The transition to mainstream primary school for children with Down syndrome: An exploration of the transition process in an Irish context, from the perspective of parents and school staff.

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March 2017

A dissertation submitted to University of Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of MSc by Research in Occupational Therapy.
Declaration

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Mary Hurley
March 2017
Acknowledgements

My gratitude to all the participants who generously gave their time to share their experience of school transition.

Also…

• Thank you to Dr Deirdre Connolly and Dr Michelle Spirtos for their patience, insight and guidance during this research. I really appreciate the learning opportunity this provided.

• Thank you to those wonderful friends who encouraged and supported me throughout.

• Thank you, Enda. Your support was endless and means everything.
Abstract

**Background:** This qualitative study explores the transition to school for three children with Down syndrome from the perspective of the parents and school staff involved. Research has identified the importance of the transition from home or early childhood settings to primary school for the child and their families and has also identified the challenges associated with the transition process for parents of children with intellectual disability.

Because of legislative and social changes both nationally and internationally, children with Down syndrome in Ireland, are increasingly attending mainstream primary schools, however little is known of how the transition process unfolds and how it is experienced by parents or school staff in an Irish context.

**Methods:** A qualitative description methodology has been used in this study. Multiple interviews were carried out with all participants over the course of the transition using a semi structured interview format. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning across the data and was used to generate rich, near data, description of the transition process and participant experiences.

**Results:** The three central themes were present in the data. These were; Home School Relationship, Social Engagement and Supporting Participation in School Activities. Both parents and school staff actively supported the child’s transition to school within the context of a fluid and dynamic transition process.

Challenges that arose during the transition process related to how communication between home and school was managed, varying expectations for social engagement and the requirement by parents and school staff for support from the service provider multi-disciplinary team.

**Conclusions:** The establishment of a positive collaborative relationship between parents, school and the disability service provider is central to how the transition is experienced. This relationship is underpinned by flexible communication and appropriate transition practices.

**Keywords:** Transition Process, Down syndrome, Mainstream Primary School, Irish, Parents, Communication. Peer Social Interaction, Transition Practices.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the background and rationale for the study. The aims and objectives are also briefly outlined and an overview of the methodological approach adopted is provided.

Background and Need

*Increased Participation in Inclusive Education*

Intellectual disability (ID) is characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours that arise before or during birth or in childhood (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Down syndrome (DS) is the most common non-inherited genetic condition associated with ID (CDC, 2006; Rauch et al., 2006).

Internationally, since the 1980's an increasing number of children with ID including children with DS are participating in inclusive education (Cunningham, Glenn, Lorenz, Cuckle, & Shepperdson, 1998; De Graaf, Van Hove, & Haveman, 2014; Thompson-Janes, Brice, McElroy, Abbott, & Ball, 2016). Social, legislative, and educational philosophy changes at international level have contributed to this change. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guidelines have advocated for equal access to inclusive, community based, quality and free primary education (UN, 2006; United Nations Educational & UNESCO, 2009).

In Ireland both legal challenges by parents, to the education system (Perry & Clarke, 2015), and social policy reports, such as the Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC, 1993), have highlighted the segregated nature of Irish special education. Subsequent education legislation and policy has focused on addressing this inequity. Most recently, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Oireachtas, 2004) and the Disability Act (2005) (Oireachtas, 2005) provides a legislative basis for educational provision for children with special education needs, and strengthened their rights to access mainstream education settings and associated resources (Rose, 2015).

Consequently, in Ireland, there has been a decrease in the number of children with ID in special classes in Irish primary school and a marked increase in the
number of children accessing mainstream primary education (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2016). The scale of change is illustrated by data from the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIID) showing 2106 children with ID in mainstream schools in 2014, compared to 703 in 1996 (Kelly, 2015).

*Transition to school as a significant event:*  
Research has described the lasting influence on children's progress of the first year in primary school, and has proposed that the transition to school is predictive of later school outcomes (Belsky, 1994; Margetts, 2009). Transition to school for children with special education needs including those with DS and their families, brings multiple changes and new expectations for the parent, child and school staff. For parents, the relationship with the school may also be quite different to that experienced previously in preschool. Typically, early intervention and preschool services for children with SEN are characterised by a family centred approach that incorporates regular communication and collaboration with parents (Dunst, 2002). In contrast, the relationship with the school may be different with reduced communication between the parent and school (Janus, Lefort, Cameron, & Kopechanski, 2007). School transition is also a vulnerable time for children with SEN, with challenges relating to communication, problem-solving, and adaptive behaviour (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006) and relationships with peers (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). For the child, there may also be the new experience of being evaluated in relation to the performance of others (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998). For teachers and school staff the transition brings expectations that they have the capacity to effectively support the child (Dockett & Perry, 2009).

*Transition to school as a significant process:*  
This section outlines the conceptualisation of school transition for children with ID as a significant process occurring over time that involves frequent reciprocal interactions between a variety of contexts. Villeneuve et al. (2013) describes school transition as “the events and the process of children moving from preschool contexts to school contexts, including the planning meetings prior to the move and the child’s and family’s experience during the first year of school” p10. School transition for children with special education needs has also been examined within an ecological framework that
emphasises the reciprocal influence of contexts (Curle et al., 2017) The influence of relevant child microsystems such as family contexts or school programmes and the interaction between these microsystems and the wider environmental influences are emphasised within this approach (Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007). Research has also established the importance of how the process of transition is managed, with an emphasis on the benefits of collaboration and coordination between school, families and other agencies, underpinned by a variety of transition policies and practices (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; La Paro, Pianta, Cox, & Allen, 2000; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Focus of existing transition to school research
Internationally, a small number of studies have focused predominantly on the parent’s perspective of school transition, with one study also comparing the perspectives of parents, teachers and school principals (Kemp, 2003). No studies that reflected the views of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) or Resource Teachers were located. Research with parents reveals several concerns and priorities including the importance of choosing the right school and the process adopted to achieve this (Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2011). The advocacy role adopted by parents during school transition is also presented (Hutchinson et al., 2014). Parents have also described a range of goals for the child during transition, including academic and behavioural goals as well as the importance of the child’s social acceptance and interaction with peers (Villeneuve et al., 2013). Despite the importance of the transition process, inconsistent implementation of policies and practices to support transition was highlighted within the studies located (Kemp, 2003; Villeneuve et al., 2013).

Absence of contemporary school transition research in an Irish context:
Research carried out prior to the enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 identifies the considerable difficulties encountered by parents of children with ID during the school enrolment aspect of school transition. Barriers included complex assessment and enrolment procedures, a lack of preparedness on the part of the school, and a frequently unwelcoming response by school principals (Flatman Watson,
There is a paucity of research on how the school transition is currently experienced by parents and school staff for children with DS in Ireland.

Study Aims and Objectives
This study aims to explore how the transition to school for children with DS is experienced by parents and school staff. The specific research objectives are:

- To identify key relationships within the transition process.
- To explore how the child’s transition is supported.
- To identify the key concerns of parents and school staff during the transition.

Overview of Methodology
A qualitative method has been used to address the study aim and objectives presented. Data was gathered from parent and school staff over the course of the transition from preschool to primary school using a semi structured interview format with a view to forming an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants (Mason, 2002) Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis (TA) as defined by (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A qualitative description approach within the broader qualitative framework was used to generate rich, straightforward, near data, descriptions of the experiences of school transition that (Sandelowski, 2010).

Conclusion
Increasing numbers of Irish children with ID, including those with DS are transitioning to mainstream primary education. School transition is an important and sometimes vulnerable time for children with DS and involves the interaction of families, school staff and external agencies and services. Contemporary approaches to school transition recognise that both parents and school staff are important to the success of children’s transition, and emphasises the need to understand their respective experiences of this process (Curle et al., 2017; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000)

In an Irish context, there is an absence of information about how school transition is currently experienced by parents and school staff for children with DS. This study seeks to address this gap.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction
This chapter explores the literature related to the transition to mainstream primary school for children with Down syndrome. This review is integral to the research process embarked on. By examining the literature and presenting current knowledge, gaps in research are identified, thus providing a rationale for the present study (Aveyard, 2010). The review is organised into three main sections. First, the literature search process is outlined. Next, DS as a condition is presented. This section also includes findings on health and functional factors for children with DS relevant to starting school. Finally, the concept of transition is explored, and the findings from previous studies that provide the perspective of parents and school staff of school transition for children with DS or ID are presented.

Literature Review Search Process
To locate literature relevant to the research question, a thorough search of electronic databases for research on education, health and children with disabilities were searched. These databases are listed in Table 1. Database searches were also carried out using the ‘Author’ search field. Manual searches of the reference lists in relevant articles and textbooks were carried out to identify literature not located via electronic search as well as to obtain details of primary research where applicable.

Table 1. Electronic databases

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<td>Academic Search Complete</td>
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<td>AMED - The Allied and Complementary Medicine Database</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Education Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINAHL</td>
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<td>Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson)</td>
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Search Terms: Search terms developed using keywords and concepts commonly associated with school transition and with children with DS. A list of search terms and search combinations is provided in Table 2.

Primary school transition research specifically for children with DS was not located thus the search terms for the literature review were broadened. As DS is the most common genetic cause of intellectual disability (ID) (Fidler & Nadel, 2007) the literature concerning children with ID was also considered relevant to this literature search. The terminology used to describe a diagnosis of intellectual disability varies geographically and this is reflected in the search terms used. ‘Mental Retardation’ refers to terminology used in the United States prior to the publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) while ‘Learning Disability’ is used in the United Kingdom (Farrell, 2012). Special Needs’, ‘Developmental Disabilities’ or ‘Global Developmental Delay’ (GDD) are also used interchangeably in the literature to include or to directly refer to children with ID (Suraez & Atchison, 2017). These terms were therefore included in the search. Identified literature was then examined to establish whether its findings related partially or wholly to children with ID or DS. Kindergarten is used to describe the first year of the elementary school program in Canada and the United States consequently this term was also used to identify literature originating in these countries (Canada, 2015; Fulbright, 2015).

Table 2. Literature Review Search Terms.

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<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Starting school or Move to school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Down’s syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Down syndrome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Mental Retardation (Terminology in United States prior to DSM V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school. and Learning Disability (UK terminology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school. and Global Developmental Delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school. and Special Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Kindergarten Transition or Starting school or Move to school. and Developmental Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Transition or Starting school or Move to school. and Resource Teacher or Special Needs Assistant (SNA) or School support or Psychological Assessment</td>
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- Diagnosis and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Incidence and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Prevalence and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Risk Factors and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Health and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Hearing and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Vision and School and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Language development and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Communication and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Play with peers and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Social interaction and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
- Functional skills and school and Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome
Inclusion Criteria.
Peer reviewed literature in the English language, including journal articles and text books are included within the literature review. No date restrictions were applied. Both qualitative and quantitative research was included.
To be included it was required that the sample populations of reviewed studies are wholly or partially composed of children with ID or DS within the age group related to the early primary school years. The exception to this age criteria is the section of the review concerned with transitions for persons with ID across the lifespan.

Exclusion Criteria. Literature that focused predominantly on children with physical, visual or hearing impairment is excluded as their school related needs have been identified as different to those of children with ID (Janus, 2011). Research relating exclusively to school transition for children with autism is also excluded because of their specific and differentiated support requirements and because a diagnosis of autism does not necessarily indicate the presence of an intellectual disability (Gillberg, 2007).
Studies published in a language other than English are excluded.

Intellectual Disability
As previously stated, the condition of DS is located within a broader diagnosis of ID (Sherman, Allen, Bean, & Freeman, 2007). Thus, the diagnostic and classification systems in respect of ID are described here. Both the terminology and the process of diagnosing ID have changed over time, and there are also differences in the terminology used internationally (Suraez & Atchison, 2017). Table 3 summarises and compares how ID is defined and diagnosed within two main classification systems, namely the, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition, (DSM-5, 2013) and International Statistical Classification of Disease (ICD-10).
A third system, The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) is not included in the comparison below but warrants a mention. Here, the level of ID is classified in relation to the basis of intensity of support needed for daily living (The National Academies of Sciences, 2015)
Table 3. Intellectual Disability Classification Systems

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<tr>
<td><strong>Mandating Body</strong></td>
<td>American Psychiatric Association</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Terminology</strong></td>
<td>The term intellectual disability is used and replaces “mental retardation” used previously in the previous version, DSM-IV.</td>
<td>The term ‘mental retardation’ is used in the current version, however the authors of the next iteration, ICD-11 have indicated that it will use the term ‘intellectual developmental disorders’ (Salvador-Carulla et al., 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core Components</strong></td>
<td>This system specifies three criteria that indicate an intellectual disability -Limitations in intellectual functioning -Limitations in adaptive skills -These limitations arise before the person’s 18th birthday, i.e. during the developmental period. (Suraez &amp; Atchison, 2017)</td>
<td>Like DSM-5, ICD-10 identifies three factors, cognitive development, skill impairment and arising during childhood. “Mental retardation is described as a condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind, which is especially characterized by impairment of skills manifested during the developmental period, which contribute to the overall level of intelligence, i.e. cognitive, language, motor, and social abilities. Retardation can occur with or without any other mental or physical disorder “ (WHO, 1996) p11</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Severity Categories</strong></td>
<td>Mild, moderate, severe, or profound</td>
<td>Mild, moderate, severe, or profound</td>
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<td><strong>Diagnosis Process</strong></td>
<td>The diagnosis process requires standardised intelligence testing but has removed intelligence quotient (IQ) cut-off points in defining the severity of ID present. Instead, the level of ID is based on the person’s adaptive functioning capacity in conceptual, social, and practical domains (Harris &amp; Greenspan, 2016)</td>
<td>For a definite diagnosis ICD-10 specifies that there should be reduced level of intellectual functioning resulting in diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the person’s normal social environment (WHO, 1996) IQ levels are used within ICD -10 as a guide to severity. IQ 50 to 69 -Mild IQ 35-49-Moderate IQ 20-34 -Severe IQ&lt;20-Profound (WHO, 1996)</td>
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Down syndrome

While children with DS have more differences than similarities there are also specific epidemiological and aetiological factors associated with the diagnosis and these are presented here. Literature findings related to the physical, health and cognitive and school function abilities of children with DS, are also included.

**Diagnosis:** DS is a lifelong developmental condition that is diagnosed either prenatally or after birth. Developments in prenatal screening methods resulting in an increased ability to identify DS during the first and second terms of pregnancy (Wolfberg, 2016). Prenatal screening comprises of maternal blood tests and ultrasound scanning while definitive confirmation of a diagnosis of DS prenatally involves invasive tissue sampling test (Radoi, Bohiltea, Bohiltea, & Cirstoiu, 2015). Diagnosis after birth is normally based on the child’s physical appearance and may if necessary be confirmed through blood tests (Cunningham, 2006).

**Causes:** Down syndrome arises through a process of non-disjunction at cellular level resulting in an additional whole or partial chromosome 21 within cells. (Flores-Ramírez et al., 2015; McDermott, Durkin, Schupf, & Stein, 2007). The extent to which chromosome 21 is replicated dictates which of the three distinct karyotypes for DS manifests for the child. Free Trisomy 21 (present in 90-95% of cases) occurs when each body cell has an extra copy of chromosome 21. Robertsonian Translocation (3% of cases) arises when extra material from chromosome 21 attaches to another chromosome, while mosaicism (1.3-5%) occurs when there is an additional whole or partial chromosome 21 in some body cells only (Cunningham, 2006).
**Risk Factors:** Advanced maternal age has been identified as the highest and most significant risk factor for DS, (Sherman et al., 2007) (Loane et al., 2013). Other risk factors have also been identified to lesser extent. In a small number of cases of translocation DS, (i.e. < 1/100) the extra genetic material has been inherited from the parents (Cunningham, 2006). Socioeconomic factors have also been scrutinised as a potential risk factor and in a review of 714 children with DS and 977 control families, a significant association between low maternal socioeconomic status and DS was detected (Hunter et al., 2013).

**Incidence and Prevalence:** A EUROCAT study of 20 countries, reveals Ireland to have the highest live birth prevalence for DS, and this was attributed to the absence of a legalised termination procedure in respect of foetal abnormality (Loane et al., 2013). It was estimated that 1 in every 550 live births in Ireland is a child with DS. This compares to US figures of a live birth prevalence of estimated at 12.6 per 10,000 for years 2006-2010 with around 5,300 births annually. The number of pregnancies relating to children with DS has increased significantly (Irving, Basu, Richmond, Burn, & Wren, 2008). This is attributed to an increase in the average age at which women are having their first child, coupled with the increased risk for DS associated with higher maternal age, (Crane & Morris, 2006) (Csermely, Czeizel, & Veszprémi, 2015). More widespread access to prenatal screening and pregnancy termination has however resulted in a relatively stable rate of live births for children with DS.(Wu & Morris, 2013). Additionally, survival rates for those children born with DS have continued to improve (Halliday, Collins, Riley, Youssef, & Muggli, 2009).

**Health Factors for Children with Down syndrome.**

For children at primary school going age, health factors described in the literature include those related to sleep (Ashworth, Hill, Karmiloff-Smith, & Dimitriou, 2015; Carter, 2009) respiratory conditions,(Barr, Dungworth, Hunter, McFarlane, & Kubba, 2007; McDowell & Craven, 2011), and gastrointestinal disorders, and hearing and vision difficulties (Khatri & Burttram Carlisle, 2016). Research has described the impact of some of these conditions on school function for children with DS who are of similar age or slightly older, than those
commencing school in the present study. A population based cross sectional study of 8-year-old children with DS found that all children had undiagnosed obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) indicating that OSA is prevalent in the early school years (Austeng et al., 2014). This is concerning in respect of the negative impact on the performance of daily function activity that has been demonstrated for children with DS between 5 and 18 years (Churchill, Kieckhefer, Bjornson, & Herting, 2015). Also for children with DS, research has indicated that recurrent respiratory tract infections were associated with developmental delay and increased risk of behavioural problems. (Verstegen et al., 2013).

Vision and hearing abilities are relevant to school participation and difficulties in these areas have been identified in the literature for primary school aged children. Cregg et al. (2001) suggest that difficulties with visual accommodation resulting in near vision being consistently out of focus has an impact on school academic tasks for children with DS. Also, in a study of 206 children with DS aged between 6-12 years’ visual organisation skills were found to be impaired in the youngest children in this study (Wuang & Su, 2011). Additionally, children with DS have a higher prevalence rate of congenital hearing loss than typically developing children (Laws & Hall, 2014). These hearing impairments have been shown to negatively impact on language development and communication (Tedeschi et al., 2015).

**School Related Functional Performance**

The school readiness or maturational approach traditionally identifies child characteristics as critical factors for understanding the child’s adjustment to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Contemporary ecological approaches to school transition suggest that to focus solely on the child’s characteristics is insufficient, and that the child’s ability to function in school is influenced by multiple contexts (Graue, 2006; McBryde, Ziviani, & Cuskelly, 2004). Nonetheless, literature that considers the impact of child factors for DS on school transition and school function may still have relevance, as the provision of information to families, schools and health professionals on areas of
functional need may assist with goal setting and intervention planning (Dolva, Coster, & Lilja, 2004).

Language, Communication and Social Interaction

**Strengths and Challenges:** Children with DS have relatively stronger receptive language skills than expressive skills (Sigman et al., 1999). Speech and language development is however an area of challenge for children with DS particularly in language production and intelligibility (Roberts, Price, & Malkin, 2007). Difficulties with both personal narrative skills (van Bysterveldt, Westerveld, Gillon, & Foster-Cohen, 2012) and difficulty signalling non-comprehension during social communication (Martin et al., 2017) may also impact on school function.  

**School factors:** Because of this, communication is an area of concern for parents of children with DS starting school and difficulties in these areas have been cited by parents as reasons for postponement of school. (Dolva, Lilja, & Hemmingsson, 2007). The potential for improved communication abilities is also one of the reasons that influences parent’s choice of mainstream school for their child with DS. Research indicates that children in mainstream settings demonstrate higher abilities in respect of vocabulary comprehension and expressive language in comparison to children with DS in special school settings (Laws, Byrne, Buckley, Glynis Laws, & Sue, 2000).  

**Supporting communication in school:** An Irish study has explored the use of key word signing by peers for 10 children with DS aged 6-7 years (Bowles & Frizelle, 2016). While peer recall and accurate formation of signs was a challenge, mainstream school peers demonstrated an understanding and an appreciation of the use of key word signing.

Learning, Self-Regulation and Behaviour  
Researchers have noted higher level off task behaviours for children with DS, including during visual perceptual tasks. These challenges have been cited as an explanation for cognitively avoidant behaviours by some children and as contributing factors in difficulty achieving new skills (Cebula, Moore, & Wishart, 2010)
Motor Skills
Children with DS experience delays attaining gross motor milestones. Once these are achieved however, participation in physical tasks in school is an area of relative strength, although recreational movement has been identified as a challenge (Daunhauer, Fidler, & Will, 2014). Studies have also described the difficulties with fine motor tasks experienced by children with DS because of underlying physical, visual-motor integration and developmental factors (Schott, Holfelder, & Mousouli, 2014; Spanò et al., 1999; Volman, Visser, & Lensvelt-Mulders, 2007). In the first year in school, skills likely to be present for the majority of children with DS include holding a crayon (23-36 months), tracing pre writing shapes 60-12 months, snipping with a scissors (60-96 months) while tasks such as tracing letter’s in name (108-144 months) may not to be achieved independently until children are much older (Frank & Esbensen, 2015). These findings have implications for the level of support and task adaptation required in school the first school year.

Self-Care
Toileting skills are acquired later by children with DS, with only between 10-30% of children achieving independence in this area at school age (Frank & Esbensen, 2015). In a Norwegian study, parents of children with DS feared that stigma for the child they were unable to manage toileting skills independently when starting school (Dolva et al., 2004). In a further Norwegian study with postponement of school placement by parents of children with DS, was associated with not having achieved independence in this area (Dolva et al., 2007).
Transition
Occurring throughout the lifespan, life transitions are typically characterised by a change in roles status, and activities. (Vogler, 2008). These transitions are also considered a regular and expected occurrence in all children’s lives as they move from home to early child care setting and onto to primary and second level education settings. These are characterised as ‘vertical transition’ involving an upward shift for the child both in terms of status and expectations (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). When managed well, life transition such as these, are associated with the child’s growth and development, and are associated with children moving forward with their lives and making progress (Kane, 2007). Conversely difficulties with early transitions place children at risk of failure and regression. (OECD, 2006).

Transition and Intellectual Disability
Transitions within the lifespan of people with ID include moving to, or leaving school, establishing relationships, gaining employment and transitioning to independent living away from the family home (Strnadová & Evans, 2013). Sources of stress for parents of the young person with ID relate to the capacity of the young adult to adapt to and to take on an adult role (Leonard et al., 2016), access to services and supports, (Isaacson, Cocks, & Netto, 2014), and social inclusion and access to employment. (Pallisera, Fullana, Puyaltó, & Vilà, 2016). The lesser volume of research concerning the transition from primary school to secondary school has been attributed to the low number of children making this transition (Cunningham et al., 1998). For parents whose children with DS completed this transition, the parent-school partnership at primary school was identified as contributing to inclusion and a similar relationship was also sought in secondary school (Lightfoot & Bond, 2013).

Transition to Primary School
The transition to primary school has been given prominence in the research literature, with the outcome of this transition suggested as having far reaching consequences for children in later school setting (Margetts, 2009).
Starting school has been described by some writers as a critical or sensitive period for the child (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). Changes are described as occurring simultaneously in the child’s internal world as their cognitive abilities develop, as well as in their external world in the form of a new physical and social setting and the interactions between these two events having potentially formative results in the child’s life (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989).

As a result of the move to school the child’s identity and self-image undergoes numerous adjustments (Ackesjö, 2013). Children develop an increased awareness of their own levels of competence or incompetence relative to peers, in response to the challenges and opportunities they encounter (Stipek, 1981; Wong, 2015). An increased emphasis on peer relationships in the new school context is significant in that children’s early social competence in a kindergarten setting has been shown to be predictive of outcomes in education and employment later (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

School transition requires both families and children to assimilate a new way of doing things. (Kane, 2007) has emphasised the contrasting pedagogical approaches between preschool settings, and primary school. While preschool settings focus on play and active, exploratory learning, in school where there is an expectation that children can sit, listen and respond to the teacher’s instruction. Similarly, the relationship between parent and school may be quite different to that experienced previously, with reduced opportunities for parent teacher informal communication compared to earlier childcare settings (Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005)

Parents are also required to adjust to increased expectations in relation to how they support their children’s education, collaborate with teachers, and adjust to new school routines McIntyre, Eckert, Fieste, Digennaro Reed, and Wildenger (2010).
Transition to Primary School for Children with Intellectual Disability

This section presents the literature on school transition for children with ID, including the literature identification process and methodological strengths and limitations of the identified studies.

The findings arising within these studies are then presented under relevant subtheme headings.

