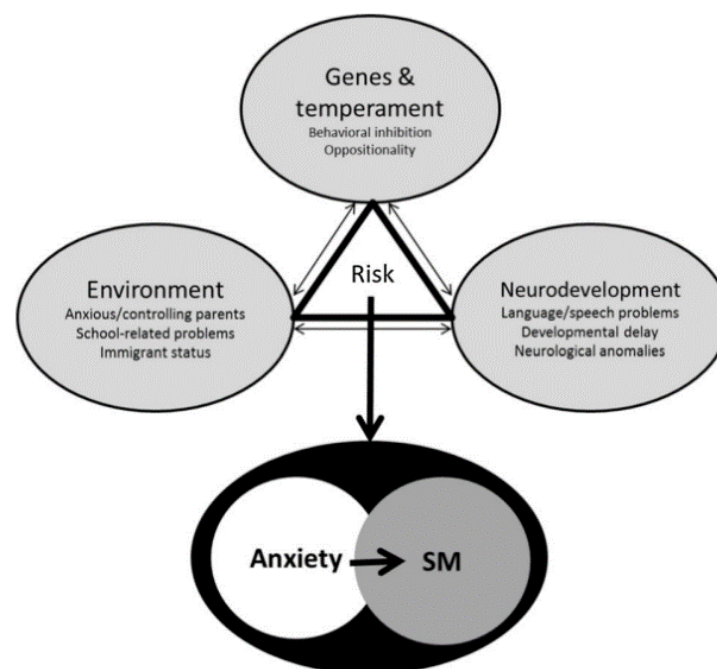
The Role of Maintaining Factors in SM

Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) conceptualisation of SM emphasises the principles of reinforcement in behaviours and events. These may strengthen and maintain a fear of speaking. The authors propose that the identification of 'maintaining factors' (table

1) for each individual is fundamental to helping CYP overcome SM. Whilst most maintaining factors represent a direct and natural response to the child's silence and a genuine attempt to improve the situation, these may inadvertently inhibit or delay a child's progress by generating cycles of pressure and avoidance (figure 3). Johnson and Wintgens (2016) stipulate that ascertaining the maintaining factors in school and at home should be embedded as part of the assessment process when supporting CYP with SM.

Table 1

Maintaining Factors contributing to SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016 p. 39).

> **Summary of SM Maintaining Factors**
>
> A **Talking is a negative experience**
> *Expectation to talk is linked to unreasonable pressure, anxiety, disapproval, or failure.*
>
> B **Fear of talking is strengthened through avoidance**
> *Avoidance brings instant relief from anxiety which reinforces the individual's conviction that there was indeed something to fear.*
>
> C **Avoidance is a positive experience**
> *Avoidance is more rewarding than participation*
>
> D **Not talking becomes a habit**
> *Little or no experience of successfully mastering anxiety convinces the individual that the situation is permanent, and nothing can be done; ultimately, they become resigned to a non-talking role.*

Educational experiences and CYP with SM: An outsider perspective

When seeking to develop an understanding of the academic, social, emotional and behavioural presentations of CYP with SM, the nature of the condition and silence by which it is characterised may pose barriers to researchers gaining access to individual perspectives. In these circumstances, it is reasonable to suggest that parents can contribute an intimate understanding of their child's experiences in

Figure 2

Summary of factors contributing to the development of SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016 p. 37).
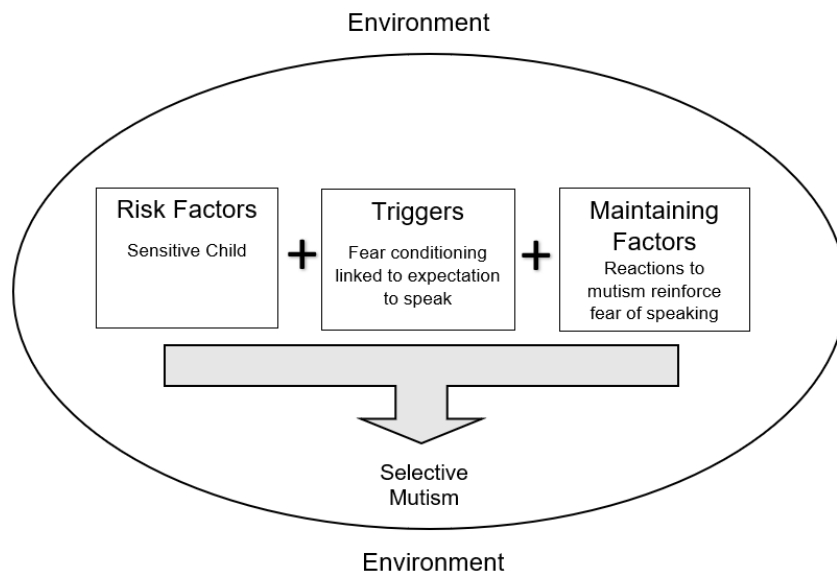
Figure 3

Pressure and avoidance contributing to SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).
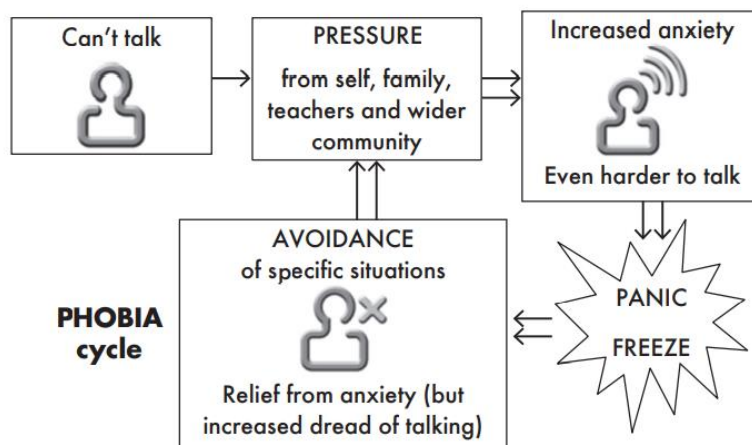
school as "almost always are parents aware of the child's anxiety around aspects of speaking outside of the home" (Cline & Baldwin, 2004 p.151). As SM can become more prominent when a child enters an educational setting, teachers can also contribute an important perspective and understanding in the identification and intervention of SM (Crundwell, 2006). Furthermore, considering the contextually dependent nature of SM, a combination of parent and teacher reports may provide a more holistic understanding of the child, based on the differing perspectives (Klein et al. 2019).

The following sections synthesise research adopting one or more of these approaches (parent and/or teacher reports) to elicit an understanding of the educational, social and emotional presentations of CYP with SM from an 'outsider' perspective. Subsequently, they highlight educational implications, including ensuring staff awareness of SM and facilitating appropriate support for their pupils.

Academic Skills and Competences
Research exploring the impact of SM on academic skill development has yielded variable results. Utilising objective, academic measures, Cunningham et al. (2004) observed no differences between a group of participants with SM and a matched control across mathematics and general classroom performance. These mirrored previous findings that CYP with SM present with comparable abilities to peers without SM across the curriculum subjects (Busse & Downey, 2011; Ford et al. 1998; McHolm et al. 2005). Nowakowski et al. (2009) reported that CYP with SM had average academic abilities and receptive vocabulary scores for their age. A study conducted by Kumpulainen et al. (1998) found that almost half of the participants meeting the diagnostic criteria for SM performed at an average level at school with more children performing at an average level or higher refusing to speak to the teacher (72 percent). These align with previous conclusions made by Browne et al. (1963) that CYP with SM present with "average or above average intelligence" (p. 605). Offering further insight, Cunningham et al. (2004) proposed that children with SM may be protected from academic difficulties and failures owing to observed abilities in paying appropriate attention to instructions, following directions, managing transitions, completing assignments on time, producing correct work, and waiting for help.

Barriers to learning and academic performance

Conversely, other findings suggest that CYP with SM may face several barriers to learning in school. More than half of parental responses in a study by Pamba (2018) indicated that SM had impacted their child's academic performance. Dummit et al. (1997) reported that 11% of children with SM had speech, language, or learning needs and approximately one third of the children in a study by Kumpulainen et al. (1998) performed below the expected standard across the curriculum. Whilst absence of a control group and objective academic measures may distort the interpretation of these findings (Crundwell, 2006), Bergman et al.'s (2002) survey of 125 teachers observed how the academic performance of children with SM was significantly lower than a control group of peers without SM. The authors proposed that academic impairment was secondary to an absence of verbal interactions in settings. Despite relying solely on teacher reports, potentially underestimating the skills of children who do not speak in the classroom (Cunningham et al. 2004), the findings amplified the importance of professionals considering the academic consequences that may be experienced by CYP with SM.

Attention and concentration in the classroom

Further learning barriers were highlighted in a study exploring parental and teacher reports of CYP with SM across behavioural rating scales and language measures (Klein et al. 2019). In contrast to previous research observing participants with SM as having fewer attentional difficulties (Cunningham et al. 2004), teachers in this study reported concerns around sustaining attention in class. The authors proposed that whilst sitting quietly could imply that children are paying attention, much of their school day is likely spent in a state of hypervigilance, monitoring surroundings for fear of being called on to answer questions or feeling apprehension about others' attempts to encourage them to talk. This can take time and energy away from focused attention in class (Hung et al. 2012).

Processing auditory stimuli within the classroom

Findings reported by Pamba (2018) have suggested that sensory processing disorder (SPD) has a high co-morbidity with SM. However, given the exclusive reliance on parental reports rather than clinical measures, the conclusions drawn from these findings were rendered tentative at best. Nonetheless, research adopting

more objective measures of SPD, has also observed a higher comorbidity in children with SM compared to a control group of children (Brimo, 2018). The highest rates fell in the 'visual/auditory sensitivity' and 'auditory filtering' categories, reflecting previous suggestions around specific and significant auditory processing difficulties in CYP with SM (Arie et al. 2007). These findings fit with those of Schwenck et al. (2021) whereby 13% of parents indicated that places with high volume were associated with their child's SM and may illuminate an alternative understanding of the reduced attention identified by teachers of CYP with SM (Klein et al. 2019) as reflecting a hypersensitivity and/or difficulties in filtering auditory information in a busy classroom environment.

Summary of academic skills and barriers to learning
The research provides a mixed picture regarding the academic abilities of children with SM. Notably, the relationship between school-related barriers and SM is likely to be bidirectional therefore children may not speak because of academic difficulties, but it is equally plausible that difficulties emerge because of not speaking at school (Muris & Ollendick, 2015). A social dimension is a key feature of the school curriculum and "talking is an essential tool for learning in every area of the curriculum" (Jefferies & Dolan, 1994 p.117). In primary settings, verbal skills are pertinent in the assessment of children's knowledge and understanding of basic concepts. The impact of remaining silent in school could thwart the assessment and provision of formative feedback, important in improving academic functioning (Crundwell, 2006). When making accurate assessments of children with SM, concerns have been raised by teachers around the difficulties in capturing the child's true ability (Williams et al. 2021). Consequently, unless children achieve the social objectives of the curriculum, it is difficult to affirm that they are meeting the basic requirements of school learning (Cline & Baldwin, 2004).

Social and communicative functioning in school
School is an important arena for the practice and development of verbal skills both academically and socially (Ford et al.1998). Nonetheless, research suggests a prevalence of speech, language and social communication difficulties in SM, including expressive language, articulation (Steinhausen et al. 2006), phonological

discrimination (Kristensen, 2000; Manassis et al. 2007) and expressive narrative language deficits (Klein et al. 2012).

Children with SM are often reported as shy and inhibited (Black & Uhde, 1995; Kristensen & Torgersen, 2001) whilst others propose that SM may reduce opportunities for social interactions for children and may reduce the growth and development of social skills (Giddan et al. 1997). Teacher and parental reports suggest that CYP with SM are similarly at-risk on scales of functional communication and social skills with the most prominent feature of SM reported as withdrawal (Klein et al. 2019). In a study by Cunningham et al. (2004) parents and teachers agreed that CYP with SM displayed difficulties in verbally mediated social behaviours; they were less likely to join groups, introduce themselves, initiate conversations, or invite friends to their houses. The absence and refinement of social skills in school may place children at risk of developing further difficulties in socially interacting with their peers (Crundwell, 2006) and CYP with SM were rated by their teachers as more likely to be victimised and experience peer rejection than other children (Boivin et al. 1995; Olweus, 1994; Schwartz et al. 1993).

Social competences in CYP with SM in school
Conversely, others found that children with SM were no more at risk of being victimised or bullied by peers (Kumpulainen et al. 1998) and Cunningham et al. (2004) proposed that a combination of child and social mechanisms may protect children with SM from these experiences. In their study, CYP with SM were rated as more assertive than submissive, less disruptive, and just as likely to be enrolled in sports, recreational activities, and after-school playtimes with peers, helping to foster friendship. Nonetheless, teachers may not detect most bullying episodes and in general children may not report bullying or harassment in school (Olweus, 1994) thus it is possible that parents and teachers may have underestimated rates of victimisation in these studies.

Summary of social and communicative functioning in school
Overall, the research suggests that although aspects of social development may be affected in children with SM, placing them at risk of future social-based difficulties, other 'mechanisms,' particularly the desire to communicate and interact with others

through activities that eliminate the need to speak (e.g., gestures, nodding, pointing) may serve to protect them. This strengthens the assertion that CYP with SM are not "unsociable" (Crundwell, 2008 p. 50) and teachers have a duty to help pupils develop their social skills, enabling them to remain included within the wider school community.

The impact of internal fear contents in the school environment
Despite the association of SM with other internalising needs and internal factors considered as playing a role in SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Muris & Ollendick, 2015), research exploring a deeper understanding of these mechanisms is limited and likely inhibited by the closed-nature of much of the available research (Schwenck, 2021). However, Capobianco (2010) argues that understanding the child's internal dynamics is crucial to comprehending how the child interprets events surrounding them and the impact at the emotional and behavioural level. Considering the association with anxiety, Bissoli (2007) postulated key cognitive distortions and emotional elements as underpinning SM. (See table 2).

Providing a deeper understanding of some of the fear contents in CYP with SM, Schwenck et al. (2021) utilised an online open-ended questionnaire with a sample of 91 parents. Findings revealed that the most frequently reported aspects of a situation inducing a fear response in CYP with SM included unknown places (56 percent) and new activities (47 percent). Additionally, 25 percent of parents reported activities with an increased risk of failure as associated with their child's silence. These aligned with previous outsider perspectives highlighting the influence of stressful activities on the SM child's speaking pattern (Ford et al. 1998). Providing some insight into these findings, Johnson and Wintgens (2016) propose that different activities carry an associated level of 'risk' for CYP with SM. The authors further note the importance of minimising anxiety by selecting 'low-risk' activities, those with a known content and fixed duration, when supporting CYP with SM to establish and generalise speech in school. This aligned with recommendations in the literature indicating that schools hold an important role in adapting the provision, for example by establishing clear routines for pupils with SM (Elizalde-Utnick, 2007).

Table 2

The role of emotional and cognitive distortions in SM (Adapted from Bissoli, 2007).

Cognitive Distortions	Emotional Interpretation of Events
Catastrophising *(The consequences of one's own mistakes)*	**Inadequacy and inability** *(Experiences constant disorientation with perception of danger in unfamiliar situations and perception of inability and of personal devaluation)*
Hyper-generalisation *(Fear and perception of incapacity in any unfamiliar context)*	**Fear of the judgment of others** *(Worrying that others will judge what they say and do negatively)*
Selective abstraction *(On one's own inability)*	**Shame and meta-shame** *(Fear to be ashamed and to show such fear to others)*
Minimising one's own resources	

Further illuminating the impact of fear contents in CYP with SM, parents reported activities requiring speech (19 percent), where their child was the focus of attention (22 percent) and characteristics of people including, a lack of distance (45 percent) and low familiarity (e.g., strangers) (33 percent) as anxiety inducing for their child. Offering an understanding of these internal mechanisms driving the mute response, Capobianco and Cerniglia (2017) suggest that a CYP present a heightened awareness of attention from others, a perception of the self as incapable and inadequate, and a hypersensitivity to criticism and self-devaluation. The authors propose that being the focus of attention may activate the concern of others becoming aware of their inadequacy, leading to negative thoughts. In school, it is often expected by peers and teachers that all children participate in activities and thus attention may be placed upon those who do not participate, however, this can

strengthen the inhibition, reinforce anxiety, and maintain the mutism (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

Educational Implications

The role of understanding educational staff

When children with SM are unable to speak or communicate within the classroom, it can be frustrating for those teachers working with them (Baldwin & Cline, 1991; Cleave, 2009; Omdal, 2008). Not speaking to teachers, peers, or other individuals, can be interpreted as a characteristic of the child and it is not uncommon for staff to label them as wilful, defiant, controlling, or manipulative (Imich, 1998; Williams et al. 2021). In attributing their will to remain silent, family members and teachers may adopt angry and punitive attitudes towards the child, provoking a sense of tension, guilt, and inadequate sense of self in the CYP (Capobianco & Cerniglia, 2017). However, as indicated by the parental responses in the study by Schwenck et al. (2021), such approaches were regarded as strongly associated with their child's silence. The authors propose that in turn these could stimulate the perception that the situation is inescapable, activating a freeze response as a passive coping strategy, including immobility, typical symptoms in children with SM.

The role of educational staff in identification of SM

The class teacher can play a critical role in the identification, support and outcomes for a child with SM (Kumpulainen, 2002; Lescano, 2008) and a consistent understanding of the core features and developmental pathways associated with SM is the key to ensuring that CYP receive the appropriate support (Crundwell, 2006). Nonetheless, teachers may inadvertently act as 'gate keepers' to the interventions found to reduce anxiety, improve speech, and increase positive educational outcomes (Bergman et al. 2013; Oerbeck et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2021). Externalising behaviours may often overshadow the more 'internalising' difficulties therefore teachers may be less likely to prioritise CYP with SM for support (Busse & Downey, 2011; Omdal, 2008; Williams et al. 2021). Teacher perceptions of SM can also have a direct impact on the subsequent support and provision (Williams et al. 2021). Those ascribing SM as characteristic of the child may be more inclined to conclude that targeted support is not necessary (Korem, 2016; Williams et al. 2021), whereas those viewing SM as anxiety-driven may be more willing to explore targeted

interventions to help children manage the physiological responses and aim to increase speech production (Williams et al. 2021).

The findings illustrated some of the internal mechanisms underpinning SM from an outsider perspective whilst bringing to the forefront the importance of teachers' appropriate understanding, identification, and intervention in school. Understanding SM will likely determine the approaches and provision needed to support the child to manage their anxiety in school.

Summary and rationale for systematic review

The previous section provides an understanding of the wider topics and debates in the field as well as the observed educational, social and emotional implications for CYP with SM. However, findings are inconsistent and subject to methodological difficulties (Cline & Baldwin, 2004; Cunningham, 2004; Ford et al. 1998; Hadley, 1994; Stone et al. 2002). Arguably, a fundamental methodological flaw among the literature reviewed thus far is the reliance on 'outsider' perspectives. Concerningly, when the views of CYP with SM and their parents are collectively represented, rather than offering an assumed 'intimate' (Cline & Baldwin, 2004) understanding, parents may hold contrasting or incomplete perspectives regarding perceptions of recovery and school experiences (Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong 2019). This is further amplified in a study where participants with SM reported accounts of bullying and victimisation in school, of which their parents were unaware (Albrigtsen et al. 2016).

Whilst teachers and school staff are crucial in the identification of SM, a systematic literature review exploring the role of schools in supporting CYP with SM, found that school staff continue to hold a limited understanding and indeed misconceptions regarding the nature of the condition (e.g., arising from the wilful attempt of the child, or shyness which CYP would outgrow in time) (White & Bond, 2022). It is conceivable that reliance on outsider perspectives within the literature may lend to a simplistic representation regarding the speaking patterns of CYP with SM in school (e.g., the perception of CYP not speaking at all). Research exploring the self-reported confidence levels of speaking across home, school and public situations has found that whilst a proportionally lower number of participants with SM felt confident speaking in class (n=6), to teachers (n=6), or support staff (n=6) with

nearly half of the participants 'never' feeling confident to speak in class (n=12), a greater number of participants felt confident speaking with friends in school or outside areas (n=12; n=14 respectively) (Roe, 2011). This research captured the complex, context-dependent and individual nature of SM and arguably provides a rationale for a move towards the use of 'Situational Mutism' as a more appropriate term for developing a shared understanding of the condition (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015).

The findings illuminate the dangers and implications of relying on a predominantly outsider perspective in representing the complex phenomena of SM. Solidifying the rationale for the subsequent literature review and indeed the current research, a paucity regarding the representation of the views of CYP with SM in relation to their educational provision has recently been highlighted by White and Bond (2022) as a "clear limitation within the literature and one which future research should seek to address" (p. 9). It is conceivable that a disregard for the voice of the child may indeed contribute to, and perpetuate the current misunderstanding and misrepresentation of SM. In attempt to redress the difficulties inherent in the research, the following section reviews the limited literature eliciting the perspectives of individuals with SM regarding their educational experiences.

Systematic Literature Review

The overall aim of this review is to highlight gaps in the evidence-base, enabling the formulation of an appropriate research question to enhance the literature and contribute a more accurate co-construction of SM. Attention is paid to the views of individuals with SM regarding their school experiences and findings are situated in the context of Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) model of SM (particularly perceived maintaining and protective factors in school). This offers a unique perspective to the literature by exploring the research through an educational and psychological lens. Multiple search strategies applying synonyms and truncations for Selective Mutism (selective mut*/elective mut*/aphasia voluntaria/situational mut*), experience (view*/voice*/stor*/ perspective*) and school (edu*/school*/learn*) were used across four electronic databases (EBSCO; PROQUEST; PsychINFO; Web of Science). Consistent with the inclusion and exclusion criteria (See table 3) ten studies

(Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Remschmidt et al. 2001; Roe, 2011; Schwenck et al. 2019; Strong 2019; Vogel et al. 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and one awaiting publication (Hill, 2019) were included (See table 4). A paper by Manassis (2015) was disregarded as the children's views were not the focus and the findings were deemed insufficient in enabling an in-depth understanding of experiences.

Summary and review of the papers

Before detailing the themes regarding participants' subjective experiences and views of school, the focus population and methodology of each paper will be reviewed

In the study by Remschmidt et al. (2001), participants referred to a university department and child guidance clinic were followed up on average 12 years later. Data was obtained through interview, standardised psychopathological examination, and biographic inventories. Whilst the study provided insight into the long-term psychological implications of SM, only 25 of the 41 participants were able to participate in the interview, with the remainder being sourced from an outsider perspective (e.g., parents). Thus, the findings may vary and be impeded by the information that could be obtained at the time. Impacting the accuracy of the findings, the study was carried out retrospectively and may be open to selective recall bias. Furthermore, the adoption of standardised interviews hindered an in-depth understanding of participant experiences.

Utilising face-to face interviews with six recovered adults, Omdal (2007) addressed the gap in the literature by eliciting the personal accounts of SM. Through exploring the experiences in childhood through to adulthood, several themes were identified. Participants shared experiences in school which may have contributed to the maintenance and recovery of SM, revealing the psychological impact SM had on the individuals. Nonetheless, the inclusion of participants without a formal diagnosis of SM and adoption of retrospective reports, made the findings susceptible to several biases (e.g., sampling bias; selective recall bias).

Table 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic literature review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
✓ Peer reviewed journal articles or unpublished theses sourced from Web of Science, PROQUEST, EBSCO or PsychINFO ✓ Published articles (or those awaiting publication) ✓ Research focusing on individuals' current or historical experiences of SM (CYP or adults). ✓ Literature adopting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches to elicit the views of individuals with SM. ✓ UK-based or internationally conducted research. ✓ Literature up to April 2022, with no prescribed start date.	• Newspaper articles, books or book chapters which may have referred to personal accounts of SM as these contained information based on professional/ 'clinical' experiences/observations of working with CYP rather than direct research (e.g., Johnson & Wintgens 2016, 'The Selective Mutism Resource Manual'). • Literature relying purely on the views of parents, teachers, and other professionals regarding SM. • Literature where the individuals' perspectives are not the main focus of the study.

Table 4: Summary of the studies regarding the subjective experiences of SM surrounding school.

Study	Type of paper	Sample	Country	Context /Method of elicitation	Themes relating to education/school experiences
Albrigtsen et al. (2016)	Peer reviewed journal article	Male twins (aged 14)	Norway	Conducted retrospectively, two years after recovery from SM using, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews.	**Maintaining factors,** victimization/bullying Ignored, vulnerability, helplessness **Protective factors (internal)** Willing to engage in activities nonverbally **Protective factors (in school) -** staff checking in, friends, change of school **Emotional impact-** frustration
Hill (2019)	Awaiting publication	30 teenagers (genders or ages not given)	UK	Participants had either recovered (6) or were partially/fully affected by SM (24). Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews gathering background information and advice YP would give to teachers.	**Maintaining factors** Others lack of understanding of SM, pressure. **Protective factors (internal)** Willing to engage in extracurricular activities **Protective factors (in school)-** staff approach, friends, environmental changes **Emotional impact-** frustration **Academic impact** Sought adjustments in assessments/tests
Omdal (2007)	Peer reviewed journal article	6 female adults (aged 31-60)	Norway	Retrospective research conducted following recovery from SM. Adoption of semi-	**Maintaining factors,** victimization/bullying Ignored, determination not to speak, Other's reactions

				structured, face-to-face interviews exploring experiences of childhood through to adolescence.	**Protective factors (internal)** Determination to change **Protective factors (in school)-** staff encouraging communication "Fresh start" **Missed opportunities** One participant reflected on how SM held them back academically **Emotional impact-** frustration, therapy in adulthood.
Omdal and Galloway (2007)	Peer reviewed journal article	3 CYP (aged 9-13; 1 male, 2 females)	Norway	During the time of research, participants were still experiencing SM. Raven's Controlled Projection for Children (1951) was conducted face-to-face with participants sharing their perspectives via story completion (writing on the computer or by hand)	**Protective factors (internal)** Friends (sociability) **Protective factors (in school)** Use of non-threatening; non-verbal tool to communicate views. Teachers' encouraging communication.

Patterson (2011)	Unpublished thesis	6 female CYP (aged 13-19)	UK	Research conducted with participants still experiencing SM. Use of Personal Construct methodology, the repertory grid (Kelly, 1955) in addition to the experience cycle questionnaire, Oades and Viney, 2000), and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (Zigmond and Snaith, 1983).	**Maintaining factors** Fear related cognitions (e.g. uncertainty/ unpredictability of social interactions in the school environment/ being heard by others). **Protective factors (Internal)** Social cooperation Listening to others and thus more liked by others Desire to change **Protective factors (in school)** Use of online social networks
Remschmidt et al (2001)	Peer reviewed journal article	45 participants (23 boys; 22 girls) with 41 followed up on average 12 years later.	Germany	Follow up of participants referred to a university department and child guidance clinic using interview and standardized psychopathological examination and two standardized biographic inventories.	**Maintaining factors** Combination of environmental and internal factors. **Consequences of SM** Missed opportunities (e.g., less independent, confident) Psychological impact

| Roe (2011) | Published paper (British Education Index) | 30 CYP (aged 10-18; 7 males, 23 females) | UK | Research conducted with three fully recovered participants and 27 partially or severely affected by SM. Postal questionnaires with a combination of Likert scales, closed and open-ended questions about their experiences of SM across three contexts, home, school and community. | **Maintaining factors** 80 percent felt that SM had affected them in school. Peer and teacher reactions, pressure to speak, isolated/ invisible/ignored in school **Protective factors (internal)** Social cooperation- concentrating in school, friends Assertiveness- Self attributes (e.g. stubborn). Determination. **Protective factors (in school)** Understanding from others Using alternative communication methods in school "Fresh start" **Consequences of SM** Missed opportunities in school; psychological impact (frustrations) |
| Schwenck et al. (2019) | Peer reviewed journal article | Participants aged 8-18 years | Germany | Comparison of how participants rated 21 videos with neutral, embarrassing, | **Maintaining factors (internal)** |

		(SM=52; SAD= 18, 'typical development' = 41)		or speech-demanding situations with respect to their anxiety elicitation.	Fears regarding speech demanding situations more elevated than SAD/Typically developing groups. **Strengthened conceptualisation of SM** As a distinctive anxiety pattern rather than extreme form of SM**.**
Strong (2019)	Unpublished thesis	5 CYP (aged 8-14; 3 males; 2 females)	UK	At the time of the research participants were still affected by SM. Interviews were carried out face-to-face using the Personal Construct Psychology technique, 'Drawing the Ideal Self' (Moran, 2001) which was adapted, enabling CYP to share their views and experiences non-verbally (card sorting, writing and drawing).	**Maintaining factors** Peer and teacher reactions, pressure to speak; bullying **Protective factors (internal)** Assertiveness – standing up to bullies. Determination **Protective factors (in school)** Understanding from others "Fresh start" Using alternative communication methods in school

Vogel (2019)	Peer reviewed journal article	65 CYP (aged 8-18; **25 males, 45** males)	Germany	Research conducted with participants still experiencing SM. Online survey with an open-ended question addressing fears about speaking, and a questionnaire exploring fear-related cognitions.	**Maintaining factors** Fear related cognitions surrounding social anxiety. Fears of making mistakes. Interactional vs performant social situations. Strengthened Johnson & Wintgens 'high' and 'low' risk tasks in school.
Walker and Tobbell (2015)	Peer reviewed journal article	Four adults (aged 21- 30; 2 males, 2 females)	UK	Research conducted with participants still experiencing SM. Adoption of online semi-structure interviews and interpretive phenomenological methodology. Research exploring the participants' historical (e.g., school) and current experiences of SM.	**Maintaining factors** Others' reactions in school Adjustments in school may have reinforced silent identity Dissociation from their silent identity. Social isolation/ exclusion **Consequences** Psychological impact persisted into adulthood. Missed opportunities academically.

Omdal and Galloway (2007) adopted the Raven's Controlled Projection for Children (Raven, 1951) with three participants (aged 9, 11 and 13). This was considered a flexible, non-threatening method requiring the participants to complete fictitious stories (handwritten or computer-typed). Whilst themes regarding school included difficulties making friends, school refusal, and testing authority, they were based on fictional accounts, potentially influenced by the researchers' prior knowledge of the participants. Furthermore, the psychodynamic methodology reflected earlier conceptualisations of SM which neglected the of role anxiety and fear of expressive speech, now widely accepted as characteristic of SM.

Utilising online Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) techniques (including the repertory grid, Kelly, 1955) to elicit the experiences of five adolescents (13-19 years) with SM, Patterson (2011) highlighted several internal factors (e.g. fears) perceivably maintaining the SM. A potential criticism is that the high level of cognition and language required by this methodology may have been threatening for some participants posing ethical considerations and in turn barriers to the richness of data obtained. Furthermore, the findings may be specific to the secondary school context and overlook the important views and perspectives of primary school pupils. Nonetheless, the research added to the sparse UK-based evidence whilst providing a refreshing perspective on the benefits of accessing experiences of SM through online methods.

Roe (2011) elicited the views of 30 CYP (10-18 years) with SM via postal questionnaires containing a combination of Likert scales, closed and open-ended questions. Despite difficulties inherent in the purposive recruitment method and indirect method of data collection (e.g., confirmation of participant responses) the findings revealed a broader understanding of the participants' views of themselves including their self-identified internal strengths (e.g., determination) whilst providing further insight into the maintaining (e.g., lack of staff and peer understanding) and protective factors (e.g., friendships) in school and the perceived emotional impact of SM (e.g., frustration).

Walker and Tobbell (2015) used interpretive phenomenological analysis and online instant messaging software to interview four adults and gain insight regarding their existing experiences of SM. Whilst the incorporation of one of the researcher's own experiences of SM may have weakened the credibility of the research, findings highlighted several maintaining factors driving the mutism in school (e.g., being ignored by teachers). Findings further illuminated the long-term social, psychological and educational consequences of SM (e.g., unfulfilled educational and career paths, limited independence, employment, social isolation).

Using in-depth interviews with a set of twin boys, two years post recovery from SM, Albrigtsen et al. (2016) revealed compelling insights regarding experiences of maintaining (e.g., victimisation) and protective factors (e.g., relaxed teaching approach) as well as the emotional impact of not speaking in school. However, this study specifically reflects the Norwegian cultural context of the participants which may reduce applicability to the context of CYP with SM in the UK. Furthermore, the study is limited by the adoption of retrospective accounts which may offer a distorted or diluted understanding of the individuals' experiences in school.

Vogel et al. (2019) explored fear-related cognitions in social situations by inviting 65 participants (8-18 years) to answer an online, open-ended and closed questionnaire. Yielding a larger sample of participants than previous studies, the research identified several fear related cognitions maintaining the SM (e.g., fear of mistakes). Limiting the findings, this research was also conducted outside of the UK. Furthermore, it could be suggested that this study offers a narrow, and within-child perspective viewing SM as a distinctive pattern of 'faulty' cognitions and overlooking the important environmental context also playing a role in SM.

Hill, (2019) elicited the views and experiences of 30 secondary school pupils affected by SM, through closed and open-ended questions. This UK-based study uncovered information regarding the perceived protective and maintaining factors in school and provided important implications for practice in school settings. However, limited by the secondary school context, this study does not consider the perspectives of SM pupils in primary settings. As needs often present in the primary school phase, it is vital that the views of younger pupils are also represented in the literature.

Schwenck et al. (2019) recruited participants aged 8-18 years meeting the diagnostic criteria for SM (n=52), SAD (n=18) and a control group of 'typically' developing children (n=41). Utilising in vivo situations via an online survey, participants evaluated 21 videos with neutral, embarrassing, or speech-demanding situations. Using an 'anxiety thermometer', participants were asked to indicate how much fear they would feel given each situation. Whilst this provided insight into the specific anxiety evoking situations for CYP with SM (e.g., speech-demanding), the online and 'detached' nature of data collection may have limited the study as the authors could not entirely rule out that individuals other than the child and parent had participated in the study. Furthermore, the closed approach precluded an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences.

Strong (2019) interviewed five CYP (aged 8-14) with SM using an adaptation of the PCP technique, 'Drawing the Ideal Self' (Moran, 2001). Through non-verbal techniques (e.g., drawing, card sorting), the participants' constructions of their current and 'ideal' selves, 'movement' over time, and future goals were explored. Themes included participants' desire to change, maintaining and enabling factors. Despite providing a novel insight into the participants' willingness to compromise regarding their ideal selves, Strong (2019) proposed important developments of the tool (e.g., additional prompt cards) to further increase the participation of CYP with SM during the interview process. This insightful technique provided several implications for future practice and research in facilitating the voice of CYP with SM.

Summary of key themes through an educational lens
Themes among the reviewed papers strengthened, challenged and extended upon the existing understanding of SM. The review uncovered individual (e.g., fear related cognitions) and environmental factors (e.g., limited social relationships; expectation to initiate requests; needs not openly acknowledged; pressure to speak by others; reinforcement of the silent role) in school which may contribute to the maintenance of SM. Furthermore, the findings identified several individual characteristics (e.g., social cooperation, assertiveness and determination and participation in non-verbal interactions) and environmental protective factors in school which may contribute to more positive educational experiences and potential recovery (e.g., supportive staff

and positive peer relationships). Themes further revealed the impact of not supporting the needs of CYP with SM in school which included educational, social and emotional consequences. These will be explored in greater depth subsequently.

Maintaining factors in the Individual

Fear Related Cognitions

Whilst the relationship between SM and SAD has been discussed, a common methodological feature of studies advocating SM as an extreme form of SAD is the reliance on 'other-ratings'. Studies exploring self-reported fear elicitations in participants with SM, found that a high percentage of spontaneous fears fell under the cluster of 'social fear' (Vogel et al. 2019). Offering further insight into the context of social interactions, the fear of mistakes was identified as a persistent fear content in SM as well as fears concerning other's reactions to them (e.g., looking at them) (Vogel et al. 2019). Patterson's (2011) participants described fears of saying something 'stupid' and making the wrong impression during social interactions. Similar fear related cognitions were also perceived by participants to prohibit them from fully demonstrating their true capabilities in school (Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011). These findings aligned with Bissoli's (2007) 'fear of judgement of others;' the perception that others will negatively judge what they say and how they behave. The above findings could therefore serve to strengthen this and previous findings suggesting a distinctive cognitive pattern of responses to feared situations in SM (Schwenck et al. 2019).

Comparisons of CYP with SM and SAD found that participants with SM demonstrated an elevated fear response to social situations regarding speech-demands (e.g., reading aloud in class) suggesting SM-specific feared situations, particularly those involving the expectation to speak (Schwenck et al. 2019). These findings strengthened the conceptualisation of SM as a fear of expressive speech and a distinct entity with an over-lap regarding social fears (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008; Schwenck et al. 2019).

Supporting previous clinical observations and findings in the literature (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) themes further suggested that fears of social interactions were more prominent than 'performant fears' and may be another characteristic of SM. Consistent with this, participants in Hill's (2019) study indicated a willingness to engage in school performances with some finding it easier to speak in the role of a character. Among the retrospective studies, some participants reported feeling confident in more formal, professional settings such as providing lectures to students in contrast to informal, social situations (Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Illuminating the perceived discrepancy between 'performant' and 'interactional' fears in SM, Johnson and Wintgens (2016) propose that situations with known content and fixed duration (e.g. saying a line in a play) ('low risk') may minimise anxiety for individuals with SM whilst more open-ended or 'high' risk situations (e.g., a conversation) may be more difficult for CYP with SM. The findings may further tentatively support the role of specific cognitive and emotional elements in SM as hypothesised by Bissoli (2007). For example, 'hyper-generalization', the fear and perception of incapacity in unfamiliar contexts and 'inadequacy and inability;' a continuous disorientation between the perception of danger in unfamiliar situations and the perception of inability and personal devaluation.

Providing further insight into the potential role of fear related cognitions in SM, Vogel et al. (2019) proposed that silence may be used as a mechanism to gain control in situations characterized by perceived uncertainty or to avoid negative implications ("…I usually remain silent because I'm afraid I might lose control" p 1174). This is strengthened by a response from a participant in Omdal's (2007) study, describing silence as a way of "protecting herself against a chaotic world" (p.243). In response to the uncontrollable and uncertain nature of some situations, participants across the studies perceived a need for predictability (Patterson, 2011; Omdal, 2007). This was also evident in Hill's (2019) study where secondary pupils with SM sought advanced notice and clear expectations for class activities and assignments. The findings suggest that fears regarding the unpredictable nature of social interactions and environments in school could serve to maintain the mute response and strengthens Patterson's (2011) assertion that for individuals with SM, being mute may enable greater anticipation of their interpersonal relationships in school than speaking.

Emotional interpretation of events: 'Shame and meta-shame'

Capabianco and Cerniglia (2017) propose that CYP with SM are hypersensitive to signs, attention and 'looks' that come from unfamiliar people/peers and being at the centre of attention activates the concern that others may become aware of the child's perceived 'inadequacy'. Consistent with this, a large proportion (75 percent) of the secondary school participants in Hill's (2019) study reported that the expectation to communicate non-verbally was just as stressful, with 100 percent of the participants not wanting to stand out in anyway. Furthermore, participants reported feeling shame, embarrassment, and insufficiency (Remschmidt et al. 2001; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Conversely, in Roe's study (2011) less than half of the CYP reported embarrassment. Illuminating these findings, Bissoli (2007) proposed that the perception of 'shame and meta-shame', the fear to be ashamed and to show this fear to others, may further drive the mute response. Equally, these anomalies may arise from the age range of participants across the studies, with CYP as young as 10 years participating in Roe's (2011) study in comparison to the adolescents and adults in the other studies (Hill, 2019; Remschmidt et al. 2001; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Early research exploring embarrassment in a general sample of children aged 5-13 years, observed a significant increase with age in the self-attribution of embarrassment (Bennett, 1989). It could be tentatively suggested that embarrassment in individuals with SM may increase with age, due to the confluence of several factors (e.g., adolescence and the effects of SM) (Walker & Tobbell, 2015).

Maintaining factors in School

Consistent with Johnson and Wintgens (2016), others' behaviours and events were considered to play a role in the maintenance of SM. The maintaining factors in school as perceived by the participants are explored subsequently.

Limited social relationships

Themes of social isolation, invisibility and loneliness in school were captured among several studies (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway,

2007; Patterson, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and emulating previous clinical observations (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016), represented a maintaining factor in school. These feelings resonated in the responses of five participants, sharing experiences of isolation from adults and other children in school (Omdal, 2007). Participants represented a willingness to engage in group activities with appropriate support and accommodations (e.g., nonverbally, with adult or peer support) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011). In the study by Albrigtsen et al (2016), the twins willingly engaged in football and other activities non-verbally. 67 percent of the participants in Hill's (2019) study wanted support to engage in extra-curricular activities in school. Among several papers, being excluded from communication was not what participants wanted (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011). These findings support previous 'outsider' observations of CYP with SM appearing "active and lively" in their social environments (Omdal, 2008 p. 311) and offer support for the conceptualisation of SM as a fear of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008) with a specific anxiety pattern (Schwenck et al. 2019) rather than an extreme state of Social Anxiety Disorder (Black & Uhde 1995; Muris et al. 2016).

The expectation to initiate requests in school
Consistent with Johnson and Wintgens (2016), a further maintaining factor centred around the perception that SM inhibited individuals from expressing their primary needs in school (e.g., physiological needs e.g., going to the toilet, asking for a drink, need for safety). Not speaking in school appeared to evoke a sense of vulnerability and helplessness in individuals with SM (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). For example, in Hill's (2019) study, CYP felt particularly vulnerable during unstructured times (e.g., break, lunch, field trips). Responses further suggested that SM prevented participants from informing adults or speaking up for themselves when faced with injustice (e.g., bullying) or misunderstandings in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). In the study by Albrigtsen et al. (2016) the twin participants unveiled examples of daily life traumas for which they were unable to obtain support or help. These experiences likely fuelled feelings of helplessness in school and in turn strengthened the conviction that talking is too difficult.

Needs not openly acknowledged in school

Limited understanding of SM and unhelpful practices from school staff were viewed as further maintaining factors in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal; 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). In Roe's (2011) study, school staff were regarded as unhelpful by 40 percent of CYP with SM. Furthermore, participants regretted their teachers had not responded to, or advocated for them when faced with bullying and victimisation from peers (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007). Hill (2019) uncovered harrowing experiences of 'draconian' treatment and individual information, reflected in several participants' accounts of school. Emulating previous findings by Roe (2011), all participants in Hill's (2019) study called for a greater understanding of SM as a manifestation of anxiety rather than a conscious 'choice'. Findings indicated that a lack of understanding or empathy from school staff served to reinforce the silence thereby making "the barriers more impenetrable." (Omdal, 2007, p. 250).

Pressure to speak by school staff and peers

Consistent with Johnson and Wintgens (2016), people's reactions and expectations towards the mute behaviour can reinforce the fear (Omdal, 2007). Pressure to speak in school by peers and staff, was reported in several studies which emerged in many forms, from subtle to insolent reactions, including enticing, teasing, bullying, punishing, threatening, the promise of reward, being forced or put on the spot and taking offence (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011). Serving as another form of pressure to speak, participants further called for others to be less judgemental about their non-speaking behaviours (Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019).

Challenging previous findings from an outsider perspective that children with SM were not victimised or bullied more by peers (Cunningham et al. 2004), participants among several studies reported that peer reactions such as bullying, teasing and rejection played a contributory part in the maintenance of SM (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). This is illuminated in the study by Albrigtsen, et al. (2016) where the twin participants, having joined their school from a different region in Norway, were teased about their accents.

Reinforcing the silent role in school

Whilst some participants reflected positively on experiences where their "abnormality" was recognised and accommodated in school (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p. 466) and valued the assistance of peers occasionally speaking for them (Albrigtsen et al. 2016), Johnson and Wintgens (2016) warn if CYP with SM are 'rescued', this could strengthen the conviction that talking is too difficult, thus increasing the fear and maintaining the mutism.

Accounts of CYP with SM highlighted experiences of being ignored and feeling invisible in school (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). The twin participants described humiliating and painful experiences of being ignored and left alone in class, despite trying in vain to be acknowledged (Albrigtsen et al. 2016). Reflecting on their school experiences, a participant in Walker and Tobbell's (2015) study revealed:

> *"…because no one expected me to say anything, it became kind of impossible to say anything…other kids just avoided me."* (p. 463).

A further maintaining factor regarded the expectations of others who had adapted to, and in doing so, reinforced the silence of the child (Omdal, 2007). Nonetheless, accounts from individuals highlighted that they were not choosing to be silent but felt unable to speak in school (Hill, 2019; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). These echo an important implication, that if CYP are not encouraged to communicate, they may become increasingly 'stuck' in their role as the 'silent child' (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

The voices of individuals with SM further strengthen previous research from an outsider perspective emphasising the need for increased staff awareness of SM and the role of teachers in facilitating positive outcomes (Crundwell, 2016; Kumpulainen, 2002; Lescano, 2008; Williams et al. 2019;).

Protective factors in the individual

Social Cooperation

Importantly, not all participants felt that SM had affected them in school as illustrated by one participant who reported that they worked "just as well as everyone else, if not better, because they are always chatting and not concentrating" (Roe, 2011, p. 21). When considering the advantages of not speaking, participants in Patterson's (2011) study reported that they would not cause trouble and proposed that others may be fonder of silent people as they listen and appear respectful. These responses aligned with previous research observing fewer of the attentional or oppositional behaviours associated with academic difficulties, in CYP with SM (Hinshaw, 1992) and echoed the proposal that individual and social mechanisms may serve to protect CYP with SM from academic failure (Cunningham et al. 2004).

Contrasting the dominant picture within the literature characterising CYP with SM as 'shy', 'quiet' or 'introverted', the participants in Roe's (2011) study identified many positive and conceivably 'social', attributes in themselves, including 'friendliness', 'kindness,' and a sense of humour. Participants reported a willingness to engage in extra-curricular activities that did not involve speaking, including football (Albrigtsen et al. 2016); music (Omdal, 2007); dancing (Roe, 2011) and school performances (Hill, 2019). Mirroring Cunningham et al (2004), these conceivably fostered friendships which were considered a further protective factor in school for CYP with SM (see 'positive peer relationships').

Assertiveness and determination

Providing some support and further insight into the protective internal mechanisms within the individuals (Cunningham et al. 2004), assertive traits were reflected in some of the CYP with SM who identified themselves as, 'stubborn', 'loud', 'stroppy' and 'bossy' (Roe, 2011). In Strong's (2019) study one participant felt that standing up for themselves and not caring about what people said, was an important factor facilitating progress in school. Further amplified in Strong's (2019) research were participants' willingness and motivation to change. Whilst research suggests that

determination not to speak could represent a maintaining factor (Omdal, 2007), among the findings, remaining determined to overcome the SM and making a "conscious decision to start talking" (Omdal, 2007 p. 245) was viewed as a precursor in the recovery process (Patterson, 2011; Roe 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). These are further illustrated in the messages of encouragement from CYP with SM to other individuals with SM (e.g., "you can beat it and have a better life") (Roe, 2011, p. 28).

Protective factors in school

Positive peer relationships
Positive relationships with peers were identified a key protective factor in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Patterson 2011; Roe 2011; Strong, 2019). Amplifying this, all participants in Hill's (2019) study valued having a trusted friend in school. Responses of individuals among other papers ranged from the importance of having one trusted friend (Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway 2007), to lots of school friends (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019).

Accommodating needs in school
Participant responses among the papers highlighted the importance of changing some aspect of their school environment to make it more conducive to learning. In Hill's (2019) study, 75 percent of participants sought appropriate location of seating in class, and more than half of the participants called for extended time for testing and assignments. The positive effect of joining a new school or club was further reflected in several papers (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019) suggesting a "fresh start" may enable individuals with SM to escape familiar people's expectations and reactions (Omdal, 2007).

A further environmental adaptation in school involved alternative (e.g., non-verbal) forms of communication. In Hill's (2019) study of secondary pupils, 75 percent of respondents preferred to communicate with teachers by email, a liaison book or a 'go between' and 50 percent had used substitutions for speaking in school

assessments and assignments, including, written work, non-verbal communication, audio-or videotaping. 80 percent of Roe's (2011) respondents used some form of alternative verbal communication techniques, with gesturing, pointing and writing most commonly utilised when communicating with teachers in school.

Computerised and electronic communication devices were also used by 70 percent of the respondents in Roe's (2011) study whilst instant messaging and social networking, were also considered important communication aids in school (particularly with peers and school staff) (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). The papers highlighted several benefits for online social networking and communication, including validating their experiences (Patterson, 2011); reducing or eliminating the pressure during face-to-face interactions (Roe, 2011), satisfying a need for socialisation, and restoring a sense of 'normality' (Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Consistent with Roe (2011), for individuals with SM, these methods "provided a vehicle for self-expression, which their condition often denies them" (p. 32).

