

# **An Evaluation of the Design of a New School Curriculum?**

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## **Abstract**

Research in to the efficacy of educational programmes has made noticeable contributions to the literature involving individuals with autism, and this has resulted in a greater understanding of some of the challenges faced by individuals on the spectrum. The focus on autism has resulted in an increase in the range of provision available for children and young people with autism and the need for a greater understanding of the most effective teaching methodologies. However, there appears to be a lack of research in to residential provision and outcomes for the children and families accessing it. This research project was undertaken to establish the views and opinions of people working and caring in the field of autism about a new residential school curriculum. The participants were selected from a range of backgrounds using a non-probability purposive sampling technique and data gathered through open-ended questionnaires. It was found that residential provision was a positive option for some children with autism, and that this curriculum should be individualised and personalised for each child. The curriculum and environment should be designed using a multi-disciplinary approach, and teaching skills such as communication, social interaction and self-management must remain priority.

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# 1. Introduction and Context of study

## **About the Author**

I have been working with people with autism for about 14 years and I am constantly fascinated by people's reactions, behaviours, characteristics and rationale to life. I am the Head Teacher at a brand new residential school for children with an autism spectrum diagnosis and have been tasked with the job of setting this school up from scratch as the first school that the Directors have financed.

## **About the School**

Mackworth House School intends to educate our students in a very different way and our philosophy is that a traditional model of education from 9.00am – 4.00pm is not effective in preparing and equipping individuals on the autism spectrum with the skills they will need in adult life. The viewpoint is that learning takes place throughout the waking day, and students gain skills and independence if taught within realistic and motivating environments. Priority will be given to independent living skills, communication and behaviour and emotional management as opposed to discreet teaching of the subjects within the national curriculum. The programmes are not based on any one particular teaching method or strategy but a range of individualised support strategies that suit and complement the learning needs of our individual students.

All students will have an individual learning programme developed through person centred tools, and the national curriculum will be mapped in to daily routines and activities that the students find motivating and realistic. There are five areas to our 24 our curriculum and students will experience all of them throughout the week. These 5 curriculum areas are independence, academic and vocational studies, physical education, creative expression and well-being and prevalence of certain curriculum areas will vary depending on the personal priority needs of each of our students. Students will be supported and educated primarily on a one to one basis, with peer and group work embedded within their individual education plan. Students will have mobile classrooms in the form of a

rucksack which will contain all the equipment and resources needed to engage within different activities and learn those vital skills in areas of their living accommodation, school work spaces and community they find interesting and stimulating.

### **Terminology**

Throughout this research project the term autism and Asperger syndrome will be used to address both the specifically classified disorders and the broader array of the autistic spectrum. People or individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome will be used to consider the person foremost, and learners and students will be used in the context of the children and young people that I work with. I will refer to individuals who have not got a diagnosis of autism and Asperger syndrome as neurotypical.

### **Autism, Asperger Syndrome and the Autistic Spectrum**

Autism and Asperger syndrome are found as part of a group of neurodevelopment disabilities and form the autistic spectrum (Patrick, 2008). Autism and Asperger syndrome are lifelong developmental disabilities that affect the way a person communicates and socially interacts with others and the environment they live in (NAS, 2009). Both manifest themselves in people very differently, although similar behaviours are characteristic to the autistic spectrum. People with autism and Asperger syndrome share the same core diagnostic features of difficulties in social interaction, language and communication development, together with specific and intense interests and repetitive behaviour (Baron-Cohen, 2008).

### **About the Research Project**

There is little research about the waking day curriculum methodology and the effectiveness of it for children and young people with autism in preparation for adult life. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain the views and opinions of professionals, parents and carers towards our new school curriculum design and evaluate my findings against the current research and literature published. This will hopefully in turn present me with some valuable information to support

the setup of Mackworth House School to provide the highest standards of education and care to our students.

In the next section of this project I have carried out a literature review which explores current research and theories in areas I have included within my questionnaire. I will also discuss the literature from my view and standpoint in relation to the experience and knowledge I have working with people with autism and the education sector.

## **2. Literature Review**

There is little investigation in to the waking day curriculum pedagogy, and the literature that is relevant to my research project explores the different elements of the curriculum that will be used at the school independently. Research papers have been published around different educational settings and interventions that can be used with children, adolescents and adults with autism both at school and at home. Particular subject areas have been explored such as art, P.E. and the social curriculum along with research on teaching strategies, assessment of need, progress made and classroom organisation techniques, but little around our school philosophy of prioritising the learning of those skills that are required for adult life over subjects included in the national curriculum.

### **Special Schools versus Inclusion**

There is much debate regarding the thoughts about the special school educational model versus that of inclusion within a primary or secondary main stream setting for children with learning disabilities, and there is opposition and agreement towards the educational policies. Allan and Brown (2001) produced research papers to investigate and increase understanding in to the role of special schools and the perceptions of them. Allan and Brown discuss the thoughts of Dessent within their research where Dessent (1987, cited in Allan and Brown, 2001) makes a case for the model of inclusive education for all children across the range of abilities and disabilities and states that “Special schools do not have the right to exist if that same education can be provided in a main stream school” (p 206). Hall (1997) and Ballard (1997) expand on the thoughts of Dessent with their views that often the isolation of special educational needs settings go against cultural ideology and could potentially lead to “segregated lives” (Ballard, 1997 cited in Allan and Brown, 2001, p206).

Norwich (2008) examines some of the key documentation and theories regarding special schools and their future and the comprehension movement that encouraged and pushed towards the direction of inclusion, and although special

schools would be required for the children with the most complex needs, that "...more provision was to be made for children with special educational needs or disabilities in ordinary schools" (p136). However Lindsay (2007) states that we have to be mindful of the fact that there is no clear evidence that promotes social or academic effectiveness of either inclusion or special schools (p 137) and in 2007 the conservative party were more in favour of special schools. The Warnock report (1978) established the use of statementing to gain the support for children with special educational needs and the official policy of inclusion was written in to the 1981 Education Act. Warnock however discarded inclusion as being "all children under the same roof" (pg 138) but prefers the notion that involves "Including all children in the common educational enterprise of learning, wherever they learn best" (Warnock, 2005 pg 22). Kager (2004) suggests that for a child with autism, an integrated environment could be more effective where children grow and develop together as there are "...appropriate models of language and behaviour available to students with autism in a regular classroom" (pg 300). Tissot (2003) believes however that a lot of the language, instructions and directions found within a classroom environment can be missed by the child with autism as they "...do not typically have the associated receptive meaning and have difficulty analysing the meaning of abstract information" (pg 425).

From my experience of working with children and adults with autism and Asperger syndrome, one type of education does not fit all, and that flexibility and adaptation is needed for an individual to succeed and learn within school. Some children are able to function and thrive in a mainstream environment but this is usually only possible if the teaching staff have appropriate understanding and knowledge of the individual and the way in which autism impacts on each child's learning. Some children are just not able to cope in a more generic environment and require more specialist input, where teaching and learning and the environment can be more structured and individualised. However, I do believe that all children should have the opportunity to access particular subject areas at an appropriate level and if schools were to work together, curriculum packages could be designed and tailored to suit individual needs. Some children may benefit from accessing

mainstream education for certain elements of the curriculum and vice versa for children enrolled within a mainstream school.

### **Educational Techniques**

There appears to be limited research about the effectiveness of specific education techniques to address the learning needs of children and young people with autism. Kudzan (cited in Luiselli et al.2008) identified 550 intervention methods and writes about the dramatic increase in the number of interventions that claim to be successful, however “only a very small number have been empirically evaluated” (pg4). Mesibov and Shea (2011) discuss evidence based practices within their research paper and suggest that the diversity we see in the people with an autism spectrum diagnosis makes it difficult to establish the effectiveness of particular educational programmes. Those that do claim to produce positive results in functionality perhaps only base themselves on the short-term rather than long term goals that are most important for adolescents and adults with autism. In line with Kudzan, Mesibov and Shea, Luiselli et al.(2008) highlights that as a society we have made tremendous progress in supporting people with autism but demonstrate “..the lack of agreed upon guidelines for best practice in ASD” (pg34) and Mundy and Mastergeorge (2012) suggest in their literature that there is “...a gap between clinical research and educational practices for school aged children with autism” (p22). Engaging in a learning situation requires an individual to be aware of their own feelings and actions while taking part. Students have to be aware that they are learning something to be able to use the knowledge flexibly, and people on the autism spectrum benefit from direct learning (Beardon, 2007). Indirect learning is difficult for people with autism because it is subconscious and not obvious that learning is taking place.

From my experience, children with autism are all too often expected to fit in with certain teaching and curriculum methodologies that do not suit the learning styles of that child. This in turn creates anxiety, confusion and frustrations that may be communicated through what is often perceived as “challenging behaviour” (Emerson and Enfield, 2011, pg 1). When working with individuals with autism, I

believe it is important to carefully consider a range of educational techniques that address the long term and short terms goals for that individual. The learning programme designed needs to be reviewed regularly by the multi-disciplinary team and adapted and changed to accommodate the progress, achievement and developments of the child.