Literature Selection Process

A thorough search of the electronic databases specified in Table 1 was carried out using the key words outlined in Table 2. Studies located were then screened using abstract information and the study title to identify studies that related to school transition as experienced by school staff and/or parents. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were eligible for inclusion. Eligible studies were further scrutinised to identify those whose sample population was composed wholly or partially of children with ID. Ten published studies in total were identified using these relatively broad criteria and these can be divided into three categories based on the focus of the research. Seven of these part of large research programs linked with either universities or health organisations. These ten studies can be divide into three groupings for further consideration of methodology and in some cases the rationale for inclusion.

- Three of the ten studies were considered to most closely resemble the current research in that they examined the school transition over time and carried out multiple qualitative interviews with participants (Dockett et al., 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2014; Villeneuve et al., 2013). All three used a qualitative case study approach which is particularly suited to situations where a phenomenon’s variables and contexts are intertwined (Yin, 2006). The small sample size (n=3) in two of these studies may however limit the generalisability of findings (Stake, 2006). This potential limitation is counterbalanced by the multiple perspective case study approach used. The third study identified was carried out in partnership with two organisations responsible for the delivery of early childhood interventions (Dockett et al., 2011). Two forms of qualitative enquiry were used, namely case study and grounded theory with six case studies
constructed. Grounded theory is recognised as being well suited to uncovering social processes (Stanley & Nayar, 2014). Congruent with principles of rigor for grounded theory, the authors provide detailed descriptions of their written analysis notes (Charmaz, 2006).

A fourth study also adopted longitudinal perspective on school transition (Kemp, 2003). In this instance a quantitative approach was taken with data collected via interviews at middle and end of school year treated descriptively to reflect the perceptions of parents and school staff. The authors acknowledge the limitations inherent in using participants perception of school transition success as a measure of success while recognising that it is these perceptions that will guide parents and teachers. The role of the researcher in interpreting descriptive data such as this is highlighted by (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

- A further three of these 10 studies required additional consideration prior to their final inclusion because of their lesser focus on school transition in its entirety (Flatman Watson, 2009; Kenny, Shevlin, Walsh, & McNeela, 2005; Lalvani, 2013).

Two of these studies report the challenges experienced by parents of accessing mainstream school for their child, and are included because of the insights provided into the early stages of school transition. The third study concerns parent’s fears and concerns prior to their child starting mainstream school and is also distinguished by its research sample which is the only one of the 10 study identified composed exclusively of children with DS. Two Irish studies are included within this grouping, with both carried out prior to the implementation of inclusion oriented legislation such as the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005, thus may be useful in providing a historical context to school transition in Ireland. In a study of the capacity of the Irish primary education system to provide inclusive practices quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined to enables both the prevalence of non-enrolment practices to be described as well as parent’s experiences these practices (Flatman
Watson, 2009). Information was not provided however on format of the semi structured interview with parents or the school principal questionnaire or the data analysis process. The second Irish study required parents to recollect past experiences of accessing education including primary school (Kenny et al., 2005). The age range of the children concerned (13-22 years) indicates that a significant time had elapsed since the child’s transition to a mainstream primary school. This contrasts with the collection of data in real time during school transition in studies mentioned at the beginning of this section of the literature review. (Sandelowski, 1999) refers to participants having had enough time from the target event to process it and to that is “to transform the event-as-experienced into the event-as-told” p 82, and this is reflected in these parent’s accounts.

- The remaining three studies focused on specific factors related to transition including parental distress, child adaptation and child skills for transition rather than the transition process itself. One study examined the predictors of distress and wellbeing for parents during school transition using a quantitative approach with survey data gathered mainly online (Minnes, Perry, & Weiss, 2015). In this instance, the absence of corroborating observational data is acknowledged by the authors as a limitation. The transition of children with ID from a preschool program at Macquarie University Special Education Centre to kindergarten classrooms in Sydney has also given rise to two pieces of quantitative research one of which was included with the first grouping. (Kemp, 2003; Kemp & Carter, 2005). In both instances comprehensive and detailed descriptions of data gathering procedures and protocols are provided, including information on the pilot studies used to develop and refine the interview and observation instruments used. Researchers also described the close similarity between the pilot study sample populations and the respondent in the main studies. This similarity is a key factor in assessing the validity and reliability of data collection methods (Clifford, 1997).
Finally, a study by (McIntyre et al., 2006) on the adaptation of children with and without ID to primary school during transition collected data using a wide range of collection methods including child assessment, standardised parent report measures, teacher report measures and direct observation to ensure triangulation of data and to present a more complete picture (Clifford, 1997).

It is notable that all studies involving parent participants, primarily reported the views of mothers, reflecting a trend for greater participation in research by mothers of young children with disabilities (Crawford & Simonoff, 2003; Kluth, Biklen, English-Sand, & Smukler, 2007; Mueller & Buckley, 2014; Tétreault et al., 2014). Four studies included the views of the teacher and/or school principals (Flatman Watson, 2009; Kemp, 2003; Kemp & Carter, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2006).

Summary information for each study is presented in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Research Focus/Methodology</th>
<th>Research Sample</th>
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| (Villeneuve et al., 2013) | The Experience of Parents as Their Children with Developmental Disabilities Transition from Early Intervention to Kindergarten | To obtain the perspectives of parents of children with developmental delay on their experience of collaborating with professionals during their child’s transition from preschool to kindergarten using a qualitative approach.  
- Qualitative multi-perspective case study approach. | N=3 mothers  
- 4-year-old girl with DS syndrome  
- 5-year-old boy autism and visual impairment.  
- 4-year-old boy with GDD and fragile health. |
| (Hutchinson et al., 2014) | Understanding Parent Advocacy during the Transition to School of Children with Developmental Disabilities: Three Canadian Cases. | To examine the experiences of parents as advocates for their children over the course of the transition  
- Qualitative multi-perspective case study approach. | N =3 mothers  
- 4-year-old girl with DS syndrome  
- 5-year-old boy autism and visual impairment.  
- 4-year-old boy with GDD and fragile health. |
| (Dockett et al., 2011) | Starting school with special needs, issues for families with complex support needs as their children start school. | To report the experiences and expectations of 24 Australian families as their children started mainstream primary school. | Multiple Interviews with 23 mothers and 1 grandfather of 24 children with diagnosis that included DS, developmental delay, autism and behavioural needs. |
| (Kemp, 2003) | Investigating the Transition of Young Children with Intellectual Disabilities to Mainstream Classes: an Australian perspective | To obtain the perceptions of transition process including the overall success of the transition, the level of difficulty experienced in integrating the children, the supports needed for the collaboration among transition partners.  
- Descriptive quantitative approach | Mothers and associated teachers and principals for 33 children with ID transitioning to kindergarten during 5 successive years |
| (Flatman Watson, 2009) | Barriers to inclusive education in Ireland: the case for pupils with a diagnosis of intellectual and/or pervasive developmental disabilities. | An exploration of the capacity of the Irish primary education system to provide inclusive practices, specifically primary school enrolment practices for children with ID and/or pervasive developmental disabilities.  
- A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was used. | -Survey data from 245 primary school principals of which 90% worked in mainstream primary schools.  
-Survey data from 119 parents that included 60 parents of pupils with ID who had sought mainstream primary school places.  
-Thirty semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of parents. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenny et al., 2005</td>
<td>Accessing Mainstream: Examining the Struggle for Parents of Children Who Have Learning Difficulties.</td>
<td>The experience of parents of in relation to their efforts to access appropriate education and education supports for their child in the mainstream school setting as their child commences mainstream primary school.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview with ten parents of children with DS or general learning difficulties. -8 children with DS -2 children with general learning difficulties. Children’s ages ranged from 13-22 years at the time of data collection.</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalvani, 2013</td>
<td>Land of misfit toys: Mothers’ perceptions of educational environments for their children with Down syndrome</td>
<td>A study in which mothers reflected on their choices, expectations and perceptions of different educational environments, focusing particularly on their understanding of mainstream inclusive primary school classes in the first year of school.</td>
<td>Semi structured interview with nineteen mothers of children with DS whose ages ranged from 6 months-6 years.</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnes, Perry, &amp; Weiss, 2015</td>
<td>Predictors of distress and well-being in parents of young children with developmental delays and disabilities: the importance of parent perceptions.</td>
<td>To explore and compare predictors of distress and well-being in parents during their child’s school transition</td>
<td>N= 155 mothers -26% =mothers of children with ID -12% =mothers of children with DS -The remainder of the children had autism or other genetic diagnosis.</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
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- A quantitative approach was used. | Teachers for 33 children with ID transitioning to kindergarten over 5 successive year. |
| **(McIntyre et al., 2006)** | The transition to school: adaptation in young children with and without intellectual disability | To identify child characteristics that are predictive of early adaptation to school during school transition.  
Also, to investigate whether children with ID and typically developing (TD) children differed in their adaptation to school and on two specific predictors-self regulation and social skills,  
- A quantitative research approach. | Sixty-seven children and their mothers and teachers recruited as part of a larger longitudinal multi-site study in United States.  
-24 children with ID  
-43 TD children. |
To aid understanding of the findings of the 10 studies and identify gaps in the literature, research findings in respect of school transition are distilled into themes under the following main headings: 1. Parent Perspective of School Transition and 2. School Staff Perspective of School Transition.

Parent Perspectives of School Transition.
The views of parents focused on five main areas. These were; school enrolment, transition practices, accessing school supports, the parent's advocacy role and peer social interaction.

School Enrolment
The experiences of parents in accessing a school placement is a recurring feature in the research located and two Irish studies address this part of the transition process (Kenny et al., 2005) explored how 10 parents of children with DS in Ireland, sought to secure access to mainstream education and appropriate education supports throughout their child’s life. Parents described at each education entry point, including that of mainstream primary school, the attitudinal and institutional barrier encountered, with children with ID considered less likely to receive a school place in comparison to children with other needs (Kenny et al., 2005). Similar challenges are described in a subsequent Irish study of primary school enrolment for children with ID and/or pervasive developmental delay (Flatman Watson, 2009). Parents frustrated by a lack of support for informed decision-making in relation to school placement and by the perception that schools gave preference to children who were perceived by principals as easier to manage. Practices such as these resulted in 54% (n=64) of parents interviewed experiencing deferred or delayed admission for their child, or being subsequently advised to seek a school placement elsewhere.
The prevailing theme in an Irish context therefore was the existence of discriminatory enrolment practices with little regard for parent choice or the child’s right to mainstream education.
This contrasts with the more positive school enrolment experiences described in Australian and Canadian research with parents reporting being well supported in the early stages of school transition in relation to choosing and accessing school placements (Kemp, 2003; Villeneuve et al., 2013).
Parent Experience of Transition Practices

In an Irish context parents reported having to negotiate a complex school enrolment process with little support from services linked to their child or from schools. In the US, parents reported that the transition was not formally coordinated, however incidences of family members, school or early intervention staff member taking it upon themselves to coordinate the transition were identified (Dockett et al., 2011). Elsewhere, more positive accounts of transition practices were found, although difficulties still emerged. Kemp (2003) reported on the University based preschool transition program that included child preparation, parent support and support for receiving schools. Parents reported successful collaboration between home and school and of having the opportunity to be involved in the transition process. The most frequently reported transition practice by these parents was the receipt of information on choosing a school and the opportunity to visit the future school and to meet with school staff, although the adequacy of these school orientation visits was queried, by parents. In a Canadian context, the extensive support in the initial stages of the transition has been described with families having access to an inter-professional team at preschool level to support transition preparation. This included supporting families to enable them to effectively communicate their child’s strengths and needs to the school (Villeneuve et al., 2013) Subsequently all families noted an absence of supports or structures once school commenced and reported being unsure who to contact for follow up in respect of decisions taken at a previous transition planning meeting. In addition, the absence of agreed home school communication channels, meant that it was challenging for parents to meet with teachers and to exchange meaningful information with the school (Villeneuve et al., 2013). A main finding from this study was the need for a key facilitator in the school setting to ensure adequate communication between school and home and to support families during the first school year. Overall, these findings suggest that while transition practices are utilised for children with ID that a great deal of variation exists in how they are implemented and in their effectiveness.
Accessing school supports
The difficulties experienced by parents in relation to accessing school supports have been presented in several studies with these difficulties relating to both the process of assessment required as well as delays in receiving information about supports granted or receiving supports. Two studies report the difficulties related to the assessment process. Parents in an Irish study described the struggle to obtain professional reports required to access resource teaching and/or special needs assistant support for their child. In many instances parents reported having to source and pay for these assessments themselves (Flatman Watson, 2009). Elsewhere in a US study, the linking of supports with the child’s assessed level of ID was problematic with parents distressed by the need to emphasise their child’s weaknesses in order to obtain supports (Dockett et al., 2011). Parents have also described the frustration at delays in receiving information about the school supports the child would receive (Hutchinson et al., 2014) and in receiving supports granted (Kemp, 2003).

Parental advocacy
In both Canadian and Australian and research parents adopted an advocacy for the child. The first of these studies identifies four aspects parent advocacy in relation to school transition, including knowledge of self and rights, communication and leadership. During the transition instances in which parents embodied each aspect of this advocacy role were identified. Parents were well informed and actively shared the information gathered with health and education professionals during the transition (Dockett et al., 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2014). There was also an expectation of reciprocal information sharing by parents although, practically achieving this was challenging because of contrasting preferences for communication methods, between teacher and parents (Hutchinson et al., 2014).

While positive outcomes for parents of taking on an advocacy role are noted, there were also disadvantages. The impact of taking on this role for parents was feeling a sense of responsibility or blame when the transition did not go to plan as well as the frustrated felt when school staff made judgements about what the child’s abilities that differed to that of the parents (Hutchinson et al., 2014).
In other research with parents of children with developmental delay including children with DS and ID, parental empowerment along with the capacity to reframe experiences occurring during the transition been linked to parental wellbeing (Minnes et al., 2015).

Peer Interaction and acceptance.

The child’s social engagement with peers received limited attention in transition studies for children with ID. In one Canadian study, parents were described as focusing at various intervals on academic or social inclusion with one parent believing that academic inclusion would lead to social inclusion, however, parent or teacher expectations or supports for social engagement with peers was not a main focus of the study (Villeneuve et al., 2013). A US study that explored the perceptions of mother of children with DS of their children provides some additional insights. The importance of peer acceptance and group membership was highlighted, with mothers questioning whether their child would be included in social with and by peer (Lalvani, 2013). The possibility of social isolation for their child was a key consideration for these parents and the overall belief that inclusive education settings were places where children with differences were likely to be rejected or ignored by their peers was a consistent finding within this study.

School Staff Perspective of School Transition

The limited research concerning teacher perspective of the school transition focused on supports for the transition and on child school adaptation factors.

Supports for the transition

Research that illustrated the perspective of school staff in relation to transition for children with ID including DS was very limited and tended to focus instead on the perspective of the school principal.

In an Australian study, the perspectives of 33 teachers were sought in respect of the ease of integration of the children with ID and the supports that had been received for the transition (Kemp, 2003). While most teachers in this study felt adequately supported during the transition, one third of those involved believed that additional supports were needed. Supports perceived to be missing included provision of classroom assistance for the child, one to one interventions and therapy. Direct support for the teacher sought included in-service training,
assistance with writing individual education plans (IEPs) support for behavioural incidents and for the content of the child’s program (Kemp, 2003). Teachers considered the parent’s attitude as the most important factor contributing to success of the transition (Kemp, 2003).

Child school adaptation factors
Two quantitative studies explored the teacher’s perspective of factors related to the capacity of children with ID to cope with the demands of mainstream school setting in the first school year. A US study that included 24 children with ID and 43 typically developing children, sought to determine which child characteristics were predictive of early adaptation to school (McIntyre et al., 2006) Data collected from both parents and teacher indicated that social skills were predictive of positive school outcomes. Correspondingly, deficits in adaptive behaviours and excesses in maladaptive behaviours were the biggest threat to school adaptation rather than the child having an ID per se (McIntyre et al., 2006).

Self-help skills relating to independent behaviour and classroom skills such as listening, responding, and participating were nominated by teachers as critical for school success during school transition for children with ID (Kemp & Carter, 2005). Interaction skills and compliance skills were also commonly listed with language and communication skills, early academic skills and fine motor skills were less frequently listed. Children rated by their teachers at the end of the year as being more successfully included had better on-task behaviour and responded better to group directions than those rated as less successful (Kemp & Carter, 2005)

Gaps in Research and Rationale for Present Study.
An ecological perspective of school transition suggests that the views and experiences of the key adults such as parents and school staff is central to understanding transition (Curle et al., 2017). School transition is also a collaboration process between parents and schools as well as other agencies and organisations (Rous et al., 2007).

The purpose of this review was to examine the literature on school transition, for children with ID including DS, and to better understand how the transition is
experienced by parents and schools staff. A small number of relevant studies were located. Primarily this literature focuses on the views of either parents or teachers. Research that examined concurrently the experiences of parents and schools staff was limited and only in one instance were the views of both parties obtained (Kemp, 2003). For teachers, the concerns identified focused on the classroom supports for the child as well identifying direct supports for teachers that were required. Research with teachers also identified that child factors were considered important in the first year in school with an emphasis on the ability to follow teacher instruction, to demonstrate on task behaviour. While limited in number, studies that incorporated the views of parents provided some insight into their experiences of school transition. This included parents positive and negative experiences of transition practices as well as the challenge of obtaining appropriate supports for the child. The advocacy role of the parent is given prominence in one study.

In an Irish context, no studies have examined how parents have experienced the school transition process in its entirety. Information on the teacher’s perspective of the transition process overall is very limited and the views and experiences of SNA’s or resource teachers are not reported at all. An ecological perspective of school transition suggests that the views and experiences of the key adults such as parents and school staff is central to understanding transition (Curle et al., 2017). This study seeks to contributing to addressing the gaps in literature identified.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction
This study explores how parents and school staff experience the transition to mainstream primary school for children with DS. In this chapter, the qualitative approach used to address the study aim is presented. The methodological choices are discussed and justified and the steps and procedures followed during the research process are made explicit (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Santiago-Delefosse, Gavin, Bruchez, Roux, & Stephen, 2016). The methods used to select the research sample are explained and the data generation and analysis practices are presented. The steps taken to strengthen quality within the research are appraised. Finally, ethical factors are considered and the merits and limitations of the research design are discussed.

Research Aims and Objectives
This study aims to explore how the transition to school for children with Down syndrome is experienced by parents and school staff. The specific research objectives are:

- To identify key relationships within the transition process.
- To explore how the child’s transition is supported.
- To identify the key concerns of parents and school staff during the transition.

Choosing a Qualitative Methodology
To address the research aims and objectives in this study an overarching qualitative approach has been selected. Originating from a naturalistic enquiry perspective, qualitative research is underpinned by a desire to understand a phenomenon, event or process from the point of view of those experiencing it (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Research questions that focus on the how and why of processes occurring in complex contexts and including the perspectives of multiple stakeholders are well suited to a qualitative methodology (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Within the qualitative approach there are several qualitative enquiry frameworks. (Patton, 2015) has referred to “a rich menu of alternative
possibilities” p96. In designing this research, certain methodologies were excluded at an early stage. Ethnography is most suited towards developing an understanding of how behaviour reflect the culture and characteristics of a group (Finlay, 2006). As this type of knowledge was not central to the current study, this approach was excluded. Phenomenology examines situations in the everyday world from the perspective of the research participant with view to synthesising the reported experiences into a ‘typical experience’ (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). This approach was also excluded because of concerns that it’s focus on individual experiences would not enable the researcher to adequately important capture aspects of the school transition process. Three approaches were subsequently considered and these comprised of grounded theory, case study and qualitative description. A grounded theory approach to research seeks to develop theoretical knowledge that is grounded in the data in relation to a specified social interactions or processes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Rowan & Huston, 1997). The exploratory nature of the research being undertaken here resulted in the subsequent elimination of this approach. A case study approach which is frequently used to develop knowledge on a little known or poorly understood situation and for examining change occurring over time has been used in other qualitative school transition research (Hutchinson et al., 2014; Villeneuve et al., 2013). This approach was subsequently eliminated and this will be discussed further within the Limitations of Methodology section. A qualitative description approach was subsequently adopted and the rationale for this is outlined in the next section.

Qualitative description
Qualitative description (QD) is a method of naturalistic inquiry that enables the researcher to provide a clear, recognisable account of the varied, overlapping and shared experiences, events, and processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005). The transition to primary school for children with ID is complex, involves multiple stages and interactions, such as preparing for school, school enrolment and establishing relationships. As an approach QD has been used successfully to examine research questions that are similar in to the
one proposed here, namely, how events and processes are experienced as they unfold and to examine how supports and (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). While Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, and Sondergaard (2009) note that the analytical process and presentation of data, using QD stay closer to the data, interpretation at the level of the researcher is also critical to its use. This view is supported by Sandelowski (2010). She emphasises that the data never speaks for itself and that it is the duty of the researcher to make something of the data. In the present research, this was achieved by clustering together common ideas from multiple participants to form themes and subthemes (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016).

**Research Design**

Developing an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants in context, over time, and over a process, is central to this research and requires a research design that addresses this. A social process is defined as a series of events or actions involving human interaction that occur over time. It involves change and has a beginning, an end and a series of events and actions and interactions (Lofland, 1995; Patterson & Morin, 2012). Villeneuve et al. (2013) has described school transition as “the events and the process of children moving from preschool contexts to school contexts, including the planning meetings prior to the move and the child’s and family’s experience during the first year of school” (p10).

**Interview Schedule.**

The transition to primary school is conceptualised here as a social process with distinct stages and key participants and with this having an impact on the research design. Interviews were carried out at four separate research stages that comprises of pre-transition, start of first term, start of second term and end of school year. (See Figure 1).

Individual interviews with key participants at each stage of the transition process was chosen as the method of data collection and aimed to obtain data that was rich and meaningful with increased depth and breadth (Adams et al., 2002; Polkinghorne, 2005). Through collection of data at four points during the transition, it was possible to obtain participant’s initial expectations, to gain an
understanding how the transition unfolded, and to capture perceptions, outcomes and reflections at the end of the first school year (Patton, 2015). Allowing adequate space between interviews enabled participants time to experience, and reflect, on each transition stage as well as allowing sufficient time for the recording, transcription and analysis of interviews (Calman, Brunton, & Molassiotis, 2013).
Figure 1: Participant Interview Schedule.

Pre-Transition
Interview 1 with parents (n=3)

Start 1st School Term
Interview 2 with parents (n=3)
   Interview 1 with:
   Class teacher (n=3)
   Resource Teacher (n=3)
   SNA (n=2)

Start 2nd School Term
Interview 3 with parents (n=3)
   Interview 2 with:
   Class teacher (n=3)
   Resource teacher (n=3)
   SNA (n=2)

End of School Year
Interview 4 with parents (n=3)
   Interview 3 with:
   Class teacher (n=3)
   Resource teacher (n=3)
   SNA (n=2)
**Sampling Method.**

In a qualitative study where the researcher seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of the transition to mainstream primary school, a sampling procedure that allows this is required (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this study, a purposeful sample approach was used. Through including key participants to the transition process, purposive sampling has the potential to provide unique, personal and rich information over the course of the school transition. (Mason, 2002; Milne & Oberle, 2005).

From the literature review and from the researcher’s professional experience as an occupational therapist, parents and primary school staff, comprising of class teacher, resource teacher and SNA were identified as most directly involved in the transition over time. As parents and the class teacher would be in close daily contact with the child, over the course of the transition, they were positioned to provide in-depth and ongoing information on the research topic. Resource Teachers and SNA’s have varying roles in relation to with children with DS during the first year of school (Carey, 2008). Their views on the transition process are not however reflected in the literature thus indicating a requirement to include these participants.

The inclusion of participants with a variety of roles and professional and personal experience aims to identify shared experiences or concerns that cut across participant roles. Shared patterns arising in this way have significance from having emerged out of participant heterogeneity within a small sample size (Patton, 2015).

At the pre-transition interview stage interviews were completed with parents only. At that point in time, school principals were unable to confirm which staff members would be working with the children concerned, thus school participant interviews commenced in the first school term.

**Recruiting of Participants**

Due to the longitudinal nature of the study, it was necessary to complete data collection in geographical areas close to the researcher. Within the relevant area in Leinster, there were two main disability service organisations, identified as having the potential to provide access to parent participants. Both services were contacted and were interested in facilitating the study.
In line with ethical research practices, direct contact with potential participants was not made in either of the two organisations during the recruitment process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Contact with gatekeepers in both organisations was established and research information was provided by the gatekeeper to all parents of children with DS confirmed as transferring to a mainstream primary school class in the forthcoming school year. Families were not contacted by the gatekeeper about the research if they had a professional relationship with myself. This was of particular importance as the researcher is employed by one of the disability services. Once a parent consented to being involved in the study, school class teachers, resource teachers and SNA’s were approached via a gate keeper in the respective schools.