The fundamental role of teachers

A theme among almost all the papers highlighted the fundamental role staff play in supporting CYP with SM in school (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Omdal, 2007; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019). For example, in Roe's (2011) study, 20 percent of CYP felt staff were helpful and 75 percent of Hill's (2019) participants felt teachers played a significant role in developing their self-esteem. Omdal's study (2007) provided further insight into how teachers can support CYP with SM in school, by breaking down the barriers to communication through informal, non-pressurizing approaches. Similarly, the twins in the study by Albrigtsen et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of a non-confrontational atmosphere of curiosity and follow up on subjects. The authors proposed such an approach increased the twins' sense of self efficacy in school. Half of the secondary pupils with SM in Hill's (2019) study sought a calm approach and staff checking in with them. Furthermore, time and patience from school staff were key attributes valued by pupils with SM (Roe, 2011) with the students in Hill's study (2019) expressing that in school, they were often too tense to process the information quickly or accurately. Reflecting previous findings observed from an outsider perspective, these may strengthen the

role of anxiety impacting on the ability to attend to and process information in school (Klein et al. 2019; Hung et al. 2012).

The importance of staff acknowledging and understanding their needs was highlighted in Hill's (2019) study, with all participants calling for a greater understanding from staff. Moreover, responses suggested that school staff play a key role in supporting the social inclusion of CYP with SM in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011), by gently encouraging them to communicate, relate with others (Omdal & Galloway, 2007) and consistently initiating conversation in a gentle, supportive manner (Patterson, 2011).

Acceptance and Inclusion

Acceptance from others and inclusion in school were also considered vital protective factors across the papers (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Participants emphasised the importance of others (e.g., peers and staff) speaking to them but not expecting an answer (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011) as a critical factor in the management of their SM. In Roe's (2011) study CYP wanted to be accepted as normal, which aside from having SM, they felt they were. Consistent with this, the twin participants wanted school staff to look beyond their SM and focus on the school subjects (Albrigtsen et al. 2016). 67 percent of the participants in Hill's (2019) study reported a need to separate their academic performance from their SM so that success could be measured by their accomplishments. The accounts and experiences reviewed in the papers indicated that SM had not defined their personality (Strong, 2019) and strengthened the proposal that individuals with SM may dissociate between a recognised 'true' identity and the silent identity that individuals are able to outwardly express (Walker & Tobbell, 2015). As reflected in the views of the individuals', these themes highlight the importance of others in school preventing acceptance of the silence and withdrawal, rather gently supporting individuals to break down the barrier of their "silent identity" (Omdal, 2008, p. 14.).

Consequences of not intervening in school

According to Johnson and Wintgens (2016), addressing the maintaining factors may be all that is needed for children to improve, however, if not identified, SM is likely to continue and at the very least, take longer to overcome. Some of the consequences of not speaking in school were further reflected in the accounts of the individuals among the reviewed papers and are subsequently considered.

Missed opportunities in school

Previous outsider research suggested that children's educational performance and experiences are likely not affected by their SM. This was echoed by parents in Roe's study (2011) reporting that academic progress was good for 47 percent of the participants, despite their verbal limitations. Nonetheless, 80 percent of the CYP considered that SM had affected their ability to fully participate in school (Roe, 2011). The individuals reflected on the impact of SM which limited their options and ability to make academic progress (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015), prevented them from demonstrating their thinking and understanding in class (Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011) and fundamentally, ask for help when stuck (Abrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2911; Strong, 2019).

Participants reflected on how SM had held them back from reaching their full academic potential, subsequently impacting on their further education and career options (Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015;).

> *"I got a lower grade for my English GCSE than I would have if I could do the speaking part. I couldn't ask for help when I got stuck on work, so I would do less work than I could have. I am finding it difficult to find a job"* (Sarah, 17 years, Roe, 2011, p. 21).

In comparison with the reference group at follow up, participants in the study by Remschmidt et al (2001) study described themselves as less independent, less motivated about school achievement and as having poor concentration.

The perceived 'missed opportunities' echo stark reminders around the challenges posed by an educational curriculum, centred around social objectives which may

prevent CYP with SM from meeting basic requirements of school learning (Cline & Baldwin, 2004).

Emotional impact of SM

The psychological impact of SM was reflected in several of the papers. For example, feelings of frustration were voiced in four of the studies (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). 80 percent of CYP considered that having SM had affected them at school which had in turn impacted them emotionally (Roe, 2011). At home, the frustrations of not expressing their primary needs in school, led to violent outbursts and conflicts between the twins in the study by Albrigtsen et al. (2016). These aligned with Roe's (2011) findings that due to remaining silent during the school day, CYP with SM experienced frustration, which was subsequently released in the safe environment of the home. As the dialogue, vital to a child's development (Shaffer, 1996; Stern, 1985) is absent at school, it is possible that the reciprocated experience with another human being is also absent thus CYP with SM may not receive the 'tuning in' from others that could protect and vitalize them psychologically (Albrigtsen et al. 2016).

The long-term social and psychological impact of SM

Notwithstanding the 16 participants (39 percent) describing a complete remission, all other participants in the 12-year follow up study by Remschmidt et al. (2001) continued to present with communication barriers which impeded across school, employment, and leisure activities (e.g., fear of unknown situations, talking to strangers and using the telephone). Furthermore, for five cases, the non-speaking was described as unchanged. Experiences of social isolation were also reflected by the adults in the study by Walker and Tobbell (2015), highlighting barriers to developing relationships and independence beyond their immediate family (e.g., family occasions).

The emotional impact of SM perceivably persisted into adulthood as reflected by participants' feelings of shame and embarrassment regarding the impact of SM on the fulfilment of 'normal' social roles (e.g., unemployment, reliance on parents) (Remschmidt et al. 2001; Walker & Tobbell, 2015;) whilst others' subjective experiences of SM reflected feelings of insufficiency and remarkable anxiety states

(Remschmidt et al. 2001). Participants reported feeling less self-confident, mature and healthy in comparison to a reference group at follow-up (Remschmidt et al. 2001). Moreover, of the respondents in Omdal's (2007) study, four had obtained psychological therapy as adults. Almost all the participants interviewed in Remschmidt et al.'s (2001) study perceived SM as a very serious condition from which they had suffered intensively. Furthermore, participants reported a number of psychopathological symptoms, (particularly psychomotor disturbances) with almost half of the participants (42 percent) reporting scores that 'categorized' them as having 'severe psychopathological disturbances.'

These reflect assertion made by Kolvin and Fundudis (1981) that SM is a persistent condition with an overall tendency of poor outcome, challenging those who found a favourable outcome and after some years, a complete remission (Wergeland, 1979). This further highlights the importance of ensuring that teachers are knowledgeable about SM and able to intervene earlier which is key in reversing the practice in school settings of just watching, waiting, and hoping that they will 'grow out' of their shyness and selective silence (Bergman et al. 2002; Camposano, 2011; Crundwell, 2006; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Williams et al. 2021).

Summary

Themes among the systematic literature review identified several internal factors, in particular a distinctive pattern of cognitive distortions and emotional states (e.g., fear, shame), as playing a significant role in the maintenance of SM. Furthermore, findings illuminated the role of environmental factors in school which if left unaddressed, may serve to maintain the SM response in CYP. This strengthened Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) conceptualisation of SM as a unique interaction of child characteristics and environmental factors operating for each individual to maintain the mutism. The multiplicity of factors makes SM one of the most complex conditions, therefore knowledge of the particularities of the SM and its variants in each child can provide important insight and inform intervention. Extending on Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) model, the review provided a unique insight into the perceived protective characteristics within the individuals and their school environments which may contribute to more positive educational experiences and

potential recovery. This emphasised the importance of identifying and eliminating the unique individual and environmental factors maintaining the SM response (Johnson & Wintgens' 2016) whilst harnessing the protective factors for CYP in their school setting.

A willingness to engage in non-verbal interactions and the detrimental impact of being isolated and ignored in school, further strengthened the conceptualisation of SM as a phobia of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008) with a specific anxiety pattern (Schwenck et al. 2019) and challenged the view of SM as an extreme form of social anxiety (Black & Uhde,1995; Muris et al. 2016). The review uncovered the difficulties individuals with SM face daily in school, providing insight into the array of academic, social and emotional consequences for individuals with SM which, if ignored may persist into adulthood. Echoing previous warnings, without support, SM:

> *"…can cripple a child for life and may curb the way for an array of academic, social, and emotional repercussions."* (Shipon Blum, 2007 p.5).

Implications for educational psychology

This review captures a broad range of innovative approaches (e.g., drawing, writing, postal questionnaires) (Omdal & Galloway 2007; Roe, 2019; Strong, 2019) and online communication methods (Patterson, 2011; Schwenck et al. 2019; Vogel et al. 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) for successfully accessing the views of individuals with SM reinforcing the message that:

> *"There are ways to hear the voices of those with SM, if we are willing to listen"* (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.468).

Whilst the silence by which the condition is characterised may make this a challenging prospect, with their unique skill sets, Educational Psychologists (EP) are in a prime position to gather and communicate CYPs' views (Ingram, 2013) by adopting the creative strategies required for working with "hard to reach learners" (Smillie & Newton, 2020 p.337).

The review strengthened the model proposed by Johnsons and Wintgens (2016), however, more research exploring the internal and external factors in the development and maintenance of SM is required (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015). This highlights a need to explore specific contributory factors in the school environment and how to address them (Ford et al. 1998; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). Through discovering the bi-directional impact of factors (e.g., environment, identifying the function 'not speaking' has for the child) and developing individualised interventions, EPs can play a direct role in the support and management of SM (Lawrence, 2018).

Whilst the profession is equipped for supporting the needs of CYP with SM, it is estimated that EPs will encounter a pupil with SM only once every five years (Imich, 1998). An insufficient understanding of the breadth and scope of EP work could lead the unique contribution of the profession to become overlooked (Keen et al. 2008). Further barriers may stem from time (Lawrence, 2018) and budget limitations, with teachers perceiving external agency support from EPs as difficult to access (Williams et al. 2021). However, Johnson and Wintgens (2016) argue that a coordinated approach is vital to ascertain individual, experiential, and environmental factors and whether the mutism has a speech and language or emotional basis. Providing a robust argument that EPs are suitably skilled in supporting the emotional aspects of SM, Strong (2019) proposed a SM pathway with a distinct role for EPs.

Mirroring previous findings, the themes within this literature review highlight the potential short and long term educational, social and psychological consequences for CYP with SM, if needs are not appropriately met in school (Crundwell, 2006; Remschmidt et al. 2001). Consequently, the longer SM lasts, the more complex and lengthier it is to resolve while early intervention offers a relatively quick, non-invasive and inexpensive solution (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). EPs are in a central position to act as agency of support and source of information to promote an awareness of SM and evidence-based practice for change (Williams et al. 2021).

This section illustrates the breadth of skills EPs can contribute to the lives of CYP with SM through activities such as raising awareness and implementing prevention at the universal level, providing focused interventions and employing creative

approaches to enable their voice to be represented both within the planning of provision and among the literature. This review calls for a better understanding of SM whilst highlighting the important perspective EPs can contribute to the field.

The rationale for this study and identified gaps:

- Only five of the studies were conducted in the UK (Patterson, 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2018; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) four of which accessed the views of CYP regarding their current experiences of SM (Hill, 2019; Patterson, 2016; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2018).

- Whilst four of the studies utilised online data collection methods (Patterson, 2016; Schwenck et al. 2019; Vogel et al. 2018; Walker & Tobbell, 2015), none of these adopted a video format to elicit the views of CYP with SM. This method may overcome some of the methodological barriers posed by previous studies and provides a 'live' interaction and confirmation of the responses from the individuals themselves.

- Aside from Hill's (2019) research, none of the studies specifically explored the CYPs' views about their educational environment.

- Only one paper was conducted by an EP (Strong, 2019) highlighting the dearth of literature from an educational and psychological perspective.

The research aimed to address these gaps in the literature whilst adding to the limited evidence-base in this area.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented literature regarding the educational, social and emotional presentations of SM from an 'outsider' perspective whilst illuminating the implications of such methods in providing a partial understanding of SM. The 'cursory' and limited attention paid to the experiences of CYP with SM from an educational perspective emphasises a need for more research exploring the school situations more closely to ascertain the circumstantial factors (e.g., contextual, emotional and socialisation) that may play a role in SM (Ford et al. 1998). It calls for more research exploring the perceptions of the school environment from the perspectives of the CYP themselves to develop a better understanding of how best to support CYP with SM by reducing

the school environmental factors which may be threatening to some CYP with SM (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). This indicates a gap in the research and provides a rationale for the study. Furthermore, findings considered the key but often overlooked role that EPs can play in advocating for, and supporting CYP with SM, strengthening the need for a coordinated and collaborative approach to explore the unique internal and external mechanisms in SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

Chapter 2: Empirical Paper

Abstract

This study applied a qualitative, flexible design to explore the educational views and experiences of CYP with Selective Mutism (SM). Ten CYP aged 7-17 identified as having SM, participated in a series of semi-structured interviews centred around a non-verbal adaptation of the PCP approach, the 'Drawing the Ideal School' technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007). Utilising this creative, flexible approach, the participants' perceptions of an 'ideal' and 'non ideal' school were elicited before capturing views regarding their current school and ways in which this could become more like their ideal school. The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Common themes were identified regarding the perceived important features in an 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school including the layout and landscaping, ethos, person characteristics and the climate. Findings further highlighted a combination of external factors in school (e.g., the role of others such as staff and peers) and internal factors within the participants (e.g., speaking identity, construing of events, personal competences) that may play a role in the maintenance or protection of CYP in school. Finally, the findings revealed both internal (managing the underlying mechanisms, assertiveness and determination) and external factors (relaying the foundations, paving the way to a better understanding and applying the 'Goldilock's Principle' e.g., just right) perceived as important for improving the participants' current experiences in school. Conclusions illustrated that Educational Psychologists are well placed to support CYP with SM using this creative technique whilst illuminating the implications for future research and practice in this area.

Keywords: Qualitative research, Selective Mutism, child voice, children and young people's experience, School, Education, Personal Construct Psychology, Critical Realism, maintaining, protective, facilitating.

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the rational, context and current research from the views of those experiencing SM which informed the decision to contribute to this vastly under researched area of study.

Rationale for the study

Within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-fifth edition (DSM-V; American Psychological Association [APA], 2013) and the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), 2019, SM is defined as an anxiety disorder characterised by a consistent pattern of speaking in some situations (e.g., home) and a 'failure' to speak in others where speech is typically expected (e.g., school). However, given its complexity it is usually poorly understood and vastly under-recognised (Keen et al. 2008). An independent review of the provision for CYP with speech, language and communication needs in England revealed an insufficient understanding of low-incidence, high-need conditions including SM (ICAN, 2018).

Adding to its complexity and likely misunderstanding, SM continues to attract debate among researchers in the field. A common misinterpretation of SM as an active choice may arise from the very terminology used to describe the condition (e.g., 'selective' equating to 'selecting' and thus choosing, rather than the intended meaning of 'specific') (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015). Furthermore, a comprehensive and uniform aetiology of SM does not yet exist, rather SM likely arises from complex interactions among various vulnerability factors, (environmental and internal) unique to each individual child (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Muris & Ollendick, 2015; Lawrence, 2018). Despite anxiety now a widely accepted characteristic of SM (Black & Uhde, 1995; Bogels et al. 2010; Yeganeh et al. 2003), the nature of this remains unclear with some conceptualising SM as a form of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) (Black & Uhde, 1995) whilst others postulate a specific anxiety pattern (Schwenck et al. 2019) or a fear of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008).

The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) and legislation informing the role of professionals supporting CYP with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (Children and Families Act, 2014; SEND Code of Practice, DfE and DoH, 2015) provides a rationale and legal basis for the rights of CYP to have a voice. Remarkably, literature searches mirrored previous concerns regarding the minimal progress made in valuing CYPs' perspectives among SM research (Roe, 2011). As such, the current literature base portrays a predominantly medicalised view of SM and one that relies on "observer interpretations rather than experiential accounts" (Walker & Tobbell, 2015, p.457). Such methodologies have attempted to provide insight into the understudied internal mechanisms (e.g., anxiety inducing aspects of places and activities) associated with SM from the accounts of parents (Schwenck, 2021). However, calling into question the assumed 'intimate' (Cline & Baldwin, 2004) understanding, research has revealed that parents held only partial or distinct perspectives from their children regarding aspects of their SM and school experiences (Albrigtsen, 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019). These mirrored previous concerns that:

> *"Methodologies which fail to take into account the perspectives of those with SM may be presenting a misleading or partial representation of SM by reporting only how it appears to outsiders"* (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.456).

This highlighted the importance of gaining an accurate and co-constructed representation from the individuals themselves.

SM research has attracted attention broadly across the contexts of school, home/family and public/social (Bergman et al. 2008; Ford et al. 1998; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019), however, little has been written specifically about the school context in which the behaviour occurs (Cline & Baldwin, 2004). Key to supporting CYP in school is the identification of 'maintaining factors' which may inadvertently reinforce pressure and avoidance of speaking (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). The "cursory" (Stone et al. 2002 p.15) attention paid to the experiences of CYP with SM from an educational perspective emphasised a need for more research in this area to ascertain the circumstantial factors (e.g., contextual, emotional and socialization)

that may play a role in SM (Ford et al. 1998). This formed a rationale for the current study, adding depth to the limited literature base whilst developing an understanding of the educational experiences from the perspectives of those with SM.

Context of the research

The current study was conducted during a two-year TEP placement within a Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Key priorities outlined in the local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) strategy 2019-2022 included simplifying the 'pathways' for families and professionals, ensuring CYP with SEND have their needs identified and assessed as well as the co-production of jointly commissioned SEND services and provision. Following consultation with LA professionals including Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and LA Commissioners, the researcher understood that the support, services, and pathways for CYP with SM were under review. Discussions echoed previous findings where CYP with SM did not fall within the remit of one professional group (Keen et al. 2008; Selective Mutism International Research Association [SMIRA], 2020) and highlighted the importance of increasing an understanding across local services who can work with and help inform support for CYP with SM (ICAN, 2018). The current research additionally aimed to strengthen the need for collaboration between EPs, SALTs and CAMHS in the researcher's placement LA, informing a multidisciplinary care pathway where the views of CYP with SM are pivotal to informing practice.

Literature

Confirming a paucity in pupil voice research, the sparse papers utilising methodologies for exploring the experiential accounts of those with SM were examined through an educational and psychological lens. Findings from research in the area consolidated, extended and challenged the existing understanding of SM, strengthening the importance of contributing an accurate and co-constructed representation of this complex phenomena from the views of those with SM.

They further revealed perceived internal and environmental factors contributing to the maintenance of SM in school. Internal factors included social fears such as making mistakes, other's reactions (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Vogel et al, 2019), speech demanding situations (Schwenck et al. 2019) and 'interactional' fears in comparison to 'performant' fears (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). These aligned with previous outsider perspectives regarding the role of internal processes in the maintenance of SM (Bissoli, 2017; Schwenck et al. 2021) and the conceptualisation of SM as a fear of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008).

School environmental factors contributing to the maintenance of SM included experiences of social isolation, invisibility, and loneliness (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Patterson, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) whilst a lack of understanding, support and unhelpful practices adopted by staff, fuelled feelings of vulnerability and helplessness in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Among the papers, pressure to speak by others in school presented in many forms (e.g. teasing, punishing, rewards, forced and taking offence) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011) whilst acceptance of the mutism through ignoring (Albrigtsen et al. 2016), 'rescuing' (Walker & Tobbell, 2015) or adapting to the silence (Omdal, 2007) were also considered significant factors strengthening the conviction that talking is too difficult and thus maintaining the SM. These aligned with outsider perspectives warning that without encouragement to communicate, CYP may become 'stuck' and their identity as a 'silent child,' entrenched (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Schwenck et al. 2021).

Research in this area has also identified both internal and environmental factors that may protect CYP with SM in school. Contrasting the 'outsider' narratives of CYP with SM as 'shy' or 'introverted' (Cline & Baldwin, 2004) themes among the reviewed papers identified social (e.g. willingness to engage in interactions once the pressure to speak is removed) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007, Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011) and assertive traits (Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019) as key internal factors protecting CYP with SM in school, highlighting

that SM had not defined their personality. Moreover, a desire and determination to change were considered likely precursors in the recovery process (Patterson, 2011; Roe 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). These aligned with previous outsider perspectives suggesting that a combination of child and social mechanisms may protect children with SM socially and academically in school (Cunningham, 2004).

School environmental factors included positive relationships with peers (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Patterson 2011; Roe 2011; Strong, 2019), adjustments in school (e.g., classroom seating location, additional time for work and alternative modes of communication) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019), the fundamental role of staff in adopting supportive, understanding, non-pressurized approaches (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal & Galloway, 2007; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019), acknowledgement and encouragement to be socially included in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011). Finally, acceptance and inclusion in school were considered important protective factors across several papers (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015).

In absence of appropriate support and understanding from the onset, research in the field identified academic, social, and emotional consequences for CYP with SM. These included missed opportunities, inhibiting individuals from participating fully in school (Abrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019), limiting subject options and academic progress (Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Moreover, the psychological impact of remaining silent during the school day was illustrated by reported feelings of frustration (Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and violent outbursts in the home context (Albrigtsen et al. 2016). This suggested that remaining silent during the school day may deny individuals the important 'tuning in' from others that could protect and vitalize them psychologically (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Shaffer, 1996; Stern, 1985). Research further revealed the long-term social (Walker & Tobbell, 2015; Remschmidt et al. 2001) and psychological (Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015;

Remschmidt et al. 2001) impact on individuals and reinforced previous warnings that without support, the implications of SM:

> *"…can cripple a child for life and may curb the way for an array of academic, social, and emotional repercussions."* (Shipon Blum, 2007 p.5).

This provided scope for more research exploring the internal and external factors in the maintenance of SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015) from the individual perspectives, with a specific emphasis on the school context and how to address these (Ford et al. 1998; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

Methodology

This section outlines the aims, research questions and adopted philosophical stance informing the choice of PCP (Kelly, 1955) for gaining an insight into the participants' views. It further details the adoption of a flexible qualitative design which enabled the adaptation of the Drawing the Ideal School technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007) and facilitated the elicitation of the participants' voice. Finally the recruitment process, participant information, ethical considerations, and approach to data analysis are outlined.

Aims of the Study

Using a qualitative approach, the primary intention of this study was to explore and gain an in-depth insight into the views and experiences of CYP with SM. By considering the way CYP view the world and including elements of what is most important to them, the research sought to capture a synthesised description and shared 'essence' of participant experiences (Creswell, 2014). In viewing them as the experts of their own experiences, the research also had an emancipatory or "empowerment" purpose (Robson & McCartan, 2016 p.39). Moreover, it intended to contribute to the limited understanding of SM from the individuals' perspectives and inform improved learning environments by exploring the perceived maintaining and facilitating factors within the school and the CYP themselves.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do CYP with SM perceive as important features in an ideal and non-ideal school?

RQ2: What factors do CYP with SM perceive as influencing their current school experiences?

RQ3: What do CYP with SM perceive as important in making their current school more ideal?

Ontological and epistemological approach

The philosophical assumptions of the researcher shape the way in which research is conducted, as well as the interpretation of the findings (Cohen et al. 2017; Robson & McCartan, 2016). A paradigm is a set of beliefs about reality and how the world can be understood. These include the nature of reality: ontology; how knowledge is generated: epistemology; and how to approach these: methodology (Matthews, 2003). Paradigms in research are believed to lie on a continuum, ranging from realist to relativist (Madill et al. 2000). Realism asserts that there are truths in the world that can be studied objectively with a known cause and effect (Willig, 2013) whilst relativism stipulates there is no single truth, acknowledging that individuals have different perspectives of events based on their own perceptions and interpretations (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

As highlighted in the literature review, SM has a complex and 'multifactorial' aetiology (Lawrence 2018) and there is likely to be little consistency in practice and support for CYP with SM (Keen et al. 2008). Thus it was assumed that the participants would have unique and differing experiences of SM in school. Whilst SM could be a socially constructed phenomenon, some of the presentations exist independently of the individuals' perceptions of them (e.g., symptoms, diagnostic criteria, ICD-11; DSM-V). In consideration of these, the current study does not fit with pure relativist positions (e.g., social constructionism). Ontologically and epistemologically, the research was situated between realism and relativism (Kelly, 2008; Bergin et al. 2008) and aligned with the beliefs of critical realism.

The philosophy of critical realism derives from the work of Roy Bhaskar (1975; 2008) who highlighted the "heavily anthropocentric" (p. 38) and thus socially located nature of science. Central to his position was the notion that:

> *Knowledge is a social product, produced by means of antecedent social products; but that the objects of which, in the social activity of science, knowledge comes to be produced, exist and act quite independently of men"* (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 5-6).

Distinguishing between 'closed' and 'open systems,' Bhaskar (1975) rejected the idea that it is "only under conditions that are experimentally produced and controlled that a closure, and hence a constant conjunction of events is possible" (p. 55). Rather, it is a central contention of the critical realist that reality exists in inherently 'open systems,' complexly related and causally codetermined by a range of external (e.g., contextual, environmental) and intrinsic (e.g., temperamental) structures (Manicas & Secord, 1983). Thus critical realism accepts the belief in a reality independent of our assumptions whilst acknowledging the partial, mediated, tentative and interpretive nature of knowledge production. These principles align with the proposed aetiology of SM as arising from complex interactions among various factors unique to each individual child (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Muris & Ollendick, 2015). Moreover, they facilitate the study's aims of allowing access to a mediated reflection of reality through exploration of CYPs' views of their subjective experiences of SM, invariably shaped by the cultural and social context (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

For the critical realist, the aim is not to focus on the phenomena itself (Matthews, 2003) (e.g., SM) but to propose mechanisms (e.g., environmental, or internal) operating to produce or block an outcome or effect (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Bhaskar (1975) stipulated that "such mechanisms combine to generate the flux of phenomena that constitute the actual states and happenings of the world" (p. 37). This aligned with the research aims of gaining an 'essence of reality' through exploring the perceived maintaining and protective factors within the school and the

CYP with SM. Consistent with critical realism, theory is at the heart of explaining reality rather than the data and methods of study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This allowed the application of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) theory when seeking to develop an understanding of the participant perspectives within this study.

Personal Construct Psychology Theory

In his Psychology of Personal Constructs: Volume 1, Kelly (1955) refers to people as 'scientists' seeking to understand and make sense of events and in doing so, detect and apply 'constructs' in anticipation of future events. These constructs are representations (similar or different from something else) combining to create the individual's theory of self and the world. Some constructs are believed to be more 'core' than others and may serve to maintain a person's identity by influencing construing and subsequent behaviour (Beaver, 2011). Eliciting these core constructs was considered a fundamental feature of the current research to gain an understanding of the individuals' world views and how these may shape and maintain their responses to the environment (Butler & Green, 2007).

PCP acknowledges the universe's true existence whilst stipulating it as open to continual revision with multiple ways of perceiving reality (Kelly, 1955). Its application to the lives of children specifies that by acting on the environment around them, CYP are "architects of their own unique reality" (Butler & Green, 2007 p. 6) thus reality becomes represented by the way in which CYP make sense of it. This fits with the beliefs of critical realism that it is the process of how subjects interpret and act upon their environment that is central to understanding the mechanisms involved in a particular situation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). PCP is an approach to viewing reality in and of itself thus researchers have developed techniques which can be used within a PCP theoretical framework however, these can equally be applied in a wider range of approaches (Burr et al. 2014). The philosophical assumptions underpinning PCP theory and methods are epistemologically congruent with approaches that value subjective experiences (Burr et al. 2014) (e.g., critical realism). Together, these strengthened the rationale for adopting a PCP theory and methods for understanding the school views and experiences of CYP with SM in the current study.

PCP relevance to the experiences of CYP with SM

Whilst Kelly's fundamental postulate is built upon 11 corollaries, the 'dichotomy' and 'choice' corollaries were of relevance to the current study. 'Dichotomous' thinking involves contrasting one aspect of reality with the opposite view for the individual (e.g. in this case ideal and non-ideal school) and facilitates an understanding of how a person interprets a situation (Kelly, 1955). Successive advocates of PCP have proposed that exploring both emergent (preferred) and implicit (contrast) constructs enable understanding of an individual's discriminations and anticipatory predictions (Blowers & O'Connor, 1995; Fransella, 1995).

Applying PCP to explain the reality of the experiences for CYP with SM, Strong (2019) proposed that 'speaking' and 'non-speaking' are opposing poles of the same construct. Thus for individuals with SM, 'speaking' represents the preferred pole in some situations (e.g., home) whilst in others (e.g., school) the contrast pole of 'non-speaking' is more desirable. Providing further insight into its applicability to the SM population, Kelly's (1955) 'choice corollary' assumes that when faced with a decision, the most meaningful pole of an individual's construct will be selected and further elaborated. This corollary illustrates how choice-making could serve to maintain certain behaviour patterns which may function as "a seeking of self-protection" (Kelly, 1955, p.67). Strong (2019) stipulated that when encountering a speech-demanding situation outside of their 'comfort zone' (e.g., school) CYP with SM may use 'non-speaking' as a means of anticipating the event and reducing anxiety whilst the opposite pole of 'speaking' may offer greater anticipation in other situations thus forming the elaborative choice. This illuminates the role of cognition, subjective interpretation, construct systems and environmental factors in the maintenance of SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). Together this provided a rationale for the adoption of PCP theory when seeking to capture and explain an essence of reality regarding the school experiences of CYP with SM.

Eliciting the 'dichotomy' and 'choice' corollaries

The original Drawing the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001) offered a tool for exploring how CYP perceive themselves through 'dichotomous' thinking. Children were invited to draw the kind of person they would not like to be, the kind of person they would like to be, before tapping into the 'choice corollary' (Kelly, 1955). Here, the individuals' real-life experiences were explored by rating themselves along the construct of 'self' to elicit their preferred pole and how closely they associated with this. In the PCP technique adapted by Williams and Hanke (2007), The Drawing the Ideal School, pupils were invited to consider and draw their school's ideal and non-ideal provision, facilitated by semi-structured questions, eliciting views of school, the classroom, children, adults and themselves.

The flexibility of PCP methods enabled these techniques to be adjusted by researchers seeking to explore personal 'dichotomous' and 'choice' corollaries in CYP with a range of needs. For example, the Drawing the Ideal Self technique was successfully applied to CYP with emotional (e.g., anxiety; anger) (Moran 2001; 2005) and learning needs as well as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) (Moran 2006). Subsequent versions included the 'Ideal Learner' for exploring the views of a pupil with complex learning, speech and language needs (Green, 2014) and others at risk of exclusion (Connelly, 2018). More recently, this technique has been specifically adapted to explore the 'non-speaking' and 'speaking' behaviours in CYP with SM (Strong, 2019). Building on Moran's work (2001; 2005; 2006) these illustrated the innovative ways in which personal constructs, 'dichotomy' and 'choice' corollaries could be elicited.

The Drawing the Ideal School technique was further applied in exploring the dichotomous school constructs of children with ASC (Williams & Hanke, 2007) and secondary school pupils attending mainstream schools in Scotland (Fraser-Smith, 2021). Consistent with the final stage of Moran's (2001) original approach, further adaptions have included scaling activities for eliciting perceived changes that could be made to enhance school experiences in primary pupils considered as 'anxious' (Pirotta, 2016) and those experiencing Persistent School Non-Attendance (PSNA) (Smith, 2021). Other adaptations included general consultation around a "dream

school" (Kostenius, 2011), exploring how an ideal school contributes to wellbeing (Simmons et al., 2015) and recently, the 'Ideal Safe School' (Williams, 2020; BPS, 2020) following a period of uncertainty stimulated by the Covid-19 global pandemic. Moreover, views regarding specific areas of school have also been captured in adaptations including the 'Ideal Playground' (Snow et al. 2018) and 'Ideal Classroom' (Morgan-Rose 2015).

Design

Given the exploratory aims of the study, a qualitative approach was considered important for enabling an understanding of processes and meanings attributed to events by the research participants themselves (Willig, 2013). PCP methods are well suited to qualitative research where exploration of the participants' world views is the aim (Burr et al. 2014). Aligning with the principles of PCP which rejects causality in providing explanations for human behaviour and experience, qualitative research does not seek a cause-and-effect relationship, rather it explores people in their own naturally occurring contexts where conditions continuously emerge and intertwine (Willig, 2013). Considering the 'open systems' in which the research took place, an important feature of the current study regarded an 'evolving design,' with an emphasis on participant perspectives and acknowledgement of complex and multiple realities. As such the current study was framed within the assumptions and characteristics of a 'flexible design' (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Flexible designs allow for the integration of procedures from several traditions thus PCP methods were considered appropriate for flexibly and creatively capturing an in-depth insight into personal experience and facilitation of participant voice (Burr et al. 2014). This approach allowed for multiple qualitative data collection techniques which was an important aspect of the study given the complexity of SM and the anticipation of several adjustments for enabling the participants to access the research. The following section elaborates on these adjustments.

PCP methods and appropriateness for eliciting the views of CYP with SM

The 'formal' and 'discursive' nature of traditional interview approaches would likely impede access to the views of CYP with SM thus alternative methods were

considered important in facilitating more meaningful participation (Fox, 2013). Methods based on PCP are less dependent on verbal fluency and "particularly effective in researching experiences that are hard for participants to articulate" (Burr et al. 2014 p. 343). Moreover, underpinned by a 'credulous' (Kelly. 1955; 1991) approach where all constructions of events and experiences are accepted as valid (Butler & Green, 2007) when used in collaboration with the researcher, PCP methods may overcome any uncertainties about 'doing it right' (Burr et al. 2014). This was pertinent considering the findings indicating a fear of mistakes in some CYP with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). These methods further aligned with the emancipatory aims of the study, allowing the researcher to adopt an 'advocacy' role in contrast with that of the "detached, objective scientist" (Robson & McCartan, 2016 p. 40).

The suitability of PCP methods for CYP with more severe learning, motor co-ordination or language needs has recently been called into question (Bloom et al. 2020). Within the literature, barriers to eliciting CYPs' views using PCP also include factors such as the child's age, level of maturity and confidence in social interactions (Beasley & Burnham, 2014). It is conceivable that to be able to access the more complex and 'abstract' components of PCP, CYP must have developed the cognitive capacity of 'introspection' or more recently coined 'theory of mind' (Melhuish et al. 2014). Flavell and colleagues (1995) describe this capacity as:

> *"an instance of reflective consciousness because it consists of reflecting on, and perhaps also verbally reporting on, primary-conscious mental events construed as mental events by the reflecting person" (p.741).*

Whilst authors in the field contend that introspection becomes more fully established in older children (e.g., 8 years old) (Flavell et al 1993; 1995), the age at which this capacity develops has been hotly debated, with research indicating that children as young as 3 and 4 years can introspect (Gopnick & Slaughter, 1991). However, the reductionist definitions used in much of the introspective research, were illuminated by Harris (1995) who highlighted the complex and variable nature of these capacities depending on the type of cognitive process under consideration.

Conversely, in embracing all idiosyncratic ways of viewing the world and people, Moran (2014) asserts that PCP is accessible to children of all ages and abilities and can be especially useful for CYP with Autism (a population of which 'theory of mind' may be inherently compromised, e.g., Baron-Cohen, 2000). Furthermore, concrete approaches can overcome barriers in accessing the more abstract and complex components of PCP (e.g., 'constructive alternativism') (Beasley & Burnham, 2014). This is strengthened by research finding that a combination of PCP and Lego construction can be effective in reducing emotional and cognitive limitations impeding participants' ideas (Morgan-Rose, 2015).

Barriers in verbal communication can further be supplemented by visual approaches which "should be a core part of a PCP practitioner's repertoire when working with children" (Beasley & Burnham, 2014 p. 56). Notably this approach involves providing constructs for a young person which may inevitably reduce the authenticity of views expressed and may not represent PCP in its purest sense thus findings utilising these approaches must be situated alongside these limitations. However, Beasley and Burnham, (2014) stipulate that such approaches can provide valuable insights that may not be accessible when using methods reliant upon a child's ability to articulate their own thinking. Furthermore, research has highlighted the importance of PCP methods in providing a safe space for exploring school factors evoking anxiety (Pirotta, 2016). Aligning with the chosen research design, these findings further solidified the suitability of adopting PCP techniques and allowing the views of CYP with SM to be heard.

Interview design and research method

Consistent with critical realism and the exploratory nature of the study, whilst individuals would construct their own interpretation, the aim was to discover patterns and commonalities or a 'shared essence' of experiences. This informed the use of semi-structured interviews for facilitating participants' reflection on their experiences whilst exploring common meanings of the participant group (CYP with SM) regarding a concept or a phenomenon (e.g., ideal and non-ideal school) (Creswell, 2014). The

flexible design and semi-structured nature of the interview provided a structure for framing the research questions, allowing for the emergence of unanticipated ideas, whilst affording the researcher an element of flexibility to adapt to participants' responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022). As such, the ordering of questions was not fixed and on occasions adjusted according to the participant responses. Interview questions were open yet focused on specific areas. (Appendix 3 details the areas explored and the format of the interviews). Prompts ensured that all areas relating to the research questions were covered whilst minimising the risk of interrupting the flow for the participants. Occasionally, additional prompts were used, and some participants required further elaboration, rewording of questions and concrete examples to facilitate understanding. These approaches were considered important when conducting research with CYP (Greig et al. 2013).

The interviews followed the Drawing the Ideal School technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007) where participants were firstly invited to consider the kind of school that they would not like to go to, followed by the kind of school they would like to go to. In addition to the original exploratory areas of 'school', 'classroom', 'adults', 'children' and 'me,' a further exploratory area ('outside') was incorporated following findings identified in the SM literature (e.g., Hill, 2019). Exploring these six areas enabled detailed understanding of how CYP conceptualised the 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school. In line with the emancipatory aims of the research, establishing any discrepancies between the participants' perceived current and ideal schools would likely illustrate potential changes and conflicts (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Recognising the value of eliciting personal experiences of SM in school, the current study embedded a final stage in line with Moran's (2001) Drawing the Ideal Self Technique (Appendices 12;13). By rating their current school on a scale (between the ideal and non-ideal), participants were able to reflect on their existing experiences in relation to their preferred pole of the construct and any changes needed to make their current school more like their ideal school. This approach also allowed the researcher to focus on maintaining and protective factors in school as identified by the CYP themselves.

Development of the non-verbal, online tools

As the original ideal school method was developed for face-to-face interactions and assuming participants would be able to engage by drawing and talking, amendments were made to account for participants' likely non-speaking during the interviews (see also Ethical Considerations) and the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic (remote interviews). As such several considerations were made to ensure that the participants could be empowered to share their views using the online platform. This led to the development of an online, non-verbal tool.

Initially developed in January 2021, the online tool and procedure underwent several changes before being finalised and implemented. The first part of development involved the creation of 'child friendly' sorting cards. These were based on a review of the SM literature (Appendix 4) to ensure that the cards were appropriate and meaningful to the SM population whilst minimising the risk of bias imposed by the researcher's assumptions. With reference to figure 4, 'Bitmoji' characters were considered engaging, age-appropriate, and effective visuals for depicting the range of feelings, actions and scenarios captured in the literature. (See Appendix 5 for further examples of prompt cards).

Figure 4

Exemplar visual prompt cards for sorting ('me')

With reference to figures 5 and 6, an initial prompt card resource utilised a PowerPoint presentation with internal links which, once clicked would direct participants to relevant prompts required for each part of the interview process. As the visuals were numbered, an early proposal involved the researcher sharing their screen and participants holding up the corresponding number using a number fan to represent their views (See Appendices 8-11 for more detail about the early stages of the tool).

Following reflections around the importance of enabling participants as much ownership as possible when sharing their views, the 'flippity' 'flashcards' and 'manipulatives' were considered a key adaptation to the original design. This website enabled the creation of an online interactive card sorting activity to meet the aims of the study. The researcher reasoned that this would increase the autonomy for the participants by enabling them to manipulate the cards independently rather than relying on the researcher to move to the appropriate slide on a PowerPoint. The following sections detail the finalised resources and interview process.

Figure 5

Initial proposed visual prompt card resource
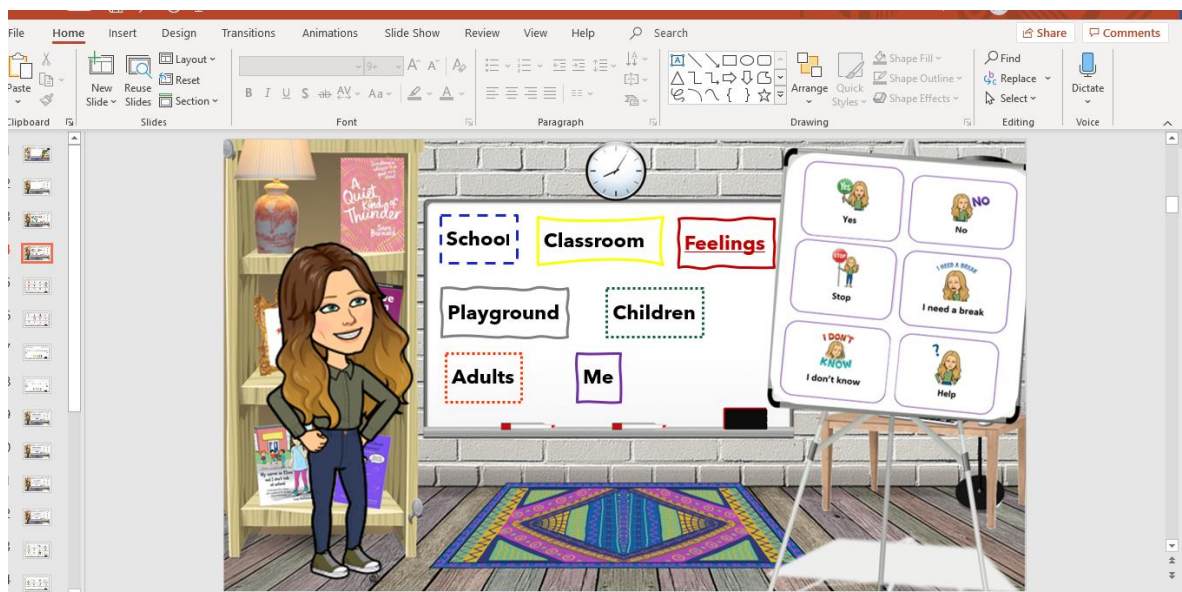
Figure 6

Initial proposed part 3 of the ideal school technique (scaling line)

Procedure

The interviews consisted of three main parts: Part 1; eliciting the non-ideal school; Part 2; eliciting the ideal school; Part 3.a; the scaling activity and Part 3.b; moving towards the ideal school. Prior to each interview, a number of physical resources were sent via postal delivery to the participants (see figure 7). These included optional drawing templates for Parts 1 and 2 of the interview, and a visual system with accompanying written prompts for sharing requests non-verbally (e.g., 'help,' or to stop the interviews altogether) (Appendix 24).

Figure 7

Resources posted to participants

In addition, prior to each part of the interview, an interactive resource (containing links to the online card sorting activities) was emailed to parents of the participants. During the interview, if participants opted to use the sorting cards for answering the questions, they were invited to open the interactive resource and share their screen on Microsoft Teams. Clicking on relevant images directed participants to corresponding interactive sorting card activities (see figure 8 and Appendices 19-20 for examples of the four interactive resources).

Figure 8

Finalised Part 1 & 2 interactive resource

Part 1 (eliciting the non-ideal school)

During part 1 of the interviews when constructing the non-ideal school, participants were able to click and drag (or tap, if using a tablet or iPad) the cards to sort them. Participants were invited to sort the cards according to their views (e.g., cards in their non-ideal school under the 'non-ideal school' heading and any cards considered irrelevant to their non-ideal school under the bin visual). (An example of the non-ideal card sorting activity is illustrated in figure 9).

Part 2 (eliciting the ideal school)

During part 2 of the interviews when constructing the ideal school, the participants were invited to set up the cards in a similar format to part 1 and sort them. Participants were asked to place the cards that would not be in their ideal school under the column headed by a bin symbol and the cards that would be in their ideal school under the 'ideal school' heading. (An example of the ideal card sorting activity is illustrated in figure 10).

Figure 9

Interactive Card Sorting Activity (Part 1; Non-ideal school; Classroom)

Figure 10

Interactive Card Sorting Activity (Part 2; Ideal School; Outside)

In parts 1 and 2, once the cards were sorted across the two broad headings (bin and ideal/non-ideal) participants were invited to refine their decision by choosing the top three cards most likely to be in their non-ideal or ideal school (placing these under the purple framed heading numbered 1-3). The three cards in this section were considered significant to the participant's views. This aspect of the tool, known in PCP theory as 'pyramiding', enables moving away from a more abstract (core) construct (e.g. ideal playground) to more specific and observable constructs (e.g. playing with friends) (Moran, 2020).

The drawing templates mirrored a similar process (see figure 11; Appendices 19;20) thus if participants opted to use these, they were invited to draw the aspects of their non-ideal school (e.g., classroom, outside, adults) before their ideal school, sharing and elaborating on these at relevant points throughout the interview process.

Part 3.a (scaling activity)

Part 3.a of the interview process was centred around an interactive scaling activity and all participants were invited to set the cards up with 'ideal school' at one end of the pole and the 'non-ideal' school at the other. Subsequently, participants were asked to consider their current school and place the arrows along the scaling line in relation to where they felt each aspect of their current school was situated. Consistent with parts 1 and 2 of the interview, the researcher was available to assist with setting up the cards (see figure 12).

Part 3.b (moving to the ideal)

Participants considered what could be done to make their current school more ideal. In addressing any challenges faced by the open-ended nature of this part of the PCP approach and building on previous recommendations (Strong, 2019), sorting cards were embedded and offered to the participants (Appendix 14). As in the previous parts of the process, if participants opted to use the card sorting activity they were asked to share their screen and the researcher facilitated the setting up of the cards. With reference to figure 13, participants were invited to click on one of the two images in the interactive resource (e.g., 'Others can help me by…') which directed participants to the card sorting activities. These were of a similar format to those used in parts 1 and 2 of the process (figures 9-10; Appendices 11-20).

Figure 11

Exemplar final non-ideal school drawing template

Figure 12

Finalised Part 3.a Scaling activity

Figure 13

Finalised Part 3.b moving towards the 'ideal school'

Pilot study

Due to the difficulties in participant recruitment and the small sample size, it was not possible to conduct a pilot study. However, the adapted tool was applied as a starting point in a therapeutic context with a with a young person identified as having SM. The tools successfully elicited an understanding of the young person's school constructs and allowed the researcher to assess the suitability of the prompt cards, interview format and appropriateness for participants. Adaptations included the incorporation of 'text only' sorting cards (Appendix 17) more positive 'feelings' cards (Appendix 15) and simplification of wording and pictures on some of the resources (Appendix 16; Appendix 18). This ensured accessibility and avoided leading participants.

Participants

The sampling strategy for this research was purposive and participants were selected according to pre-defined criteria (See table 5). As a potentially harder to reach population, homogeneity was achieved by selecting a group of participants identified as having SM, confirmed by an appropriately qualified external professional (e.g., SaLT, EP). Participants were recruited through the social media accounts of organisations and charities for SM, predominantly the SMIRA parent and professional pages (Appendix 1). Following receipt of the signed consent forms, ten participants (one male; nine females) aged 7-17 were interviewed. Of the selected participants, nine had a formal diagnosis of SM, whilst one was in the process of pursuing an SM diagnosis.

A key part of the selection criteria regarded Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) 8 stages of confident talking ranging from 0 ('absent') to 8 ('conversation'). Whilst the resources were designed in anticipation of the participants' likely non-speaking, in order to access the interviews, participants were required to be in at least stage 3 ('uses non-verbal and written communication') and above. (See Appendix 2 for further information about the stages of confident talking)

Five participants communicated their views non-verbally (and on occasions through parental verbal mediation e.g., muting the microphone sharing their ideas with the

parent and allowing the parent to share their views). The remaining participants elaborated on their drawings and chosen prompt cards verbally with the researcher. A summary of participant information is illustrated in table 6. (See Appendix 33 for further information about the participants).

Data collection

Interviews took place during Summer 2021. Due to restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, all communication was undertaken remotely using Microsoft Teams, accessed through parental email accounts. As highlighted in the literature review, online data collection has been used successfully in research involving individuals with SM (Vogel et al. 19; Schwenck et al. 2019; Patterson, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) conceivably overcoming some of the ethical issues raised when engaging in face-to-face interactions with this population (see Ethical Considerations, risk of psychological harm).

Consistent with the participant-led nature of the PCP methods (Burr et al. 2014), the length of interviews differed for each participant, ranging from 103 to 290 minutes in total. As such, whilst there were three parts to the process, meetings tended to take place on more than 3 occasions and ranged between 3-5 sessions (approximately a week apart from each other). All interviews were video recorded through Microsoft Teams and any card sorts, drawings or writing produced throughout the sessions were captured by a screen shot of which consent was sought prior to, during and after each interview session. Owing to technical difficulties (e.g., connectivity) some of these screen shots were captured by parents and emailed to the researcher following the interview.