### **The Curriculum**

There appears to be a vast amount of research around the national curriculum but not so much about the implications of a curriculum for children and young people with an autism spectrum diagnosis. The National Research Council (2001, as cited in Luiselli et al. (2008) defines a curriculum as "...the particular design of the environment, materials and teaching interactions within an intervention programme" (pg 93). Gregory (1999) stated that research had not identified a single effective curriculum but that an individualised curriculum was necessary "...that promotes independence and skills needed for adult functioning" (pg 595). Myles and Simpson (Cited in Lee, 2010) highlight in their research that many practitioners and researchers recognise the importance of teaching a less formal curriculum to children and young people with autism, ".....the so called hidden curriculum" (pg 141). Lee (2010) goes on to say that the "hidden curriculum" is an important factor right the way through life not just while children are at school whilst Jenkins (1997) describes achievements in life and leisure skills with "time wasting" (pg 91).

From my perspective, what needs to be taken in to account is the priority given to the acquisition of certain skills. For some children with autism, independent living skills are often documented as being far more important to parents/carers than learning elements of the National Curriculum (Hallett et al. 2007, Pulling et al. 2007, Smith et al. 2005 and Morris et al. 2003). From my experience, children with autism who access a mainstream environment can be at a disadvantage as these life skills are not explicitly taught but expected to be acquired from peers and context, something that is often not grasped by children with autism. Curriculum programmes need to be carefully designed and include learning within the

community so students at the school increase knowledge and understanding of how to behave, develop coping mechanisms, avoid isolation and become valuable and respected members of the community. Transition from school will not be successful if students only experience the school environment, and individuals will not have the skills required to function in to adult life.

The five curriculum areas at Mackworth House School are Independence, Academic and Vocational Studies, Creative Expression, Physical Education and Well-Being, and although there appears to be a vast amount of research and literature regarding the national curriculum subjects that fit within our curriculum, the majority of research has a focus on children with special educational needs and not specific to autism.

### ***Physical Education***

Physical education and the benefits of exercise on behaviour, emotions and self-regulation seems to be a growing area of research on the human population but according to Hillier et al. (2011) "...such benefits have not been studied among those on the autism spectrum" (pg 396). Kasner et al. (2012) state that physical exercise has been used "...to reduce stereotypical behaviours among individuals with autistic spectrum disorders" (pg 1419) and Soma and Meulenbroek (2012) suggest that physical activity is not only beneficial for our fitness but "...also reduces the maladaptive behaviour patterns of people with autism" (pg 47). Lang et al. (2010) also report these findings within their research paper stating that exercise appears to be beneficial for reducing stereotypical and self stimulatory behaviours. Sayers and Smith (2008) discuss the success of individual physical activities for people with autism due to the need and enjoyment individuals get from repetitive activities such as cycling, running or swimming. Each activity usually takes place in the same or similar venue, the equipment and kit is usually unchanged and the overall aim of the activity is time, distance or calorie lead. Jordan and Powell (1997) summarise the importance for rituals and routine and state that "Rituals and routines are not just for creating regularity but for re-activating memory sequences and cueing own learning" (pg 7).

Physical activity carries obvious health benefits, but I believe that sport should be perceived as a tool to teach the necessary skills that people with autism need to be learning. Exercise can facilitate the development of self, confidence and independence and can assist with understanding our thought processes, feelings and purpose in life. Creating a successful and manageable sporting environment for someone with autism can be challenging, but with careful thought and planning the learning journey can be fruitful.

### ***Therapies***

Therapies seem to be a popular area for research, especially in the field of art, music and animal therapy and the benefits that they are suggested to have for individuals on the autism spectrum. Barnett (2009) proposes that art can be used to help people with autism to express internal feelings, ideas and emotions as this is something that some individuals may find difficult. Osbourne (2003) believes that art provides a medium to develop a relationship between the therapist or teacher because "...it is independent of verbal communication and less fundamentally concerned with cognitive ways of knowing as many other subjects like maths or science" (pg 147). Kellman (1999 as cited in Furness, 2008) describes the ability that children with autism have of "...developing a visual vocab that seems to both create and express meaning" (pg 11) and Martin (2009) identifies this ability to be beneficial for working on an individuals "...social-emotional skills and self-expression" (pg 188). Martin does go on to say that although art therapy does seem to produce some positive results, there is still a lack of substantial research data about its efficacy.

Silverman (2008) reports his belief that "Music can serve as a bridge across communicative restrictions" (pg 7) and can therefore be used with individuals that have difficulty with using verbal communication. Gfeller (2002) and Koelson (2011) promote that music can act as non-verbal behaviour and can convey emotions, values and wants. Trevarthan (2001, as cited in Raglio et al. 2011) agrees with Gfellers thoughts and proposes the use of music to stimulate "...emotional sharing, to regulate anxiety and to increase motivation" (pg 128).

Gold et al. (2006) however states that there is no evidence based research to confirm Gfellers or Trevarthans proposals and Houngan et al. (2009) raise concerns about the necessity to understand each individual and the way they receive, process and interpret the sensory stimuli they receive.

There is a range of literature in the field of Animal Assisted Interventions (AAIs) although little that is specific to support people with autism. Boris Levinson (1969, cited in Plass 2008) documented using his dog to motivate a child with autism during psychotherapy sessions in his book "Pet-Orientated Psychotherapy." Smith (1981, 1988 cited in Brensing et al...2003) studied the effect of dolphin assisted therapy on children with autism. Redfer and Goodman (1989) wrote a report on pet facilitated therapy where children with autism were exposed to dogs. Martin and Farnum (2002) looked at the effects of Animal Assisted Therapy on children with Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Sams, Fortney and Willenberg (2006) studied the effects animals had on children with autism when incorporated in to occupational therapy sessions.

The bond between humans and animals has been apparent for a number of years and we have developed a variety of relationships for work, companionship, sport, entertainment and survival (King, 2007). The concept of social development and our relationships with animals was documented as early as 1699 by John Locke. He believed that caring for animals provided humans with the opportunity to develop emotions and responsibility (Cited in Fine, 2006). Further benefits began to be explored in areas of mental health, hospital environments, medical related studies and holistic therapy.

Temple Grandin (2005) hypothesises that "Autistic people can think the way animals think" (p6) and describes what she believes are the similarities between the behaviour of people with autism and the behaviour of animals. Daria (2008) also discusses this behavioural comparison in an attempt to provide neurotypical people with a greater understanding of autism. This research and its findings may provide us with a starting point in generating a picture about the efficacy and appropriateness of animal assisted interventions.

In my opinion the curriculum areas of art, music and working and caring for animals can play a vital part in exploring particular skills, interests and motivators. From my experience, people with autism benefit from visual strategies and tend to gain understanding using images and pictures. Being able to use the medium of art to convey meaning, build relationships and explore emotions, senses and complex ideas is something I feel is very worth while. I believe that creative arts should be part of any curriculum, perhaps not always in the format of therapy, but built in to the individualised learning plan for each child.

As a musician myself, I fully appreciate the impact that music can have on an individual, especially someone with autism. Not everybody will enjoy music but I feel with the way that music is constructed, formed and sounds it lends itself to some of the structure and routine that people with autism tend to enjoy. Music can help to remove barriers and act as a method of communication and skills such as turn taking, repetition, copying, counting and social interaction can be practiced and learned. From my experience, exploring the senses, emotions and feelings through music can be a real motivator.

### ***Teaching Self Management Skills***

There are a number of studies and research where children and young people are taught how to behave but the main focus seems to be around "...the method of instruction rather than its content" (Gregory, 1999 pg 595). Gregory say that because of this it is often not easy to identify the most crucial teaching elements and in which order they should be taught. Luiselli et al. (2008) highlights the importance of making sure that "the pre-requisite skills for future learning are in place and fluent in the child" before any curriculum offer can be implemented. Lund (2001) describes a "basic behaviour repertoire" that is essential for the development of future learning as individuals use one set of self management skills to learn others. From my experience of working with people with autism I tend to agree with Luiselli and Lund and that without an individual having the coping mechanisms to deal with the different situations faced, then learning is not able to take place.

## ***Communication***

Embedded throughout the curriculum at Mackworth House School will be the development of communication systems and this will be the primary focus of the curriculum when students enrol. There appears to be a vast amount of research and literature on communication and social interaction for children, young people and adults with autism, with many authors reporting on adaptive communication strategies recommended for use when teaching those individuals. Walter (2011) highlights the importance of understanding individual learning and communication styles that provide people with instruction. Kluth and Darmody-Latham (2003) discuss the importance of supporting individuals to use, develop and access communication across a variety of settings and curriculum areas (pg 534). Temple Grandin (cited in Notbohm & Zysk, 2010) emphasises the importance of supporting all children on the autism spectrum to develop a communication system whether it be verbal, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), using assistive technology or sign language. Without the means of communication, life becomes a constant battle to cope and "...no true learning can take place in such an environment" (pg xxiii). Tissot and Evans (2003) discuss the use of visual strategies and highlight that they can be used to "...enhance the meaning of communication for the child" (pg 426).

From my experience of working with both children and adults with autism, a communication system is absolutely paramount to learning and has to be the first thing that is implemented in to any learning programme. Without a communication system in place we see a range of behaviours that tells us that the individual is feeling anxious or frustrated, does not understand what is expected of them, can not tell others what is needed or wanted. Stereotypical, inappropriate behaviours will reduce if a child or young person is able to communicate with or understand others, and we see much more in terms of progress and development.