Sample Size
Five children who were due to transition to a mainstream school were identified by the gatekeeper. Of these, 3 families agreed to participate. While both parents were invited to contribute to the research in all cases only the mother of the children chose to become involved. All school participants associated with each child chose to participate in the research. This resulted in a sample size of 11 participants directly connected to the children’s transition. This is outlined in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Research Participants for each child.](image-url)
**Data Generation**
To reflect change occurring during the school transition process, a longitudinal data generation approach was selected (Dubé, Schinke, Strasser, Couper, & Lightfoot, 2015; Holland, Thomson, & S., 2006). As previously described, this entailed the completion of multiple interviews positioned at each stage of the transition process. This approach also aligns with the QD approach described earlier. Interviews completed over time with parent and school participants who are in the midst of the transition process enabled the generation of a rich descriptive database (Willis et al., 2016).

Semi structured interview format

Semi structured interviews are ideally suited to qualitative research questions where the experiences of the participants are the focus of inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A minimally to moderately structured interview guide is characteristic of a QD focused research (Neergaard et al., 2009). Used in a skilful way, it allows the participant to recall events and experiences and construct meaning in the telling (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Mason, 2002). It also assists in building rapport between the interview and interviewee (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Not only did this interview approach provide scope for the researcher to ask spontaneous and unplanned questions, it also allowed participants to raise issues that had not been anticipated (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

When formulating interview questions both before and during interviews, maintaining the sense of context in relation to the transition process was prioritized (Mason, 2002). Topics in the main part of all interviews were influenced by the interview context, i.e. the stage of the transition underway. For example, at the start of the school year, questions on how the child was assisted to settle into school were posed. In later stages of the transition questions on the child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) and on how school staff collaborated with each other became relevant. This involved asking questions about specific experiences.
Development of an Interview Guide
The interview guide for this study is contained in Appendix 8. It was designed to
gather participant experiences throughout the transition process. Questions for
each of the research stages interview stages were generated from a review of
the literature and from the researcher’s reflections and experience of working
with children transitioning to school (Braun & Clarke, 2013). At each stage
questions in relation to challenges and successes for that stage of the transition
and supports were included.

Interview stages and focus of questions were:

**Stage 1. Pre-transition**
This interview stage sought to understand how parents were preparing for school
and to gather information on the initial contact they had with the school.

**Stage 2. Start of first term**
Here the parent’s initial perceptions of school were sought, including how the
child was being supported and how communication with the school was being
managed. For school staff question areas included getting to know the child, how
communication with parents was being managed, and how the child was being
supported.

**Stage 3. Start of second term**
*Parent question:* What if anything is different from last term?
For school staff questions sought information on changes to the staff members
role/focus with the child and how collaboration with colleagues was managed.

**Stage 4. End of school year**
A final interview was held with parents and school participants at the end of the
first school year. Its purpose was twofold; to find out what was happened at that
point in the transition as well as to provide participants with an opportunity to
reflect on the transition. This latter part of the interview incorporated principles of
member checking and member reflection (Tracy, 2010).

To refine the interview questions and identify any challenges that could potentially
arise during the interview process a pilot interview was carried out (Willig, 2013),
(Doody & Noonan, 2013). This involved a Parent, a Class teacher, Resource
Teacher and Special Needs Assistant who had been recently involved in the
transition process.
Further additions and amendments to questions occurred throughout data collection as new topics and themes emerged (Mason, 2002). Early analysis of prior interviews influenced questions in subsequent interviews. For example, in Interview 1, Parent 3 had emphasised the primacy to her of the relationship between the SNA and her daughter. Subsequent interviews with this parent then included questions on her perceptions of this relationship as the school year progressed.

Conducting Interviews
At the core of qualitative research is the desire to expose the human part of a story. Good practices adhered to in pursuit of this goal included active listening, the use of open questions, rephrasing of questions, probing comments and prompts, and the adoption of an empathetic and neutral demeanour (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Patton, 2015). To maximize convenience for participants and to facilitate minimized disruption to the natural context all were invited to select a venue and interview times that most suited them (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Two parent participants selected to meet in the health center that was already familiar to them, while the third parents requested that interviews be held at home. All school participants requested that interviews be held on school premises. The interview duration ranged from 25-55 minutes with an average duration of 40 minutes.

Recording and transcribing of interviews.
Each interview was audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim to facilitate subsequent data analysis.
Transcribed interviews were checked by the researcher against audio recording for accuracy. Transcripts were then uploaded to qualitative data software program Nvivo 10.

Data Analysis
As previously described an overall QD approach was used in this research to develop clear, recognisable accounts of participant experiences of school transition. Within this QD approach there was a requirement to assemble data obtained from multiple participants into themes and subthemes (Vaismoradi et
In this study this was achieved using thematic analysis (TA). Braun and Clarke (2013) has emphasised that in using this method of analysis that the data does not speak for itself, rather the researcher speaks for the data.

Thematic Analysis Process
Thematic analysis is one of the most frequently used pattern based data analysis within qualitative research (Willig, 2013). Its usefulness in analysing how participants experience events and processes has been supported (Thompson-Janes et al., 2016) TA is characterised by a six stage recursive analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These stages are briefly described in relation to their use in this study.

Data Familiarisation /Immersion
Familiarisation with the interview data collected was achieved by repeated listening to interview recording and reading of interview transcripts. Items of potential interest were initially noted and highlighted on paper copies of transcripts. To understand the data the researcher reflected on how parent and school participants made sense of the school transition process, why they saw a situation in a particular way, for example why parents believed their child had to be at their very best for the start of school. (Clarke & Braun, 2013)

Open Coding.
Within the open coding stage, a code was described as a concise and informative label or phrase that identified data with the potential to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Open coding of data was carried out during data collection as well as in the data analysis stage of the research (Saldana 2015). A complete coding approach was used initial to ensure all relevant material was considered (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As a precursor to identification of themes, over time a single comprehensive coding framework was created, with new codes added and existing codes modified as subsequent interviews were completed during the transition timeframe. (Saldana 2015). A strategy of constant comparison was adopted in creating and reviewing code also aimed to contribute to research quality (Patton, 2015).

Searching for Themes
A theme represents a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question and is actively created by the researcher (Clarke & Braun,
In the present study three potential themes were created initially in respect of school transition process. As these themes were constructed, the researcher considered also the relationship between themes and if they could linked together to meaningfully address the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

**Reviewing Themes and Defining and Naming Themes**
Themes were rigorously reviewed throughout the research process to ensure that they coherently represented the entire data set. Considerations at this stage also included the scope and boundary of each theme to ensure sufficient data to justify and support each one (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Finally, in defining the name of each theme, consideration as given to the essence of each to ensure that it authentically reflected an aspect of the school transition process experience (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

**Presentation of findings**
The three themes created from the data are presented in Chapter 4, Results Chapter. The themes are presented with three associated subthemes that reflect the progression within each theme over the transition.

**Qualitative Analysis Software Program**
Data organisation and analysis was facilitated by using NVivo (Version 10; QSR International, Doncaster, Victoria Australia). This is a software program designed to assist in the management of qualitative data and while NVivo is useful program for storing and visualising the data, the researcher remains responsible for the process of analysis and interpretation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). To become familiar with the NVivo program was time consuming but necessary to ensure that software features were used to generate accurate data summaries. The practical benefits of NVivo included increased efficiency and flexibility in managing data from multiple sources as well as the ability to change codes and themes over time (Cope, 2014). Visualization of data in the analytical process through the creation of hierarchical coding categories and visual models was useful in providing clarity and new insights (García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009).
Research Quality

Research quality in qualitative research encompasses a range of factors and relates to all aspects of the research process from establishing the scope and purpose of the research, research design, data analysis and interpretation, reflexivity and ethical dimensions (Walsh & Downe, 2006). Numerous quality frameworks also have outlined factors that specifically enhance quality in qualitative research (Santiago-Delefosse et al., 2016). Research credibility is a key component to ensure that the study findings are credible as the experiences of the parent and school participants is considered vital to answering the research question (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Specific strategies recommended by the literature to enhance quality and credibility include, accurate transcription and use of participant voice, prolonged and varied time with the participants, member checking and triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Other indicators include the application of methodological, interpretative and narrative transparency as well as researcher positionality and reflexivity (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Prolonged engagement with participants:
The longitudinal approach adopted for this study aims to illustrate how the participants experienced change over time and to capture rich data (Calman et al., 2013). Multiple points of contact with parents and school staff during the first school year produced an awareness of the context of school transition that might not otherwise have been achieved with data collected at a single point in time (Patterson & Morin, 2012). Additionally, over the course of the 13-month period an increase in trust and rapport with research participants was facilitated, resulting in participants providing more detailed and reflective accounts of transition events (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Oosterveld-Vlug, Pasman, van Gennip, Willems, & Onwuteaka-Philipsen, 2013)

Member checking and member reflections:
All participants were provided with the opportunity to examine their completed transcripts with a view to ensuring that their responses were accurately recorded. For methodological and logistical reasons, participants were not however provided with results of analysis to review. Given the volume of interviews
involved and the ongoing nature of the interview process it was felt that there would be insufficient time to adopt this approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Instead a process of member reflections was adopted (Tracy, 2010). This entailed checking back with participants regarding issues raised in previous interviews, and providing an opportunity for questions, critique, feedback and affirmations (Saldana 2015; Tracy, 2010).

Transparency:
Through description of the research process including discussion of how the research question evolved, how data was generated and analysed as well as through openness about the strengths and limitations of the research transparency was prioritised throughout the research process (Tracy, 2010). Regular engagement with the research supervisor formed a core part of the research process. Through this interaction, assumptions about the data and methodology were challenged and new avenues to explore identified.

Triangulation:
Triangulation has traditionally referred to the use of two or more methods, data sources or researchers, to examine the same phenomena with the aim of getting close to the truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A view more congruent with qualitative research is that triangulation is a way of obtaining different versions of the phenomena being studied, so that a richer fuller story in acquired rather than a more truthful one (Flick, 1992). By listening to the experiences of parents and of school staff with a variety of roles it is acknowledged that there is no one reality against which results can be verified or disputed, rather different versions of the school transition phenomena are revealed (Flick, 1992).

Researcher Reflexivity
The researcher’s interests background, contextual knowledge, assumptions and biases all have the potential to impact on the interaction with study participants and the data collected (Forbat & Henderson, 2003). To both acknowledge and manage this, strategies used by the researcher included the completion of a reflective journal, maintenance of awareness of the researcher’s positioning in
relation to the research topic, as well as engagement in discussion and debrief. (Probst, 2015).

Researcher positioning.
Consideration was also given to the researcher interviewing style and the impact this potentially had on the participants and on their responses. The researcher as an instrument in qualitative research is described by (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). After listening to recording after each interview subtle changes in interview style and in phrasing of questions occurred throughout the process. As an early intervention occupational therapist working the area of early intervention, I have an ongoing interest in the primary school transition for children with ID. The researcher’s day to day role includes supporting children and families as they transition to various school options, including mainstream school. The initial research topic arose out of the experience of observing how these transitions to mainstream school unfold for children with ID.

Ethical Considerations
Qualitative research focuses on the reality, meaning and experiences of participants therefore adopting an ethical approach is recognised as both complex and critical (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While ethical approval is essential and was provided by both disability services and from Trinity College, Dublin, ethical research goes beyond this. The protection of participants from harm or loss and the preservation of their wellbeing, and dignity is central to the ethical approach adopted during the research process and the later stages of dissemination of findings. (Willig, 2013). While maintaining an overall ethical focus, several core issues were considered. These were; informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, addressing unintended consequences, and the right to withdraw (Willig, 2013),(Braun & Clarke, 2013) Adequate communication of the intent of the research is also discussed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).
Informed consent:
For all participants, informed consent was obtained face to face and in writing. A minimum of seven days had elapsed between potential participants receiving the study information and obtaining of written informed consent from those intending to participate. Consent was first obtained from parent participants. This included consent for the researcher to contact the school gatekeeper (school principal) and to subsequently have study information circulated. All school participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that parents or other connected to the child would not be advised of their decision regarding participation. Participants were advised in writing in that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences and without any other parties being made aware.

A qualitative approach has the potential to reveal unexpected data or take an unplanned direction (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To address this unpredictability, consent continued to be verbally obtained at the start of each interview and participants were reminded also at each meeting that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Confidentiality
Both confidentiality of data and the anonymity of study participants were considered as a core component of an ethical research approach at all stages of the research process (Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2006).
Assurances of confidentiality were provided to participants both in writing through the Participant Information Leaflet and Informed Consent form as well as verbally at each meeting (Kaiser, 2009). Gatekeepers were sourced and utilised in each disability service to distribute study information to manage confidentiality. Within data transcripts pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants. Additionally, specific information that had the potential to identify participants that is necessary to set the context of the research was changed to generic descriptions (Morse & Coulehan, 2015)
The multiple perspective feature of the research design presented its own concerns in relation to confidentiality. During interviews, the researcher was vigilant when framing questions to ensure that comments made by one participant
were not shared directly or indirectly with the parent or other school staff. Forbat and Henderson (2003) describe this approach as a means for researchers to ethically protect their research subjects in situations where multi perspectives on a common process or experience is sought.

To ensure security and confidentiality of research data typed information relating to the research is stored on an encrypted and password protected computer to which only the researcher has access. Data collected during the research process in the form of voice recordings and typed information will be stored until the research is complete. After that it will be kept under lock and key for five years and then destroyed.

**Unintended consequences:**
The researcher was aware that participating in this research had potential for unintended consequences, particularly for parent participants. Parents may not have had previous opportunity to deeply reflect or articulate feelings in relation to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). To address this, parent participants were made aware of supports available and also that they could discontinue or reschedule the interview at any point or leave the study if they wished to do so without repercussions (Patton, 2015). This was not however necessary however during the research.

**Adequate communication of the intent of research.**
The purpose of the research and they type of knowledge sought was explained to potential participants within the participant information leaflet and at then initial meeting. It was also explained that the research was part of a postgraduate master’s degree. Parent participants expressed interest in the potential role of the research in bringing about positive results for children with DS and school transition. In these instances, the researcher explained that publication of the finished research might contribute to the discussion on school transition for children such as theirs but that on its own it was unlikely to bring about change (Wiles et al., 2006).
Limitations of Methodology
The present study is exploratory in nature, therefore through the appraisal of its methodological approach and examination of the methodological approaches for other school transition research, suggestions for methodologies for future school transition research can be considered.

Chafe (2017) considers both positive and negative aspects of the qualitative description approach used in the current study. The relatively straightforward approach inherent in QD may assist engaging a range of stakeholders at a level they relate to in order for them to better understand a situation and potentially effect change (Chafe, 2017). He also acknowledges that for some researchers, qualitative description can be viewed merely as a journalistic account of what was seen, what people report as having happened and their reports about what they thought about it.

The three existing qualitative studies most closely related to the current study have effectively used alternative approaches to QD (Dockett et al., 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2014; Villeneuve et al., 2013). In each instance, a case study approach was used and in two instances multiple perspectives were obtained. A further strength of two of these three studies was the use of observational data both at home and in the classroom to see first-hand what was going on and to understand and capture its context (Patton, 2015). This approach resulted in contextualised accounts of each child and their family and the production of thick description of specific aspects of the transition from the parent’s perspective and to explore both similarities and unique aspects of their experiences. A fourth study that also examined experiences of school transition by parents and school staff used a quantitative approach to produce data on both participant perceptions of transition success and to explore the relationship between transition factors (Kemp, 2003).

These outcomes suggest that school transition can be successfully explored using a variety of methodological perspectives including that of multi-perspective case studies and using a quantitative design.

Both the absence and the importance of the child’s perspective in relation to the school transition is acknowledged. The children whose transition is the subject
of the research were aged 5-6 years old with a diagnosis of Down’s Syndrome and varying degrees of verbal and nonverbal communication skills. While it is possible to elicit the children’s, perspective using verbal, visual or assistive technology based communication systems it was beyond the scope of this research to do in a manner that would have reliably and validly captured the child’s perspective (Bedoin & Scelles, 2015).

There are also limitations for the purposive sampling method used which may have implications for this study. The mothers in this study constituted a relatively homogeneous group in terms of age, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. Two participants were recruited from the same disability service provider thus there may be similarities in their understanding and expectations of their children’s school transition.

The sample size for a qualitative research project depends on several factors including the type of knowledge sought and purpose of the inquiry and the breadth and depth of the information sought, and what can be done with available time and resources (Braun & Clarke, 2013) (Patton, 2015). The small sample size for this research limited as it is to the transition for three children with DS means that it is not possible to generalise the finding from this study. However, by maintaining a relatively small number of participants it was possible for the researcher to see each participant’s identity clearly while at the same time providing the potential for comparison and triangulation (Robinson, 2010a).

Instances of ‘lost data’ may have arisen where the need to maintain confidentiality superseded the need to ask participants about matters mentioned by other participants (Forbat & Henderson, 2003).

Participants may in some instances have felt constrained by what they could or should reveal about their own attitudes. In some instances, particularly for less experienced staff members there may have been a desire to say the right thing and the face to face nature of the interview may not have suited these participants.

Finally, while the researcher had not engaged in qualitative research previously and did not have experience of qualitative interviewing, experience of carrying out interviews with family members in a professional capacity was helpful in managing and completing the interviews.
Conclusions
In line with a desire for methodological transparency the purpose of this chapter was to present the methodological approach used. Decisions made at recruitment, data collection and data analysis stages were presented and the iterative nature of the research process was highlighted. The methodology employed aims to support the examination of a process (i.e. school transition) using a multiple participant perspective. The specific thematic analysis approach used to analyse data is described and evaluated. Both ethical factors and methodological limitations are highlighted to enable the reader to evaluate the research accordingly. Chapter Four will outline the results obtained using the methodology presented.
Chapter 4: Results Chapter

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with parents and school staff directly involved in the transition to primary school of three children with Down syndrome. Interviews were carried out at four stages of the transition and included the process of school enrolment and the three school terms. The three central themes present in the data were, *Home-School Relationship*, *Social Engagement* and *Supporting Participation in School Activities*.

Child and Participant Profiles.
To provide context for the findings an overview of each child and brief description of each parent is presented. This is followed by a description of the school participants.

Child 1 was a five-year-old girl with Down syndrome. She was the oldest of three children and the first child in her family to start primary school. She was reported by her mother at the outset to have good verbal communication skills although speech clarity was a concern. In contrast to the other two children, Child 1 did not have a moderate level of ID or require personal care assistance and therefore was not eligible for a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support in school. The school principal, however arranged for some classroom support for Child 1 from a volunteer SNA who was not directly involved in this research but to whom school staff referred. The school was unfamiliar to both Child 1’s parents at enrolment. Child 1’s mother, who participated in this research worked full time within the home.

Child 2 was a five-year-old girl with Down syndrome. She has a moderate degree of intellectual disability and a hearing impairment, necessitating the use of a hearing aid. Child 2 was described by her mother as a shy, but pleasant and lively. While she communicated verbally, her mother reported that her speech was very unclear. Child 2 required SNA assistance for toileting. She had one older sibling who attends the same school, thus her parents were already familiar with the school. The school principal was newly appointed but Child 2’s parent had met him previously and were aware that he had a background in resource teaching. Child 2 missed two weeks of school in the second term because of a
hospital admission and subsequently missed eight separate school days because of outpatient appointments. Child 2’s mother worked part time outside the home. Child 3 was a five-year-old girl with Down syndrome and a diagnosis of moderate intellectual disability. She was the oldest of three children and was also the first child in her family to start primary school. Child 3 was reported by her mother to be a shy child who could communicate verbally although her words were not always clear. She required SNA supervision for toileting. Child 3’s mother was a past pupil of the school chosen and had also completed part of her teaching practice there as a student teacher thus was familiar with the school. She worked as a primary school teacher and had commenced job sharing once Child 3 started school.

All three children had attended a mainstream pre-school for at least two years prior to starting school.

Prior to starting school each child was linked to a multi-disciplinary early intervention team with disability service providers that specialised in intellectual disability. At the commencement of school or shortly afterwards each child was transferred internally within these organisations to a multi-disciplinary school team.

The class and resource teachers working with these children reflected a variety of professional experience and perspectives. They can be divided into two categories, those who had substantial professional experience (10-14 years) and those who had started work relatively recently (≤ 3 years).

For Child 1’s SNA this was her first primary school post. Prior to taking up the SNA post she worked in a mainstream preschool setting. She had not worked with a child with Down syndrome previously. The SNA for Child 2 had worked as an SNA for eight years and had previously worked with children with Down syndrome.

Table 5. Participant abbreviations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child 1: Parent 1=P1/ Class Teacher 1=T1/ Resource Teacher 1 =RT1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child 2: Parent 2=P2/ Class Teacher 2=T2/ Resource Teacher 2 =RT2 /Special Needs Assistant 2 =SNA 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Research themes and subthemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home-School Relationship</th>
<th>Social Engagement</th>
<th>Supporting Participation in School Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Uncertainty and anxiety</td>
<td>• Hopes and Priorities</td>
<td>• Supporting Child at Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing Trust in the School</td>
<td>• Factors that Impact on Engagement</td>
<td>• School Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managing Communication</td>
<td>• Supporting Peer Engagement</td>
<td>• School Support Factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: Home-School Relationship.

Figure 3. Home School Relationship

The early stages of the transition were characterised by uncertainty and anxiety for parents. This included their concerns about the potential response of the school principal and staff, and incidences of not knowing key information.
Subtheme 2: The response of the school principal at school enrolment and subsequently during the school year was influential in allaying parental concerns about the school’s acceptance of the child. As the school year progressed, parents began to trust the school and to feel that their child belonged there. The features of the school’s staff interaction with the parents and child that enabled this trust are presented.

Subtheme 3. Communication was central to the establishment of a relationship between home and school and how this was managed is described here. The way in which ‘negative’ information was communicated to parents was found to have a significant impact on one parent’s perception of the school transition.

Subtheme 1. Uncertainty and Anxiety

Apprehension about the school’s response.

When explaining the decision to send the child to a mainstream school parents adopted a rights’ based approach and expressed a hope that society would become more tolerant:

“The school should be willing to teach all children. They are as entitled as anybody else to go in there.” P1

“You would hope that if more people had that experience of the positive aspect of people with special needs, and an acceptance of people with special needs as being different but the same, that maybe, society would become more accepting of people who are different, and that you won’t run into the issues that you can run into as a parent of a special needs child, you know.” P1

Parents’ hoped that their prospective schools would also believe in this right, and that there would be genuine acceptance of the child, however, hearing from other parents of children with disabilities in other schools, caused them to doubt this possibility:

“I have heard stories from other families where every year there’s more and more hints that she should be going to special [school]…that idea that they didn’t feel she should be there, but they were tolerating her because they had to. That was my biggest fear.” P3
“I know other parents who have children with the same like with Down Syndrome as well and ... and it's a battle, a battle every... even just the routine stuff is a battle” P2

The possibility that the teacher would focus on difficulties was also a concern over the summer months:

“They might be coming to me with problems saying look, you know, she’s not toilet trained yet. When are, you going to sort this out? We had to change twice and you know, it's not really on.” P3

Parents also described the contrast between school and the prior preschool setting at the beginning of the first school term:

It’s a more structured environment. There’s stuff that has to be done...it’s not as like fuzzy and warm as a little preschool is, they [the preschool staff] all knew her inside out ... she was very safe and minded and I know a school cannot replicate that. P2

For parents, the distress and uneasiness felt in the lead up to school continued

To characterise the transition during the first school term:

“I was surprised to realise about halfway into September that I was in very bad form. I was stressed, waiting for something to go wrong even though everything was going well... there has to be a catch somewhere, we’re being setup for a fall here kind of feeling.” P3

Transparency of transition process.

Parents reported several incidents whereby they did not have key pieces of information in relation to the transition process and how this contributed to the uncertainty and anxiety felt.

The process of obtaining SNA and Resource Teacher support was a source of confusion. Parent 2 reported becoming aware of the gaps in her own knowledge in relation to her child’s entitlements:

“So, it was principal in the school rang me up and she said, if you get a letter from the visiting teacher you will get additional resource hours, I
wasn’t aware that you need another report ...resource hours and one-to-one and general allocation and all these new terms that you’re not familiar with, I mean I thought resource hours were resource hours.” P2

Despite having undergone a lengthy assessment and application process uncertainty remained over the summer as to the level classroom and teaching support the child would receive:

“I didn’t know whether she was going to get an SNA or whether she’s going to get resource hours, you know and I really felt she needed if not a full-time SNA, quite a lot of support from the SNA to manage that kind of step and I didn’t know she was going to get that…. like if you could know more, that definitely she is going to get an SNA for this amount” P2

The first meeting with the teacher and SNA at start of school was significant for all parents and while welcomed it also contributed to uncertainty in respect of the way in which the meeting arose, with each parent describing an ad-hoc arrangement whereby the principal, teacher or parent themselves initiated the meeting.