Enabling the researcher to become 'immersed' in the data, interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymised. Screen shots of the card sorts, drawings and writing were combined into individual transcripts for each participant and embedded at the relevant discussion points (Example transcripts can be found in Appendices 38-40). Data were thematically analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and described in further detail in the Analysis section.

Table 5: Participant selection criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
CYP who are identified by a professional as meeting DSM-V and/or ICD-11 diagnostic criteria for Selective Mutism who may or may not have a formal diagnosis of SM but are aware that they sometimes find it difficult to speak.	CYP who do not meet all the DSM-V and ICD-11 diagnostic criteria for Selective Mutism and have not had involvement from a professional deemed suitable for making the diagnosis (e.g., EP, SaLT)
Those who do not have a formal diagnosis must have been involved with a suitable professional (e.g., SaLT; EP) and are of the opinion that the child fits the profile for SM.	CYP in a specialist setting

Children aged 6 or younger |
CYP who are on roll at a mainstream setting and have attended the school within the last 6 months.	Children who have not attended school for more than 6 months.
Children who are at, or above stage 3 ('uses non-verbal and written communication') of confident talking (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) (Appendix 2)	Children who are at the 'absent' or 'frozen' stage of confident talking (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) and are unable to communicate non-verbally (Appendix 2).
CYP aged 7-17 years who can write/draw or are able to use visual prompts to express their views.	CYP residing outside England, UK.
CYP residing in England, UK	

Ethical Considerations:

This research was approved by both the UEA Ethics Committee ([Appendix 31](#)) and the LA, meeting the requirements of the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014; 2021). During the planning phases of the research, several ethical issues were identified and are addressed subsequently.

Identifying, accessing, and recruiting participants

As highlighted previously, variations in understanding and support for CYP with SM across the UK (Keen et al. 2008) meant that CYP may meet the diagnostic criteria with no formal diagnosis or support in place (Kopp & Gillberg, 1997). Consequently, the equally important views of those with "hidden SM" would be overlooked if a formal diagnosis were required to participate in the study. By opening the criteria to include those with and without a formal diagnosis, it was reasonable to suggest that the integrity of the research would be strengthened whilst aligning with the critical realist position and the emancipatory aims of the study. However, a key consideration regarded the use of the term SM and the potential ethical implications of 'labelling' those with SM without a formal diagnosis. To reduce these implications, the researcher avoided reference to the term Selective Mutism throughout the interviews considering phrases such as 'children who find it hard to use their voice in school' as more 'child friendly.' To remain distanced from any discussion or decisions regarding potential diagnosis or identification, checklists or diagnostic criteria did not form part of the recruitment process rather, it was emphasised that identification or involvement had previously been sought by an appropriately qualified professional (e.g., SaLT; EP) in discussion with family and other key stakeholders. Before interviews, a background information form ([Appendix 32](#)) was completed with parents to further check the eligibility of the participants against the inclusion criteria for the research (figure 6). This step aimed to reduce potential sampling bias whilst increasing the credibility, transferability, and authenticity of the results.

Appropriate methods for eliciting views

The nature of SM as underpinned by anxiety (Omdal & Galloway, 2008; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) required suitable approaches for participants to express their views. Consistent with previous research and clinical recommendations, the pressure to speak was removed (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) enabling the participants to access all aspects of the research non-verbally if they wished. Sorting activities and choices are recommended as effective alternative forms of communication for CYP with SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) and have been applied successfully using an adapted non-verbal PCP approach (e.g., Strong, 2019). Consistent with the flexible research design and research emphasising child-led approaches with CYP with SM (Schwenck et al. 2019), participants were invited to select their communication method from a range of different modalities including drawing, writing, online written or visual prompt cards (Appendices 11-20). In the spirit of PCP methods as "intrinsically participant-led" (Burr et al 2014 p. 343), the communication choices were not 'fixed', and participants were able to adapt their chosen method throughout the interview process. (With reference to table 6, some participants initially opted to use the card sorting activity then progressed to a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication).

Gaining voluntary and informed consent

Prior to any video communication, participants and their parents received several resources electronically providing time to process the information regarding the research and to make informed consent (Code of Human Research Ethics, 2021 4) These included a child friendly video (Appendix 22) interactive introductory resource (Appendix 23) participant and parental information sheet and consent forms (Appendix 28; Appendix 29). Upon completion of the written consent forms, participants and their parents were invited to an initial remote meeting with the researcher allowing the establishment of rapport, clarification of the nature and purpose of the research and elaboration of any further questions. Consent particularly relating to the video/audio-recording of interviews was gained verbally at the beginning of each interview.

Table 6: Participant preferences for communication during the interview process

Pseudonym	Stage of communication	Methods of Communication	Interview preferences	Number of sessions	Total time
Isabelle	8 'conversation'	Drawing and talking (no use of prompt cards for part 1 and 2)	Video on, microphone on.	4	143 minutes
Hannah	Progressed from 3 'uses non-verbal and written communication' -8 'conversation' (stage 8 in the final interview)	Drawing, writing, use of prompt cards to guide thinking, communicating via parent and conversing with researcher.	Video and microphone on.	3	146 minutes
Coco	Progressed from 3 'uses non-verbal and written communication' -8 'conversation' (stage 8 in the final interview)	Drawing, writing, communicating via parent and occasionally conversing with researcher.	Video and microphone on.	3	154 minutes
Olive	Fluctuated between 3-7/8.	Attempted drawing, then preferred card sorting activities, communicating via parent and occasionally conversing with researcher.	Video off, microphone on. Shared screen when completing the card sort, so researcher could see the choices being made.	5	230 minutes
Monkey	3 'uses non-verbal and written communication' (second interview session, stage 1 'frozen' Debrief offered and participant opted to postpone)	Completed drawing template, with key words prior to interview, communicating via parent and writing.	Video on, microphone on.	4	103 minutes
Ruby	3 'uses non-verbal and written communication'	Completed drawing template, with key words, used prompt cards (particularly during the	Video off, muted when asked questions and parent shared what was said	3	137 minutes

		'ideal' school interview) parent shared their ideas with the researcher.	subsequently with the researcher.		
Elsa	3 'uses non-verbal and written communication'	Used the card sorting activity.	Video on. Shared screen when completing the card sort, so researcher could see the choices being made.	5	142 minutes
Willow	3 'uses non-verbal and written communication'	Used the card sorting activity.	Video on. Muted microphone to answer some questions. Parent took photos of the card sort and sent them to the researcher during the interview.	3	160 minutes
Tris	8 'conversation'	Used the card sorting activity and elaborated on these through conversation with the researcher.	Video off when recording, on when not recording and microphone was on at all times. Shared screen when completing the card sort, so researcher could see the choices being made.	5	290 minutes
AT	'Uses non-verbal and written communication'	Used the card sorting activity.	Video on. Muted microphone to answer some questions.	5	196 minutes

The participants' right to anonymity and withdrawal from the study were reinforced and a visual system with accompanying written prompts (Appendix 24) was offered to participants allowing them to share requests non-verbally (e.g., 'help,' 'a break' or to stop the interviews altogether). These in addition to the drawing templates (Appendix 19; Appendix 20 Appendix 21) were sent directly to the participants' home addresses prior to the interviews. Parents and the researcher ensured that other non-verbal cues (e.g., signs of anxiety) were monitored and the researcher reminded participants of their right to withdraw if detecting any signs of anxiety. The researcher ensured removal of pressure to participate and respected participants' decisions.

Risk of psychological harm to the participants

Careful consideration was given to the potential for psychological harm, distress or discomfort evoked by the interviews (BPS, 2021; 3. P.10). The 'child/young person-friendly' nature of the interviews and adoption of PCP approaches were considered "especially useful when exploring sensitive issues" (Burr et al. 2014 p. 20). The interviews took place remotely, from the participants' home environment to facilitate a sense of familiarity and safety. This 'virtual' approach was chosen in line with research illustrating the effectiveness of computer-based communication with CYP with SM (Patterson, 2011; Schwenck et al. 2019; Vogel et al., 2018; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). It may also reduce the pressure in comparison with face-to-face situations (Roe, 2011). In combination with the attentive, empathic and non-pressured approach adopted by the researcher, these measures were considered important in alleviating the risk of harm to the individuals. Moreover, participants and their parents were provided with the contact details of the researcher and their supervisor enabling further questions or concerns to be raised throughout the process. The researcher regularly checked in with parents and participants throughout the process (before, following and after each interview) and offered a debrief should the interviews induce distress. Parent and participants were also signposted to SMIRA for more information, resources, and support for those affected by SM. These were also detailed in the parent information and consent forms (Appendix 29).

Role of Parents

In limiting the risk of harm to participants, parents were also asked to remain available and within proximity throughout the interview process. All except two of the participants called upon their parents to mediate their views to some degree. The focus of the research, the 'voice' of the participants, was made explicit in the parent guide (Appendix 30), during the initial meeting and at appropriate points throughout the interview process. Where participants sought parental verbal mediation, informed consent was gained from the parents and participants to reference their contributions in the findings.

Possible researcher bias

In minimising the risk of leading the research in a particular direction, the prompt cards were informed by previous research eliciting the views of individuals with SM (Appendix 4) and participants were invited to indicate when a prompt card was required (e.g., using the 'help' or 'I don't know' cards) (Appendix 24). Interpretations from the interviews were summarised with participants throughout the interview process (Appendix 3) to increase the credibility of the data and ensure a "reasonable representation of their views" (Moran, 2001 p.603).

Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection

In line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the principles of GDPR, all video/audio recordings and screen captures (e.g., card sorts or drawings) were stored securely on an encrypted password protected USB, in a secure place until the completion of the doctorate. To ensure the protection of identity (BPS, 2021, 5. p. 21) and in the spirit of person-centredness, participants were invited to choose a pseudonym which they were referred to during anonymised transcription and any identifiable information relating to schools were removed. Throughout the process it was made clear that the participant data would be accessed only by the researcher and their supervisor. The researcher remained transparent with the participants and their parents regarding limits to confidentiality around safeguarding, these were also detailed in the participant and parent information and consent forms (Appendix 28; Appendix 29).

Approach to Analysis

The theoretical flexibility of Reflexive Thematic Analysis enabled the research to 'give voice' to the experiences of those with SM, whilst locating these within their sociocultural contexts (Braun & Clarke 2022). Braun and Clark (2022) stipulate this as a flexible, accessible and useful tool, lending itself well to qualitative methodology adopting a critical realist stance as it can provide a "coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in, or anchored by, the participants' accounts, that speaks to their situated realities" (P.171). The process involves searching for repeated patterns of meaning among data, providing rich information regarding the participants' shared views and experiences.

Consistent with critical realism, the study of uncontrolled, 'open systems' makes the prediction of future events impossible, however, in understanding the structures and processes that were in existence, the past can be explained (Robson & McCartan, 2016). When carrying out research in these circumstances, 'abductive reasoning' (Peirce, 1986) presents as a suitable lens for framing the findings. Rather than the application of one approach in a linear fashion, 'abductive reasoning' involves the cyclical movement between both inductive (observations to theory) and deductive (theory to observations) approaches. This facilitated the inference of tentative possible mechanisms (theory) capable of producing the events observed, which were strengthened within successive cycles (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Stages of thematic analysis

The research followed the six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to interpret the data set and identify key themes relating to the CYP's experiences of SM.

Despite its predominant application to purely verbal interview data, Braun and Clarke (2022) acknowledge the diversity of TA approaches in the field, stipulating that often these "effectively do TA in some way" (p. 247). For example, Gleeson's (2011; 2021) 'poly textual thematic analysis' for analysing visual data were viewed by the authors as conceptually and methodologically aligning with reflexive TA. The multiple modes

of data elicited during the interview process (e.g., visual, text, card sorting and verbal) were synthesised into individual transcripts or "data items" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.286) for each participant (See Appendices 38-40). Throughout the interview process, participants opting to use the drawing or card sorting activities, were invited to elaborate on their responses verbally (either directly or mediated by their parents). As such, the visual data (drawings/ card sorting) were clarified and supplemented by participants' verbal responses, to support the analysis process rather than analysed separately. Whilst interpretation inescapably occurs through the lens of one's own cultural membership, the researcher reasoned that this approach would strengthen the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data as derived from the participants' accounts. Mirroring the reflexive TA approach, once transcribed into written format, the interview responses were analysed and data illustrating the captured themes were illuminated, as outlined in the subsequent section.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset

The researcher became 'immersed' in the data. This involved listening to the audio recordings several times and re-reading the transcripts, briefly noting any analytic ideas or insights related to the data items and data set. (An example of notes taken following familiarisation with individual data sets is shown in Appendix 34). Visual notes also helped the researcher "get a grasp on the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2022 p. 46) (Appendix 35).

Phase 2: Coding

Working systematically from the researcher's 'analytic take' on the data, extracts of relevance to the research questions were identified and 'code labels' applied. Coding occurred at the 'surface' (semantic) through to the more conceptual (latent) levels. A spreadsheet of the identified codes was created for each participant with a main page of reference for organising and checking the codes. (An example of this is found in Appendix 36, exemplar individual coding in Appendix 37 and coded transcripts in Appendix 41; Appendix 42).

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes

Initial codes sharing a core idea or concept were compiled to develop a shared pattern of meaning (theme). This stage involved exploring clustered patterning across the whole data set rather than within a single data item (e.g., each participant transcript), thus whilst interesting ideas were articulated across many individual accounts, consistent with reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022), a theme could only be considered if it was shared by more than one participant.

The list of codes was reviewed and grouped into similar areas (Appendix 44). The data within the provisional candidate themes were sectioned into smaller categories and subcategories (Appendix 43), these formed a list of themes and subthemes relevant to the research questions (Initial and draft thematic maps can be found in Appendices 45 - 48).

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing the themes

During this phase the researcher assessed the initial fit of the provisional candidate themes by returning to the full data set to ensure that the themes illustrated the key patterns in relation to the research questions. Some of the initial candidate themes were collapsed together, (e.g., 'Aesthetics' into 'Layout and Landscaping') whilst others became separated into new themes (e.g., 'Internal Processes' split into three themes of 'construing,' 'speaking identity' and 'personal competences').

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

The analysis was refined to ensure that the themes were clearly demarcated and captured the essence of the data. Definitions for each theme and subtheme were developed. The final names and definitions for each theme and subtheme are illustrated in Appendix 50.

Phase 6: Writing up

The final themes were presented in an overall thematic map detailing the relationships between the themes and individual thematic maps for each research question (figure 14). During this phase the analytic narrative and data extracts were weaved together to present a 'story' about the dataset.

Analysis

Consistent with the qualitative reporting model, an 'integrated approach' was adopted with the 'Results' and 'Discussion' combined into one section, 'Analysis' (Braun & Clarke 2022). This approach was considered appropriate due to the identified links between the current study's findings and those with the existing SM research as well as the interpretive approach to analysis. This section presents the research findings from the data elicited across all three parts of the interviews. These are discussed in relation to the existing literature in the SM field. Figure 14 details the overall thematic map capturing the entire data set. The research questions are discussed subsequently in relation to their key themes.

Figure 14 outlines the overall findings whereby two superordinate themes were captured: 'External Processes' within the school environment and 'Internal Processes' within the participants. Under these were eight key themes (five and three respectively). These processes were considered to interact and serve as protective or maintaining factors for the individuals in school as represented by the bidirectional relationship detailed in the thematic map. The eight main themes and their relevant subthemes will be illustrated subsequently in further depth.

RQ1: What do CYP with SM perceive as important features in an ideal and non-ideal school?

Regarding RQ1, four themes and a further nine subthemes were identified. Aspects of the first three themes 'Layout and Landscaping;' 'Ethos' and 'Person Characteristics' were considered to contribute to the fourth theme; 'The Climate' as represented by the directional arrows in the thematic map. These themes will be illustrated subsequently.

Figure 14

Thematic Map detailing the relationships between the main themes
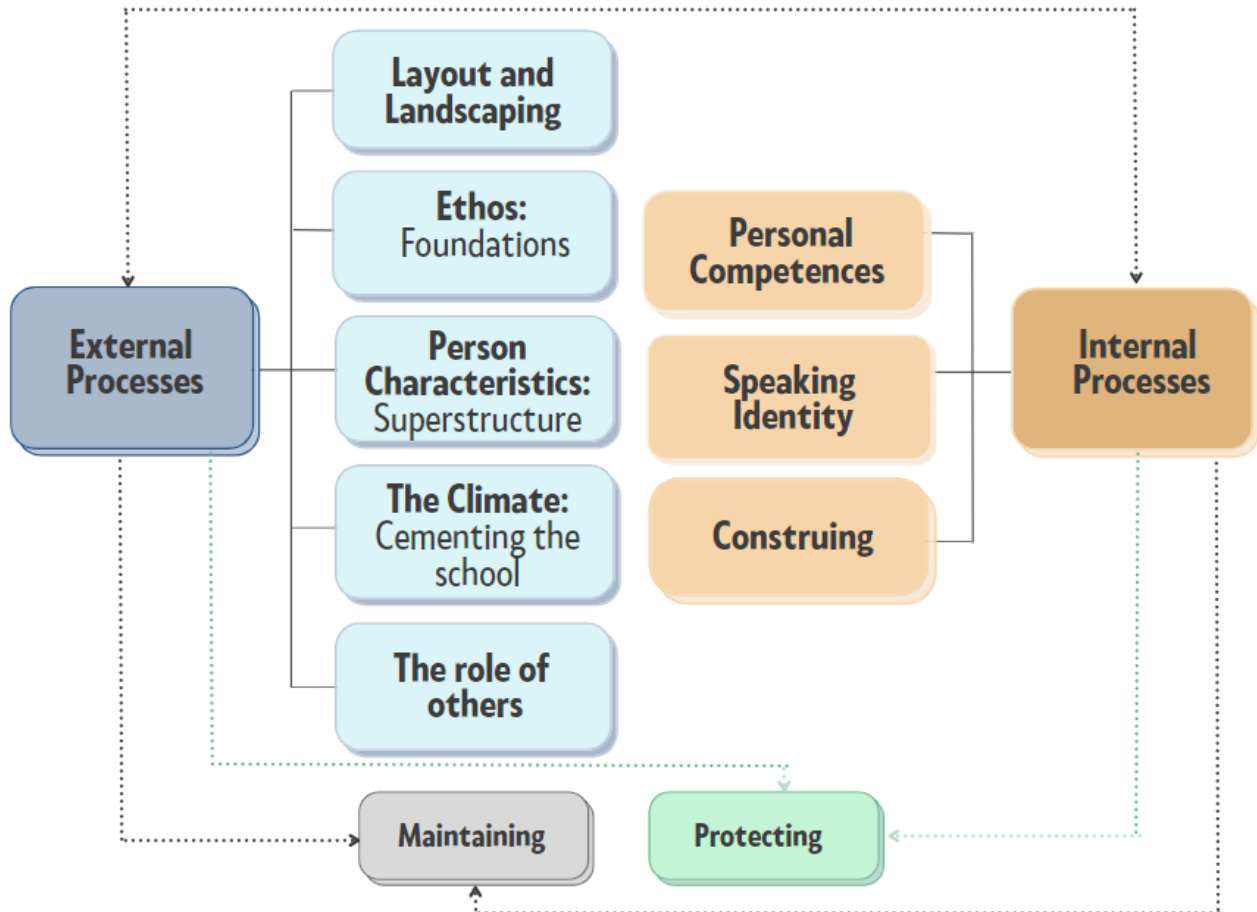
<u>Superordinate theme: External processes within the school</u>

Under this theme several external processes were captured as key features in the participants' views of an ideal and non-ideal school environment. These are illustrated in further detail subsequently.

Figure 15

Thematic map detailing the themes and subthemes captured
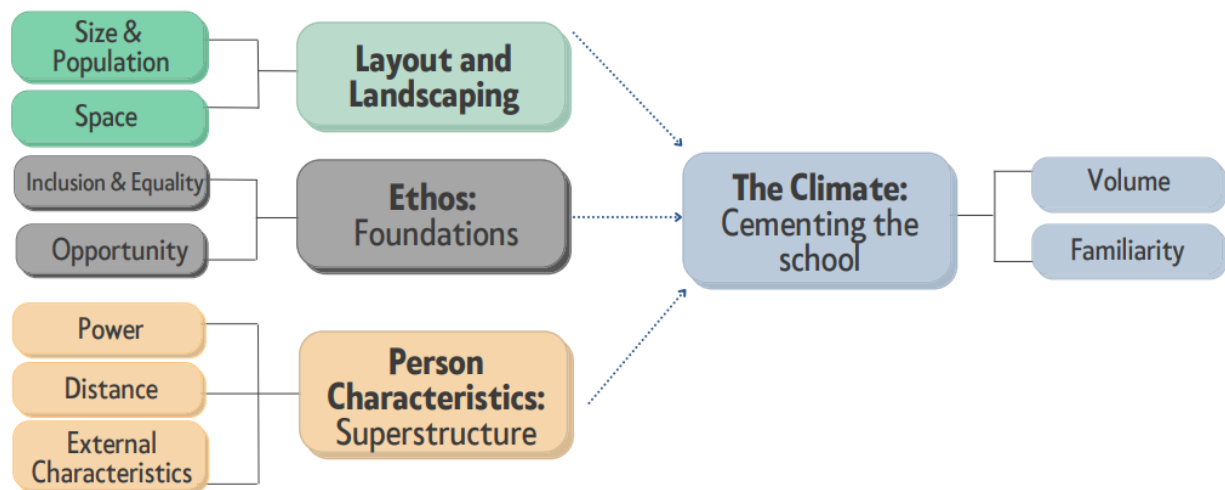
Theme: Layout and landscaping

Participants detailed important specifications across their ideal and non-ideal school environments and the feelings elicited when navigating aspects of the school. These have been captured under the theme 'Layout and Landscaping.'

Subtheme: Size and population

Size featured among the participants' constructions, with data predominantly including the words: *"giant" (*AT, 2/90), *"large"* (Ruby , 1/27) and *"big"* (Hannah, 18/942; Olive, 5/244) among participants' non-ideal school environments.

Figure 16

"…a very large secondary school" (Ruby, 1/27)

For some, a large school was associated with difficulties in navigating their environment; *"it's easier to get lost"* (Olive, 5/248-249); "*It's kind of confusing because I still don't know where all of my classrooms are…*" (Hannah 18/947-948). For Hannah, this posed further risks of feeling *"stuck"* and *"can't ask for help."* As such, an important factor in reducing this unpleasant experience was having *"someone to walk with through corridors- e.g., from lesson to lesson"* (Hannah's ideal school).

For others, a bigger school meant one with *"lots of people"* with a large population featuring regularly among participants' views of a non-ideal school. Furthermore, the terms *"crowded"* and *"busy"* were consistently captured among the non-ideal school descriptions. For Monkey, this meant having *"more than 40 in a class"* whilst being subjected to such experiences evoked "*overwhelming"* feelings for Olive (33/1799).

Figure 17

"I have drawn a lot of people" (Coco, 8/400)

In contrast, Isabelle described her non-ideal school as small which aroused *"uncomfortable" (*3/139) feelings *"because if it is not very big and there is lots of people, they'd just be staring at you" (*4/145*).* Illustrated in Isabelle's account, crowds contain publicity with little control over the people (Schwenck et al. 2021).

Conversely, in their ideal school, participants perceived a classroom environment with *"a smaller number of people;"* (AT, 38/1539) *"no more than 20 in a class"* (Monkey, 12/532); *"only a small group not too big so maybe like five other people…"* (Isabelle, 13/645); *"five"* (Olive, 35/1903); *"fourteen" (*AT, 38/1533) and learning activities centred around working in small groups with a friend, enabling participants to feel comfortable and able to participate.

> *Tris: Well, if it's a big group and there's no friends there, then you're not going to be as comfortable talking are you, if it's a close friend, you can talk to them about what you want to do instead of talking to the whole group…(43/2085-2087).*

Others sought to avoid places typically associated with crowds in school. The canteen induced unpleasant experiences for some participants (Ruby; Isabelle; Hannah). As such, alternative places to go at lunch and break times featured in participants' ideal school constructions; *"can have lunch in classroom"* (Monkey's ideal school).

Figure 18

Seeking sanctuary in quiet spaces away from busy places in school (Hannah)

quiet rooms/ places to eat - not canteen

Whilst the accounts varied individually, emphasising the need to consult with the CYP, they provide insight into the anxiety inducing nature of crowded situations in school which may serve as a maintaining factor for participants with SM. These findings provide a new insight regarding the impact of such situations in the school environment whilst strengthening recent research whereby 44 percent of parents reported crowds as associated with their child's SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). These findings provide important implications for making the school environment less threatening to CYP with SM by accommodating and enabling them to comfortably navigate the crowded, busy, or populated parts of school. Moreover, they may tentatively support previous research alluding to the implementation of interventions based on graduated exposure to crowded situations (Schwenck et al. 2021), particularly in the school environment.

Subtheme: Space

The importance of physical space represented a key element in the participants' school constructs and may also provide further insight into the perceived undesirable nature of crowded places for the individuals.

Figure 19

A bird's eye view of a non-ideal school layout (Hannah's non-ideal school)
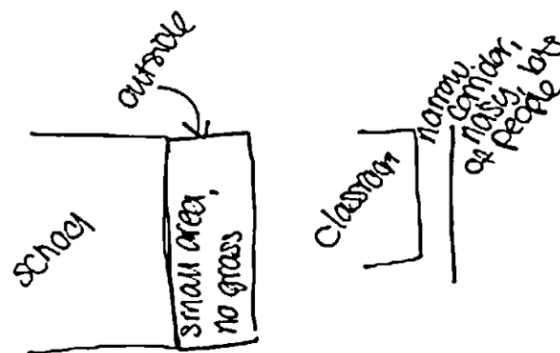
Portraying her views of space as an important element in the type of school that she would not like to go to, Hannah's picture represents an aerial view of the school layout, depicting a *"narrow corridor"* with a *"small outside area."*

Figure 20

Restricted space in a non-ideal school (Isabelle' non-ideal school)
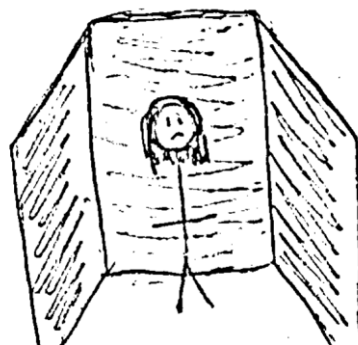
In her non-ideal school, Isabelle describes the outside area, particularly the canteen, as *"…very compact which can be stressful"* (15/764). Expanding on this, she subsequently describes the physical impact of not being able *"to move which isn't very nice and it kind of restricts you"* (15/775). She later draws a picture of herself in

"a corner" (7/356) closely surrounded by walls which further illustrates a sense of physical restriction in her non-ideal school.

Coco describes his non-ideal school as a *"prison that turns into a school"* (2/79) where the children *"go outside but they go in something outside"* (7/337). His drawing depicts a place where children's physical freedom is restricted as represented by the boundaries drawn around them in their outside area.

Figure 21

Restrictions imposed on the children in a non-ideal school (Coco's non-ideal outside)
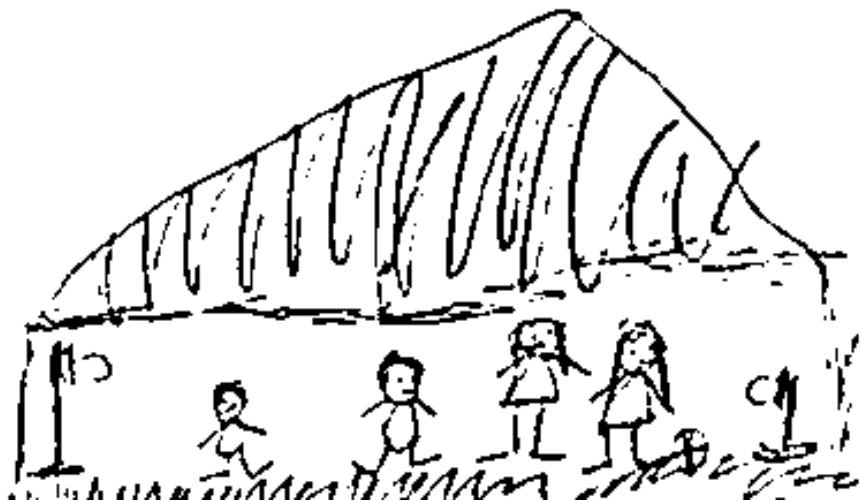
Within the classroom, seating location was considered another important feature of the school layout for some of the participants who, in their non-ideal school described being *"seated in the middle of the row at the back"* (Monkey's non-ideal classroom). These constructions indicated a shared feeling of being unable to *"get out"* (Monkey 2/59; Hannah, 3/113).

Figure 22

A sense of feeling trapped in a non-ideal classroom (Hannah)

Under these conditions, participant accounts revealed a sense of frustration as captured in the following description.

> *Coco: you can't, you can hardly walk anywhere where I sit (23/1233)*
> *Coco: Yeah and its dead small (23/1235)*
> *Coco: …And its dead annoying. (23/1237)*

Others described the physical and emotional responses to this type of school environment as *"suffocating"* (Hannah, 4/200) *"squashed"* (Hannah, 4/197); *"Squished"* (Tris, 3/134), *"trapped"* (Monkey 2/62) and a place *"I want to escape"* (AT, Willow's card sorts).

Space was considered a pertinent aspect of the participants' ideal school with *"spaced out"* (Hannah; Ruby) classrooms because "*I like there being a space between me and the next person"* (Monkey's written note); "*I just like my own space*" (Olive, 8/423). Reductions in feeling *"overcrowded and pressured"* (10/528) were captured in Ruby's perceived need for space whilst for Hannah, space appeared to have more practical implications: *"because of having the dog with her… so there's a bit more space for [the dog] to spread out at the edge"* (Hannah's parent, 10/502-503).

Others viewed space in the ideal school environment as having more social and emotional functions. Isabelle's construction of her ideal classroom environment featured a separate and designated space whereby children could spend time alone if they wished.

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Figure 23

The importance of space in an ideal classroom (Isabelle)
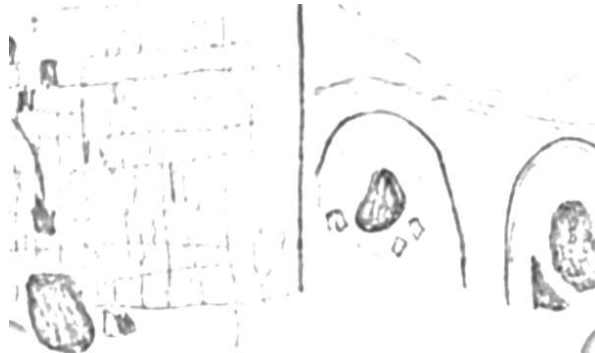
Isabelle: lots of space and there's gonna be lots of books um… there's gonna be so instead of having er like desks you each get your own section of the classroom and you can sit however you like. (9/428-430)

Isabelle: You can choose who you want to be with or if you want to be by yourself then that's fine too. (9/435-436)

Isabelle: *"…so it doesn't feel too busy I guess um and that you don't always have to be around people if you get tired of it".* (9/447-448)

The need for space from social situations is also portrayed in Tris' account, "*being alone sometimes can be nice 'cause you need a break from people and socializing".* Using the metaphor of a "*low social battery*" (14/678) to illustrate the impact of social situations for her, Tris articulates the following.

Tris: if you've already been speaking like before school to people and maybe you've been forced to speak in lesson, I feel kind of drains my battery and get really annoyed by that, don't like it and erm you know you kind of need to calm down. (35/1705-1708).

Tris further reveals an emotional response signalling a need for space from these situations to help her "calm down." These statements suggest that for some of the participants, prolonged periods of social interaction can have intense physical and

emotional repercussions, offering a new insight to the literature, not previously captured by CYP with SM.

The accounts strengthen recent research where more than 50 percent of parents reported a lack of distance from others as associated with their child's silence (Schwenck et al. 2021). Extending on these findings, this research captured rich data from the individuals serving to illustrate space in school as having physical, as well as practical, social and emotional functions. The findings offer a new insight to the literature as well as important, practical implications for creating more SM 'friendly' school environments. Within the literature, it is assumed that a lack of dialogue in school may inhibit the reciprocated experiences with another human (Shaffer; 1996; Stern, 1985) in turn having psychological implications for the SM child (Albrigtsen et al. 2016). On the contrary, accounts in this study revealed the negative physiological and psychological effects of extended exposure to social situations in school for some individuals with SM, rather space and time away from these may serve as important protective factors in school helping participants to *"recharge"* (Tris, 14/685).

Theme: Ethos (The foundations)

Participants referred to shared characteristics and common attitudes adopted within their ideal and non-ideal schools. This theme captured the participants' thoughts about inclusion, equality, and opportunities in the school they would not like to go to and their ideal school. Two sub themes are elaborated subsequently.

Subtheme: Inclusion and Equality

Being included socially and academically featured considerably in the participants' ideal school environment, whilst being ignored, left out or overlooked featured in the school that participants did not want to attend.

Figure 24

A sense of isolation and loneliness in a non-ideal school (Ruby)

Ruby draws herself sat alone in the classroom whilst expressing feelings of sadness and isolation from her peers. For Isabelle, not having friends brings with it a loss of connection and stability in school and she describes feelings of confusion when facing social situations alone:

> *Isabelle: umm I would probably be by myself because I probably wouldn't have any friends and I probably wouldn't know what to do.* (7/334-335)

> *Isabelle: uh so um like at break times I wouldn't really know where to go or what to do.* (7/337).

However, others perceived being ignored more positively:

> *Tris: Well, I would feel upset but like at the same time I feel like being ignored isn't that bad. You know, no one really pays attention to you, so you can do what you want.* (13/647/648)

Invisibility seemingly reduces the perceived social pressure for Tris, at the same time she acknowledges unpleasant feelings when being excluded socially.

Other constructions of a non-ideal school regarded 'blanket' approaches and policies which together contributed to a school ethos based upon discrimination and unfairness. For some participants, a non-ideal school meant that everybody would be expected to complete the same level of work with no adjustments for children

needing challenge or additional support (Monkey; AT). For others 'blanket approaches,' were associated with unfair and inconsiderate behaviour policies:

> *Tris: Well. I think it's unfair because like a lot of. I know, another kid who like has like social anxiety. Not, exactly Selective Mutism but he's got selective not selective, social anxiety and he doesn't really speak that much, but a lot of the teachers give out like rewards for the speaking. Which I feel is unfair because you know, I'm still doing the work, a lot of occasions better than everyone else in the class and they're only giving merits to like the kids who are speaking.* (4/161-166)

In their non-ideal school, participants felt that as consequence for others' wrongdoings, they were collectively punished: *"… usually when someone's done something wrong, they don't own up to it so then the whole class is punished"* (Isabelle, 18/955-956). Mirroring previous findings represented in views of individuals with SM (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) participants further indicated a sense of helplessness, frustration and defencelessness when faced with injustice in school.

> *Tris: I was talking to my friend, and it was like the entire class was talking and it wasn't just us two. And the teacher told just us off. And that annoyed me. I couldn't say anything.* (19-20/945-950)

Teachers are not always aware of every situation that occurs and may draw conclusions to maintain calm learning environments or discipline in school (Pirotta, 2016). However, participants reported that these may not benefit the children who do not engage in misconducts or speak in class.

In contrast to being ignored, excluded and blamed, social and academic inclusion were perceived as important aspects of an ideal school ethos. Participants valued positive practice and experiences of being included and enabled to participate in school once the pressure to speak was removed:

Parent: Do you like the fact that you don't have to talk when you do art? (29/1551)

Coco: Yes. You just get to do fun stuff. (29/1552)

Elsa: Today we played a game of nouns and adjectives. One side was nouns and the other adjectives. The teacher said a word and we had to go to the side we thought was right. (Parent mediating Elsa's views)

Hannah: …everyone else had to like put the presentation up on Teams and like talk through it but my teacher changed it so, you know like the notes bit under the slides on PowerPoint? (21/1119-1121)

Hannah: *So I would like just type a mini script and I just handed that in so I didn't need to talk.* (21/1123)

Whilst participants' views of preferred subjects and activities within school varied, underpinning these were the importance of being included in social and academic activities on a 'level playing field' where everyone has the same chance of succeeding.

In an ideal school, participants viewed social connection and relationships with peers as critical in shaping positive experiences. Representing Monkey, who described the children in this school as *"inclusive,"* her mother shares the following discussion:

Parent: well we spoke about, cos we went through them this morning just so that I could clarify what she meant, but basically, say if you were outside and it would be play time and there was somebody who didn't have anyone to play with, then there would be children to go over to that person and they would get them to come in, there wouldn't be anybody on their own, basically. (15/686-690)

All participants valued having friends in their ideal school. These featured in Coco's ideal playground where he describes the children as; *"holding hands and the children are happy because they are friends."* (See figure 25).

Figure 25

An ideal school with friendly and inclusive children (Coco)
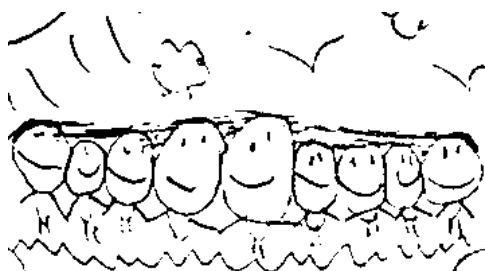
For others, being with close friends in class was an important feature in their ideal school. This may enable the participants to connect with an interaction partner over a shared topic of interest; "*I can show her my work" (Elsa)*. Others perceived sitting near friends as important in helping them feel comfortable and able to talk, creating a more positive and enjoyable classroom experience.

> **Tris:** *Well, she's, my friend. We can talk during lesson, you know. It's fun. You know she's, if I'm missing a piece of kit then she can easily lend it to me 'cause we're friends.* (32/1524-1525).

In the ideal school, inclusion is fostered: Children feel accepted and can spend time with other children. This enables participants to enjoy the inclusive atmosphere in school and engage in activities, adjusted so everyone can take part and succeed. Findings align with previous research where CYP with SM were keen to engage in the social, recreational, and academic activities once the pressure to speak was removed (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong 2019). As the CYP appeared willing or eager to perform or engage in social encounters when speech is not required, they further solidify the conceptualisation of SM as a specific fear of speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008). Moreover, friendships in school may serve as an important protective factor mirroring

Strong's (2019) findings where participants attributed friends as important in facilitating progress in school.

Subtheme: Opportunities

Being afforded choice and opportunities was another aspect of the school ethos described by the participants in their ideal school, whilst being denied these liberties featured strongly in participants' non-ideal schools.

A non-ideal school where choice was not an option was captured in descriptions of being unable to access activities or resources, including favourite lessons and play equipment (Monkey; AT). This is illustrated in Elsa's non-ideal school where she would be *"missing out"* on *"going to the mile"* and *"going to the dell/broken oak."* This type of school was also constructed as a place where children were at the mercy of the teachers' agendas: *"I don't like the work that they choose to do" (Coco, 23/1221),* thus learning was viewed as something to endure rather than to enjoy. Under these conditions, Olive further views school as a place where learning and enjoyment would be difficult for her:

> **Parent:** *'working hard and concentrating'. Do you think you'd be able to in your nightmare school? (*16/827)
> **Olive**: *I'd try to. [moves card to non-ideal school column]* (16/828)
> **Parent**: *right 'having fun'* (16/829)
> **Olive:** *I don't think you could in a nightmare school.* (16/830)

Others described a non-ideal school "*where they force people to do things*" (Isabelle, 5/216). For Monkey, this included mandatory participation in perceivably undesirable activities (e.g., *"assemblies"; "KS2 eat in the hall at the same time"*). For others, being forced to *"talk if you don't want to"* (Isabelle, 5/218) was perceived as a significant part of a non-ideal school ethos, inducing negative emotional responses including frustration and distress:

> **Tris:** *If you've got your hand up then it's like more OK. But erm being like picked on in lesson and forced to speak, or if they're like reading a book in*

English and you're like made to speak, that can be upsetting and annoying.
(2/63-65)

At the same time, removing the opportunity to speak altogether in school was perceived as having the inverse effect of helping participants. For some participants introducing cards as a way of communicating non-verbally was not ideal; "*I don't want that"* (Willow, 14/373); *"Cos that will just make me just feel like I can't speak"* (Olive, 20/1051). Further amplifying the impact of removing the expectation to speak altogether, having children and teachers talk for them was also perceived as undesirable because *"they might say the wrong thing"* (Elsa) or *"change your words"* (Tris, 39/1883). These views echo previous research whereby the expectation to communicate nonverbally was perceived as unhelpful by 75 percent of participants (Hill, 2019) and may serve to reinforce silence and social isolation (Walker & Tobbell, 2015). They also align with clinical observations whereby alternative forms of communication replacing talking altogether may serve as a maintaining factor in school (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

In their ideal school, participants conveyed the importance of a school ethos built upon acceptance and celebration of diversity. This is captured by participants articulating that *"normal is boring*" (Tris, 52/2491-2492) as well as others describing children in their ideal school as "*just doing their own thing"* (Isabelle, 13/674) with *"no specific uniform"* (Hannah's ideal school).

Choice for participants included alternative inside activities at break and lunch times (Hannah; Monkey; Willow) and position of classroom seating were further conveyed. For some participants, a choice of seating intended to meet an emotional need for avoiding attention (Elsa; Isabelle; Monkey; Ruby; Tris) whilst others viewed seating as providing a more cognitive function for attending to and processing information in class (Hannah; Willow). These reflected previous findings where a high percentage (75 percent) of secondary participants viewed seating preferences as important in school (Hill, 2019).

Participants sought *"opportunities to talk but carrying on if I don't have, or if I don't want to say anything"* (Hannah's ideal school). Responses varied according to the individual however, the data captured views of a preference to talk with people and in contexts where they felt comfortable (AT), amplified in Olive's comment, that; *"when its play time I can speak for myself, in school anyway."* (12/612)

Further echoed in the participants' views is the importance of teachers seeking consent whilst accommodating individual needs:

> **Isabelle:** *if they ask like people in the class to do group work or something, um if they're unsure whether you're okay with that, then they could ask like you do you want to do this or would you prefer to do something else?* (12/620-623)

This theme captured participant's need for a school ethos intricately balanced between exerting force to speak and removing the expectation to speak altogether. These reinforce observations within the literature regarding the importance of others in school preventing acceptance of the silence and withdrawal, rather gently supporting individuals to break down the barrier of their "silent identity" (Omdal, 2008, p. 14.). Going some way towards explaining the perceived importance of choice and opportunities in school, the nature of the condition can serve to deprive individuals with SM of important opportunities and liberties in school. In the literature, participants viewed SM as inhibiting their most basic needs including going to the toilet, asking for a drink and feeling safe (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Consistent with Johnson and Wintgens (2016) the expectation to initiate such requests in school may serve as a maintaining factor. These findings extend these by offering a new insight into the importance of schools affording CYP with SM the opportunity for "self-expression, which their condition often denies them" (Roe, 2011 p. 32), these may further act as important protective factors fostering positive experiences in school.

Theme: Person Characteristics (superstructure)

Characteristics of people in school (staff and peers) played a significant role in the participants' views. From the data, three sub-themes were captured 'Power,' 'Distance' and 'External Characteristics'. People in school were captured as the perceived metaphorical building blocks or superstructure, serving to 'scaffold' or 'demolish' the participants' views and experiences in school.

Subtheme: Power

Within their non-ideal school, participants perceived the behaviours and characteristics of peers and teachers as authoritarian or aggressive in their approach. In this school, teachers were described as *"strict"* (Isabelle; Hannah; Olive; Ruby) and adopting punitive approaches; *"punishing me for not speaking"* (Elsa's non-ideal card sort). This is captured in Coco's illustration (figure 26) with such approaches seemingly inducing a fear response, *"the people are very strict and its very scary."* In his non-ideal school, Coco's representation refers to punitive measures similar to that of solitary confinement, describing *"…a room you go to when you've been bad"* (Coco, 3/156).

Figure 26

A non-ideal school with punitive approaches (Coco)

An uneven distribution of power was further amplified between the pupils and the teachers in Isabelle's account where the teachers; *"… find something to blame you for, so they'll tell you off for any little thing"* (5/212). Ruby's descriptions further capture the authoritarian characteristics of the teachers in her non-ideal school

implying a sense of surveillance *"…the adults are moving and walking around the school, like looking (5/219-220)… They're looking at Ruby"* (5/223).

Within the non-ideal school, authoritarian characteristics were also captured among descriptions of peers as "bullies" (AT; Coco; Elsa; Olive; Monkey; Ruby; Willow;). Others perceived peers belonging to groups resembling an authority; "*they travel around in big groups"* (Isabelle, 16/815) as associated with unpleasant feelings; *"not very nice"* (Ruby, 4/203); *"very intimidating"* (Isabelle, 4/171); *"I get more panicked if it's like a group of people"* (Tris, 12/565).

Conversely, an equilibrium of power between pupils and teachers is captured in the participants' ideal school. This is reflected by participants who sought the adoption of more respectful and restorative approaches:

> **Isabelle:** *Probably, the adults as well could be less strict if that makes sense so if somebody has done something wrong, they could try talking to them instead of shouting at them or punishing them.* (18/949-951)

The power shift was further captured in data valuing teachers with characteristics including: *"funny"* (AT; Olive); *"relaxed… telling jokes"* (Isabelle, 12/585) and adopting informal approaches; *"teachers are quite not informal but informal for a teacher"* (Hannah, 18/949-950) and valued in Ruby's account:

> **Parent:** *Ruby likes the way that [the teacher] is very down to earth, the students'll chat about kind of what's happened at the weekend and things like that so she's quite yeah chatty and kind of on their level.* (17/886-888)

Extending these characteristics across the school environment, others described the importance of fostering harmony among teaching staff:

> **Isabelle:** *"the teachers get on well.* (12/607)

> **Isabelle:** *Like you see them walking with each other and they always talk to*

each other and laughing and stuff. " (16/850-851)

These teacher characteristics appeared to play an important role in developing positive school views because *"it just kind of makes the school seem a bit more friendly"* (Hannah, 18/963). Furthermore, "friendly" was an ideal attribute consistently used by all participants when describing the teachers and peers in their ideal school.

Findings among this theme mirror previous outsider research whereby 36 percent of parents attributed their child's silence to people with authority characteristics (Schwenck et al. 2021). They challenge previous research indicating the difficulties CYP with SM have when talking to teachers (Longobardi et al. 2019) in comparison to their peers (Black & Uhde, 1995) by illuminating the impact of authority characteristics in both peers and school staff. Such perceived characteristics may maintain the mutism, whilst an even distribution of power through the adoption of friendly, informal approaches may facilitate more positive experiences in school.

Subtheme: External characteristics
These referred to the externally visible or audible characteristics of peers and teachers. For some participants, external appearance may impact subsequent interactions with particular people. Age was perceived as influencing some of the participants' views which related to a view that older teachers adopt more authoritative approaches and are less understanding; "*I feel like they're meaner and probably less relatable"* (Isabelle, 5/224); *"personally erm because kids more your age will understand better than adults will"* (Tris, 39/1881-1882). In a non-ideal school, teachers were described as wearing *"very formal clothes"* (5/215) which "*makes them not very relatable and it makes them look like they are more intimidating than they are"* (Isabelle 5/221-222).

Figure 27
A non-ideal school with teaching staff wearing formal clothes (Isabelle)
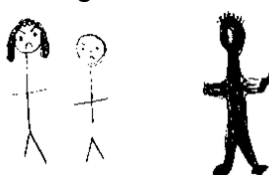
For others, external aspects of teachers in a non-ideal school related to facial expressions as captured in the following comment: *"not very nice and they have a look on their face like they're not very nice"* (Olive, 13/695). This may instil a feeling that teachers displaying these attributes are *"unapproachable"* (Monkey's non-ideal adults).

External features of peers in a non-ideal school included size and volume. For Isabelle, taller and bigger peers were perceived as *"intimating"* (4/171) and the cohort in her non-ideal school *"would probably all be boys as well um 'cos I guess that's kind of more intimidating 'cos naturally they are much bigger"* (4/188-189). For others, *"noisy"* (Olive; Willow; Isabelle) or *"loud"* (Hannah; Ruby) were perceived as important external characteristics of peers in a non-ideal school. Noisy peers seemingly evoked an emotional response in the participants as captured by descriptions of these peers as *"annoying"* (Hannah; Olive; Tris). Moreover, one participant perceived a dissociation between her own outwardly *"quiet"* (Tris, 48/2353) characteristics and others externalising *"noisy"* (47/2248) characteristics. These appeared to pose barriers to her interacting with peers displaying these attributes; *"it's more hard to talk to the louder kids because you know they're different and it's weird."* (Tris, 48/ 2353-2354). Through this dissociation, her world is firmly divided between peers that are perceived to be *"nice"* (52/2525) and those that *"aren't nice"* (52/2526):

> **Tris***…its mainly the loud kids that aren't nice, there are a few quiet kids that aren't nice, but you know.* (52/2526-2527)

> **Tris:** *there's more of a chance that they're gonna understand.* (52/2529)

These indicate that peers and teachers with external characteristics aligning with those self-identified by the individuals may be viewed as more understanding, less intimidating and thus more approachable than those with perceived conflicting or opposing external characteristics. These findings provide first-hand insight into the impact of other's external characteristics in school and strengthen previous outsider research where a quarter of parents identified characteristics including old age and

body size as a reason for their child's silence (Schwenck et al. 2021). This offers a new insight into the preferred characteristics of interaction partners in school, providing scope for identifying key adults and peers which may foster a sense of connection and comfort in CYP with SM.