## ***Choice Making***

Making choices will form a key element of the curriculum at Mackworth House School, and the individualised philosophy relies upon students making decisions to

increase interest and motivation. Luiselli et al. (2008) discuss the importance of presenting choice and that this process can "...improve responsiveness and engagement, increase adaptive behaviour and decrease challenging behaviour" (pg 96). Rispoli et al. (2013) report that using choice before or during teaching has shown that it reduces behaviours that challenge and that "Choice making has been linked to greater independence and improved quality of life" (Cannalaet, 2005 cited in Rispoli et al. 2013, pg 67). Ulke-Kurkcuoglu and Kircaali-Iftar (2010) agree that providing opportunities for children to choose and make decisions may improve concentration, engagement and reduce unwanted behaviours and also report that this was the case for participants of their study during both "activity and material choice" (pg 717). From my experience I tend to agree with the benefits that choice making can have for an individual, but the process needs to be managed and developed very carefully. Offering too much choice can have the opposite effect for individuals, and work has to be done to give the choices meaning and consequence enabling students to make an informed decision in relation to previous experiences.

### **Individual Needs**

Murray (2012) discusses the need to understand the characteristics and behaviours displayed by people with autism, but that it is also necessary to appreciate that autism is ".....always in personal form and always individual" (pg15). Zager (2004) agrees with Murray in that children have huge differences in their abilities with communication, social functioning and cognition that "...educational placements always must be determined on an individual basis" (pg 299). Lawrence (2012) maintains that to meet the individual needs of particular children and young people with an autism spectrum diagnosis requires a more structured and low-arousal environment and teaching team. Temple Grandin (cited in Notbohm & Zysk, 2010) also reports on the priority that should be given to the physical needs of the children and young people to "...create a comfortable environment where they can learn" (p xviii). Grandin goes on to explain that learning will not take place without these needs being met. Leaf, McEachin and Taubman (2012) highlight the importance of "learning how to learn" (pg vi) and that we can easily assume that our students understand what to do to learn.

Individuals with autism, who may for example struggle with attention, turn taking or understanding what people are saying will probably find learning incredibly hard. Lawrence (2012) also suggests that if a child can be understood and their needs met then they will be more equipped in reaching their potential. Temple Grandin (cited in Notbohm & Zysk, 2010) emphasises the need to ensure that a child's "specialist interest" is supported and progressed in to a skill that other people will appreciate.

### **Individual versus Group**

Lawrence (2012) suggests that "Thinking in schools tends to be around groups and not the individual" (pg 29). Baron-Cohen (2008) discusses the advantages of working one to one with a child and that individuals with autism are able to manage one-to-one social relationships more effectively than unstructured social groups (pg 111). Notbohm and Zysk (2010) believe that we have to stop making comparisons between children with autism and typically developing children to enable individuals to develop "...within his own abilities, his own personality and his own timeline" (pg xxiii). Lawrence (2012) asks is all the work that is done in schools to encourage children to join in with group activities really going to be effective if ".....when by diagnosis, he is not a group player?" (pg 29). Baron-Cohen (2008) also highlights the fact that enabling the child to be themselves, to be autistic, may reduce anxieties about having to become different. Gregory (1999) believes that although we see similar behaviours and traits in people with autism, they all manifest themselves very differently from person to person, therefore "Individual children vary greatly and seldom fit into a uniform curriculum but an individual curriculum" (pg 597). Zager (2004) discusses the need for the classroom environment to provide learning opportunities, which for neurotypical children may be true. For children and young people with autism the environment can be counterproductive due to the "...lack of precision teaching, inability to adequately structure the regular classroom environment, massive doses of rapidly delivered abstract language and uncontrolled ongoing distractions" (pg 300).

In some educational establishments, the level of detail required for individualisation is difficult to achieve due to numbers, the environment, time

constraints, lack of support and generalised rather than specific training. My belief is that each child and young person with autism should have an individualised learning programme to allow for diversity and enable differentiation. I agree that people who have an autism spectrum diagnosis do find difficulty with similar skills but the way autism manifests itself within each individual can be entirely different. Not considering the specific learning needs of each child may result in a slower or negative progression and development of skills which may lead to difficulties in behaviour. In my opinion, identifying the learning priorities for each child is crucial, as well as using the interests and motivators, will provide the most effective educational programme.

### **Sensory Considerations**

There is considerable research regarding the sensory needs and impact that our environment can have on people with autism. Diane Ackerman (cited in Notbohm and Zysk (2010) pg 1) states that “There is no way in which to understand the world without first detecting it through the radar-net of our senses.” Lawrence (2012) describes the school as being a “busy social environment” and that the “stresses of lights, movements, smells and sudden bells” (pg 23) may create a place where learning is very difficult for children with autism. Temple Grandin (cited in Notbohm & Zysk, 2010) also adds that it would be very unrealistic to expect learning to occur in a place where an individual is experiencing sensory overload, “.....unless we place major emphasis on sensory integration” (pg xiii).

Bowen and Plimley (2008) suggest that it is crucial to take into account the individual differences in sensory perception and interpretation and the impact this has on behaviour and function which in turn “....could affect access to the curriculum; tolerance of school environments; inclusion with peers and general development” (pg 25). Bogdashina (2003) highlights that we have to be very aware of the way each individual receives and processes sensory information so we can “....select appropriate methods and interventions for these children” (pg 160). Reinson (2012) discusses “sensory processing disorders” and the belief by some practitioners that this forms a major component in autism. Reinson (2012) mentions the Occupational Therapist Practice Guidelines for Children and

Adolescents with Autism and their use of the “sensory diet” approach. Yack et al. (2002) described the “sensory diet” as a “planned and scheduled activity programme designed to meet a child’s specific sensory needs” (pg 72).

In my opinion, and from experience, the way an individual receives, processes and interprets sensory stimulus can have a significant impact on the way in which they are able to function, behave and make sense of the world. Getting to know an individual and developing a sensory profile is the most effective way of designing a successful educational programme. When asking and supporting children and young people to access a variety of familiar and new environments, considerations have to be made about the impact that will have on an individual. Although I believe that it is incredibly important to explore new sensory experiences, this does need to be done in a controlled and structured manner to make it positive and rewarding, hopefully encouraging students to want to try it again.

## **Behaviour**

Behaviour is a very popular topic and there appears to be vast amounts of research and literature about behaviour, explanations of behaviour, reasons for behaviour and strategies to teach, manage and support “appropriate” behaviour. Reinson (2012) suggests that some of the learning and behavioural difficulties that children with autism have to face can affect their “...ability to participate and interact more adaptively in the activities of the school day” (pg 62). Gregory (1999) discusses interests and the positive impact these have on “problem behaviour” (pg 599). There is some research in to the benefits of residential schools and that the 24 hour curriculum model provides consistency for children to learn to self manage (Smith et al 2005). Pilling et al.(2007) publish their findings to state that individuals within their study, who attended a residential special school, provided “...evidence of significant improvements in challenging behaviour” (pg 185) which children were able to maintain into adulthood. Winter (2011) highlights the need to be prescriptive and that we should “...never assume that behaviour is defiant until you are absolutely sure that the student knows what to do to behave correctly” (pg 35). Zager (2004) writes that typical children learn behaviour through observation and are intrinsically rewarded

through "...social approval, attention and affection from adults" (pg 302), which however is not always the case for children with autism.

There are significant links between behaviour and communication, sensory and emotional systems and the environment according to a wealth of literature and research. Grandin (cited in Notbohm and Zysk, 2010) states "There simply can not be any argument that a child who can not make his needs known and met is going to be a simmering cauldron of frustration and despair" (xxii). Cohen and Volkmar (1997, as cited in Tissot and Evans, 2003) also suggest that "...a lack of an effective communication system is associated with increased tantrums, aggression and even self-injury (pg 428). Whitaker (2001) reports on the impact of the presence of a learning disability in a high proportion of people with autism and that this learning disability can affect the way an individual is able to comprehend and deal with the demands made of them. Without a mechanism for coping comes frustration, anxiety and boredom and ".....makes it more likely that your child will resort to challenging behaviour" (pg 11). Tony Attwood (2007) describes "sensory overload" and that this can cause an individual with autism to become "...extremely stressed, anxious and almost shell shocked" (pg 273). Willey (2003) describes anger and frustration as the most powerful and overwhelming emotion and that "Not even sorrow can compare in intensity with anger" (pg 184) and it is crucial that we teach individuals how to identify when their anger is becoming too much and what actually triggers these emotions.

### **Residential Schools**

There is some literature and research in to the effectiveness of residential special schools from the views and opinions of students, parents/carers and professionals, however Morris, Abbott and Ward (2003) say that "The Government itself has stated that not enough is known about disabled children in residential schools" (pg 70). Hallett, Hallett and McAteer (2007) found that parents/carers and educational professionals felt that there were great social benefits for children and young people attending residential schools. The accessibility to social care was reported to be more valuable "rather than curricular led, educational residential provision" (pg 223). Pulling, McGill and

Cooper (2007) suggest that residential schools that provide a 52 week curriculum can provide provision for those children and young people that families and social services are unable to support but that residential placement “may increase the vulnerability of the children” (pg 184). Smith et al.(2005) described the 24 hour curriculum and reliable and constant behavioural support as key factors that are considered in placing a child or young person in to a residential school. However McGill, Tennyson and Cooper (2006) suggest that reported parental satisfaction with residential special schools may be skewed by the improved home life and may not be consistent with children’s and young people’s perceptions.

Although I totally and wholeheartedly agree with the fact that children should live at home with their families if safe to do so, I do believe that for some children this can begin to have a detrimental effect on the family and relationships within it. From my experience families are often not provided with the support they require to support children with autism effectively, and often do not have access to training and understanding that professionals working in the field of autism have. I believe that residential schools do have their place within society for those families and children that need more specialist input and guidance, but it is critical that parents/carers and families make the decisions around the design of individual learning programmes. Whilst residential schools can provide the consistency and structure that may not always be available in the family home, a large part of the learning programme has to be around supporting positive and successful visits home, holidays and activities within the local community with family and friends.