“I didn’t know they were doing [this] and it would have been nice if we knew this was coming but they brought me and Child 2 in the day before she started school.” P2

It was distressing also for one parent when she realised that the SNA she met initially would not in fact be working with her child:

“The first day I met an SNA who was lovely and it was her that I met the following week with the teacher as well...I assumed that that would-be Child 3’s SNA but actually that SNA was an SNA for another girl in an older class who was with Child 3 until they got Child 3’s SNA hired.” P3

The significance of this mix up is explained by the importance placed by parents on the relationship with the SNA:

“I suppose maybe other parents are worried about who the teacher will be... I’m just hoping that the relationship with the SNA for everyone, child to SNA, teacher to SNA and us to the SNA all works out well, I think that will be kind of vital” P3
Subtheme 2: Developing Trust in the School

Over the course of the school year parents identified a range of the circumstances that alleviated the anxiety and uncertainty described previously, and that contributed to the establishment of a trusting relationship. These included the welcoming response of the school principal, the approach taken by school staff in getting to know the child and meet their individual needs. Parents also appreciated having the opportunity to present a true picture of the child to the principal and school staff.

Response of school principal

Several features of the principal’s interaction reported as encouraging by parents considering the uncertainty that had been described previously. For all parents the time provided by the principal at the first meeting and during subsequent meetings was highlighted:

“the principal met with us and we thought it would be a twenty-minute thing and it was an hour-and-a-half of a meeting.” P1

It was the perception of parents that the principal had made an extra effort to welcome the child and this was influential in relation to how parents felt:

“we brought her in and, the principal came out and met her and brought her into the office and had a little book and a teddy bear as a gift for her, so I was nearly in tears already ... really I was overwhelmed that they would have gone to that trouble to make her feel welcome, they acted as though she was very welcome which made me feel very welcome.” P3

Parents are also reassured by factors that suggest the principal understood what it means for a child to have Down syndrome and that the attitude to inclusion was genuine.
"the school itself are very receptive towards not just particularly Child 2 but any child with special needs that they’re very receptive towards it...and whole thing was very positive about having children that are different" P2

“They have a lot of children with Down Syndrome. They’ve had about six, so at least one or two every year” P1

The positive impression created by the principal is reinforced as the school year progressed by the ease with which parents could approach the principal:

“it’s an open door” P2

Parents also expressed appreciation that the principal attended the child’s IEP meetings.

“The principal was there. Myself, the class teacher, the SNA and the resource teacher. I thought it was lovely that she thought it was important enough to come, you know that way because, you know, in a lot of ways she didn’t need to be there but I think, I can tell even from her and it’s a lovely feeling how fond she is of Child 3, you know and even in such a big school with so many children how fond she is of her and I suppose that’s the feeling I got by her even being there, you know” P3

True picture of the child.

All parents reported how critical it was that they could present to the school a true picture of their child. Feeling constrained in this regard when completing the SNA application for her child had been a concern for Parent 3:

“having to exaggerate things and then having to go back to the school and say listen, you know, while I didn’t lie don’t worry too much, you know, sometimes your first contact with the school has to be [this]worst case scenario of your child and so I felt like what if they really think this is her.” P3

Other parents described how valuable the first meeting with the principal and subsequently with school staff was in order to share key information in person
was at the first meeting with the school principal.

“to give that background in person rather than just filling out a form and putting on it, oh, you know, by the way she has Down syndrome and she has this and she has that.” P2

Parents were also aware of the primacy of their own expertise in respect of the child and the importance of the information they could share with the school:

“I know the little areas that cause the problems because I’m with her for five years...like a simple thing like she always hops off the toilet before she’s half finished ...and if her sleep goes off then everything starts to unravel...they seem like small little things but they’re massive.” P2

Staff approach.

The proactive and flexible response of the school to meet the child’s needs often in exceptional circumstances was influential in the formation of a positive home school, relationship. At the start of the first term this approach initially manifested itself for parents in the way in which school staff sought to get to know the child and her needs:

“I could see they’d really been watching her and taking the time to get to know her because there were little specific Child 3 things, that they were able to say ‘what about when she does this?’” P3

“I think she is totally understood and they’ve really tried to get to the heart of her”. P1

Parent 2 recalled how in the first term, the resources her child needed were put in place without her having to ask for these:

“everything that she needs…the sound field system the communication book… the IEP meeting that all came from them. I didn’t have to ask them for any of that like… I didn’t feel I had to go ‘oh would you mind?’ “P2

Because of this she felt that the school was genuine in their approach and not
Just “saying the words” (P2) that she wanted to hear. This view was reinforced in the second school term when Parent 2 noted the willingness of the teacher to support Child 2’s return to the classroom after hospitalisation:

“the hospital had advised that she didn’t go out into the yard, and she said [the teacher] oh we’ll work that out and so they let her pick a friend to stay in with her. I suppose it’s something that’s different to the school routine and some schools I think can handle quirks and routines and some schools don’t like anything that’s outside [the routine], but you know for them it wasn’t. I must say that was great.” P2

In the second and third term two parents reported being pleased that the teacher had not neglected the child’s educational progress and they were reassured by the progress that the child had made in school:

“They were actually interested in her education. She wasn’t just there passing the time.” P1

“The teacher has a good grasp of where she’s at...She just had a good innate sense of, where Child 3 was and didn’t underestimate her...I never in my wildest dreams thought that it could so quickly bring her on so much.” P3

The cumulative effect of these factors resulted in two parents believing that their child belonged in the school:

“They made her feel entitled to be there.” P1

From this realisation, the possibility of sharing some of the responsibility for the child’s progress in school emerged:

“I can let the school take care of a lot. Like I’ve a lot of trust in them now that they’ll take care of stuff but I still do the extra work with her myself, you know... I suppose I’ve given a lot more responsibility to the school, you know”. P3
Sub-theme 3: Managing Communication
Three aspects of communication emerged as having an impact on the home School relationship. Positive features included the flexible approach adopted by the school in facilitating day to day communication. How sensitive information was communicated, impacted on one parent’s evaluation of the school transition at the end of the school year.

*Day to day communication.*
Day to day communication between parents and the teacher and other school staff took the form of a communication notebook that went back and forth between home and school daily, and opportunities for face to face discussion. For parents having this regular communication with the school was critical because of the child’s communication difficulties:

“because her verbal ability would not be great… she’s not going to bring anything home.” P2

The potential consequences of these issues were a source of worry:

“our biggest fear is that we won’t really know what upset her.” P3

School staff meanwhile, hoped that the consistency that regular effective communication afforded would be beneficial:

“if you’re on the same page with the parents, if they’re doing the same thing at home and we’re doing the same thing at school it just tends to flow better.” T1

Individual preferences influenced each parent’s communication with the school staff. Deciding factors included parent’s preferences for privacy and having confidence to approach the teacher.

For two parents, there was a reluctance to engage in prolonged conversation in front of other parents.
“You don’t want to be the one taking up the teacher’s time. Nobody seems to be doing it but, you know…you cannot hog the teacher…like picking up the child, it’s not a forum to talk to the teachers maybe once every two weeks we might have a word but that’s basically it. P1.”

“It would only be two minutes… it wouldn’t be a big long conversation” P2

Parent 1 explained that as a parent of a child with DS, she was conscious of being easily identifiable to other parents:

“the other parents would all look at you. You are the parent with the disabled child” P1

A key advantage therefore of the communication notebook was the privacy it afforded for parents while enabling the sharing of information in a discreet manner.

“I don’t have to be asking things or talking outside, kind of thing “P1

In contrast, the opportunity for direct contact with the teacher in the morning or evening was valued by Parent 3 who attributed having the confidence to approach the teacher in this way to her own professional background as a teacher.

“just to see the teacher face-to-face, it's not all notes and phone calls and like you can see and whether it’s to spot a problem early on or whether it’s to see how well its going and be reassured" P3

Parents described sharing less routine information face to face:

“you know, hearing aid issue or that she’s a hospital appointment coming up and say she’s going to have to leave early, so those little tiny things can be discussed on the drop off or pick up no problem.” P2
“I knew about Numicon [a numeracy learning resource] and the school didn’t and I was happy to say to them look here the Numicon kit, try it out for a couple of hours, see what you think.” P3

In the first school term teachers reported valuing information about how the child was feeling:

“She writes in it if she’s had a bad night or if she hasn’t eaten breakfast or if she thinks she’s coming down with something and it means that myself and SNA2 can read her for the day then and alter the routine a little bit to suit how she’s feeling.” T2

In the second school term the communication book was used increasingly to inform parents about class work and homework, for instance:

“If we’re starting a new topic in history, geography or science or something like that would write a little bit just explain to them to have a chat to her about, autumn or to go for an autumn walk and find the leaves so that she has some of the vocabulary when it comes to doing it in the classroom.” T2

The approach reported by all teachers was to allow the parents to choose how much direct contact they wanted:

“I kind of leave it up to them. If they want to ask how things were today, they know that I’m there. I’ve said that to them I’m not going to keep calling you in front of all the other parents, so you set the tone and if you want to talk to me I’m there” T2

Changes to use of communication book
Reduced use of the communication book was reported in the final school term. Parent 1 explained that she herself had stopped using the book:
“I kind of stopped writing in it because I felt it was like I boasting, you know, what we did at the weekend...so it was nice that they kind of reined me in on that and they said no, it would be nice to know.” P1

Parent 3, also, in the final school term reported that the teacher’s use of the communication book had faded. Because of this, she realised that she was not up to date with what was being competed in class and this was a concern for her:

“at one stage I realised they had started addition. They had obviously been doing it for a couple of weeks and I hadn’t realised and I would have helped her at home if I’d known.” P3

Communicating sensitive information.

At the beginning and end of the school year parents disclosed that they feared being confronted with information about negative behaviour on their child’s part while still wishing to know the truth:

“you know, does Child 1 have a name for herself? I didn’t want to be told that Child 1 had very good behaviour with some other kid saying that [she]is always scratching and scraping.” P1

“You know you hear of some children being asked to go home early” P3

While none of the parents reported any confrontational discussions of this nature, the differing approaches used for communicating sensitive information about the child emerged in the data.

School staff for Child 2 highlighted the importance of being open about how the child had managed in school, for instance:

“I could say oh my goodness today was absolutely and utterly fabulous and then Child 2 goes home and wrecks the place at home...that’s not fair because you’re giving them a perception that’s not there, I wouldn’t be a strong believer to sugar coat anything: RS2

Despite this it appeared from Parent 2’s accounts of her interaction with the school that she was unaware of the challenges that the school staff referred to in relation to the child’s behaviour:
“She would be quite a biddable child and she is quite shy…she is more likely not to act up…I have never been asked to come down except for scheduled meetings and there have never been any issues brought up at any of those.” P2

This contrasts with the teachers’ comments:

“You could turn your back for two seconds and she could have pulled notebooks of the library…her new thing is to get under the table and not come out…she is just a bit stubborn” T2

The consequences of the gap in communication between both parties resulted in disappointment for Parent 2 at the end of the school year when informed by the teacher that her child could not participate in the extended school year activities [July Provision] for children with SEN:

“Now it’s only doing arts and crafts and a few tours around, you know, like going to soft play or going to the park or something like that. Stuff she would have done in the crèche with no SNA, like no problem. My feeling is that the teacher because she’s has this SNA with her [during school term] all the time is terrified of being on her own with her” P2

Further comments by this parent indicate the approach taken by the school staff of communicating only positive information.

…I mean the school were always very positive, and in some ways nearly you’d kind of feel you wish they wouldn’t, like any tiny thing she does they’re like ‘oh it’s great, you feel let’s raise the bar a little higher. Any of the meetings are always focused on the positive but sometimes the positive is quite low down the skills base.” P2

This scale of the misunderstanding between the parent and teacher is underlined by the teacher’s description of her perception of the shared understanding with parents of the child’s abilities:

“we just decided that it would be nicer for them to see all the things she can do rather than all the things that she can’t do, I think they know where
she’s at and it’s actually really refreshing to work with parents who have a clear idea of where their child is and they don’t have massive expectations, obviously, they want her to be doing the best she can, but they’re not cross if she doesn’t attain something that the others do.” T2

Further comments by Parent 2 illustrate that she has in fact reflected on the different progress made by her child compared to peers.

“They say children with Down syndrome are mimics and they’ll model what they see, so if they’re modelling children in mainstream education.... but you don’t know how it’s going to pan out, but I can see that there is a gap already between her and the class and like the little girls in the class are way ahead of her” P2

A different arrangement for sharing information about the child’s behaviour was described for Child 1. Parent 1 described how neither she nor the school wrote negative information in the communication book, although this approach had never been directly discussed:

“I noticed they never wrote anything really overly negative. The negative stuff was told to me. I try not to put anything overly negative in the book either.” P1

She explained that the communication book was going to be her child’s “little diary” (P1) of the school year so when Child 1 got less favourable results in a private language assessment Parent 1 did not include that in the communication book, and instead wrote this in a separate note for the school. Speaking about an incident where Child 1 hit another child, the resource teacher explained that the IEP meeting was used to discuss this with parents:

“We were inclined to just wait and check and see...because you’re not aware of how the parents perceive those behaviours then you’re not going to jump in. We waited and we had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting.” RT1

She attributed the subsequent success of this approach to the time taken by school staff to get to know the child before broaching matters with the parent,
“the sense was that we understood the child to a greater degree so, therefore, [we] could make the point in a way that was appropriate and the parent was on board as well so that was good.” RT1

Theme 1 Summary:

The establishment of a relationship between home and school was an active and evolving process. Parents reported events and interactions that caused both anxiety including apprehension about the potential reactions of the school principal and staff. The ad-hoc nature of some parts of the transition process combined with the absence of some key pieces of information also contributed to the sense of uncertainty and anxiety for parents.

Although not completely erased, parent’s anxiety was reduced by the perception that the principal made an extra effort and that there was a genuine belief in inclusive education. The way in which the teacher responded in exceptional circumstances, such fostered parents trust in school staff. The child’s difficulties with verbal communication placed an added emphasis on communication between home and school. The opportunity for regular communication was appreciated by parents, with preferences for face to face or written communication identified depending on the type of information to be shared.

The differencing perceptions of the parent and the teacher, for one child’s high support needs in school impacted on how the parent perceived the school transition at the end of the year. How communication was managed in these circumstances influenced parental perceptions.

In summary, the development of a positive home school relationship formed a core component of the school transition process. The recurring anxiety felt by parents required ongoing practical reassurance. The response of the school principal and school staff and opportunities for regular communication were important in supporting the relationship. The degree of transparency within the transition process also influenced how parents experienced the early stages of the transition.
**Theme 2: Social Engagement**
The child’s social engagement in school with peers was identified by all participants as a key component of the transition to school is composed of three subthemes, *Hopes and Priorities, Factors that Impact on Engagement,* and *Supporting Peer Engagement.*

Subtheme 1: The hopes and priorities of parents are first presented with new priorities for peer engagement emerging in the latter part of the school year.

Subtheme 2: Peer engagement was impacted by several factors during the school year. The barriers and supporting factors as identified by parents and school staff are presented in this subtheme.

Subthemes 3: Both parents and school staff were proactive in supporting engagement with classmates and the approaches and strategies employed are described.

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**Figure 4. Social Engagement**

**Subtheme 1: Hopes and Priorities**
This subtheme reflects the contrasting hopes and priorities of parents and school staff for the child’s social engagement with their class peers. New parental priorities in the second and third school term in relation to the type of peer engagement sought are presented. Parents also made plans for the coming year based on their experience during the transition to school.
Parent’s hopes and expectations

Social engagement with peers was a key element of the transition to school for parents and their hopes and expectations in this regard were discussed. Before school commenced parents repeatedly stated that if child “gets on well socially” (P2) this would indicate a successful transition to school.

To explain their initial hopes, Parent 1 and 2, recalled previous negative experiences of peer interaction. Parent 1 described incidences in preschool where Child 1 was not fully included:

“sometimes I don’t know whether Child 1 is part of the group as she could be, sometimes I feel that she’s a bit in the periphery.” P1

while Parent 2 recalled incidences of bullying:

“children can be very cruel and obviously, I’ve seen it already and you know, when I bring her to a play centre some kids can be extremely nasty.” P2

Both parents hoped that these scenarios would not be replicated in school.

One parent, [Parent 3] described hoping that her child would adopt an active role when interacting with her peers:

“not even just that the other girls go to her… that as she goes into the classroom in the morning she goes in maybe with one or two little pals, or at least says, ‘Hi’ to her little pals she’s going in” P3

Parents were hopeful that there would be genuine involvement in the classroom with others,

“that when she’s playing, she is involved may be, you know, in a pair or around a table” P3

and that signs of closer interaction would emerge:

“That she’s talking about other girls and who she likes and that those girls in return maybe talk to her” P3

Parents expressed relief early in the first term that the other children seemed friendly. Parent 1 appreciated that as they walked to and from school the other children frequently greet her daughter by name while Parent 3 is pleased that her daughter’s shyness is not off-putting to her peers:
“When the other girls would come up to her she’d hide in my coat but that’s eased off now...They soon see that she’s just shy and quieter but she hasn’t offended any of the other little girls, I think she’s still very likeable to them.” P3

In the second and third terms both Parents 1 and 3 began to focus on providing opportunities for their child to meet and interact with classmates outside of school and on their own role in facilitating this. Parents spoke of their experiences of arranging playdates for their children.

“Child 1’s friend in school and she’s been to a play date at their house.... We had our first play date in our house... Child 1 was very good now. She was saying come up and see my room. Come up and see my dolls...but then when things weren’t going Child 1’s way with some sort of play, Child 1 took a strop.” P1

Afterschool activities were also viewed as an additional means of social interaction with peers:

“they have great chats going over [to afterschool ballet class] with the girls and they’re getting all excited about this.” P1

School staff perspective:

School staff shared the view that that the child’s social relationships were “a huge target “(T3) for school transition.

Their hopes included that the child could initiation contact with peers:

“being able to mix and ask someone can I play with you.” T2

School staff had differing expectations in relation to the potential for meaningful social interaction. One teacher hoped that peers would have a positive attitude to the child with DS.

“the other children to see her just as an equal friend to the rest of the gang.”

T3
Elsewhere, the potential challenges to forming friendships in mainstream school was highlighted by Resource Teacher 1 in the first school term:

“I think the hardest message I’ve had to say to parents is sometimes that those friendships are not real friendships.” RT1

While parents described wanting their child to participate in playdates with peers, the importance of this goal was not always shared by teachers:

“So, the school was saying they didn’t really recommend play dates and that’s fine. They said they see enough of the kids during the day”. P1

Differences also emerged in how school staff interpreted the response of peers to the child. A teacher reported positive peer interactions for Child 1:

“the kids love playing with her as well they don’t see any difference at all which is fantastic” T1.

This contrasts with the view of the resource teacher who noted some children avoiding Child 1 and she wondered if action to address this was needed,

“the question is whether to address the children who are avoiding her and I don’t know about that yet...there is a realisation [by the other children] that she’s different.” RT1

Subtheme 2: Factors That Impact on Social Engagement

Several factors influenced peer social engagement for the three children. The main factors highlighted in school were the child’s communication, the attitude and response of peers and the child’s play preferences.

Child communication

Concerns about the child’s speech difficulties and a recognition of the importance of communication for social interaction in school had prompted parents to access private therapy on a regular basis. Despite the intensive efforts by parents to develop the child’s communication skills, ongoing communication difficulties were noted by school staff to place limitations on the
child’s interaction with peers:

“I'd know who they are ... but any other child wouldn’t. Now if she could say their names I think they would respond to her a good bit more” SNA2

This resulted in frustration for the child:

“They find it hard to understand you know, that can be quite frustrating for her because she’s trying to get her point across and they’re not picking up on it” T1

as well as restricted participation in socially interactive play:

“a lot of the time it’s probably parallel play really, because she can’t use her language” T2

The difficulties encountered were to some extent mediated by the sustained proximity of the children to each other over the school year:

“they didn’t understand what she was saying, but as the year has gone by there’s not one of them in class now who isn’t really tolerant and they’re interpreting or trying to interpret what she’s saying all the time, you know” T2

**Attitude and response of peers**

School staff identified peer understanding and acceptance as a key factor in relation to the establishment of social relationships. The differing peer responses are described here and the factors thought to influence these are presented. School staff characterised the response of children in the child’s class as a mainly tolerant, patient and caring approach. They also noted that some classmates presented with anxious avoiding or non-inclusive behaviours in relation to the child. The caring role adopted to all three children to varying degrees by peers is described:

“some of them would probably be very helpful to her, kind of motherly in a way...I think, have an underlying sense that she might just need that little bit of extra attention than others” T3
Instances of anxious or avoiding behaviours by peers are described by school staff although the SNA queries how aware the children are of their behaviour

“You know, they don’t realise they’re not accepting her.” SNA 2

A teacher described the anxiety in the first school term felt by a peer when Child 2 was not fully participating:

“she was very hesitant….and quite anxious I think. If Child 2 was doing something she wasn’t supposed to be doing or off task the child would be panicking and kind of feeling like it was her responsibility, so we’ve moved a long and we’ve got new tables anyway, they seem to be a little bit better now.”

The more positive response of peers that had known Child 2 in preschool is also noted by her SNA.

“She was in the same crèche as a couple of them and they’re really good to her….because they know her they don’t pass any remarks on her if she does anything… like if she’d lies down on the floor they’d pass no remarks on her and they tell her get up, get up, you know, whereas the other kids just probably look at her.” SNA2

Improved responses are noted from new peers also as they children become more used to each other.

“now they’re not best buddies but the child is not moving away from her…So that is a concrete example of increased tolerance or whatever” RT1

In the final term, it was suggested by Teacher 2 that peer attitudes towards Child 2 were positively influenced by her level of independence in certain activities.

“she’s very, very good at, you know, [at] things like threading so they see her as being the exact same as them at times when she can do what they’re doing.” T2

She contrasted this with times Child 2 required one to one assistance and suggested that this draws attention from the other children:

“they look at her and wonder why she's getting that help?” T2
Child Play Preferences

Both parents and school staff identified features of how they child preferred to play as having an impact on peer engagement.

Child 3 is described as “content in her own company” (T3) and more likely to wait for other children to approach her:

“She will sit out in the yard and kind of stare at the clouds... but definitely it’s a thing that other children seemed to be drawn to her as opposed to her going out seeking a friendship you know.” T3

This reticence is also noted by Child 3’s parent when considering the arrangement of a play date parents as wondered how the child would cope:

“I don’t want to invite children over and then have her not want to play either” P3.

Parent 1, when also considering arranging a play date recognised that that having a friend over was a change of routine for Child 1 who was used to having time to herself after school:

“She is used to going up to her own room and get the books and start reading them to the teddies and playing with her doll’s house you know, for half an hour before dinner time... so coming in the door with a friend, she was after a while going, I’m getting tired of this” P1

Child 2’s preference for gross motor play while off-putting for some peers, was more appealing to others:

“a couple of the girls now would look at her when she’d push them and you know... I just feel the girls think it’s not nice behaviour to do that.” SNA 2

The boys were reported to be more tolerant of the rough and tumble play which appealed to Child 2:

“the boys are great with her, if I asked the girls to play with her they will play with her but they’d have to be asked, but the boys will just come up and take her straightaway and off they’ll go in the yard with her and she’s as rough as anything with them and they never say no to her” SNA2
Contact with other parents
Parents identified making links with other parents as important in providing their child with social opportunities. In some instances, making these links was problematic on a practical level.

“What I’m kind of focused on now, her birthday is coming up and will I invite all the girls, so it’s more really from my own side of things and I suppose some of my friends in their children’s school they have, even what’s app groups on their phone for the parents. There’s more parental links in some schools, I don’t think it’s that we’re on the outside of a group. There just doesn’t seem to be that in her school whereby parents’ kind of swap numbers and have playdates, so that’s the only thing that I wish was different “P3

“In this class an awful lot of the children are dropped off my minders so there’s actually very few parents [at school gate] “P2

There was also a consciousness on behalf of parents about how they could be viewed by other parents:

“they’ll say, “Oh you’re Child 1’s mother”, you know and you’re easily identifiable and it’s not because it’s the kid with the blue jacket or something. Right. It’s because oh, because your daughter is the one with Down syndrome.” P1

“One parent also reported the benefits of having contact with other parents in terms of opportunities for social engagement at the end of the school year:

“Child 1’s best friend is [Child’s name] but her mum now we’ve met for coffee a few times, about six or seven of us. It’s actually very casual and it’s pretty nice. [Parent name] this woman, just texted around because she said to me, a lot of the mums actually work so maybe we might do a night out, but we’ve met three times and it was nice…When I went the party the last day now two different mothers came up to me…[and said], I don’t do the drop off, can I get your number? I want to have a playdate during the summer’ P1
Subtheme 3: Supporting Peer Engagement

School staff made significant efforts to support play and social interaction with peers during the first school year. This initially included whole class strategies that were found useful for all the children. The provision of support adult’s support in a way that did not isolate the child from her peers was priority. By the end of the year some progress is noted to varying degrees for all three children in relation to having opportunities for engagement with peers and in the child’s ability to approach peers.