Subtheme: Distance

In their non-ideal school, lack of distance was viewed both physically and through the expectations of others. Participants constructed a non-ideal school where teachers made social; "*making me look at them*" (Willow's non-ideal adult card sort); speaking; "*setting unachievable targets for me to speak*" (AT; Elsa; Willow) and academic demands; *"I guess if they gave me loads of homework um set the next day or something* (Isabelle, 2/37). Unrealistic social, speaking and academic expectations were further captured in Hannah's construction of a non-ideal school and consequently a lack of distance may place undue pressure and strain on the participants.

Figure 28

A non-ideal school with pressure and expectations (Hannah)

In their non-ideal school, peers would also show little sensitivity for the participants' need for physical distance as reflected in the descriptions of peers that *"push"* (Ruby; Isabelle; Tris; Coco) and *"shove"* (Isabelle, 16/802) and in other accounts of peers as *"constantly talking"* (Hannah's non-ideal peers) or "*doesn't stop talking*" (Olive, 31/1667). Peer expectations in the form of pressure to speak also appeared across participants' non-ideal school constructions as illustrated in Hannah's picture below.

Figure 29

A non-ideal school with pupils who do not respect a need for distance (Hannah)

Furthermore, a lack of personal space and the perceivably confusing social expectations of peers are captured in the following account promoting uncertainty and stimulating discomfort:

> **Tris:** *they just like walk past you and maybe like gesture for a high five or fist bump. And it's really weird. Yeah. I don't think anyone ever actually fist bump or high five them back. I just kind of stand there awkwardly and maybe like walk away a bit.* (47/2293-2295)

This theme highlights how a lack of physical space, direct demands and expectations (social; speaking; academic) by others may instil feelings of discomfort and place pressure on participants. Conversely, in their ideal school, participants sought distance from expectations and as such, displayed a preference for teachers exercising *"patience"* (Isabelle, 18/933), giving *"more time"* (Ruby 9/453) and distributing work in *"sections"* (Hannah, 9/463).

Figure 30

An ideal school where pressure and expectations are reduced (Hannah)
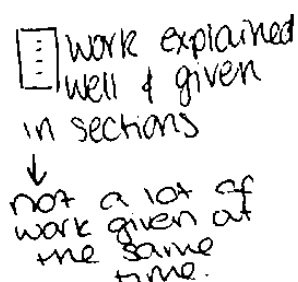
> **Hannah:** *It's like, I'm gonna use course work as one example, um the difference between like psychology and business. Psychology, we were given the whole thing and they said complete it in like three months or whatever. Whereas business we were given it in sections.* (9/461-463)

Reducing the expectations and allowing space and time appears to alleviate the pressure for Hannah who subsequently reflected that *"It almost feels like less work"* (9/482). The accounts highlight how others' lack of distance both physically and through exerting pressure may serve to maintain the mutism. These align with clinical observations (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) and 50 percent of parents who agreed that people who get too physically close or place expectations and in turn exert pressure on their child were associated with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). The responses provide a new insight into potential anxiety-reducing person characteristics of others which may facilitate more positive experiences and interactions in school.

Theme: The Climate

The school climate refers to the quality and character of school life and is captured as the metaphorical 'cement' that holds the school together. The previous themes feed into the climate. In essence, the climate reinforces the perception of school as a *"safe"* (Willow's ideal school card sort) or unsafe place for the participants.

Subtheme: Volume

A central feature contributing to the climate, was the perceived level of noise within a school environment. Noise featured immensely among constructions of a non-ideal school, emerging from others *"shouting"* (Coco; Isabelle; Olive; Ruby). Isabelle expands on her views of noise coming from "*the teacher… if they're shouting and then also if they're making loud noises on purpose to try and scare you*" (3/95-96) Similarly, Coco describes an emotional fear response evoked by *"shouty"* teachers.

> **Researcher:** *What makes them scary?* (10/526)
> **Coco:** *[Speaks quietly to P]* (10/528)

Parent: Is it the fact that they shout? (10/529)

Coco: Uh huh. (10/530)

Researcher: who do they shout at? (10/531)

Coco: everybody. (10/533)

Figure 31

A non-ideal school with "shouty" teachers (Coco, 27/1446)

Figure 32

A non-ideal school with loud children (Isabelle)

Isabelle: they [the children] shout things a lot and are very rude. (4/166)

Noise provoked other emotional responses as captured in Olive's description of feeling *"overwhelmed with all the noises"* (Olive, 17/915) and Tris' perceived frustration; *"…if there's loads of loud noises, that's when I get annoyed really easily."* (14/705-706). Moreover, being near noisy people had the undesirable consequence of averting others' attention; *"noisy people just drag other people's attention towards you and it's not nice"* (Tris, 10/459-460). Noise appeared to have more cognitive implications due to *"distracting people"* (Hannah, 3/112). Elaborating on Willow's construct of "noisy", *"if the noise is too high, she just can't process the information*

around her" (Willow's mother, 1/5-6). These may further illuminate findings regarding a decreased attention in class (Klein et al. 2019) and fit well with research observing reduced auditory processing in a small subgroup of CYP with SM (Arie et al. 2007; Henkin & Bar-Haim; 2015).

Conversely, *"quiet"* (Isabelle 10/514) and *"peaceful"* (Isabelle, 10/496) sound levels contributed to an ideal school climate with some participants associating this with feeling *"relaxed"* and calm.

> **Olive:** *I thought that meant quiet.* (19/985)
> **Parent:** *Oh the relaxed means quiet to you as well?* (19/986)
> **Olive:** *yeah.* (19/987)

Figure 33

A "peaceful" ideal school (Isabelle,10/496)
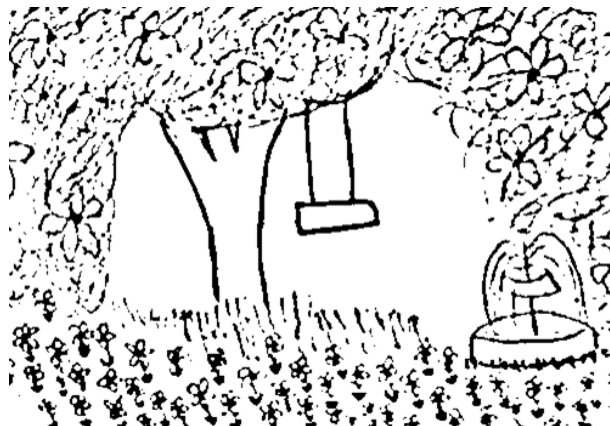
> **Isabelle:** *it is not too busy, not loud so it's very quiet, not a stressful environment. Just very calm.* (10/514-515)

However, participants also viewed a completely silent school as undesirable and perceivably *"odd"* (AT, 22/865) which may prevent them from being able to speak in school, captured in the following extract.

> **Olive:** *I wouldn't want it to be silent though.* (36/1966)
> **Parent:** *if it's silent would you speak?* (37/1970)

> **Olive:** *No.* (37/1971)

For these participants, a silent environment may stimulate further emotions; "*if everyone else is completely silent then obviously, I'd get a bit nervous about saying you know, I'm here*" (Isabelle, 19/1000-1001).

Tris described her tolerance of noise as context-dependent across the school environment as captured in the following description of outside.

> **Tris:** *It's good because you know I get to have a break from lessons and talking people and loud people. Even though it is still loud. It's it's quieter than a classroom.* (48/2302-2304)

> **Tris:** *because in like the corridors and the classroom, there's no like room, so it's kind of people's voices are just going everywhere. But like outside there's more air.* (48/2307-2308)

For Tris and others, outside may act as an important 'buffer' helping to manage the everyday noise exposure within a non-ideal school environment. These enrich recent findings indicating that high volume was associated with the silence of CYP with SM as reported by a small proportion of parents (Schwenck et al. 2021). They further capture new insights into the importance of making the school climate more conducive to the needs of CYP with SM whilst revealing the cognitive, social, emotional and physical impact of noisy environments for these individuals in school.

Subtheme: Familiarity
Within the school climate, familiarity was captured in participants' constructions, as perceived by others' expectations and behaviours. Consistent with PCP, these constructions shaped the way participants seemingly navigated the school environment. Within a non-ideal school, participants described the climate as unpredictable, unfamiliar, and unknown. For some participants, a lack of predictability and structure were perceived outside the of classroom environment (e.g., break and lunch times); "*There's not much order to it, it's not very organised.*

So it's kind of just a bunch of people just wandering around" (Isabelle, 15/764-765). These echoed the views of participants in Hill's (2019) study who reported feeling particularly vulnerable during unstructured times in school (e.g., break, lunch, field trips).

For other participants, a non-ideal school consisted of a place with unfamiliar people; *"teachers changing often"* (AT's non-ideal card sort); *"having a teacher I don't know"* (Olive, 6/314) and having a supply teacher (Ruby's non-ideal school). Moreover, inconsistent, and unpredictable approaches adopted by teachers *"randomly [choosing] people if you don't have your hand up"* (Olive, 37/2008-2009) and putting participants *"on the spot"* in class (Ruby, 17/871) featured in participants' non-ideal schools. This appeared to evoke an extreme emotional response as reflected in one participant's account.

> **Tris:** *Well, it's like 'cause I'm not really prepared unless I've got my hand up, erm so I wasn't expecting. I wouldn't be expecting it. So, a lot of the time during lesson I'm really panicked if they're going to pick on me.* (2/79-81)

Coco's description also implies a non-ideal school where teachers present inconsistent behaviours: *"The adults are very nice sometimes, but they are mostly scary"* (Coco's non-ideal school). He subsequently explains how *"it would be fun, but it would be scary in case the teachers come."* This suggests that for Coco, an unpredictable, inconsistent climate may prevent him from being able to relax fully and enjoy this school environment. As illuminated in these accounts, unpredictability may consequently stimulate a state of hypervigilance leaving little energy to relax into the learning process in school as outlined in the following comment:

> **Tris:** *most of the time I'm kind of like just waiting to get picked so it's like I start panicking and then I don't focus on the lesson as much as I probably should.* (41/1999-2000)

These align with previous proposals from an outsider perspective that for CYP with SM, much of their school day is likely spent in a state of hypervigilance, monitoring

surroundings for fear of being called upon to answer questions or feeling apprehension about others' attempts to encourage them to talk, taking time and energy away from focused attention in class (Hung et al. 2012). They further echo the views of 50 percent of the participants in Hill's (2019) who reported being too tense to process information accurately or quickly.

Conversely, familiarity was another pertinent component among the participants' ideal schools. This meant bringing structure and predictability to aspects of the school environment. In Olive's ideal school, familiarity refers to people; particularly friends because *"I know them"* (20/1087)*; as well as situations; "I think I quite like a clear routine"* (26/1408) *"And I know what, what I am gonna do"* (26/1410). For Isabelle, structure and familiarity contributes to a climate that is *"not chaotic or anything"* (11/555). She illustrates this with children *"outside"* at *"breaktime"* (11/551) sitting around a board game; *"just talking to each other and just being nice"* (11/544). "*And not messing around or anything"* (11/546).

Figure 34

An ideal school with games and things to do during unstructured times (Isabelle)
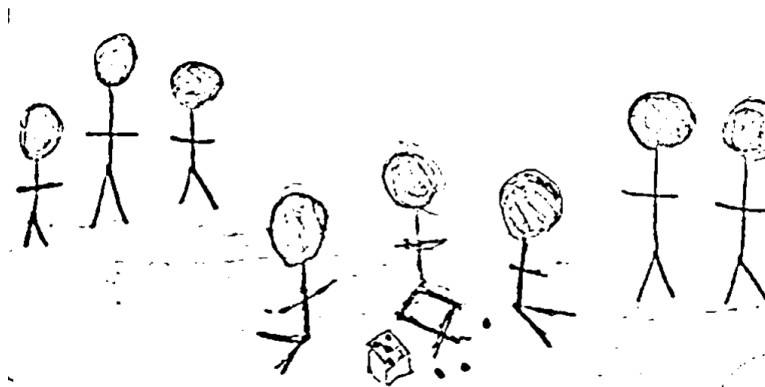
For others, structure and predictability was captured in the form of alternative arrangements at break and lunch times (Hannah; Willow; Monkey). During these times, Tris articulates a preference for games instead of talking.

> **Tris:** *I just kind of prefer computers to socializing. Socializing is just hard. Computers are easy, you know.* (35/1700)

Predictability may help participants manage the perceivably unpredictable, unknown and potentially 'risky' social world around them. These findings strengthen clinical observations and child voice research indicating that interactional rather than performant fears are significant for CYP with SM, owing to the unpredictable nature of these exchanges (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Vogel et al. 2019).

Familiar people within the school environment featured regularly in the participants' accounts. In his ideal school Coco described the teachers as the *"mums"* (18/970) and *"dads"* (18/972) *"So you can see them every day"* (18/976) which may represent a desire to remain connected with significant and familiar people in school. These reflected previous findings where participants valued "knowing family were there" (Strong, 2019, p.112) in school.

For AT, familiarity represented a two-way process, where *"everybody knows everybody."*

> ***Parent****: One of the things we, AT was talking about before was yeah, that it is really important that she knows everybody and that in particular, you wanted people to know you. She prefers it if the other children know that she doesn't like talking.* (8/318-320)

Together, familiar people and situations appeared to be associated with feeling *"organised"* (Olive, 21/1098), *"safe"* (Willow's ideal card sort), *"in control"* (Hannah; Ruby's ideal card sort) and a sense of calm.

> ***Tris:*** *Well, normally I'm quite stressed, but at least like now, I know that she is like understanding and so it's made me feel a lot calmer in like that lesson 'cause I know she's not just gonna randomly pick me 'cause she knows I'm not OK with like reading or talking.* (45/2183-2185)

These findings reflected previous research whereby parents identified unfamiliar people and new activities as associated with their child's silence (Schwenck et al. 2021). A strong need for control has also been proposed as a further etiological

factor in SM (Ford et al. 1998). When individuals with SM are subjected to a perceived unpredictable environment (people and situations) an emotional response may be triggered. In attempting to regain a sense of control and safety, participants may inadvertently use 'silence'; as an avoidance mechanism (Schwenck et al. 2021). These further strengthen observations of elevated distress to novelty in CYP with SM which were associated with high behavioural inhibition (Kagan et al. 1984). An unpredictable environment may serve as a maintaining factor in school. Key implications and considerations are raised by the participants who share consensus around the importance of creating a climate based upon familiar people and situations. These align with 60 percent of the participants in Hill's (2019) study who reported reduced anxiety when knowing what was expected of them in school, with advanced notice for class activities valued by 33 percent of the participants. These will likely serve as protective factors and may enable participants to relax in their school environments.

Summary

In summary of the findings regarding RQ1, aspects of the school environment including limited space, crowds and populated situations were perceived as anxiety inducing whilst more positive feelings were associated with space (physical and social). Participants sought an inclusive school ethos based upon equality, fairness and opportunities whilst the antithesis of this was a school that excluded or isolated pupils with limited scope for choice and opportunities. Certain traits of others (e.g., authoritarian characteristics) were further viewed as stimulating a negative response whilst friendly, informal, and quiet people were perceived more positively. Participants sought a calm climate based on structure and predictability whilst an unfamiliar and noisy climate was perceived as undesirable. The insights from the individuals themselves amplified the importance of creating school environments that are more conducive to the individual needs of pupils with SM.

RQ 2: What factors do CYP with SM perceive as influencing their current school experiences?

<u>Superordinate theme: External processes within school</u>

Among the responses, 'Internal Processes' within the individual and 'External Processes' in the school environment were captured. Together these may interact and serve as protective or maintaining factors for the individuals with SM in school. Under the External processes sits the role of others (peers and teachers) which will be elaborated subsequently (See figure 35).

Figure 35

Thematic map detailing the themes and subthemes in answering RQ2
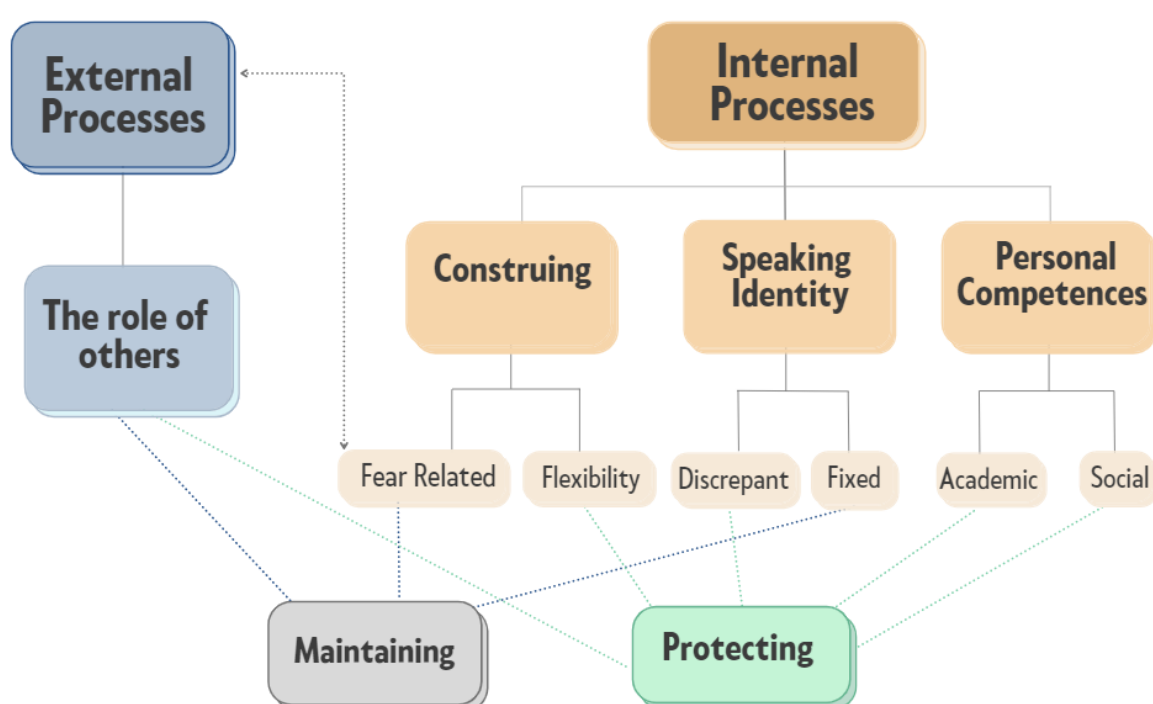
Theme: The role of others

A key theme captured how people in the school environment play a critical role in shaping the participants' current experiences in school. The findings highlighted that over and above other aspects of their school environment, teachers and peers can have a significant impact on participants' school experiences as reflected in the following comments.

> *Isabelle: I think it definitely is the teachers, um I don't think it matters what the subject is whether I like it or not because if it's a subject that I like with a not very nice teacher it still wouldn't be very good.* (17/873-875)

> *Isabelle: if you got rid of all the non-ideal teachers and you got rid of all the non-ideal children then I think that would be completely fine.* (18/912-913)

> *Tris: It would be fine if the school and the classroom and outside stayed the same and just the adults got better. That would be fine.* (50/2433-2434)

Illuminating the role of others in school, some participants regretted a lack of understanding from peers and teachers which shaped views of their current school as a negative and unsupportive place:

> *Parent: I'm sorry, I got that wrong, the the, children say that she 'doesn't speak,' Ruby's just corrected me, not that she 'can't speak'.* (15/794-795)
> *Parent: Yeah, it annoys her, it makes her upset but also a little bit mad as well…* (15/798-799)
> *Parent: sometimes like they try and, they think they're trying to help, but they're not.* (15/803-804)

A partial understanding was captured in the perceived assumptions from peers who in *"trying to help,"* inadvertently had the opposite effect, leading to feelings of upset and frustration for Ruby. Olive shared similar views of other's perceivably incomplete understanding of her SM as captured in the following extract.

> *Olive: …but they sometimes just think I'm shy.* (30/613)
> *Researcher: Okay. So, what would you rather they thought you were?* (30/1637)
> *Olive: That they knew.* (30/1638)

The responses also provided insight into the approaches of well-meaning adults with incomplete understanding in serving to single participants out as "different."

> *Tris: it might have made me seem more like different because you know all of the people in charge just kept coming up to me and talking to me and like trying to help me make friends. So it was. It was nice of them but like at the same time no one else was getting that off the people in charge.* (33/1586-1589)

Perceived unhelpful responses from teachers were further portrayed in Willow's views and subsequently elaborated by her mother.

> *Parent: So she tries to, she would say 'encourage' Willow to join in erm but it doesn't work… she had done some dancing and she'd got Willow to follow her, copying her and she'd felt that had gone really well and Willow came home and said that it was the worst day she had ever had in her life.* (10/277-282)

Figure 36

External maintaining factors influencing current views of school (Willow)
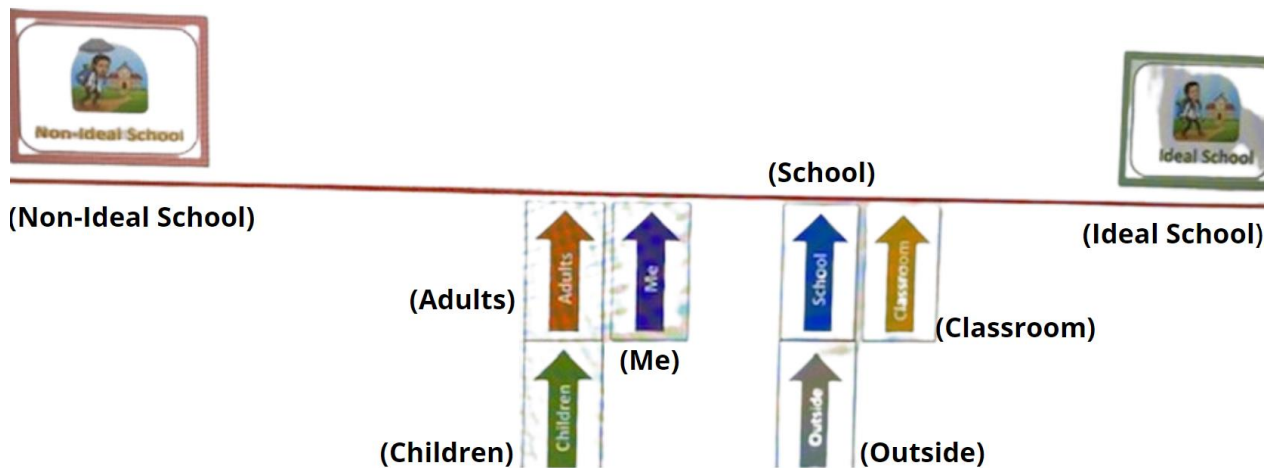
Others' reactions to the mutism reflected the assumption that participants could not speak and thus ignored them altogether. However, being socially excluded by peers was not something the participants wanted.

> *Tris: You know she was asking like everyone, but she didn't ask me. So I think she might have thought that I couldn't speak.* (17/797-799)

> *Tris: I was kind of happy that she didn't speak to me 'cos that means I didn't have to speak back, but at the same time I feel like she didn't include me.* (17/802-804)

This was further echoed in Ruby's current account illustrating the perceived contribution of peers in reinforcing feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

> *Parent: Yeah so she said, it, it's a mixture like there is some children that understand, and and kind of care about her and have been friendly but there's a lot that I think are just, kinda not kind and maybe not bullying her in particular but more kind of ignore her.* (16/833-837)

These insights mirror the wider literature suggesting that the behaviour and reactions of others in school can serve to maintain SM (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011) by inadvertently reinforcing the silence and invisibility of individuals (Omdal, 2007). They align with previous findings indicating the role of peer reactions (Strong, 2019); unhelpful staff (Roe 2011) and the need for a greater understanding from others in school (Hill, 2019). Moreover, they strengthen the role that school staff play in fostering more positive experiences by ensuring CYP with SM are socially included in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway, 2008; Patterson 2011; Roe, 2011).

For some participants, other's understanding appeared to be a key driver in promoting more positive views of school, as outlined in the following comment.

> *Tris: I would have put them completely under the non-ideal but yesterday there was like, there is one teacher that has like understood.* (45/2167-2169)

Figure 37

External protective factors influencing current views of school (Tris)
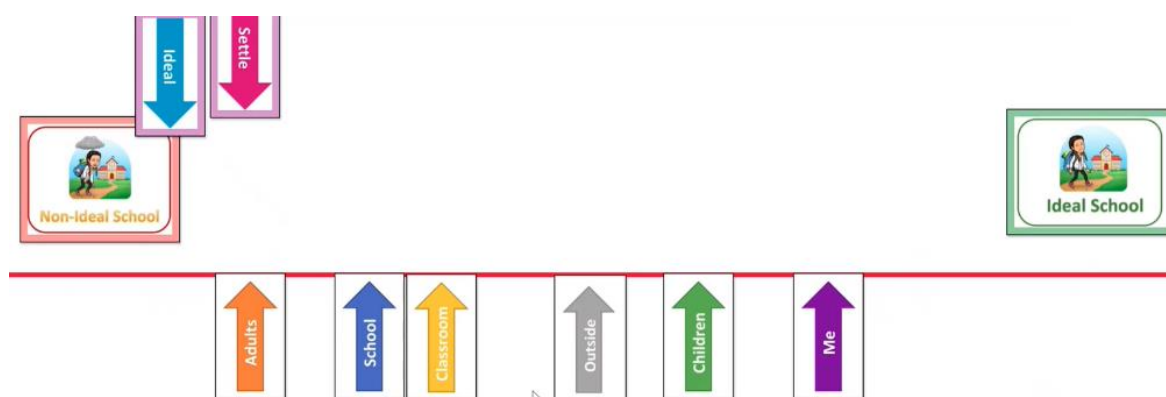
For Tris, having just one understanding teacher, appeared to positively influence her current ratings in school. Staff accommodating the participants' individual needs featured as an important factor in preserving positive views of school.

> **Hannah:** *…quite good as it is at the moment 'cause the things that I don't really like, like corridors and it being really big and confusing, erm, I have a 1:1 that goes with me through the corridors to get to my lessons, so its things like that, that the school does.* (19/1018-1021)

For Hannah, the role of staff in making the school environment more manageable enabled her to navigate the school surroundings free from the constraints of her perceived difficulties.

Having trusted peers and friends in school was considered another important factor influencing positive current experiences due to their perceived understanding and relatability.

> **Tris:** *Like they already know that I have like struggles with speaking and stuff. They already know, so they'll like understand more and I feel like I get along better with them. You know it's just better.* (31/1477-1479)

AT was the only participant viewing their current school as already 'ideal,' attributing these positive experiences to the understanding approach adopted by "everybody" in her current school.

Figure 38

External factors influencing positive views of school (AT)
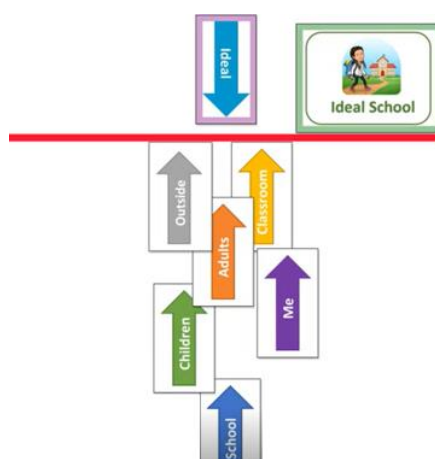
Being understood by others acts as an important factor in facilitating more positive current experiences in school and this theme indicates how responses from others may serve to either protect the participants or maintain the mutism. Underpinning a 'complete' understanding is the importance of acknowledgement, accommodation, acceptance, and social inclusion. The importance of peer and teacher involvement in the management of SM was highlighted in other pupil voice studies, where 20 percent of CYP reported school staff and 33 percent reported friends as being helpful (Roe, 2011). These are also reflected in Hill's (2019) study where 75 percent of participants with SM felt teachers played a significant part in developing self-esteem, and all participants valuing trusted friends in class. Together the findings connect with the views of participants signifying the importance of friendships, understanding and acceptance from staff and continued support from a trusted keyworker (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Strong 2019). These have direct implications for practice regarding a role for the key adults supporting them, both to address the speech anxiety and maintaining factors of SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

Superordinate theme: Internal processes within the individuals

Under the broader theme of 'Internal Processes,' participants reflected on aspects of themselves which may play a role in their current experiences in school. These are considered in more detail subsequently.

Theme: Construing

This theme captured the participants' interpretation of events in school (fears) and aspects of themselves (flexibility) which were considered potential internal factors in serving to maintain the mutism or facilitate positive experiences and/or recovery.

Subtheme: Fear related

Fear related constructs were reflected among the participants' accounts and clustered under four main fears: failure; being the focus of attention; judgment and activities with speech demands. In PCP theory, behaviour and thinking are not separate, rather, "construing leads to behaviour and behaviour leads to construing" (Moran, 2020, p. 56.) thus representing a bidirectional relationship between the internal fear contents and aspects of the participants' external environment (See figures 35 and 14).

A fear of failure may shape how participants interact in the school environment; data capturing these fear inducing constructs included "_…Mistakes in my work, being naughty,_" (Elsa's non-ideal school) _"saying the wrong thing/getting the answer wrong,"_ (Hannah's non-ideal school) _"when I get told off"_ (Coco, 25/1305). For participants, fear of failure seemed to stimulate an arousal response:

> **Tris:** _I don't know if it makes other people panic, but it makes me panic when they're like just taking the register 'cause I feel like I'm gonna say it wrong. Or I'm gonna say something wrong._ (6/268-270)

These findings mirror research where activities associated with failure were considered by 27 percent of parents to influence their child's silence (Schwenck et al. 2021). They further align with other research noting a fear of mistakes as a

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remarkable fear content in CYP with SM (Vogel et al. 2019) and are echoed in the responses of CYP among the pupil voice studies (Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011). More widely, they strengthen Bissoli's (2007) hypothesis that internal mechanisms including fear of 'inadequacy and inability' may play a critical role in SM whilst recognising environmental factors, including challenging activities in school as associated with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). Direct implications in school include providing experiences with reduced demands and guaranteed success rather than creating new experiences of perceived failure for CYP with SM. They further align with the importance of reducing pressure on CYP with SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) which will likely serve as key protective factors in school.

Being the focus of attention was a consistent fear content for the participants who; *"don't want to stand out"* (Olive, 16/842) or have the *"focus directed on me"* (Hannah's non-ideal school). These impacted participants in different ways, however, may be exacerbated or alleviated by aspects of the school environment. As such, some participants sought seating at the back of the class "*…because there are so many people. If you sit at the back, nobody can see you. Even in the middle it's fine" (Elsa) and* more subtle forms of praise from the teachers:

> **Tris:** *I think it's mainly because you know everyone would then be focusing on me and I don't like that, I want them to focus on other people so I can go like under the radar and not be noticed.* (22/1056-1058)

In attempt to avoid the limelight, others wanted to work with smaller groups of peers; *"'So I can just kind of blend into the background or something"* (Isabelle, 13/650-651). These findings further reflect previous research where 100 percent of participants did not want to stick out in anyway (Hill, 2019) and 66.7 percent of participants reported observational fears ("I don't speak because others might observe me") (Vogel et al. 2019). They further strengthen the parental reports indicating that activities drawing others' attention towards their child were associated with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). Attentional focus will be an important aspect to consider within the school environment and when planning interventions for CYP with SM. The defocusing of attention (e.g., sitting beside rather than in front of the

child) may reduce anxiety as recommended in the SM literature (Oerbeck et al. 2014; Schwenck et al. 2021).

Judgment by others was another important fear content and included: "*Worrying about what others will say,*" (Willow's card sort) *"thinking I am a freak,"* (AT; Elsa's card sort) *"saying/thinking I cannot speak,"* (AT's card sort) and "*taking my silence personally*" (AT's card sort). Fear of being judged by others is further articulated in Tris' account; *"I don't want to be seen as like really, really weird*" (52/2499-2500). Whilst not speaking may serve as a mechanism for reducing the risk of being negatively perceived by others in the school environment, participants also acknowledged how the act of not speaking itself may serve to reinforce the fear of being judged:

> **Tris:** *If it's a group of people like it was when they always said, why don't you speak? Erm, I didn't say anything which was might have come across as a bit weird because I didn't know what to say.* (12/566-569)

These accounts align with previous research noting participants' desire not to appear foolish to others (Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and fears of social evaluation (Vogel et al. 2019). In addition, they strengthen Bissoli's (2007) contention that 'judgement of others' may be a critical emotional element underpinning SM. Whilst these fears might be clustered under the more general social fear, a key difference for Tris and others with SM, is the need to specifically avoid the distress of the undesired mutism. This aligns with previous lived experience studies (Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and strengthens the conceptualisation of SM as a specific fear of talking (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008) rather than a manifestation of social anxiety disorder (Black & Uhde, 1995).

Reports from the individuals themselves highlighted how *"Talking based" (*Hannah, 21/1094) activities in school induced uncomfortable and *"nervous"* (Isabelle, 19/1001) feelings and some participants sought to avoid these:

> **Isabelle:** *I don't ask to go to the toilet in class, I just go at break.* (19/998-999)

For others, the act of reading out loud in front of the whole class was another source of anxiety, evoking an intense physiological and emotional response:

> **Tris:** *I feel like either my voice is gonna like crack through the sentence or I might my voice might sound weird. So it's kind of when I'm speaking the further along I go in a sentence, the more panicky I get about the sentence*. (18/883-885)

Tris' reflection further aligns with clinical and empirical observations indicating that voice related fears may also exist in a small subgroup of CYP with SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Vogel et al. 2019). Participants perceived these fears as more manageable when external environmental accommodations were made in school, highlighting the impact that small adjustments can have on the experiences of CYP with SM:

> **Hannah:** *My psychology one, that was another PowerPoint and everyone else had to stand up and do it in the class erm or on teams. Erm and my teacher did it with, instead of the whole class it was only a couple of people. Yeah, that was better.* (21/1133-1135)

These strengthened previous research from an outsider perspective highlighting speech demanding activities as associated with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021) and from the individuals themselves reporting an elevated fear response when subjected to these situations (Schwenck et al. 2019). Moreover, the findings solidified the conceptualisation of SM as a fear of expressive speech with an over-lap regarding social fears (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008; Schwenck et al. 2019).

Consistent with previous research, social fears and fears of failure may play a role in maintaining SM (Schwenck et al. 2021; Vogel et al. 2019). The findings further contribute to outsider perspectives in the literature indicating that children with SM present with a hypersensitivity to criticism, self-devaluation and perception of the self

as incapable and inadequate (Capobianco & Cerniglia, 2017). Tentatively contributing to the consistently reported fear of being the focus of attention, the authors propose that being the centre of attention activates a concern that others will become aware of their inadequacy which may play a role in the mute response. The findings provide directions for future interventions identifying and targeting these types of fear (Vogel et al. 2019) for facilitating positive school experiences and potential recovery.

Subtheme: Flexibility

This captured the participants' flexibility in construing aspects of themselves. When placing the 'ideal' and 'settle' cards on the scale, a strong desire for their current school to be more like their ideal school was expressed. Whilst the degree of ratings varied, all except the one participant, who rated their current school as already 'ideal' (AT), acknowledged that they would 'settle' for less than 'ideal.'

Figure 39

High yet realistic expectations in an ideal school (Isabelle)

> **Isabelle:** *I don't think it would be very good to settle anywhere lower because I don't think ummmm I don't think what I'd like is very difficult to do so.. yeah.* (17/888-890)

> **Isabelle:** *I wouldn't want to settle any higher because I know that it's probably not possible, but I wouldn't want to settle anywhere less because it just wouldn't be very nice.* (17/892-893)

Figure 40

Willingness to compromise in an ideal school (Tris)
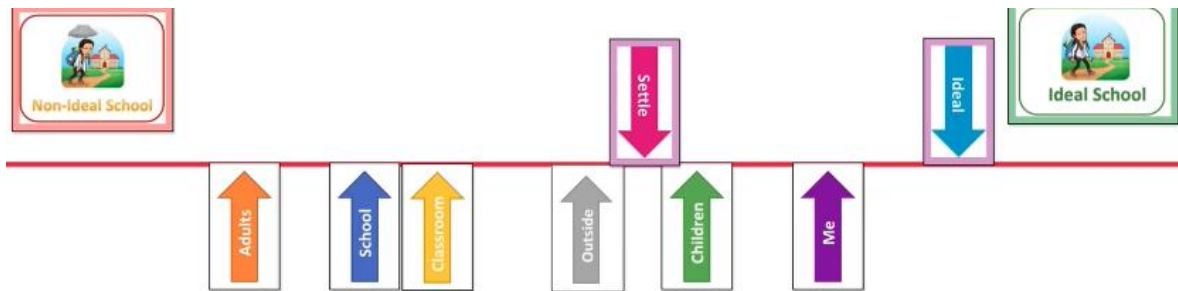
> **Tris:** *Well, it doesn't really need to be perfect because it's not gonna be perfect. But I would like it to be close to perfect, because then I'd feel more comfortable and not stressed out like during lesson. They need to try and do something.* (49/2403-2045)

More than half of the participants placed their 'settle' ratings midway between their current and 'ideal' school thus despite having high expectations, participants demonstrated flexibility regarding their preferred pole of the construct. In PCP it is important to observe "whether the child will settle for less than perfection in their personal development" (Moran, 2012a p.21). A perceived flexibility and willingness to settle may act as a protective factor for the participants, inducing feelings of accomplishment and acceptance should even a small amount of progress be made towards their ideal (Moran, 2012a). The findings in the current study build on Strong's (2019) research where most participants demonstrated a willingness to compromise regarding their 'ideal self'. Moreover, they contrast with previous findings suggesting an association between perfectionism and SM (Vogel et al. 2019).

Theme: Speaking identity

This theme captured the participants' views of themselves and their speaking identity which are elicited subsequently.

Subtheme: Discrepant

In line with previous research (Strong, 2019), participants revealed a discrepancy between their current and ideal speaking selves; *"I want to say stuff but I, I don't think I can"* (Olive, 15/786) *"I don't like my voice. I think I sound weird"* (Tris, 24/1143). This was also observed in Coco's account when expressing a desire to be more like his brother:

> **Coco**: *Yeah. Cos he's not shy. He's confident, con-fi-dent, I'm not.* (20/1054)
>
> **Researcher**: *In what way is your brother confident?* (20/1055)
>
> **Coco**: *He talks.* (20/1056)

Others shared an internal conflict between wanting to conform with the social expectations in school, whilst recognising talking as difficult for them. For Ruby, this meant *"speaking normally"* so that she could *"be the same as everybody else at school and not yeah have to worry about it."* (13/670-671). Similarly, Tris displayed a preference for not talking; whilst acknowledging a need to 'fit in.'

> **Tris:** *Yeah, I prefer not talking, but I feel like people think that I'm weird 'cause I don't talk. So I kind of want to talk to sort of fit in.* (40/2379-2380)

These findings reflected 23 percent of participants who wanted to talk but acknowledged this would be very difficult, with reports of feeling "different", "frustrated" and "wanting to be like others" (Roe, 2011 p.25). They further align with findings suggesting a disparity between participants' "personal and socially negotiated identities causing them distress" (Walker & Tobbell, 2015, p. 464). In PCP, if an individual perceives a difference between their current and ideal self, it would be reasonable to expect that they feel at least uncomfortable with their own development, thus providing scope for change in their behaviour (Moran, 2020). The perceived discrepancy between participants' current and ideal speaking identities may therefore represent a protective factor within the individuals. Supporting previous research, this suggests a motivation and willingness to change (Strong,

2019). The internal conflict between not talking and wanting to socially conform was only revealed in the secondary aged participants which may tentatively strengthen the suggestion that embarrassment in individuals with SM, increases with age (Walker & Tobbell, 2015).

Subtheme: Fixed
Some participants perceived aspects of their speaking identity more rigidly. For Olive, her established speaking patterns in school appeared to be contextual and person dependent; *"Cos you can talk to your friends in class, I mean [laughs] at break but not in class"* (11/580) and for Coco play time was a place where he could speak more freely in absence of the teachers.

> **Parent:** *And do you chat a lot at playtime?* (25/1348)
> **Coco:** *Yeah.* (26/1349)
> **Parent:** *to everybody in your class?* (26/1350)
> **Coco:** *Yeah. Cos there's no teachers.* (26/1351)
> **Parent:** *And how about when you're inside your classroom? Do you talk to your friends inside?* (26/1352)
> **Coco:** *Sometimes.* (26/1353)

Others demonstrated uncertainty around aspects of speaking behaviours such as *"Loud,"* "Silent" and *"Whispering"* (AT; Olive; Tris; Willow). For Olive, speaking loudly was something that appeared to be incompatible with her current and ideal speaking identity; *"I wouldn't be doing that in my ideal school either"* (15/801) whilst for Tris, "quiet" was a more fixed aspect of her identity; *"I still want to be quiet"* (49/2383) These reflected previous accounts of individuals with SM using adjectives such as shy and quiet to describe themselves (Omdal, 2007; Patterson, 2011; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and aligned with assumed introverted personality traits within the general SM literature (Black & Uhde, 1995; Cline & Baldwin, 2004; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Salfield, 1950; Wright, 1968). Whilst previous research revealed participants' flexibility and willingness to compromise regarding their 'speaking selves' (Strong, 2019), the findings in this study revealed how aspects of the participants' speaking identity appeared to be more fixed for some individuals

with SM. Consistent with PCP, low flexibility in construing may limit the scope for action and change (Moran, 2020), placing individuals at risk of invalidating their desired theories about themselves and provoking distress such as frustration or anxiety (Kelly, 1955; Moran, 2012a). This is echoed in the following extract:

> **Tris:** *I still want to be quiet but I want to talk like at least once a day, but I don't really. If I can avoid it, I will, but I I want to talk. Yeah, it's just kind of. It makes me feel a lot of anxiety and I start getting very panicked. So, I don't talk very often if I can avoid it, that's, that's great.* (49/2383-2386)

From a PCP perspective, the findings strengthen Strong's (2019) contention that when encountering a speech-demanding situation outside of their 'comfort zone', CYP with SM may use 'non-speaking' as a means of anticipating the event, reducing the anxiety and thus becoming their elaborative choice. These accounts provide insight into the role of the 'choice corollary' functioning as a means of "self-protection" (Kelly, 1955, p.67) in turn maintaining the non-speaking behaviours whilst strengthening previous outsider assumptions of SM being maintained internally with respect to different environments and interlocutors (Bissoli, 2007). Moreover, they reflected outsider perspectives within the literature suggesting that CYP with SM may "…rigidly and consistently divide their world into the people, places, and activities that are associated with either being able to speak or not" (Schwenck et al. 2021). However, once the speaking pattern is established and an individual is assigned the role of a non-talking person, it is more difficult for them to overcome the silence (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Schwenck et al. 2021; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) thus findings consolidate the importance of participants being sensitively encouraged to break down the barrier of their "silent identity" (Omdal, 2008, p. 14.). They also provide direct implications for the use of PCP interventions to enable more flexible construing regarding their speaking identity.

Theme: Personal Competence

This theme related to the participants' self-identified academic and social competencies which were considered important in serving to protect and facilitate more positive experiences in school for the individuals.

Subtheme: Academic Competence

Participants described a willingness and motivation to engage in a range of academic activities within the school community. These included creative activities such as *"Art"* (Coco; Tris; Willow), physical activities including the *"daily mile"* (Elsa) *"P.E 3 times a week"* (Monkey's ideal 'outside') and organised sporting activities (AT's ideal school) as well as practical activities including "cooking" (Ruby) "Lego" (Willow, 8/185) and curricular activities, in particular "Maths" (AT; Monkey; Tris). Whilst preferences varied for each participant, engagement in pursuits appealing to their strengths and interests was considered an important factor in influencing more positive views of school. This is articulated by Coco when describing *"play"* as *"the only part that I like in school, and I like art"* (24/1278) and Tris who described *"creative was my favourite lesson"* (29/1380).

These align with the views of the twin participants who demonstrated a motivation to focus on school subjects (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) and tentatively with the participants in Hill's (2019) study reporting a need to separate their academic performance from their SM so that success could be measured by their accomplishments.

Participants also self-identified internal strengths which may facilitate success in the classroom, *"I'm still doing the work a lot of occasions better than everyone else in the class"* (Tris 4/165-164), *"So what [Ruby] said is that yeah, she just hates school in, in general erm, except really the kind of learning part of school"* (Ruby's parent, 14/722-724).

> ***Parent:*** *…I know you get a bit irritated sometimes in your class because sometimes the kids are not doing what they're supposed to be doing and they're being noisy, and you don't like it when the teacher can't do what she needs to do Cos the kids are going meh meh meh* (32/1706-1709)

Olive: [laughs] (32/1710)

Parent: Like think about Spanish. What happens in Spanish? Cos it's a different teacher isn't it? (32/1711)

Olive: Yeah the majority of the class just doesn't stop talking. (32/1712)

These align with the findings in the child voice studies which indicated that not all individuals felt that SM had affected them academically in school whilst highlighting some internal strengths that may facilitate progress in school compared with their peers as they are "not always chatting" (Roe, 2011, p. 21), listening and appearing respectful (Patterson, 2011). These responses further strengthened the proposal that individual and social mechanisms may serve to protect CYP with SM from academic failure (Cunningham et al. 2004).

Subtheme: Social Competence

All participants described social connection and relationships with peers as important protective factors when rating their current school experiences.

Tris: I do have one of my friends from like this school…(31/1509)

Tris: It was like my first week. I didn't know my way around because of COVID. You know, I was already friends with her. We'd already talked a lot last year. So and she kind of knew her way around. And she was in all the same lessons as me so we kind of just went through it together. And so it's kind of more comforting with like, someone who you're friends with, in the same class as you. (31/1511-1515)

For Ruby having *"lots of friends, best friend with you, support to make friends*" (11 /558) was a significant factor in shaping her views of school. This was further reflected in her current school ratings. Mediating for Ruby, her mother shared that *"…the reason she's put it kind of a bit further along is the, the, two things in the classroom she, she sits next to a friend"* (13/772-773).

This sense of connectedness expands on previous research highlighting participants' speaking constructs as centred around relational construing (Patterson, 2011). Responses from the individuals themselves strengthen previous outsider studies observing CYP with SM as "active and lively" in their social environments (Omdal, 2007 p. 311) and those suggesting that internal mechanisms within individuals with SM may serve protect them socially in school (Cunningham, 2004).

Figure 41

The importance of friends (Ruby's scaling line)
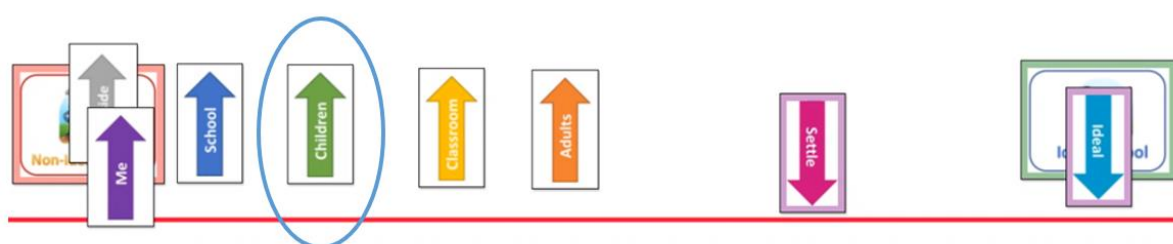
Extending on previous conclusions (Walker & Tobbell, 2015), the responses from participants highlight the importance of fostering inclusion and belonging in school by harnessing their personal strengths and interests. These may serve to protect CYP with SM and influence more positive school experiences.

Summary

In summary of the findings regarding RQ2, participants highlighted external and internal processes important in shaping their current experiences in school. The role of others (peers and staff) was a prominent factor, with participants particularly valuing those who understood their needs as important in shaping more positive experiences in school. Participants revealed a range of internal processes including fear related constructs (e.g., fear of mistakes) and aspects of their speaking identity which may also play a role in the maintenance or recovery of the mutism. Personal competences were also identified (e.g., academic and social skills) which were considered to facilitate more positive current school experiences. Harnessing these competences in school may be an important protective factor for CYP with SM.

RQ 3: What do CYP with SM perceive as important in making their current school more ideal?

All participants opted to use the sorting cards when considering ideas for how to make their school a better place. The desire for change but an uncertainty of what specifically they and others could do was mirrored in previous research (Strong, 2019).