In the following sections of this project I will discuss how the research was carried out, my findings and analysis of the qualitative data gained and discusses these results in relation to the current literature and theories proposed.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **The School Under Study**

Mackworth House is a brand new residential school in Derby for 12 children aged between the ages of 6 and 18 with a diagnosis of autism and opened in February 2013. The curriculum will run for 52 weeks of the year which means the school is required to hold a dual registration for a children's home and independent special school. The school currently does not have any enrolled students but has generated a significant amount of interest from local authorities, parents and carers.

#### **Procedure and participants**

The data collection methodology used is designed to evaluate the impact education has on children and young people with autism from the perspectives of professionals and families. By using a discovery research process and open-ended questionnaire design the author was able to establish the views and opinions towards the design of our school curriculum. Descombe (2007) highlights that this method of collecting qualitative data is "...more likely to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent" (pg 166).

To gain the participant sample a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed with the intention that the hand picked participants would have provided the most valuable data and highest response rate. However, the nature of qualitative research design relies on the participants providing a subjective view of the topic area from their experiences of working with people on the autism spectrum and perhaps does not account for the specific children and young people that will access the school. Therefore, the data has to be analysed in relation to research and theory to avoid generalisations being made. The professionals, parents and carers chosen all have first hand experience of working, supporting and caring for children and young people on the autism spectrum. A total of 26 participants were asked to take part in the study who all agreed to do so and subsequently 26 questionnaires were sent out.

## **Ethical Review**

When considering any research project, the author has to carefully consider the ethical issues and implications that the study and results may have on others. Orb et al. (2000) say that the process of research causes "...tension between the aims of research to make generalisations for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy" (pg 93). Ethical issues should be considered throughout a research project and not just at the beginning to gain authorisation from the ethical committee, and whilst most ethical issues might be able to be identified before the study takes place "...often ethical issues emerge as research proceeds, sometimes in unexpected and surprising ways" (Miles, 2013, pg 2).

### *Informed consent*

Informed consent allows participants to make a judgement about how they see their role within the research, and whether they want to continue to be a part of it and "The researcher must reiterate the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time (Houghton, 2012, pg 16). Providing the participants with all the information necessary to make an informed decision about their involvement in the study is crucial and "...comprehend the potential risks and benefits of the study" (Tracey, 2013, pg 89). Within the research study, participant consent was gained by providing a detailed explanation about the school profile, the curriculum methodology and philosophy, issues that had been considered around confidentiality and the option of withdrawing from the entire study or elements of the study at any time. It was felt that as the participants knew the researcher, they would feel confident in raising any ethical issues with, and they had the ability to contact the researcher at any time.

### *The relationships between the researcher and the participant*

The relationship between the researcher and participant is likely to have an impact on the quality of data that is obtained from the research study (Given, 2008). "Participants are the ultimate gatekeepers. They determine whether and to what extent the researcher will have access to the information desired" (Hatch, 2002, pg 51). The non-probability purposive sampling technique chosen was done so to identify those people who had an understanding of individuals with autism.

Gaining the qualitative data without this level of knowledge may have been hard to collect, but what must be considered is the possibility of “The ultra-helpful participant” (Searle, 1999, pg 67). Participants may have a real interest in the topic area and may also be trying to interpret and answer questions in a way that gives the researcher the data that is desired.

### *Risk to benefit ratio*

Risk to benefit ratio should be addressed when thinking about any research proposal and “Risks to subjects posed by participation in research should be justified by the anticipated benefits to the subjects themselves” (Michigan State University, 2005, pg 1). The questionnaire design requires participants to provide their views and opinions of the school curriculum plans and methodologies and as they are professionals, parents/carers and family members it could be assumed that they have the best interests of people with autism in mind. Gaining data from a variety of people with a range of knowledge and experience should hopefully provide some interesting and valid information and would suggest poses more benefits than risks to the population of people with autism.

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality in the context of research can be defined as “Information about individuals collected will not be disclosed and that the identity of research participants will be protected” (Wiles, 2013, pg 42). As part of the research design confidentiality is considered and explained to enable participants to make a decision on whether they wanted to be part of the study. All questionnaires received are anonymous, coded and kept in a secure place until the research project has been completed when they will be destroyed. All information will only be used for the purpose of this research study, and participant’s identity will never be used.

### *Dual role of the Head Teacher and researcher*

Researcher bias needs to be carefully considered as “Conflict can arise for the researcher if they also have a professional interest in the study topic” (Houghton, 2010, pg 21). A conflict of interest could potentially have an influence on the objectivity and judgement of results and therefore when analysis of the qualitative data takes place, it is important assumptions are not made unless related to research.

In line with the regulations of Sheffield Hallam University, the questionnaire was submitted for ethical approval which was subsequently granted. Research participants were assured of confidentiality and all materials were kept securely and in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act. Participants were given the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and were reminded that they could refrain from answering any of the questions and still remain in the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The research project was designed to find out what elements of an individual's education the participants feel should take priority and why this would be beneficial for children and young people with autism in later life. Research questions include:

1. What areas of the curriculum do parents, carers, and professionals feel would most benefit pupils with autism?
2. Why are these areas a priority?
3. Why would these areas benefit pupils with autism?

The open-ended nature of the questionnaire will produce qualitative data. This raw data was referenced or coded to provide a data format that is used to identify any relationships between ideas and theoretical analysis. The data can then be categorised under the 3 research questions identified above to identify any themes and relationships among the codes and categories. Further coding and classification may be required once the raw data has been received and

analysed as areas outside of my initial research questions may occur from responses. The analysis of the data should hopefully identify key concepts that will form the foundations for any generalised conclusions compared to theories or explanations.

As a researcher my role in the data analysis process should take into account the following factors:

1. Decide on which parts of the data should take priority
2. Ensure the number of codes, categories and themes are such that it will produce some meaningful data to be analysed
3. Ensure that the key ideas developed are gained from the analysis of raw data only
4. Make comparisons between the key ideas developed and existing theories, explanations and research.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) promote the use of “Grounded Theory” as a tool to generate theories. We can then apply coding techniques to break down, compare and organise the data to construct “...themes, essences, descriptions and theories” (Walker and Myrick, 2011 pg 549). Coding is not something that is just done during data analysis, it is the “fundamental analytical process used by the researcher” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, pg 12), and it helps the researcher convey their findings into ideas and concepts. From coding we may begin to sort our data in to what Searle (1999) describes as categories which “...can be imposed by the researcher from their own perspective, or may emerge from what the participants themselves say or do” (pg 192).

All responses to the open ended questions were analysed and coded and a list of theories, views and ideas were then generated and grouped in to topics. Comparisons were then made between the topics and themes and related to our research questions.

## **Measures**

The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections. Section 1 requires the respondent to provide a profile of themselves in relation to working, supporting or caring for people with autism. Questions 2 to 4 asks participants to answer open-ended questions on the following areas:

- (1) Personal profile (including experience, sector, role and training).
- (2) The school profile (including private, specialist and residential provision and age range).
- (3) The waking day curriculum (including 52 week curriculum, individualised education plans, teaching methodology, national curriculum and personal priority need).
- (4) The school environment (including building design and outside facilities).

After receiving the returned questionnaire, the researcher was able to analyse the qualitative data and discuss findings in relation to the current research and theories and make some judgments about the design and implications of that the curriculum may have on the children and young people attending the school. .

## 4. Findings

### Participant Returns

A total of fourteen questionnaires were completed and returned giving a response rate of 54% which according to Hayes (2000) is significantly higher than the 20-30% commonly found with postal questionnaires.

### Participant Profile

The fourteen returned questionnaires provide qualitative data from a range of sectors with one participant being a sibling to someone with autism, six participants working in education, four professionals from the health care sector and one participant from social care. The partakers in the research study come with a number of years of experience working with, teaching or caring for a person on the autism spectrum with two participants having three years or less, three with four to six years of experience, six people with seven to ten years, one individual with eleven to fifteen years and three people with over sixteen years of experience.

### Training Profile

Only half of all participants had done training specifically linked to working with people with autism and even fewer, 43%, were actively using some of these principles in their practice (see table 1.1 Description of the Participants). Some participants had received internal training through a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), had attended a short course from a local training provider, or had covered some autism specific content as part of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Autism specific training that individuals had undertaken were strategies such as Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) (Cooper & Heward, 2006), Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children (TEACCH) (University of North Carolina, 2013), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (Pyramid Educational Consultants UK, 2007), Social Stories (The Gray Centre for Social Learning and Understanding, 2013), Sensory Integration (Sensory Integration Network, 2013)

Intensive Interaction (Caldwell, 2008), SPELL (The National Autistic Society, 2013), visual timetables and behavioural intervention strategies such as PROACT-SCIPr-UK® (The Lodden Training and Consultancy, 2008), Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) (British Institute of Learning Disabilities, 2013) and positive behaviour management (PBM).

### **The School Profile**

Participants were provided with an explanation about the school and were asked to provide their views and opinions about the ownership of the school, what provision would be on offer and the age range that the school could cater for.

#### *Privately Owned School*

Participant thoughts on children and young people accessing a privately owned school were that this type of provision could be beneficial and a needed alternative to state maintained schools. Respondents felt that it is important that children and young people have access to them as long as private schools do not lose sight of the mission statement for profit. Participants said that private schools “Can supply a high quality and creative service” and that “For children with severe autism private education was better.” Four of the participants believed that private schools were required due to the lack of public funding to provide specialist provision, and according to two individuals the more wealthy private organisations can supply the family support and structure that is required to cope with the impact autism has on everyone involved.

