

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS ONLINE SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

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Declaration of originality

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Abstract

This thesis explores stakeholder perspectives in relation to children's online behavior and safeguarding with a specific focus on children with a special educational need (SEN). The research aims to explore key stakeholder perspectives in relation to safeguarding SEN children online in order to inform and guide stakeholders towards sensibly balancing risk and opportunities online. SEN children are identified as having been largely ignored over previous years within the field of online safeguarding, with the focus predominantly on children within mainstream schools without a learning need or disability. There are some unique challenges for SEN children that place them at a greater risk than mainstream children and which can have a significant and long-lasting effect on mental health, self-esteem and development. The interaction and engagement of stakeholders is a central theme in examining how to effectively safeguard SEN children online and support a system which places the child at the center. An ecosystems theory approach, which considers child development as a system of interrelated relationships affected by multiple levels of surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) positions the thesis within the field of education and facilitates an analysis of stakeholder engagement which proposes that a multi-stakeholder approach is central and key to supporting SEN children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that a child's development is affected by their immediate environment and their larger external environment, which subsequently consists of a number of different stakeholders.

One-to-one interviews with 18 stakeholders were included as part of the study, comprising of 14 adults and four children aged between 12 and 14. Adults included as part of the study were all key stakeholders within the field of safeguarding SEN children online whilst all children involved in the study had been previously identified as having a learning need and/or complex emotional and social need. The study revealed a range of perceptions around online safeguarding and SEN children and revealed that there more commonly exists stakeholders working fragmentedly, in isolation or with a limited number of other stakeholders within the field. It was revealed through thematic analysis adopted as part of the study that support, resources and specialist training are difficult to find or are non-existent and frequently cause frustration and challenges for all stakeholders. Children as stakeholders were interviewed as part of the study and their views and experiences considered alongside other stakeholders including teachers, parents, headteachers, SENCO, mental health practitioners, social care, external education consultants, enhanced SEN inspector and the police. Analysis revealed that a holistic multi-stakeholder and multi-agency approach is required. As a result, the outcomes of this study have produced a framework for SEN online safety which supports a multi-stakeholder approach and provides guiding principles for all stakeholders to support SEN children online and to sensibly balance the risk and opportunities online.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research was, initially to explore online safeguarding with a specific focus on children with a special educational need (SEN). As the research progressed it was clear that there existed a gap in the research for SEN children or any child with a learning need, disability or mental health disorder. The dearth of research and literature around SEN children and their online behaviour and safeguarding has led to a real and current problem for stakeholders supporting SEN children online (SEN, 2019; Balantyne, Duncalf and Daly, 2010; Livingstone, 2013). The vast majority of research has in the past predominantly focused on non-SEN children and those attending mainstream school without an additional need or disability. There exists a broad range of needs which impact and influence behaviours and interactions online which require consideration within the online safeguarding debate (Katz, 2016) which have not been fully addressed. The range of needs can include, but is not limited to emotional, social and behavioural disorders which can impact on their lives and mental health disorders. It is significant to highlight that there exists heterogeneity among SEN children, and they should not be classified as a uniform group which has often been the case for parts of policy and guidance relating to SEN. This debate will be explored further within chapter one and the debate over definitions of SEN and terminology. Understanding the balance between opportunity and risk is central to safeguarding SEN children online and ensuring that a child's right to freedom of expression and privacy are not compromised by the use of technology. Technology can be incredibly powerful for children with disabilities and provide many opportunities for development when supported effectively to mitigate risks. Current research suggests that SEN children are at a greater risk online due to their additional need which can place them at a greater risk than mainstream children and have a significant and long-lasting effect on their mental health, self-esteem and identity (Rose, et al, 2009; Griffin, 2014). There is strong evidence to suggest that advice and guidance which currently exists needs to be addressed to effectively support and safeguard all SEN children online.

Interaction and engagement of key stakeholders is a central theme of this thesis in exploring how to effectively safeguard SEN children online and sensibly balance the risk and opportunities (RSPH, 2017). The thesis is situated within the field of education with links to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which supports a stakeholder analysis and brings into focus the role and engagement of stakeholders in relation to the online safeguarding environment. An ecosystems approach to healthy child development is identified and explored in relation to stakeholders within the field of online safeguarding and facilitates a discussion and exploration around the role and impact of stakeholders working independently of each other and also working together. An ecosystems approach provides insights into multi-stakeholder engagement and explores the link which exists between a child's environment and their development which may subsequently impact on their current and future interactions online. The differences which exist here for SEN children are acknowledged and the challenges that this can present are recognised. It is argued throughout the thesis that SEN children have been underrepresented and ignored (Griffin, 2014) within research, which has contributed to a

lack of awareness and understanding around how SEN children can effectively navigate between opportunity and risk to ensure that they can safely and effectively interact and engage online.

Consequently, this research explores perspectives from stakeholders central to SEN children's online behaviour and safeguarding and examines the challenges and difficulties SEN children experience in relation to risk and opportunities online. I interviewed a range of stakeholders within a number of fields including education, social care, mental health, police and family to gain perspectives and understanding specific to each stakeholder's environment to identify the challenges each stakeholder perceives to exist online for SEN children. I also interviewed SEN children as part of the study to gain some understanding of their views, practices and perceptions online. After the initial interviews, the process of thematic analysis enabled me to explore the themes arising from the data and to establish common and recurring themes evolving from the data. An iterative process of analysis produced key themes which alongside analysis of the literature, facilitated the development of a framework to support SEN children online.

Throughout, I was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the current perceptions of key stakeholders within the field of SEN online safeguarding in relation to opportunities and risk online for SEN children?
2. What is the role and involvement of stakeholders in supporting and safeguarding SEN children online?
3. How can current stakeholder perceptions and views inform a considered approach to support SEN children online in order to effectively balance risk and opportunity?

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis begins in chapter two and provides the context for the following chapters of the thesis. Chapter two explores and discusses the literature regarding special educational needs (SEN), policy development and education for which the context of online safeguarding is situated within. The SEN environment is highly significant and important to examine as a precursor to presenting the literature relating to online safeguarding and stakeholder engagement to set the scene for a detailed examination of online safeguarding and SEN children. A specific concern highlighted here is the lack of research that currently exists in relation to the online safeguarding environment for children with learning needs and disabilities. Chapter three begins to differentiate between the risks and opportunities online for SEN children compared to non-SEN children and examines how SEN children are at a higher risk online. The impact of UK online education and safeguarding (online provision and policy) is also highlighted here as an exploration of safety and attitudes towards SEN children and their education. Chapter four situates the topic of the thesis within the education discipline and explores the link between child development and environment making further links to the impact of stakeholders to healthy child development, growth and education. A detailed examination of the stakeholder environment and an ecosystems approach for child development is presented. Chapter five acknowledges social theory and the relationships which might exist between technology and society and SEN children. This chapter is to demonstrate awareness of theories which exist outside of

the focus of this research, but which are still important to demonstrate awareness and consideration of. Whilst the ecological model is the overarching framework of this thesis, the theories reflected upon within this chapter inform my understanding and approach. Chapter six outlines the overarching research philosophy and methodology which has guided and informed this study and justifies the approach within the context of the wider discourse and conflicting debates. Chapter seven, eight and nine are dedicated to analysis and reveal stakeholders' perceptions regarding SEN children and their online and offline behaviours as is meaningful to them. Themes are examined here and pay close attention to stakeholder perspectives in relation to interactions and experiences of SEN children online, opportunities, risks and the impact of technology and the online environment. A multi-stakeholder approach is positioned which places the child at the centre of any decision making in relation to their online safeguarding and promotes children's rights and empowerment of a child over constraints and limitations. Chapter ten presents the dissemination and outcomes of the study and links an ecosystems and multi-stakeholder approach to online safeguarding by presenting a framework for SEN online safety. Feedback on the framework from two key stakeholders within the field of SEN and safeguarding are discussed and their comments reviewed. The feedback supported evolution of the proposed framework and provides insights into the relevance, robustness and reliability of the framework for current day practice. Chapter eleven concludes the thesis by reflecting on the outcomes of the study, contributions to knowledge, limitations and future direction of research.

Chapter 2: Special educational needs (SEN), policy and education

Online safeguarding, within this thesis, is placed within the context and environment of special educational needs (SEN) and is explored from the perspective of stakeholders linked to and working within this field. The focus of online safeguarding and SEN prompt a number of areas to be explored which have previously been ignored and unexplored. Before discussing online safeguarding, it is important and helpful to discuss the environment and context in which it is being examined. Initially this chapter will explore the definitions and perceptions of stakeholders surrounding SEN which have changed over time and discuss the impact of SEN policy, children rights and education in England. Within the literature and policy documents, the research and evidence often views vulnerable children and SEN children as the same without considering the differences between the two definitions. Evidence on vulnerable children is sometimes about SEN but sometimes also about other vulnerabilities and it is important to highlight this. SEN children are predominately identified as having an additional need which can include but is not limited to an emotional, social and behavioural disorder which can impair their lives and their learning. It can be identified in this chapter, how the evidence on the experiences and needs of SEN and other vulnerable children is limited and exposes a gap in research which this thesis contributes too.

The wider policy approach is discussed in this chapter in relation to the development of policy to include wider stakeholder perspective to SEN education and online safeguarding. Children's rights are considered in line with policy development to support the development of this study and provide an appreciation of how SEN children have been underrepresented and previously ignored in studies pertaining to online safety and safeguarding. The discussion develops to highlight the lack of attention in terms of policy, safeguarding and education that vulnerable groups receive by recognising how online safety education has failed to address some of the key concerns for SEN children.

Finally attention to where the majority of studies have focused on the risks online for children as opposed to the opportunities is presented alongside the increasing need to consider how the risk and opportunities may be different for SEN children. It is important to highlight how a lack of research in relation to SEN has led to a lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues that are specific to online safeguarding and support the dearth of research in the field to which this thesis contributes.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusion

Definitions of SEN are wide ranging, have changed over time and can differ from one policy document to another. As a result, it is challenging to propose one single and comprehensive definition which covers the term for the context of this study. What is proposed here however, are

the most prominent definitions from key pieces of guidance and legislation which represent the term and its associated meanings.

Special educational needs (SEN) as defined by Department for Education (DfE, 2015) states that

“a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.”

Also that,

A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- *has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or*
- *has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions*

The terminology used within the SEN environment has evolved over the years and can cause confusion. Cole (2007) attempts to set out a coherent theory around the term ‘inclusion’ which would encompass SEN children, but concludes the difficulty in defining the term as it is open to many different interpretations and meanings. The evolution of the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘special’ education can be traced back to the Warnock report (Department for Education and Science, 1978) which *“started the ground-breaking review of the state of special education which was set against increasing worldwide pressure for comprehensive integration”* (Raynor, 2007, p20). New concepts around special needs and education were introduced at this point and began to revolutionise education for children with special needs in England. There were three types of level of integration set out by Warnock and these included, completely separating SEN children within mainstream schools from non-SEN children on the same site, educating SEN children separately but allowing social interaction at playtimes and finally complete inclusion both educationally and socially (Raynor, 2007). Hornby (2014, p234) discusses inclusive education and educational policy and practice and argues that this is currently the most *“controversial issue regarding the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities.”* Debates range around full inclusion of SEN children within mainstream schools and the reduced need for separate special schools to educate SEN children. Despite the fact that this debate is not the focus of this study, it is important to recognise historically the evolution of SEN education policy and the influence of it. Krischler (2019, p633) argues that the term inclusion is *“is by no means a clearly defined or universally understood concept, demanding more in-depth, culture-specific research on understandings of inclusion.”* One of the major problems identified by Warnock is in policy making decisions where policy makers view SEN as an homogenous group with one solution which is argued not to be the case (Peer and Reid, 2016,p1)

The language and definition of terms, ‘special’ or ‘inclusive’ is sometimes unclear, misunderstood or used interchangeably to mean the same thing. The term inclusion is widely used in government policy and guidance certainly since the 1978 Warnock report which used the term integration to refer to SEN children and their integration into mainstream school. However, the term inclusion has been introduced in more recent years, notably with the Salamanca statement which was *“arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education”* (Ainscow et al, 2019, p 671, UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca statement focused on developing fully

inclusive education systems embedded as part of the overall education strategy within policy. The Education Act 1981 abolished previous terminology and the use of the word 'handicapped' and provided the foundation for policy development in the following years and subsequently influenced the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). The policy debate continues around the level of segregation of SEN children and how best to educate a child with special needs. Alternative educational provision for SEN can be provided by a 'special' school which provides education solely for children with a special need or disability. Special schools continue to deliver education as set out in the national curriculum and are inspected by Ofsted but cater for needs which are not able to be met or accommodated within mainstream school. Norwich (2008) discusses the arguments against special schools but believes that this is based primarily on the stigma attached to attending a special school and the poor-quality provision they have had in the past. Raynor (2007, p25) highlights the case for educating SEN children within a special school and argues that many special schools have provided *"new educational and social opportunities for their pupils, have reversed patterns of hopelessness, failure and behaviour."* The debates around inclusion and special schools are outside of this study but it is important to highlight the different provision and subsequently opportunities and barriers which can exist for SEN children accessing education.