Figure 42

Thematic map detailing the themes and subthemes in answering RQ3
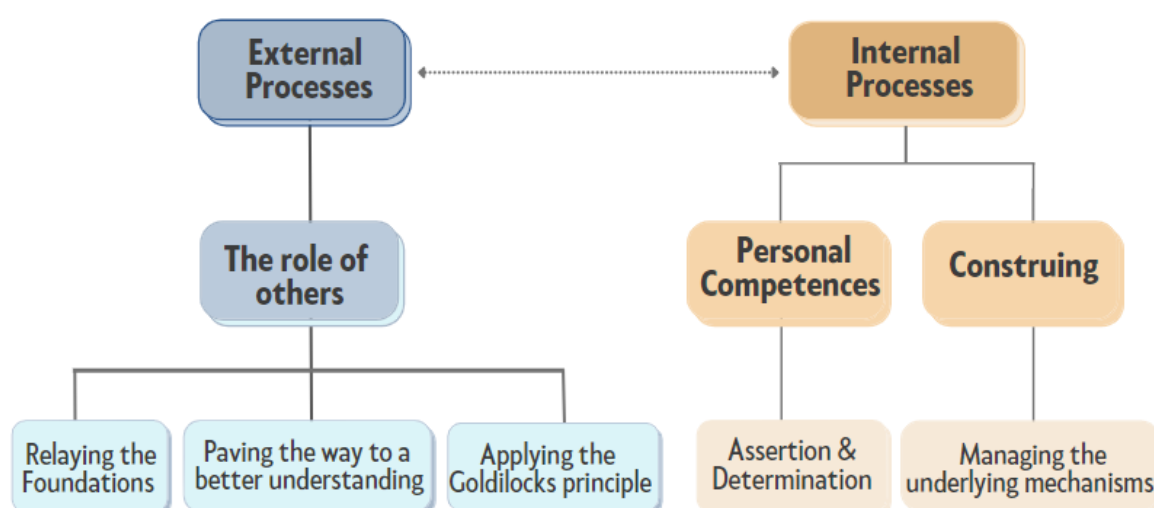
The sorting cards therefore stimulated discussion and data nested under the two superordinate themes: 'External Processes' (within the school environment) and 'Internal Processes' (within the individuals). Regarding RQ3, under 'External Processes,' 'The role of others,' a further three subthemes were captured; 'Relaying the foundations,' 'Paving the way to a better understanding' and 'Applying the Goldilocks principle.' Among the 'Internal Processes'; the subtheme 'Managing the underlying mechanisms' was captured under 'Construing' whilst 'Assertion and Determination' was captured under the theme 'Personal Competences.' These are elicited subsequently and illustrated in figure 42.

Superordinate theme: External processes

Within this overarching theme, the participants expressed several environmental factors important in facilitating more positive experiences in school. Over and above other aspects of the school environment (e.g., landscape and layout) the responses clustered around the role of others (e.g., peers and staff) in making their current school more ideal.

Theme: The role of others

Under this theme, the participants emphasised the protective role of staff and peers in facilitating more positive school experiences. These included the importance of others adopting more inclusive approaches, demonstrating a better understanding of their needs and the unique contextual factors and preferences for each individual with SM for achieving a school environment that is "just right." These are illustrated in the following subthemes.

Subtheme: Relaying the foundations

> **Tris:** *it's got to include you like the teachers have to include you.* (28/1327)

This theme captured data regarding the importance of an inclusive, fair and respectful ethos in making participants' current schools more ideal. For some, this meant ensuring that the participants felt valued and included in lessons in a way that they were not singled out as different.

> *Tris: Maybe like instead of getting the entire class to put their hands up and talk, maybe something more like instead of just giving me like the cards and stuff, giving the entire class cards, I think that would make the classroom a lot quieter as well, because you know that instead of everyone just shouting out over each other it'd be a lot quieter. You know, cos everyone would have cards and you'd hold up the cards. We did have a whiteboard activity in Spanish as well instead of just saying out loud, we got to like write down our answers. That's also a good idea. Whiteboards.* (54/2580-2586)

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For Ruby, a better school would be one where her "*personal interests*" including "*cooking*" were valued. Similarly for Coco, this meant a school where he would "*do art everyday*" (29/1523). These findings highlight the importance of enabling participants opportunities to experience success and enjoyment in school, by making school conducive to needs of CYP with SM and removing the barriers serving to disadvantage them. For others, views of an ethos based on equality were centred around the importance of patience and respect.

> **Isabelle:** *because I think it's important to give everybody the equal amount of patience.* (18/933)

> **Isabelle:** *I just think that everyone could be just a bit nicer and more understanding. It would make it a nicer environment to be in.* (19/963-964)

Similarly, participants wanted others to be "*friendly*" and "*patient*" (Elsa; Hannah; Olive; Ruby) asking teachers to "*allow more time to do things*" (Ruby, 9/453)*, more the learning like allowing her time to finish things and not feel worried*" (9/459-460) and "*repeat instructions quietly and calmly*" (Hannah; Willow's card sort). The accounts were rich, complex and varied for each individual, however all participants reflected on how SM had impacted their experiences in school to some degree. These aligned with previous findings whereby 80 percent of CYP reported that SM had affected them in school (Roe, 2011). The accounts highlight a need to ensure schools are inclusive and conducive environments for CYP with SM enabling them to feel acknowledged, accepted and included rather than ignored, isolated and invisible. Together, by sharing their own ideas and experiences, the findings emphasise the importance of schools utilising practical methods for fostering inclusion and belonging in helping CYP with SM to rediscover their voices (Walker & Tobbell, 2015).

Subtheme: Paving the way to a better understanding

> **Tris:** *"They just need to work on understanding more."* (50/2434-2435)

Participants wanted others to be *"understanding"* (AT; Elsa; Isabelle; Ruby; Tris). Removing the pressure and expectation to speak was a strong message elicited among the participants. These mirrored previous findings where all participants viewed taking the pressure away, by not expecting them to speak as a facilitating factor in school (Hill, 2019). For some participants (including AT), this need was already being met in school; *"everyone knows not to fuss when I don't make a answer"* (Coco, 27/1455).

> **Hannah:** *some lessons I'd walk in and I'd talk fine and other lessons I'd walk in and just wouldn't speak and she'd be like are you speaking today? and if I said no, she'd be like alright.* (22/1146-1148)

However, for others a key feature in improving their current school centred around staff removing the pressure to speak with participants pleading teachers "*Don't randomly ask me questions if I haven't put my hand up*" (Olive, 38/2027) and "*…not just randomly pick students*" (Tris, 26/1232). These highlighted the importance of developing a better understanding of SM in schools and aligned with previous research whereby pressure to speak by peers and staff served as another maintaining factor in school (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe 2011).

Participants also wanted everyone to understand their unique needs and as such called for others to advocate for them when they couldn't for themselves. This is reflected by Tris who wanted her teachers to explain her needs in a way that did not make her feel "different" (40/1923).

> **Tris:** *But like if they just say she doesn't really like talking that much, she might talk to you a different time. Then that I feel like that would be easier.* (40/1923-1924)

Further reflected in the participants' views, was the role that peers can play in advocating for them; "*if I need to ask the teacher a question, I usually get my friends to ask instead*" (Isabelle, 19/999-1000).

Figure 43

Responses illustrating the importance of others advocating

Olive   AT   Elsa   Hannah   Ruby

"Understanding/Accepting Standing up for me"

Having trusted peers to advocate for them appeared to provide reassurance and protection from the perceived threats in the school environment as echoed in the following account:

> **Tris:** *Yeah, because then you know, if you've got someone who has your back, it's just better. You feel kind of calm like you don't have to do like the same you don't have to just stand up for yourself and that's it.* (38/1839-1841)

This theme recognised the importance of others removing the pressure and acting as advocates for them if they felt unable to speak in school. They further align with the accounts in the study by Albrigtsen et al. (2016) whereby the twin participants valued peers trying to help them in school.

The variation of experiences among the participants around others' understanding in school, further solidified the researchers' initial concerns around the postcode lottery of support and the need to raise awareness at LA level (ICAN, 2018) through the development of clearer pathways for CYP with SM as well as national guidelines and quality standards relating to the training of professionals (Keen et al. 2008). A better understanding may lead to actions as revealed in the following statement:

> *Tris: if they don't understand your needs then they're not gonna do anything about it.* (12/548)

Subtheme: Applying the Goldilocks principle

Participants sought an optimal school environment which, by the very nature of this principle was unique and multifaceted. Some sought an environment that was *"not too big and not too small"* (Hannah, 9/445); *"quiet, but not too quiet"* (Olive, 23/1213) with *"informalish"* staff (Hannah's ideal school). The importance of teachers acknowledging, valuing, and including them whilst sensitively managing a need to avoid attention of others was a consistently conveyed message among the participants. This is reflected in participants seeking more subtle ways of giving praise (Ruby's ideal school); "*teachers can see without causing attention*" (Monkey's parent, 4/183) and the importance of teachers *"checking in with me to make sure I understand"* (Elsa; Hannah; Ruby; Willow card sorts). This reflected previous research where 100 percent of participants felt that they could not ask for help with half of them valuing teachers checking to see if they need anything (Hill, 2019). Tris' views highlight the importance of teachers exercising due diligence to avoid inadvertently drawing attention and judgement from others:

> *Tris: Like maybe after a lesson, not like telling me to wait back because then people are gonna think that I did something wrong and that's still not really subtle. But maybe just like a note, in my book on my desk that I could like see.* (39/1902-1904)

Whilst the views for achieving the optimum environment were complex and varied, the findings strengthen the need to listen to the CYP and identify what it is specifically within their school environment that may play a role in SM (Ford et al. 1998). If the educational context can cater for the needs of CYP with SM (including what is important to them), they may be able to participate more fully in their learning environment.

Superordinate theme: Internal processes

The participants reflected upon and identified their own role in achieving a more ideal school. These are more broadly captured under the superordinate theme 'Internal processes' and reflected in the following themes and subthemes. Whilst all participants recognised the role that others can play; one participant was unable to identify their own role in facilitating more positive views of school. Notably age and the more challenging nature of this concept may have inhibited their engagement.

Theme: Construing

Under this theme and consistent with PCP, participants reflected upon their internal views of the world and events in shaping their responses within the school environment. The following subtheme illustrates the role of re-construing these views in facilitating more positive experiences in school.

Subtheme: Managing the underlying mechanisms driving the mutism

Featured consistently amongst the participant responses were the "*manage my worries and anxiety*" (AT; Isabelle; Monkey; Ruby; Tris; Willow) and "*develop more confidence so that I am not nervous*" (Ruby; Coco; Olive) cards. These indicated that participants perceived addressing the internal mechanisms driving the mutism as important in facilitating recovery. For Ruby, *"She just feels the anxiety is, is the main thing that's having the effect on her*" (Parent, 19/1027). Together the insights supported previous outsider perspectives suggesting the role of internal mechanisms (e.g., emotional responses to feared situations) as characteristic of SM (Bissoli, 2007). Despite recognition of the internal mechanisms, participants indicated uncertainty around what specifically they could do to manage these in school.

> **Researcher**: *Yeah? Would you like that, to feel less nervous in school?* (28/1493)
>
> **Coco**: *Yes.* (28/1494)
>
> **Parent**: *Yeah? Okay. Do you know what would make you feel more confident?* (28/1495)
>
> **Coco**: *No.* (28/1496)

Some participants perceived themselves as already trying to manage their responses in school *"I kind of already do what I can to make it like my ideal school"* (Hannah, 20/1083-1084). Others highlighted difficulties in applying these in reality:

> **Tris:** *Yeah, well. I do want to do all of these, but it's not necessarily that easy. You know, like being brave isn't that easy and managing my worries and anxiety I try and do that a lot. And I actually this one number 2, 'tell myself I can beat this and have like a better life' erm I sometimes do try and do that and try and speak, but it doesn't necessarily work.* (55/2674-2677)

Accounts illuminated feelings of uncertainty, helplessness and hopelessness which were reported in previous lived experience and child voice studies (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) and align with previous research where participants wanted to change but were unsure how to do (Strong, 2019). Conversely, others reflected a tension between these internal mechanisms, perceiving them as inferior yet consuming:

> **Isabelle:** *I think I spend a lot of time actually worrying about something that probably actually isn't that important.* (19/984-985)

> **Isabelle:** *It doesn't really affect you it is not gonna have an impact on your future at all.* (19/987)

For Isabelle, from a PCP perspective, addressing and reframing the 'core' constructs shaping her views of the world, may serve as a factor facilitating recovery. For others, exposure to fearful situations by *"Being brave"* (AT; Coco; Willow), trying new things (e.g., clubs; or alternative ways of communicating) (Coco; Monkey; Olive; Willow) and *"Forcing myself to speak"* (Tris, 56/2692) were also considered important in facilitating recovery. Facing the fear driving the mutism appeared to be reflected in the following account when considering how to overcome SM.

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> *Tris: It's just trying to overcome everything. I actually, I sort of actually stopped having a fear about something a couple of days ago and like yesterday.* (56/2709-2711)

> *Tris: So I'm still scared of needles, but like a little bit less.* (57/2728)
> *Researcher: A little bit less OK. What's made you feel like that?* (57/2729)
> *Tris: Just doing it. I don't know erm.* (57/2730)

For Tris, exposure to a fearful situation seemingly reduced the fear itself, *"a little bit"* and her account provides tentative insight into her thinking around how this may be applied to her SM.

Together, these findings provide first-hand insight into the role of internal processes that may be maintaining the mutism whilst illuminating important suggestions for the management of these, from the individuals themselves. For some participants, addressing the internal mechanisms meant restructuring the dominant constructs or fear contents which may enable them to develop more adaptive responses within their school environment. For others, addressing the internal mechanisms centred around graduated exposure to the fear inducing situations, mirroring previous research highlighting the scope of behavioural approaches in the management of SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). The results strengthen previous proposals that the mechanisms underlying the mutism might not be homogeneous among all CYP, rather there may be distinct subgroups with contrary levels of anxiety and arousal in situations with speech demands (Vogel et al. 2019).

Theme: Personal Competences

Within this theme, key strengths self-identified by participants concerned their assertiveness and determination to overcome their difficulties. These were considered a further internal mechanism important in facilitating more positive experiences in school for some of the individuals and are outlined in the following subtheme.

Subtheme: Assertion and determination

To make their current school more ideal; participants perceived a need to remain "determined to overcome" their difficulties (Monkey; Olive; Ruby):

> **Tris:** *well I try and do it anyway because you know I have to speak at some point. That's just a fact. So I'll try and overcome it as much as I can.* (56/2689-2690)

These findings reflected previous research where participants believed they could recover from SM and were hopeful that it would not always affect them (Strong, 2018; Roe, 2011). Moreover, they contrasted with Omdal's (2007) study observing a determination not to speak whilst aligning with other studies (Patterson, 2011; Roe 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) where remaining determined to overcome the SM and making a "conscious decision to start talking" (Omdal, 2007, p.245) were considered likely precursors in the recovery process.

Being assertive was considered an important protective factor in school as outlined in one participant's account:

> **Hannah:** *One thing I do is if there's like erm a piece of work or something that's erm like talking based. I tell my teachers that I can't do it and then like before quite like when…*(21/1093-1094)

> **Hannah:** *Erm. Like when it's pretty much first given out, I tell them that I can't do it and they manage to change it a bit.* (21/1096-1097)

This strengthened previous research from an outsider perspective suggesting that for CYP with SM, assertiveness may serve to protect them from negative experiences in school (Cunningham et al. 2004) and aligns with other studies capturing assertive traits as identified by participants with SM (Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019). Whilst one participant demonstrated assertiveness, sharing times where they had informed teachers, the act of doing this seemingly led to confusion and frustration owing to the very nature of their difficulties:

> *Tris:* I have told two of my teachers which is very ironic 'cause I had to speak to say that I didn't want to speak (51/2461-2462)

> *Tris:* it's a bit weird that I have to say to them because I shouldn't have to be the one that has to say something because I don't want to. This is what I'm struggling with. I shouldn't have to say that I'm struggling with speaking. They should know, it's a thing that they need to know. (55/2640-2643)

Tris' account reflects the previous lived experience studies where participants reported a "determination and desire" (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.462) to speak yet feelings of frustration and failure when this could not be fulfilled. These findings further strengthen Johnson and Wintgens' (2016) contention that dismissing or ignoring the speech anxiety in addition to the expectation to initiate requests can serve to maintain SM. Whilst assertive traits may be protective, the findings also highlight that these may not be sufficient in isolation, rather key to positive school experiences and potential recovery will be the input and commitment of both the individual and others within the school environment.

Summary

In summary of the findings regarding RQ3, external and internal processes were perceived by the participants as key to shaping more positive experiences in school and potential recovery. With reference to the external processes, participants echoed the fundamental role of peers and teachers in developing an inclusive ethos and a better understanding of SM in school. The unique and varied accounts strengthened the importance of schools adopting the Goldilock's principle in achieving the 'just right' environment for CYP with SM.

 Participants also acknowledged their role in managing the internal processes and remaining determined to overcome their SM. These findings align with previous research observing support from friends, school staff, a personal decision and willingness to change (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019) as well wider literature emphasising the importance of holistic

multimodal interventions (Cleave, 2009; Johnson & Wintgens, 2015; 2016; Lawrence, 2018) as key to creating more positive school experiences and potentially facilitating recovery.

Summary of the findings

The research sought to elicit the views and experiences of CYP with SM with a purpose of increasing an understanding from the individuals' perspectives and contribute to the sparse literature in this area (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Omdal & Galloway 2007; Patterson, 2011; Remschmidt et al. 2001). Roe, 2011; Schwenck et al. 2019; Strong, 2019; Vogel et al. 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). The research questions were addressed using a non-verbal PCP technique which elicited participants' contrast poles of 'ideal' and 'non ideal' school. This enabled exploration of factors playing a role in participants' current and ideal school experiences as well as providing insight into the perceived factors facilitating more 'ideal' school experiences.

Following Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), 2 superordinate themes; 'External Processes' within the school; and 'Internal Processes' within the individuals were captured and a further eight themes relating to the research questions were identified – nested under the 'External Processes' these themes were 'Layout and Landscaping' (with subthemes 'Size and Population;' 'Space'), 'Ethos' (with subthemes 'Inclusion;' 'Opportunity'), 'Person Characteristics' (with subthemes 'Power;' 'Distance;' 'External Characteristics') and 'Climate' (with subthemes 'Volume;' 'Familiarity') (RQ1).

Under 'External processes' a further theme, 'The role of others' was captured as an important factor shaping current views of school whilst 'Internal Processes' captured themes of 'Construing' (with subthemes, 'Fear Related'; 'Flexibility), 'Speaking Identity' (with subthemes 'Discrepant'; 'Fixed') and 'Personal Competences' (with subthemes 'Academic'; 'Social'). These themes were considered to either facilitate positive experiences in school or maintain the SM (RQ2).

Within 'External Processes,' 'The role of others' captured a further three subthemes; 'Relaying the foundations,' 'Paving the way to a better understanding' and 'Applying the Goldilocks' principle.' Regarding the 'Internal Processes,' two further subthemes were established, 'Assertion and Determination' sitting under 'Personal Competences' and 'Managing the underlying Mechanisms' under the theme 'Construing' (RQ3).

Conclusions

The findings captured a consensus around aspects of the school environment, particularly those with limited space (physical and social) and the associated unhelpful responses including frustration, discomfort, and fatigue. Expanding on previous 'outsider' perspectives (Schwenck et al. 2021), the findings offered a rich insight into the anxiety inducing nature of crowded and populated situations in school for the individuals, whilst acknowledging the need for space across a range of domains (e.g., physical; social and academic). Findings conflicted with previous suggestions that CYP with SM require 'tuning in' with others to vitalise them psychologically (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) rather, space was associated with positive feelings including reduced pressure, calm and 'social revitalisation.'

The individuals sought an inclusive school ethos based upon equality, fairness, and opportunities. A consistent message conveyed by the participants was that they did not want to be ignored by teachers or peers in school, strengthening previous research that being excluded from communication was not what children with SM wanted (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong 2019;). Rather they sought opportunities to be included socially and academically in a way that they felt comfortable whilst being afforded choice (e.g., alternative activities) and opportunities to speak if they felt able to, without being singled out as different. These strengthened the conceptualisation of SM as a phobia of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens, 2015) and the identified protective role of friendships and social connection in CYP with SM in school (Hill, 2019; Patterson, 2011 Strong, 2019; Roe, 2011).

Consistent with previous 'outsider research' (Schwenck et al. 2021), CYP perceived others with authoritarian characteristics (e.g., bullies; strict; "shouty"), externalising incompatible traits with their own outward identities (e.g., older teachers; bigger children; loud people) and paying little respect to their need for distance (e.g., placing undue pressure or direct demands on them) as inducing a fear response. As such, people displaying some or a combination of these characteristics were perceived as unrelatable, unapproachable, less understanding of their needs and more difficult to talk to. Preferrable traits of others included those who adopt friendly, informal, relaxed, and quiet approaches whilst respecting a need for space (e.g., time; patience; reduced pressure; direct demands). These traits were associated with increased relatability, understanding and ease of talking. The accounts from the individuals themselves offered a new insight into the perceived behaviours and characteristics of people (peers and staff) in school which may play an important role in maintaining the mutism or facilitating more positive experiences.

Within the findings, aspects of the school combined to create the perceived school 'Climate.' A shared consensus revealed the undesirable nature of noisy environments in school which evoked a range of emotional (e.g., frustration; overwhelm; fear) and cognitive responses (e.g., distraction; difficulty concentrating). These provide a new understanding around the impact of external stimuli (noise) in school for some individuals with SM whilst contributing to previous findings regarding decreased attention (Klein et al. 2019) and reduced auditory processing (Arie et al. 2007; Henkin & Bar-Haim; 2015).

A fear response appears to be induced in CYP when they are exposed to unpredictable and unfamiliar climate (e.g., people and expectations of the individuals e.g., supply teachers; randomly selecting children to speak in class). These situations appeared to activate a hypervigilant response in school, leaving little energy to relax into the learning or social opportunities available to them. These strengthen previous outsider perspectives regarding the fear inducing nature of unknown people and situations (Schwenck et al. 2021) whilst providing insight into the physiological impact of SM in school from both outsider perspectives (Hung et al.

2012) and those articulated by CYP with SM (Hill, 2019). Extending upon these findings, participants sought structure, predictability, and familiarity in school (e.g., through clear expectations, structured games and activities during unstructured times, time with friends and familiar people). These were associated with feelings of safety, control and calm and may serve as a further protective factor in school. This strengthened previous assertions regarding the importance of providing 'low-risk' activities, those with a known content and fixed duration, when supporting CYP with SM in school (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016).

Over and above other aspects of the school environment, participants highlighted the significant role of others (peers and teachers) in shaping their current experiences in school. Positive current experiences appeared to be associated with others' acknowledgement, accommodation, acceptance, and inclusion; whilst the actions of well-meaning peers or adults with limited understanding of SM were perceived to hinder positive school experiences, by placing undue pressure on the individuals or disregarding them and their needs altogether. This mirrored previous research indicating that the behaviours and reactions of others may serve to maintain the SM by inadvertently reinforcing the silence and invisibility of individuals with SM (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019).

The findings captured several internal mechanisms within the individuals which may be crucial to comprehending how individuals with SM interpret events surrounding them and the associated emotional and behavioural responses. Fear related construing was identified as a possible underlying factor serving to maintain the SM. These included fears of failure; judgement; being the focus of attention and activities involving speaking. They echoed previous outsider findings (Schwenck et al. 2021) and those reported by CYP with SM in the literature (Vogel et al. 2019; Schwenck et at., 2019) whilst strengthening the conceptualisation of SM as fear of speech with an overlap regarding social fears (Johnson & Wintgens 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008).

Expanding on previous work with adults, findings revealed the complex way in which CYP experienced both SM and their identities (Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Serving to facilitate change, participants acknowledged a discrepancy between their current and ideal speaking selves as identified in previous findings eliciting the views of the individuals (Roe, 2011; Strong, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). Contrasting previous research (Strong, 2019), this study revealed how fixed aspects of the individuals' speaking identities may function as a "self-protection" (Kelly, 1955, p.67) mechanism and thus an internal maintaining factor in SM by limiting scope for change and action.

Strengthening previous outsider perspectives (Cunningham et al. 2004), social and academic strengths were captured as important internal protective mechanisms for the participants in school. These included a willingness and motivation to engage in curricular, recreational, and social activities in school. Echoing outsider perspectives indicating that CYP with SM are not 'unsociable' (Crundwell, 2006), findings strengthened the conceptualisation of SM as a fear of expressive speech (Johnson & Wintgens 2015; Omdal & Galloway, 2008) rather than a subset of social anxiety disorder (Black & Uhde, 1995).

Despite a desire for change, participants indicated an uncertainty regarding specific actions for themselves and others. These were captured in previous research (Strong, 2019) and illustrates the perceived difficulties in overcoming SM. Managing the internal mechanisms driving their behaviours and adopting assertiveness and determination were considered key actions by the individuals for facilitating more positive experiences in school and potential recovery

In facilitating more positive school experiences, participants sought a more inclusive ethos built around mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance. Responses indicated that the individuals wanted to be included and acknowledged by others in school whilst highlighting the importance of their needs being managed sensitively. Reponses called for a greater understanding of SM, by others removing pressure (speaking and other demands) and advocating for them when they felt unable to do so for themselves. In facilitating change, the complex and unique factors perceived

by the participants illustrated the need to adopt the 'Goldilocks Principle,' creating a school environment that is 'just right' for each CYP with SM and central to achieving this is through listening to the views of the CYP themselves.

Equally, the findings revealed how the participants presented with high, yet realistic expectations in a school and a willingness to compromise. These conflicted with previous research suggesting an association between SM and perfectionism (Vogel et al. 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). Thus for the participants, whilst the ideal school was perceived as aspirational, they were willing to compromise provided their school "do something" (Tris, 49/2045). Solidifying this, responses alluded to the importance of commitment from the individuals and others in school. Therefore, a unique and complex combination of internal mechanisms within the child and external mechanisms within the school environment were considered as important factors serving to facilitate recovery.

These findings support current thinking around the aetiology of SM as a complex interaction among multiple internal and environmental vulnerability factors (Muris & Ollendick, 2015; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) and strengthen the rationale for adopting a multifactorial model of SM with factors interacting for each individual (Cleave, 2009). Findings also consolidate Lawrence's (2018) contention that multimodal interventions are likely to be the most effective approach in the management of SM. Through the adoption of a child-led, creative, and flexible approach based on the principles of PCP, all participants were able to share their views about school. Therefore "there are ways to hear the voices of those with SM, if we are willing to listen" (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.468) and in doing so we can achieve the "just right" for CYP with SM.

Strengths of the research from the participants' perspectives
Following the interviews, evaluation forms completed by all participants elicited valuable feedback about the research process and efficacy of the technique. Figure 44 indicates that participants expressed positive views with statements scoring at or above 7.5 out of 10.

Open-ended questions enabled participants to elaborate on their favourite parts of the work, which included reference to the online card sorting (50 percent of the participants) and drawing activities (20 percent). These strengthen the suitability for utilising these approaches with CYP with SM (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Strong 2019). Responses indicated that participants mostly enjoyed the activity and felt it had enabled them to share their experiences of SM as captured in the following comment: *"being able to find a way to express my views on schools and it was easy to do."*

Figure 44

Participant feedback regarding the interview process and tools

Average ratings for questions on the CYP's evaluation form
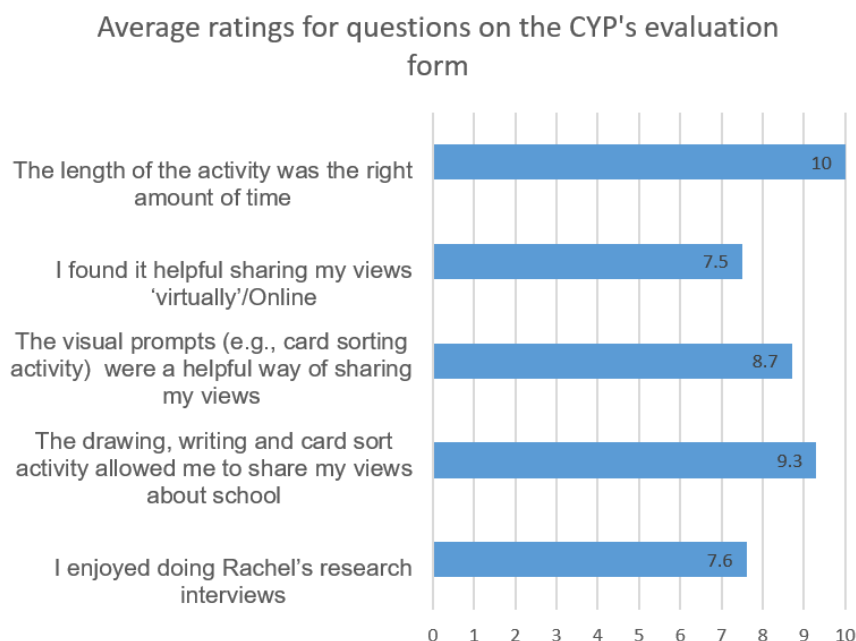
All participants felt that the activities were just the right amount of time, whilst these varied for each participant, the responses solidify the importance of adopting a child-led approach and investing time to build up a playful and meaningful relationship with CYP with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). These ratings suggest that this may be a worthwhile technique to further develop for this population.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be considered in relation to this study. The evaluation form elicited important feedback from participants, two of whom shared their least favourite parts of the process; *"answering why questions," "Sometimes it was hard to think about why things are hard as I don't always know."* This could be associated with the more open-ended and thus 'high risk' (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) aspects of the technique, particularly the final part (e.g., scaling and actions for self and others). Despite the implementation of prompt cards in addressing the barriers previously acknowledged (Strong, 2019), the final part of the interviews posed difficulties for some participants. In particular, the three younger participants were unable to complete the final part of the scaling activity (placing the 'ideal' and 'settle' cards on the line). The challenging nature of the final part of the interviews may have prevented some participants from communicating freely about their SM. It will be important that these limitations are considered if the technique is to be developed further.

Whilst most participants reported not wanting to change anything about the process, an important piece of feedback raised by one participant revealed that *"some of the cards were a little bit difficult to understand what they mean."* Despite seeking to clarify any ambiguous terminology and offering visual and text-based cards, the language content may have prohibited some of participants from fully engaging in the interviews. This highlighted a need to make the cards more accessible by simplifying the language on them.

Despite the researchers' efforts to minimize the impact of parental dynamics (e.g., parental instructions; clarifying the research aims), it is acknowledged that this could never truly be removed. In some cases, the parental presence may have led the research in a different direction. However, consistent with reflexive TA, rather than strictly adhering to a pre-determined interview schedule, the researcher acknowledged the 'messy' context of the interviews and sought to capture quality data by remaining responsive to the participants' developing accounts (Braun & Clarke 2022; Braun & Clark, 2013).

Some parents acted as verbal mediators which may have diluted or distorted the participants' accounts. Remaining aware of the responsibility in verifying the accuracy of the accounts (Robson & McCartan, 2016), the researcher regularly checked in with participants who validated these using nonverbal gestures (e.g., nodding) and at times appeared comfortable challenging their parent if something was portrayed inaccurately. Consistent with previous research, parents were deemed a valuable aspect of the research in gaining access to the participants (Cleator & Hand, 2001; Schill et al. 1996; Klein et al. 2012) which may have been more difficult otherwise.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, it is not possible to conclude that the findings are exclusively applicable to CYP who have Selective Mutism or whether similar outcomes might be found if the research were undertaken with a broader group of CYP who have not been diagnosed with SM (e.g., those who present with anxiety). As such, future research may seek to address this limitation (e.g., through the adoption of comparative studies). A further factor directing or limiting the information gathered may stem from the tools (e.g., sorting card) which were informed by the SM literature and assumed their relevance to the participants. However, the card sorting activity was not utilized by all participants, yet similar themes were captured across the accounts. Together, it is reasonable to suggest that these served to strengthen the findings.

The selection sampling methods potentially resulted in bias towards CYP with extreme experiences (e.g., negative or positive) in school and may have targeted participants with an affinity to the internet. The sample consisted of mostly girls (90 percent) and participants of White British ethnicity (80 percent) of variable age and geographical location (See Appendix 33). These might be considered as reducing the homogeneity and generalisability of findings. However, situating these as limitations may reinforce the norms and ideals of knowledge generation as embedded in statistical or empirical generalisability (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Rather the aims and purposes of this study were to elicit a rich, multifaceted, and contextually located understanding (Cohen et al. 2017) of SM. A more qualitatively situated perspective may enable an element of 'transferability' (Lewis et al. 2014)

providing the researcher demonstrates 'sensitivity to the context' (Yardley, 2015). Acknowledgement is made to the variation of practice, processes, and pathways for supporting CYP with SM across different schools, local authorities (Keen et al. 2008) and the complex aetiology of SM (Muris & Ollendick, 2015; Johnson & Wintgens, 2015). The researcher invites the reader to determine the extent to which they can safely transfer the analysis to their own context. As the findings may be applied in similar contexts to support understanding and provide practical strategies for change, this research could be considered to have theoretical generalisability (Yardley, 2015).

The research sought to explore possible maintaining and protective factors within school and the CYP themselves, using a PCP technique to explore views of 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' aspects of school. However, what young people like and find helpful may not necessarily be 'protective,' echoing Rutter's (1985) warning that experiences do not need to be pleasant to support positive outcomes. The same could be inferred for the assumed 'maintaining' factors in this study which taken together may provide a reductionist account of the participant's experiences. As highlighted in the literature review, SM likely arises from complex interactions among various factors, unique to each individual child (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Muris & Ollendick, 2015;) and Ungar et al. (2013) point out that it is not possible to separate within-child and environmental factors as they both affect each other. As such it was not the researcher's intention to go beyond the suggestion of potential protective and maintaining factors however, themes give rise to practical applications for facilitating positive practice and experiences for SM pupils in school.

Whilst the role of home and family factors are broadly captured in the SM literature (Bergman et al. 2008; Ford et al. 1998), this study did not consider factors outside of the school associated with SM. The researcher acknowledged that home and family are important in SM, however reasoned that educators may have less influence over shaping these environmental factors. Combined with the limited evidence specifically exploring the educational contexts of CYP with SM, the research sought to capture information of potential benefit to schools for supporting pupils with SM. The researcher's intention was not to imply that in-school factors can support pupils

regardless of difficulties experienced at home, this would be a reductionist approach. Rather it was to develop a better understanding for achieving school environments conducive to the needs of CYP with SM.

When seeking to triangulate key conclusions, Kelly et al. (2008) stipulates the importance of drawing on more than one source of evidence and a variety of approaches. The researcher acknowledges that by focusing on the views of CYP with SM, key contextual information may have been overlooked. Consequently, a lack of triangulation with the views of parents and other stakeholders may have prevented a holistic picture of the experiences of CYP with SM. However, whilst parents and staff may present with views of SM, they have not directly experienced it from the perspective of the CYP. Consistent with the critical realist position and PCP (Kelly, 1955) the CYP were viewed as 'experts' of their own experience and their views were regarded as relevant and valid for all intents and purposes in this study.

Finally, the qualitative methodology means that the process of developing themes was likely to be influenced by the researcher's subjective views. However, every effort was made to reduce the impact of these was through ensuring transparency, a reflective and reflexive approach. It is hoped that these served to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

Future research directions
As raised in the limitations, the final part of the PCP technique (scaling and next steps) presented more challenge to some of the participants. Noting the difficulties that open-ended tasks pose to some CYP with SM, Johnson and Wintgens (2016) suggest the use of closed choices. Future developments might include adapting the final part of the technique by creating more optional closed choice cards based on the findings from this research and the wider SM literature. Consistent with previous research (Strong, 2019), the adapted PCP technique was rated positively among participants, therefore it may be worthwhile developing this tool further. More research exploring the use of this technique for eliciting the views of CYP with SM is

welcome, allowing for further refinements to determine its dependability and increase transferability.

The research revealed new insights from the perspectives of CYP with SM thus in addition to typical situations, such as speech demand and evaluation by others, situations containing crowds, high volume or lack of distance in the school environment should also be explored (Schwenck et al. 2021). As this and previous research has outlined, there is clear potential for the use of PCP approaches with the SM population (Strong, 2019; Patterson, 2011) therefore research adopting other PCP techniques for eliciting the school constructs of CYP with SM would be fruitful. This could include a non-verbal adaption of The Children's Exploratory Drawings (CEDs) (Timney & Cohman, 2020), a creative PCP technique based on simplistic illustrations depicting common school scenes. These may provide more insight to the internal representations and core constructs regarding school for CYP with SM.

Given that participants described explicit fears and fear-related construing, it seems promising to assess and target these constructs within the concrete situations in everyday life. The findings captured how construing may play an important role in SM providing scope for the use of PCP based interventions for supporting reconstruing of the 'speaking self' (Strong, 2019) and aspects of the school environment perceived as threatening. Therapeutic applications of PCP have been successfully implemented in support of CYP with variable needs including those at risk of exclusion (Hardman, 2001), with behavioural needs in school (Howarth, 2014), reduced school attendance (Truneckova & Viney, 2006; Howarth, 2014), self-harm and depression (Moran et al. 2009), social and communication needs (Truneckova & Viney, 2008; Howarth, 2014) and transition from primary to secondary school (Tee, 2014). Moreover, in a comparison study of adult 'stutterers,' a significantly lower relapse rate was revealed in participants allocated to a PCP ('construct') intervention than those within the Practice ('technique') group (Evesham & Fransella, 1985). Whilst the current research provides a rationale for adopting PCP based interventions for CYP with SM, to date there is no existing research utilising this approach with the SM population. Therefore, research exploring the efficacy of

PCP interventions with a focus on reconstruing (e.g., fear related reconstruction) will likely be an encouraging and worthwhile future direction.

Implications for practice

Whilst each participant presented with unique experiences, several key themes were identified within the accounts. When considered in relation to the existing literature, these findings offered some suggestions for EP practice with scope across a range of levels (e.g., broader systems, organisational, group and individual).

The research strengthened the importance of appreciating individuals with SM as the 'experts in their lives' by empowering them to express their views and facilitate a more accurate understanding of their unique needs. The PCP technique utilised in this research offers a broad scope of opportunities for accessing the views of CYP with SM and could be used as starting point for exploring the impact of bi-directional factors (e.g., school environment, fear-related construing, flexibility and willingness to change) for the child or young person with SM. Although not limited to a particular profession, with a unique skill set and psychological understanding (Ingram, 2013), EPs are in a prime position for utilising this technique which may serve as a welcome addition to the EP 'tool kit' for accessing the world views of CYP with SM.

EPs can also play a direct role in the support and management of SM (Lawrence, 2018) by developing individualised interventions targeting the unique needs of CYP. The research provides a rationale for the adoption of PCP based interventions with this population which further lends to the knowledge and skillset of EPs. Although Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is considered a promising intervention for CYP with SM (Oerbeck et al. 2018; Vogel et al. 2019) the emphasis on repairing "faulty thinking" (Squires, 2010 p. 286) may infer judgement and errors on the child's part which should be considered given the fear contents for participants with SM outlined in this, and previous research (e.g., mistakes) (Bissoli, 2007; Schwenck et al. 2021; Vogel et al. 2019). PCP approaches and interventions may be more suitable for CYP with SM as they celebrate individuality through acknowledging how people uniquely make sense of their world, accepting all constructions of events and experiences as

valid (Butler & Green, 2007). Rather than locating the 'blame' within the child, emphasis is on achieving better matches between the environmental context and individual needs. PCP approaches also provide scope for systemic discussions around making the school environment less threatening for CYP (Williams & Hanke, 2007) for which EPs can use their consultation skills to explore maintaining and protective factors for individuals with SM whilst supporting school staff to set achievable targets within the child's capability. (See also Appendix 51).

This research indicated that perceived characteristics of others may play a role in the individuals' interactions with particular people. Child-centred approaches are key for developing playful and meaningful relationships with CYP with SM (Schwenck et al. 2021). As illustrated in this research, through the adoption of creative and dynamic strategies, EPs can access the views of "hard to reach learners" (Smillie & Newton, 2020), including those with SM. Placing the child's unique needs at the centre of the work, PCP approaches further align with the core values and legislation informing the EP role (Children and Families Act, 2014; SEND Code of Practice, DfE and DoH, 2015). Unconstrained by protocols or programmes, the optimal timeframe for PCP approaches and interventions depends on the unique needs of the child (Moran, 2020). Nonetheless, the current LA context whereby time pressures to deliver an expected amount of service (Atkinson et al. 2013) may limit the scope for working in a more open-ended way with these individuals. Wade (2016) warns that under these conditions, rapport must be established quickly which, given the nature of SM may pose barriers to the EP gaining access to the individuals' world views. The research strengthens previous assertions that work with CYP with SM must not be bound by time or pressure from competing demands of the EP role (Lawrence, 2018). It is hoped that through sharing the findings at local, national, and international level (e.g., LA; SMIRA) the unique contribution of EPs will be illuminated, providing scope for negotiating a clear, flexible, and creative role (Lee & Woods, 2017) when working with this population.

The research called for a more consistent understanding of SM and its implications for CYP in school. A lack of national guidelines or quality standards relating to the training of professionals and support of CYP with SM (Keen et al. 2008) will likely

contribute to the breadth of school experiences conveyed in this study. The need to 'level up' the support and opportunity for CYP across England, seems timely given the government's recent green paper (DfE & DoH, 2022) which proposes a set of national standards to ensure:

> "*…every child and young person has their needs identified quickly and met more consistently, with support determined by their needs, not by where they live."* (p.5).

To achieve this ambition, the government acknowledges a need "*to listen to children, young people"* (p.6). Through disseminating research findings and promoting evidence-based practice (Frederickson & Miller, 2008), EPs can communicate key themes from this and previous research from the perspectives of the individuals. (See also Appendix 51; Appendix 52). This should broaden awareness of SM whilst emphasising the need for an individualised approach that places the views of the CYP at the heart of all support.

CYP with SM may be particularly vulnerable as their needs often do not 'fit' the remit of any one professional group whilst a limited understanding of the EP role could overlook the unique contribution of EPs in supporting the outcomes for CYP with SM (Keen et al. 2008). Outlined further in the recent government green paper (DfE & DoH, 2022) is the commitment to greater clarity in roles and responsibilities through collaboration, joint working, and strategic leadership. Consistent with this, when supporting CYP with SM, a coordinated approach is vital to ascertain individual, experiential, and environmental factors and whether the mutism has a speech and language or emotional basis (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). The role of EPs in working collaboratively with schools to support the mental health and wellbeing of CYP is stipulated in the government's green paper (DoH & DfE, 2017) and aligns with MacKay's (2007) assertion that EPs are "key therapeutic resources" (p. 7). Together with SEMH needs recognised as a discrete category of SEND (DfE and DoH, 2015) and SM as underpinned by anxiety, these provide a robust argument for EPs being well placed to support the needs of CYP with SM. As such, Strong (2019) sets out a SM pathway with a distinct role for the EP in supporting the emotional

aspects of SM. At a LA level, by working collaboratively with other professionals and facilitating the implementation of a pathway, EPs can have a clear role in advocating for CYP with SM whilst ensuring the voice of the child remains at front and centre of all planning and provision.

Final Comments

Providing a unique contribution to the literature and limited evidence base regarding the school experiences of CYP with SM, this research used a creative PCP technique to elicit the views of ten CYP with SM. Eight key themes relating to the research questions were captured under two superordinate themes, 'Internal' and 'External' processes. Despite the acknowledged limitations, positive and constructive feedback was elicited from the individuals regarding the research process and efficacy of the technique. This provided scope for further development of the tool for the SM population. Future research and implications for practice were revealed, strengthening the rationale for interventions and approaches based on PCP as well as the breadth of skills EPs can contribute when supporting CYP with SM.

Chapter 3: Research-Practitioner

A Critically Reflexive Account

Introduction

Undertaking reflexive qualitative research can pose challenges to the novice researcher. A particular area of consideration is the emphasis on subjectivity which has seen a substantial shift in psychological research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Knowledge imparted on me from my undergraduate degree, over a decade ago, led me to view subjectivity as problematic and interrupting the 'ideals' of objectivity. Along this research journey, I discovered that this was the antithesis of reflexive research which views knowledge as situated and inevitably shaped by the processes and practices of knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As I delved deeper, I understood the importance of embracing rather than managing and controlling subjectivity. Beyond accepting it, I recognised the importance of interrogating it. This is actively encouraged through the practice of reflexivity which illuminates the researcher's insight and articulation regarding their role throughout the process and is central to 'quality control' (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is also considered a fundamental aspect of, 'investigator sensitivity,' a verification technique inherent in well-conducted qualitative research (Morse, 2008). The need for researcher self-reflectivity is further set out in the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). Through the reconstructed lens of subjectivity and aligned practices of reflection and reflexivity, I endeavour to 'own my perspectives' (Elliott et al. 1999) in explaining how the findings in this study were constructed. These undoubtably shaped the research and the knowledge produced.

In addition to personal values, reflexivity encompasses methodological choices, disciplinary location and how these shape the knowledge produced. Wilkinson (1988) proposed three purposes of reflexivity: 'Personal', 'Functional' and 'Disciplinary.' Correspondingly, this reflexive account begins with me situating myself within the context of SM and school experiences before probing other elements of decision-making including the methods, design and academic disciplines.

"She is a quieter member of the class"

Immersing myself in the abundance of primary and secondary school memorabilia kept devotedly by my late father, I recently discovered "quiet" to be an attribute assigned to me as a pupil documented among numerous end-of-year reports. Reiterated in my teachers' targets for me was a need to "contribute more ideas in class." This narrative remains an aspect of my identity, internalised, pathologized even. However, looking back, I am somewhat perplexed as to why 'quiet' required 'fixing' or changing. For me, central to a system that expected me to change was a disregard to the value of listening to, acknowledging, and understanding my perspective. In my view, quiet had its advantages especially in school. I was conscientious, a deep, reflective thinker, and good listener. These qualities equipped me for the career I was to embark on and as key attributes of flexible design investigators (Robson & McCartan, 2016), likely shaped my adopted research approach.

Through reflection I realise that my career in education was not a product of chance, rather emerged from an internal desire to foster a system built upon fairness, equality, diversity, and opportunity for all. My experiences of an educational culture that viewed 'quiet' as a deficit likely instilled a compelling desire to understand the educational views of CYP with SM from their perspectives.

"If you want to know what's wrong with someone, ask them."

In my primary teaching career I embedded creative and engaging opportunities, striving to provide meaningful learning, relevant to my classroom context. I often questioned the usefulness of manualised lesson plans. In my view, children contributed their own multifaceted and unique experiences. Despite the busy, demanding nature of teaching and ease of adopting such approaches, I spent many an evening creating bespoke, captivating resources, placing my pupils' needs at the centre of the curriculum planning.

As an aspiring EP, I was naturally drawn to the PCP and its aligned child-centred, creative, and flexible methods of enquiry. Underpinning Personal Construct

Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955) is an emphasis on gaining an insight into individual perspectives through situating oneself non-judgementally within a 'child's shoes' (Butler & Green, 2007 p.9). During my second year of doctoral training, I was privileged to support a young person therapeutically using a PCP based intervention. I reflected on the power of PCP approaches for enabling the YP to engage in the work. The deliberate choice of this approach when working therapeutically whilst avoiding the adoption of manualised interventions (e.g., Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) solidified my values as a practitioner, seeking to understand how CYP made sense of their experiences. The introduction to PCP was catalytic for establishing my approach as a practitioner whilst stimulating a framework for my research study.

My experiences and values likely fuelled an avoidance of "off the shelf" (Robson & McCartan, 2016 p.146) research approaches in pursuit of one that enabled me to adapt as the research evolved. With the decision to adopt a flexible design also came countless complex decisions with no definitive answer. In the early stages, I recalled my research questions and sampling approach (e.g., who, where and what) as underdeveloped, undecided, and tentative. These created uncompromising feelings of uncertainty which I felt important to include in my reflections.

'Nothing about us, without us'

Research does not happen in a vacuum and is inevitably shaped by the researcher's personal politics (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Owning these social and political values was central to ensuring ethical research practice (BPS, 2021). Never was this more apparent than in the early stages of my research as I became enmeshed in a confusing web of ethical and practical dilemmas around the inclusion of participants in my study. As a strong advocate for egalitarianism, equity, and fairness, I found myself grappling with the term 'exclusion criteria' which by the very nature of the terminology was juxtaposed to my values and beliefs. I recalled seeking support and advice around the inclusion of willing participants without a 'formal' diagnosis of SM, intuitively knowing that under my initial 'inclusion criteria' it was neither ethically nor practically possible. Including only those with a 'formal' diagnosis of SM did not sit

comfortably with me. These initial uneasy feelings were confirmed during conversations with professionals in the SM field who illuminated a 'post-code lottery' of support and understanding across the UK and the existence of a "hidden" population of children devoid of diagnosis and support. In potentially excluding many of the CYP this research sought to liberate, I reconsidered the initial inclusion criteria so that the views of individuals regardless of diagnosis could also be heard.

