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‘Nowhere fits’

Exploring the issues around parental choice and school placement for students with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in England

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Summary of presentation

- This presentation will present the findings from phase one (a postal survey) of a study investigating the reasons behind why parents of children with statements of special educational needs (SEN) choose the schools they do for their children.
- We will briefly outline the English school system
- Explain the methods that were used and the sample
- Then we consider the main findings & limitations
- Lastly we highlight the key questions that remain unanswered and require further study

Contextual overview: SEN and Inclusion in England



What is a Statement of Special Educational Needs

- Special educational needs (SEN) are when a child has learning difficulties that require additional support
- A statement is a formal document given after an assessment of a child's SEN, it details the support that must be provided to meet their needs



Legislation

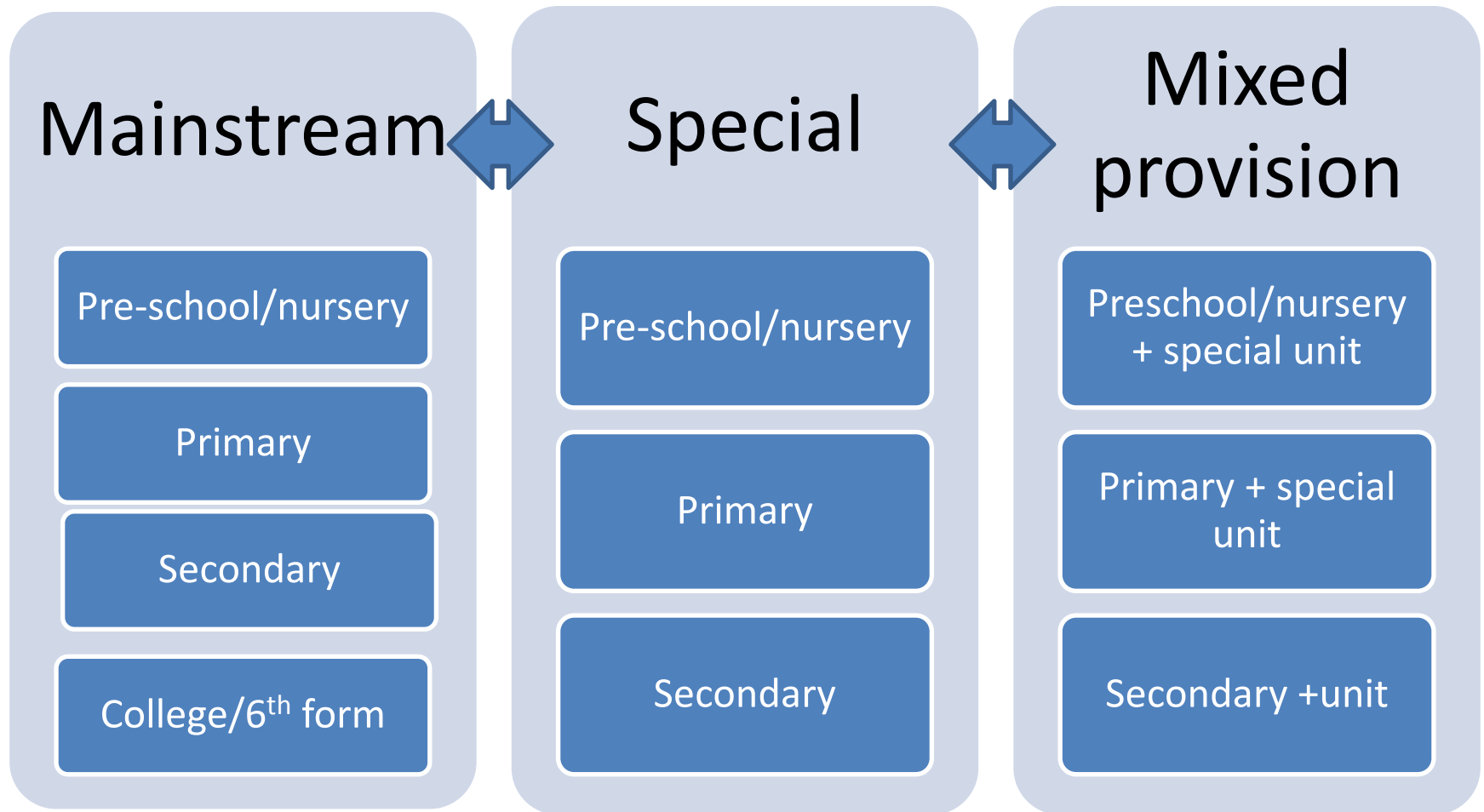
- 1981 Education Act recognised that all children, regardless of abilities or disabilities had a right to education, in mainstream schools if possible
- Subsequent Acts (1996, 2001) have increased this idea of mainstream for all and given parents more rights to express a preference in terms of school placement