Children's rights, policy development and SEN

Children's rights are discussed ahead of policy due to the significance of children's rights having become more central to policy development in England. Over recent years the rights of a child and placing a child more centrally within policy demonstrates an intention to empower and enable a child's voice but is perhaps more challenging to implement in practice. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) covers all aspects of a child's life and sets out that every child has *"the right to a safe childhood set out within civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights"* (UN, 1989, UNICEF, n.d). Bradwell (2019) recognises the UNCRC is considered a major development in the recognition of children's rights and subsequently prompted a number of government policy responses since its introduction. Four guiding principles of the UNCRC are:

Non-discrimination. "The convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities" (UNCRC, 1989)

The best interests of children. "Best interest of children must be of primary concern in making decisions that may affect them." (UNCRC, 1992)

Right to life, survival and development. "Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily." (UNCRC, 1992)

Respect for the views of the child. "When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account." (UNCRC, 1992)

Within the convention, children have a set of rights which are focused around economic, social, cultural, civil and political and are afforded to all children without exception. The UNCRC has informed and provided a framework for governments and organisations to protect the rights of children through education, schools, children's services, health, social services, the police and crown prosecution services (CPS). The UK government has specifically highlighted rights which draw on the UNCRC and

include, the right to life, survival and development, children's right to have their views respected, and to have their best interests considered at all times (Jones and Walker, 2011). As reflected in UNICEF's 'four core principles' of the UNCRC, the rights of children are highlighted in four key areas which include non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development and respect for the views of the child. Particular attention and significance for a child with a learning need is related to Article 12 and Article 13 of the UNCRC which states the right of every child to freely express their views and their right to freedom of expression. Potter and Whittaker (2011) argue that a child with a complex learning need or communication impairment may not be given the opportunity to express their views as freely and argue that this is due to the quality of the communication environment that is created by adults rather than the child themselves. Morris (2003) suggests that a child with cognitive disabilities is less likely to be included in decisions which directly impact them, which would be in direct contrast with the rights of that child and against the UNCRC rights of children. What is proposed by Potter and Whittaker (2011, p11) to address some of these concerns regarding SEN children is to develop strategies which require the development of "communication enabling environments" which empower children to have a voice. However, it is felt that the current education system in England does not adequately prepare teachers or other stakeholders working within education for supporting children with complex learning and communication difficulties.

Mepham (2010, p19) explores the extent to which the UK government have given disabled and SEN children the opportunity to experience and reflect UNCRC rights within their lives. It is highlighted that the United Nations Conventions on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2007) and its value in ensuring that disabled children are included within society and are safe and protected. Chatzitheochari et al (2014) report on evidence which concludes that there is a clear link with a disabled child and bullying from early childhood to adolescents including emotional and physical types of bullying. This makes SEN children particularly vulnerable when entering adulthood with lasting effects of bullying (Chatzitheochari, 2014; Green et al, 2010, p9; Humphrey and Symes, 2010, p79).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD) was introduced to further support and prompt changes in attitudes to a person with disabilities to be viewed as active participants of society capable of making decisions for their lives (Degener, 2016). The convention impacts on studies related to perceptions around disability as well as human rights legislation. The introduction of the convention does not introduce any new themes or rights for disabled people, yet it aims:

"to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity" (Article 1).

Specific to this study and in relation to SEN education, legislation and policy in the UK, the convention includes, but is not limited to the following: equality and non-discrimination (Article 5), freedom of expression and opinion (Article 15), respect for privacy (Article 22), the right to education (Article 24). The majority of rights support that "parties must take effective or all necessary measures to ensure their enjoyment (Series, 2020).

Potter and Whittaker (2011, p83) highlight further the implications for children's rights for those with complex learning and communication impairments and discuss how UNCRC applies to all children but considers how for those with a disability this may be impaired. Oliver and Knight (2007, p116) argue that children and young people have more commonly been excluded from being a part of the decision-making process around issues affecting their lives which applies further to disabled children and those with special needs. Further to this Armstrong and Barton (1999) support that over the course of history 'voices' of disabled people have been absent from discussion at all levels in issues affecting them which has contributed to a level of social exclusion. Conclusions were drawn from a study involving multiple disabled children, parents and professionals and identified common problems for those supporting SEN services which included inadequate resources, shortage of funding, lack of involvement in decision making process and the involvement of professional advocates which are child-led rather than parent-led (Knight and Oliver 2007). Evidence suggests that there is a tendency in children's services that initiatives are adult-led rather than child-led. Oliver and Dalrymple (2008) argue that children's health and social care have an adult centric approach due to the number of adult professionals involved within the decision-making process and the number of formal processes and procedures involved. Consideration of Article 12 of UNCRC, the rights of a child to be listened to and heard are of relevance here but are perhaps overlooked where adults view children as passive as opposed to active participants of care and education. This would be more prominent for a disabled child where it may be felt that there is less understanding a child's perspective due to a disability or cognitive ability.

Policy and multi-stakeholder approach

Due to the scope of this study, the policy analysis and approach is UK centric as opposed to a wider European or international focus which would entail a far bigger pedagogic approach outside of the scope of this thesis. The Warnock report in the UK, 1978 was the first and one of the most highly significant and formal acknowledgements to SEN children (Holland and Pell, 2017; Lindsay et al, 2020), which paved the way for the current legislation and guidance. The report at the time began to identify the significance of many stakeholders and their importance or role in relation to the development of a child. Namely parents, teachers, schools and healthcare are highlighted here. The suggestions made are undeveloped at best, but they did start to consider the different stakeholders and acknowledged parental rights and dialogue. The report considered and gave new rights to parents of SEN children. The Children's and Parents Act (2014) which introduced a new system to help SEN children and families aimed "to improve services for vulnerable children and support strong families." Holland and Pell (2017, p294) highlight the direction in policy and guidance towards a multi-stakeholder approach with further integration and cohesion between stakeholders including education, health and social care. Barnes (2008) concludes on evidence that support a "*multi-agency teamworking*" approach which places the child at the centre of all activity and argues that this approach improves communication and experiences for SEN children and their families and further argues that a lack of a multi-agency teamworking response could be the cause of increased stress within families. Within the 1978 Warnock report and also within 1989 legislation (Children's Act, 1989) and more recent legislation including the Children and Families act (2014), a multistakeholder approach was first introduced and called for "*the development of more multi-agency engagements*". (Barton, 2005, p6) to work together around the needs of the child. Warnock and Norwich (2011) acknowledges how extremely difficult this is to achieve especially for SEN children but is something that is deemed essential.

Norwich and Eaton (2014, p121) summarise the key points from the Children's and Families Act (2014) towards acknowledgement of a more holistic approach and implementation of guidance which suggests the integration and significance of key stakeholders:

- (1) the participation of children, their parents and young people in decision making;*
- (2) the early identification of children and young people's needs and early intervention to support them;*
- (3) greater choice and control for young people and parents over support;*
- (4) collaboration between education, health and social care services to provide support; and*
- (5) high-quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN.*

Norwich and Eaton (2014, p117) review the policy "the policy and practice contexts in which the Government in England has reviewed provisions and moved to enact the Children and Families Act" . This has specific reference to SEN and emotional and behavioural difficulties and mental health as recognised within dimensions of SEN. The paper reviews the replacement of statements, as introduced by the Education Act (1994) with educational health and care plans (EHC) and person-centred planning (PCP) which are incorporated as part of a more recent system for supporting SEN children in education. The EHC sets out a child or young person's (up to the age of 25) educational provision as requested by parents and identifies the educational, health and social needs which require additional support within schools. Further to this the paper concludes that for "*multi-agency working to improve, there is a need to understand and address issues in multi-agency collaboration*" (Norwich and Eaton, 2014, p130), suggesting that there is further work to be done in this area. The Children and Families Act (2014) and the special educational needs and disability code of practice 0-25 (SENCoP) have without question brought some significant changes for SEN children and families with considerations around a multi-stakeholder response and placing the child and their families "*at the heart of the process*" ((DoE & DoH 2015 s.9); Hoskin, 2019), but evidence suggests that they do not go far enough and perhaps do not fully appreciate the impact of such a system. Post Warnock, the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) reflects policy development and non-statutory guidance for schools which partly devolved responsibility to schools and encouraged the idea of schools working with other stakeholders, primarily, parents of a child.

The SENCoP sets out statutory guidance for those working with children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities (DfE, 2015). It was introduced at the time as one of the most significant reforms to assessment and planning process in 30 years alongside the Children's and Families Act (2014) (Sales and Vincent, 2018). Within the guidance a child is considered to be SEN if he/she "*has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others the same age*" or "*has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age*" (DfE, 2015). The guidance when published at the time focused on four key areas; higher education and/or employment, independent living, participation in society and a healthy adult life in order to "*raise aspirations of children and young people labelled as SEN*" (Burch, 2018, 95). The SENCoP outlines that mainstream schools should ensure that SEN children have access to and get all the support that is needed, which includes a designated SENCo, ensuring that SEN children engage with activities which involve all children and that there is communication with parents. Sales and Vincent (2018) highlight previous guidance in place before the SENCoP (DfE,

2015) and reveals the challenges presented before implementation in relation to there being no formal framework for supporting a multi-stakeholder approach where agencies work together. SEN children no formal framework for supporting a multi-stakeholder approach where agencies to work together.

Thom et al (2015) report on the SEN Pathfinder programme that evaluated the impact of SENCoP and concluded that access to support for young people up to the age of 25 was more straightforward than previous years but that there was still further work needed within this process (Norwich, 2014; Thom et al, 2015). Harris (2015) highlights the haste at which the revised system came into place and comments on the complexities of the “awkward” relationships and interactions between stakeholders, namely parents, schools, local authorities, healthcare and government. Concluding on the difficulty in drawing all these stakeholders together and navigating a system that ultimately should support and address the needs the child, who remain at the centre of the system.

Policy including the Children’s Act (1989) sets out a legislative framework alongside the more recent Every Child Matters initiative which set out guidance “designed to both protect children and maximise their potential” (DfE, 2003). Every Child Matters is another significant document which encouraged a wider stakeholder approach looking at broader services which focused on early intervention and integrating services with the intention of “delivering real and lasting benefits to children with SEN and their families” (DfE, 2003). A number of these policies in recent years have clearly considered working towards a more collaborative approach amongst professionals and stakeholders within a policy framework. The recommendations set out within Every Child Matters initiative quite clearly link with UNCRC principles and establish clear relationships between welfare and education. The paper set out five key areas that are fundamental to child development, these include, being healthy, being safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic wellbeing.

Research suggests that policy has continued to move towards a more holistic approach which engages stakeholders at every level. Vandebosch (2014) comments on how a multi-stakeholder approach to address cyberbullying is a move towards deepening partnerships between stakeholders, including parents and their communities and when pulled together at institutional, parental and professional levels support children and young people. A more recent report by the House of Commons (2006) regarding a review of SEN policy supports this and highlights the need to ensure engagement across stakeholders with a “multi-agency” approach that supports SEN children from early childhood through to adulthood.