*Whole class approach*

Whole class strategies occurred mainly in the first term and included the use of a social story to teach all the children to approach their peers and ask them to play with them. Similarly, by rotating the tables the children sat at it was hoped by the teachers that the whole class would become familiar with each other,

“she was at a small group of four to start with and she spent two weeks there and then I changed their tables every two weeks anyway so, they move around and make new friends” T2

*Managing adult support*

Managing the adult support to the child in a manner that ensured the child was not isolated from peers because of this support was a factor for all the schools.

For two of the children the use of a buddy system was also implemented by the teacher early in the first term: This entailed each child in class being allocated a play partner for the week and then on Friday “for the big break they get to pick their own partner” (T1)

Encouraging the child to physically separate from the SNA in the playground was identified by both SNAs and teachers as important. It was noted that each child was reluctant to leave the SNA initially:

“she was holding onto my leg or holding on to SNA 3’s hand in the yard and she just stayed with the adults and it was hard to get her to communicate and to blend in with the rest of the children” T3
Practicing key skills:

The SNA and teacher for Child 2 also described practicing physical skills such as independent running and walking as this allowed the SNA move away from the child:

[SNA name] has been doing a lot of work trying to encourage her to run independently, walk independently because she likes to hold hands all the time with people, so we are trying to pass her onto a child rather than always holding an adults hand and then she'll make some friends and get to know the children.” T2

The graded approach used to build Child 3’s confidence is described by her SNA saying:

“we started first with one child in her class to come and hold hands and she loved that child and like they’ll go off and play together, and then with another child and with another child and now anybody can hold her hand”. SNA 3

Both SNA’s also described setting up games and activities that included the other children as part of this approach:

“we go outside to the yard like we take a few girls from her class and then we’d play games like ring a rosy, you know, different games.” SNA 3

Explaining to other children:

Teacher 2 described deciding that she needed to explain to the other children about Child 2’s needs when it became apparent that other strategies were not ensuring the child’s interactions with peers in the school yard.

“I’ve explained to them, you know, that Child 2 has a hearing problem and that’s why her speech isn’t as good as the other boys and girls and she’s only learning that we have help her… so they seem to be more inclined to volunteer now than they were. “T2

SNA 2 described helping the other children understand Child 2’s behaviour.
you explain to them look it it’s not her being mean, that’s the way she is and she doesn’t mean to be mean. SNA 2

This also involved coaching the other children on how to include this child and advocating for the child with peers.

“on the second break two children stay in and play with her, I give them a game on the whiteboard to play but they’re still not fully including her you know, and I said you can’t do it until you explain what you’re doing on the whiteboard so she can see that she’s being included.” SNA 2

*Evaluating progress at year end.*

In the second and third school term parents and school staff evaluated how the child’s social engagement had progressed and parents made plans on further addressing this aspect of their child’s school participation.

It was a source of satisfaction for all parents, that the child had attended birthday parties:

“there’s one or two boys that for some reason, she gets on very well with, one of the boys had a birthday party...they insisted that she was to come. and that has worked out fine” P2

One parent also felt that she herself was not doing enough in relation to play dates, and making “particular friendships” (P3) and hoped to address this in the coming year:

“I suppose from my own point of view I feel the only thing that we are not doing enough with her is playdates with other children and making particular friendships, so the socialising is a big concern even though she has made amazing progress.” P3

“She won’t go to birthday parties without me, so even though she loves the girls and so we haven’t really done playdates or things like that. Like one-to-one she can still be quite shy...hopefully may be even next year we
can start doing some playdates or that kind of thing and facilitate the friendships more” P3

Parent 1 and 3 are however positive at the end of the year in respect of their child’s acceptance by peers.

“yeah, you know, you can see, from my observation she’s kind of well stuck in there, you know.” P1

“I mean clearly she feels the warmth and acceptance of the group, so yeah it is a huge success.” P3

Parent 2 however queried whether her child would have more opportunities for peer social engagement in a special school?

“if she was in a special school she would be on a par with the others and they would all just play together”. P2

For Parent 2, also the is also a new aim of ensuring Child 2 had the opportunity to meet other children with DS.

“it’s been an abnormal year because she has been sick…I suppose, next year for me then it would be to put more emphasis on her doing that kind of stuff outside of school so she has a peer group... [of children with DS] do you know?”

School staff considered the outcome of social engagement in relation to the child’s confidence in being independent in the school yard and initiating contact with peers. Child 1 and Child 2 are observed in the last school term to make choices about who they want to play with, and they were no longer a passive recipient of offers to play from peers:

“If she doesn’t want to talk to somebody, like she won’t automatically go to somebody because I say… she’ll select out other partners… there are some children who mightn’t appeal to her in terms of their loudness or ......like even in the yard she doesn’t run fast so she doesn’t gravitate
towards children who are more athletic in the yard, you know, because it might be hard to keep up with them” RT1.

“she knows exactly who she wants to play with.” T2

The children were noted to have increased enjoyment of play with peers as the year progressed.

“She loves when there’s somebody else playing, you know and not me.”

SNA 2

Child 3 was described in the second term as more responsive to peers but still needing prompts from a supporting adult:

“now you literally will say [peer name] off you go there and play with Child 3 or Child 3 off you go and they’ll hold hands and off they go” T3

Theme 2 Summary

Both parents and school staff prioritised social engagement although differences in expectations emerged. Engagement with peers outside of school became important to all parents as the school year progressed and they addressed this proactively. Differences emerged in relation to the expectations of school staff for peer engagement. There were also differences in how school staff interpreted the attitude of peers.

Factors that impacted on peer engagement were identified by parents and school staff and these were related to the child’s communication, the response of peers and the child’s play preferences. The response of peers was characterized as a mainly caring, although instances of avoiding and non-inclusive behaviours were also noted. Opportunity for contact with other parents in the child’s class was also a factor.

School staff used several strategies to promote social interaction including those that applied to the whole class and those directed specifically at the child with DS. The requirement to help the child to separate from the SNA or other adults when possible was also highlighted and multiple strategies to achieve this were implemented. Additional strategies included practicing key skills, scaffolding peer
interaction and supporting the other children’s understanding about the additional needs of the child with DS.
While parents and school staff identified examples of positive social engagement outcomes at the end of the year, parents also indicated the ongoing priority of peer social engagement by considering strategies for the following year.
Theme 3: Supporting Participation in School Activities

Both parents and school staff actively supported the child’s participation in school. For parents, this included a focus on school readiness as well as working at home to reinforce what was learned in school and accessing private therapy. For school staff, the establishment of a workable routine for the child was a critical part of school transition. Finally, factors that supported or limited the capacity of school staff to support the transition were highlighted. This theme comprises of three subthemes, namely: Supporting the child at home, School Routine, and School Support Factors

Subtheme 1: Supporting Child at Home.
Having the child ready for school was an important part of the early stages of
The school transition for parents as illustrated by the active role undertaken.
Several considerations informed parent’s views on supporting the child’s school readiness. These including fears about the attitude of the teacher, the parent’s desire for the child to fit in and the level of independence aspired to for the child. Parents continued to have an active role once school commenced, including
accessing private therapies and completing homework with the child. Illness was a complicating factor for one child.

**Personal responsibility**

A strong sense of personal responsibility for ensuring the child’s school readiness was expressed by all parents as exemplified by Parent 3’s comment:

“I think my role is everything.” (P3)

and with an emphasis on starting the preparation early:

“I think the preparation for school has to start at least eighteen months beforehand, like any child it takes them a while for them to adapt...but like this past year has been a total model for big school.” P1

**Rationale for school readiness approach.**

A common goal identified by parents for her child prior to the start of school was that the child would participate in classroom activities:

“so, at her own level that she’s taking part so if they’re doing something with building blocks I don’t mind if hers is only three blocks high and the other children have made a castle or you know.” P3

To maximise the child’s chances in this regard parents emphasised the importance of the child’s maximising the child’s abilities:

“When they start at school they have to be at their very, very best.” P1

The fear that their child’s participation might be limited if the teacher discounted the child’s abilities was influential:

“I suppose I wanted her going in doing really well partly to impress the teachers and so they’d say “well this one is great.” We won’t pop her in the corner and just ignore her and let her colour.” P3

There was also a belief that the child needed to be able to conform to the
routine and behavioural norms of the classroom:

“she has to be able to not look different and not be different. She has to go in and conform, the same as anybody....

For all parents’ school readiness and the practice of activities at home before starting school was linked to anticipating a degree of independence for the child in school:

“There is no reason for a child like her [i.e. a child with DS] not to be independent... she cannot zip yet but she will know how to zip by the end of the summer.” P1

School preparation and school readiness areas targeted a broad range of functional and developmental domains. These including communication, social interaction skills, behaviour, social and emotional well-being, self-care and academic abilities and hearing and vision check-ups.

All parents emphasised the importance of the child’s social-emotional wellbeing and happiness in school.

“to have her in a good place that when she goes into school that she’ll feel happy herself, that she won’t feel scared and upset and not know what’s going on.” P3

The development of communication skills was prioritized and bringing the child to private speech and language therapy was repeatedly mentioned both before school and during the school year:

I suppose with an eye to the fact that she’s starting school in September, I have restarted her with the private speech [therapist]” P2

Foundation skills for academic tasks were also targeted:

“getting her sounds right and that she knows her colours and working on things like getting her to hold a pencil so that she’s ready for those school skills...just to keep her ready during the summer, it’s all with an eye to school.” P3

you know, get the eyes done. Get the things done. Get everything done so that when they’re going in they are at their optimum. It has to be done
so that we know that she’s going in there and nobody can say to me oh well she’s not hearing right or I don’t want to know in a year’s time that she’s missed out on a year of school because she wasn’t hearing right or that there’s this thing with her eyes

Homework challenges

When school began, parents continued to practice activities at home in the evening and during holiday time with the aim of reinforcing what the child had learnt in school:

“We did work a lot on her letters and everything over Christmas and they [the school staff] saw a huge improvement.” P1

The initial ease in doing this was attributed by one parent to a habit established when her child was younger:

“I've always been in the habit of doing kind of an hour of therapy a day, since she was a baby, so it was easy to keep going...I say” it’s time for homework” she’ll be delighted. She pulls up the chair to the table and she wants to get going.” P3

Illness for two children in the second term impacted on the capacity to maintain this level of activity at home. Parent 2 describing her child as having been being “very very sick.” (P2).

“there was not a huge amount of going over what they did in school at home...she would have definitely benefitted if she could have done more at home. But some days there was just absolutely no way she could do anything.” P2

Parents also describing the challenge of managing the child’s routine in conjunction with accessing other supports.

The homework, the therapy work and going to therapy sessions, because we’re still going, so you have to try and keep it all going.” P1
Waiting for disability service support

Parents described how the school transition had emphasised their own role in managing their child’s supports:

“Well you really do have to be your child case manager and do you know because none of the services talk to each other, none of them and even within the one service they don’t talk to each other” P2

Parents also reported the disappointment felt at the lack of information from their disability service as the school year progressed.

I suppose that’s something that took me a while to realise, before she started school it took me a while. I was waiting and waiting for these services to kick in and I kept thinking oh we’ll get it, and it took me a while to realise we’re never going to get it, we’re never going to get anything. I have to go and find it myself and then to start looking and trying to find therapists” P2

“I found that personally disappointing that after all those years of her being so well looked after by the team, that suddenly it was just gone… We kind of feel we were just kind of let go. There was no transfer I feel almost like I felt in the very beginning, when she was a baby thinking; do we go to Down Syndrome Ireland? And I almost feel like I’m back there. I don’t understand…We don’t anything about the next team. “P3
Subtheme 2: School Routine.
The establishment of a school routine for the child was central to the approach taken by school staff. Each child’s routine differed from each other and from that of the class to varying degrees and the factors contributing to this are explored. The impact of disruption to the child’s routine is also examined.

Establishing a routine for the whole class was prioritised by teachers in the first term as a means of assisting all the children to adjust to school:

“I would always try and have the day as routine as possible just because the transition can be quite difficult for a lot of them…so that they just kind of know where they are and they’re a bit more settled.” T2.

The child becoming familiar with the daily routine by the end of the first term was viewed as an indicator of progress:

“Child 1 loves the routine of the school day so she’s coming into the classroom in the morning by herself. She’s hanging up her coat and the dad now, her dad just leaves her at the door and she’s growing in independence a lot.” T1

Similarly, incidences where the routine is disrupted due to illness for the child or exceptional events such as a school sports day were unsettling for the child:

the routines we would have done daily had become broken and she was quite unsure of herself.” RT2

School staff spoke repeatedly of adopting a trial and error approach over the course of the school year to establish each child’s routine and influenced by several factors.

Meeting child specific needs: For two children activities outside the classroom were considered to meet individual needs:

“We brought her [and a classmate] up to an art teacher... just an unstructured environment where the children can just be totally free, it’s all painting with her fingers, they can make whatever they want. We
noticed that when she came back down that she was definitely more engaged... we had colouring then afterwards and her colouring was good and we just noticed it made a difference.” T3

“I thought that it would be very beneficial for the teacher to work with Child 2 in the small setting out of the classroom. She’s very indistinct [in her speech] and I thought in a smaller setting she might make more of an effort to speak, and to use her language” T2

*Classroom management factors:* Pragmatic factors related to smooth running of the classroom were also influential in shaping the child’s routine.

“twelve to half twelve while her SNA is having lunch it was very, very difficult to get anything done in the classroom unless you were doing play... so, the child would go [out with the resource teacher] from twelve to half twelve while the SNA is out of the room... so that the classroom can function fairly normally.” T2

“If you did play she’d settle and she’d play for the half an hour but we couldn’t always guarantee that we’d be doing that at that time... if we’re doing something else she goes [out] with another learning support teacher and she does stories, songs, rhymes and fine motor skills.” T2

*Resource teacher support approach:*

Each child’s routine was also shaped by the approach taken to providing Resource teaching support which varied between each school.

School policy dictated that for Child 1 resource teaching support occurred exclusively in the classroom:

“That’s our policy and that’s what works best especially for infants really. They don’t do well coming outside the classroom. Resource Teacher 1
now comes in from half eleven to twelve every day when we’re doing Aistear.” T1

This approach was also grounded in the Resource Teacher’s beliefs that withdrawing the child had a stigmatising effect and that the child should have equal access:

“I suppose it’s the whole idea that you’re labelling that child and that they know themselves that they’re going out for help and everybody else knows too… and even if you are withdrawing them in senior infants they’d be withdrawn in a group. They’d never come out by themselves… I think she should have access to the classroom the same as every other child should have.” RT1

For Child 3, the Resource Teacher describe working both inside and outside the class, based on collaboration with the class teacher.

“a group is good as they [Child 3] wouldn’t feel as separate from the other kids in the class” RT3.

Well on the three days that I come in I do station work in the class and so I’m working with the whole class usually, Child 3 will be in one group and like I work with all the groups so that’s when I get a chance to work with her and then another day, I take her out with another girl. “RT3

In contrast to the other two children Child 2 accessed resource teacher support exclusively outside the classroom. This was described as meeting the child’s need for a less distracting learning environment and helped the teacher to manage the classroom:

“If they [the teacher] want Child 2 withdrawn from the class that would be a major one and then may be the mood as well, if we [the child] needed a bit of down time out of the classroom because that half an hour can make a difference just to have a bit of attention and be doing things one-on-one” RT2
Subtheme 3: School Support Factors
In supporting the child’s transition, school staff identified both limiting and enabling factors. Limiting factors included their own experience and training and the inconsistent support from service provider multi-disciplinary teams. Positive factors included collaboration with colleagues and the class teacher emphasised the importance of the support of an SNA.

Impact of experience and training.

The degree of professional experience with children with DS or children with SEN impacted on how participants felt about supporting the child. School staff who had previous professional contact children with DS described understanding “what it means for her to have Down syndrome” (T2). In contrast, school staff with little or no previous experience in this regard had concerns about meeting parental expectations and about being able to cope when working directly with the child:

“I was quite nervous to be on my own with Child 2, I was just nervous that if something happened to her, or if I just wouldn’t be able to deal with it.”

RT2

Limitations in prior formal training was emphasised to explain these feelings:

“it’s nearly a different job in many ways, that I never really got trained for in college” (RT3)

A lack of training in relation to teaching strategies specifically to support children with DS was identified by all teachers and the form of training that would be useful was discussed:

“you know, even to sit down in a group situation and do a workshop, just as an introduction to how to work with children with Down Syndrome”

T3

Information and training needs in relation to specialised programs were also identified:
“like the Handwriting Without Tears because we wouldn’t use that in school and you know, being able to see how it works and may be filter that into my handwriting slot with the others...and the Numicon and those things as well” T2

A lack of experience and knowledge in how to communicate with the child as well as how to support the development of the child’s communication skills was the most pressing need identified throughout the school year. The negative consequences of this for the child was a major concern for school staff. Illustrative of this was an incident in the first term described by Teacher 2 where a Lámh sign the child used was not understood:

“I don’t ever want to see her upset and not know what might be bothering her and even today when SNA 2 was down here [out of the classroom] she [Child 2] was making the sign for mammy and I didn’t know that was mammy, so when SNA 2 came back I said “does that mean mammy” and she said yeah, “T2

Because of this the teacher was remorseful as she hypothesised that the child was using the sign ‘mammy’ because she was feeling vulnerable while the SNA was out of the room. Subsequently, in the second term the positive impact of having completed a Lámh course was described by Child 2’s Resource Teacher:

“so, I signed her what is your name and she answered back [Child 2] and I nearly fell off the chair... We were going around and we were asking the teddies and the dolls in the room their names. Like I’d done so many different approaches but it just so happened to be the day that I signed it as well.” RT2

The need to be self-directed in acquiring skills and knowledge was recognised, and several staff members described personal study undertaken directly that was motivated by their desire to provide the best possible support to the child:

“I remember after my first or second week, I said I’m going to go and do level 6 in special needs. [FETAC Qualification]. I just got my certificate there a week ago, I said I want to go and learn more because of her. I don’t
want to do anything that will keep her back. I just want to help her to be at the top, so I went and registered for the course and I paid for it. I did the course. I got my certificate there last week so.” SNA3

Despite highlighting the challenges encountered, school staff were all positive about the experience of working with a child with DS and used phrases such as “She’s a pleasure and I’m very lucky to have her” (SNA 2), while one teacher described how having Child 2 in the school had changed her approach to teaching.

_Disability Service Support_

All schools discussed the relationship with the disability service provider and associated that the child was linked with.

This relationship commenced with the receipt of written reports and visits from Early Intervention multidisciplinary team (MDT) linked to the child. These reports were considered useful for the practical strategies and the insight they provided on the child’s abilities when school staff were getting to know the child in the first term:

“From the reports that there are certain things that’s she’s refusing to do in school that she can do so …. if I didn’t have the reports I would think oh maybe she just can’t do that; you know. T2”

Reservations were, however, expressed about the readability of some of the reports,

“the speech and language reports can be very wordy and as teachers we’re not familiar with it.... You know, some of those reports I would read and I would think I don’t fully understand that” T1.

Each teacher reported receiving a visit from MDT members in the first school term, and the value of a face to face meeting was identified:

“it was the second week in September, a speech and language [therapist] and an, occupational therapist came into the school…the reports are great but the face to face meetings are definitely better” T1
These meetings were viewed by teachers as an opportunity to hear ‘from the horse’s mouth’ (T2) about the child,

“What I want to know is what is the plan for the future for that child. Where do they see, this child going? People who write reports have had a relationship with the child prior to this whereas I haven’t had that relationship yet.” RT2

Frustration was subsequently expressed that the hoped for working relationship with MDT members did not materialise:

“we had a meeting at the end of September and then never heard from them again” (T2)

School staff described two expectations from visiting therapists whom they identified as “the experts.” (RT2)

First, they wanted to be reassured that they were doing the right thing with the child:

“What we all want is somebody to come along to observe the situation and say yeah that’s going in the right direction, If somebody would just sit in on a day that’s not working or we need to redirect that a little bit or whatever … are we doing the right thing and have I got the IEP focused in the right direction and you know? RT1

“A mentor or whatever So somebody who would just say yeah no I think may be tweak that a little bit more.” RT1

Second, there was a desire by school staff to be shown new approaches and activities particularly in the second term as the focus on the child’s learning and progress increased:

“to come into the classroom and actually show us different areas of things that would help Child 2. I can do all day the things she’s good at, you know, but to introduce more activities and is there any more resources that I could make, I suppose just making sure that we’re covering all areas for her.” RT2
A format and frequency for the looked-for MDT support was also suggested:

“It would be lovely if they came in once a term even. that the OT could come in and show us a set of exercises that maybe we could do with her, but then may be if they change or if she sees that yes, she can tick those boxes now and she’s moving on with her that maybe we would get the list. I wouldn’t mind whether it was via email even, you know, like if we did have some bit of communication “T2

“I’d like them coming on a may be termly basis sitting in on a lesson saying yeah, no I think she’s moving along there or whatever.” RT1

In the final term for one child, the positive impact of finally receiving speech therapy support in the school is noted:

“We’d say “what do you want”? Now she says “I want my crackers” or “I want a drink.” T2

**SNA role**

The support of the SNA was cited as critical by class teachers in relation to the child’s participation in the daily routine and in classroom activities:

“She is brilliant when she has her SNA by her side and she’s cooperative and just gets on with whatever is being done but as soon as that support moves away she’s just a law into herself. “T2.

“she might need a few dots to start off with and encouragement really but having access to somebody like that makes it a lot easier.” T1

Differences in the scope of the role was also apparent. For Child 3 the SNA’s support for the child is focused on toileting, peer interaction and support with practical tasks:

“if she can’t let say a pack of smoothie and she can’t open it or a yoghurt and then she’ll come up to me” SNA3

For Child 1 and 2 the SNA support was repeatedly described in terms of Assisting with classroom work:
“she needs somebody to be there to actually move her fingers and do the touch counting with to make sure that its accurate, so at times like those she definitely needs her.” T2

Child 2’s SNA emphasised the discretion she was afforded by the teacher to source learning material for the child:

“I suppose I’m probably more aware of what level she’s at, you know, than [a teacher] that has twenty-eight children who are all at the same level... and so I just said to Teacher 2, can I go and get [pre-handwriting work] sheets done out for her and she said yeah, work away.” SNA

Theme 3 Summary
The child’s participation in school activities and routines was important to both parents and school staff. Parents described the preparation carried with the child at home before school had commenced with an emphasis on the child’s school readiness.

When school started the establishment of workable school routine was prioritised by the school staff and the factors that influenced this included child specific factors, the desire to ensure smooth running of the classroom and the way in which resource teacher support was provided.

Despite describing a strong desire to support the child’s participation in school, school staff described circumstances that limited their ability to do so. The impact of gaps in school staff’s knowledge, training and professional experience was explained. The inconsistent support and lack of information from the child’s disability service multi-disciplinary team was highlighted by both school’s staff and by parents as limiting factor.

The SNA’s role was identified as critical by teachers in respect of supporting the child’s participation and the broad range of SNA responsibilities were identified.
Chapter Summary
This chapter has presented three aspects of the experience of school transition for parents and school staff. These aspects included the relationship between home and school, peer social engagement and the child’s participation in school. The results demonstrate the proactive involvement both of parents and school staff in each domain as they sought to maximise the child’s participation during the transition to school.
Chapter 5: Discussion Chapter

This study examined how the transition to mainstream primary school for three children with Down syndrome was experienced by the parents and school staff involved. The preceding chapter has presented the study results and these comprised of three themes; *home-school relationship, social engagement,* and *supporting participation in school.* This chapter focuses on the main findings from these themes that relate to the research question outlined in Chapter 1.

Home School Relationship

Over the course of the transition each parent established a primarily positive relationship with the school. The factors that contributed to this included the response of the school principal and staff, the way communication was managed and how transition practices were used.

Response of school principal and school staff

In the pre-transition interviews, the parents demonstrated apprehension about the school’s attitude to their child and whether there would be genuine acceptance on the part of the school. Their experiences however were positive with all parents reporting a warm and welcoming response by the school principal during school enrolment and later in the school year. This is a key finding of the study, and contrasts with those of previous Irish studies. Flatman Watson (2009) and Shevlin, Kenny, and Loxley (2008) both reported discriminatory enrolment practices and a negative response from school principals towards parents of children with ID in Ireland. Kenny et al. (2005) described parents of children with DS, having to approach defensive and fearful schools, to inform and persuade them to include their child. Several factors may explain the different response received by parents in this study. The previous research was carried out prior to the enactment of inclusion orientated legislation and policies such as The Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act (Oireachtas, 2004), which provided a legislative basis for the rights of children with SEN to access an appropriate education on a par with their peers who did not have such needs (McConkey et al., 2016). In the intervening years, the number of children with ID
attending mainstream primary schools has increased significantly (Kelly, 2015). Schools, therefore, have had the opportunity to become more accustomed to the inclusion of children with SEN including those with DS or ID and two of the schools in this study had already children with DS enrolled. In addition, school principals have previously cited an absence of supports in school as rationale for non-enrolment (Flatman Watson, 2009). Changes to the provision of school based supports to children with DS, coincided with the school transition for the children in the current study and resulted in guaranteed resource teacher support hours for children with DS (NCSE, 2015).