School system in England

- Children start schooling aged 3 with part-time pre-school – kindergarten
- Compulsory schooling is at 4+ and is called primary schooling, ages 4-11
- Secondary schooling is from 12-16 or 18

A varied provision for SEN in English Schools



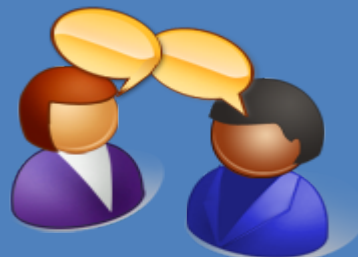
Research questions

- 1. How do parents of children who have a statement of SEN make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special school?**
- 2. What aspirations do these parents have for their children?**
- 3. In choosing either a mainstream or a special school, what in-school factors do these parents perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools?**

Research Design – Mixed Methods



PHASE 1- Questionnaires-
used to elicit broad range
of , largely quantitative,
data across one LA



PHASE 2- Semi-structured
interviews – used to add
depth to the
questionnaire data and
explore emerging issues



ONGOING - Document
scrutiny - to examine the
policies behind the
practice and explore what
structures are in place to
help support parents



Phase 1- Postal survey

Survey Design

The aim of the survey was to find out certain basic characteristics of the parents, e.g. educational background, age, location, details of their choices regarding school placement and evaluate how they felt about their choice of school

Sample & responses

A group of parents whose children were just starting primary or secondary education formed the sample, for logistical reasons a larger sample was not possible. 390 surveys were posted, 65 families responded

Accessing the population

Proved to be very difficult group to access, confidential details of a sensitive group. Eventually parents were reached though use of a postal survey sent out via a cooperative Local Authority that held details of the sample and agreed to post out prepared envelopes

Summary of findings 1- characteristics of respondents & their children

Majority of parents were aged 40+

Majority of parents were university educated

Majority of parents lived in villages

Majority of children attended special schools, which was not their local school

Majority of children were aged 12-13

Children had a range of SEN, over 45 different needs . An unusually high number of children had ASD

Summary of findings 2- school choice & evaluation of provision

Nearly 2/3 of parents felt as if they had been given an actual choice of school and over half the parents felt they had received all the information they needed to help them choose a school

Negative aspects of the children's schooling included distance travelled, a lack of friends & not reaching academic potential

Parents with children attending special school were less likely to feel that their child was receiving the best education

Specialist staff & facilities were key factors in helping parents decide which school suited their child best

Positive aspects of the children's schooling included the fact that they were happy to go, were developing social skills & confidence

The majority of parents felt that that their child was receiving the kind of schooling that best supports them

Limitations

Response rate/sample

- Only 17% of surveys were returned
- Surveys were only posted out to parents of children with statements in only 2 years groups