SEN and education in England

For many years much of educational policy has become a devolved matter, whereby each home nation has pursued its own educational agenda including the development of the curriculums which serve to guide education, learning and teaching. “The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 heralded statutory control of the curriculum” (Wyse and Torrance, p214, 2008) which sought to assert greater control over education at both primary and secondary levels, for mainstream education and SEN. It is argued that the National Curriculum in England has its roots in a political agenda to regulate education

and to hold schools accountable (Whetton, 2008). Debates around education in England are outside the scope of this study, however it is important to note that for clarity of focus matters discussed relate to education in England. The narrative around a multi-stakeholder approach and philosophy within education in England has evolved in recent years and is suggested to be effective for supporting SEN children. Saland (2011, cited in Hornby, 2014, p235) highlights four key areas fundamental to SEN education. These are, a challenging, engaging and flexible curriculum, embracing and responding to individual talent and limitations, reflective practices and a community approach. Most significant to highlight here is *“establishing a community based on collaboration among students, teachers, families, other professionals, and community agencies.”* Watson and McCathren (2009) comment and agree around the importance of collaboration and commitment of stakeholders to develop a community approach to effective SEN education alongside professional collaboration and services (Friend and Bursuck, 2019, p72). Hornby (2014) believes a theory around the education of SEN children is required to develop effective strategies for all SEN children and proposes a model for effectively teaching SEN. The theory comprises four components which seek to provide a solid foundation for SEN education and working with SEN children. These components are listed as:

- Maximum inclusion in mainstream schools
- Best practice in inclusive education
- Continuum of placement options
- Education in most appropriate settings

- Organisation for providing optimal education
- Collaboration between mainstream school and special schools

The theory places emphasis on some key considerations which are relevant. Firstly, involving the child in the decision making and offering choice, for example with regards *“education in most appropriate setting”* and secondly, *“collaboration between stakeholders including schools, teachers and parents”* Hornby (2014, p247). The wider stakeholders are not mentioned here but there is an acknowledgement of the importance of relevant policy to inform education and the impact of systems working together. Norwich (2014, p18) agrees around there being more of an emphasis on consultations with young people, however also highlights the obstacles that may still continue to cause difficulty and confusion around finding and accessing sources of support.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, (DfE, 2021) sets out statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England which specifies *“a child centred and coordinated approach”* around safeguarding and welfare of children. For the purposes of this guidance safeguarding and welfare are defined as:

protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children’s mental and physical health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. (Children includes everyone under the age of 18.)

Keeping Children Safe in Education is of particular relevance due to its clear links with education in England and safeguarding but also in the fact that the guidance illustrates a desire for placing the child at the centre and working towards a multi-stakeholder approach. The guidance itself states that “*a child centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding*” (DfE, 2021) is required alongside early intervention and a multi stakeholder response. Specifically, the guidance states that there should exist systems which enable a child to have a voice and be able to express their views and to also give feedback. The best interests of the child are suggested to be central to the document. A learning need or disability is highlighted within the guidance as being significant and would benefit from early intervention and help. Where intervention and help are identified, multiple agencies are suggested to be coordinated in order to effectively support and safeguard a child. SEN children are identified as a group who may face additional safeguarding challenges where additional barriers can exist which include being more prone to peer-to-peer isolation, more likely to be bullied and communication difficulties to overcome barriers. Schools must ensure that there is appropriate provision and support for SEN children to provide a sufficient level of support and safeguarding. Where online safeguarding is concerned, the guidance offers additional information for protecting all children against harmful and inappropriate content. The proposed approach to safeguarding is based on three main categories of risk or more commonly referred to as the 4 Cs:

- *Content: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material; for example pornography, fake news, racist or radical and extremist views*
- *Contact: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users; for example commercial advertising as well as adults posing as children or young adults*
- *Conduct: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm; for example making, sending and receiving explicit images, or online bullying.*
- *Commerce – including risks such as online gambling, advertising and phishing*

(DfE, 2021)

As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, there is an increased level of risk for SEN children especially in relation to the underlying reasons that SEN children might be at a higher risk within each category. SEN are not recognised as needing additional or separate support and education in relation to the risk categories or are recognised as having an additional or learning need which may interfere with their understanding or interpretation of risk.

Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)

Ofsted inspect all services providing education, skills and care for children and young people (Ofsted, 2021). Ofsted have a number of main responsibilities aimed at ensuring that all children are receiving at least a ‘good’ level of education and care. Ofsted inspections consist of onsite inspection of a provision or service, the publication of a report based on an inspection and a rating which ranges from

grade 1 (outstanding), grade 2 (good), grade 3 (requires improvement) and grade 4 (inadequate). Schools must ensure that their safeguarding policies and practices are up to date as it is a key area of inspection for Ofsted (Ofsted, 2021) and ensure that a school's inclusion policy is evident in practice. In specific relation to SEN Ofsted identifies the following factors to support SEN children (Davis, 2004);

- *Availability of sufficient teaching and personal support*
- *Involving parents or carers as fully as possible in decision making*
- *Developing and taking advantage of training opportunities*

The Education Act (1988) saw the introduction of the National Curriculum in schools and at the time was *"one of the most far reaching of the century"* (Warnock, 2010, p20) however it was also a piece of legislation which seemingly appeared to *"drop the agenda"* for children with disabilities and their educational need from the agenda (Warnock 2010, p20) due to an assumption that SEN children would receive their education in mainstream schools. Further to this Warnock (2010, p20) discusses inclusion of SEN within mainstream schools and comments on how within the *"context of educational policy, what people (including ministers) think about the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream school cannot be separated from what they think is the proper functioning of special schools."*

The Ofsted framework in relation to SEN sets out,

"leaders take on or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life"

(OFSTED, 2019)

"the provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high levels of SEND – its curriculum is designed to be ambitious and to meet their needs"

(OFSTED (2019)

Baker (2007) highlights how the framework for inspection of children's services applies to all schools including the provision of SEN (Ofsted, 2019) and comments on the preference of the UK government that SEN children be included as part of mainstream schools and education. Every child should be able to achieve without any barriers to learning and able to study the full national curriculum (DfE, 2014)

Online Safety Education in the UK

Katz (2016) highlights the lack of attention in terms of policy, safeguarding and education that vulnerable groups receive and argue that at best they receive *“the same generic online safety advice as all other children, while specialist intervention is required”* (Katz and Asam, p7 2018). It is argued that generic rules and warnings are applied across the board for online safety and do not address any motivational or emotional needs when tackling risky behaviours within this particular category of children and young people (Asam and Katz, 2018, p285). Internet Matters reported in February 2019 that vulnerable children are more likely to suffer online harms and less likely to receive online safety advice and education in this area to support and protect them. Age-appropriate strategies are required which break down any distance that the internet creates (Griffin, 2014, p115) and empower children to respond appropriately to situations they may find themselves in. It is argued that stakeholders including parents, carers and educators should be equipped to support this (Noll et al, 2009).

Katz and Asam (2018) also address the type of support and engagement of stakeholders within the lives of vulnerable children that are likely to require some form of specialist support and guidance and argue that stakeholders identified within their study were ill equipped to address often complex needs of vulnerable children. Combined with inadequate or non-existent online safety education, this potentially puts vulnerable groups at an even higher risk. The content of online safety education is questioned by researchers. Jones et al (2014) argue that research-based content is needed as a starting point. Despite the lack of consideration here around different groups of children and young people, there is certainly an argument for drawing considerably more from research when developing educational content. However, the problem arises when there has been a lack of research within the area of SEN and additional needs to know and understand the most effective content and delivery mechanism for online safety. As has been previously evidenced, there exists a dearth of research around SEN children and online behaviour to adequately inform effective practice.

Attempts to resolve and address online education for children in England has taken a more general approach over recent years and attempts have either ignored risks or restricted opportunity, whereas more subtle solutions may be required (Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009, pp 365). Solutions are required that involve a number of stakeholders who are able to balance risk and opportunity, especially with evidence to suggest that reducing online risk specifically for vulnerable children may restrict online opportunities (Livingstone, Bober and Helsper, 2005). It is argued that subtle *“solutions may include state or industry self-regulation, awareness-raising among parents, teacher training or supporting and guiding the coping responses of children themselves”* (Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009, p3)

The most recent advice and non-statutory guidance regarding teaching online safety in schools was published by the Department for Education in June 2019, (reviewed September 2020) with the intention to support schools to deliver and embed online safety within schools (Department for Education, 2019, p4). The guidance recognises the challenges for schools to keep informed about the rapidly developing online world and the threats that it may present to some children. The guidance identifies research that supports a whole school approach to online safety and suggests the creation of an online safety culture within schools that engages stakeholders including staff, students, parents/carers. The age specific advice covers a broad range of topic areas and signposts to where these topics could be delivered within the curriculum. The documents make specific reference to vulnerable groups and SEN and states that *“schools should consider how they tailor their offer”* for this group (Department for Education, 2019, p24). The guidance makes specific recommendations

regarding where online safety fits within the curriculum. In relation to vulnerable groups, the guidance signposts to advice and research from UKCIS, Internet Matters and Childnet for resources to support teaching online safety in school. The report from Internet Matters cites evidence and conclusions from the CyberSurvey 2017 (Katz and Asam, 2017 p37) that compares vulnerable groups to peers without difficulties and identifies that a more *“nuanced delivery”* would be beneficial for vulnerable groups that is specific to age (Katz and Asam, 2018).

The current approach to online safety education needs revising (Asam and Katz, 2018, 297) especially in relation to vulnerable groups that remain at a higher risk than non-vulnerable groups, and where education needs a more age-appropriate distinct and tailored approach.

Asam and Katz (2018) highlight research where a percentage (27%) of secondary schools within their UK study only deliver online safety education once a year and identify that the ‘one size fits all’ approach is insufficient. Vulnerable children are at a significantly higher risk online where *“offline vulnerability extends to online life and enhanced, targeted online safety education and support is required”* (Asam and Katz, 2018, p281). A rethink of current online safety education that includes different approaches at different ages by taking into account the nuances around the changing needs of a child in relation to their age (Phippen, 2018, Asam and Katz, 2018). A *“one size fits all approach is unacceptable”* (Emmens and Phippen, 2010, p2) because it will not address the ever-growing lack of distinction between online and offline worlds in which children engage in on a daily basis.

Bond (2013) argues that empowering vulnerable young people to overcome the challenges and risks they face online takes enormous expertise, resources and ultimately a whole-community commitment. Vulnerable children are likely to require some form of specialist support and guidance from a range of stakeholders to equip them with the skills to engage safely online, however with the current picture of inadequate or non-existent online safety education, vulnerable children are more at risk (Katz and Asam, 2018). The content of online safety education is questioned by researchers. Jones et al (2014) concluded that research based- content is needed as a starting point via a review of US online safety education and found that strategies were not based on sound research or evaluation. It was identified that broader safety strategies alongside engagement of stakeholders would be beneficial.

Online safeguarding

Safeguarding as defined by UK government on its website is: *“protecting children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of children’s health or development, ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to have the best outcomes”* (Ofsted, 2021). There are explicit safeguarding responsibilities contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education based around the 4 Cs (content, contact, conduct and commerce) which attempt to classify the breadth of online safety issues. Contained within this key document for schools and colleges is guidance to support schools in embedding online safety as a whole school approach reflected within school policy and procedures. As previously discussed, it is recognised that SEN children face additional safeguarding challenges particularly in relation to communication barriers and reporting these challenges.

Porter (2016, p997) looks at the safeguarding rights of disabled children, specifically in participation in school and in accessing inclusive education and argues that *“schools are routinely denying children access to the opportunities that support their participation in education and through this, disregard a fundamental child right”* (Porter, 2016, p997) and concludes that the UK legal system failing disabled children leaving safeguarding to voluntary organisations to take up and support.