The leadership role of school principals and their potential to influence the home school relationship with parents of children with SEN has been described in previous research. In a study with parents of children with a range of disabilities, parent’s trust in the school principal, were enhanced by the approachability, accessibility and actions of the principal (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). In the present study, parents provided several examples that resonated with these findings. These included the time provided by the principal to parents during enrolment, and the presenting of a gift to the child during a school visit. It was important also to parents that the initial impression of acceptance from the principal and school staff was followed up by concrete actions. Consequently, the principal’s attendance at an IEP meeting later in the school year was meaningful to parents.

The impact of the principal’s response to parents of children with DS at enrolment and beyond is particularly significant considering the vulnerability of parents of children with DS to the reaction of others. Kenny et al. (2005) in a study with parents of teenage children with DS, highlights the ongoing requirement for parents to deal with the response of others from the moment the child is born, and in particular at every new transition stage (Kenny et al., 2005).

While the school principal’s response in the initial stages of the transition was welcomed by parents, it was not sufficient to completely erase the anxiety experienced. Over time, however, the proactive and flexible response of school staff promoted the establishment of trust and the empathetic, individualised and flexible approach described by parents, reflected a family centred approach.
(Dunst & Trivette, 1996). Incidents highlighted by parents that illustrated this included the opportunity to meet with school staff to present a true picture of the child, the perception that school staff had taken time to get to know the child, and the flexibility demonstrated in managing one child’s return to school after illness. In the present study parents, did not take their child’s entitlement to school supports or IEP meetings for granted, and were relieved that they did not have to ask for these.

Parental trust in a primary school context is described as the belief that the other party will meet the expectations of their role (e.g., teacher) and be open, honest, benevolent, and reliable (Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie, & Moore, 2016). Tschannen-Moran (2014) has stated that benevolence is especially important for parents of children with SEN in a school context, and refers to a parent’s confidence that school staff will act with the best interest of the child in mind. A similar construct of authentic caring that involves genuine, voluntary child focused actions that benefit either and/or the parent was described by Angell, Stoner, and Shelden (2009) in relation to the school transition of children with autism. The approach of the school as described by parents reflected these qualities. The findings in respect of the school staff approach suggest that trust is a critical element within the home school relationship and that a family centred approach supports the development of trust.

Communication as factor in the home school relationship.
The need for frequent, honest, and open communication between parents and teachers is highlighted in the literature (Stoner, Bock, & Thompson, 2005). In the context of school transition for children with ID, communication between parents and school staff has been recognized as both supporting the home school relationship and as a source of difficulty (Kemp, 2003; Villeneuve et al., 2013). This was also true in the current study with flexible day to day communication methods, strengthening the home school relationship. Parents found reduced communication with school staff challenging as seen during one particularly complex situation causing one parent to question the approach of the teacher.
Day to day communication:
The regular exchange of practical information via a communication notebook and regular face to face discussion at collection and drop off times was common for all children and was found to support the home school relationship. Having an effective means of communication with schools on a day to day basis, was considered vital by parents because of the reduced ability of the child to relay information about the school day.

Parents identified individual and changing preferences between each option depending on the type of information to be shared, and their confidence in approaching the teacher. This value of having a choice between communication methods is also reflected in one transition study whereby a parent described being more confident in oral rather than written communication (Hutchinson et al., 2014). A key finding in the present study was the value placed by parents on having the option of the communication notebook to exchange information in terms of protecting their privacy, and ensuring that they were not perceived by other parents to be taking a greater share of the teacher’s time. The communication notebook was also considered essential for both parents and school staff as a means of supporting the child’s communication at home and in school through the inclusion of triggers for verbal interaction. While day to day communication was identified in the literature as a problem by some parents, strategies to address this are not addressed in detail in existing transition studies (Janus et al., 2007; Villeneuve et al., 2013). There is limited information available also on the use of communication notebooks in the wider literature. Fonteine, Zijlstra, and Vlaskamp (2008), in a study with teachers and parents of children with profound ID in a special school, found that teachers wrote significantly more than parents. This was reflected also in the present study, with a desire for more targeted concise information highlighted by one parent.

Communicating sensitive information:
While the flexible approach taken with day to day communication worked well during the transition and supported the home school relationship, a consistent formal and structured approach to communicating more sensitive information was absent. This is illustrated by the contrasting approaches taken by two schools in how they managed communication of the child’s support needs and behaviour.
One school was described by the teacher as focusing on providing parents with only positive information about the child, while a second school took the approach of waiting to formally discuss the child’s behaviour concern in the IEP meeting. The consequence of this for one parent was that she was unaware at the end of the school year of her child’s high support needs in school, and was subsequently disappointed and frustrated to learn that her daughter could not participate in summer activities in the school because of this. These incidences have implications for the home school relationship and similar experiences of not being included in important decisions about their child’s participation in school during school transition are reported by Villeneuve et al, (2013).

Communication is central to the advocacy role adopted by parents during school transition (Hutchinson et al., 2014). The earlier example of the child who was not facilitated during summer provision, and the exclusion of the parent from the decision-making process hindered their opportunity to advocate for their child and to engage in collaborative problem solving. This is of concern considering the finding of a study with parents of children with developmental disabilities that indicated that parental empowerment was the most significant predictor of wellbeing for parents during the school transition period (Minnes et al., 2015).

Parents in the current study have described their perception of the wide scope and sense of responsibility in relation to their own role in the child’s transition that suggests a desire to be actively involved and informed. They also revealed fears of being presented with information about disruptive behaviour on the part of the child. Managing communication between home and school on sensitive matters such as behaviour while establishing a new relationship requires a way of reconciling these two aspects of how parent experience the transition so that open and collaborative communication is supported. This suggests that early meetings between the parents and school staff should include the drawing up of a communication protocol. This would describe how both day to day communication, and communication of sensitive information would be managed. Items included in this protocol could include preferred communication formats, the priority information to be shared daily and the requirement to maintain day to
day communication throughout the school year. Due consideration should be
given to methods of communication that maintain parent privacy given the
importance placed on this by parents in this study.

Impact of transition practices
The transition process described was fluid and dynamic, with no specific
transitions structures in place. While this facilitated a family centred approach, it
also resulted in incidences of uncertainty for parents and some frustration with
the school. Examples include uncertainty about SNA support that their child
would receive and the timing and arrangement of the first meeting with school
staff.

In other transition studies, parents have indicated that they found transition
practices helpful with the most frequently occurring practices being related to the
ey stages of the transition including receiving information on schools, visiting
the school, meeting with teachers (Kemp, 2003; Villeneuve et al., 2013). Similar
to the current research findings, one study reported parents views, that the
meetings between parents and school staff to share critical information about the
child’s strengths and needs were very useful (Villeneuve et al., 2013). In this
study, parents also identified deficiencies including inadequate school orientation
(Kemp, 2003), a lack of formal coordination of the transition process (Dockett et
al., 2011) and inadequate communication channels once school had commenced
(Villeneuve et al., 2013).

Ecological theories which relate to school transition and outlined in the literature
review are useful in considering how the transition process is planned, managed
and communicated. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory described the interaction
between the home and school microsystems as a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner,
1979b, 2005). Rous et al. (2007) highlighted that the importance of interagency
structures that maintains this mesosystem is central to a successful transition
process. These structures include written transition process guidelines and
written descriptions of specific roles and responsibilities in relation to the
transition. In the present study, these processes and policies were not evident
resulting in a subsequent lack of transparency. Villeneuve et al. (2013) has also identified this issue and has proposed a dedicated school transition coordinator within the school. Ecological theory also identifies the importance of specific transition practices and previous transition research has reported examples including, placement planning meetings, school orientation visits for parents and children and assisting parents to communicate with the school in relation to their child’s strengths and needs (Dockett et al., 2011; Kemp, 2003). However, like the present study, a great deal of variation existed in how these practices were implemented and in their effectiveness.

Social Engagement
In the current study, the development of the child’s social engagement with peers was a shared focus for parents and school staff and represented a critical part of how the transition was experienced

Differing expectations for social engagement:
The opportunity for increased social engagement with typically developing peers is widely cited as rationale for parents of children with ID and SEN, choosing an inclusive setting for their child (Blackmore, Aylward, & Grace, 2016; Guralnick, Connor, & Hammond, 1995). This was also the case for parents in the current study. The progression in parental expectations for social engagement for the child became evident during the school year. Perhaps reflecting previous negative experiences, parents spoke of their apprehension prior to the start of school that their child would be socially isolated. This parental concern is also reflected in other research. In a US study, mothers of children with DS aged between 6 months and 6 years, questioned whether their child would be included in social activities, develop friendships and be considered valued members of the peer group in mainstream primary school (Lalvani, 2013). In the current study, parents’ priorities and expectations for peer engagement changed over time to encompass more positive expectations for social contact. Examples of positive interaction with peers that were initially important for parents, included other children greeting the child and including them in play. In the second and third
school terms, parent’s expectations expanded further to include the possibility of friendships for the child. While specific peer social engagement aspirations of parents or school staff are not outlined in existing transition studies, an American study with mothers of children aged between 4-10 years with a range of disabilities including some with DS and ID explored parental expectations for friendships (Overton & Rausch, 2002). Expectations reported included a focus on opportunities for peer engagement outside of school such as play dates, attending birthday parties and after school activities. This type of social interaction was also sought and supported by parents in the current study and the active involvement of parents in providing these opportunities is also described in the literature as part of the established parental role of children with SEN (McCollum, 2008).

The parents own social contact with other parents in the child’s school was also identified as an enabling and hindering factor in respect initiating opportunities for children to meet outside of school. Richardson and Schwartz (1998) suggest that parents’ social networks can have direct and indirect effects on their children’s peer relationships. The presence or absence of a parent social network was influential for two parents in this study in relation to the possibility of after school play activities with peers. Given the parental awareness of being viewed as a parent of a child with a disability, it may be that schools have a role in promoting parent social networks as means of supporting the child’s social engagement.

At the end of the school year, the child’s social engagement remained important for parents, with a continued emphasis on friendship. This is reflected in the plans made by parents to further support their child’s involvement with peers in a meaningful way in the next school year.

The expectations of school staff regarding the child’s peer interaction ranged from those who believed that none of the children in junior infants engaged in real friendships, to others who foresaw specific difficulties for children with DS forming friendships. Others expressed the hope that the children would be viewed as an equal friend by peers. Differences also emerged in how school staff perceived and interpreted the response of the other children to the child with DS. At the end of the school year school staff identified the child’s ability to choose their own play
partner, the increased tolerance of other children, and reduced need to ask other children to include the child with DS as indicators of improved social engagement.

Supporting Social Engagement within School.

Despite the mixed expectations verbalised by school staff, all subsequently reported active and sometimes ongoing involvement in supporting positive social contact with classmates for the child. The variety of strategies used and the degree of reflection engaged in by school staff suggests that social interaction was viewed as key to a successful school transition. The diverse and frequent support provided also suggest that this is an area of challenge and need within the transition process.

Three strands were noted within the support strategies described. In the first school term, the scaffolding of the child’s participation in play with peers in the school yard was reported. This included the adaption of play activities and formation of small play groups for the child to join, and aimed to reduce the impact of communication, play and cognitive difficulties experienced by the child. Provided primarily by the SNA, with support and direction from the teacher, this form of support resonates with that described by teaching assistants (TA) in a Norwegian study, with children with DS. Here the TA used their own understanding of the school yard dynamics and activities to guide the child with DS within specific interactions with peers (A. S. Dolva, Gustavsson, Borell, & Hemmingsson, 2011).

The second approach taken to supporting social engagement was linked to a goal of enabling the child to engage with peers independently. For all three children at the end of the school year, their degree of independence in social engagement was considered a measure of success by school staff. To achieve this, the SNA described practicing key skills including running, holding hands and approaching peers to play. The post of SNA is outlined in a Department of Education and Skills Circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014) which places emphasis on SNA’s role of meeting the child’s care needs. The diversity of the SNA role in practice, is acknowledged in government reports but not supported (DES, 2011a; Keating & O’Connor, 2012; Oireachtas, 2016). Consequently, the significant support
provided by the SNA for social engagement during school transition is under recognised. Given the child related factors such as communication difficulties, and differences in play preferences, that impacted on social engagement in this study, the support provided by the SNA was considered critical by the teacher and parents to the success of the transition. In the absence of this support it is likely that the children in this study would have had much fewer and less positive interactions with peers in the school yard.

The final strand of support in respect of social engagement emerged mainly in the second school term and focused on supporting peer’s understanding of the child with DS. The response of peers was characterised by school staff as a mainly ‘mothering’ or ‘helping’ approach but examples of anxious or avoiding behaviours by peers were also frequently cited for two children. In the current study, the mothering or helping approach was viewed as a positive development and school staff did not identify concerns about the implications that this could have for how the child was viewed by peers. This contrasts with the response of teacher in UK and Norwegian studies who sought to discourage this type of peer response as they did not view it as evidence of genuine friendship. (Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004). Instances where the child with DS was forgotten, or avoided by peers were however identified as a source of concern by school staff. To address this issue, teachers reported providing information to the class on the practical difficulties experienced by the child with DS. The types of peer responses reported in this study, were reflective of a board range of literature exploring peer attitudes to children with ID including DS in mainstream primary school (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012; Fox et al., 2004; Georgiadi, Kalyva, Kourkoutas, & Tsakiris, 2012).

The decisive influence of teachers and other school staff in mediating and shaping peer responses is illustrated in the wider literature on peer social networks Dopplinger (2014), as well as more specifically for children with DS in UK school transition research (Rietveld, 2008). In the latter study, the author compared the transition of two children with DS and highlights the impact of the differing teacher’s approach on peer attitudes. Positive strategies such as the establishment of shared meaning, inclusive language and supporting group
norms are described as creating mutual and equal relationships. In contrast a deficit focused approach was taken by the teacher of a second child with DS. In this instance the helping behaviour of another typically developing children was characterised as kindness and conferred status on that child while reducing the status of the child with DS. The absence of reciprocity or shared meaning during activities, resulted in the child with DS experiencing unchecked, neglecting and rejecting behaviours from peers, interspersed with instance of being in receipt of helping behaviours.

For many children in mainstream junior infants’ classes, their first experience of meeting a child with DS, may occur during school transition. The requirement by the child for positive and skilled adult support, in knowing how to respond is understandable, given the ages of the children concerned. Existing literature such as Rietveld (2008), and the findings of the current study suggest that careful consideration of approaches to support peers understanding is an essential part of transition planning by school staff.

Being a friend is a valuable occupational role for all children (Woodyatt & Rodger, 2006). Friendships in early school years have been suggested as influential in children’s present and future social relationships (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1998). Additionally, multiple cognitive, social and emotional development benefits have been associated with friendship (Bukowski & Sippola, 2005). Parent and teacher support is critical in facilitating friendship between children with ID and typically developing peers (Rossetti, Lehr, Huang, Ghai, & Harayama, 2016). Collaboration and consistency between school staff is likely to lead to effective support for the child and in setting mutually agreed goals (Fox et al., 2004). In the current study, differences emerged in the expectations of supporting adults for social engagement with peers. Differences in how peer responses were interpreted by supporting adults were also apparent. There is no framework for establishing shared goals and agreed support strategies in this area. A first step to addressing these issues may be to establish a common understanding of what social engagement comprises of. To facilitate such discussion and to enable the formulation of an agreed strategy for meeting the child’s social engagement needs, instruments such as the Social Participation Questionnaire (SPQ) devised by Koster et al. (2009) may be useful. The SPQ categorises the social
participation of children with SEN and includes subscales relating to: contacts/interactions, acceptance by classmates and friendships/relationships.

Supporting Participation in School

When discussing the child’s participation in the classroom, school staff referred to the child’s engagement in the routine social and academic activities occurring throughout the school day. These activities included whole class learning activities, independent work station activities, play based learning activities with peers. Parents and school staff described their experiences of supporting the child’s participation.

Preparing for school

While supporting the child’s participation in the classroom routine was primarily implemented by school staff, parents also had a key role. The belief of parents that the child had a right to access mainstream class was juxtaposed with the belief that the child had to be at their best for school and that this was the responsibility of the parent. For parents, this included supporting the child’s skill development before school started, and during the school year.

Parents expressed most concern about their child’s communication, social interaction, behaviour and emotional wellbeing and described their endeavours to develop their children’s abilities in these areas. School transition research with teachers working with ID also indicated that adaptive behaviour such as listening, responding and following directions and social skills were critical for success during school transition for children with ID (Kemp & Carter, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2006). While parents also reported practicing selfcare skills and preacademic skills, they experienced less anxiety in respect of their child’s abilities in these areas. This contrasts with Norwegian research with children with DS in which parents reported deferring school entry if children were not toilet trained (Dolva et al., 2007). This may be because parents in the current study were aware that needs in areas such as toileting and selfcare were criteria for eligibility for SNA support (DES, 2014).
School routine
The concerns of parents in relation to the child’s behaviour and communication were also shared by teacher in the present study and adjustments were made to each child’s classroom routine because of these factors, for example one child was taken out of the class during activities that were perceived to be challenging for her to attend to or to practice communication activities. Other instances of the child being withdrawn from class related to the model of support provided by the Resource Teacher, with each child’s school routine from each other and from peers. In other transition research parent concerns were expressed at instances of child withdrawal from class, e.g. Villeneuve (2013).

This was not the case in the current research and this may be due to the prevalence and acceptance of this model of support for children with SEN in Irish classrooms (Stevens & O’Moore, 2009).

Collaboration and teamwork
Groom (2006) stated that collaboration and teamwork were vital skills for school staff and in all three schools a strong collaborative culture was reported. Teachers’ reported frequent discussion and planning with colleagues, as they sought to adapt the routine to meet the needs of the child. The high degree of collaboration reported in this study was attributed by teachers, in part, to the absence of support from the child’s disability service provider, as teacher and other school staff sought to fill this gap. This resonates with Canadian research carried out with 208 preservice kindergarten teacher working with children with developmental disabilities including children with DS, identified colleagues to their best and most used resource in schools (Hutchinson et al., 2015). In the current study, within the collaborative partnership in schools, the role of the SNA was emphasised. Teachers frequently highlighted the critical role of the SNA in supporting the child’s participation during transition regardless of the child’s level of ability. As described previously in relation to the SNA support for the child’s social engagement, it was evident that the SNA’s role in supporting the child to participate in the school routine often exceeded the formal boundaries of the role.
Gaps in Knowledge and Skill for school Staff
At the end of the school year the interviews with school staff displayed greater openness discussion how the school transition had challenged their professional skills and knowledge. Several staff members acknowledged that the experience of working with the child had caused them to initially doubt their own ability to support the child effectively and that the transition had been a source of anxiety at times. There was repeated emphasis on the need for practical training and knowledge as opposed to the limited theoretical knowledge that teachers and resource teachers described acquiring from their formal teacher training. This broadly reflects literature findings that states that special needs knowledge and skills within initial teacher training is limited and tends to remain a discrete part of element of the course (Kearns & Shevlin, 2006). By the end of the school year, the transition experience had enabled some staff members to develop new approaches to teaching as well as prompting engagement in additional education courses. These professional benefits reflect findings in research relating to teacher’s experience of inclusion (Carrington et al., 2016; Shevlin, Winter, & Flynn, 2013).
In-service training available to primary school teachers from the Special Education Support Service include communication modules such as Lamh and Picture Exchange Communication and ‘An introduction to teaching Children with down Syndrome’ (DES, 2016). How school transitions are planned and the way school staff are allocated to a child’s transition team within the school have implications for their opportunities to upskill in advance of the child’s school start.

Support from Disability Service Providers.
A key finding from this study, is the specification by school staff of the type of support and the type of information and support they sought from the disability service provider linked to the child. While professional reports with practical strategies and face to face meetings were appreciated initially, the absence of follow on support or adequate communication with the MDT team seemed to influence the school staff’s capacity to support the child. School staff highlighted the lack of opportunity to consult with relevant disability service team members. The most pressing need initially related to input from Speech & Language
therapist’s and the impact this had on supporting the child’s communication needs and this is highlighted also in the literature. A need for occupational therapy was also frequently identified in relation to progression and developmental and academic goals. These findings resonate with other transition related research that identified deficits in professional support as limiting factor for the children’s inclusion in school and a source of frustration for teachers (Dockett et al., 2011; Flatman Watson, 2009; Kemp, 2003).

The role of a mentor who could provide feedback was suggested by school staff participants including Resource teachers as a need. This form of support appears to correlate with the concept of professional supervision that is accessed by health professional (Fone, 2006). Teachers in Ireland experience of continuous professional development has been reported to be fragmented, and potentially lacking a coherent and sustainable continuous professional development (CPD) structure (Harford, 2010). The current study indicates that a potential element of any revised CPD initiatives should consider the necessity for professional mentorship or supervision for school staff engaged in transition.

Teachers in the current research also provided valuable information on the type of support needed to support the child’s transition, including the opportunity for contact either through school visit, telephone or email with members of the disability service MDT. The current research also highlighted inadequate communication between MDT teams and school staff in relation to the transition and identified a need for structured links and processes between schools and disability service providers.

A promising recent development in this respect is that a recent government initiative has produced ‘A Framework for Collaborative Working between Health and Education Professionals’ as part of Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People. This framework aims to guide key transitions for children with complex special education needs (HSE, 2013). It indicates that primary schools and education services and the health disability services and parents should work out a timetable of what needs to be done, separately and together, to achieve smooth transition for children with complex special education needs and equitable access to therapeutic supports (HSE, 2013).
Chapter 6: Conclusion Chapter

Parents and school staff form the immediate supporting environment for children with DS during transition to school. This research has shed a light on the experiences of parents and school staff of the transition process, an area which has been given little attention in the literature and which has the potential to inform future practice and research. This chapter outlines briefly the main findings from this study and the conclusions drawn. The implications for occupational therapy practice and for research are also presented. The limitations within the study are described. Finally, a summary of recommendations arising from the study are presented in Table 7.

The establishment of a positive home school relationship was central to how parents experienced the school transition process and arose though the convergence of several key factors over time including the response of the school principal and the flexible and proactive response of school staff. Parents identified the features of the principal’s response that reduced anxiety. An awareness by school principals of these factors that positively influenced parent’s perceptions of their first encounters with the school may facilitate the establishment of positive home school relationships and reduce parental anxiety. Additionally, research that targets the perspective of the school principal on school transition and their perception of their own role is warranted.

This study highlighted the absence of formal transition pathways and policies both on behalf of the schools and the disability service providers concerned. This had implications for how parents and schools staff experienced the transition. For parents this resulted in uncertainty about key transition meetings with the school during the early part of the transition. Both parents and school staff lacked knowledge of how to access to disability provider MDT supports as the school year unfolded and expressed frustration about the lack of transparency in this regard. This suggests that schools should devise and make available to prospective parents, information on the school’s transition pathway and transition practices as a means of reducing uncertainty. The current study has highlighted the advantages of flexibility and choice within the transition process for parents.
in this study. In practice for schools, this suggests that the capacity to individualise the transition process and adapt transition practices collaboratively with parents may be an important element of managing school transition for children with DS in a manner that supports the establishment of the home school relationship.

The concept of a ‘ready school’ refers to the capacity of the school to support the school transition and the child’s participation in school and includes the knowledge and skills school staff have to support the child (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Disability service providers have the potential to influence how school staff experience the transition, through the provision of timely support in a manner that empowers school staff to support the child’s participation in school. On practical level this requires a communication and collaboration between schools and disability service providers and the establishment of joint working processes. Further research may also be useful to explore what support is required by school staff as well as how multidisciplinary team members can provide this support.

The child’s social engagement with peers was a key area of focus during the transition and involved both consideration of the expectations of parents and school staff and of the strategies used to support engagement. A key finding of the current research was the differing expectations between parents, school staff and between schools for the child’s social engagement. The findings presented here may add new knowledge on this topic. Despite the demonstrated importance of the child’s relationship with peers, no studies have compared the expectations during transition of parents and school staff in respect of children with ID or DS. As the literature currently does not provide a framework for addressing this important and sensitive aspect of the child’s transition, further research is merited.

Previous research has indicated the importance of parental empowerment in promoting wellbeing during the transition. In the current research, it is therefore encouraging that at each stage of the transition process the active role of the parent was evident. Also, reflecting previous literature findings, parents themselves emphasised their desire to be involved in the transition and their
capacity to provide knowledge and insights in relation to the child. This suggest that both schools and disability service providers should practically recognise and support parent’s role in the transition process as this may be an additional means of reducing the distress reported in the initial stages,

**Study Limitations**

The current study is exploratory in nature and through the presentation of its findings is intended as a gateway to further, more in-depth research. It is recognised that primary school transition is a key event for children with ID in Ireland and as such warrants thorough investigation.