With this decision also came the intricate balance of ethical considerations regarding the implications of labelling those without a formal diagnosis. For this reason, reference to the term Selective Mutism was avoided throughout the interview process. Conversations with my research supervisor prompted a further ethical consideration, refraining from offering educational or health advice and inadvertently becoming drawn into identifying SM (BPS, 2014; 6). I remained transparent about the limits of my competence (BPS, 2021) and distanced from discussion or decisions regarding potential diagnosis or identification. This consideration was pertinent during the recruitment process when encountering a parent with two children in absence of diagnoses or external involvement. At this point in my research having not yet recruited a single participant, I became tied between my ethical responsibilities and desperation to secure participants. However, the growing feeling of discomfort outweighed my personal beliefs and 'fear of failure.' Instinctively, I knew not to include these participants and was grateful for the support from my supervisor in ensuring that I complied with my ethical duty as a researcher.

Whilst reflecting on the use of labelling and diagnosis, I was inspired by the work of Lucy Johnstone and colleagues who sought a shift from biomedical diagnoses assuming a flaw or disorder within the person to alternative ways of assessing and understanding individuals in the context of their experiences and social circumstances. This led to a methodology fulfilling my passion for understanding the CYPs' experiences, facilitating interpretation through an educational and psychological lens whilst acknowledging the influence of the participants' social and environmental contexts. Underpinning my preference for qualitative research was its deep connection with the emancipatory research paradigm (Barnes, 2003) and disability activism statement, 'nothing about us, without us' (Charlton, 2000). This

aims to address the power imbalance in research by empowering the subjects of social inquiry. Viewing the individuals as the experts of themselves, I strongly believed that the CYP in my research study deserved to benefit from the knowledge produced. Reflection enabled the realisation that my chosen approaches to research (e.g., critical realism, qualitative research and PCP) were likely influenced by my social and political values, enabling me to take the role of 'partner' (Butler & Green, 2007 p.130) and being guided by the participants' words and theories. These together with my own educational experiences likely shaped a passion for challenging the dominant social norms and expectations embedded in a system that may inadvertently marginalise those unable to 'fit' these ideals.

In listening to the views and experiences of the CYP, I understood my own world views must be open to reorganisation if I was to truly 'walk in the shoes' of the participants. At the same time, I was distinctly aware of my 'status' as a researcher as the power imbalance is no more obvious than between 'privileged researchers' and their research subjects from traditionally marginalised or oppressed groups (Danieli & Woodham, 2007). I acknowledged my own social privileges including my educational background, age, and socioeconomic status, all of which risked imposing further issues of power (BPS Code of Ethics, 2018; 3.1). Central to addressing these power dynamics and hearing what the CYP had to say, I offered choices (e.g., participants' preferred communication method) and invested time in building relationships with my participants (McLeod, 2008). This was achieved through the adoption of strong interpersonal skills and a friendly, warming, non-judgemental and relaxed environment which ensured the voice of the 'research collaborator' could be heard.

"Positivism Creep"
As a novice researcher, the decision to ensure parental presence during the interviews was met with deliberation and uncertainty. A responsibility for safeguarding remotely whilst creating an atmosphere of comfort and familiarity for the participants was balanced with an awareness of parental dynamics in shaping the participants' accounts and knowledge produced. As I began considering the role

of 'bias' in my research, I realised that my previous conceptualisation of subjectivity was perhaps more ingrained than initially thought. Through the importation of values more akin to the positivist-empiricist research, I had unwittingly committed "positivism creep" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 7).

I tried in vain to 'manage' and 'control' the 'bias' however, realised the 'messy' context of the interview process. In almost every case, parents spontaneously offered commentary. Despite the discomfort and uncertainty this evoked, I sought validation from the CYP, checking their agreement. On occasions I was struck by the participants' fearlessness and assertiveness in correcting their parents throughout the interview process. This insight illuminated my own difficulty in moving away from a view of subjectivity (and therefore bias) as a flaw, threatening the ideals of objectivity rather than considering it as a key resource in reflexive qualitative research. Under the reconceptualised view of subjectivity, I understood the importance of remaining responsive to the participants' developing accounts as key for capturing the quality data (Braun & Clarke 2022) whilst embracing the parental dynamics as inevitably and inescapably shaping the knowledge production. Notwithstanding the considerations raised, I believe parental presence was important in gaining access to these CYP and from an ethical and safeguarding perspective were also in the best interests of the participants (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2016).

A square peg in a round hole

My belief in every child's right to a voice is a core thread that has weaved itself into my practice throughout my role as a teacher and subsequently a TEP. In my early teaching career, I discovered the power of listening to children and being led by them when planning the curriculum content. This provided enriching, engaging and autonomous learning opportunities. During small group work and classroom discussions, I gained first-hand insight into the world views of children by facilitating and listening to their rich and captivating dialogue. Through these approaches, I fostered a classroom ethos of encouragement treating all contributions as valid and valued, allowing even the 'quietest' of voices to be heard and acknowledged.

Through affording undevoted time in actively listening to their perspectives, I have been honoured when children have bravely entrusted me with their stories.

During my first year of the doctorate, I was introduced to the work of Carl Rogers and discovered that I instinctively applied his humanistic philosophy throughout my teaching career. The words "unconditional positive regard" resonated with me and were an inspirational driver in my in my approach as I ventured into the world of a practitioner. At the heart of Rogers' active listening was a deep empathy and awareness, a consideration further enshrined in the BPS code of ethics and conduct (2021). It was one of my participants, Tris' articulation of school experiences, which instilled a deep sense of empathy in me when sharing feelings of frustration, isolation, invisibility, and anxiety. In actively listening, I was invited to witness a raw and compelling insight into her world. This left a lasting emotional impression on me in the days following the interview. Underpinning Tris' account was a need for someone to listen to, understand and acknowledge her in school. An effortless plea, deeply rooted in my own values. Through her captivating, personal and unique reflections, Tris seemingly and nobly advocated for those CYP who did not 'fit' into the niche of society. Tris instilled in me the true power of listening, yet I felt deeply saddened by her discomfort and invisibility. Despite lacking an experiential 'benchmark' having not directly experienced SM, I have experienced a sense of invisibility, vulnerability, and unhappiness in my own educational experiences. I believe that through this shared experience, I related to Tris on an emotional level. It was at this point in my research journey that I understood the personal risk imposed by the skill of active listening and the importance of my own inner strength and courage (Rogers & Farson, 1987). Balancing a need to listen with a reflexive stance, I became acutely aware of my own 'separate' identity. In benignly giving voice to Tris and others with SM, I felt it important to return to my own privileges. Alluding to my participants' 'otherness' (e.g., belonging to marginalised 'group' outside of the dominant norms) may have reduced the messy, complex concept of identity into a singular dimension, simplified and decontextualised. Instead, I believed in an interaction of social disadvantage and privilege which could be best understood through the lens of 'intersectionality' (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Engaging in the data in this way allowed the incorporation of privilege and marginalisation whilst recognising

the partiality of my claims. Through reflexivity, I recognised my interpretations as 'imperfect' and enmeshed in my own situatedness. My interview with Tris left a lasting impression, exceeding beyond the realms of this research and I am thankful that she allowed me to momentarily 'walk in her shoes.'

Donning my researcher 'hat'

Being able to demonstrate an understanding of the complex ethical and legal issues of any form of dual relationship and the associated impact is stipulated in the standards of proficiency set out by the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC, 2015 2.8). This consideration was most prominent as I began to assimilate my newly established identity as a 'researcher' in my second year of the doctorate. Accommodating this with my existing identities represented a common theme throughout my research journey. As a novice and somewhat naïve researcher there were times when the boundaries between my role of researcher and TEP inadvertently intertwined. In the initial stages of research planning, I recall being questioned and challenged on proposals of incorporating aspects of my 'front line' TEP practice (e.g., 'child letters' and 'action plans'). This illuminated my inexperience as a researcher, and I was met with feelings of failure and a 'conscious-incompetence' (Curtiss & Warren, 1973). I was reminded of the importance of reflective practice (Schon, 1983) through which every imperfect interaction is seen in a positive light as it can reveal how to improve next time (McLeod, 2008). These experiences, albeit uncomfortable encouraged me to reflect ethically and critically, preparing me for the subsequent encounters along my research journey.

During the interviews, there were occasions where my internal desire to help, support and potentially 'fix' the participants' 'problems' might have compromised my position as a researcher. I was mindful of my ethical responsibilities in exercising caution when offering advice (BPS, 2021; 6) and the need to remain within the limits of my own competence (BPS, 2021; 3.3). A particular challenge when undertaking research with children concerned balancing participation and inclusion in the research activity with the need to protect vulnerable children (Greig et al. 2007). The ethical duty of ensuring my research did not cause any harm to my participants

became apparent during the third remote meeting with one participant who presented as 'frozen' with fear, resulting in the subsequent termination of the interview. Another participant disclosed difficult school experiences which triggered concern regarding potential harm. Maintaining respect for the safeguarding of others is central to the BPS Code of Ethics (2021; 3.3) and the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016; 6;7; 15.2; 15.3). In these circumstances I deemed it imperative to offer additional support (e.g., a debrief and signposting to the appropriate professional advice and services) (BPS, 2021; 6). Recognising the nature of debriefing as potentially difficult for the participants, I remained flexible to the preferred methods of communication (Morris, 1998). Neither participant pursued this, opting to engage in the research despite several reminders of their right to withdraw. I saw this as confirmation that the research had not caused any significant harm and felt secure in the knowledge that I had followed the appropriate protocols in ensuring participant welfare and wellbeing.

Strength in numbers?

"How many participants will you recruit?"

This was a question I was met with following my initial research proposal presentation. A question I recall vividly and uncomfortably unable to answer. Despite a practical need to determine sample size in advance (e.g., for a research proposal, ethics) this question caught me off guard. I was informed of an important consideration, ensuring the 'richness' of my data. This consideration haunted me throughout my research journey and undoubtably influenced the knowledge produced.

In pursuit of an answer to this question, I discovered the concept of 'data saturation,' arguably the 'Gold Standard' for determining sample size (Guest et al. 2006). In appeasing my feelings of inadequacy when failing to articulate an answer, I predicted the need for around 10 participants. However, I questioned the appropriateness of 'guess-timating' the specifics of my participants before even engaging in the analysis. Noting the incompatibility with the reflexive TA approach, Braun & Clarke, (2019) describe 'data saturation' as nothing more than a rhetorical device or 'quality

assurance' mechanism for passing the gatekeepers of knowledge. Whilst these aligned with my initial instincts, the "positivism creep" resurfaced. I became torn between my intuitive beliefs as a flexible qualitative researcher (Robson & McCartan, 2016) and a lingering sense of positivist-empiricist produced anxiety. I fear this led to an 'obsession' with sample size and blinded me in seeing the rich data already apparent. Despite declaring a sufficient richness of data, I received an email from a tenth prospective participant. The decision to include this participant required time, reflection, and discussion with my research supervisor. It was here in my journey that I discovered that research is almost always a pragmatic activity, dependent on the researcher's available time and resources (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My 'perfectionist' and 'conscientious' tendencies (e.g., goal of ten participants), values and comfortable position along my 'subjective research timeline' led to the decision of interviewing a final participant. Despite questioning myself in the lead up to the interviews, this participant contributed a perspective that I had neglected to consider, a school that was already in her views 'ideal.' My final participant helped awaken these assumptions. For that, I am forever grateful. I realised that this research journey could continue indefinitely as coding and deeper analysis will never reach a fixed end point (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Instead I had to make an interpretative judgement about when to 'stop' and move on. With my multifaceted, complex and rich accounts, I was finally ready to commence the next part of my research journey, the analysis.

The best view comes after the hardest climb

At this point, I should have felt excited to embark on the analysis stage and begin weaving together a narrative shaped by the participants' accounts. However, I felt a great burden of responsibility. I did not want to disappoint the participants by presenting an inaccurate interpretation of their voice. This was daunting and ironic given the fear of failure echoed among many of my participants' accounts. I returned to my coding several times and instead of the desired "progressive and recursive process" (Braun & Clarke, p. 3) found myself 'stuck' and reluctant to move on. With no "rigid rules" or "right answer" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 12; p. 89) for approaching the data an overwhelming sense of uncertainty surfaced. At times this felt intolerable

and anxiety provoking. In seeking to rid myself of these uncomfortable feelings I retreated into a vicious cycle of procrastination, guilt, and perceived failure. Further fuelling my disengagement was the inner critic that emerged. Whilst listening back to the interviews, I picked out occasions where I hadn't asked follow-up questions and dwelled on missed opportunities for gaining deeper insights. Despite my attempts to avoid pressure or influence the direction of the conversation, I was aware of a need to ensure the richness of data and the requirements in meeting a doctoral standard of work. The pressure of these competing influences will have inescapably shaped the discussions.

In acknowledging the emotional impact qualitative analysis can have on the researcher, Braun & Clarke (2022) emphasised the importance of self-care through awareness and taking a break. I realised that space and time away from the data helped rather than hindered my progress. Through distancing myself from the data and continuous reflective diary entries, I realised that I did not have to commit to one coding approach, rather it was important to do what worked best for me (Braun & Clarke, 2022). With a newfound confidence in exploring and representing the data, I created an excel spreadsheet to maintain a record of the different codes. In an electronic version of the data set formatted into a three columned table, I typed the emerging code labels (on the left) and subsequent themes (on the right) of the relevant data extracts. This process was time consuming however, facilitated a deep, rich, and robust engagement with the data for knowledge production.

Another decision I grappled with was my approach to analysis. In my naivety as a novice qualitative researcher, I sought to approach the data purely inductively (driven by the data) rather than deductively (driven by theory) (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, I recognised the open and malleable systems in which my research took place and reflected that in practice, neither of these approaches were applied in their purest and most linear form (Guttman, 2004). As an instinctively realist and flexible researcher, I understood my aim in the process was that of 'theory generation' (developed systematically from the data collected) yet equally accepted a place for theory verification processes. This led to the consideration of abductive reasoning (Peirce, 1986) which allowed successive cycles of movement between induction and

deduction. Through this process, I explored patterns of data, putting forward initial tentative hypothesis to explain the patterns, evaluating these with other competing hypotheses before applying 'inference to the best explanations' (Proctor & Capaldi, 2006). Abductive reasoning arguably negated the complexities associated with the other approaches when applied in isolation and thus their inadequacy when generating meaningful theories (Holcombe, 1998).

Implications for EP practice

The findings from my research have key implications for EPs involved with CYP with SM. They highlight the importance valuing individuals as 'experts' in their lives. PCP's philosophical underpinnings and the aligned creative, child-led, flexible approaches were revealed as particularly valuable for empowering the participants to share their educational views and experiences. I hope that through disseminating this research, EPs and educators will be encouraged to incorporate these innovative and versatile methods within their own 'tool kits' so that more CYP with SM can be valued, understood, and championed in their education.

The research process and the findings have provided some implications for my own practice as a newly qualified EP. Through this journey, PCP has provided me with a method of enquiry which aligns with my values of being child-centred, creative, dynamic and an advocate for the voice of CYP whilst offering a philosophical and theoretical foundation. Engagement in this research has consolidated the importance of working flexibly when seeking to capture rich and meaningful insights into the world views of CYP with SM. Moreover, it has illuminated the power of sitting with the uncertainty that such an open approach can evoke. I am reminded to never underestimate the important insights CYP with SM can share if they are afforded the space, time, and opportunity to be heard. These values will continue to be at the front and centre of my work as a practitioner.

Through this journey, I have been reminded to trust my instincts and not be afraid to interrogate and challenge the uncomfortable feelings, decision making can provoke. In the future as I assimilate my identity as a newly qualified EP, I recognise the

power of reflection and reflexivity which have been important resources in facilitating these insights. Reflection has helped me challenge my inner critic and imposter syndrome, helping me see that "our practice is never perfect, we can be in a continuous loop of improving it" (McLeod, 2003 p. 118). This is an axiom that will follow me into my future career as it reminds me never to become complacent or 'unconsciously-incompetent' (Curtiss & Warren, 1973) but to continue reflecting, learning, and improving for the greater good of all the CYP and families I am privileged to work and indeed 'walk' alongside.

Conclusion

For me, equality, opportunity, and inclusion are at the heart of a thriving education. However, a system built upon rigid social norms and objectives will likely be detrimental to some pupils. In a society that may ignore, disregard, or misunderstand, I plead that *"there are ways to hear the voices of those with SM, if we are willing to listen"* (Walker & Tobbell, 2015 p.468). This research journey has affirmed my belief in CYP as the real experts of their own experiences and the power of enabling them to feel heard. Challenging the narrative of "quiet" as a deficit, I echo the compelling words shared by the parent of a participant from this study. To the CYP I have had the privilege of meeting along this research journey:

> *"You have taught me the power of quiet. I just had to listen."*

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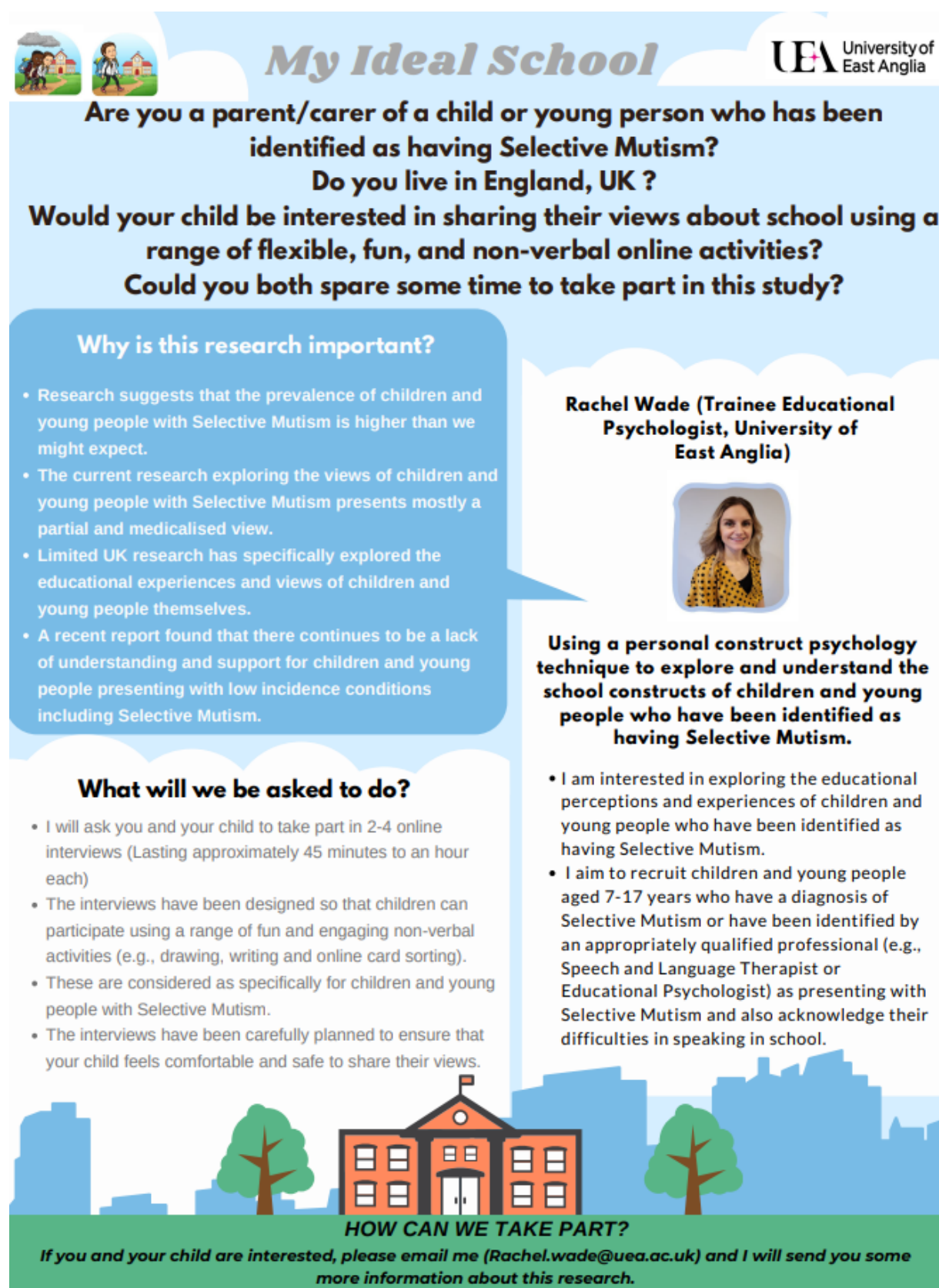
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment poster

Appendix 2: Stages of confident talking

(Johnson and Wintgens, 2016, p.74).

Stage	Child's Presentation	Example of behaviour
0	Absent	Child or young person stays in the bedroom, hides behind a chair, or observes activity from a distance
1	Frozen	Child sits passively or accepts help without moving (e.g. does not take a ball that is offered; stands motionless while coat is buttoned up).
2	Participates without communication	Child participates silently in activities such as board games or jigsaw puzzles; takes items that are offered (e.g. a biscuit or crayons); and complies with requests which do not require an answer (e.g. deals out cards or draws a picture).
3	Uses non-verbal and written communication	Child responds to questions and may even initiate contact through pointing; nodding or shaking head; tapping; gesture; drawing or writing. Child is relaxed and responds to the adult with a variety of facial expressions.
Talking bridge	Tolerates voice being heard by a bystander	Child talks to or laughs with parent without hiding their mouth in a visitor's or the therapist's presence; talks to other children in the same room as their teacher; talks to family member using a telephone in a public area. Voice may be quiet but is audible rather than whispered.
4	Talks through another person	Child answers when the parent repeats the therapist's question; asks the parent if a person present can play a game with them; talks in a structured activity with an adult but looks at their friend or parent when they speak. Voice may be quiet but is audible rather than whispered.

5	Uses voice	Child vocalises an audible rather than a whispered sound to express emotion, accompany shared play, participate in an activity or directly communicate (e.g. laughter, humming, sound of police siren, animal noises, letter sounds, 'mmm' for 'yes'). Child reads familiar material aloud on request (reading is a vocal exercise for proficient readers, rather than communication).
6	Communicates with single words	Child says a single word in response to questions or choices or in structured activities such as games. Voice may be very quiet but is audible rather than whispered.
7	Communicates with sentences	Child uses sentences in response to questions or in structured activities such as games or play readings. Child may: Occasionally offer a spontaneous comment. Only ask questions during structured activities Voice may be very quiet but is audible rather than whispered.
8	Conversation	Child has an adult-led, two-way conversation, provided no one else is perceived to be listening. Child: Volunteers spontaneous comments but questions may be limited May not initiate contact or seek help outside planned sessions

Whispering is not included in this progression because it is an avoidance of using voice. For the purposes of keeping records, whispering can be regarded as stage 3+.

Appendix 3: Adapted 'Ideal School' Interview Questions and process

(Moran, 2001; Williams & Hanke, 2007).

Part 1: Drawing the kind of school you would not like to go to.

1. The school

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper. Draw, write or use the prompt cards (Appendices 11 - 20) to tell me:

  i.   Three things about this school.

  ii.   What kind of school is this?

2. The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school. Draw some of the things in this classroom. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

  i.   How do you feel?

3. Outside

Think about the outside areas that you would not like to be in (e.g., the lunch hall, canteen playground or other areas outside of the classroom). Make a quick drawing of this. Draw some of the things in the outside area. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

  i.   How do you feel?

4. The children

Think about some of the children at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

  i.   What are the children doing?

  ii.   Three things about these children.

5. The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

     i.   What are these adults doing?

     ii.   Three things about these adults.

6. Me

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

     i.   Three things about the way you feel at this school.

Part 2: Drawing the kind of school you would like to go to

Before this part of the interview process, the researcher will remind the participant of their 'non ideal' school constructed in the previous session and via the share screen function and will present the screen captures taken to serve as a visual reminder.

'I just want to check that I heard what you told me last week and remind you what your shared about your non-ideal school. You told me that your non-ideal school would be…. (Repeat for classroom, outside, etc).'

1. The school

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing in the middle of this paper. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

     i.   Three things about this school.

     ii.   What kind of school is this?

2. The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of

this classroom in the school. Draw some of the things in this classroom. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

    i.   How do you feel?

3. Outside

Think about the outside areas you would like to be in. (e.g., the lunch hall, canteen playground or other areas outside of the classroom) Make a quick drawing of this. Draw some of the things in the outside area. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

    i.   How do you feel?

4. The children

Think about some of the children at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

    i.   What are the children doing?
    ii.   Three things about these children.

5. The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

    i.   What are the adults doing?
    ii.   Three things about these adults.

6. Me

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Draw, write or use the prompt cards to tell me:

    i.   Three things about the way you feel at this school.

Part 3: (scaling and moving towards the ideal school)

When the responses from part 1 and 2 are complete (non-ideal; ideal school), the researcher will remind/seek validation from the participant of their 'non ideal' and 'ideal' school constructed in the previous sessions using the share screen function to present the screen captures taken throughout the process. The researcher will then support the participant to set up the online scaling line ready for part 3 of the interviews.

Part 3 a)

i. We have the kind of school you would not like to go to on the left, and the kind of school you would like to go to on the right. Where would your current school most likely fit on this scale?

ii. Can you share why you have given your current school this rating? (Repeat for classroom, playground, adults, children, me)

iii. Where would you like your school to be in an ideal world? (Invite the participant to move the 'ideal' arrow along the continuum/ scaling line).

iv. What would you settle for?

Part 3 b)

Think again about your current school. Draw, write or use the prompt cards (Appendices 11 - 14) to tell me:

i. Three things others (e.g., teachers, TAs, peers) can do to help your current school be more like your Ideal school.
ii. Three things that you can do to help your current school be more like your Ideal school.

Appendix 4: Table of themes within the literature informing the prompt cards

Area being explored *Interview 1 & 2*	Literature informed written/Visual prompts available for participant if needed.
School Tell me about this school. What kind of school is this?	- Stressful (e.g., pressure to speak, Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Strict (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Noisy (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Busy (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Scary (Roe, 2011) - Hard/ difficult (Roe, 2011) - Crowded (Johnson, 2018; Roe, 2011) - Cheerful (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016) - Relaxed (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Confusing (e.g., Mixed messages/expectations from different teachers, Johnson, 2018) - Fair/respectful (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016;) - Friendly (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Clear/consistent rules and expectations (Johnson & Wintgens; Hill, 2019) Zero tolerance of bullying (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007). - Pupils treated individually (e.g., personal interests valued) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) - Supportive/inclusive (e.g., adjustments to exams, support in establishing friendships) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011). - Unfair (e.g., ignoring those in need or support) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011)
Classroom Draw some of the things in the classroom. How do you feel?	- Noisy (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Busy (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Crowded/ Always a large audience (Johnson, 2018; Roe, 2011) - Cheerful environment (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016) - Relaxed environment (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Seating at the back of the class and away from the teacher's desk (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016 Hill, 2019) - Seating at the front so that teacher can see if I need help (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016 Hill, 2019) - Keyworker/ trusted adult (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019) - Personal computers in a communal area (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) - Consistent/clear routine (Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011) - Rewards for my achievements (Johnson, 2018) - Unrealistic targets set for me to speak (Johnson, 2018) - Close/trusted friends (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019)

	• A range of non-verbal options to help me share my requests (e.g., visual break/toilet card) (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Seating near a trusted friend and/ for partner work (Hill, 2019) • Tasks that are presented clearly so I know what is expected of me (Hill, 2019)
Outside Draw some of the things in the playground. How do you feel?	• Children ignoring me/no friends (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson, 2018; Roe, 2011) • Friendly Children (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Roe, 2011) • My close friend(s) who I can speak to (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011) • Bullies (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011) • Personal computers in a communal area (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Easy access to facilities (e.g., toilets/drink). Things in place to make it easier for me to use facilities e.g., toilets/drinks (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) • Social support during breaktimes (Hill, 2019) • Support to engage in clubs at breaktimes/lunchtimes (Hill, 2019) • Understanding Staff (e.g., TAs/Lunchtime supervisors) (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Staff that do not understand my needs or know me (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Activities that do not need me to speak e.g., Football/dancing/School performances (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011)
Children What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.	• Teasing /Bullying me (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011) • Saying that I cannot or will not talk (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016)/ Expecting me not to speak (Omdal, 2007) • Talking for me when I am asked a question (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011) • Asking questions and expecting an answer /Asking why I don't talk, if I can talk or when I will talk Children/ do not understand me (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Being over-protective (Johnson, 2018). • Understanding/Accepting (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011) • Standing up for me (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Passing messages to the teacher for me (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Being Friendly (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Roe, 2011) • Thinking I am a 'freak' (Roe, 2011) • Ignoring me (Albrigtsen, et al. 2016; Roe, 2011; Johnson, 2018)
Adults	• **Putting Pressure on me to speak** (Forcing me to speak/shouting/ Unhelpful comments putting pressure on me to

What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about the adults	speak (are you going to talk to me today?) asking questions and expecting an answer. (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011)
	• Speaking for me (Johnson and Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011)
	• Disapproval/ Frustration/ punishment for me not speaking (Cline & Baldwin, 2004; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011).
	• **Not understanding my needs-** Expectations me to change without properly understanding my needs (Johnson & Wintgens, 2004; Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015)
	• Making me feel comfortable (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016)
	• Making me look at them (Johnson, 2018).
	• Praising privately/ Subtly (e.g., post it notes) (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019)
	• Drawing attention to me when I speak (Johnson, 2018; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007)
	• Ignoring me/ Talking in front of me as if I am not there (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011;)
	• Correcting my speech or laughing at me (Johnson & Wintgens 2016).
	• Telling me off for talking to my friend(s) (Johnson & Wintgens 2016; Omdal, 2007).
	• Consistent and clear expectations (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016)
	• Saying/Thinking that I cannot or will not talk (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007)
	• Explaining to others that I will speak when I am ready (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019)
	• Taking silence personally (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016)
	• Putting me on the spot to speak (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Omdal, 2007)
	• Showing me what to do when I am struggling (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Roe, 2011)
	• Checking with me to make sure I understand (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019)
	• Friendly/ likeable (Albrigtsen et al. 2016)
	• Time and knowledge to meet my needs (Albrigtsen et al. 2016)
	• Talking about me when I am not in the room (Hill, 2019).
	• Try to help/prevent bullying (Omdal, 2007)
	• Do not try to help/prevent bullying (Albrigtsen et al. 2016).
	• Relaxed/calm and quiet approach (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Omdal 2007)
Me What will you be doing?	• Worrying about what others will say (Roe, 2011).
	• I am too scared to put my hand up and ask the teacher (Roe, 2011; Hill, 2019)

Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.	• Reading work aloud/ Answering questions in class (Roe, 2011; Johnson and Wintgens, 2016). • I am in control (Omdal, 2007; Vogel et al., 2019) • I am the centre of attention (Omdal, 2007) • Making mistakes/ getting things wrong (Vogel et al., 2019; Roe, 2011). • Not standing out/ blending in (Hill, 2019) • Working as well as anyone else (Roe, 2011) • Working in small groups with at least one trusted peer (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011) • Missing out (Roe, 2011; Hill, 2019; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) • Engaging in activities where I do not need to speak e.g. Football/dancing/School performances (Albrigtsen et al. 2016;; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011) • Working 1:1 with an adult (Johnson, 2018) • Speaking normally (Roe, 2011) • **Gestures**- Nodding/shaking my head/pointing (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) • Writing down answers/ Drawing (Roe, 2011) • Whispering (Roe, 2011) • Silent (Cline & Baldwin, 2004) • Talking loudly (Roe, 2011) • Playing sports (Roe, 2011) • Working hard/ Concentrating (Roe, 2011) • Being creative/artistic (Roe, 2011) • Having fun (Roe, 2011) • Being sociable/friendly (Roe, 2011) • Being thoughtful/Caring/Kind/Helpful (Roe, 2011) • Being devious (Cline and Baldwin, 2004)
Feeling How do you feel?	• **Self-Conscious (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007)** • Bored (Roe, 2011) • Helpless (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) • Humiliated (Albrigtsen et al. 2016) • Fine (Roe, 2011) • Abnormal (Roe, 2011)/Different/misunderstood (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) • Scared (Roe, 2011) • Physical symptoms of panic (i.e. heart racing, breathing, shaking, sweating, stomach-ache, headache) (Roe, 2011; Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Vogel et al., 2019) • Comfortable to listen and watch (Roe, 2011) • Uncomfortable (Roe, 2011; Albrigtsen et al. 2016) • Left out/isolated (Roe, 2011) • Wanting to escape or disappear (Roe, 2011) • Stupid (Roe, 2011) • Shy (Cline and Baldwin, 2004; Roe, 2011)

	• Quiet/Introvert (Roe, 2011) • Emotional (Roe, 2011) • Sad/Unhappy (Roe, 2011) • Self-conscious/Unconfident/Low Self-esteem (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) • Sensitive (Cline and Baldwin, 2004; Roe, 2011) • Stubborn (Cline and Baldwin, 2004; Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) • Isolated/Lonely (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) • Frustrated/Angry/Annoyed (Roe, 2011) • Embarrassed (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) • Happy (Roe, 2011) • Relaxed (Roe, 2011) • Confident Assertive (Roe, 2011; Cline and Baldwin, 2004) • Anxious/Worrier/Nervous (Roe, 2011; APA, 2013) • Vulnerable (Roe, 2011) • Popular/ Liked by others (Roe, 2011; Patterson, 2011) • Appreciated/ Included (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011). • Clever (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) • Accepted/ Understood (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Hill 2019; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015). • Normal (Roe, 2011) • Other (CYP can come up with their own descriptions)

Area being explored. **Part 4**	Literature informed written/Visual prompts available for participant if needed.
What can others do to help your current school become more like your ideal school?	• Normalise Mistakes (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016; Vogel et al., 2019). • Provide reassurance (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016) • Focusing on what I CAN not what I can't do (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019) • Make me feel valued and included (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016; Roe, 2011). • Do not make a fuss when I don't answer (Roe, 2011) • Make me feel normal (Roe, 2011) • Encourage and support me (Roe, 2011) • Keep talking to me but do not expect an answer (Albrigtsen et al 2016 ; Hill, 2019; Roe, 2011; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016) • Be patient (Roe, 2011) • Be understanding (Roe, 2011; Johnson and Wintgens, 2016) • Do not judge too quickly (Roe, 2011) • Take the pressure away by not expecting me to speak (Roe, 2011; Johnson and Wintgens, 2016; Hill, 2019) • Be friendly (Johnson, & Wintgens, 2016) • Not asking too many questions (Johnson & Wintgens, 2016)

	- Tell other pupils about SM whilst I am in the room (Omdal, 2007) - Understand that I am not choosing to be silent (Hill, 2019) - Help build my self-esteem and confidence (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). - Offer choices so that I can say how I would like to contribute to an activity or share how I am feeling (e.g., email, liaison book) (Hill, 2019; Johnson & Wintgens, 2016). - Realise that it is not personal that I am unable to talk to you (Hill, 2019) - Repeat instructions quietly and calmly (Hill, 2019) - Advanced notice for class activities so I know what is coming (e.g. a minimum of a day before) (Hill, 2019).
Me	- Learn more about how I can help myself (e.g. use SMIRA and SM resource manual) - Try to whisper or murmur quietly to friends at first - Be brave (Omdal, 2007; Roe, 2011; Walker & Tobbell, 2015) - Be determined. (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007, Walker & Tobbell, 2015) - Try different ways to communicate (Roe, 2011) - Tell myself I can beat SM and have a better life (Roe, 2011; Omdal, 2007) - Remind myself that I am not alone and there are people who understand (Roe, 2011) - Manage my worries and anxieties (Roe, 2011) - Develop more confidence so that I am not nervous (Roe, 2011) - Change some aspect of my environment to avoid familiar people's expectations and reactions (e.g., begin attending a school club) (Albrigtsen et al. 2016; Omdal, 2007).

Appendix 5: Exemplar visual prompt cards for sorting.

Interviews 1 and 2 (parts 1 & 2 Ideal School Technique)

i.   Exemplar Prompts: Children

ii.   Exemplar visual prompts: Adults

iii.   Exemplar visual prompts: Me

1. Worrying about what others will say	2. I am too scared to ask for help	3. Not standing out	4. Working as well as the other children
5. Reading aloud/ answering questions	6. I am in control	7. Woking in small groups with a close friend	8. Missing out
9. Being the centre of attention	10. Making mistakes/ getting things wrong	11. Taking part in activities that do not involve speaking	12. Working with an adult

iv.   Exemplar visual prompts: Feelings

1. Frustrated	2. Lonely	3. Stupid	4. Vulnerable/ Sensitive
5. Comfortable to listen and watch	6. Fine	7. Isolated	8. I want to escape
9. Different/ Abnormal	10. Scared	11. Helpless	12. Panic

Appendix 6: Exemplar visual prompt cards for sorting.

Interview part 3 b

    i.   'Think again about your current school. What three things can others do to help your school be more like your Ideal school?'

1. Normalise mistakes	2. Reassure me	3. Make me feel normal	4. Talk to me but don't expect an answer
5. Focus on my strengths	6. Make me feel valued and included	7. Be patient	8. Be understanding
9. Don't make a fuss when I don't answer	10. Encourage and support me	11. Do not judge too quickly	12. Take the pressure away by not making me speak

    ii.   'What three things can you do to help your school be more like your Ideal school?'

1. Learn more about how I can help myself	2. Tell myself I can beat SM and have a better life	3. Begin attending a club	4. Try different ways to communicate
5. Be Brave	6. Try to whisper or murmur to friends at first	7. Remember I am not alone and others understand	8. Manage my worries and anxiety
9. Stay determined to overcome SM	10. Develop more confidence so that I am not nervous	11. Other	

Appendix 7: Early developmental stages of online card sorting tool

(Jan 2021)

i.   Number fan
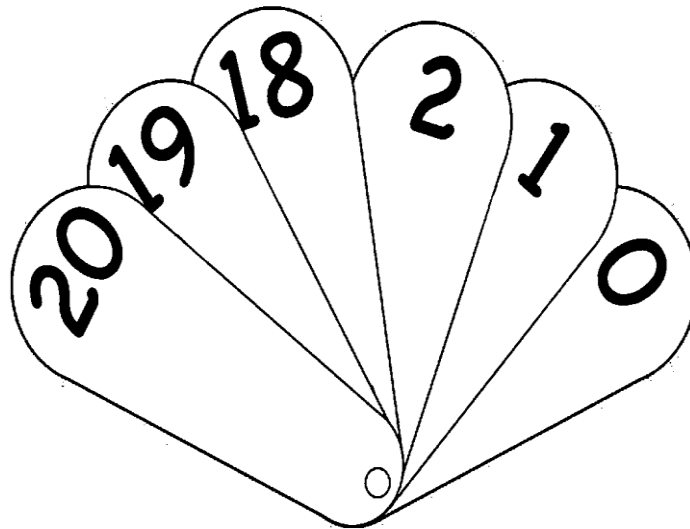
Appendix 8: Initial developments of the non-verbal tool

(Parts 1 & 2 Ideal School Technique)

ii.   Exemplar Prompts: Classroom

iii.   Exemplar Prompts: Me

Appendix 9: Initial proposed Part 3 of Ideal School technique

    i.   Scaling template

    ii.   Scaling line

In this initial design, participants would be invited to rate aspects of their school using the number fan or complete a template as outlined above (scaling template).

Appendix 10: Initial Part 3 Ideal School Technique moving to the ideal school
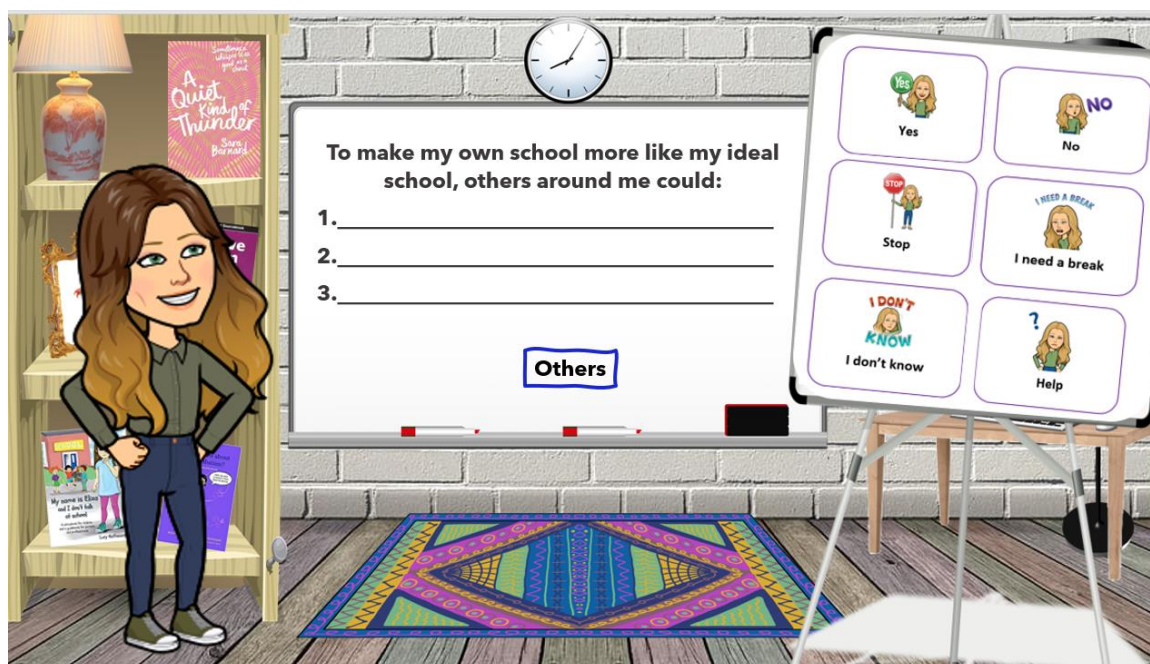
Following a webinar, the researcher was introduced to the 'flippity' 'flashcards' and 'manipulatives' tool and discovered how these could be used to create an online interactive card sorting activity to meet the aims of the study. The researcher felt that this would enable the participants more freedom to take ownership of the cards, manipulating them independently rather than relying on the researcher to move to the appropriate slide on a PowerPoint. The following sections detail the development of the finalised online card sorting tool used in the current study.

Appendix 11: Finalised Part 1 & 2 online card sorting activities

(Interactive resource sent to the participants prior to the interview)
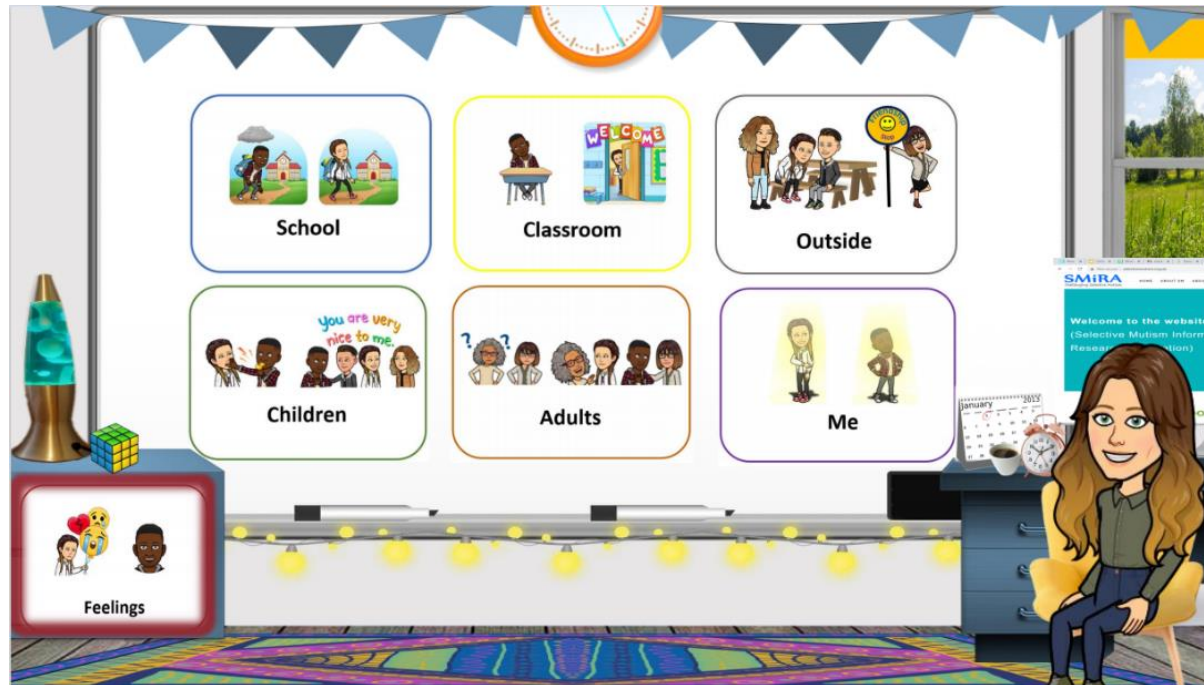
Prior to the first two parts of the interview (sesssions 1 and 2), an interactive resource was sent to the participants via their parent's email address. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to share their screen on Microsoft Teams. If participants required support or opted to use these tools for answering the questions during the interview, they were invited to click on the relevant images on the whiteboard which directed them to the associated interactive sorting card activity (see example below).

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i.　　　Exemplar Online Flashcard format (Outside)

When clicking on the 'outside' picture, participants were directed to a page where they could read through a range of cards (based on the literature). Sharing the screen with the researcher was important as if necessary, the researcher could offer support to read the cards and set them up in a way that they can be sorted.

ii.　　　Interactive Card Sorting Activity (Part 1; Non-ideal school; Classroom)
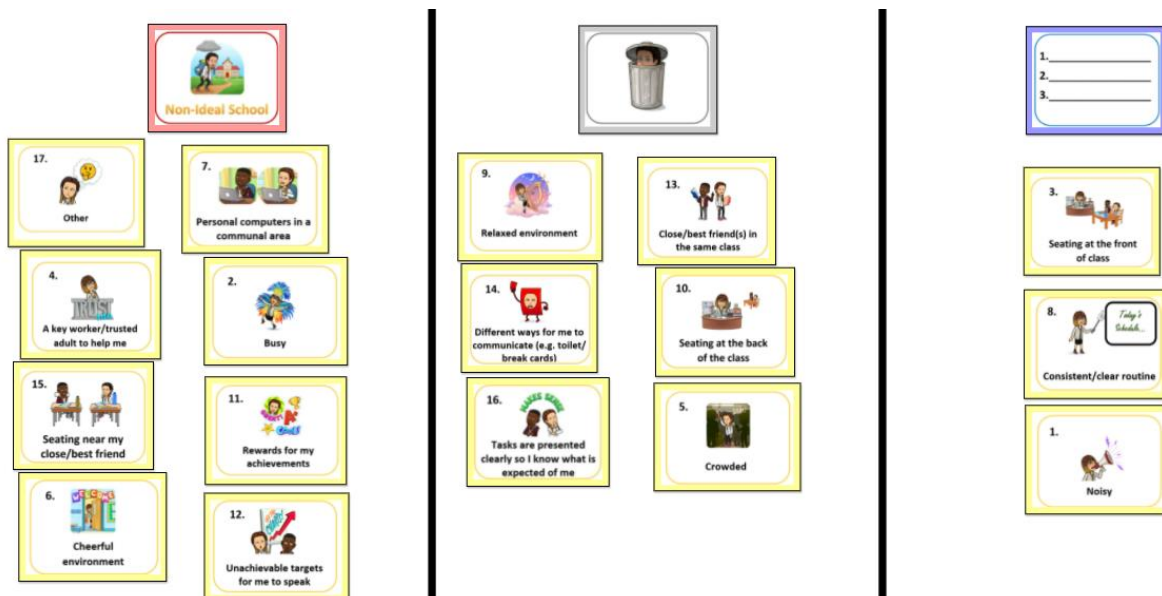
During part 1 of the interviews when constructing the non-ideal school, participants were able to click and drag (or tap, if accessing via a tablet or iPad) the cards to sort them. Participants were asked to place the cards that would not be in their non-ideal school within the column headed by a 'bin' symbol and the cards that would be in their non-ideal school under the 'non-ideal school' heading.

iii. Interactive Card Sorting Activity (Part 2; Ideal School; Outside)
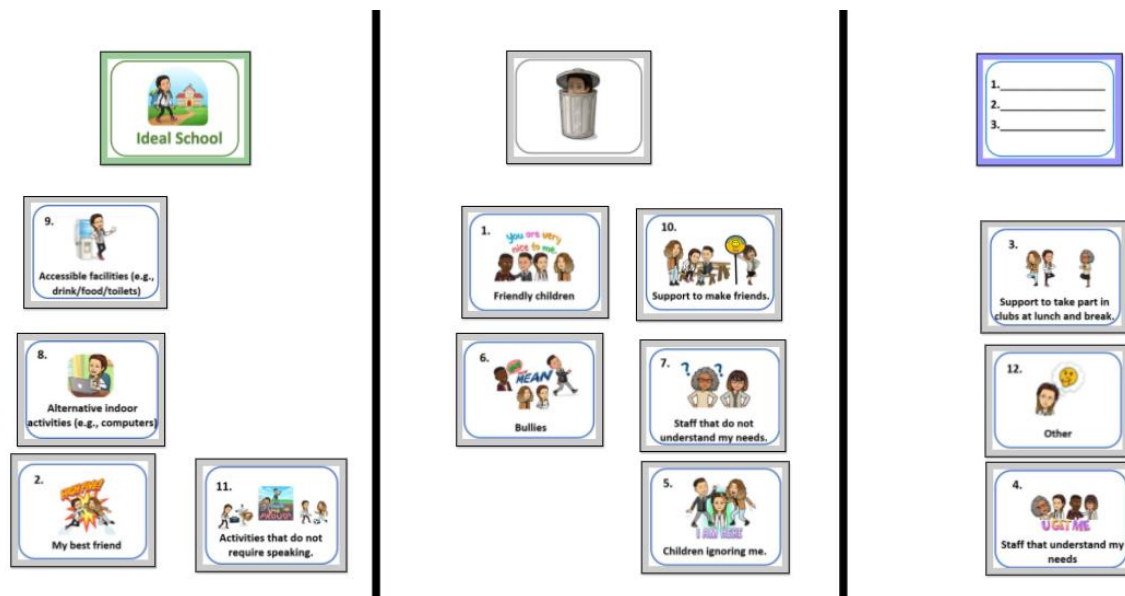
During part 2 of the interviews when constructing the ideal school, the participants were able to click and drag (or tap, if accessing via a tablet or iPad) the cards to sort them. Participants were asked to place the cards that would not be in their 'ideal' school within the column headed by a 'bin' symbol and the cards that would be in their ideal school under the 'ideal school' heading.