Three participants commented on the ability to be able to adapt and vary the teaching methods in a privately owned school, and that this “Specialist environment, equipment, resources and smaller class sizes can result in a positive impact on education and progress for the children.” Due to the money for correct staffing levels and the ability to provide bespoke packages, often privately owned schools were able to meet the individual needs of the students as “Often placement failures occurred because of a lack of understanding.” One participant also described the need to provide the structure, routine and predictability for a child with autism.

### *Specialist Provision for Children with Autism*

Every participant said that there was a need for specific provision for children and young people with autism and that due to the individuality of people on the spectrum there needed to be “specialist provision and specialist care.”

Participants also added that this type of provision supported the needs of the family and access to the home environment and that this was important for children and young people to feel safe and thrive. Two participants expressed that for some children main stream school is not an option as they often had to try and “Fit the individual in to the service and not the service to the individual” and one participant believed that a blanket curriculum was far less successful. Four participants talked in detail about some of the elements of a specialist provision that are essential for progress and that a structured skill based programme was vital and would make a significant difference to people in their adult lives. There was one participant that showed concern with a specialist provision and talked about the difficulties that this may create with integration when leaving school, and two subjects did state that it is important to consider the impact that autism has on a child’s life and that a specialist placement is not necessarily the most suitable option if a child is able to cope within a mainstream environment.

### *Residential Provision*

Nearly all the participants stated that they could see the need for residential support for some children on the autism spectrum and that as long as the staff were well trained and the environment was suitable that this could be a positive provision. Three participants talked about the benefits that residential provision could have for the family and that it can offer “respite” and a “lifeline for families.” Seven of the subjects described some of the factors that residential provision could provide and that learning all day would allow students to work on all aspects of life in a “realistic and supportive environment” in preparation for adulthood. Two subjects noted that residential care might provide the consistency, structure and routine that may not be able to be achieved at home and that this security may positively influence learning. However, two

participants stated that they believed residential provision should not be available below the ages of 12 and that children are much better off at home if at all possible. One participant also said that a residential provision may shelter an individual from the real world which may present difficulties when leaving school.

### *The Age Range*

This question required participants to comment on their thoughts and views on the five to nineteen age range for the school. Five of the subjects agreed on the fact that they believed 5 was too young to be at a residential school, that the age range is too vast and that because of this would children have access to suitably aged peers for joint educational experiences. One participant however commented that this might not be such an issue due to the individualised curriculum at the school. Eight of the participants discussed the idea of consistency and that a child or young person might benefit from being at the school for a length of time and that the support would be available throughout part or whole of a child's life. However, four of the participants highlighted that due to the time a child might spend at the school, a carefully planned transition would need to be implemented as this may be difficult for children when leaving.

### **The Waking Day Curriculum**

Participants were asked to provide their views and opinions on the curriculum model that is to be used at the school. They were provided with information regarding the plans for implementation and how this might work for individual students.

### *The 52 Week Curriculum*

This question asked the participants about their thoughts of a 52 week curriculum. Eleven out of the fourteen subjects reported that they believed it was a beneficial model of teaching and for two of the participants the reason was that it could provide "consistency and routine." Three out of the eleven people discussed the ability to be able to present experiential and holistic learning

opportunities and “actual life experience” and support interaction in to adult life. For one of the participants, the 52 week curriculum is described as “innovative, exciting and highly suited to people with autism” and for two others it was about providing the chance to maintain and develop greater skills that may hopefully result in our children and young people with autism having better control of their lives. Holidays and transition were also discussed by these participants as being “confusing and unnecessary” and that not having to deal with transition would “lower stress and anxiety.” However five of the participants discussed what they felt may pose challenges with the 52 week curriculum, that this model could be too intense and there needs to be careful consideration given to spending time with the family, accessing the local community, relaxation and down time. It was suggested that there needed to be a clear division between school and home time. Two of the subjects suggested that “life after school” may be difficult because of the intensity of a 52 week curriculum and being away from the family for so long and that the transition process needed to be carefully planned.

*Individualised Learning Programmes Designed by the Multi-Disciplinary Team*

Participants were asked what they thought about the multi-disciplinary approach when designing individualised learning programmes for the children and young people at the school. All fourteen of the participants reported that they believed this approach was a positive and beneficial one and that this “perfect scenario” should be replicated within mainstream education. Six of the subjects discussed the need to have a range of experienced people that know the students best to generate a truly holistic learning programme that covers every aspect of a child’s life. Some of these participants suggest that personalised learning can only be achieved through a multi-disciplinary approach and that everyone needs to be involved to ensure that we are able to problem solve, assess, review and develop educational programmes effectively. However one participant suggests that there should always be a lead within a multi-disciplinary team to ensure that learning programmes are managed efficiently. Two participants highlight the idea that individualisation is important as the curriculum becomes meaningful and therefore learning is more significant, and one subject suggests that programmes need to remain flexible.

### *Teaching in a Range of Environments and not in Classrooms*

This question was to establish what the participants thought about the curriculum methodology of teaching in a range of different environments rather than in a classroom situation. All participants provided positive comments towards this approach, with three stating that it was good as long as there remained some structure and routine. Eight subjects expressed that they believed the classroom environment is not a good one for people with autism due to group sizes, accessibility and individual needs not being able to be met and that “individual programme design works better.” All participants discussed a number of different reasons for their positivity towards the curriculum design and four of the subjects suggested that using a variety of tailored and familiar environments would “promote the confidence to cope,” that the positive stimulus would “encourage communication, relaxation and participation” and that students may learn best when in an environment that feels “comfortable, safe and secure.” One participant paid particular attention to the idea that the environment will aid progression if “non-threatening” and that students will learn in a “natural and progressive way.” Another participant commented that if sitting in a classroom is not considered a life skill then there is no need to teach in this way. Three of the subjects discussed the methodology as providing an opportunity to access a meaningful and realistic curriculum where skills can be practiced in real life experiences. One participant commented that for individuals with autism there has to be a point and reason for doing something and so teaching in this way allows us to put “skills in to a relevant context so it makes sense.”

### *The National Curriculum*

This question was asked to gain the thoughts of individuals about how we will map the national curriculum into the 5 areas of the school curriculum (academic and vocational studies, creative studies, well-being, independence and physical education). Children and young people will not be learning geography for example in a classroom, but will be doing so by exploring our local community and world around us. All participants, apart from one who did not answer this question, stated that they thought the national curriculum needed to play a part in

the school set up as it provides a framework to be able to establish student base-lines, set targets and track learning and progress. One of these participants however also commented that they were glad it was not the focus. Five of the subjects highlighted the importance they felt the national curriculum played for comparing student progress and school performance and that it keeps the school in touch with special and mainstream education. One of the participants suggested that they felt this approach was the “most appropriate way to embed the national curriculum” and another individual that “embedding in to motivating activities would enhance learning.”

### *Skills for Adult Life*

Views were obtained from participants by asking what they thought about the priority given to teaching life skills over and above the areas of the national curriculum. All participants reported that they felt learning life skills were far more important for adult life than elements of the national curriculum. Seven of these subjects suggested that the national curriculum was not always suitable for children with autism and that it “tries to fit children in to the same box” and that national curriculum skills are “a lot less transferable to adult life.” One of the subjects reports that all schools should teach the skills needed for adult life, and although these skills may be very different than for neurotypical children, they are crucial for those children with autism as they are often the skills that individuals really struggle with. Three of the participants state that there is no point in teaching the national curriculum if children and young people are not able to cope in the real world or in later life, are not able to look after themselves, are not in control of their emotions, are not able to mix with the community, are not able to understand themselves or the world around them or have the communication and behavioural skills to participate. Two individuals also suggest that if our children and young people with autism do not have the necessary life skills then progress towards the national curriculum is limited, and that if lifeskills are embedded throughout the curriculum children and young people will be “more settled about life, be able to cope with change and will suffer less placement breakdown in later life.”

## **The School Environment**

Participants were provided with a description of the inside and outside spaces at the school and the plans for the development of them according to student's needs, likes and interests.

### *Bedroom Design*

All of the participants thoughts about the bedroom design was positive with descriptions such as "comfortable and functional," "well designed," "spacious and luxurious," and "everything a child needs." Six of the subjects made comment on the plans to personalise the bedroom space for each student and that this would create a "personal space that is like home," "a sense of belonging and ownership" and a room that promotes independence and supports the child or young person to become an individual. Two participants suggested that this safe personalised space could be used for and aid learning activities and that this could be done "on own terms without having to compromise with other students." Two participants highlighted some areas for consideration with bedroom design and that the space may be too open plan for students and so may need to be screened off, and some students may prefer to have a bath instead of a shower.

### *Shared Living Space*

Establishing the participant's views on shared living space resulted in all fourteen of the participants reporting that they felt it was important and essential. The most common factor was to promote social interaction and communication, build relationships and to support children and young people to make friends. Two participants suggest that this design creates a space that is "like a family home," "generates a sense of community" and that it promotes a range of opportunities to learn how to use a "shared space." Two subjects also highlight the possibility of learning from others and exploring new interests and experiences, perhaps with older students teaching skills to younger individuals. However, two participants point out that consideration needs to be given to the need for the environment to be carefully controlled to "prevent confrontation" and that some older students may wish to "prepare food in their own environment."