Hempton and Williams (2011, p148) highlight the significance of stakeholders working together collaboratively to safeguard and protect children but highlight that more commonly there is a lack of communication between stakeholders which works against the child and raises some significant safeguarding concerns. Hempton and Williams (2011, p148) relate this to a jigsaw puzzle where one missing piece, or piece of information may not generate great concern, but as part of a bigger picture can generate significant concern. Stakeholders are referred to here as including health, social care, voluntary organisations and education. Kay and Fitzgerald (2007, p4) adds to this and highlight the importance of stakeholder working together collaboratively using a framework of *“interagency cooperation”* with reference to the Every Child Matters initiative and teamwork across education and care settings and present a framework for supporting this. They also identify some of the challenges to a more holistic approach which see stakeholders working together toward positive outcomes for a child. These challenges are summarised as including fragmented services within planning and delivery, cultural differences between stakeholder services, lack of clear focus and goals, training needs and funding. UK government policy has proposed the benefits of a multiagency approach and encouraged interaction between stakeholders, however there exist challenges to the implementation of this within literature (While and Mergatroyd et al, 2006, p96; Moore, 2015, Horwath and Morrison, 2010; Smith and Mogro-Wilson, 2007). Horwath and Morrison (2010, p368) explore the implications for stakeholders working together in partnership and the associated challenges here and states that *“there is international recognition amongst policymakers that collaboration is essential if the needs of vulnerable children and their families are to be met effectively.”* It is evidenced here that high level collaboration is becoming increasingly common than in previous decades but is more challenging at an operational and frontline level. Horwath and Morrison (2010) cite losing focus and vision within complex environments amongst stakeholders as one of the key reason for this. Again, despite the policy proposing and acknowledging the need for inter-agency collaboration and engagement of multiple stakeholders, the actioning of this appears more challenging to implement within a child safeguarding environment. Morrison (2000, p368) draws together research which propose outcomes towards identifying key issues to support effective collaboration and intended outcomes and argue that effective collaboration is as much dependant on the interactions within each stakeholder group as well as the interactions between wider stakeholders.

The Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance (Ofsted, 2019), issued under the Children’s Act (2004) proposes statutory guidance around the need for a system which works together, is responsive to the needs of children and families and places the child at the centre. The guidance recognises the role of key stakeholders around the child including,

Specifically, the police, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. Everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play

(Ofsted, 2019, p6)

Norwich (2009, p215) highlights how at the time it was apparent that the SEN framework was not enabling SEN children to access sufficient resources and support from a range of stakeholders and there is a clear lack of a more collaborative and common approach within stakeholders and agencies.

The Education Act (2004) called for education to consider the wellbeing of the child as well as their rights, however Warnock (2010, p20) argues that there is no statutory duty for schools to cooperate with other stakeholders that have links to the wellbeing of a child. Peckover (2009, p 26) offers good practice points in relation to safeguarding and wellbeing and argues that schools can have the biggest impact on a child's life due to the proportion of time children spend in education. The good practice points consider a child personal development and include a positive and proactive curriculum; partnership with parents and a safe learning environment with integrated practices with a multi-stakeholder approach.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and healthy relationships

Outcomes of large-scale studies by RSPC (RSPC, 2017, p25) have included minority groups (LGBT and ethnic minorities specifically) and identify the significance of PSHE education within schools by recommending that safe use of social media be taught in PSHE classes to promote mental health and enhance online safety education. However, they do not specifically identify or acknowledge nuances related to SEN that may be required when teaching directly.

From September 2020 it was made compulsory for schools to teach children about positive, healthy and respectful relationships online as part of the new Relationships and Sex education curriculum (DfE, 2019). The Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) guidance addresses social, emotional and physical aspects of sex education and relationships and is a step towards addressing some concerns here including an opportunity to deliver more age specific guidance and advice (Katz and Asam, 2018, p28). Teaching around building positive healthy relationships within the curriculum is a current strategy towards addressing online behaviour and relationships online. There exists a lack of adequate sex and relationships education specifically for those with special needs or learning disabilities (Blake and Muttock, 2004, Michielsen and Brockschmidt, 2021), leading to a gap in online safety both online and offline for this vulnerable group. suggesting that there needs to be further consideration around how SEN children are taught. Consideration is also given here to children's rights (UNCRC, 1992) and reducing barriers to learning (DfE, 2014), ensuring that all children have access to and the right to education. The sex and relationships guidance is suggested to be implemented in all schools and is mandatory for all primary aged children.

Sex and relationships education can have a significant impact on children's lives and has been reported to reduce risky behaviours online and offline and promote more positive and healthy relationships (Kirby and Laris, 2009; Brown and McCann, 2018). Still there is a lack of consideration around different groups of children and young people, and there is certainly an argument for drawing considerably more from research when developing online safety content and developing a more nuanced approach for SEN children. Bond (2013) discusses the importance of having a having a robust PHSE curriculum,

one which includes up to date and relevant e-responsibly awareness and online safety training of all teaching and support staff, not just those delivering the computing curriculum. Online safety needs to be embedded into school life (Katz and Asam, 2018) where sessions are repeated throughout the year rather than one-off sessions. A multi-stakeholder approach to online safety is required which supports and informs children on how to behave online (NSPCC, 2019). Government guidance has evolved to highlight the importance of protecting children online (Department for Education, 2018) including the computing programme of study as part of the national curriculum and the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory relationships, (RSE, 2021) and health education guidance. Recommendations from a study by Street and Katz (2016, p35) identify the importance of designating a safeguarding lead in education to highlight online safety and also agree a menu of additional intensive support targeted at those vulnerable groups including SEN and children with mental health difficulties. Arming children with the tools to reduce risk whilst acknowledging the online world they inhabit is essential to protecting them (Ybarra et al, 2007, p 139). SEN children are reported to be at a greater risk from harm of a sexual nature and there is evidence to suggest that they have more limited access to sex and healthy relationship education (Barnard-Brak et al, 2014) and are at a higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease when compared to non-SEN children (Cheng and Udry, 2005). Children from vulnerable groups are reported to have seen an increase in viewing self-harm sites with an increase from 21% in 2014 to 29% in 2017 (Asam and Katz, 2018, p28).

Schools are an important link for online safety and safeguarding, particularly for children from homes where parents may lack skills and confidence to support (Livingstone et al, 2015). Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech (2014) identify that a number of stakeholders including schools, parents and friends support recovery of victims of abuse online which demonstrates the active role and contribution they can have. Bryon (2008) argues that the skills and capabilities of parents should be raised alongside children's through the school curriculum, through building knowledge and skills, and through Ofsted ensuring accountability of the quality of online safety education. The impact of cyberbullying should be included in the training of child and adolescent mental health professionals (John et al 2018).

Online safety research and SEN

There has been a lack of research and analysis around online safety and safeguarding, explored in the following chapter, which is specific to SEN children. The terminology relating to the field of research has changed and evolved over recent years, having been used interchangeably within literature and policy documents. This has included the terms esafety, online safety and online safeguarding. All are predominantly concerned with the safety and protection of children online. Phippen and Street (2021) recently commented on how the perceptions of how "online safety" are largely ineffective and likely to fail as it would be impossible to ever prevent harm online. Online safeguarding as identified within this thesis considers a more holistic approach and includes the wider stakeholder community which supports equipping children with the knowledge to effectively balance risks and opportunities.

Highlighting the evolution of terminology is important to demonstrate how a lack of research within the field has led to a lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues that are specific to

SEN children and online safeguarding. Online safety and online safeguarding will be used interchangeably due to the development of the terms within education, literature and policy over recent years. The broad narrative around online safeguarding within UK education has been dominated as might be expected around non-SEN children. The main dilemma here is where the outcomes of such studies are applied to all children regardless of disability or learning need. Online safeguarding is discussed here in close alignment with SEN children in order to highlight the need for further studies within the current dearth of valuable research. A number of qualitative studies, locally, nationally and internationally and at a number of levels including government, industry, charities and academics have been conducted over the years examining children and young people's internet use, access, risk and opportunities in the UK and Europe including studies and surveys by EU Kids online (Machackova, 2020; Smahel et al, 2020; Livingstone et al, 2011; Livingstone, 2014; Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2014; Chaudron, 2015, HollowayGreen and Livingstone, 2013; Ofcom, 2017; Ofcom, 2021; Blum-Ross & Sonia Livingston, 2018; Morton et al 2018). Recent research by UNICEF in partnership with London School of Economics (LSE) explores children's experiences online (Morton et al, 2018 p22) and identifies issues that affect all children's online activity including blurred lines between offline and online, the role of the internet, stakeholder influence and policy implications. Ofcom (Ofcom, 2021) report on children's media literacy is intended to inform a multitude of stakeholders including industry and policy makers. Insightful outcomes and evidence of this are intended to support industry and policy makers but the outcomes are unable to provide insights into the behaviour of different groups, including SEN for example. Few of these studies in the past have had a specific focus on SEN children, vulnerable children or children with mental disorders, issues and difficulties or fail to identify that such a category sits outside of their sample. The EU Kids Online 2020 survey maps access, skills, risks and opportunities of the internet for children aged nine to 16 in Europe (Smahel, 2020) and explores a range of areas related to children and the internet. Generally, the studies both past and present have not fully taken into consideration children with special educational needs or any type of disorder, and break down data more generally between gender, age and nationality. There are minor references to SEN within some categories, but this does not reflect a true picture where one in eight five to 19 years olds in England had a mental disorder in 2017 (Keller, 2018). With a focus on research, policy and education within many of these studies, there is some significance within this. Failure to address SEN children and online safeguarding together has led to a failure to address some of the specific needs relating to SEN children.

This chapter has identified that research in relation to SEN children has been broadly under-researched in relation to their internet use and online safeguarding. The development around terminology of SEN has been shown within policy and guidance to have evolved over time since the Warnock Report (1978) which has led to a variety of terms and a multitude of different interpretations being adopted within a range of Contexts. Research in relation to SEN children and the internet has often focused on the risks online (Sen, 2016) as opposed to the opportunities with high profile cases around young people's internet use often reported on in the press to highlight the negative aspects more frequently than the positive for stakeholders (Ballantyne, Duncalf, Daly, 2010 , p95). This chapter has explored the evolution of terminology within policy and education alongside the lack of research within the field which has contributed to a lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues that are specific to SEN children and online safeguarding. This chapter aligns with the perspective of stakeholders establishing a more balanced approach to online safeguarding education encompassing an unbiased approach to risk and opportunity (Livingstone, 2009). which is required if stakeholders are to move forward positively Livingstone, 2013, p13) and capitalise on opportunities available for SEN children.

The next chapter explores both the risks and opportunities online with a specific focus on SEN and the opportunities the online environment can provide in supporting a child with an additional need. Online risk is critically analysed alongside wider debates around opportunity and resilience which allow for understanding of the previously discussed wider policy context, which incorporates a drive for protection within a risk adverse society and subsequently influences responses to risk management.

Chapter 3: Online risks and opportunities for SEN

Online risk and opportunity are proposed to be different for SEN children when compared to non-SEN children without an additional need or disability. A SEN child can be at increased level risk online due to their additional need and their level of cognitive, emotional and social developmental stage (McPherson et al, 2017). This places a SEN child within a higher risk category online and vulnerable to increased levels of bullying, grooming, harm and more likely to engage in risky online behaviours. SEN children are believed to experience low levels of self-esteem and mental health which can be exacerbated by their online activity and interactions (Greenspan, 1998). Alongside this there is evidence to suggest opportunities online which can enable and empower SEN children and support additional needs. Opportunities and benefits from online engagement include enhanced opportunities to socialise, make friends, communicate and support expression of self. A balanced approach to the opportunities and risks online for SEN children should be sought to ensure that the risks do not outshine the potential opportunities. Drawing the chapter to a close, online safety education is discussed as an exploration of safety and attitudes (online provision and policy) within schools and the impact that this is currently having on SEN children's behaviour and interactions online. A background to media use in England is given as a pre-cursor to the discussion around SEN children and online behaviour in order to outline the significance of technology to children in current day.

Children and devices

The discussion around children and devices is required in order to establish the growing use of devices and media over recent years. Ofcom establish a definition of media literacy as *"the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts"* (Ofcom, 2013 p4, 2021) with the report commissioned to give an overview of media literacy among all children and young people, encompassing SEN and non-SEN. Interestingly the demographic analysis was conducted by age, gender and household socio-economic group and did not include ability or specifically, disability within the 2013 demographic. However, in more recent years sections of the 2021 report include vulnerable children for the first time. Ofcom (2021) believe that whilst the report cannot provide a robust analysis here, what is provided can give insights into two specific categories. These are split between *"children in financially vulnerable households"* and *"Children with a condition that impacts or limits their daily activity."* The report does not specifically identify SEN children but is helpful in identifying emerging issues and gaps and to inform and provide data to the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS), another UK Government organisation which aims *'to keep children and young people safe online (UKCIS, 2017, p2)'* by bringing together 200 organisations across a number of sectors including government, industry, law, academia and charity. UKCIS is discussed in more detail below.