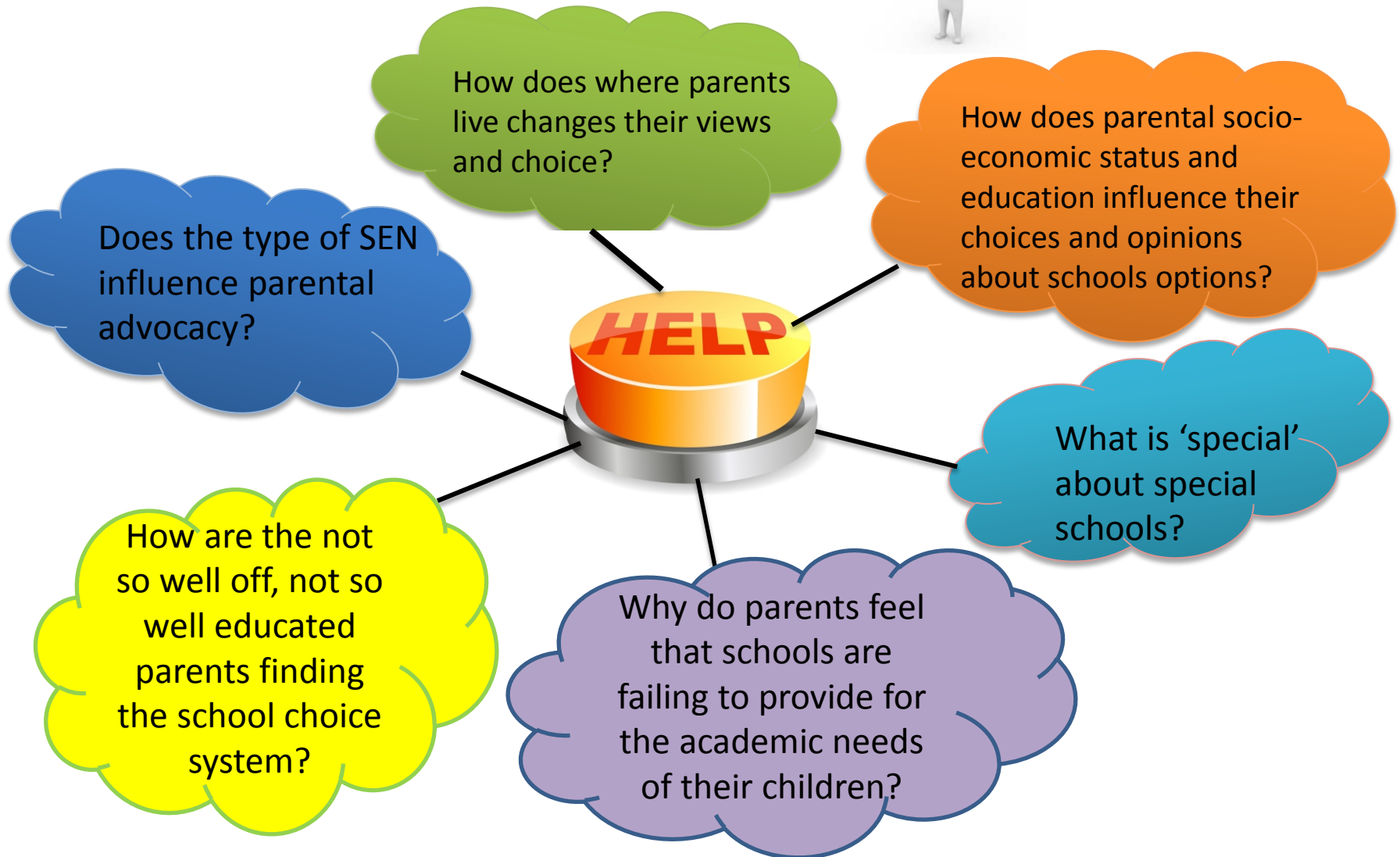
Geographical area

- Only one Local Authority was surveyed
- Practice and schools vary across local areas

Addressing the limitations

- Phases 2 & 3 include parents & schools across 2 more local authorities.
- Parents from across more year groups are being interviewed
- Interviewers are using a variety of means to ensure greater breadth across the sample

No definitive answers, but more questions



THANK YOU!

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