### *Inside School Space*

All subjects discussed the school facilities in a positive way describing them with words such as “Amazing,” “Excellent,” “Fantastic,” “Incredible” and of “Real benefit.” Five of the participants commented that they thought the range of facilities are relevant and would suit individual needs and cater for a variety of interests. One participant stated that it may encourage students to “try new things and develop in new areas” and two individuals suggested that it may promote the sharing of interests and peer interaction to work on social skills and communication. Two individuals highlight their thoughts about the importance of enjoying to learn and that the school facilities will mean students will be engaged and rewarded from the environment they live and learn in.

### *Outside Space*

As with the inside space, all fourteen participants reported positive comments about the opportunities this would provide. Three of the subjects discuss the importance that the space is “equipped for students needs” and that it is crucial to be able to “develop individual experiences” and “experience new environments.” Three participants suggest the therapeutic benefit the pets corner and sensory garden will have for students and that animals are able to support the development of nurture and care. Seven people highlight the importance of having an outside space which allows students to safely explore with a “sense of freedom” and that this will be “the most important place for some children.” Finally, three of the participants discuss the opportunities an outside space provides for “physical activity, relaxation, play and learning” and working towards individualised learning programmes and targets for our students.

## 5. Discussion

The findings in this research project need to be discussed with regard to a number of factors. The opinions gained are only from one sibling and thirteen professionals caring or working in the field of autism, and not from parents or children who have experienced a 52 week residential special school. The views reported by participants may not agree with parents, with the children with autism themselves, or those individuals working in different roles within the local authority. The questionnaire response rate was 54%, which is relatively high, but with only 14 participants the sample is quite small. Care needs to be taken not to make conclusions from the findings that claim to reflect the general population of children with autism, their families and the professionals working and supporting individuals on the autism spectrum. However, due to the design methodology, subjects were selected that have a range of first hand experiences of supporting and working with people with autism across a variety of sectors, therefore providing a rich source of qualitative data. This data has been coded to establish themes that enable the author to make comparisons with current research and theories which form the basis of this discussion section.

From the experience of the author and other studies, privately owned schools can often cause contention with local authorities due to mainly the cost implications (Morris et al..2003, Pilling et al. 2007), but research also shows that there has been contrasting opinions about the ethics behind inclusion and special school provision (Allan and Brown, 2001; Norwich, 2008; Morris et al..2003). All participants in this research study believed that children, young people and their families should have access to this privately owned provision as not all maintained schools have the resources and support to be able to deliver such a diverse curriculum for those children and young people most severely affected by autism. The 1981 Education Act deemed all children with special educational needs were to be educated in mainstream schools if that provision could meet the child's needs, if it did not disrupt the education for other children, that the parents were supportive of this and that it was cost-effective (Norwich, 2008).

However, the children and young people who may live and learn at the school under study will be individuals who do have diverse and complex support needs that mainstream education may not be able to meet. There is some evidence that the profile of children attending residential schools is changing with more individuals demonstrating compound, multifaceted and specific difficulties such as autism and severe learning disabilities (Morris et al. 2003). Pilling et al. (2007) and McGill et al. (2006) also found that children accessing a 52 week residential school “present needs that both families and local services struggle to meet” (pg184), and were commonly seen to offer a highly effective provision, although recommended that local alternatives need to be explored so families are able to visit more frequently (Morris et al. 2003).

Morris (2003) carried out a survey to establish the views and opinions of 32 children and 34 parents about residential special schools. Interviews were carried out and results reported mixed emotions about living at a residential school, from feeling homesick to being given the opportunity to be more independent and make friends. Some of the respondents within this study felt that residential school provision should not cater for children under the age of 12 and that children are much better off within the family home. In contrast however, some of the participants within this study express their views about the need for residential schools and the funding, structure and support it can provide to families. However, this would only be a positive provision if the staff had the right experience and were suitably trained. This reflects the findings of Morris et al. (2003) and Norwich (2008) who report on the social reasons why parents might consider a residential school and that the lack of family support from the local authority was a major factor for placement. The Department of Health (2001), Abbott et al. (2001), McGill et al. (2006) and Smith et al. (2005) found that parents chose a residential provision for their children because of bad experiences of special and mainstream education, a high rate of exclusion, schools being unable to manage behaviour and the consistency of the 24 hour curriculum. It is important here to consider the points raised by the participants within this research project regarding transition, and due to the time a child may

be at the school, a well planned transition programme would need to be put in place.

A common theme running throughout the participant's answers included individualised learning and the importance this had on engaging and motivating pupils. All of the participants reported that individualised curriculum programmes designed by a multidisciplinary team were exactly the method that should be employed by all schools to generate a "truly holistic learning programme that covers every aspect of a child's life" an opinion also shared by the Department for Education and Skills (2006). Back in 1999, Gregory found that one approach was not suitable for all children and that the curriculum should have structure but the teaching tailored to suit the learning needs of each individual. This reflects the thoughts of Kerr's research paper (2003) and the need to identify that "the child knows best" (pg 197) and that any individual will respond to teaching methods in such a way that can inform and develop the design of educational programmes. Research by Morrier et al. (2011) and Stahmer et al. (2011) replicates this proposal by Kerr and Gregory and suggests that educational strategies that work with one child may not work with another.

The school under study intends to teach the national curriculum in a way that embeds learning targets into functional and meaningful activities that are motivating and interesting for the pupils. It was felt that embedding the national curriculum in this way would enhance learning and students would be able to learn in a naturalistic and progressive way, an opinion shared by some of the participants and Toelken and Miltenberg (2012). Brickner (1994) found that if activity based teaching is employed, then adaptations and flexibility can be implemented in to learning programmes to meet the developmental needs of each child. Jung and Sainato (2013) and Kluth and Daemody-Lathyam (2003) extended this research by reporting that the level of engagement by children and young people with autism tends to increase if we embedded individual interests in to activities. Leaf et al. (2012) suggests that any curriculum needs to be about what is enjoyable and motivating for the pupils, and not about what the educational professional thinks is significant or right.

The respondents suggest that the national curriculum should not be the main focus of the schools learning programmes, but that it can be used as a framework by educational professionals to monitor and track progress whilst maintaining individualisation. The participants reported that the national curriculum tried to fit children in to categories and levels and there was a strong feeling that skills required to be learned for adult life should remain priority. Gregory (1999) shares this notion and suggests that curriculum targets should be based around independence and the management of emotion and behaviour and that pupils should be enthused by the natural consequence of learning (pg 602). Leaf et al. (2012) follows on to state that if an individual is not motivated by the learning process, then we should look at the environment and how this may play a part in reinforcing participation from our students.

All respondents in the study discussed the idea that the 52 week residential aspect of the school would provide pupils with the opportunities to practice real life skills throughout the whole day in a “realistic and supportive environment” and that this model of education would prepare the children and young people for adulthood. Gregory (1999) suggests that an effective curriculum has to be one that prepares a child for adult life and includes the teaching of the skills that are often lacking for children and young people with autism. Lee (2010) and Attwood (2007) discuss the need for teaching the “hidden curriculum” (pg 141) due to the difficulty that individuals with autism have with social skills, interactions and developing and maintaining relationships. Zager (2004) reports that a number of students with autism do not have the “self-help” skills they need for adult life and that a false impression can be generated about ability levels due to an uneven skills profile. Hallet et al. (2007) and Emmerson et al. (1996) conducted a study to evaluate the residential provision at a special school and also concluded that the social aspects had real benefits for students accessing it including socialisation, increased independence, improved confidence and a reduction in challenging behaviour, which in turn had a positive impact on educational achievement and were sustained after leaving school.

Some of the life skills identified within the research project by the participants were those of social skills, communication and behaviour. Parsons et al. (2011) suggests that programmes that focus on communication and behaviour, that also involve parents, were most effective and demonstrated better outcomes for the students. Participants within this study also felt that teaching these elements of the curriculum was vital to enable students to engage and participate in learning as found in the research carried out by Gregory (1999). Lund (2001) suggests that learning new self management skills relies on the existing skills we already have and as Leaf et al. (2012), Luiselli et al. (2008) and Matson et al. (2007) found, if children are inattentive, engage in self-stimulatory behaviours, are unable to wait, or do not have the communication skills to understand others, then learning key social, communication and academic skills will be incredibly hard.

Neitzel (2010) discussed that children will often display behaviour that can hinder learning because of the lack of social and communicative abilities to get their needs met. For this Neitzel, Durrand et al (1992) and Quill (2000) suggest an individualised curriculum that will result in a reduction of interfering behaviour by teaching the necessary communication skills. Gregory (1999) found that a variation of preferred and non preferred activities reduced the amount of problem behaviour and increased motivation. In the research carried out by Murray et al (2009) it highlights the importance of having an understanding about the sensory component that may be rooted in the behaviour itself and this in turn could be incredibly reinforcing for the individual with autism. Research also suggests that providing choice can have a positive impact on self-management and therefore increase on task activity and motivation (Ulke-Kurkcuglu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2010).

Some of the respondents within this study discussed the notion of flexibility around teaching methods, and that correct levels of staffing were perhaps more possible in a privately owned school. Zager (2004) reports that the individuality of autism requires specific, intensive and specialised teaching with high staff to student ratios and recommends that residential provision are suitable for those

children with severe autism. Boyd et al. (2008) and Sayers and Smith (2008) studied children with autism in an educational provision and found that smaller group sizes and one to one teaching resulted in higher level of social interactions, initiations, the acquisition of lifelong skills and learning goals being achieved.