Once cards were sorted across those two broad headings, under the column headed with three numbered blank spaces, participants were invited to refine their decision by choosing the top three cards most likely to be in their non-ideal or ideal school. The three cards in this section were considered as the participant's answer to the relevant interview question. This aspect of the tool, known in PCP theory as 'pyramiding', enables moving away from a more abstract (core) construct (e.g. ideal playground) to more specific and observable constructs (e.g. playing with friends) (Moran, 2020).

Appendix 12: Finalised Part 3 Scaling activity

Before the third interview the above resource was sent via the parental email addresses. The participants were asked to share their screen on Microsoft Teams and to click on the whiteboard where they were directed to an interactive scaling activity. For the purposes of consistency, the cards were created via the flippety website and with permission, the researcher captured screen shots of the participants' responses.

Participants were invited to drag the arrows for each aspect of school (explored in the previous interview sessions, e.g. classroom, children) in relation to where they felt their current school fits along the scaling line. At one end of the pole sits their 'ideal school' and the other, their 'non-ideal' school.

The activity could be accessed by clicking the picture above, and consistent with the other sorting cards for parts 1 and 2 of the interview, the researcher was available to assist setting the cards up so that they aligned with the picture on the above resource.

Appendix 13: Finalised Part 3b moving towards the 'ideal school'

Whilst original PCP techniques (e.g. ideal self, Moran, 2001) adopt an 'action planning' phase at the end of the interview, referring to this as an 'action plan' posed potential implications for schools who are not part of this project as well as expectations that this might create for the participants about what their school might do for them in the future. In light of the ethical considerations, the final part of the interview was adapted as the research questions could be suitably addressed without the need to create an action plan. Clicking on one of the two cards in the interactive resource (e.g., 'Others can help me by…') directed participants to further card sorting activities (See example below).

Appendix 14 : Visual prompt cards for final part of the interview process
(part 3b)

     i.   Exemplar flash cards for Part 3b: 'Others can help me by…'

     ii.   Interactive card sorting activity

Appendix 15: Amendments to cards

(following implementation of the online card sorting activity during a therapeutic intervention)

Original positive feelings options   Updated feelings options

The researcher reflected on concerns around the disproportionate number of negative feelings (drawn from the literature), returning to the literature to incorporate more positive feelings. It was hoped that this would reduce the risk of the cards leading the research in a particular direction.

Appendix 16: Replacement Headings for sorting activity

    i.   Original headings for card sorting: Part 1 & 2 (non-ideal school & ideal school)

These headings may have been confusing or given the impression of a right or wrong response. They were subsequently amended to ensure clarity and avoid instilling any anxiety about a 'correct' answer. Therefore, two individual resources, one for each part (ideal and non-ideal school) were embedded with a view of making the interview process clearer (See ii-iii)

    ii.   Updated headings for card sorting: Part 1 (non-ideal school)

    iii.   Updated headings for card sorting: Part 2 (ideal school)

Appendix 17: Text Only Card sorting activities for more confident readers

i.   Exemplar non-ideal school card sorting (classroom)

Different ways for me to communicate (e.g., toilet/break cards)

Personal computers in a communal area

Seating near my close/best friend

Relaxed environment

Seating at the front of the class

Cheerful environment

Consistent and clear routine

Other

Noisy

Close/best friend(s) in the same class

Tasks are presented clearly so I know what is expected of me

Seating at the back of the class

A key worker/trusted adult to help me

Crowded

Busy

Unachievable targets for me to speak

Rewards for my achievements

ii.   Exemplar non-ideal school card sorting (school)

Consistent and Clear rules and expectations

Busy/ Crowded

Stressful/Pressured

Other   Confusing

Friendly   Scary

Relaxed

Zero tolerance of bullying

Unfair

Cheerful

Noisy

Fair/ Respectful

My personal interests are valued

Strict

Hard/Difficult

Supportive/Inclusive
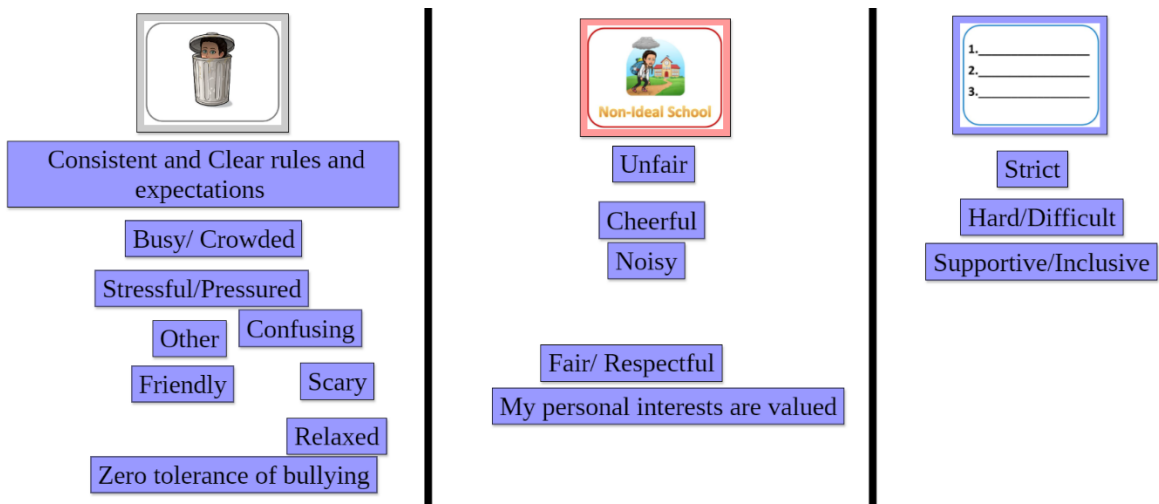
iii.   Exemplar ideal school card sorting (adults)

Making me look at them

Correcting my speech/ laughing at me

Drawing attention to me when I speak

Being angry or punishing me for not speaking

Putting pressure on me to speak

Not understanding my needs/difficulties

Taking my silence personally

Talking about me when I am not in the room

Ignoring me/Talking in front of me as if I am not there

Thinking I cannot or will not talk

Telling me off for talking to my friends(s)

Not trying to prevent bullying

Speaking for me

Being friendly

Consistent and clear expectations of me

Praising privately or subtly (e.g. post it notes)

Other

Showing me what to do when I am struggling

Checking in with me to make sure I understand

Trying to prevent bullying

Explaining to others that I will speak to then when I am ready

Making me feel comfortable

Giving me time and understanding

Relaxed, non-pressurised and quiet approach

iv.   Exemplar ideal school card sorting (children)

Saying/Thinking I cannot speak

Teasing/ Bullying

Being over-protective

Thinking I am a freak

Asking me questions and expecting an answer

Ignoring me

Passing messages to the teacher for me

Standing up for me

Other

Understanding/ Accepting me

Talking for me

Being friendly
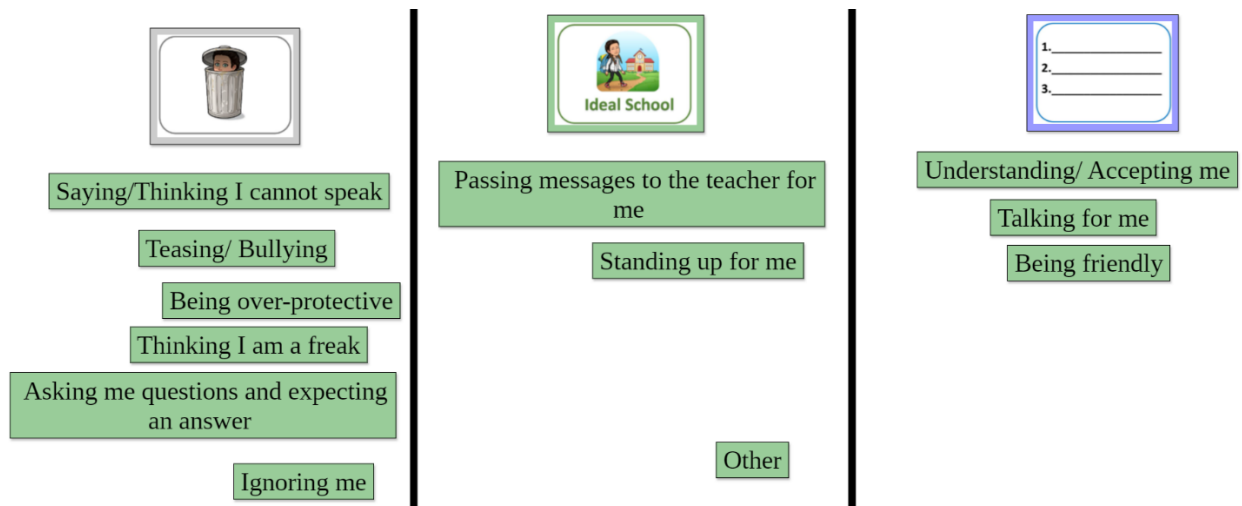
Appendix 18: Amendments to the main page of the resource (parts 1 and 2)

i.   Original resource
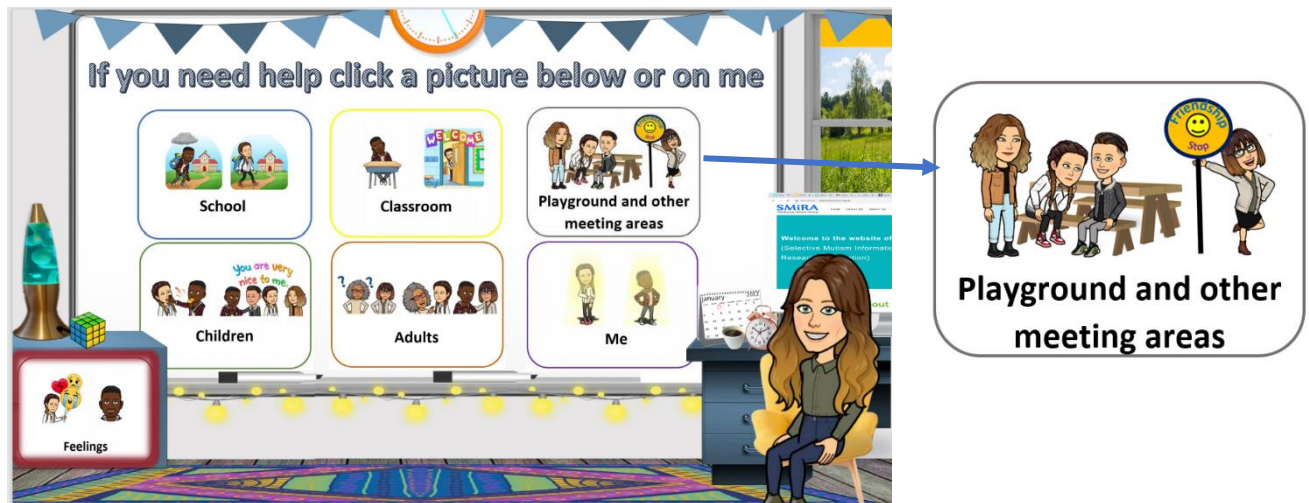
'Playground and other meeting areas' was replaced with "outside" as used by the secondary pupil that took part in the therapeutic intervention and was considered a more succinct and meaningful title.

i.   Updated resource
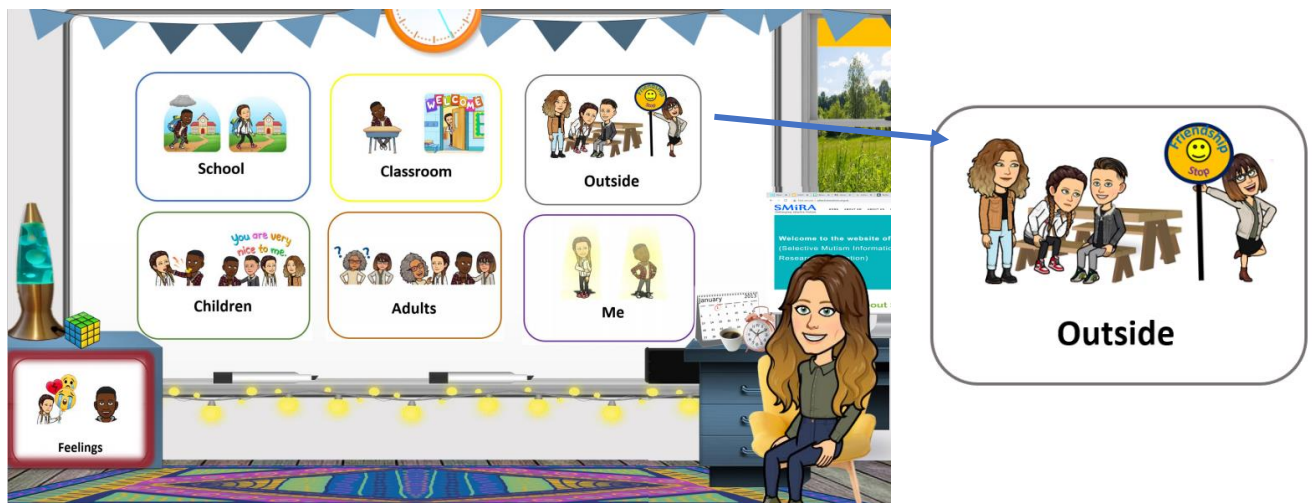
Appendix 19: Final non-ideal school template (printed in A3)

1. School

Write three things about this school. What kind of school is it?

----

2. Classroom

What is it like in the classroom? How do you feel?

----

3. Outside

What is it like outside? How do you feel?

----

4. Children

What are the children doing? Share three things about these children.

----

5. Adults

What are the adults doing? Share three things about the adults.

----

6. Me

What will you be doing? Share three things about the way you feel in this school.

My Non-Ideal School

Appendix 20: Final ideal school template (printed in A3)

| 1. School | 2. Classroom | 3. Outside |

Write three things about this school. What kind of school is it?

What is it like in the classroom? How do you feel?

What is it like outside? How do you feel?

| 4. Children | 5. Adults | 6. Me |

What are the children doing? Share three things about these children.

What are the adults doing? Share three things about the adults.

What will you be doing? Share three things about the way you feel in this school.

My Ideal School

Appendix 21: Resources posted to participants

(Packs included the non-ideal and ideal drawing templates, communication cards, post-it notes and additional lined paper)

Appendix 22: 'Child Friendly' video explaining the research
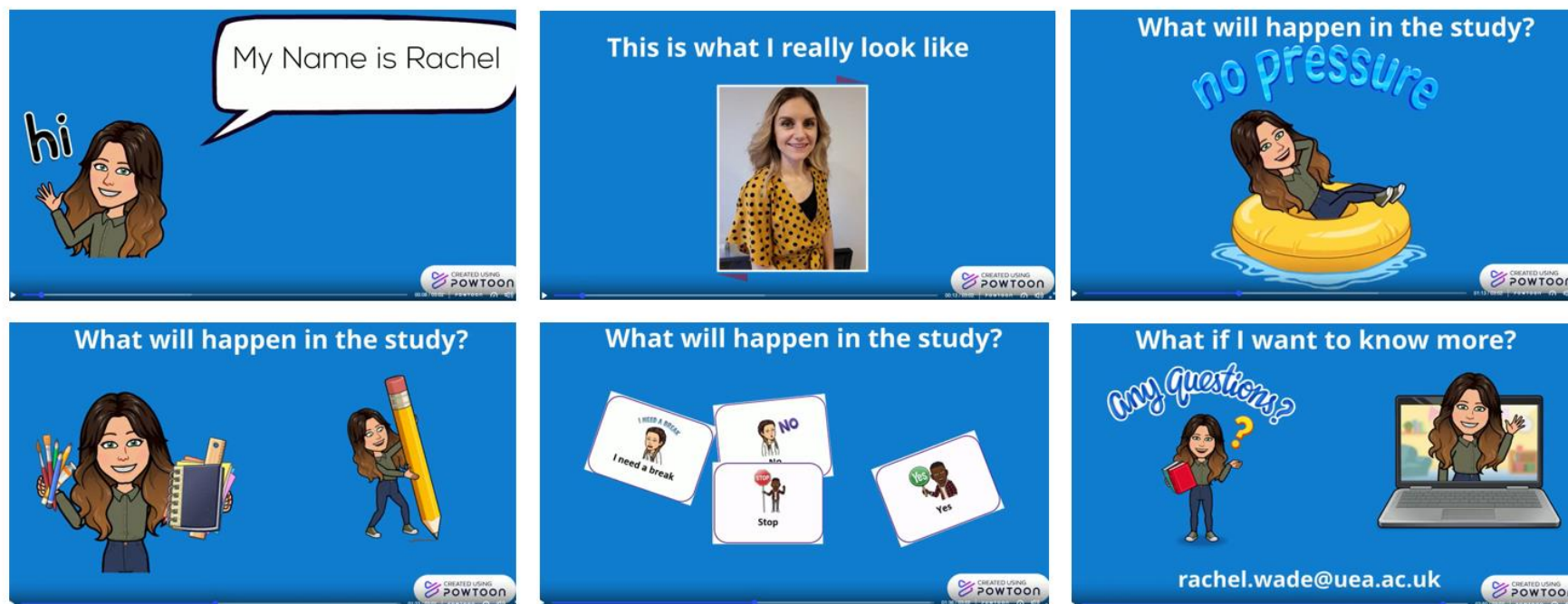
* To view the full video follow this link https://www.powtoon.com/s/f2WvpLueCWR/1/m/s

Appendix 23: Introductory resource sent to participants

*Objects within the interactive classroom were linked to further information about the researcher and the research (e.g. an introductory video of the researcher, example interactive sorting activity). This allowed participants to explore the research aims and make an informed decision about participating. (See subsequent sections for examples of these).

Appendix 24: Visual support cards

*When clicking on the stack of cards under the coffee table in the introductory resource, participants were directed to enlarged images of the visual support cards

Appendix 25: Researcher's One-Page Profile

Rachel Hi!

What we will do
- Talk about the school you would like to go to and not like to go to.
- Think about your current school and what could be done to make your current school more like the school you would like to go to.

This is me...

My name is Rachel, and I am interested in your views about what makes an 'ideal' and 'not so ideal' school. I am looking forward to meeting you.

What I enjoy...

Chocolate

Films

Walks

What I would like to get better at...

Singing/ Music

Exercise

Baking

People describe me as...

Kind HELPFUL

Helpful

Happy

My job...

WELCOME

I am interested in working with children and young people who find it difficult to use their voice in school.

When I am working with you, I will try to find out what you like at school and what you find a bit tricky.

Together, we can think about what changes could be made in school so that you are happy and doing the best you can in school. GOOD JOB!

What happens next...

To help keep us both safe, I will appear on a computer screen. We can still do the same or similar activities we would do if I came to see you.

There will be no pressure for you to speak to me, the activities have been designed so that you can answer in a way that you feel most comfortable (e.g., drawing, writing, online card sorting). no pressure

You do not have to meet with me or do all the activities. We will only do as much as you would like to do. SEE YOU SOON

*When clicking on the character in the classroom, participants were directed to an introductory one-page profile of the researcher

Appendix 26: Instructions for setting up the card sorting activity

Instructions for the online sorting activities
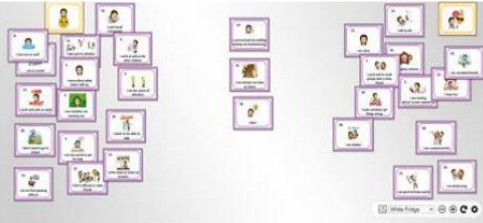
1. To make the cards bigger, when you do the sorting activities you can click this cog and it will open some options (see step 2).

2. By clicking the ⊕ symbol you can zoom in and the cards should be easier to see.
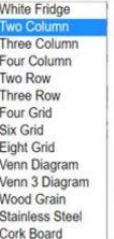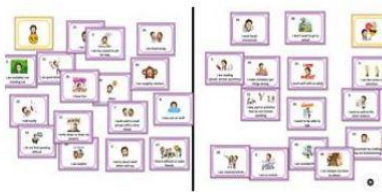
3. You will see that some of the sorting activities have orange cards too. These can be used as headings so that you can sort the cards however you like. See step 4 for an example.

4. There are no right or wrong answers, this is about you and your own feelings and experiences. You can click/tap and drag the cards to where you would like them to be.

5. Clicking the drop-down arrow will reveal some options for 'splitting the screen'. You can have a try and see which works best for you. See the example below for two columns.

White Fridge
Two Column
Three Column
Four Column
Two Row
Three Row
Four Grid
Six Grid
Eight Grid
Venn Diagram
Venn 3 Diagram
Wood Grain
Stainless Steel
Cork Board

Now that you have read the instructions you can have a go for yourself.

*When clicking on the phone, participants were directed to the instructions for setting up the card sorting activity. The researcher also talked through how to set up the card sorting activity during the interview process.

Appendix 27: Participant Certificate

THIS IS A CERTIFICATE TO SAY

Well Done and Thank you to

FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH

I HAVE REALLY ENJOYED WORKING WITH YOU AND AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOU SHARING YOUR VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES. I HOPE THAT MY RESEARCH WILL HELP OTHER PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE YOU.

I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN THE FUTURE.

Appendix 28: Participant information and consent form

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and
Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ

Email:
rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk
Web:www.uea.ac.uk

UEA University of East Anglia

Rachel Wade
Trainee Educational Psychologist
April 2021

My Ideal School

USING A PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY
TECHNIQUE TO EXPLORE AND UNDERSTAND THE
SCHOOL CONSTRUCTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING
SELECTIVE MUTISM (SM).

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
AND CONSENT FORM
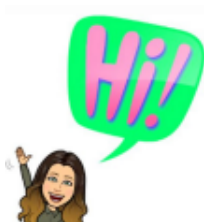
My name is Rachel.

I am doing a research study to find out the views of children and young people who find it hard to speak in school. A word often used to describe this difficulty is Selective Mutism.

I am asking you to be a part of the study because I am very interested in hearing your views about the things that make an 'ideal' and a 'non-ideal' school. I believe your views are very important and by sharing these you may help make school a become a better place for you, as well as other children who have been identified as having Selective Mutism.

You can decide if you want to take part in the study or not. You do not have to - it is up to you.

Study Information Sheet

This sheet tells you what I will ask you to do if you decide to take part in the study. Please read it carefully so that you can make up your mind about whether you want to take part.

If you decide you want to be in the study and then you change your mind later, that is ok. All you need to do is tell me or your parent/carer that you do not want to be in the study anymore.

If you have any questions, you can ask me or your family or someone else who looks after you. If you want to, you can email me any time (Rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk).

What will happen if I say that I want to be in the study?

If you decide that you want to be in my study, I will ask you to meet me online with your parent or carer for between two to four different sessions. Each meeting will between 45 minutes to an hour.

During these meetings, I will ask you to think about an imaginary school that you would not like to go to (your 'non-ideal school') and one that you would want to go to (your 'ideal school'). You can share your ideas using a range of different activities (e.g., drawing, writing card sorting).

Non-Ideal School

Ideal School

I will then ask you to think about and rate where your current school is in relation to your 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school and invite you to make suggestions on how your current school can become more like your ideal school.

There will be no pressure for you to speak to me. I have created some fun tools (e.g., virtual sorting cards) to help you share your views with me in a way that you feel most comfortable. Look in my virtual classroom to find out more.

When I ask you questions, you can choose which ones you want to answer. If you do not want to answer a question you can just leave it and move onto the next one. If you are not sure, you can always use a 'help card' or 'I don't know' card and I can point you to some pictures which may help you answer the questions.

Will anyone else know what I say in the study?

I will not tell anyone else what you say to me, except if you talk about someone hurting you or about you hurting yourself or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone to keep you and other people safe.

All the information that I have about you from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully. I will write a report about the study and show it to other people, but I won't say your name in the report, and no one will know that you were in the study.

How long will the study take?

The study will take place over 2-4 sessions, each meeting will take about 45 minutes to an hour.

Are there any good things about being in the study?

You will be helping me to do my research which aims to make school a better place for children and young people who have been identified as having Selective Mutism. If you like, I will send you certificate and sticker for taking part.

Are there any bad things about being in the study?

This study will take up some of your time, but I do not think it will be bad for you or cost you anything. The sessions have been designed to be fun and interactive. You may feel worried about meeting me and I will do everything I can to make sure you are as comfortable as possible during the interviews.

Will you tell me what you learnt in the study at the end?

Yes, I will if you want me to. There is a question on the next page that asks you if you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study. If you circle Yes, when I finish the study, I will tell you what I learnt.

If you are not happy with how I am doing the study or how I treat you, then you or the person who looks after you can write an email to M.craddock@uea.ac.uk

Consent Form 1 (please return this to Rachel)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:
- Write your name in the space below.
- Sign your name at the bottom of the next page.
- Put the date at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about, and you want to be in it. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the form.

I, ...[PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:
- I know what the study is about.
- I know what I will be asked to do.
- Someone has talked to me about the study.
- My questions have been answered.
- I know that I do not have to be in the study if I do not want to.
- I know that I can pull out of the study at any time.
- I know that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to answer.
- I know that the researcher will not tell anyone what I say, unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.
- I am happy for screen shots and photos to be taken of the work I complete during the research (e.g., card sorting and drawings).

Now I am going to ask you if you are happy to do a few other things in the study. Please circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you would like.

Are you happy to meet with me using an online video chat?
Do you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study?

Signature..Date...........................

Consent Form 2 (You can keep this)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:
- Write your name in the space below.
- Sign your name at the bottom of the next page.
- Put the date at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about, and you want to be in it. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the form.

I, ...[PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:
- I know what the study is about.
- I know what I will be asked to do.
- Someone has talked to me about the study.
- My questions have been answered.
- I know that I do not have to be in the study if I do not want to.
- I know that I can pull out of the study at any time.
- I know that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to answer.
- I know that the researcher will not tell anyone what I say, unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.
- I am happy for screen shots and photos to be taken of the work I complete during the research (e.g., card sorting and drawings).

Now I am going to ask you if you are happy to do a few other things in the study. Please circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you would like.

Are you happy to meet with me using an online video chat?
Do you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study?

Signature...Date............................

Appendix 29: Parent information and consent form

Rachel Wade
Trainee Educational Psychologist
April 2021

University of East Anglia

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ

Email:
rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk
Web:www.uea.ac.uk

My Ideal School

USING A PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY TECHNIQUE TO EXPLORE AND UNDERSTAND THE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SELECTIVE MUTISM (SM).

PARENTAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

What is this study about?

Your child is invited to take part in a research study which explores their views of what makes an 'ideal' and 'non- ideal' school. I am also interested in how your child thinks and feels about aspects of their current school (e, g. the classroom, outside and people) and the kinds of suggestions they put forward for making their current school, more like their 'ideal school'. Your child has been invited to participate in this study because he/she is aged 7-17, meets the (ICD-11 or DSMV) criteria for Selective Mutism, has been identified as having Selective Mutism and is currently attending a mainstream primary or secondary school in England. (for further information about the diagnostic criteria for Selective Mutism see http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/info-guidance-for-the-diagnosis-of-sm/)

The Parental Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to let your child take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about. Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent you are telling me that you:

◻ Understand what you have read.
◻ Agree for your child to take part in the research study as outlined below.
◻ Agree to the use of your child's personal information as described.
◻ You have received a copy of this Parental Information Statement to keep.

Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher:
Rachel Wade, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East Anglia under the supervision of Dr Miriam Craddock, Educational Psychologist, and tutor on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (EdPsyD), School of Education and Lifelong learning, University of East Anglia.

What will the study involve?

In the presence of a parent or carer, your child will be invited to take part in a series of 2-4, remote video interview sessions (via Microsoft Teams) which are sensitive to the needs of children and young people who have been identified as having Selective Mutism and utilize a range of engaging, non-verbal activities (e.g. drawing, writing and online card sorting). The interview sessions involve completing the 'drawing the ideal school technique' (Williams and Hanke, 2007), based on Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955). PCP theory considers how individuals form unique constructs (or views) of the world that are shaped by their experiences. These, constructs are on a bi-polar dimension with one pole shaping 'ideal' values, beliefs and attitudes and another pole representing the contrasting less preferred construct.

Initial meeting:

This is an important part of the study as it will enable me to begin forming positive relationships with you and your child. As your child's parent/carer, you also have an important role to play in facilitating the sessions and we can talk about this during the initial meeting. I will also ask some questions to gather further background information and will share the resources required to take part in the sessions.

Interview Part 1: Drawing the non-ideal school.

I will ask your child to imagine a school they would not like to go to and invite them to complete a drawing and writing activity. Visual and text based interactive resources informed by the literature, have been created, should your child find answering my questions difficult. The visual prompt card sorting activities are considered fun, engaging and offer an interactive element to the process, which I hope will empower your child to share their views, feelings, and experiences.

Interview Part 2:
Drawing the ideal school

During this step, your child will be asked to imagine the kind of school they would like to go to and complete the non-verbal activities (e.g. drawing, writing, card sorting).

Interview Part 3 (parts a and b):

The rating scale part of the process is a crucial part of the PCP technique as it connects the two pictures (from parts 1 and 2) in the exercise. "Together these pictures make a 'whole' which is rich in information about the child's views" (Moran 2020 p.) of school and themselves. This interview will involve the use of an online interactive scale which places your child's ideal school at one end and non-ideal school on the other end. This will enable your child to provide personal ratings of aspects of their current school (e.g., classroom, children) by manipulating (dragging and clicking) arrows to where they feel these are in relation to their ideal and non-ideal schools outlined in the previous parts of the interview.

Finally, your child will be invited to suggest 3 things that they and 3 things that others could do to help make their current school more like their ideal school.

Following these interview sessions, I will ask you and your child to complete an evaluation form and your child will receive a certificate and sticker for taking part in the research.

How much of my time will the study take?

The study will involve a series of 2-4 online sessions, each one lasting between 45 minutes to an hour.

Does my child have to be in the study? Can they withdraw from the study once they've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and your child does not have to take part. Your decision whether to let them participate will not affect your/their relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or the school, now or in the future. If you decide to let your child take part in the study and then change your mind later (or they no longer wish to take part), they are free to withdraw from the study at any time. During the interviews, your child is free to stop participating at any stage. If your child decides to take part in the study and then changes their mind, they are free to withdraw at any time up to the point that I have analyzed and published the results. In this case your child's information will be removed from the records and will not be included in any results. You and your child can withdraw from the study by letting me know via email (rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk).

Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from your child giving up their time, I do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. I understand that your child may find it difficult to share their views about school if they have had a negative experience. I will be mindful of anything that might cause concern. Furthermore, your child will not be pressured to speak. To ensure that your child feels as comfortable as possible, I can work flexibly around your child's needs and preferred forms of communication. If your child becomes upset at any point in the interview, we can stop the interview and resume it another time or cease to continue. If the latter option is chosen a child-friendly letter will be sent to your child, thanking them for their time.

If participating in the study raises any concerns for you or your child, contact details of both the researcher and supervisor are provided should you or your child feel the need to arrange a debrief following the interview. Contact details are also provided for organizations that support children and young people who have been identified as having Selective Mutism.

Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

I hope that this will be a fun, engaging and empowering experience for your child and that what your child says will make school a better place for them and for other children who have been identified as having Selective Mutism. I also hope that sharing their experiences, will increase awareness and provide a better understanding of the educational needs of children and young people who have been identified as having Selective Mutism. Furthermore, participation in the study may enable identification of factors that facilitate positive experiences of education, in turn providing implications for future interventions and provision for children and young people who have been identified as having Selective Mutism.

What will happen to information that is collected during the study?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about your child for the purposes of this research study. Their information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019). Your child's information will be stored securely, and their identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published but publications will not contain your child's name or any identifiable information.

What if we would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, I will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have (rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk).

Will I be told the results of the study?

You and your child have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell me that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page summary, and you will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

What if we have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee. If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the above address.

You can contact my research supervisor at the following address:

Dr Miriam Craddock
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
miriam.craddock@uea.ac.uk

If you or your child are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at y.lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

OK, I am happy for my child to take part – what do I do next?

Please complete one copy of the consent form and return this via email to rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

SMIRA website
http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/
SMIRA – Selective Mutism Information and Research Association facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/groups/SMIRASelectiveMutism/
SMIRA twitter page
https://twitter.com/search?q=%40InfoSmira&src=typd (@InfoSmira)

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT PARENT'S/CARER'S NAME], consent to my child
....[PRINT CHILD'S NAME] participating in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

◻ I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
◻ I have read the Information Statement and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
◻ The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
◻ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or the school now or in the future.
◻ I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time.
◻ I understand that my child may end the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue.
◻ I understand that the interview sessions will be recorded using the audio and (if comfortable) video recording function on teams.
◻ I understand that my child may turn the video recording off at any time if they do not wish to continue but that the audio recording will continue so that the researcher gains an accurate understanding of their views.
◻ I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to.
◻ I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
◻ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my child's name or any identifiable information about my child.

I consent to:

Audio-recording of my child	YES ◻	NO ◻
Videorecording of my child	YES ◻	NO ◻
Snap shots of my child's drawing/card sorting	YES ◻	NO ◻
Would you like to review the transcript of data?	YES ◻ NO ◻	
Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?	YES ◻ NO ◻	

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

◻ Postal: _____

◻ Email: _____

Signature .... PRINT name..Date ....

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM (2nd Copy to Parent/Carer)

I, ... [PRINT PARENT'S/CARER'S NAME], consent to my
child ....[PRINT CHILD'S NAME] participating in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

☐ I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

☐ I have read the Information Statement and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.

☐ The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

☐ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or the school now or in the future.

☐ I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time.

☐ I understand that my child may end the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue.

☐ I understand that the interview sessions will be recorded using the audio and (if comfortable) video recording function on teams.

☐ I understand that my child may turn the video recording off at any time if they do not wish to continue but that the audio recording will continue so that the researcher gains an accurate understanding of their views.

☐ I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to.

☐ I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

☐ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my child's name or any identifiable information about my child.

I consent to:

Audio-recording of my child	YES ☐	NO ☐
Videorecording of my child	YES ☐	NO ☐
Snap shots of my child's drawing/card sorting	YES ☐	NO ☐
Would you like to review the transcript of data?	YES ☐ NO ☐	
Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?	YES ☐ NO ☐	

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:
☐ Postal: _____
☐ Email: _____

Signature .... PRINT name...Date ....

Appendix 30: Parental Guide

My Ideal School

USING A PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY TECHNIQUE TO EXPLORE AND UNDERSTAND THE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SELECTIVE MUTISM.

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Thank you for showing interest in taking part in this research. This parental information guide has been created to give you and your child an idea of what to expect when taking part in the study. Rachel will guide you both through the process during our remote meetings and should you still have any questions you can contact Rachel (Rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk)

Contents

1

Setting up your computer

Once Rachel has received consent from you and your child, an initial meeting can be arranged to discuss the interview process and begin building rapport with you and your child. Rachel will also be able to answer or clarify any questions you or your child might have about the research process.

As the interview sessions will include a number of visual online, interactive activities, a laptop, computer or tablet will be required to facilitate the interview process.

Rachel will schedule meetings (at a time of your convenience) via Microsoft Teams for the initial and subsequent interview sessions. You do not need to have the Teams App as they can be accessed through your browser by simply clicking the link emailed to you on the scheduled date of the meeting.

Should you need further support in using Microsoft Teams, Rachel can discuss this with you prior to the meeting, via phone or sending over further instructions.

On the day of the interviews, you will receive an interactive PDF via email. This contains links to the online, interactive resources designed to support and engage your child in the interview process. Rachel will ask you and your child to share your screen and open this PDF. Sharing the screen will enable Rachel to observe and record your child's answers when engaging in these activities. As Rachel will be able to see your screen, please ensure that you shut down any documents that you do not want Rachel or your child to view. Rachel will talk through the necessary steps during the meetings.

2

Prior to the interviews

Prior to the initial meeting and interviews, please allow your child to explore the interactive PDF and child resource templates. This resource contains information about the interview process, the researcher and the tools that they may wish to use. Before the interview, please ensure that your child completes the short online questionnaire so that Rachel is aware of your child's preferred interview conditions and methods of communication. You can access this questionnaire using the interactive PDF by clicking the portrait of characters or via the following link https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=lYdfxj26UUOKBwhl5djwkBUxRIjNgjNAp2BlnWSX60dUOFdZNVozUEg5S0s5VVQxRFhWREo2V1FIVC4u.

The activity will be completed together with the researcher via Microsoft Teams, however, your child will be offered an opportunity to read through (and if necessary prepare for) the questions in the child resource template prior to the meeting. You can through each question and familiarise your child with these participant resource templates.

3

Visual Support

Throughout the interview process if your child requires support, a break or is not sure how to answer a question they have the option of using the 'help' or 'I don't know' cards (e.g showing these to the camera or to their supporting adult)

Rachel can either send a premade resource via post or an emailed version, which you can print and prepare at home (should you wish). Please inform Rachel of your child's preference at least a week before the scheduled interview to allow for postage etc.

Should your child wish to use the visual prompts sorting cards, Rachel will assist you and your child to access these, via an interactive PDF which will be emailed to you on the day of the interview (See image below).

The research aims to capture your child's views about school therefore, these will only be used if your child indicates that they require further support or are not sure about a question during the online interview process.

Interactive PDF

During Interviews Part 1 & 2

Your role will be to provide reassurance and possibly mediate, should your child wish for you to speak on their behalf. As the aim is to capture your child's views, should they wish for you to mediate for them, please share the comments made by them in their own words.

It will be important that your child is empowered to share their views, should you you wish to share any additional information there will be a dedicated time to expand on these with the researcher following the interviews.

Visual prompt cards have been created, should your child find answering a question difficult. Rachel will read these with your child if they would like assistance.

You know your child best and it is important that they are comfortable throughout the process. Your child's welfare and wellbeing are of utmost importance. Rachel has provided some cards to enable them to share if they wish to discontinue or require a break (etc). However, in the event that you detect signs of distress, fatigue or discomfort in your child, it will be important to respond to this immediately and inform Rachel in a subtle way to minimise further distress. An appropriate method for responding to this will be agreed during the initial meeting.

Visual Card Sort

Text Card Sort

4

5

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During Interviews Part 3a & 3b

The same steps apply as before, however, this part of the interview will consider where your child feels their current school is, in relation to their ideal/non-ideal school and whether anything could be done to make their current school more like their 'ideal school'.

3.a. Scaling Activity

Rachel will send over the following interactive PDFs and will invite you and your child to share their screen.

Your child will be able to click and drag the arrows to where they feel aspects of their current school (e.g. classroom, children etc) are in relation to their 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school.

Interactive PDF

3.b Moving towards an 'ideal school'

Interactive PDF

This part of the interview process will ask your child to share their views about what they feel could be done to make their current school more like their ideal school.

If your child finds answering this part of the interview process tricky, there will be a range of visual prompt cards available for them to choose from. They can let Rachel or their supporting adult know and Rachel will direct them to the cards using a similar approach to sort them as in the previous stages.

6

After the interviews

Rachel will invite your child to complete short evaluation form. Their feedback will be important as it will enable the tool to be refined, with a view of eventually making it available to children and young people with Selective Mutism so that more children can be empowered to share their views about school.

Rachel will offer your child a certificate and sticker as a thank you for participating in the research.

Should your child wish for a copy of the results once the research is over then tick the 'yes' in the consent form.
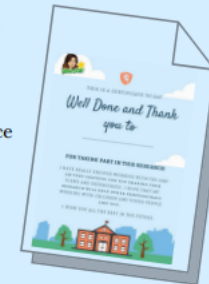
Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. Should you have any questions you can contact Rachel (Rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk)

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Appendix 31: Ethical Approval from the University

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2020-21	

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Rachel Wade
School:	EDU
Current Status:	EdPsyD Student
UEA Email address:	Rachel.wade@uea.ac.uk
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	2021_03_RW_MC

Approval details	
Approval start date:	15.04.2021
Approval end date:	31.07.2022
Specific requirements of approval:	
Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.	

Victoria Warburton EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 32: Background information

(Gathered from parents before the interview)

Child's chosen Pseudonym	
Gender	
Age	
Year Group/Setting	
Ethnicity	
First Language	
Location	
Age of Diagnosis	
Other Diagnoses	
Involvement from other professionals and support received	
Stage of Communication	
Preferred method of communication	
Resource preferences (e.g., text or visual options? Key fob)	
Parent present	
What to do if participant becomes tired or wants to stop?	
Any additional information:	

Appendix 33: Participant Background information

Child's chosen Pseudonym	Isabelle	Hannah	Coco	Olive	Ruby	Monkey	Willow	Tris	AT	Elsa
Gender	F	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Age	14	17	7	10	15	10	12	12	10	7
Year Group	9	Further Education	2	6	10	6	8	8	6	2
Ethnicity	White British	White British	White Caribbean Mixed Black Caribbean	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	Half Finnish/ Half Algerian
First Language	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English, Finnish Arabic
Location	Kent	Leister	Liverpool	Nottingham-shire	Carlisle	Derby	Essex	Manch ester	West Sussex	Buckingha mshire
Age of Diagnosis	5	16	Pursuing diagnosis EP involved	7	15	7/8	Primary school	12	4	3/4
Other Diagnoses	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Involveme nt from other profession als	SALT	SALT, EP, CAMHS, Paediatrici an	EP, SAL, Art therapist	SALT, Occupational Therapy, Paediatrician	SALT, CAMHS, Paediatrician	SALT	SALT	SALT, ASD Team	SALT	SALT

Appendix 34: Phase 1 brief notes of analytic ideas and insights Elsa

- *Fear of making mistakes (choices/ in work/ others on their behalf)*

- *Importance of outdoor/physical activities*

- *Communication methods (non-verbal but to try whispering to friends)*

- *Accessing/participating in learning, physical, social and recreational activities*

- *Impact of external or sensory stimuli (e.g., noise)*

- *Wants to be concealed but not invisible (e.g., not attention on me, but doesn't want to be ignored or miss out on learning/social activities in school)*

- *Teacher approach- friendly, understanding and patient, helping me with learning.*

- *Children- friendly and advocating (Links with Tris 'having my back').*
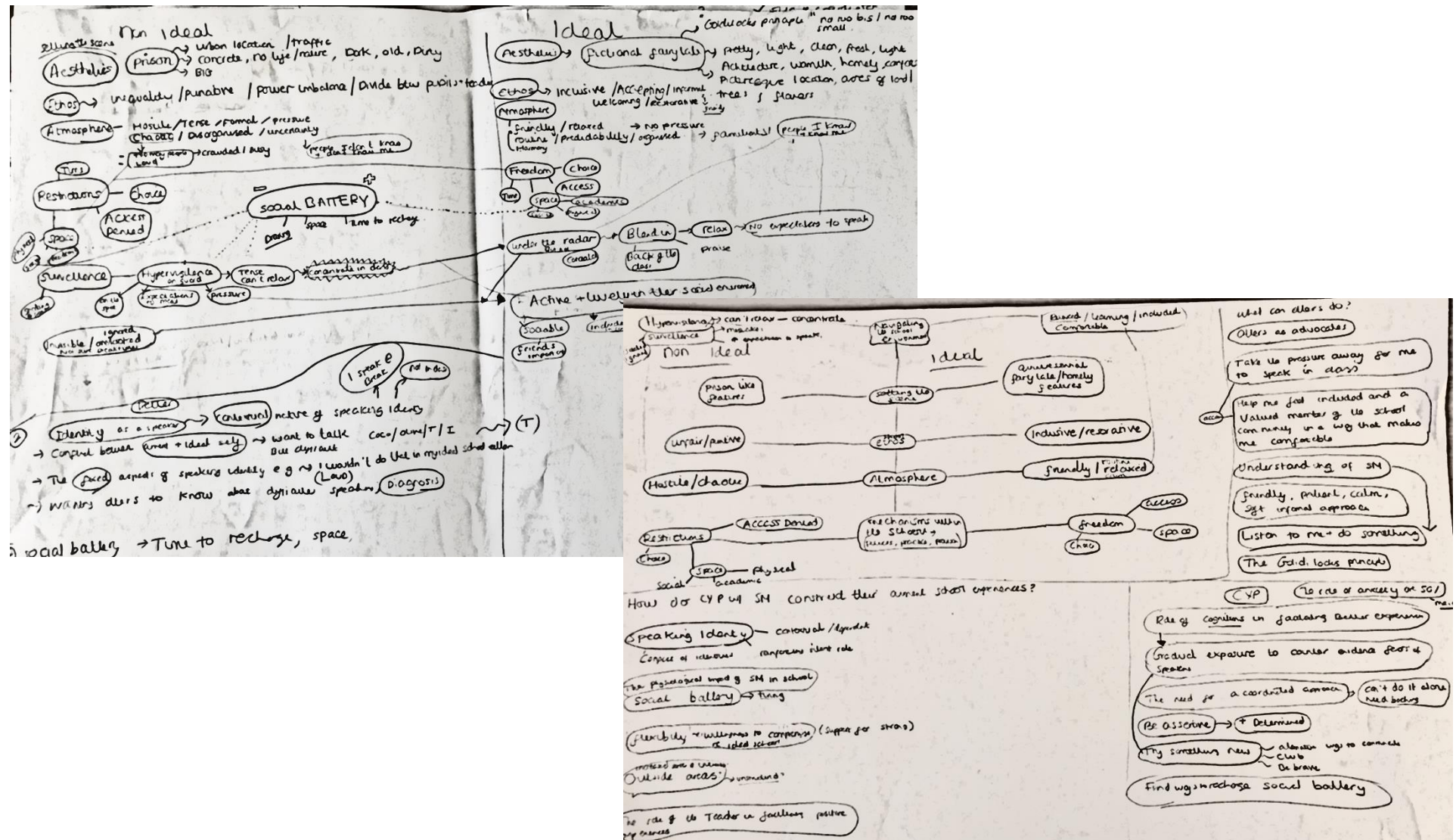
Appendix 36: Main page of reference

(Listing examples of identified codes across the data set)

Level 1: what it is	Level 2: how it is described	Tris	Olive	AT	coco	Elsa	Isabelle	Hannah	Monkey	Willow	Ruby
The school environment as..	"A prison"/ Institutional				√						
	Threatening				√						
	a deprivation of liberty	√			√			√			
	A home from home				√		√				
	Familiar/predictable	√		√	√					√	
	"Playful"/fun				√						
	conducive for learning				√						√
	Noisy	√	√			√	√	√		√	
	lifeless				√		√				√
	Punitive		√		√		√	√			
	Natural				√		√		√		
	"old"				√						
	"Pretty"				√		√				
	Stressful/Pressured	√		√		√	√	√		√	
	unfair/unequal	√	√			√	√				√
	friendly					√		√		√	√
	happy/cheerful					√		√			√
	fair	√	√			√		√			
	inclusive/ Supportive	√	√	√		√		√		√	√
	Sunny				√		√				
	small			√			√				
	unattractive						√				
	dirty						√				
	disorganised/chaotic	√					√				
	crowded	√	√				√	√		√	
	a confusing place	√	√				√	√			
	Big		√	√			√				√
	light						√				√
	Sunny						√				
	Clean						√				
	New						√				
	just right…	√	√	√			√	√			
	Informal/relaxed		√				√	√			

classroom environment as	limited in space/ restricted				√		√		√		
	Cheerful			√							
	small				√		√				
	chaotic/disorganised				√		√			√	
	conducive for learning				√	√			√		
	hindering positive current views of school				√	√	√	√			
	facilitating positive current views of school					√					
	old				√						
	dirty				√						
	boring/repetitive					√					
	crowded	√	√	√			√	√	√		
	dark						√				
	unpleasant						√				
	loud/noisy	√	√				√			√	
	similar to the current classroom						√				
	spacious						√	√	√		
	informal/relaxed			√			√	√			√
	child/pupil led			√			√		√		
	not too busy						√				
	promoting individuality/ diversity/ acceptance						√				
	busy		√	√						√	√
	unpredictable	√		√							
	big			√							
A classroom with	accessible resources				√	√	√		√		√
	a close/best friend(s)	√	√	√			√				√
	no desks						√				
	sections/areas designated to pupils						√				
	space/ opportunities to 'recharge'	√					√		√		
	no whiteboard						√				
	high expectaions	√		√		√		√		√	
	a manageable workload							√			
	clear explanations and expectations		√					√		√	√
	not too many pupils								√		
	unknown/unfamiliar children	√	√	√							
Seating as	flexible/ a choice				√		√	√	√		
	increasing the possibility of being seen/exposed	√				√					√
	better at the back	√				√					√