Media use by all children ranging across primary level education and secondary level education has risen over recent years with a surge in growth growing from increased use of tablets (Ofcom, 2017,2020). There is a distinct lack of data regarding media use directly related to SEN children upon which to base a critical analysis. However, the following statistics produced by the Ofcom report provide an insight into media use for all children and provide some evidence regarding the rise in the use of devices for all children, which has increased exponentially in recent years. The number of 5-7 year-olds owning a smart phone has seen the greatest increase from 5% to 14% from 2017 to 2020, with an increase from 35% to 57% owning a tablet. The increase of smart phone ownership has increased for 8-11 year-olds from 39% owning a smartphone in 2017 to 49% in 2020 with tablet ownership rising from 52% to 66%. The number of 12-15 year-olds owning a smartphone has increased from 83% to 91% with the smallest rise in tablet ownership from 55% to 59%. As children enter into teenage years the attraction for a smartphone outweighs the desire for a tablet. The most popular way to access the internet is through the use of a smartphone, tablet or laptop in 2020, however the increased rise in the use of laptops was felt to be due to home-schooling during the Covid pandemic. There has been a very high percentage across all ages ranges watching video-on-demand content rather than a live broadcast, including 88% of 5-7 year olds and 92% of 12-15 year olds in 2020, an increase across all categories. Interestingly alternative devices were used other than a TV set to watch TV programmes. Playing games online is also identified as a popular activity for children with 50% of 5-7 year-olds, 78% of 8-11 year-olds and 80% of 12-15 year-olds gaming online in 2020 (Ofcom, 2021). The report identifies that children are more likely to chat to people they know (67%) but also stated that they knew how to block people if they needed to (41% had blocked people). Ofcom (2021, p10) identify that nearly all children aged 5-15 (97%) accessed the internet. Primarily, children and young people are using and accessing social media sites, including primarily Snapchat in 2017 (Ofcom, 2017). 42% of children under the minimum age requirement were accessing social media in 2020. The rise in popularity of Instagram was seen amongst 12-15 year-olds in 2020 (Ofcom, 2021).

Critical understanding is identified as a “*core component*” of the report encompassing the level of online knowledge and understanding (Ofcom, 2017, 2021). More than half of 8-11s (53%) and nearly nine in ten 12-15s (87%) who go online say they have visited social media sites or apps (like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube). In 2017, Ofcom reported that less than one in ten in each age group use social media believe that all the information on social media sites or apps is true (6% for 8-11s and 2% for 12-15s). A quarter of 8-11s (26%) and 12-15s (24%) believe that if a website has been listed by Google it can be trusted, while about one in ten in each age group don’t think about whether Google results can be trusted (11% for both 8-11s and 12-15s). In 2020 (Ofcom, 2021), a quarter of 12-15 year-olds do not think about the “*truthfulness*” (Ofcom, 2021, p29) of information on new sites or apps. Vulnerable children aged 8-15 were reported to have had higher levels of difficulties managing engagement with social media with almost all (99%) feeling that “*people can be mean or unkind*” on social media sites compared to 92% of non-vulnerable children. Vulnerable children were also reported to be more at risk online with seven in ten children (12-15 year-olds) more likely to have been contacted by a stranger (45% compared to 27%) and felt “*under pressure to send photos of themselves to someone*” (14% compared to 4%), which is a dramatic different compared to children within the same age group who are not vulnerable. Bullying was higher for vulnerable children across a range of platforms including social media, video calls, texting and online gaming comparable to non-vulnerable children. The Anti-Bullying Alliance (n.d) report that during 2013, SEN children are 12% more likely to have been bullied online compared to non-SEN children.

Online risk

Asam and Katz (2018) call for urgent research around vulnerable children, their internet use and exposure to online risk. As previously discussed, there has been a lack of research within the area over a sustained period of time, which has contributed to the urgency and the need for further research. Vulnerable children are defined as including a child with a special need or disability. The internet and access to it has evolved to become a fundamental part of children's lives (Marwick and Danah, 2014) where there is practically no distinction between the virtual world and the offline world. Both are a reality for many with blurred boundaries between the two (Miller et al, 2016; Livingstone, 2013, p25). Many online behaviours, interactions and experiences have become the norm online, including a broad range of behaviours both positive and potentially where harm may be caused (Ybarra, 2007). This includes for example behaviours included within messaging, forming social groups online and the normalisation of exchanging personal information and pictures with others or posting online. Val Hooper (2012, p122) highlights young people as one of the most active users of social networking sites yet also as the highest proportion of negative users around their behaviour. SEN children (especially those with autism) are believed to be at a higher risk for a number of reasons due to the tendency to make literal interpretations of online content, misconceptions around friendship and being more likely to trust and share personal information (Cerebra, 2015)

Livingstone and Helsper (2007, p620) identify that in order to understand what happens online, it is important to 'grasp' what happens offline. Being online will inevitably open children up to risk as *"opportunity and risk go hand in hand"* with strong links between the two (Livingstone and Bober, 2005, p3). A child that is at risk offline has a strong possibility to be at risk and vulnerable online (UKCCIS, 2017). There is further evidence to suggest and support that young people who have experienced prior abuse offline are more susceptible to online grooming (Maychahal et al, 2014, p600). Offline behaviours in establishing friendships and developing relationships significantly influence online friendships and relationships. O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011, p 800) argue that young people who do not possess the necessary skills to develop healthy relationships offline or have poor social skills will struggle to develop healthy relationships online or at worst are unlikely to develop these at all.

Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2007, p303) considered if children and young people adopt different types of engagement online and consider if different groups are more at risk than others and concluded that *"a more complex explanation, based on demographic and Internet use factors, leads young people to take up opportunities to participate online in different ways."* Within child exploitation data, children with links to social care (including a high proportion of SEN) are over represented (Berelowitz, 2012, CEOP, 2013). Griffen (2006, p108) evidences the higher risk for SEN children and young people due to their *"social naivety, increased vulnerability or a tendency toward obsessive compulsive behaviours."* The impact of these factors on their own behaviours online and interaction with others places them at a considerably higher threat from harm than other non-SEN children. Ansaar and Loof (2010, p65) argue that vulnerable children are placed within a higher risk category online and are more susceptible to grooming arguing that *"due to their particular circumstances it may be easier for the perpetrator to groom these children and pretend that he/she is a person with good and caring intentions."*

Steinburg et al (2006, p1764) proposes that online risk taking by young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties during adolescence proposes a higher risk due to the natural tendencies and attitudes towards seeking fun and adventure at that age which in turn may be reflected in their behaviours to escape somewhere online for enjoyment and adventure (Livingstone et al, 2005). The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 9 (NSPCC) concludes that adolescents may be more likely to engage in risky behaviours due to their inability to fully regulate or control their impulses or emotions (Bentley et al, 2020). Harm may be dependant not only on the severity of an incident but the vulnerability and resilience of the child (Smahel, 2020, p60). The combination of heightened risk factors and stages of child development is relevant to the debate. Heightened risk-taking during times within a child's life, particularly during adolescence is "*normative, biologically driven and inevitable*" (Steinburg, 2008, p57) but a contributing additional need may exacerbate this further.

Asam and Katz (2018) report on vulnerable young people and their online risk and argue that vulnerable young people may experience risk differently and encounter experiences where some are beneficial for some children and some potentially harmful (Phippen, 2018, Christofferson, 2016). Marchant et al (2017) suggest also that the act of experiences being shared online may be therapeutic for some but destructive for others. Whilst the internet and social media offer both opportunities and threats, it is argued that challenges online are "*augmented for children with SEN, who are more vulnerable and therefore require more protection*" (Griffen, 2014, p116) Asam and Katz, (2018) comment on how the challenges for vulnerable children and young people may rely on how the experience is perceived, interpreted and the actual behaviour exhibited within an interaction. Social media for example can have an impact for all young people on relationships and have both a positive and negative impact on adolescents in terms of affecting their mood and impact on mental health (Wood, Bukowski, Lis, 2016, p163, Sant and Catania, 2014). O'Keefe (2011, 801) highlights evidence that link depression directly with social media and refers to "*Facebook depression*", as a result of engaging and spending lengthy amounts of time on social media (Frost and Rickwood, 2017, Jelenchick et al, 2013, Simoncic et al, 2014).

Katz and Asam, (2018) provide insights into online risk within the UK's most vulnerable children providing evidence to support conclusions around the debate. Vulnerable children defined here as children with physical, emotional or mental health issues (Children's Society, 2019) and as having been engaged and interacted online in some way. Risks identified in relation to vulnerable children and young people include amongst others sexting, cyberbullying, searching self-harm sites, perceptions around body image, experiencing lower levels of wellbeing and exposure to inappropriate content (Katz and Asam, 2018; Prichard et al, 2020, p2, Prichard et al, 2018, p781; Krasnova et al, 2013, p2; Valkenburg, Schouten, Peter, 2005). Children with an additional need, be that physical, emotional or cognitive sit within the vulnerable group and are less likely to recognise and report abuse studies have shown (Hershkowitz,,Lamb, Horowitz, 2007 cited in Franklin, Raws, & Smeaton, 2015 and Taylor, et al, 2015). Additional needs and mental health issues are argued "*make children more sensitive or vulnerable to online harm*" (Asam and Katz, 2018, p283)

Katz (2014, 2016) suggests findings that create a picture around there being two very distinct groups, those children that are coping well and are confident and digitally literate and those very vulnerable children that are highly susceptible to online risk (Asam and Katz, 2018, 2017, p9). Questions around whether this risk influences the opportunities available to a more vulnerable group need also to be considered (Livingstone and Helsper (2010, p310). Katz and Asam (2018) identify the increasing

number of vulnerable children and argue that their vulnerabilities offline will clearly translate online, and there are issues here that have not been addressed on a wider scale. Specifically, it is argued that vulnerable children may miss out on online safety education and be exposed to harmful content where existing vulnerabilities may be exacerbated. In conclusion Katz and Asam (2018, p39) propose “that young people who are vulnerable offline are given relevant, proactive and nuanced education and support to help them stay safe online.” For example, a suggestion that offline vulnerabilities can significantly predict certain types of risk. O’Keeffe et al (2011) discusses the importance young people attach to engaging with social media and suggest links between online lives and offline lives which are reflected intimately. Common links are related to what young people feel are important during various stages of their life, including developing relationships, sharing ideas and engaging in common interests. Due to experiences offline or difficulty or adversity communicating face to face, a more vulnerable group may seek to compensate their offline experience with online experiences for example around developing relationships. Griffen(2006) argues that SEN children often find face to face communication difficult and evidences how online social interactions can ease some of these difficulties.

Adult centric concerns

It is significant to highlight differing perceptions around risk in order to fully consider and understand various stakeholder views and perceptions around risk from both children’s perspectives and the adult-centric concerns. There are wider debates around risk, vulnerability, opportunity and resilience which require some consideration in relation to the direction of this thesis and to allow for critical debate and understanding of the wider policy context and literature (see chapter 5). Phippen and Bond (2020, p119) argue that online safeguarding has become “a pressing concern for policy makers, industry, law enforcement and the general public” with the drive for protection and vulnerability to risk which subsequently influence responses to risk management. Beck (1994) defines risk as related to control and predicting the future and argues that perceptions of risk will invariably be disputed between social groups and individuals. Risk society is discussed in further detail in chapter 5, but it would be sufficient to make links to online risk by highlighting how risk society considers conflicts and tensions running through society (Beck, 1999). A prime example being technology and online risk, which offers up a range of quite complex tensions and conflicts to be considered to groups and individuals with wide ranging views and perceptions. To further understand the concept of risk society in relation to technology here, it is defined as a phase within the development of modern society in which:

Responding to online risk has predominantly derived from adult perspectives whilst ignoring a child’s perspective and resulted in policy initiatives based on protectionist ideals where children’s behaviour is potentially controlled and limited. Lee (2001) argues that adult authority over children including making decisions in their absence has in the past resulted in the voices of children not being heard. More specifically it is highlighted that as a society there have been established strategies for controlling, filtering and mediating information from an adult perspective, without child consultation resulting in a child’s voice being safely ignored. Where the online world is concerned, this is even more apparent. Where SEN children or vulnerable children are involved, this is further exacerbated due to perceptions that this group would be unable to contribute effectively (Griffen, 2014).) As previously discussed, the online and offline world is blurred offering complexities to already complex situations.