Consistency, structure and routine are often reported as being essential for an individual with autism to learn and progress and respondents in the study report that they feel residential care might be able to provide this for its pupils. The idea that a child may remain at the same school for a considerable length of time would mean that the support would be available for the child and families for a substantial period of time throughout a child's life. A publication in the American Teacher (2007) and a study conducted by Zager (2007) agree that repetition, consistency and highly structured teaching programmes are the key to success. Similarly Neitzel (2010) and Stahmer et al. (2011) discuss the importance of the environment for children and young people with autism and the necessity to ensure there is structure and predictability so learning can take place.

Another regular theme running throughout the feedback was that of the environment and how this may have a significant impact on the children and young people accessing the school. The majority of respondents reported that they felt a classroom environment was not always an appropriate place for children with autism to learn. Norwich (2008) comments on this as part of the research carried out and the belief that children and young people may not get the access to the specialist services they require if taught in a classroom based situation. However, Norwich did go on to say that individualised learning may create a sense of exclusion and stigma from other children. Paton (2005) reports that it must be recognised that learning can take place in a variety of environments outside the classroom and Reinson (2012) describe some of the difficulties children with autism may have within a classroom environment due to the lack of ability to manage behaviour and emotions. Bendict et al. (2007) suggest that "high quality learning environments are safe, predictable and focused on building positive relationships with adults and other students" (pg 249 as cited in Neitzel, 2010).

Participants in this research project comment upon the importance of a positive and familiar environment and that being able to personalise and adapt spaces to suit individual needs is a real benefit to the pupils. Respondents state that having a familiar and suitable environment will promote students to feel comfortable and safe and more able to cope with everyday life. Perhaps some of the reasons for this is that students may be getting their sensory needs met and are not over stimulated by the surrounding environment. Barnett-Veague (2009) published findings to suggest that meeting sensory needs can reduce the impact that the characteristics of autism have on an individual's life and Reinson (2012) and Miller (2010) suggest that it is essential to base programmes around the sensory profile of each person. Yack (2002) found that supporting children to experience a range of sensory experiences on a regular basis will improve attention, engagement and social interactions. Attwood (2003) describes the connection between sensory needs and behaviour and for an individual with autism behaviour is a way of getting sensory requirements met. If we were just to work on changing behaviour without considering the sensory aspects of that behaviour, individuals may start to exhibit an alternative behaviour to get their sensory needs met. Hounagan and Hounagan (2009) go on to suggest that for children with autism, sensory processing is not an unconscious process but that a child may seek or avoid certain stimuli depending on whether they are over or under sensitive.

## 6. Conclusion

This research project gave an account of the views and opinions of people working and caring for individuals with a diagnosis of autism. The study has outlined the importance of having access to a range of provision to suit the learning needs of our children and young people with autism. The study set out to determine what priority areas of the curriculum do parents, carers and professionals feel would most benefit pupils with autism and why?

The study has shown that preparing children for adult life by prioritising the teaching of life skills through a meaningful and realistic curriculum, designed by the multi-disciplinary team, was the most important element for children with autism. The national curriculum was deemed to be an important tool to be able to assess and monitor progress, but should not be the main focus of teaching and learning. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was individualisation and personalisation and that this was the key to an effective provision and positive outcomes. Due to the diverse needs of the children and young people accessing the school it was also shown that an autism specific curriculum was most suited which addressed communication and self-management skills from the off-set. The second major finding was the importance of the learning environment and that specialist and adaptable spaces would promote and aid progression. The opportunity to develop the environment according to student's individual needs would be motivating and engaging for the children accessing it. The study also demonstrated that the shared spaces within the school would be paramount to practice, develop and encourage those social skills and interactions that often children and young people with autism find difficult, and that these areas would generate the sense of a home environment.

The results of this study indicate that privately owned residential provision has its place in society but perhaps only for those children and young people who are more severely affected by autism who are unable to manage at home or in local special schools. Residential learning programmes may be able to provide

elements of education that a mainstream school is not such as flexible teaching methods, personalised environments, individualised learning programmes, appropriate staffing levels, structure and consistency and the opportunity to practice real life skills in realistic situations with the support required. However, perhaps the most important factor is the guidance and support that a residential school may be able to provide the children and their families, to build and maintain positive relationships and spend quality time together. All of this however does seem to rely on an experienced and highly skilled team of staff that are able to design a truly individualised flexible learning programme that prepares the pupils as much as possible for adult life.

The findings from this study contributes to existing knowledge regarding autism and residential school provision, and perhaps promotes a more positive aspect of some of the benefits that this type of curriculum can provide. It appears that there is limited research in to residential schools and the impact and outcomes this has on children and their families, but what the research does suggest is that there is a need for them because of the lack of support families receive (Norwich, 2008; Hallett et al. 2007; Pilling et al. 2007; Department for Health, 2001; Smith et al. 2005; Morris et al. 2003; McGill et al. 2006). The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the importance of teaching life skills to children and young people with autism (Leaf et al. 2012; Luiselli et al. 2008; Parsons et al. 2011; Lund, 2001; Zager, 2004; Hallet et al. 2007; Emmerson, 2006; Lee, 2010; Attwood, 2007) and that learning for a child or young person with autism is unique (Gregory, 1999; Kerr, 2003; Morrier et al. 2011; Stahmer et al. 2011). The present study confirms previous findings about the impact the environment may have on our children and young people and their capacity to learn (Norwich, 2008; Paton, 2005; Reinson, 2012; Benedict et al. 2007), and the importance of considering sensory processing for each individual (Barnett-Veague, 2009; Miller, 2012; Yack, 2002; Hougan et al. 2009).

More research is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the implications of placing a child with autism in to a residential school from the perspective of the

individual and their families. Future trials should make comparisons between residential and non-residential special school provision and the outcomes for the children and their families accessing them. It might also be interesting to determine the views and opinions of the funding authorities in relation to this research.

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## Appendices A

**Table 1.1 Description of the Participants**

Participant	Role	Training Received	Specific Interventions Being Actively Used in Practice
1	Physical Education (PE) Teacher	Autism Awareness	None
2	Quality Assurance Manager (Post 16 College for LLDD)	None	None
3	Lecturer (Post 16 College – Discreet LLDD)	None	None
4	General Practitioner	None	None
5	Operations Manager and Relief Support Manager Supported Living	TEACCH, Intensive Interaction, PROACT-SCIPr-UK®, Understanding Autism	TEACCH, Intensive Interaction, PROACT-SCIPr-UK®
6	Clinical Psychologist	ABA, TEACCH, PECS, PBS	PBS
7	Behaviour Support Specialist	ABA, TEACCH, PECS, Social Stories, PBS, PBM	ABA, TEACCH, PECS, Social Stories, PBS, PBM
8	Lecturer (Post 16 College – Discreet LLDD)	PECS, Social Stories, Sensory Integration, Intensive Interaction	PECS, Sensory Integration, Intensive Interaction
9	Learning Support Coordinator (Post 16 College – Discreet LLDD)	None	None
10	Occupational Therapist	Sensory Integration	None
11	Head of Year and Physical Education (PE) Teacher	Autism Awareness	None
12	Sibling of a person with Asperger Syndrome	None	None
13	Senior Teacher and Social Communication Specialist	TEACCH, PECS, Social Stories, Intensive Interaction, Autism Awareness during PGCE	PECS, Social Stories, Intensive Interaction
14	Primary School Teacher	Autism Awareness	Social Stories, Visual Timetables

## **Appendices B**

1.0 Covering Letter

1.1: Further Information and Participant Consent Form

1.2: Participant Questionnaire

Dear Colleague

Please find enclosed a number of documents that you will need if you choose to participate in my research project.

The title of my project is:

**“An Evaluation of the Design of a New School Curriculum?”**

Within this pack, you will find the following documentation:

- Further Information and Participant consent form
- Participant Questionnaire
- Stamped addressed envelope

If you do decide that you can spare some of your time to help me with my research study, then please read the further information document which will set the scene for you about what we are trying to achieve at our new school that is due to be open in September 2012, and complete the consent form. Please then fill in the questionnaire following the instructions on page 1.

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please can you post the questionnaire and consent form back to me using the stamped addressed envelope provided by \_\_\_\_\_

If you would prefer to complete the form electronically, please email me at the address below and I will send you the questionnaire and consent form. Please return your responses using the stamped addressed envelope provided by \_\_\_\_\_

I very much appreciate you taking the time to fill out the questionnaire, and if you are interested in the findings of the research study please do let me know.

Thanking you in anticipation

*Kirsten Gibson*

## 1.1 Further Information and Participant Consent Form

Dear Colleague,

I am a newly appointed Head Teacher at an independent specialist residential school for children aged between the ages of 5 and 18 with autism, due to open in September 2012. This survey intends to find out the views and opinions of professionals, parents and carers working, caring or supporting in the field of autism towards the design of our new school curriculum. This research study forms the final project of my Masters Degree on the Autism Spectrum at Sheffield Hallam University. My supervisor is Dr. Luke Beardon and the project has been ethically approved by the academic committee.

We intend to educate our students in a very different way to a traditional school model. The model originates from The Lodden School, an independent specialist residential school specifically for children and young people with autism. Their philosophy is that a traditional model of education from 9.00am – 4.00pm is not effective in preparing and equipping individuals on the autism spectrum with the skills they will need in adult life. The viewpoint is that learning takes place throughout the waking day, and students gain skills and independence if taught within realistic and motivating environments. The Lodden School give priority to independent living skills, communication and behaviour and emotional management as opposed to discreet teaching of the subjects within the national curriculum.