Appendix 37: Codes relating to individual participants with illustrative quotes

i. Example Individual codes identified in Isabelle's views

Level 1: what it is	Level 2: how it is described	Isabelle	Evidence/extract
The school environment as..	A home from home	√	IS: so that it's comfortable and it's kind of like you can personalise your own space….IS: ummm lots of plants, lots of cushions.
	Noisy	√	
	lifeless	√	
	Punitive	√	
	Natural	√	S: I guess the architecture and like maybe the outside maybe um, like has flowers and stuff.
	"Pretty"	√	
	Stressful/Pressured	√	
	unfair/unequal	√	
	Small	√	IS: Because if it is not very big and there is lots of people they'd just be staring at you.
	unattractive	√	
	dirty	√	
	disorganised	√	IS: ummm.. it would be really messy and not clean.
	crowded	√	IS: it probably wouldn't be very good if there were loads of people in a really small space.
	a confusing place	√	R: Know what to do in what way?
	Quite big	√	
	light	√	
	Sunny	√	
	Clean	√	
	New	√	
	just right…	√	not too busy…...And even like with the register at the beginning if everyone else is completely silent then obviously I'd get a bit nervous about saying you know, I'm here. Um so yeah it's not really that important.
	Informal/relaxed	√	
	a harmonious place	√	and they are nice towards each other as well, the teachers get on well. …..IS: I don't think so. I just think that everyone could be just a bit nicer and more understanding. It would make it a nicer environment to be in.
	a place that embraces individuality	√	IS: [nods], yeah… just doing their own thing.
classroom environment as	chaotic/disorganised	√	furniture like everywhere.
	Crowded	√	
	hindering positive current views of school	√	IS: ummm well I didn't put it all the way down to the non ideal school because it's not as bad as I had imagined it when I drew the worst classroom possible but it is pretty much the same. It's very dirty and it has got hole
	dark	√	
	loud/noisy	√	
	similar to the current classroom	√	its like my school
	spatious	√	IS: um well there's gonna be lots of space
	informal	√	Isabelle's picture ideal classroom (bean bags) IS: yeah so you wouldn't have to sit on a chair or have to have a desk so you can sit on the floor with some cushions or whatever.
	child/pupil led	√	IS: You can choose who you want to be with or if you want to be by yourself then that's fine too. …you can sit however you like.
	not too busy	√	
	promoting individuality/ diversity/ acceptance	√	IS: so that it's comfortable and it's kind of like you can personalise your own space. IS: You can choose who you want to be with or if you want to be by yourself then that's fine too.
A classroom with	accessible resources	√	there's gonna be lots of books um…
	no desks	√	
	sections/areas designated to pupils	√	um… there's gonna be so instead of having er like desks you each get your own section of the classroom and you can sit however you like. IS: um so it doesn't feel too busy I guess um and that you don't always have to
	space/ opportunities to 'recharge' from 'peopling'	√	IS: um so it doesn't feel too busy I guess um and that you don't always have to be around people if you get tired of it. IS: You can choose who you want to be with or if you want to be by yourself then that's fine too.
	no whiteboard	√	IS: some of the teachers could ask you to come up and draw on the whiteboard.
Seating location as	flexible/ a choice	√	you can sit however you like.
	better with friends	√	

ii.   Example Individual codes identified in Coco's views

Level 1: what it is	Level 2: how it is described	Extract
The school environment as	"A prison"/ Institutional	it is a prison that turns into a school'
	Threatening	
	a deprivation of liberty	They go outside but they go in something outside.
	A home from home	.
	Familiar	P: Oh the mums.
	"Playful"	the playground has lots of toys.
	conducive for learning	P: Oh lessons okay. I thought you were going to say watch films all day. C: That would be the worst school, you wouldn't learn anything No its got plants and erm scissors and erm pens and erm, erm pieces of paper and erm and rubbers.
	lifeless	C: it's a skull and cross bones.
	Punitive	
	Natural	grass
	"old"	An old prison.
	"Pretty"	
classroom environment as	limited in space/ restricted	
	small	
	chaotic	
	conducive for learning	P: Oh lessons okay. I thought you were going to say watch films all day. C: That would be the worst school, you wouldn't learn anything No its got plants and erm scissors and erm pens and erm, erm pieces of paper and erm and rubbers.
	hindering positive views of school	C: Because it's full of stuff.
	old	the classroom is very dirty and nasty and very old fashioned.
	dirty	the classroom is very dirty and nasty and very old fashioned.
A classroom with	accessible resources	: No its got plants and erm scissors and erm pens and erm, erm pieces of paper and erm and rubbers.
Seating as	flexible/ a choice	C: You get to choose.
Outside as	better than inside	C: co's you're not in school.
		C: Co's you don't have to do any work. And you don't do anything wrong. ....R:So when are you not nervous?
		C: erm When I'm at break... Play play.....because there's no teachers.
	Escapism/freedom from the restraints in school	C: I can do whatever I want.
	Restricted in space	They go outside but they go in something outside.
	a place to relax and recharge	C: Laying down on the grass.
	providing oppunities for fun and play	the playground has lots of toys.
	Unpredictable	outside it is kind of fun but its very scary because you do not know when a teacher is going to come out.
	spending time with friends	
Peers as	Unruly/unpredictable	the kids are crazy and they are maniacs.
	boisterous	C:"punchy…everyone"
	Supportive	Coco's picture (children holding hands)
	Friendly	

12 R: now it's up to you [Isabelle] it's up to you really but I was wondering… would you prefer
13 that I ask you the questions while you're drawing or wait until you've stopped?
14 IS: probably while I'm doing it.
15 R: OK I'll remember that for next time then… OK so you've done your picture can I see what
16 you've drawn?
17 IS: [smiles then shows picture to the camera]
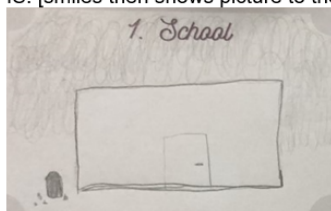
18
19 R: Oh, wow what if we got… can you tell me a little bit about what you've drawn?
20 IS: It's very small and there's lots of rubbish outside and it's not very nice outside.
21 R: What do you mean by it's not very nice outside?
22 IS: um smoke or something? I don't really know.
23 R: OK so lots of rubbish and not very nice looking outside.
24 IS: Yeah [quiet laugh]
25 R: OK so… I was going to ask you to tell me three things about it and you've told me so
26 thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the school that
27 you would not like to go to?
28 IS: ummm... it would be really messy and not clean.
29 R: Messy and not clean okay and what kind of school is the school that you wouldn't want to
30 go to?
31 IS: really strict and horrible and the people aren't very nice.
32 R: when you say people who do you mean?
33 IS: Uh the teachers and the children.
34 R: OK thank you is there anything else that you want to share about your school.
35 IS: Uh it would be very noisy and stressful [smiles and quietly giggles].
36 R: In what way would it be stressful?
37 IS: I guess if they gave me loads of homework um set the next day or something… so if they
38 set homework one day and it's due in the next.

207 R: Is it ok to ask you [Isabelle]?
208 IS: Yeah
209 R: What are these adults doing?
210 IS: They are very strict and angry all the time.
211 R: All the time?
212 IS: Yes… they'll find something to blame you for so they'll tell you off for any little thing.
213 R: So even if you're not going out of your way to do anything they'll just tell you off?
214 IS: Yep.
215 IS: They'd also be quite old… um and they would wear very formal clothes and they are not
216 very understanding. So, they force people to do things.
217 R: What sort of things do they force pupils to do?
218 IS: Talk if you don't want to.
219 R: umm [nods].. and what about so you mentioned earlier about umm wearing the formal
220 clothes. Why would you have those in your non-ideal school?
221 IS: I guess um it makes them not very relatable, and it makes them look like they are more
222 intimidating than they are.
223 R: umm I can see that. And what about old. What is it about old, older teachers?
224 IS: umm I feel like they're meaner and probably less relatable.
225 R: Less relatable than…?
226 IS: Than if they were younger so if they're younger then they have like a less of an age gap
227 between me and them.
228 R: Okay. So, we've got very strict and angry teachers. They're angry all the time, not just
229 every now and then. All the time. And they'll tell you off for any little thing?
230 IS: [Nods] Yeah.
231 R: And they're old and that's because you feel that older teachers are meaner, and you can't
232 sort of necessarily relate to them as well as perhaps like the younger teachers that have that
233 less age gap. Umm formal clothes quite intimidating… and they are not very understanding,
234 and they are sort of …forcing pupils to do things like talking.

Appendix 39: Exemplar transcripts Ruby

(Parent mediating her views)

22   R: OK erm so shall I ask now is that ok?

23   P: Yeah.

24   R: OK so you can see the questions I am going to ask you erm I just would like to know what

25   kind of school it is really?

26   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] Yeah. So,

27   it's a very large secondary school.

28   R: Okay. Okay. So, something about the size of the school so it's very large.

29   P: Very large yeah, quite concrete building.

30   R: concrete building. OK. Can I ask [Ruby], and it's just because I am very interested, but I

31   just wondered why large is kind of important in your non-ideal school?

32   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, R responds and P relays] 'there's lots of

33   horrible people'

211   R: Okay. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to share [Ruby] before we move on to

212   thinking about the adults?

213   P: No.

214   R: No? Okay. So, we'll move on to thinking about the adults. So very similar this time [Ruby]

215   we are thinking about the adults in the school and make a quick drawing of this in box 5

216   please.

217   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] So I am

218   interested to know [Ruby] in your nightmare school, what are the adults doing?

219   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] so the

220   adults are moving and walking around the school, like looking.

221   R: Okay. What are they looking at?

222   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays]. Yeah.

223   They're looking at [Ruby].

224   R: So it sounds like in this school as well there's a lot of attention on you isn't there? There's

225   lots of feeling of people kind of looking at you and…

226   P: Yeah.

227   R: and how does that make you feel with like the teachers…. kind of knowing that there's

228   that feeling of people looking at you?

229   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] she doesn't

230   like it. It makes it that she's on show.

609   P: Do you want to move on? Yeah, move on.

610   R: You're getting the hang of these cards

611   P: [Laughs]

612   R: Okay. We were thinking about the adults in the school that you would like to go to and

613   again you can make a drawing or write something about these adults in box five please…

614   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] She's just

615   wrote, she's wrote quite a few down.

616   R: Okay.

617   P: so, comfortable or making her feel comfortable, erm praising privately, showing her what

618   to do when she's struggling, checking in with her to see if she understands, er being friendly,

619   giving time, and the relaxed, non-pressured quiet approach.

620   R: Yeah. And when you say giving time do you mean giving you time for your work or kind of

621   giving you special time to show that you're valued or something else? In what way are they

622   giving you time?

623   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] To work.

624   R: Yeah. Okay. For work. Okay, so it sounds like they're quite supportive they're making

625   sure that you understand and that you know what you're doing, checking in on you, friendly.

626   And the praising privately, can I ask why that's important to you?

627   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] just less

628   attention, no one looking at her.

629   R: Ok thank you. And erm so, just one more question I hope you don't mind me asking and

630   you can absolutely say that you don't know, or you don't want to answer that's fine. I just

631   wondered in what ways do the staff make you feel comfortable.

632   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] just by

633   making sure she's okay.

634   R: Yeah. Lovely. Thank you so much. Again, is there anything that you would like to share or

635   are you happy to move on to the next part?

636   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] Move one?

637   Yeah, happy to move on.

638   R: I didn't ask. Are any of those standing out as the most important? Or are they all equal?

639   P: [mutes the volume and asks Ruby the question, Ruby responds and P relays] she said,

640   giving time.

Appendix 40: Exemplar transcripts Elsa

(Parent sharing her responses to follow up questions)
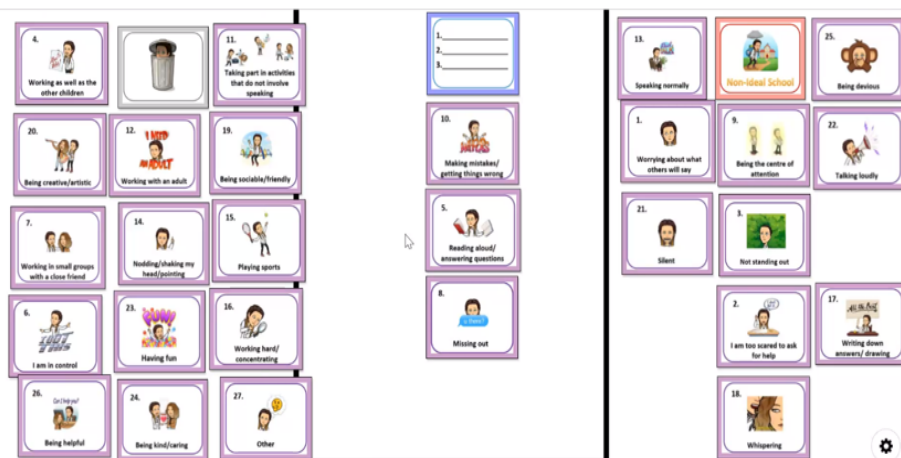
43
44 R: [Follow up questions] What kinds of mistakes might you be making in your non-
45 ideal school?
46 P: [reporting on behalf of E]…Mistakes in my work, being naughty.
47 R: What sorts of things might you be missing out on?
48 P: [reporting on behalf of E]…Going to the mile (daily walk they do every morning),
49 going to the dell/broken oak (outdoor learning areas).
50 [Interview resumed on the 18.9.2021 – Ideal school]
51 **R: School:** Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real
52 school. Share three things about this school. What kind of school is it?

R: Outside: Think about the outside areas you would like to be in. These can be any areas outside of the classroom, that you might go to at lunch or break times. For example, lunch hall/canteen/playing field/ playground.

60
61
62
63
64 R: [Follow up questions] What kind of activities might you be doing that do not
65 involve speaking?
66 P: [reporting on behalf of E]…Today we played a game of nouns and adjectives. One
67 side was nouns and the other adjectives. The teacher said a word and we had to go
68 to the side we thought was right.

Appendix 41: Exemplar transcripts with coding and themes Tris

The extracts show the initial codes the left margin. Themes and subthemes can be seen in the right margin.

Tris' exemplar coded transcripts

Codes	Transcript	Themes/Subthemes
Teachers as unfair Teachers as not accommodating individual needs Teachers as not understanding	T: Well. I think it's unfair because like a lot of. I know, another kid who like has like social anxiety. Not, exactly selective mutism but he's got selective not selective, social anxiety and he doesn't really speak that much, but a lot of the teachers give out like rewards for the speaking. Which I feel is unfair because you know, I'm still doing the work a lot of occasions better than everyone else in the class and they're only giving merits to like the kids who are speaking. P: There needs to be some equity on how contributions are rewarded doesn't there. R: It is so important that you're sharing this honestly and thank you for sharing that. That does sound really unfair because like you say you're, you're working, perhaps even harder and sort of better in, in most cases than lots of the other children, but actually, just because you're not kind of vocalising that erm you know you're not getting those rewards, which is, yeah. R: How does that make you feel in that situation then so when. You know others are getting rewards for speaking and you're sitting there working. And not necessarily getting that recognition.	**Theme: Ethos** (the foundations) Subtheme: Inclusion and Equality **Theme: Ethos (the foundations).** Subtheme: Inclusion and Equality
Feeling frustrated Feeling isolated/invisible Self-description as learning and concentrating	T: Well. Kind of upset and like angry I guess because you know, I'm not really getting noticed and I'm doing like lots of work. Whilst some of these people are still like on Question 2 and I'm on like Question 5 and they're getting merits for answering questions. I'm not though. P: Yeah, it's unfair.	**Theme: Personal Competences** Subtheme: Academic

284

Tris' exemplar coded transcripts (Continued)
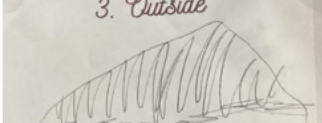
Codes	Transcript	Themes
School environment as crowded School environment as noisy Peers as unruly/unpredictable/uncon trollable Peers as boisterous not keeping their distance School environment as Disorganised/chaotic Feeling squashed Feeling restricted	T: Well, it's like the at my school because all the hallways are always crowded. And erm everyone is always pushing and shoving to try and get to lesson on time. And it's quite loud. R: OK. So, its erm very crowded in the kind of corridors, quite loud, and how does that make you feel when you're in that sort of environment when there's lots of lots of noise and lots of people, kind of crowding around. T: Sort of panicked. I don't. P: Are you having a think about that one or have you finished? She's just something a think about the answer to that one, I think. R: No worries, yeah. P: You, okay? What's up? T: Well, it's kind of like everyone's pushing, so you're kind of squished. And it's. P: So, it's coming into physical contact with people, not by choice? T: it's yeah. The one-way system makes it like better, but also worse at the same time because everyone's trying to like shove past. Erm and to try and get through the one-way system, but at the same time if it wasn't there, people would be coming like different ways up and down the corridor, which I feel like would be worse.	**Theme: The Climate** Subtheme: Familiarity Subtheme: Volume **Theme:** Person Characteristics Subtheme: Distance

Tris' exemplar coded transcripts (Continued)
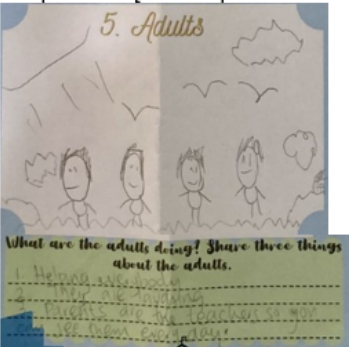
Coding	Transcript	Themes
Teachers as hindering positive views of school ←	T: So the putting pressure on me to speak happened last week on a Friday. The last lesson. The week was going so well and then it was just ruined 'cause she made me read out the entire slide. 'cause I was paying attention to the lesson and I I might look like I wanted speak, but I don't. I didn't at all. You know, I just liked the lesson and then she must have taken out the wrong way and thought I wanted to speak. But she made me read out an entire slide. And like PowerPoint slide and it was erm awkward I tried like shaking my head and saying I didn't want to, which she just kept saying. Now you've got to so.	**Theme: The role of others**
Self-description as learning/concentrating in school ←		Subtheme: Paving the way to a better understanding
Teachers as pressurizing to speak	R: OK So and you sort of mentioned that actually that spoiled the whole, you'd had a good week up until then?	**Theme Ethos:** Subtheme Opportunity
Teachers as not understanding ←	T: Yeah. R: But that sort of that ruined your whole week?	**Theme: The role of others.** *(RQ 2-CYP's current experiences impacted by impartial understanding)*
Teachers as unpredictable	T: If it was like just a sentence, it probably would have been better than the whole slide. You know, just a sentence might not of ruined the week, but then. The whole slide.	
Teachers as a deprivation of liberty ←	R: OK. So, what is it about it being the whole slide that made it ruin the week? T: Well. I feel like either my voice is gonna like crack through the sentence or I might my voice might sound weird. So, it's kind of when I'm speaking the further along, I go in a sentence, the more panicky I get about the sentence. Like maybe I said something wrong or.	
Fear/avoidance of the judgement of others ←	R: Sorry, I cut in on you there. You carry on. T: And yet just that I don't.	
Fear/avoidance of mistakes/getting into trouble ←	R: Yeah, OK, so it's kind of the the more you speak so the fact that it was more than one sentence. The more you were speaking, the more you sort of felt that your voice was sounding strange or cracking. And it was just getting harder.	**Theme: Construing** Subtheme: Fear related
Fear/Avoidance of talking in school	T: Yeah.	

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Appendix 42: Exemplar transcripts with coding and themes Coco

Feeling apprehensive/on guard

Outside as unpredictable

Teachers as unpredictable

The school environment as restrictive/ a deprivation of liberty

Teachers as a sources of anxiety

Outside as restricted in space

R: Ah we've got some, who are these people?
P: Who are the people [C]?
C: I don't know.
R: Are they children or Grown Ups?
P: Are they Grown Ups or kids?
C: Kids.

P: Do you want me to read what it says? So it says outside it is kind of fun but it's very scary because you do not know when a teacher is going to come out.
P: Oh and they're the strict teachers?
C: Yeah.
P: Yeah. Okay. So what are those things at the side?
C: Basketball hoops.
P: [Shares the picture] so those things there are basketball hoops.
R: So the kids have got smiley faces yeah?
C: because they're happy.
P: And what's this thing over them?
C: That's the prison
P: So they don't actually go out properly they're always inside?
C: Yeah. That is outside. They go outside but they go in something outside.
R: Oh right so they are never fully out?
C: Yes.

Theme: Climate
Subtheme: Familiarity

Theme: Layout and landscaping

Subtheme space

Coco's exemplar coded transcripts (Continued)

Teachers as supportive	C: erm. Helping everybody.	**Theme: Ethos**
Teachers as fair	P: Helping everybody. Okay.	Subtheme: Inclusion
	C: You are a fast writer.	and Equality
	P: I'm a bit older and mine's a bit messier than yours isn't it? What else are they doing? Shall I show [R] the picture? [shares picture with the screen]	

Teachers as informal	C: Laughing.	
	P: They're laughing.	**Theme: Person Characteristics**
	R: Oh wow, they've got some smiley faces there.	
	P: What else should we say about them? Who are they?	
Teachers as familiar/ like family	C: They're the mums.	Subtheme: Power
	P: Oh the mums.	
School environment as familiar	C: Yeah. And the dads.	**Theme: Climate**
	P: Mums and dads and they're in the school?	Subtheme: Familiarity
School environment as a home from home	C: Yeah. They're the teachers.	
	P: Oh. Okay.	
	C: So you can see them everyday.	

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Coco's exemplar coded transcripts (Continued)

Outside as providing opportunities for fun and play	C: cos I love play! P: you love playing out? C: yeah. P: is that the part of the day that you enjoy? C: it's the only part that I like in school, and I like art.	Theme: **Personal competences** Subtheme: Academic
Certain subjects/activities/parts of the school day as frequently available	P: You like art and you like going outside. R: can I ask why play time and art is the only part that you like about school? C: Cos I don't like any of the work. The worky tworky. P: He said the 'worky tworky' R: Ok thank you. Is there anything else you want to tell me about why you've put the outside there? C: No.	Subtheme: Social
Certain subjects/activities/parts of the school day as facilitating positive views of school	P: He changed that to being his ideal school I don't know if I showed you that. He put the outside at the ideal school. R: Okay. What about me? P: Okay so where did you put you? C: erm in the middle. In the centre somewhere. P: Okay. Why in the middle.	
Discrepancy between current and ideal self	C: erm. Cos, I feel nervous, and I don't. P: So I think you feel nervous sometimes and sometimes you don't? Is that what you mean. R: Ah ok. Yeah. P: he said half of the day that he does feel nervous and half of the day he doesn't.	**Theme: Construing** Subtheme: Flexibility
Emotional response as context dependent	R: Okay. In the half of the day that you're feeling nervous what's making you feel like that? C: [says something quietly to P] P: [Laughs] he just said I knew she was going to ask that. C: What? P; R: [laugh] P: So what is it [Coco]? C: What?	
Avoidance/Fear of making mistakes/getting things wrong/Failure	P: what is it that makes you feel nervous in school? C: when I get told off and I don't do my work. P: Right. Okay. C: No when I don't do my work, not cos when I don't do my work and then I get told off, I f, I feel nervous when I don't do my work. P: Yeah. Okay. I Can imagine that yeah. And what do you think could happen if you don't do your work? C: I get told off.	**Theme: Construing** Subtheme: Fear related

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Appendix 43: Provisional candidate themes

This illustrates how the initial codes sharing a core idea or concept were compiled to develop a shared pattern of meaning or theme. The list of codes was reviewed and grouped into similar areas.

RQ	Code descriptives	Theme	Superordinate themes
1	size/amount/space	Layout/landscaping	External processes
	External/internal appearance	Aesthetics	External processes
	Choice	Ethos	External processes
	Inclusion	Ethos	External processes
	Noise/volume	Climate	External processes
	Familiarity/predictability	Climate	External processes
	Learning	Climate	External processes
	Safety	Climate	External processes
	Traits/Role of others (Peers/teachers)	People/Crowds	External processes
2 & 3			
	Traits/Role of others (Peers/teachers)	External processes (seving to reinfoce/protect CYP)	External processes
	Traits of self	Internal processes (e.g., speaking identity; fear related cognitition	Internal processes
	Current views of school	Impacted by external/internal processes	

Appendix 44: Example of list of codes colour coded and grouped

	boring/repetitive		Peaceful/quiet
	crowded		Natural
	dark		a safe haven
	unpleasant		Calm/tranquil
	loud/noisy		hindering positive current views of school
	similar to the current classroom		disorganised chaos
	spacious		unstructured
	informal/relaxed		access denied
	child/pupil led		noisy
	not too busy		spacious/open space
	promoting individuality/ diversity/ acceptance		optional
	busy		not too many people/not crowded
	unpredictable		supervised
	big		unsupervised
			sectioned
A classroom with	accessible resources		Familiar/predicatable
	a close/best friend(s)		
	no desks	Peers as	Unruly/unpredictable/ uncontrollable
	sections/areas designated to pupils		boisterous/not keeping their distance
	space/ opportunities to 'recharge'		Supportive
	no whiteboard		Friendly
	high expectaions		happy
	a manageable workload		bullies
	clear explanations and expectations		excluding/ignoring
	not too many pupils		talking for me
	unknown/unfamiliar children		saying/thinking I cannot speak
			advocating
Seating as	flexible/ a choice		unpleasant
	increasing the possibility of being seen/exposed		"travelling around in big groups"
	better at the back		loud/shouting
	better with friends		Rude/ disrespectful
	a barrier in class		Intimidating
	a facilitator in class		Big/Tall
	at the front near the teacher		conforming to/following school rules
	distanced/spaced out		respectful
	depdenent on who I am with		quiet but not too quiet
	hindering positive current views of school		free to be themselves
			kind
Outside as	better than inside		understanding

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Appendix 45: Initial thematic map with codes RQ1

Non-Ideal | Ideal

| Unfair/Punitive | ← | Ethos *The foundations of the school* | → | Inclusive/ Restorative |

| Restrictions (space, access, choice) | ← | Superstructure: *The building blocks of the school* | → | Freedom (Space, access, choice) |

| Institutional | ← | Aesthetics: *Exterior and interior fittings* | → | Attractive/Homely |

| Hostile/ Chaotic Unsafe | ← | Climate *The cement binding the elements together* | → | Friendly/ Familiar Safe |

| Cautiously | ← | Navigating the school environment | → | Securely |

Appendix 46: Initial thematic map with codes RQ1

Appendix 47: Initial thematic map with codes RQ2

Super (structure) (em)powers

Acknowledgment

Accommodation

Approach

Connection

External Processes in school

Enabling Factors

Disabling factors

Super (structure) (dis)powers

Incomplete understanding

Reinforcing the silent role

Other's responses to the mutism

Social/Camaraderie

The malleable nature of speaking identity

Academic competence /strengths

Protective factors

Internal processes in school

Self-protective, maintaining Factors

Fixed aspects of speaking identify.

"Social Battery"

'Holding it together' in school

Fear of judgement and inadequacy- Inner Critic?

Appendix 48: Initial thematic map with codes RQ3

External Processes in school:
Room for improvement

Applying the Goldilocks principle

The role of others
Substructural scaffolding

Relaying the foundations

Not too big; small

Not too quiet/ loud

Approach

Accommodations

An ethos based on Mutual respect and Equality

The need for a better wider understanding of SM

Acknowledge me but don't draw attention to me

Advocacy

Internal processes in school
Summoning the Inner Ally

Management of and exposure to perceived threats

Assertion and Determination

Appendix 49: Revised thematic maps

RQ1: What do CYP with SM perceive as important features in an ideal and non-ideal school?

① Layout and Landscaping — space
  — Size
② Ethos: foundations of the school — Inclusion and opportunity
③ superstructure: The building blocks of the school — The People
  Traits of others | Crowds
④ The Climate: The cement that holds the school together — Volume
  familiarity
  Learning | safety
⑤ Aesthetics: The external and internal fittings

RQ2: What factors do CYP with SM perceive as influencing their current school experiences?

External processes:
The Role of others: Substructural Scaffolding
Peers | Teachers

Maintaing/ predicting

Internal Processes:
Cognitive Response
fear related Cognitions | flexibility

Emotional Response

Speaking Identity
Contextual | Conflicting
fixed

Competences/ Strengths — social — academic

RQ3: What do CYP with SM perceive as important in making their current school more ideal?

External Processes
- Relaying the foundations
- Paving the way to a better understanding
- Applying the Goldilocks Principle

Internal Processes
- Cognitive Responses
- Summoning the inner ally
- Assertion & Determination
- Emotional Responses
- Management/exposure to perceived fears

Appendix 50: Theme and subtheme descriptions for each research question

Research Question One: What do CYP with SM perceive as important features in an ideal and non-ideal school?

Superordinate theme	Theme/Subtheme Title	Description
External processes within school *These were captured as key features in the participants' views of an 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' school environment.*	**Theme: Layout and Landscaping**	Participants detailed important specifications across their ideal and non-ideal school environments and the feelings elicited when navigating aspects of the school.
	Subtheme: Size & Population	Size featured among the participants' responses with descriptions of *"giant"* (AT, 2/90), *"large"* (Ruby, 1/27) and *"big"* (Hannah, 18/942; Olive, 5/244) among participants' non-ideal school environments. A non-ideal school also meant a "crowded" place with "lots of people." Conversely, an ideal school for participants surrounded a smaller number of people.
	Subtheme: Space	The importance of physical space as well as space away from social situations represented a key element in the participants' school constructs. (e.g., "*I just like my own space*" stated by Olive, 8/423).
	Theme: Ethos	Participants referred to shared characteristics and common attitudes adopted within their ideal and non-ideal schools. This theme captured the participants' thoughts about inclusion, equality, and opportunities in the school they would not like to go to and their ideal school.
	Subtheme: Inclusion and equality	Being included socially and academically featured considerably in the participants' ideal school environment, whilst being ignored, left out or overlooked featured in the school that participants did not want to attend (e.g., *umm I would probably be by myself because I*

		probably wouldn't have any friends and I probably wouldn't know what to do, stated by *Isabelle,* /334-335)
	Subtheme: Opportunities	Choice and opportunities were another aspect of the school ethos described by the participants in their ideal school, whilst being denied these liberties featured strongly in participants' non-ideal schools. Participants expressed a strong desire for having their decision to verbally contribute (or not) during class discussions respected (e.g., *If you've got your hand up then it's like more OK. But erm being like picked on in lesson and forced to speak, or if they're like reading a book in English and you're like made to speak, that can be upsetting and annoying, stated by Tris, 2/63-65*)
	Theme: Person Characteristics (Superstructure)	Characteristics of people in school (staff and peers) played a significant role in the participants' responses within their environment.
	Subtheme: Power	Within their non-ideal school, participants perceived the behaviours and characteristics of peers and teachers as authoritarian or aggressive in their approach whilst an equilibrium of power between pupils and teachers is captured in the participants' ideal school with the application of more respectful and restorative approaches. (e.g., *Probably, the adults as well could be less strict if that makes sense so if somebody has done something wrong, they could try talking to them instead of shouting at them or punishing them*, Isabelle, 18/949-951)

	Subtheme: external characteristics	Participants referred to the externally visible or audible characteristics of peers and teachers. For some participants, external appearance may impact subsequent interactions with particular people due to them being perceived as "less relatable" (Isabelle, 5/22); "personally erm because kids more your age will understand better than adults will" (Tris, 39/1881-1882).
	Subtheme: Distance	In their non-ideal school, lack of distance was viewed both physically and through the expectations of others whilst in their ideal school; peers sought distance from expectations and as such, displayed a preference for teachers exercising "patience" (Isabelle, 18/933); giving "more time" (Ruby 9/453) and distributing work in "sections" (Hannah, 9/463).
	Theme: Climate	The school climate refers to the quality and character of school life and is captured as the metaphorical 'cement' that holds the school together. The previous themes feed into the climate. In essence, the climate reinforces the perception of school as a *"safe"* (Willow's ideal school card sort) or unsafe place for the participants.
	Subtheme: Volume	A central feature contributing to the climate, was the perceived level of noise within a school environment. Noise featured immensely among constructions of a non-ideal school and provoked emotional responses (e.g., "overwhelmed with all the noises," Olive, 17/915). Conversely, "quiet" (Isabelle 10/514) sound levels contributed to an ideal school climate with some participants associating this with feeling "relaxed" (Olive, 19/987) and calm.
	Subtheme: familiarity	Within a non-ideal school, participants described the climate as unpredictable, unfamiliar and unknown and a sense of inconsistency (e.g., "The adults are very nice sometimes, but

		they are mostly scary," Coco's non-ideal school). Conversely, familiarity was considered important in an ideal school. This meant bringing structure and predictability to aspects of the school environment (e.g., "I think I quite like a clear routine," Olive, 26/1408).

Research Question Two: What factors do CYP with SM perceive as influencing their current school experiences?

Superordinate theme	Theme/Subtheme Title	Description
External processes within school *were key factors in the participants' current views of school*	**Theme: The role of others**	People in the school environment were considered to play a critical role in shaping the participants' current experiences in school. Underpinning this was the impact that a partial understanding from others (e.g., peers and staff) had on their school experiences whilst highlighting the protective role of staff and peers who understand their needs (e.g., *I would have put them completely under the non-ideal but yesterday there was like, there is one teacher that has like understood, Tris* 45/2167-2169)
	Theme: Construing	This theme captured the participants' views of events in school (Fear-rated) and aspects of themselves (flexibility) which were considered potential factors in serving to maintain the mutism or facilitate positive experiences and/or recovery.

Internal processes within the individual *mechanisms within the participants may play a role in their current experiences in school*	Subtheme: fear related construing	Fear related constructs were captured among the participants and clustered under four main fears; 'Failure,' 'Being the focus of attention,' 'Judgment' and 'Activities with speech demands.'
	Subtheme: flexibility	This captured the participants' flexibility in their construing and willingness to compromise regarding their ideal school which may serve a protective factor in school.
	Theme: Speaking Identity	This theme captured the participants' views of themselves and their speaking identity.
	Subtheme: Discrepant	Participants revealed a discrepancy between their current and ideal speaking selves (e.g., "I want to say stuff but I, I don't think I can," Olive, 15/786) which may represent a motivation and willingness to change. As such, this discrepancy may serve as a protective or facilitating factor within the individuals.
	Subtheme: fixed	Within this subtheme responses indicated that aspects of the participants' speaking identity appeared to be more fixed and less open to change (e.g., "I wouldn't be doing that [speaking loudly] in my ideal school either," Olive, 15/801). This was considered to function as a self-protective factor and may therefore serve to maintain the mutism in school.
	Theme: Personal Competences	This theme related to the participants' self-identified academic and social competencies which were considered important in serving to protect and facilitate more positive experiences in school for the individuals.

	Subtheme: Academic Competence	Participants described a willingness and motivation to engage in academic activities appealing to their strengths and interests. These included creative (Coco; Tris; Willow); physical (AT, Elsa, Monkey); practical (Ruby; Willow); and curricular activities (AT; Monkey; Tris). Being able to engage in these activities was also considered an important factor in influencing more positive views of school.
	Subtheme: Social competence	The participants responses reflected an internal desire to seek connection with others. All participants described social connection and relationships with peers as important protective factors when rating their current school experiences (e.g., *And so it's kind of more comforting with like, someone who you're friends with in the same class as you,* Tris, 31/1511-1515).

Research Question Three: What do CYP with SM perceive as important in making their current school more ideal?

Superordinate theme	Theme/Subtheme Title	Description
External processes within school *in making their current school more ideal*	**Theme: The role of others**	Under this theme, the participants emphasised the protective role of staff and peers in facilitating more positive experiences in school. These included the importance of others adopting more inclusive approaches, demonstrating a better understanding of their needs whilst also highlighting the need to consider the unique contextual factors and preferences for each individual with SM.

	Subtheme: Relaying the foundations	This theme captured data regarding the importance of an inclusive, fair and respectful ethos in making participants' current schools more 'ideal'. This included the use of practical adjustments in class (e.g., *We did have a whiteboard activity in Spanish as well instead of just saying out loud, we got to like write down our answers. That's also a good idea. Whiteboards.* Tris, 54/2580-2586) as well as equal and respectful treatment of others in school (e.g., *because I think it's important to give everybody the equal amount of patience,* Isabelle 18/933).
	Subtheme: Paving the way to a better understanding	Responses highlighted the importance of others "understanding" (AT; Elsa; Isabelle; Ruby; Tris). Removing the pressure and expectation to speak was key for facilitating more positive school experiences as well as others taking an advocatory role when they felt unable to speak for themselves.
	Subtheme: Applying the Goldilocks principle and achieving the 'just right'	Participants sought an optimal school environment which, by the very nature of this principle was unique and multifaceted. Whilst the views for achieving the optimum environment were complex and varied, the theme highlighted the need to consult with individuals with SM so that their educational environment could better cater for their needs.

	Theme: Construing	This theme illustrated the participant's reflections upon their internal views of the world and events in shaping their responses within the school environment as well as suggestions in addressing these to make their current school experiences more 'ideal'.
Internal processes within the individual *mechanisms within the participants considered to play a role in facilitating more positive school experiences*	Subtheme: Managing the underlying mechanisms driving the mutism	Participants identified the role of internal processes within themselves serving to maintain the mutism whilst illuminating important suggestions for the management of these. For some participants, addressing the internal mechanisms meant restructuring the dominant constructs or fear contents which may enable them to develop more adaptive responses within their school environment. (e.g., "I think I spend a lot of time actually worrying about something that probably actually isn't that important, Isabelle, 19/984-985). For others, addressing the internal mechanisms centred around graduated exposure to the fear inducing situations (e.g., "Being brave" trying new things and "Forcing myself to speak," Tris, 56/2692)

	Theme: Personal Competencies	Within this theme, key strengths were self-identified by participants. These were considered a further internal mechanism important in facilitating more positive experiences in school/ recovery for some of the individuals.
	Subtheme: Assertion and Determination	Participants perceived a need to remain "determined to overcome" their difficulties (Monkey; Olive; Ruby) (e.g., *well I try and do it anyway because you know I have to speak at some point. That's just a fact. So, I'll try and overcome it as much as I can,* Tris 56/2689-2690) as well as exercising assertiveness in school (e.g., *Like when it's pretty much first given out, I tell them that I can't do it and they manage to change it a bit,* Hannah, 21/1096-1097). Together these internal competencies were considered key protective factors within some of the participants, important in facilitating more positive experiences in school.

Appendix 51: Condensed table of maintaining and protective factors *

Maintaining Factors in school	Protective Factors in school
Crowded places	Open places (e.g., fields; outside areas)
Lack of Space (physical and social)	Physical; personal space/time away from social situations
Places with high volume	Places to seek sanctuary from the noisy environments in school (e.g., quiet places/spaces)
Unfamiliar people; expectations (e.g., supply teachers; instructions not explained very well; chaotic environments with little 'order')	Places where there are familiar people and individuals know what is expected of them (e.g., structure; predictability; friends)
Loss of social connection/ social exclusion (Being ignored by other peers/teachers)	Relationships (friends); acknowledgement (from teachers)
Blanket approaches with little respect for the child's individual needs (e.g., need for challenge/ or clarifying understanding)	Acceptance of diversity
Lack of choice (made to speak; put on the spot; made to go outside at breaktime; go into the lunch hall at lunch time)	Choice (e.g., to speak if they want to but no pressure if not; choice of seating; alternative activities, where to go during unstructured times)
People who adopt an authoritarian Approach (e.g., shouting; sanctioning; large groups of peers)	People who adopt a relaxed/ informal approach (e.g., funny; flexible; approachable) mutual respect between staff and teachers
People with perceived 'different' external attributes to the individual's	People with perceived similar attributes to the individual's own perceived identity (e.g., quiet; younger)

own perceived identity (e.g., older; larger physique; loud)	
People who do not keep their distance (either physically; or by placing pressure or direct demands)	People who respect the individual's need for space (e.g., giving time; space; patience and reducing expectations)
Other's reactions towards the mutism (e.g., trying to help but may single individuals out as different or make assumptions or talk for them without consulting the individuals first)	Other's reactions towards the mutism (e.g., gentle/ subtle encouragement to be included; inclusion in lessons; social; activities in a way participants feel comfortable; advocating; accepting; accommodating)

Maintaining Factors individuals	Protective Factors individuals
Fear of being the focus of attention	Flexibility and willingness to change (e.g., aspects of school environment and self)
Fear of others judgement	Academic competences and interests
Fear of Failure	Social competences (willingness to engage in social and academic activities in school nonverbally).
Fear of speech demanding situations	Assertiveness/ Determination
Fixed aspects of speaking identity	Reframing the dominant fear related constructs underpinning the mute response
Feelings of helplessness; hopelessness	Gradual exposure to feared situations

Likely to be developed further for dissemination purposes e.g., presentation to the LA, SMIRA and infographics for local schools and services supporting pupils with SM.

* Could also be used by EPs to guide staff consultations e.g., by exploring the child's unique context and developing actions for reducing the maintaining factors and harnessing the protective factors.

Appendix 52: Draft list of strategies/ resources shared with EPs and schools

Key Resources	Summary of resource
Johnson and Wintgens the [SM manual](#)	Provides a comprehensive manual with a range of strategies for schools and parents of CYP with SM. (e.g., sliding in technique)
[The Ideal classroom for the SM child](#) – Shipon Blum	Shorter guide to making the classroom conducive to children and young people with SM
The [SMIRA](#) website (Selective Mutism Information and Research Association)	Has a wealth of resources for professionals and parents supporting CYP with SM. Also a professionals; parents Facebook page.
[Confident Children](#) (Lucy Nathanson, child therapist) website	Provides some resources/videos as well as a number of story books (e.g., [My name is Ben and I don't talk sometimes](#) which portrays a child's lived experiences of having SM)

Strategies that can be applied in the classroom (note every child's experience will be different and some these strategies may not be appropriate)

- Remove pressure to speak (e.g., offer a form of communication that the child can communicate through e.g., writing, drawing, card sorting, talking through a friend/peer; nodding/shaking head; IT, or talking tins/ recording devices)
- Not asking direct questions.
- Make sure that all staff in school (including lunch time supervisors; care takers; TAs, parent helpers) are aware of SM, and the child's unique needs. If the child knows everyone in the school community and they know them, they are less likely to appear 'hypervigilant' (worried that someone might talk to

them and expect them to speak) and more likely to relax into the school environment.

- As comfort grows and the child starts to communicate verbally ask closed questions (e.g., is that red or green?)
- Use humour as a way in.
- During talking activities such as circle time, provide the child with the topic of discussion in advanced and see if they would be happy to record their answer on a recording device or in a different way (drawing; writing if they are happy for their teacher/peer to read out their response during the activity).
- If comfortable to have voice heard but find answering the register difficult (invite the child to record their response on a device first so that they can press it when needed and remain included in this part of the day) Note: Often children with SM find 'standing out as different' or attention on them so this may not be appropriate in some cases, rather make adjustments to the way in which ALL children respond to the register (e.g., all respond using non-verbal communication or in a particular way)
- Offer activities so that the child can be included and demonstrate understanding non-verbally where ALL children respond in the same way, so that the child doesn't stand out as 'different' e.g., stand in this square/hoop/part of the room if you think the answer is A; write answers on white boards; thumbs up/down/ red/orange/green cards. Multiple choice questions/closed questions may be more appropriate (in terms of levels of 'risk' for the child)
- Include the child as much as they are comfortable to and always offer them a choice- do not allow children/staff to speak for them *all the time* as often children want to speak (to those they are comfortable with e.g., certain staff/ peers).
- Find out the child's preference of seating (some prefer the back, due to the attention, some prefer the front as this enables the teacher to spot when they need help, rather than having to put their hand up when stuck, also sensory overload etc – sensory needs often coincide with CYP with SM, particularly noise which they can find overwhelming and difficult to process in a classroom)

- Allow the child to sit next to a close friend that they feel comfortable to talk to.

- In group work, make sure that the child is placed in a small group of peers that they are comfortable to talk to (e.g., quiet/caring children).

- Children often find it difficult to ask for help/to go to the toilet/ to get a drink so ensure that there are accessible facilities/ or ways in which the child can communicate their needs/get their basic needs met in school at all times.

- Children with SM can find noisy/busy/crowded places where lots of people are congregated (e.g., corridors/ lunch halls/ playgrounds/ assemblies) very overwhelming. Offer choices and alternative indoor activities for children to participate in with a close group of friends or ensure there is plenty of space outside to allow them to feel comfortable to engage in playtime. Consider where the child sits for lunch, some children cannot eat in certain situations (e.g., worried that people are looking at them).

- Some children find PE very difficult (often due to the attention being on them) so consider this when planning PE sessions. Others really enjoy PE and extra-curricular activities such as organised sports as it enables them to engage at a 'level playing field' (e.g., non-verbally) equally others enjoy participating in creative activities such as art.

- Often children can find open-ended activities such as writing difficult, perceiving these as 'high risk' in terms of making mistakes. If this is the case, where possible offer 'low risk' activities as suggested in the SM manual (see resource above).

- Talk to the child but do not expect an answer/ do not take it personally if they do not speak to you.

- Hold the child in mind, and offer subtle ways of offering positive feedback/ rewards (e.g., post cards/texts to parents/ emails/ posit notes)

- If peers ask questions (e.g., why x doesn't speak) explain to peers that X does speak and will speak in school when they are ready.

- Consider the use of scaling/ check ins/ emojis to allow the child to share how they are feeling at different points in the day.

- Consider a therapeutic approach to allow the child to express themselves (e.g., play therapy; art therapy) (this would need to be adapted and sensitive to the child's unique needs e.g., removing pressure to speak).

- It is possible that spending extended time in social situations (e.g., classroom; playground; school in general) can their 'drain' their 'social battery' quicker and they will likely need to 'recharge.' This will often be in a calm, quiet environment, where social expectations/pressure is taken away e.g., 'reset tent' or 'recharge den' or using IT, reading, drawing or other negotiated with the child for a small period of time.

- During whole school assemblies/ performances; offer the child a role that they feel comfortable with (e.g., technician or prerecording their part) and consider their location (they may prefer to be concealed and not the 'centre of attention').

- Remember for children and young people with SM, it is not a choice to not speak so where possible empower them by giving them the choices that have been taken away from them.

- SM is underpinned by anxiety and so offer strategies to help children to begin to manage their anxieties (e.g., drawing/doodling; fidget toys – resources such as the [Karen Treisman grounding, soothing, coping and regulating cards](#) may allow children to explore strategies that work for them).

- One of the most important messages is that Adults and Peers in school can have the most significant impact on how children and young people with SM perceive their school environment. Ultimately, many children want peers and staff to understand/accept them, be friendly/kind, supportive and to value them as part of the school community. Whilst environmental strategies/accommodations are important, what appears to be more important is the approach of the staff and attitudes/perceptions and behaviours of children that appear to have the most significant impact. Therefore, it is important that all staff and children are educated and made aware of the impact of SM on children and young people, adopting a consistent supportive and inclusive approach across the entire school.

*The strategies were created based on the findings from the research with an aim to share successful practice already taking place in schools.

*The draft was shared with several EPs in the researchers LA EPS who approached the researcher for strategies and suggestions when supporting CYP with SM in school.

*It is likely to be developed and further refined for dissemination purposes e.g., presentation to the LA, SMIRA and infographics for local schools and services supporting pupils with SM.

Appendix 53: Criteria for Selective Mutism

DSM-V Diagnostic Criteria for Selective Mutism

1. Individuals present a consistent pattern of speaking in some situations where speech is expected but not in others

2. The failure to speak is persistent, lasting more than one month, but not including the first month in a new environment such as school

3. The failure to speak has a significant impact on educational or occupational achievement or social communication

4. Lack of knowledge or comfort with the required spoken language, or a disorder of communication of communication or a condition like social anxiety disorder, may also be present, but is not the cause and does not explain the mutism.

ICD-11 Diagnostic Criteria for Selective Mutism

1. Selective mutism is characterised by consistent selectivity in speaking, such that a child demonstrates adequate language competence in specific social situations, typically at home, but consistently fails to speak in others, typically at school.

2. The disturbance lasts for at least one month, is not limited to the first month of school, and is of sufficient severity to interfere with educational achievement or with social communication.

3. Failure to speak is not due to a lack of knowledge of, or comfort with, the spoken language required in the social situation (e.g. a different language spoken at school than at home).