SEN and online risk

A 2016 Cybersurvey (Katz, 2016) reports on online behaviour of children and young people aimed to provide insights into young people's experiences online and provide early alerts to trends developing in this area. The study made specific links and produced findings based on the more vulnerable group rather than combining the figures with the general population, as many other studies which have been identified have done. Vulnerable groups as defined in the report include young carers, those with mental health difficulties, those who are depressed (Emotional Health), those with learning difficulties, hearing loss or other SEN, and those who lack confidence or never feel they are 'good enough' (Katz, 2016)

The findings suggest that this group are likely to experience a higher number of negative encounters than those children that are not vulnerable and emphasise that it is important to support this group. This group relied more heavily on the internet to make friends and find support groups with some reasons being suggested that they might be more comfortable communicating online. Other risks for vulnerable children were recognised and included vulnerable groups being more likely not tell anyone of their plans to meet a stranger than non-vulnerable children (42% compared to 70%), and also to travel further distances to meet up with an older stranger. Establishing friendships that have the potential to become more intimate poses a risk as intimacy and intimidation can often be closely aligned when facilitated by social media (Miller et al, 2016). The study specifically considered the influence of mood, confidence and emotional health and how children were feeling 'most of the time'. The study found that *"a lack of confidence about the future; depression or unhappiness, were linked to vulnerability in high risk online situations"* (Katz, 2016, p23)

The study is one of the few reports to specifically consider and explore online behaviour with specific links to SEN children. Conclusions from the study found that predominantly the consequences regarding engagement online are different for vulnerable groups and often have a greater negative impact for this group. Katz (2016, p8) argues that *"this is not proof of cause and effect but shows the powerful relationship between their internet use and their wellbeing."* For example, the study found that those with mental health difficulties were more likely to make friends online but often felt more feelings of depression compared to those without mental health difficulties. RSPH (2017) calls for action to be taken from stakeholders to support young people's emotional and mental wellbeing more generally in relation to their online interactions. The calls for action include a strong emphasis on social media companies to do more including, encouraging the implementation of technology related to heavy usages warnings, notifications around digitally manipulated images and using technology to identify young people who could be suffering from mental health. Difficulty around how a mental health disorder presents itself online and identifying those individuals has a number of difficulties and implications (Asam and Katz, 2018). Coyne et al (2020, p1) highlights how public response to social media may stem more from a moral panic where the root cause of the problems is not fully understood. Results of a study suggests that there is no evidence to suggest a link between poor levels of mental health and amount of time spent on social media sites. Other studies in this area have supported this conclusion also (Banjanin, et al, 2015, p311).

Further to this Asam and Katz (2018) support the argument that vulnerable young people are likely to experience risk in a different way from other children and identify five different categories including, family, physical, SEN, communication and mental health difficulties and group online risk into four different categories to include, content, contact, conduct and cyberscams (4cs). SEN children are found to experience significantly higher contact risk in relation to online communication including, sexting, pressure and coercion by others. They are found to also be more likely to believe they are in a relationship online in order to fulfil a sense of love and belonging and view self-harm sites more

regularly than their peers. Helsper and Livingstone (2007, p622) argue that online relationships and the consequences of these can be difficult to evaluate but argue that for the psychologically vulnerable online communication may be more harmful or risky.

Mesch and Talmund (2006, p30) identify empirical evidence that suggests that those suffering with social phobia, anxiety disorders or low self-esteem may be more frequent users of the internet to seek friendship choosing online interactions over face to face encounters. There is evidence to suggest that the internet causes social isolation and impacts negatively on face-to-face interactions (Kraut et al, 1998, p1017) with there existing the potential for children lacking social skills offline to lack social skills online. This offers a reality for poor friendships and relationships to be manifested both virtually online and within face-to-face offline interactions.

An additional need or mental health disorder is suggested to be a factor contributing to the likelihood of a young person being exposed to greater risks online, resulting in them being or becoming more vulnerable online and having a greater impact on them (Asam and Katz, 2018, p283). Livingstone and Helsper (2007, p622) argue that whilst online communication can be positive and beneficial for online relationships, groups that are '*psychologically vulnerable*' may find online communication carries a greater level of risk and harm.

Online bullying and SEN

Significantly, SEN children are more likely to be bullied online and have less support understanding how to engage online safely and effectively (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2017). There is evidence to suggest that children who are perceived as '*different*' from their peers are more likely to be bullied (Taylor, Hume and Welsh, 2010, p191). The Annual Bullying Survey (2017) highlights that the frequency of online bullying is higher amongst groups LGBT, BME and disabled individuals, all of which were suggested to be more at risk from bullying online. Fallout from cyberbullying for individuals places them at an increased risk of self-harm and suicide, which was concluded from a systematic review of literature concluded from 26 independent studies (John et al, 2018). However, the review identified that the biggest limitation of the review was the inability to account for whether victims of cyberbullying were suffering from a mental health disorder which may have influenced the results. Further studies (Katz and Asam, 2018, p25) report that 40% of young people with mental health difficulties reported being bullied online compared to those without mental health difficulties. Children with a mental health issue were more than twice as likely than children without a mental disorder to have been bullied online (41.5 %) (Katz and Asam, 2018, p25) but they are also more likely to have bullied others online (14.6%) than those children without any mental health issues at all (6.9%).

Mental health and SEN

Research (NHS, 2017) exploring the impact of mental health of vulnerable young people in relation to online use, suggests that young people experiencing mental health issues were more likely to feel low in response to how many likes, comments and shares they might receive on a post. It was also found that low levels of mental health impacted on how young people present themselves online and influence levels of honesty when engaging with social media. Findings from the study around the use of social media found that those suffering with a mental health issue were more likely to use social media every day and engage for longer periods of time than those without. This was evident in both boys and girls with a mental disorder and across age groups from 11 to 19 year-olds.

The research which examined the mental health of 11 to 19 year-olds in England (NHS, 2017), grouped children and young people into four categories including, emotional disorder, behavioural disorders, hyper-activity disorders and other less common disorders including ASD (Davies et al 2019 p12). The national survey points to previous studies in this area in 1999 (Meltzer, et al) and 2004 (Green et al, 2005) with major differences including the population sample being expanded to include children aged 2 to 4 years old and 17 to 19-year-olds with a greater focus around online behaviour and cyberbullying. The report identifies that emotional disorder rates had increased between 1999 and 2017 with stability in all other disorders. The first in a series of follow-up reports was published in October 2020 and found that mental health disorders have again increased since 2017 with one in six children identified as having a mental health disorder, compared to one in nine in 2017. Over a third of the children surveyed aged five to 19 (35.6%) were categorised as SEN, with a quarter of children having an emotional disorder, two thirds with a hyperactivity disorder and two thirds of those children with other less common disorders (p26). Children with a mental disorder were more likely to access social media everyday (87.3%) compared to those without a mental disorder (77.8) and be on social media for longer periods of time (29.4 % compared to 12%) found that young people with a mental disorder had a higher risk and were twice as likely to have experienced bullying online (59.1%) and offline (41.5) within the previous year, said that 'likes' affected their mood (p29), more likely to have self-harmed or attempted suicide between the ages of 11 to 16, with 25.5% compared to 3.0% without a disorder (p24) and were more likely not to identify as heterosexual. The national study also looked at activity offline as well as online and found that children with a mental disorder were less likely to engage in clubs and organisations both in school and outside of school reflected by a high percentage (65.9%) there was a similar result when looking at sports club specifically both in and out of school also. Having low levels of social support which includes participation in clubs and organisations both in and out of school contribute to mental disorders (Keller,2018, p18). A significant result focusing on support networks of children with and without a mental disorder showed that children with a mental disorder have a very low level of social support (42.2%). The report further highlights overall that children and young people with a mental disorder were more likely to sit in the higher percentage of children experiencing difficulties in terms of evolving their identities and behaviours within the wider social context of adolescence. Also, SEN children included within the NHS study are more likely to not identify as heterosexual, experiencing adverse life events, having attempted self-harm or committing suicide, tried alcohol, drugs and cigarettes (Keller, 2018). Without a 'real-life' support network or adequate stakeholder engagement combined with limited resources and emotional or cognitive difficulties there is clearly an argument that these groups may be more at risk.

Online opportunities for SEN

There is strong evidence to suggest a number of very positive and encouraging links between the internet and vulnerable groups, including SEN children. Whilst SEN children were not specifically identified in the UK Children's Go Online project (Livingstone, 2005), which examined children and young people's internet use in detail and examined patterns of opportunities and risk, findings suggest some positive correlations. Findings from the study are similar to more recent studies that explore internet use, opportunities and risk for children and young people (O'Neill and Dinh, 2014; Machackova et al, 2020; EU Kids Online, 2014, Mishna et al, 2009, Jones et al, 2010, 2013). Outcomes from these studies produce findings that support positive reinforcement of some of the emotional and social needs previously discussed as important for SEN. Research suggests that the internet provides a vehicle for finding good and strong social interactions and relationships which may be missing from a child's life and can be sought by joining groups to feel "*less isolated and different*" (McKenna and Bargh 1998, p682). The online world offers many positive opportunities, education, fun, love friendship and social and support groups. Interactions reflecting a level of emotional support, friendship and a sense of belonging are accessible for all children (Wellman and Gulia 1998, p338) and enable an increased sense of self-worth and acceptance, which could be of particular value for vulnerable children and young people. There is also evidence that offline interactions and friendships are enhanced online and can complement each other (Spears et al, 2007, p19, Wellman et al 2001, p438), with some positive discussion around children with neurological and development disorders where "*screen-based media*" may enhance social engagement. However empirical evidence to propose a strong argument here is lacking.

A more recent study by EU Kids Online (Smahel, 2020, p101) evidences how communication online for the majority of children in their study, including SEN reported it to be easier to communicate online and to be themselves. Consideration around discussing sensitive issues, exploring identity or those children with emotional problems are considered to potentially impact this as online communication may give opportunities "*for better self-control of the self-presentation*" (Smahel, 2020, p100). Further to this, networked technologies expand opportunities for disclosure and belonging, both of which are meaningful processes and central to positive development during adolescence (Davis, 2012).

The internet and social online platforms support social development and interactions and builds communities irrespective of geographical locations forming social groups and friendships that would otherwise have been impossible (Wellman et al, 2001, p 437, Spears et al, 2000, p7). There is also evidence to suggest that groups that may be lacking in self-esteem, experiencing mental health difficulties or feeling marginalised in some way may find emotional, social and motivational support from online groups (McKenna and Bargh, 1998, p681. Spears et al 2000, p8). Social connection online is then able to replace or support face to face encounters and provide young people with a valued opportunity to connect (Boyd, 2014) which may otherwise be more difficult for them to seek and establish. Petra (2014, p275) suggests that shy individuals may feel they have greater control over presentation of self-online which may be of greater value alongside the lack of non-verbal behaviour which may support the expression of self-online also.

Opportunities surrounding the internet and the use of social media more generally for children and young people have been reported to include a whole range of benefits contributing to daily life and interactions with friends and family. Griffen (2006, p108) highlights specifically in relation to the opportunities which are significant for SEN children including enhanced opportunities to socialise and communicate. Lee (2009, p525) supports this further and argues that frequent online communication helps to develop and maintain cohesive relationships which further extends to influence a number of emotional, social and cognitive factors. Research to support the emotional, social and cognitive have clear links to the development of a child or adolescent and suggest a

number of positive outcomes including closer relationships with existing friends (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Lee, 2009; Gross, 2004), positive influences on a child's subjective sense of worth and value (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007), children striving to navigate and establish their identity (Val Hooper, 2012, p122; Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter, 2005, p383; Valkenburg and Peter, 2008 p209) and enhanced learning opportunities and new ways to communicate (DeWitt, 2021; Gross, 2004, p634).