Most of the existing international research on school transition has been completed as part of large scale research projects that seek to develop comprehensive knowledge at regional or national level. In an Irish context no such published research exits. The current study, while useful in providing some contemporary insights on school transition in Ireland, is not of a sufficient scale to provide comparable knowledge to the larger research projects identified. Avenues for further research arising from the current study includes research that focuses on a much larger cohort of children. Quantitative research on school transition on provincial or national scale may have the potential to provide data on transition practices and pathways in existence nationwide. Such data could inform policy development including initiatives that arise from the Framework for Collaborative Working between Health and Education Professionals’ (HSE, 2013).

It is also recognised that neither the current study or other published research located incorporates the views or experiences of the child. Research that captures this perspective has the potential to further inform school practices.

The current study has identified specific concerns from the perspective parents and school staff in respect of the school transition for three children with Down syndrome. Specific recommendations for research to further explore the issues raised are outlined in the next and final section of this study. Recommendations for specific transition practices are also proposed for consideration.
Recommendations

Table 7. Recommendations

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<tr>
<th>Recommendations Relating to Transition Practices</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Primary schools to develop and make available to parents of children with DS information on an accessible and flexible school transition process. Information provided should clearly outlines the school’s transition timeline and pathway for the child and the associated transition practices and strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. It is recommended that Disability Service providers develop and share with parents and school’s their own school transition policy that outlines the multi-disciplinary roles, supports and practices associated with school transition for children with DS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The drawing up of a specific communication protocol between school staff and parents of children with DS is recommended as an integral part of transition planning. This includes parent’s preferred communication methods, the type of information to be shared between home and school and preferred frequency of communication.</td>
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Recommendations for Further Research

| 4. Quantitative research that examines the transition of a large cohort of children and including a wider geographical area is required to provide information in respect of school transition practices in Ireland for children with ID. |
| 5. Research that further explores the expectations, attitudes and beliefs of parents, and school staff in respect of peer social interaction and friendship for children with DS during school transition is required. |
| 6. Given the pivotal role of school principals in the school transition for children with DS within this study, research that targets the perspective of the school principal on school transition and their perception of their own role may be warranted. |
| 7. Research to examine the model and content of training provided to school staff in respect of supporting children with DS during their transition to primary school would be useful to further explore concerns raised in this study by school staff. |
| 8. Research that captures the views and experiences of the child in relation to school transition is warranted. |
References.


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between health, social and education networks. *Child: Care, Health And Development, 40*(6), 825-832. doi:10.1111/cch.12105


Appendices

Appendix 1 Copy of Ethics Approval Letter

Mary Hurley
Discipline of Occupational Therapy
Trinity Centre for Health Sciences
St James’s Hospital
St James’s Street
Dublin 8

Ref: 150204

Title Of Study: To explore the transition to mainstream primary school for children with an intellectual disability.

Dear Applicant,

Further to a meeting of the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Committee held in June 2015, we are pleased to inform you that the above project has been approved without further audit.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Ruth Pilkington
Chairperson
Faculty Research Ethics Committee
Appendix 2: Parent Letter

Date:

Dear Parent,

My name is Mary Hurley and I am a senior occupational therapist with eight years’ experience of working with children with an intellectual disability. As part of a Master’s degree with Trinity College, Dublin, I am researching how parents and school staff experience the move to mainstream primary school for children with intellectual disability. The research focuses on the first year in primary school, including the months leading up to the transition. It is hoped that the research may identify ways of improving the school transition process for these children.

The information regarding this research is being sent to you via the Your Disability Service Ethics Committee Secretary. To maintain confidentiality your name or address or any other details have not been given to myself. You have a choice whether to participate in this research and if you choose not to participate this will not impact on your child’s access to services. However, if you can participate your experiences and views would be extremely valuable. The enclosed information leaflet describes the research project in full. If you would like to participate or ask any questions you can contact me at mahurley@tcd.ie or 086 1940454.

Yours faithfully,

________________________
Mary Hurley
Appendix 3: Parent Participant Information Letter

Exploring the transition to mainstream primary school for children with an intellectual disability (ID).

Researcher: Mary Hurley

Why is this research being done?
This research aims to find out how parents and school staff think and feel about the transition to a mainstream class in primary school for a child with an intellectual disability as the first school year unfolds. There is a lack of research which focuses on the experiences and views of parents and school staff on this topic and no studies in relation to Irish children with ID have been published. The information leaflet is to help you in decide whether you wish to participate. Please feel free to discuss it with your family, friends or other relevant persons. Take time to ask questions and to understand what is being asked of you so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

Who can participate?
The parents of a child with an intellectual disability receiving a service from Oakridge Children’s Services who is starting school in a mainstream class in September 2015. If you are interested in participating you can contact the Researcher directly as outlined at the end of this document.

How Will the Study Be Carried Out?
There will be four interviews with each participant. (One interview before the school year starts, one at the beginning of the school year and one at the beginning of the second term, and one at the end of the school year.) Each interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes and will be voice recorded so that the researcher can listen back at later stage and identify important points.

Interviews will be held at a time and venue that is most convenient to you.

You may have access to the typed record of your own interview if you wish and can request changes to be made to your personal comments.

The participation of at least one member of your child’s school staff is needed also to ensure that the various perspectives and experiences are obtained.

If you decide to participate the researcher will need to discuss with you which school staff may be contacted in relation to passing on information about the study to them. Your written consent for this will be requested. The researcher will also need to obtain verbal consent from the School Principal to have study information provided to staff members.
You can freely choose not to take part in any way in this study. Your child’s Service team will not be told whether you participate in this project. Your child’s school staff can also freely choose not to participate.

If for any unexpected reason the research cannot continue the Researcher will let you know as soon as possible.

**Benefits and risks of taking part:**
The information gathered in this study may help identify strategies that can be explored to improve the school transition process for children with ID.

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study, however some participants may find discussion of the transition process distressing. If this happens you will be offered the choice of arranging a new interview time or you may withdraw from the research process without having to explain or justify why you wish to do so.

If the researcher learns of important new information that might affect your desire to remain in the study, you will be informed at once. You can get more information or answers to your questions about the study, your participation in the study, and your rights from the Researcher Mary Hurley at 086 19401454 or mahurley@tcd.ie

**Confidentiality:**
Your identity will remain confidential. To do this all participants will be assigned a number, e.g. Parent 1, Parent 2 etc. Your name will not be published or revealed to any other person. The information you provide in interviews will not be disclosed to school staff.

All typed information relating to the research will be stored on a password protected computer to which only the researcher has access.

Voice recordings and typed information will be stored until the research is complete. After that it will be kept under lock and key for five years and then destroyed.

Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to information generated by the study.

**Results of the Study:**
The study results will contribute to a Master’s degree and may be included in any presentations or publications related to the study however participants will not be identifiable.

**Permission:**
Research Ethics Committee approval has been obtained from all voluntary bodies and educational institutions involved.

**How to Take Part:**
To participate in this research please contact Mary Hurley at 086 1940454. Email mahurley@tcd.ie Appendix 4: Parent Informed Consent Form
Appendix 4: Parent Informed Consent Form

RESEARCHER: Mary Hurley

BACKGROUND: This research aims to explore the transition to a mainstream class in primary school for children with an intellectual disability.

DECLARATION: I agree to participate in this research study with Mary Hurley. The study has been fully explained to me in the accompanying information leaflet.

I have read, or this consent form has been read to me and have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study and received satisfactory answers. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I understand all information obtained from me during this research will be treated confidentially and I or my child will not be identified. Data collected will be securely stored and disposed of as outlined in the participant information leaflet.

I understand that by agreeing to participate in this research that I am also agreeing to the researcher contacting my child’s school via the Principal. I can indicate below which staff members I consent to be contacted to ask for their participation.

I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, and I understand that this does not affect my rights.

PARTICIPANT’S NAME: __________ CONTACT DETAILS: ___________

PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE _________________ DATE: ______________

I also consent for the following school staff members to be contacted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Member</th>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Teacher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Needs Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RESEARCHER’S RESPONSIBILITY: I have explained the nature and purpose of the research, what the study involves and any risks that may be involved. I have offered the opportunity to ask questions about the study and fully answered such questions.

RESEARCHER’S SIGNATURE: ___________________ Date: ___________________
Appendix 5: School Participant Letter

Dear Teacher/Special Needs Assistance

My name is Mary Hurley and I am a senior occupational therapist with eight years’ experience of working with children with an intellectual disability. As part of a Master’s degree with Trinity College Dublin, I am researching how parents and school staff experience the transition to mainstream primary school for children with intellectual disability. The research focuses on the first year in primary school, including the months leading up to the transition. It is hoped that the research may identify ways of improving the school transition process for these children.

The information regarding this research is being sent to you via the school secretary. To maintain confidentiality your name, address or any other details have not been given to myself. You have a choice whether to participate in this research and if you choose not to participate this will not impact on your child’s access to services. However, if you can participate your experiences and views would be very valuable. The enclosed information leaflet describes the research project in full. If you would like to participate or ask any questions you can contact me at mahurley@tcd.ie or 086 1940454.

Yours faithfully,

Mary Hurley
Appendix 6: School Participant Information Leaflet

SCHOOL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

Exploring the transition to mainstream primary school for children with an intellectual disability.

Researcher: Mary Hurley

Why is this research being done?
This research aims to find out how parents, school staff think and feel about the transition to a mainstream class in primary school for a child with an intellectual disability as the first school year unfolds. There is a lack of research which focuses on the experiences and views of parents and school staff on this topic and no studies in relation to Irish children have been published.
The information leaflet is to help you in decide whether you wish to participate. Please feel free to discuss it with your family, friends or other relevant persons. Take time to ask questions and to understand what is being asked of you so that you can make a decision that is right for you.

Who can participate?
School staff members for a child with an intellectual disability who is attending [Disability Service Name] and who is starting school in a junior infant’s mainstream class in September 2015.
The parent of the child has consented to you being contacted in relation to this research. You can freely choose not to take part in any way in this study. The child’s Service team or parents will not be told whether you decide to participate.
If you are interested in participating you can contact the Researcher directly as outlined at the end of this document.

How will the research be carried out?
There will be three interviews with each participant. (One at the beginning of the school year, one at the beginning of the second term and one at the end of the school year.) Each interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes and will be voice recorded so that the researcher can listen back at later stage and identify important points.
Interviews will be at a time and venue that is most convenient to you.
If you wish you may have access to the typed record of your own interview and can request changes to be made to your personal comments.
If for any unexpected reason the research cannot continue the Researcher will let you know as soon as possible.

Benefits and risks of taking part:
The information gathered in this study may help identify strategies that can be explored further with a view to improving the school transition process for children. There are no anticipated risks associated with this study, however some participants may find discussion of the transition process distressing. If this happens you will be offered the choice of arranging a new interview time or you may withdraw from the research process without having to explain or justify why you wish to do so. If the researcher learns of important new information that might affect your desire to remain in the study, you will be informed at once.

You can get more information or answers to your questions about the study, your participation in the study, and your rights from the Researcher-Mary Hurley at 086 19401454 or mahurley@tcd.

**Confidentiality:**
Your identity will remain confidential. To do this all participants will be assigned a number, e.g. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc. Your name will not be published or revealed to any other person. The information you provide in interviews will not be disclosed to parents or other participants.
All typed information relating to the research will be stored on a password protected computer to which only the researcher has access.
Voice recordings and typed information will be stored until the research is complete. After that it will be kept under lock and key for five years and then destroyed.
Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access information generated by the study.

**Results of the Study:**
The study results will contribute to a Master’s degree and may be included in any presentations or publications related to the study however participants will not be identifiable.

**Permission:**
Research Ethics Committee approval has been obtained from all voluntary bodies and educational institutions involved.

**How to Take Part:**
To participate in this research please contact Mary Hurley at 086 1940454 or Email mahurley@tcd.ie
Appendix 7: School Participant Informed Consent Form

School Participant Informed Consent Form

RESEARCHER: Mary Hurley

BACKGROUND: This research aims to explore the transition to a mainstream class in primary school for children with Intellectual Disability

DECLARATION:
I agree to participate in this research study with Mary Hurley. The study has been fully explained to me in the accompanying information leaflet.
I have read, or this consent form has been read to me. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers.
I have received a copy of this consent form.
I understand that the child’s parent has consented to my being contacted in relation to this research.
I understand all information obtained from me during this research will be treated confidentially and I or the child or school concerned will not be identified. Data will be securely stored and disposed of as outlined in the participant information leaflet.
I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, and I understand that this does not affect my rights.

PARTICIPANT’S NAME: _____________ CONTACT DETAILS: _______________

PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE _______________ DATE: __________________

RESEARCHER’S RESPONSIBILITY:
I have explained the nature and purpose of the research, what the study involves and any risks that may be involved. I have offered the opportunity to ask questions about the study and fully answered such questions.

RESEARCHER’S SIGNATURE: _________________________ Date: ______________
Appendix 8: Interview Guide

Preamble script: Thank you for agreeing to participate and to remind you that I am audio recording the interview. If you need to take a break at any time let me know. You can have a copy of the transcript of the interview later also. Please take as much time as you need to think about questions.

If there are questions you don't want answer, that's fine also. Please be aware also that you can discontinue your participation in this research at any point.

Trigger Questions for Parent Participants

Interview 1
- Can you pinpoint when you first started thinking about the transition to school?
- What kind of contact and communication have you had with the school principal/staff before the start of school?
- What is your role at this point - are you carrying out any preparation for school?
- Are there any challenges that you are encountering currently?
- Is there anything that has been particularly helpful for you for with this part of the transition process?
- Are there any supports that would be helpful to assist with the transition?
- Looking ahead to the start of school, what would indicate a successful school transition to you?
- Thank you for participating - Is there anything else they would like to add?

Interview 2
- How are things going for you at this point in the transition?
- How was your child helped to settle in and adjust to school?
- Can you describe the kinds of support she is receiving?
- How has communication with school been managed?
• Are you encountering any barriers or challenges at this stage of the transition?
• What is your main focus for the transition at this point?
• What is going well?
• Are there any other supports that you have availed of?
• Thank you for participating-Is there anything else they would like to add?

Interview 3

• How are things going for you at this point in the transition?
• What if anything is different from last term?
• Do you feel the school is getting to know your child?
• Has there been any changes made to how your child is being supported in school?
• How is interaction with peers progressing
• Is there anything you are doing right now at home to help your child regarding school?
• How is communication with school this stage?
• Have you had any meetings with the school staff?
• Is there anything that is cause for concern currently?
• Is there anything you are particularly pleased about?
• What factors are contributing to this?
• Thank you for participating-Is there anything else they would like to add?

Interview 4

• How are things going for you at this point in the transition?
• What if anything is different from last term?
• What has been biggest challenge/biggest success during the year?
• Is there anything you would do differently?
• Is there anything you would want others to do differently?
• Is there advice you would you offer other parents based on your experience?
• Thank you for participating-Is there anything else they would like to add?

Trigger Questions for School Staff Participants

Interview 1
• Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been at this school?
• When did you find out about the child you are working with?
• Was there an opportunity for any planning/preparation?
• What kind of information did you receive about the child?
• Can you describe the contact between yourself and child’s parent/with other school staff/with MDT members prior to child starting school?
• How much time during the week do you spend with the child?
• What is your key role with the child?
• How is communication between yourself and other school staff (teachers/SNA) managed re this child?
• How is communication between yourself and parent managed re this child?
• What are the priorities for the child right now?
• Are there any challenges?
• Are there any supports you are availing of?
• Is there anything that has been particularly useful or helpful so far?
• Looking forward end of year-How would you define a successful transition?
• Thank you for participating-Is there anything else they would like to add?

Interview 2
• How is the transition going? Has there been any changes in comparison to the first school term?
• How has the child settled in—what contributed to this outcome?
• How is participation in class activities being managed at this point? (T)
• What are your priorities for the child right now?
• Has your role/focus with the child changed in any way?
• How is the relationship with Class teacher managed? How do you both collaborate re what needs to be done? (SNA)
• How is communication with parents being managed at this point?
• What, if any, are your expectation of parent in this part of school year? (T)
• What is most helpful/unhelpful in terms of enabling you to support the child presently?
• What if any supports are you are availing of to assist you to support the child?
• What has been the biggest success/challenge in respect of the transition to date?
• Thank you for participating—Is there anything else they would like to add?

Interview 3
• Has anything changed since our last interview?
• What has been the biggest challenge/biggest success during the year?
• Is relationship with this child’s parent different to that with other parents?
• Has the gap widened between child and peers (Academically/Socially)?
• What was most/least helpful during the year to support you?
• How have you found the process of transition on personal level regarding professional development?
• Thank you for participating—Is there anything else they would like to add?
Appendix 9: Interview Transcript

**Parent 3 Interview 1**

I Can I ask first, how much you are thinking of the move to school right now.

P3 It varies really, we thought about it a lot at the time of the applications and all of that and then it eased off and then she went in for two days and I went in for another meeting with the school kind of early June, so then it was to the forefront again and that all went so well that we kind of put it out of our minds now I suppose till later in August.

I Of course.

P3 When we get geared up again.

I The 1\textsuperscript{st} September. Very good.

P3 Yeah.

I Before this let’s say when Child 3 was younger would you have thought about school?

P3 Yeah they did. I think even before we had… Child 3 was our first child so even before that I had ideas may be because I’m a teacher. I did have very set ideas of what I wanted, em, education wise and then when got Child 3’s diagnosis we kind of like well will that really happen or will it not? So that would have been a question, em and then just may be once a year we would have considered what will be best? Will she go to mainstream? Will she go to special and even may be we were moving house at that stage and kind of well about schools but not just for Child 3. She has two younger brothers as well so I suppose just in a general way for all children you’re thinking where will they go to school and what will the school be like and then I suppose an extra consideration of getting it right.

I Sure.

P3 Really right, you know. (Laughs).

I Yeah absolutely get that match right.

P3 Yeah.

I What kind of things, when you were thinking about the factors that would make a school suitable for Child 3?
Yeah, em, I suppose things that are may be sometimes hard to know from the outside but we did want a school obviously where she’d be included, where she’d be embraced really. We didn’t want a school where they were taking her because they had to take her and they didn’t have any choice and they put with it and I’ve heard I suppose stories from other families where every year there’s more and more hints that she should be going to special and that would have been something I would have dreaded, you know, that idea that they didn’t really feel she should be there, em, but they were tolerating her because they had to. That was my biggest fear, em and then I suppose other general things, em, Child 3’s dad is (names other non EU country) em, the children are of a mixed race so things like that again would have been an issue of inclusion for all the children that, you know, that other cultures and other races would be embraced and respected, em and that’s why originally we thought we would go for Educate Together because we’re not religious and you know, different cultures. So, em, but then just through one thing and another that wasn’t working out so it was kind of trying to find a school that would match, em and be in the local environment. We could have still gone to the Educate Together but none of the other children from our area would have been going.

Yeah.

So that kind of ruled it out then.

Yeah, yeah and it’s nice to know the people you go to school with and at weekends.

Yeah and that it would be somewhat local. Now in the end we haven’t gone for our most local school. We’ve gone kind of a step away but I think there will be some children in the area still.

Okay, good.

Yeah. It’s not far a way.

Very good. Hmm… I suppose you’ve met the school now?

Yeah.

What kind of contact and communication have you had with the school?

Yeah, lots yeah.

Oh right, okay, lots, okay.

Now they’ve been brilliant.

Right, right. Do you want to say a little bit more about that?

Yeah like from while go I suppose when we applied the principal rang me. It’s a school I went to as a child.
P3 And then I went back and did a small bit of research in the school and I went back on a teaching practice. So I had known them a long-time ago, you know.

I Okay.

P3 And the principal recognised my name and so she rang and she was chatting and you know, I suppose in all honesty she was trying to gauge as well where Child 3 is, kind of where she’s at. Would they be able to meet her needs and that but straight away she was saying look there’s a place here for her. We’ll get together and we’ll chat, we’ll see what resources she needs.

I Yes.

P3 But we’re delighted to have her here.

I Okay.

P3 So that was a lovely, straight off a lovely chat and then I got word that that principal was leaving so I was all kind oh God now (laughs) but then I went to the open evening and the new principal was there and again was absolutely lovely and she was the one who suggested if I wanted to come in myself and meet the staff and chat and also if I wanted to bring Child 3 in and see the school and let her get a feel for it, em, so we did that. We brought her in and the morning I had arranged to bring her in the principal came out and met her and brought her into the office and had a little book and a teddy bear as a gift for her, so I was nearly in tears already. (Laughs).

I Yeah. (Laughs).

P3 Hmm… And then had arranged for her to go down, just to see a junior infant classroom just because I was saying to her that I didn’t think Child 3 had any concept of what big school was because she doesn’t have older brothers or cousins or that, you know.

I Exactly, yeah.

P3 You know, she didn’t have so they’d arranged again for the junior infant class to be doing story time so they were all up the front very quiet and Child 3 was left potter around the back of the room and just get comfortable.

I Very good, yeah.

P3 And the some of the little ones, it’s all girls, so some of the other little girls came over and said hi and the teacher chatted and it was lovely and then we went to a resource room, em and she played with the sand there and again just got a feel and the teacher there was saying look if she ever
needs a bit of timeout she can come to me even if I'm not her resource teacher, you know, so everyone we met was so welcoming and really, really made an effort I felt.

I Great.

P3 And then we went, the next week was the open day where all the children went. So it was great that she'd already been because I was afraid that on the first open day it might be too busy and she'd get scared of it, so I wanted her to go herself first but on the open day she was brilliant. She just went in and she as confident and calm as the best of them kind of.

I Yeah.

P3 She was now. She was great and em, interacted a little bit with other children and a little bit with the teachers so yeah it was great and then the following week I just went down to have a chat with the principal and the resource teacher, em, just about what they could do kind of in September to get her settled in. Was there anything physical or emotional that she needed and what supports she would need or straight off kind of so that was another great chat, so yeah I feel like they really put themselves out in a very positive way, you know and there’s never been any kind of feeling of oh they said straight away because I actually went in as well early on when we were doing the forms for the assessment because they just said to me, they said we don’t really have much experience with applying for resource hours, with applying for SNAs so kind of just from my own, partly from my experience as a teacher but mostly just from the stuff I’d heard from other parents, em and stuff I’d been looking into myself, I sat with them the first day before the application went in and we just kind of went through it together. So they were very honest about the fact they don’t have much experience. They’ve never had a child with Down syndrome. They don’t have many children with special needs of any kind.

I Okay.

P3 So I guess its daunting for them but they’ve never made us feel that it’s a problem, just that it’s a new challenge and that they’ll rise to meet it kind of.

I A positive attitude?

P3 Yeah very positive, yeah..Well that’s it, yeah, yeah. I think that’s the way they’re seeing it, you know, that...

I And other benefits you’d see for them in terms of…?

P3 I think they, you know, they are, em, a local Catholic school but they do have a huge emphasis on inclusion, in particular inclusion of the children with different, em, nationalities and languages. So they have a big emphasis on that so I guess it’s a new way of looking at inclusion and I
think all of us, you know, at times are looking at ways we can be more inclusive and ways we can show all of the children that there are people who speak different languages. There are people who are a different colour. There are people with different religions and there are people with different abilities and making look different and may be speak differently but we can all get along. So I hope they’ll see it that way as well and for the students that they’ll all benefit that way, you know.

I: Yeah that the other children will benefit as well?
P3: Yeah, yeah.

I: Okay, great, okay. So that communication sounded like it was very personal, very face-to-face really?
P3: Yeah.

I: Any other communication in terms of phone calls or just written information or was there anything else that was helpful for you?
P3: Yeah we got just the standard letters kind of that went out to everyone and they had some nice bits in it about kind of preparing your child for school and again they had an open evening, em and the emphasis was all about, em, don’t worry too much about teaching them to read or write. We’ll look after that but if you can get them confident, em and feeling good about school, get them loving books and they mentioned a thing that I suppose which we’re working on as well is like helping your child put on their own coat. Make sure they’ve a lunchbox they can open themselves. So just general helpful tips.

I: Have you met the teacher that will be Child 3’s class teacher?
P3: I think that last time I had a meeting they were hoping to appoint her a few days after but I just left it at that rather than, you know, anymore, so they did say that obviously in September I’m job sharing so two days a week I’ll be able to bring Child 3 to school and then the other two hopefully her dad or else her granny will so certainly on my days, you know, they said early on if we want to stay back and chat to the teacher or anything like that and I can’t remember when they said the typical parent/teacher meetings are on but they said we would have one a bit earlier and chat through kind of on a more formal setting.

I: Right, okay.
P3: Just to, so yeah hopefully early September we’ll have a proper meeting but obviously, we’ll see her in and out anyway, you know.

I: Was there anything else that was helpful?
Yeah that was and what I did as well, one of the other parents had suggested to me that day to take photos because obviously, it will be three months before she goes back, em and the school were great with that as well.

I Yeah.

So we took photos that day and she looks at them. We haven’t actually printed them yet. She looks at them on my phone...and we can remind her oh that was, you know, that’s the toilet in your new school. Oh remember the sandpit in your new school. Just to help her get more of a concrete idea of what school is, you know.

I That is brilliant. Can I just check, maybe you’ve not thought about this at all but in terms of preparing for school or thinking for school, what would you say your role is?