My new school curriculum will be modelled on that of the Lodden School philosophy, with variations that suit the needs of the students, the environment and the staff team working within it. All students will have an individual learning programme developed through person centred tools, and the national curriculum will be mapped in to daily routines, independent living skills, academic and physical activities, therapy, personal care and medical education where appropriate. Students will be supported and educated primarily on a one to one basis, with peer and group work embedded within their individual learning and support plan. Students will have mobile classrooms in the form of a rucksack which will contain all the equipment and resources needed to engage within different activities and learn those vital skills in areas of their living accommodation, school work spaces and community they find interesting and stimulating.

There is little research about the waking day curriculum methodology, for which I intend to highlight the views and opinions of professionals, parents and carers towards this curriculum design and I will look for and analyse relationships amongst answers that relate to theory and practice.

### **Confidentiality**

All information you give will be completely confidential once collected by the researcher, myself who will analyse the data. All information will only be used for the purpose of this research study, and your identity will never be used. All information you provide will be kept in a secure place and will be destroyed once the research project is complete.

### **Participation**

The questionnaire consists of 19 questions. Before answering any questions, please read the introductory paragraph at the beginning of each section.

If you volunteer to be in the study, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. You can choose not to be in this study if you would prefer not to be.

Before you decide to participate, please read the information on page 3 carefully and indicate your consent by ticking the “Yes” box below.

I very much hope you are able to find the time to be able to help me in my research and complete the questionnaire enclosed.

Please return the questionnaire to me using the self addressed envelope included by \_\_\_\_\_

Thanking you in anticipation

*Kirsten Gibson*

**Consent form for project entitled “An evaluation of the design of a new school curriculum?”**

I have been given enough time to read the information about the study and I understand that if I participate in the study, all information I give will be completely confidential. Responses will be sent directly to the researcher who will analyse the data. All information will only be used for the purpose of this research study as part of a group of information and my identity will never be used. All information will be kept confidential in a secure place and it will be destroyed once the research project is complete.

I understand that if I volunteer to take part in the study, I can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. I may also refuse to answer any questions I do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

In light of the information above, and by ticking the “Yes” box below, I agree to take part in the study.

Yes  No

## **1.2 Participant Questionnaire**

### **An Evaluation of the Design of a new school curriculum?**

Thank you for volunteering to become involved in my research project. Please read the information carefully below before answering the questions asked of you.

#### **Instructions on how to complete the questionnaire**

1. The questionnaire consists of 21 questions across 4 sections. This includes the demographics section of the questionnaire that will be used for data sorting purposes.
2. Please read the introductory paragraph at the beginning of sections 2,3 and 4 carefully before answering the questions.
3. Please read all the questions carefully.
4. Please provide the fullest answer you can to explain your views and opinions about each area of the curriculum.
5. It is helpful if you can answer all questions but feel free to leave blank any question you are unable to for whatever reason.

**Please use additional sheets if necessary to allow you to fully answer the questions or you can type your answers to the questions should you wish. Please make sure you number your answers in relation to the section and question you are answering.**

## Questionnaire

### Section 1: Participant Profile

**1. Indicate how many years of experience you have of teaching, working or caring for a person with autism**

3 or less  4-6 years  7-10 years  11-15 years  16+ years

**2. Indicate the ages of the people you have / do teach, work with or care for who have autism (you can tick more than one box)**

3 or less  4-6 years  7-10 years  11-15 years  16+ years

**3. Indicate what service you provide for people on the autism spectrum (you can tick more than one box)**

Main stream education  Special education  Social care  Health care  Parent / Carer

**4. Please describe what your role is within this service**

**5. Indicate any autism specific training you have received (you can tick more than one box)**

Applied Behaviour Analysis    TEACCH    PECS    Social Stories    Sensory Integration

Intensive Interaction    Behavioural Intervention – please name \_\_\_\_\_

Other – please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Indicate which of these interventions you are using currently (you can tick more than one box)**

Applied Behaviour Analysis    TEACCH    PECS    Social Stories    Sensory Integration

Intensive Interaction    Behavioural Intervention – please name \_\_\_\_\_

Other – please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## Questionnaire

### Section 2: The School Profile:

**Introduction:** The new school is a mixed gender independent specialist residential school for children and young people between the ages of 5 and 18 with a diagnosis of autism. All students that come to the school with have a statement of educational needs identifying autism as being the priority area for support.

The new school is owned by a private care provider but places will be funded by the local education authority, should they deem a child or young person require a more specialist environment than is currently being accessed by the individual. Students and their families may also be struggling at home, and so a residential school placement may prove suitable at this particular time in their lives. However, the schools mission is to support all students and their families to make the home environment a success.

1. What are your opinions about children and young people accessing a privately owned (independent) school?

2. What are your views about specialist provision specifically for children and young people with autism?

3. What are your opinions about residential provision?

4. What are your thoughts on the age range of 5 to 18 at the school?

## Questionnaire

### Section 3: The Waking Day Curriculum

**Introduction:** The school curriculum will be designed to enable us to teach, track and monitor learning throughout the waking day (7am – 10pm), 7 days a week and over 52 weeks of the year. All students will be thoroughly assessed upon referral from the local education authority (LEA) through the use of person centred tools, and an individual learning and support programme will be designed, implemented and regularly reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team working with each student.

There will be no classroom based activities where students attend a maths class or a science class, but the children and young people will learn in an environment that is motivating, stimulating and real. As students explore the school facilities and local community, we will begin to establish what pupils enjoy doing and like about the surrounding environment and we will use these places and activities to teach the skills we feel are required. Students will all have a rucksack of choice, acting as the mobile classroom, and this will contain items that are needed for a child or young person to learn and manage in each situation. Present within the rucksack will be the students learning and support plan, communication support system, any medication required and a range of objects that may reduce anxiety or re-direct students if needed.

Students will be set educational learning targets from the national curriculum in language and communication, mathematics and science, and these will be embedded within the activities the students are doing. The curriculum is broken down in to 4 areas of daily routines, independent living skills, academic and physical activities, therapy, personal care and medical education where appropriate. So for example students will practice their language and communication, mathematics and science targets through activities such as swimming, brushing teeth, looking after the animals or preparing drink and snacks. Students will be encouraged to engage in shared activities with peers and opportunities for small group work will be built in to individualised learning and support plans for all students. Other areas of the national curriculum that we will address are creativity, technology and ICT, physical education, personal, social and health education and citizenship, and although students will not have specific targets for these areas, opportunities to practice subject related skills will be embedded throughout the individualised programme for each student.

All of the above will form an individualised curriculum for students at the school but priority will always be given to skills we feel are required to prepare our children and young people for adult life, for example being able to get dressed, to wait or go to the toilet. Communication and behaviour and emotional management will be the first part of the curriculum to be implemented as this will provide students with the vital skills needed to be able to engage in learning and be prepared for adult life.

1. What are your thoughts about a 52 week curriculum?

2. What do you feel about individualised learning programmes being designed by a multi-disciplinary team?

**Note: Multi-disciplinary team would include some or all of the following: Child or young person, Parents / carers, Teachers, Head of School, Head of Care, Curriculum Managers (teachers), Learning and Support Workers, Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Educational Psychologist, Physiotherapist, medical staff**

3. What are your opinions about there being no classroom based activities and that students will be taught in a range of environments?

**4.** What do you think about the way we will use the national curriculum to plan, monitor and track learning?

**5.** What are your views on priority being given to the teaching of skills our children and young people will require in adult life (communication, behaviour and emotional management, daily routines, independent living skills) over the teaching of the national curriculum?

## Questionnaire

### Section 4: The School Environment

**Introduction:** The school and residential building are both new builds and are purpose built to suit the needs of the students. Each student has an individual 25m<sup>2</sup> bedroom with an en-suite bathroom and space within the room to house a bed, wardrobe, desk, chest of drawers, comfortable seating area and a flat screen television. Students will be able to personalise their room and utilise it as and when they need to. There are shared living and eating spaces for students to use and practice a variety of skills.

Within the school there are a number of work and activity spaces for students to access and the use of these will be built in to individualised learning and support programmes. Inside the school building there is an art and design workshop, a music studio, a technology suite, a sensory suite, a training kitchen and a sensory swimming pool. The garden will be developed to contain an adventure playground, pets corner, sensory relaxation garden, water play, sand play, a barbeque and patio area and an open space for running and playing games.

Use of all of these spaces, both within the residential and school buildings will be used by individual students depending on their interests and motivators identified through person centred planning and the multi-disciplinary team and all students will be supported to try new environments and gain new experiences

1. What do you think about the bedroom design and facilities?

2. What are your views on there being shared living spaces for students access?

**3.** What are your thoughts about the facilities provided inside the school building?

**4.** What are your opinions about the way we have designed the outside space?

**Thank you very much for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire.**

# **Appendices C**

## 2.0 Ethics Approval

## Masters in Education Programme Enquiry Based Project

### Ethics Sub-Committee Checklist

**Student Name:** Kirsten Gibson

**Committee Date:** 18/09/12

**Supervisor:** Luke Beardon

#### MEP Ethics Sub-Committee Decision

Please tick ✓

<b>Approved</b>	✓
<b>Approved with attention to the ethical issues specified in comment box below</b>	
<b>Revise and re-submit - following the guidelines below (re-submit at any time)</b>	
<b>Rejected for the reasons specified in the comment box below (submit for the forthcoming Ethics sub-committee meeting)</b>	
<p><b><u>Comments</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">This looks like a very interesting and worthwhile project. There are no ethical issues that require further consideration – these are covered in the form/supervisor comments.</p>	

Committee rep signature	<i>Anne Kellock</i>	Date	09/12
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