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2017) considers the growing need to consider mental health and wellbeing within the health discourse and takes a focused look at the relationship between mental health and wellbeing amongst children. The StatusOfMind report focuses on many of the positive aspects of social media that in fact support mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience and highlight community building with its universal reach as holding. The report did not specifically focus on SEN children as a separate group but the outcomes support many of the previously discussed issues important for SEN emotional wellbeing. The report identifies negatives and positives of social media and its impact on young people including anxiety and depression, poor sleep, body image, cyberbullying and fear of missing out (FoMO). The report identifies a further positive effect here of social media on young people including enhanced access to expert health information. The study found that those with mental health issues are heavier users of social media and make links to this being an opportunity to enhance the presence of online health care services to offer help and support to those heavier users. O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) highlight how the internet enables and empowers young people to access health information easily and also anonymously (Suzuki and Calzo 2004, Rideout, 2002 p27).

Another positive effect of social media which touches upon vulnerable groups is around emotional support and community building and proposes that building communities with like-minded people who may share similar worries and concerns is an important factor for groups seeking higher levels of emotional support online. The two groups identified within the report, include LGBTQ+ community and ethnic minorities that are at a higher risk for "*compromised mental health*" (RSPH, 2017, pp14). Self-expression, self-identity and making, and maintaining and building upon relationships were also explored in relation to enhancing the lives of young people. Ito et al (2010, p30) identify how young people use the internet and social media "*to build friendships and romantic relationships*" and to simply "*hang out*" with each other. However, the evidence did not make strong links to those with additional needs where many of these positive effects could potentially be more important and have a greater significance their lives.

The positive influence of the internet and social media are suggested to outweigh the negatives which should not be used as a deciding factor in limiting access to the internet regardless of need or ability. If the positive opportunities online are denied then SEN children specifically are faced with a "*double deficit*" as they are already faced with "*being edged out of society, educated apart in special schools*" (Asam and Katz, 2018, p294). Technology is viewed as being "*a great equalizer*" (Florian, 2004, p10) for children with an additional need and argues that it can help to overcome differences between children providing equal opportunities to learn and access the curriculum.

This chapter has proposed that online risk and opportunity are different for SEN children with research and evidence explored within this chapter suggesting that SEN children are at a higher risk than non-SEN children online due to their learning need or disability. As a result and as evidenced within the chapter, SEN children are potentially open to low levels of self-esteem, bullying and mental health concerns which can have a significant impact on their lives. Risk management is argued to have been positioned from adult centric perspectives with stakeholders focused on a drive for protection and control of children's behaviour without consultation or consideration of a child. Opportunities and risks should be balanced to ensure SEN children are not disadvantaged or their rights to freedom of expression breached. The next chapter discusses the link between child development and environment by examining Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of child development and exploring the link between stakeholder engagement and involvement in relation to SEN. within the online safeguarding environment

Chapter 4: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of child development

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is discussed here in order to explore the link between a child's development and the surrounding environment which subsequently impacts on the development of a child. Specific to this study, the environment and the stakeholders which exist within that environment are proposed to be contributing to SEN children's online behaviour and interactions. The model was developed in response to Bronfenbrenner's research which focused on the desire for public policy to support and enable all children to grow up healthy and competent (Shelton, 2018). This chapter discusses Bronfenbrenner as the foundation of child development and is central to developing a model which seeks to support SEN children's online behaviour. Bronfenbrenner's model has informed subsequent theory and debates within the field of child development but what is central to the theory and significant for this study is the idea of the environment impacting and influencing child development.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

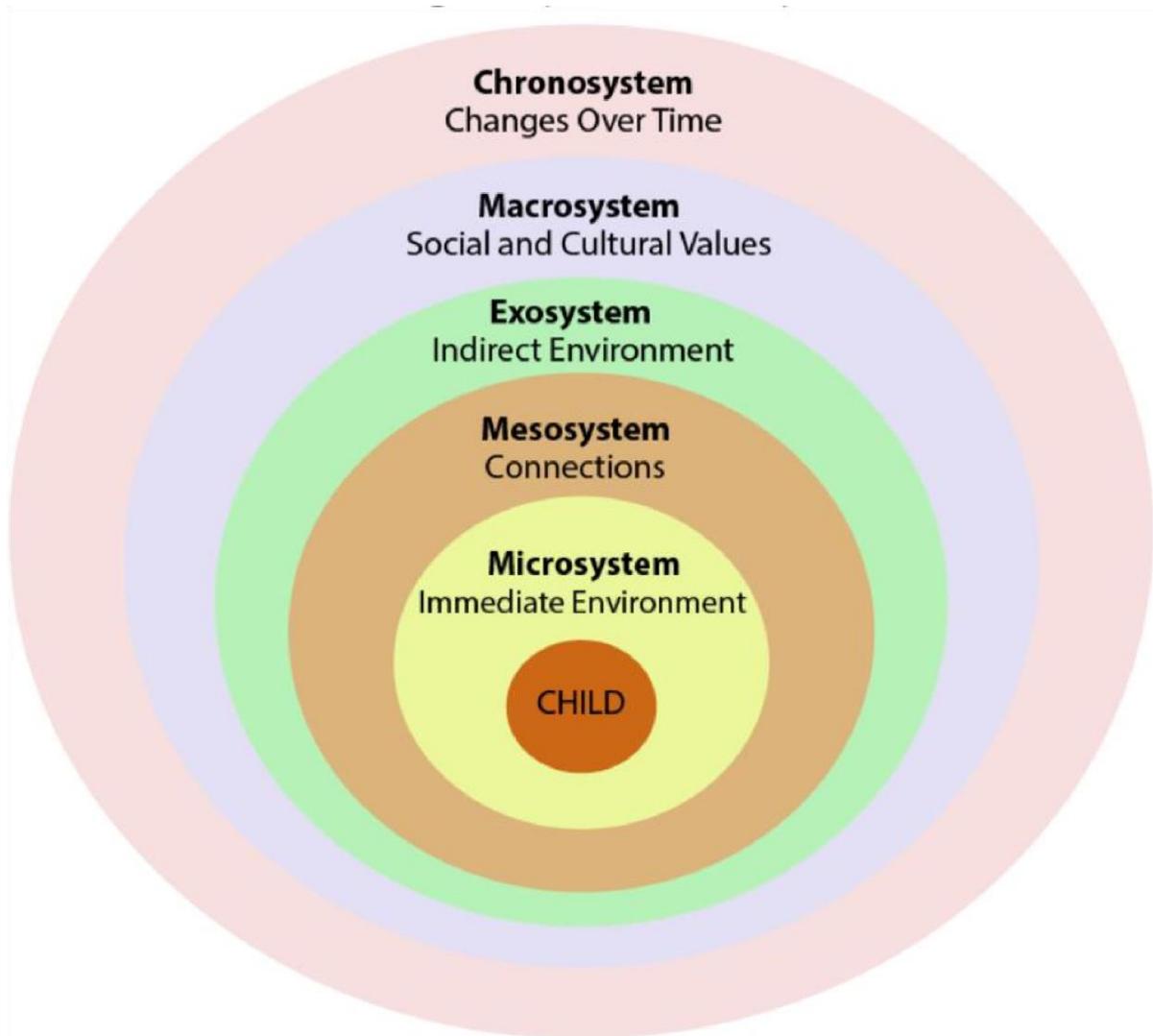
Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and scientific analysis around the role and influence of environment upon child and human development has placed him alongside other significant contributors within the field, including Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget and Erick Erikson (Lawrence, 2018) and has influenced development of theory and practice over time. The breadth of Bronfenbrenner's work is evident within a range of subject disciplines and within a range of contexts where research has cited his work consistently over the years and continues to do so (Leonard, 2011; Lau, 2014; Eriksson, Ghazinour and Hammarstrom, 2018; Yok-Fong paat, 2013; Swick and Williams, 2006; Chen, 2012; Sontag, 1996; Johnson, 1994;, Bronfenbrenner and Cesi, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a framework to extend understanding around child development which recognises that there are a number of entities and factors which contribute to the development of a child. His seminal ecological framework of child development recognises that a system of interconnected factors impact and influence child development both within their immediate environment and their extended environment (Phippen and Bond, 2019). Bronfenbrenner presented a new theory which has been widely adopted within the field of psychology to study individuals in context and their development in relation to their environmental settings (Eddy, 1981, p643, Neal and Neal, 2013, p722). Shelton (2018) highlights how the framework can be applied to any person, relationship or setting and can guide in making changes which can facilitate effective development. The model was the most appropriate choice of framework to be applied in this thesis primarily due to the breadth of analysis the model allows for over a vast range of stakeholders within a number of domains, which this thesis would ideally include. As a result, data produced can address some aspects of the model or facilitate further research in order to develop our understanding of how the model can be applied in its entirety or more holistically within the field. Environment as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1979) is categorised into five different systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. It is the interaction between each of these systems which is key to the theory and provides insights into the significance of the external environment on child development. It is important to highlight how Bronfenbrenner's work (1979) proposed that the wider environment outside of a child's immediate environment for example home, friends and family is in fact influenced by wider external factors for example government and public policy. These wider

external factors can yield great power over society and affect the wellbeing and development of that society by having influence over the conditions of lives. The chronosystem

which came later to the theory (1989,1999) suggest the influence of time on human development. Rosa and Tudge (2013, p7) cite Bronfenbrenner and argue that researchers did not take time into account and as a result *“did not take into account development as a process of continuity and change.”* The chronosystem sits outside as the final system and proposes development which takes place and changes over time.

Diagram 1. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory



Bronfenbrenner's work looks at not only the biological aspect of development, but also the ecology and ultimately the environment surrounding a child, which is central to the model. His work has been "highly influential in the development of children in the modern world" (Eddy, 1981, p643). His work provides a framework and a systematic approach of human and social development which highlights the growth into "a fully competent member of society" (Härkönen, 2007, p3) and provides insights into the development of a child. His work helps to identify influences on a child's development, for example where "environmental conditions produce different developmental results depending on the personal qualities of the individuals, living under these conditions" (Härkönen, 2007, p5). As a result of this understanding there can then be a greater understanding around factors affecting and influencing a child's development both positively and negatively. Roda and Tudge (2013, p2) suggest that the theory views development "as emerging from the interaction of the individual and context". For example, factors which may more directly influence a child and be more obvious are their immediate family, but this also extends to the wider community of external factors including culture and policy. The model is constructed around the child, with the child being at the centre of the ecosystem and the various different systems sitting outside and around the child.

Micro, meso, exo, macro and chronosystems

The first system and the one in which a child may be more directly and immediately influenced by is the microsystem, which includes the most powerful influence – the actions of others on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p45). This is the most powerful influence on a child and which Härkönen (2008, p7) argues are where the "bi-directional interactions are at their strongest". Cullen et al (2020, p17) identifies the activities and interactions which take place within the microsystem which include, but are not limited to, "home, classroom, playground, after-school club." The mesosystem is the second system to surround the child which consists of connections between two or more settings or could be interpreted as a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p45). Cullen et al (2020, p17) gives examples of the relationships within the mesosystem which are also significant influences on the development of a child by highlighting examples such as "parent-teacher meetings" and "bringing a school friend home" This is then followed by the exosystem, again consisting of two or more settings, settings in which the child has no direct involvement in, but may still consist of events that do impact the child. It is at this level that decisions can be made about a child that affect them and subsequently their development. Examples at this level may include "senior leadership meetings in which school policies affecting pupils are discussed and decided upon; a local authority making decisions about school placement" (Cullen et al (2020, p17). This system relates to the events that happen around the child but do not directly involve them, for example this could include school governors, friends or relatives related to the child. The events which take place within the exosystem influence the behavioural development (Sheldon, 2018, Anderson, 2014). The macro system is a much wider system that embodies social and cultural values and belief systems within the environment. The exosystem and macrosystem can operate individually or in unison and are further out of the child's immediate environment but can still heavily influence a child's development. The chronosystem which further extends around the child is viewed within the theory as a system or layer that is fluid and changes over time. The Chronosystem was not included within the original theory but refers to development over time or impact of events which take place over both long and short periods of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, 1989). What is central to the model and its systems, is what happens in one system is not isolated but determined and influenced by what happens in other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner clearly suggests that each of the systems which exist within the model are important and have an important role to play within a child's development either in isolation or working together. Phippen and Bond (2019) highlight how there is not one part of the system that can work independently of each other to ensure the "positive development of the child" suggesting interactions between the child and their immediate environment, for example parents and family interact and work simultaneously with the wider systems environment such as education system, and health and social. Subsequently there can be a greater understanding within and around the interactions and communication between stakeholders. These interactions, communications and roles can enable a deeper understanding around the life of a child and help to identify and establish more positive relationships and influences and enable child to reach their highest potential (Phippen and Bond, 2019 Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p9). These interactions within the systems theory are required to take place on a frequent basis and over an extended period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, Krishnan, 2010, p5).