I It’s a very formal way for me to put it perhaps?

Yeah sometimes I think my role is everything. (Laughs). It’s so big.

Right, yeah.

But I guess the main thing; I had thought my role was more to prepare her academically. I had in my head about this time last year I thought I’m going to have her sight reading and I’ll have her knowing all her numbers and I’ll have all the sounds off and I’ll have... And then at a certain point during the year I realised that’s not really my role. She can learn all of that in school the way other children can. It’s not actually my role to do all the groundwork for school.

Yeah.

You know and I suppose I wanted her going in doing really well partly to impress the teachers and so they’d say well this one is great. We won’t pop her in the corner and just ignore her and let her colour.

Right, yes, yeah, yeah.

You know, that was a big fear of mine that they’d see she has Down Syndrome and they’d go you know, she can do a bit of colouring and when we’re doing art she can join in.

I I know, yeah.

But I realised that I don’t have to have her some sort of child genius in order for them not to do that.

Yeah.

So we’ve eased off on the academics.

Okay.
But obviously still, you know, I am conscious of getting her sounds right and that she knows her colours and working on things like getting her to hold a pencil so that she’s ready kind of for those school skills.

Yeah.

But mostly I think it’s to prepare her kind of socially and emotionally to have her in a good place that when she goes into school that she’ll feel happy herself. That she won’t feel scared and upset and not know what’s going on.

Yes, yes.

So that she’s then able to socialise and work and play and do all of the nice stuff, em and also I suppose speech wise to help her that she can communicate at school, em, with the other children and with the teachers and also when she gets home that she can communicate to us if something didn’t go right or you know, so I suppose our main thing really would be to prepare her communication and her social skills.

Yeah so that she’s able to get off to a good start.

Absolutely and were there particular things you were doing in order to do that?

Yeah. Well I suppose just the general speech and language stuff and getting her to really... At the moment we’re trying... She’s good at using sentences but they’re not very clear so I can understand everything and I think at the moment she’s in pre-school where she’s always been in crèche so they know her well and they can understand a lot but getting her to speak a little more clearly.

Okay, yeah.

Which is hard without knocking her confidence, you know, kind of to say oh look say it, so just kind of trying to model very clear speech for her, em and modelling as well then things oh, you know, I’m sore. I have a sore knee because she doesn’t sometimes seem to know where is sore or if she’s sad so we’ve done a lot of work with [Names Speech & Language Therapist], the Speech and Language Therapist on talking about emotions and also like looking at pictures. The boy is sad because his food fell or something. So that she’s not ready yet but that may be in time she’ll be able to say oh I’m sad because I fell in the yard but she can say if she fell in the yard but just to kind of put them together so that would be the main activity we’re doing along with just general, em, general stuff that will all lead in hopefully.
I Very good, yeah. That idea of the picture sounds like a great idea.

P3 Yeah it is yeah.

I We’ve talked about the sort of preparation things, em, was there anything at this stage then so we’re in July that you felt anybody, em, should or could have been doing? Are there any supports that would be helpfully right now?

P3 Yeah.

I Is there anything you feel oh well if that bit was there this…

P3 I think not something we can influence but I think the government and the Department of Education really, I think.

I Right, , yes…

P3 Everybody that we’ve had one-to-one contact with has been brilliant. Early services have been brilliant. The school has been brilliant. Other parents have been a great support, Down Syndrome Dublin, you know, kind of everyone who kind of could support us it did but I think the way the government made us go through the assessment process. I know they’ve changed it so much now so that children with a mild diagnosis do get…

I Yeah.

P3 So that’s a big improvement.

I Yes.

P3 But even the fact that the SNA hours were released after the principal, after the schools went on holidays so we don’t know, you know, I don’t want to be ringing a principal during the summer holidays with what’s already a done deal, you know, so I think that caused huge amounts of stress, both of those things. The fear that she’d get a mild diagnosis and get nothing, em and then not knowing to this day whether she has SNA hours or how many hours, you know, they’ve been the really stressful parts of it.

I Sure.

P3 And even the application for SNA hours and having to focus so much on what she can’t do, you know.

I I know.

P3 That was the first time we’ve ever done that. We’ve always focused on what she can do and what she’s improving at and kind of to have to write a document that’s all negative and even I suppose because I felt responsible for preparing that document myself, just that month of focusing on all her negative points was really horrible.

I Yeah.
You know, em, so luckily it only lasted for that month because, you know if I felt I had to go through that every year or something it would be traumatic, you know, because it’s just not a healthy way to look at a child.

Not at all

No, no.

Yeah all the things they can’t do and all the things they struggle with and you know yeah so yeah I think that was that really was the issue for us was that...I’d heard even from other parents that, you know, going into the assessment they’d keep their kids up at night or give them food they knew... Now I couldn’t bring myself to do that.

Yeah.

And I kind of felt no matter what we do she’s going to get a mild diagnosis.

Okay.

So, you know, so I didn’t really feel but yeah definitely having to exaggerate things and then having to go back to the school and say listen, you know, while I didn’t lie don’t worry too much, you know, sometimes your first contact with the school is this piece of paper that has to be worse case scenario of your child and so I felt like, oh what if they really think this is her.

I know.

They’ll be running for the hills like so I was glad as well that they then got a chance to meet her and see that yes these things are somewhat true. You know, there’s a possibility of these things but this is the child and you know...

This is the child you’re getting as opposed to...

Yeah, yeah.

...that child.

Yeah it’s awful to have to put that side of her forward and like you say exaggerate some of the negatives and ignore the positives and yeah it’s just horrible.

And in terms of communication with the school how did you manage that?

Yeah and I guess I’m lucky that I’m a teacher so I was able to say teacher to teacher look wink, wink we know what’s going on here. I’m sure for other parents they don’t know can they say to the teachers, you know, who’s on whose side? What way does it all work and even I suppose I would have felt the same when she was doing the psychological assessment here, you know, that there were things may be I was having
to exaggerate to (Psychologist name) and I couldn't say, you know, because that's a professional and you don’t want to say to them look I’m exaggerating a little bit or so yeah it does.

I Yeah.

P3 So I think that could cause like you say you’re starting off with a communication problem with the school so for other families it could cause...

I An issue.

P3 That, you know, it could just keep going that way that we’re keeping secrets from the school or we’re not being fully honest with the school and they might feel that it might continue way.

I Yeah.

P3 And I suppose I was lucky enough that I know the school want the SNA as much as I do so I was able to say...

I Let’s collaborate…?

P3 Yeah, yeah.

I Yeah, very good. Okay, I know its summer now and are there any supports you feel that are missing right now?

P3 Hmm… No I think I suppose in our case we had, I did have the chat with the school just before the summer holiday so everything I know is kind of ready for September and I think Child 3 herself. Its just for us to keep her ready, you know, that way so no for now we’re keeping going with speech and language and OT during the summer and its all kind of with an eye to school so yeah.

I Are there any challenges you anticipate for the start of school?

P3 Yeah. I think it will hard. Child 3 has been in the same crèche since she was just under one when I went back to work first. She’s always been there part-time and she’s always, my mother works there in the office so she sees my mam going in and out. She’s very familiar with all the staff and all the children. Her two brothers go there.

I Okay.

P3 So I think its going to be a huge wrench for her to go somewhere new whether it was a different crèche or whether it was school so even apart from the fact that its school and formal education, I think, its going to be a big deal for her to go somewhere without her family kind of.

I All there.

P3 Yeah. So that's going to be very hard, em…Yeah and I think even like we’re kind of like her… Ronan is two years younger than her but they’re
very, very close and I think its going to be a huge deal for him as well that she’s leaving, you know, kind of and he keeps saying well when will I be going with her?

I  (Laughs). Yeah.

P3  So yeah it is I think as a family when your first child starts school there always probably is a bit of a bash. So that's the main thing and then I guess there’s stuff that we’re not aware of what the problem will be yet so, you know, may be it will be in the yard. May be it will be the toilet. May be it will be one other girl in the class that she clashes with. We don’t really know but I’m guessing there will be issues and as against a typical child who could may be come home and say well I don’t like this and our biggest fear is that we won’t really know what upset her and I suppose we’re hoping that the SNA that she gets will be good, you know, that’s obviously an issue. Like we’ve fought to get the SNA but then…

I  So having the right person is important?

P3  You know the quality of the person and you know, that they’re a good match for each other, you know. She’s had, she’s worked with different people in the past and some adults love to baby her. They love, she’s very cute and she’s very cuddly and they love making a little pet out of her, which I can understand but we don’t want, you know.

I  Hmm…

P3  And at the same time we want somebody who’s soft enough so yeah the person who becomes her SNA is a big, not a worry, but, you know, it’s a consideration of how that relationship will go and how I know myself as a teacher how the SNA teacher relationship will go and just how all the dynamics of that will work.

I  Yeah and they can be overlooked the SNAs sometimes.

P3  Yeah, yeah and their role is, it’s a difficult role because, you know, in some schools the policy is that the SNA doesn’t speak to the parent and then in other schools or in other classes it may be more laid back and the SNA can report directly to the parents so its all of that kind of dynamics of getting to know how all of that will work so I suppose may be other parents are worried about who the teacher will be. I’m not as worried about that because, you know, I’m hoping… The staff all there seemed lovely and I’m just hoping that the relationship with the SNA for everyone, Child 3 to SNA, teacher to SNA and us to the SNA all works out well. So I think that will be kind of vital.

I  How do you think you will manage communication with the school?

P3  I did mention to them in the crèche, she has a little communication book, em, and so they would just write. Now again sometimes they write too
much and they write about her whole day and all detail and we don’t get a chance to read all that but other days they write Child 3 had fun playing with the sand and so I can say to her oh how was the sand today?

I  Perfect, okay.

P3  So I just ask them if we could have something as short as that, you know one activity that she did and if anything negative happened or anything very positive happened, em, so just like that even if it’s just something as simple as she fell that I’d know to say to her later.

I  The key bits, yeah.

P3  Yeah, just so that there’s that communication because I know it’s busy when twenty odd kids are being collected at half one. They won’t have time to tell me every day what happened.

I  Yeah.

P3  Hmm… So, yeah, hopefully that just that communication will keep going and then we’ll overcome whatever little problems happen.

I  Yeah, very good.

P3  I hope she’s not totally miserable. I suppose my biggest fear is that she’ll be like, she’ll hate it, you know.

I  Okay, yeah.

P3  I know she’ll adjust in time but I’d hate her to be crying going in everyday or something like that, you know, for all of us.

I  Yeah, yeah, sure absolutely.

P3  It would be so hard.

I  Hopefully not.

P3  Yeah hopefully not, yeah. (Laughs).

I  If you could look forward to this time next year, how would you be able to say well, that year was really a success?

P3  I think if she gets one well socially that’s my main thing. So if when I come in to collect her at the end of the day or if when I’m dropping her off I see her not even just that the other girls go to her, that she’s going to them because she doesn’t really do that much yet and I think, I’m hoping its just an immaturity that, you know, she’ll go to her class teacher, room leader, em, and love to see her… Sometimes the girls in her crèche will come to her and they’ll say oh Child 3, you know and I love that. So I’d love her to be herself more socially with the other girls.

I  Yeah.

P3  And yeah just that she’s happy to go in and out to school.
I Yeah.
P3 That’s it, you know, that she’s taking part in the activities as much as she can, you know em and that she feels happy there.
I Yeah. You mentioned just at the very beginning while you wouldn’t like her be sitting in the corner.
P3 Yeah.
I Or may be left out. In terms of participating in the classroom routine, how much of that have you thought about or are there in terms of a vision of success of it.
P3 Yeah.
I How much does that fit in if at all?
P3 Yeah, em, I suppose again that she’s just taking part in things, you know, so I know like in junior infants now especially even more than ever there’s a huge amount of play and singing and action songs and so at her own level that she’s taking part so if they’re doing something with building blocks I don’t mind if hers is only three blocks high and the other children have made a castle or you know.
I Right, yeah, yeah.
P3 But so long as she’s in the group with a few blocks putting them on top of each other that’s really what matters to me that she’s taking part at her own level and as time goes by when she’s more comfortable and more confident that then they’re pushing her to the next level but I don’t even mind if for the first year she’s not pushed all that much because I think finding her own confidence in such a big group with other children within a new setting will take her time.
I So more about just getting used to the school in first year.
P3 Yeah get used to the school and the setting and all of that.
I Yeah and other children.
P3 I’m happy that if she just gets really happy for the first year that the following year then they’ll push her a little bit more, em, and I’m confident that I can continue to do a lot of work with her at home even though I know she’ll be tired, you know, I won’t have as much time but, you know, we can still work on stuff at home, so yeah I’d be happy if they work on socialising and confidence in school, em and just that, you know, she’s taking part at some level and then yeah.
I Sure. Yeah, very good. We’re coming near to the end now. I’m just going to check that there’s nothing I left out.
P3 Yeah.
So far for the transition, is there anything that pops into your head that was really helpful? You’ve mentioned great things that you had done yourself.

Yeah, em, I suppose just the attitude of the principal when we went in.

Right.

Just the fact they had the little gift for her and you know, while she was happy with it, it was really I was overwhelmed that they would have gone to that trouble to make her feel welcome, em, so that probably was the main thing that they just through whatever little things they did, they made her feel, they acted as though she was very welcome which made me feel very welcome, em and then I think it was another parent that had mentioned to me about taking photos so that we’d be able to play it back very concretely and also {names staff member}, the nurse, has mentioned about taking photos from the crèche to then to hand on to the school just as a kind of a quick note which I think will be great.

Yes, yeah.

That as again it’s just the IEP’s or the assessments or anything like that the teacher could have either on the wall or in a notebook. Oh yeah Child 3 loves these jigsaws. Child 3 likes this, em and even if there’s ever a substitute teacher or somebody standing in that they could refer to it. So I’m hoping that will be… Certainly it’s made me very relaxed about how they’ll see Child 3.

Okay, yeah. So something that summarises what she enjoys and is good at.

Yeah.

The just right challenge…..giving her something that’s too easy or too hard?

Exactly, yeah.

Very good. Okay, brilliant. Is there anything else I have left out that you feel I should have asked about?

No, em, I suppose may be the choice mainstream or special school.

Yeah.

I thought that might be more of it but…

Hmm… And I suppose yes if there’s anything you’d like to say.

No, you know, like I suppose just we do have in our mind, we always had somewhat kept the option of special school open.

Oh right, okay.
P3 And we did keep it somewhat open for the future while obviously our first choice is mainstream, em and I suppose my husband more and more at different times would have been afraid that mainstream wouldn’t be an option, em and also he would have may be liked to have held her back for another year and got her a chance to, he felt that may be she’d get have caught up a little bit more than the other junior infants.

I Yeah.

P3 But I felt that she’d be five-and-a-half starting. It time to start and that we’d start her in mainstream and see every year I suppose we’ll have to look at…

I Okay?

P3 …again her happiness and how much she’s included and if by the end of next year, I felt, well probably not the end of next year. I’d probably give it a few years but if at some stage I felt look, you know, she’s on the outside all the time. The teachers are trying their best but she’s not included. She’s not, em, involved and she’s not happy then we’d look again.

I I wonder…What would being included look like? What would that mean to you?

P3 Hmm…

I If you were to pick out three or four things.

P3 I suppose again like one of the images I have is that as she goes into the classroom in the morning she goes in may be with one or two little pals, em or at least says, “Hi”, and that to her little pals as she’s going in, em, that when she’s playing she is involved may be, you know, in a pair or around a table and then I suppose as she gets a little older that there’s may be some, I know its hard friendships and that but, you know, that she is going to birthday parties. That she’s talking about other girls and who she likes and that those girls in return may be talk to her and chat to her. So but it’s mainly that she’s happy, you know, that she’s…

I Yeah.

P3 Like sometimes I get may be too worried that even in crèche or when we go to friends’ houses she’s very little interest in the children and then I worry but she’s very happy. She’s had a lovely day and so I’m trying to remind myself that she doesn’t have to be as socially involved as I’d like her to be so I’d like to think that even if those things weren’t happening but she was very happy to go into school every day that I could look at it from that point of view.

I Yes.
P3 But I do think as children get older I’d like her to have good strong friendships and they may come more from children with special needs as well so we’ll look at that as well, how to… If she stays in mainstream, how she’ll have other friends may be through social clubs or different things.

I Okay, yeah. Very good. Well lots of really interesting points there. Thank you so much. I hope it hasn’t been too tiring.

P3 Ah no it’s been interesting, yeah.

I Thank you
## Appendix 10: NVIVO Screen-prints

### Parent 1st Cycle Coding Pre-transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Refer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating at her own level</td>
<td>Value code: Hopes child will be supported to participate in class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child at their best</td>
<td>Value code: belief that child needs to be at their best for starting school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What others say</td>
<td>Value code: beliefs around the attitude of other parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider knowledge of school system</td>
<td>Value code: Self that own knowledge and experience of how schools work was helpful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being open and up front</td>
<td>Value code: Attitude that is is better to be open about the child's needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents have a responsibility</td>
<td>Value code: Belief that parents have a responsibility to do preparation at home</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School is confirming</td>
<td>Value code: Belief that being in school means confirming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple factors influencing school choice</td>
<td>Process code: Parents describe how school choice is made</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing the child for starting school</td>
<td>Process code: How child is prepared for school (Query: independence)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrying child to be happy</td>
<td>Process code: Expressing wish for child to be happy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking to the future</td>
<td>Process code: Connecting present actions to starting to child's future</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold your head up high</td>
<td>NVivo code: Parents describe positive feelings about their child and having pride in their child.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school should be willing to teach all child</td>
<td>NVivo code: Expressing a rights based perspective</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society would become more accepting</td>
<td>In Vrivo code: Parents recall children starting school in context of society becoming more accepting of differences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They've ever made us feel that it's a praise</td>
<td>In Vrivo code: Parents describe how they were reassured by school’s initial approach; particularly that of the principal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil elise</td>
<td>In Vrivo code: Parents describe how they were reassured by school’s initial approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of the group</td>
<td>In Vrivo code: Parents query whether their child is included</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because she's not going to bring anything</td>
<td>In Vrivo code: Parents describe how important it is to have a communication system with the school as child will not tell them</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That's my biggest fear.</td>
<td>Emotion codes relating to what causes parents worry (Concerns re accessing resources not included)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting the school</td>
<td>Descriptive - Parents describe contact with school prior to starting school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sources</td>
<td>Descriptive codes: where parents obtained from</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing classroom supports</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
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### Parents School Transition Year 1st Cycle Coding

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Refer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The right amount of support in classroom</td>
<td>Value code: Worry of child being over supported</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other parents would all look at you</td>
<td>Value code: Belief that other parents are judging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing negative feedback</td>
<td>Value code: Parent describes wanting to hear about behavioural incidences if it occur.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have to ask.</td>
<td>Value code: Positive attitude towards passive approach of school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They've really tried to get to the heart of her</td>
<td>Value code: Positive attitude to school</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at home with the child</td>
<td>Process code: What parents do at home with the child</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopting parent to role in school context</td>
<td>Process code: Parents describe how they adopt new role</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing about school routine</td>
<td>Process code: Parent is aware of what child does in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising Social interaction Skills</td>
<td>Process code: Placeing increased emphasis on communication skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing key information to school</td>
<td>Process code: Parents describe providing key tips ad infar to school re managing the child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking to the future</td>
<td>Parents reflect on their children’s future</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical strategies for child in school</td>
<td>Parents describe their strategies to help their child in school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You cannot hug the teacher</td>
<td>NVivo code: to describe how parents manage day to day communication with school. Parents describe relative case they did</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kids seem very friendly</td>
<td>NVivo code: Parents describe concerns about interactions with peers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was waiting and waiting for these services to</td>
<td>In Vrivo: Parents describe gap in therapy supports</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling related</td>
<td>Emotion code: Parents reflect on feelings of relief as school year progresses</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing anxiety and uncertainty</td>
<td>Emotion code: Parents describe feelings of anxiety and uncertainty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP/IEP goal setting</td>
<td>Descriptive: How EP goals are set</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal meetings with school</td>
<td>Describing formal meetings with school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factoring in homework, private therapy and aft</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
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### Parents End of School Year 1st cycle coding

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress with communication</td>
<td>Value code: Parent states improvement in communication and attributes this to peer interaction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher over dependent on SNA</td>
<td>Value code: Parent's question whether teacher can manage without SNA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School interested in child's education</td>
<td>Value code: Parent values that school has an interest in child's learning.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits of taking time of work</td>
<td>Value code: Parent values being able to take time off work to support child during transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progress with Peer Interaction</td>
<td>Value Code: Parent expresses satisfaction with how child's interaction with peers has progressed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents role to highlight strengths</td>
<td>Value code: Importance of parent know child's strengths and telling those to school.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoying after school activities</td>
<td>Value code: Child enjoys after school activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioning the mainstream option</td>
<td>Process code: Parent questions whether mainstream is best option</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for next year</td>
<td>Process code: Child preparing child towards next school year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing homework</td>
<td>Process code: How parents manage homework</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent reflects on resource allocation system</td>
<td>Parent describes early uncertainty of resource allocation and highlights needs of children and schools to be supported.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have never been asked to come down</td>
<td>In Viva Code: Fear that school would call parents in and give negative feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She's really found her place</td>
<td>In Viva Code: Parent describes how child has settled into school and made progress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear that M would set child back</td>
<td>Emotion code: Parent reflects on fears that mainstream school would have a negative impact on her child.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown in communication with school</td>
<td>Emotion code: Parent describes incoherence where communication has broken down and how they feel about this.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings with school</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with other parents is valued</td>
<td>Value code: Importance of contact with other parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling gap in service with private therapy</td>
<td>Process Code:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on impact of health issues</td>
<td>Emotion code:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Staff 1st cycle coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the child's needs</td>
<td>Process code: How the child's needs are met in school day</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing a routine</td>
<td>Process code: Teacher describes how routine established</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of keeping child on task</td>
<td>Statuses to keep child on task (valuing child staying on task)</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Going back to the drawing board</td>
<td>Trafal of various approaches on a day to day basis</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating the curriculum</td>
<td>Value code:</td>
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<tr>
<td>So that the classroom can function fairly normally</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fostering independence</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following the child's lead</td>
<td>Value code: Respecting child's choice of wanting to do some activities as others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverse SNA code</td>
<td>Structural code: SNA describes diverse role of helping with social skills, providing academic so.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing the child in better influence strategies used</td>
<td>Process: How knowing the child better helps school staff provide right kind of support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing movement breaks</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using social stories to address behaviour</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had visited her in the hospital just to see how she was</td>
<td>In Viva code:</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using small group to build confidence</td>
<td>Process Code:</td>
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<td>Being vigilant re blocking needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forming a working relationship with parents</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using communication book</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuing communication with parents</td>
<td>Value code:</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting parents to receive and share information</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness re parental anxiety</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from Principal</td>
<td>Value code: Teacher values support of principal</td>
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</table>
### School Staff 1st cycle coding

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals for the child</td>
<td>Process code: How goals are set for child in school and what the goals are</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying progress and success for the child</td>
<td>Descriptive code</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing goal setting with parents and others</td>
<td>Process code: School staff describe how parents and others are involved in goal setting</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal area</td>
<td>Process code:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping it simple</td>
<td>Process code: Teacher describes goal setting process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource teacher leading</td>
<td>Process code: Resource teacher describes leadership role adopted in IEP goal setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertain about goal areas</td>
<td>Type of code: Instances of uncertainty in goal setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>School staff describe how goals are achieved positively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying challenges</td>
<td>Catch all category needing further analyses</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognising importance of SIAs</td>
<td>Recognising that without SIAs support that it would be more stressful</td>
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<tr>
<td>School staff knowledge, training and experience</td>
<td>Values code: Impact of school staff knowledge, experience and training.</td>
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<td>Speech clarity is important</td>
<td>Values code: Belief that speech clarity is a barrier</td>
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<td>You could feel very out of control</td>
<td>Emotional code: feelings of anxiety, stress by school staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child out of control</td>
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<td>Class size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other children have moved on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping child in the room</td>
<td>Process code: Approaches to keeping child in room or withdrawing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying progress and success for the child</td>
<td>Descriptive code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child has made progress</td>
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<td>Knowing the child influences strategies used</td>
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<td>Communication and language biggest challenge for tea</td>
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<td>Communicating with parents</td>
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<td>Quotes</td>
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<td>Preparing for next year</td>
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<td>Loss of routine at end of year is difficult for child</td>
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<td>Play is hard to move on</td>
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<td>Communication book supports consistence between home</td>
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<td>Acknowledging early fears</td>
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<td>Refreshing child’s interaction with peers</td>
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<td>Communication and hearing influences peer interaction In Vivo</td>
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<td>Knowing what to do next with a child is a challenge</td>
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<td>End of year report</td>
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<td>Receiving therapy at year end made a difference for ch</td>
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<td>Approach to homework</td>
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<td>Classmates have increased tolerance and understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNA tries to influence teacher</td>
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