While the theory itself is not specifically aimed at the education system, it may be helpful in exploring and understanding the educational environment and the key stakeholders that operate within it (Helena-Koller, 2019). The theory is useful in helping to appreciate the wider educational environment, elements of which sit in all systems external to the child. For example, school is one of the closest structures to a child outside of the home which would sit within the micro system and acts as a setting in which "people readily engage in face to face interaction " (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p22). Education is present in the mesosystem involving the interactions between school and home. It is present in the exosystem which extends outside of the mesosystem to be further away from the child but still does influence the immediate environment of the child. Interactions within these systems would be inclusive of those between school and community and include both formal and informal interactions. For example, the child has no direct input into educational policy but educational policy impacts upon the child's experience within school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p526, Neal and Neal, 2013, p725). The macro system again extended outside of the exosystem and within which the social and cultural values exist provide opportunities to explore the influence of wider systems and stakeholder interactions on a child. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p515) gives the example here of the design and function of classrooms within a given society and the similarities between them. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p515) identifies the importance of stakeholders within these systems within macrosystems and states that "they are of special importance in determining how a child and his or her caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings." Sabates and Dev (2012, p5) cite Bronfenbrenner and argue that the interactions which take place in the outer systems and further away from the child are still very much "important and are substantial sources of impact." The theory gives significance to the interactions, roles, actions and processes between the stakeholders which impacts the child (Härkönen, 2008, p6).

The model proposes that the interactions between systems and subsequently between stakeholders influence behaviour and development of a child, which when considered appropriately offer opportunities for intervention and analysis or "contextual predictors or points of intervention" (Neal and Neal, 2013, p723). For example, parenting of a child can depend upon and be influenced by a number of different factors that sit within other systems. This may include a parent job role being affected by job flexibility, work life balance, childcare availability, access to healthcare or the neighbourhood in which they live. Interactions between the child and family, home life, teachers, location and the wider society will inform and shape the development of that child alongside events that may happen within each of the systems. Eddy (1981, p643) highlights how public policy is a recurring theme here and essential for progress within the field of human development "public policy

largely determines the conditions in which human development occurs and states how experiments with “new social forms contribute to the work of creating a more human ecology.”

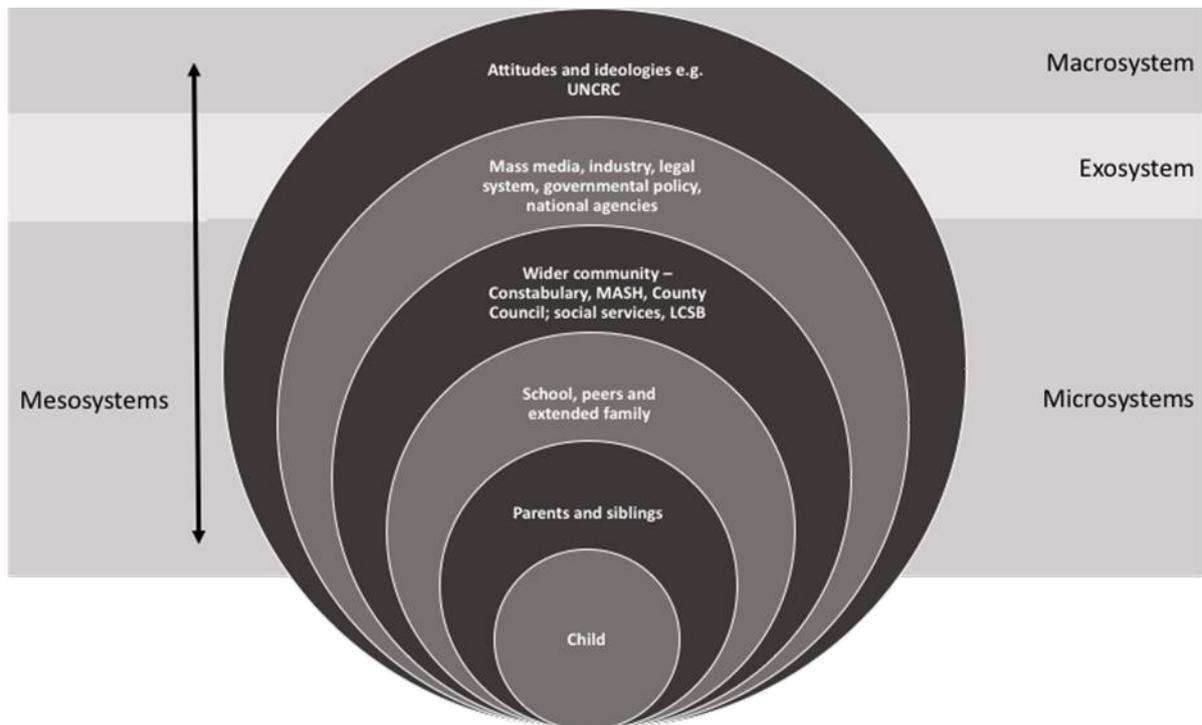
Bronfenbrenner (1979, p9) discusses how the emphasis of the theory is around what is “perceived, desired, feared, thought about, or acquired as knowledge and how the nature of this psychological material changes as a function of a person’s exposure to and interaction with the environment”. A child’s perception becomes their reality regardless of the objective reality that exists.

Bronfenbrenner argues that from an ecological perspective this capacity to change and adapt represents “the highest expression of development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p515).

Ecosystems approach for child online safety

An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s work has been proposed by Phippen and Bond (2019) who suggest that healthy development and safeguarding is dependent upon the interactions between each system which will subsequently influence interactions with the immediate environment of a child, both online and offline.

Diagram two. Ecosystems approach for child online safety



Phippen and Bond (2019)

Stakeholder interaction takes place around the child with interactions within all systems deemed to influence the child in some way. The micro, meso and exosystems include stakeholders which the child is likely to be more aware of within their immediate environment, for example parents, teachers, social

care and local authorities in both physical and virtual environments and are identified as having statutory responsibilities for online safeguarding (Phippen and Bond, 2019). Industry is also recognised here but is argued to sit within the broader environment which supports and provides infrastructure for online experiences. The macrosystem here includes the UNCRC principles and children rights and act to ensure that children's rights are always considered with respect to privacy, freedom of expression, information and education. The adaptation of the original model strongly supports the interconnection between systems as highly significant in supporting a positive online experience for a child. All groups and individuals who sit within each system are proposed to be responsible for online safeguarding, with their communication and cooperation believed to be paramount to this success. Developing the resilience of a child online is also central to this adaptation and proposed to be fundamental to developing positive behaviours and interactions online.

Development cannot happen in isolation and there is a significant impact on child development through the interactions of stakeholders which is proposed to support healthy child development and well-being (Krishnan, 2010, p5). Vanervan, (2008, p14) argues that "all members of a community can play an important role, whether bringing up, working with, working on behalf of, or having incidental contact with young children." Shelton (2018) highlights how often researchers try to explain behaviour as a function of a single event or relationship and are disappointed when simple solutions are unable to address complex problems. Interactions and relationships, or a lack of them between stakeholders within the field of SEN and online behaviour undoubtedly create some very complex problems which require attention. Shelton (2018, p118) argues that "Bronfenbrenner's framework reminds us of the complexity of life while at the same time it is a tool for conceptualising complexity."

Stakeholder interaction and development of SEN children

Hyson et al (2006, p21) highlight the significance of emotional regulation in early child development and the impact on development and learning "especially for those at risk of negative development and educational outcomes." Emotion and regulating of emotion are often linked to "problem behaviour" as it is understood that the negative emotion underlies the problem behaviour (Eisenberg et al 2001, p141, Shields et al, 2001, p74). Applying this to SEN children and specifically here to those children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, Eisenberg (2001) highlights how this severe disorder has been linked to children with a shortfall in their social spheres (Frick and Lahey, 1991 p165) and at risk of developing learning disabilities that further inhibit their learning. Interestingly (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007, p65) begins to explore the impact of stakeholders on children with attention deficit disorders, specifically parents as stakeholders and discusses how when parents and children are both engaged in education to support the child, for example problem solving, goal setting and even developing friendships, the results are far more positive and the parents report more positive results around social skills. Teachers as stakeholders also report more positive results around learning in the classroom, interactions and behaviour of a child. Whilst attention deficit disorder is quite specific here with regards SEN, links can be made with engagement of stakeholders and positive outcomes for SEN children. Semrud-Clikeman (2007, p72) continue to discuss child

development and children with learning difficulties, defined as problems in any one of the following areas, “listening comprehension, expressive language, basic reading skills (word identification, phonological coding), reading comprehension, written language, mathematics calculation, or mathematics reasoning” and identifies that many children experience emotional, social and behavioural issues alongside their learning disability. Crick and Dodge et al (1994, p74) outline child development and mental process in relation to interactions with others and comment on how gaining a greater understanding around interactions with others may lead to a greater understanding around children understanding themselves. Also included here is how previous experiences and learned behaviours are brought to new events, interactions and situations. This may help to expand upon Bronfenbrenner’s model in the sense that it is possible to gain a greater understanding around the influence of stakeholders and the significance on the child at the centre of the model. Hyson et al, (2006, p35) for example highlights how the ecological theory also proposes that interventions are significant here and use the example of how intervention from family and community may serve to promote a more positive outcome.

This chapter explored Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory in relation to child development and the wider stakeholder environment which recognises the significance of stakeholder interactions and engagement. It is proposed that each entity or stakeholder which exists as part of the model should not work in isolation of each other in order to contribute to the healthy development of a child and enable a child to reach their highest potential (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p9; Phippen and Bond,2019) The framework is considered in relation to online safeguarding of SEN children and proposes that the ecosystems approach is highly significant in supporting a positive online experience for a child. Due to the lack of research in the field, as previously discussed the framework is being applied to the SEN environment, providing insight and exploring the impact and perspectives of stakeholders situated within each system in order to contribute to knowledge within the field.

Chapter 5: Technology and Social Theory

Due to the nature of this study and the narrative around SEN children and their online behaviour and interactions it would be unwise not to comment and touch upon theory relating to technology and the influence of technology on society. As previously identified, technology is prominent within the lives of children with rates of access to the internet and mobile phones and tablets usage. 97% of all children in England aged 5-15 reported to go online (Ofcom, 2020). Cupples and Thompson (2010) suggest and support how technology re-shapes and creates new practices which is an important consideration and debate to acknowledge where children are concerned. The debates here predominantly focus on the risks and dangers here as opposed to the more positive outcomes and opportunities for children and young people who are required to be protected through limiting exposure and exploration of the online environment (Livingstone and Helsper, 2010; Schmitz and Siry, 2011). Theories around technology range from the simplistic to the complex and often ambiguous ideas that expand upon traditional thinking and aim to elaborate upon factors that shape, innovate and impact upon human behaviour, society and culture. Two main theories and debates have evolved around technology, the first being technological determinism and the second social constructivist theory. Further to this there exists one that is an anti-humanist approach versus a humanist approach where questions arise in relation to technology shaping society or . society shaping technology. Social theories predominantly focus on interactions between humans and technology and how they affect each other for example how decisions are made between humans and technology and which of the two are the driving force in relation to social change and culture. The theories are often ambiguous and require a level of interpretation and application to technologies in order to make them more meaningful. The theories are considered here in relation to their relevance to the subject matter and are being explored and considered as contributing but not central to the narrative around SEN children's online behaviour. What will be discussed in this chapter is social science and technology theory around the role of technology and risk in human lives and society. A 'risk society' is argued to suggest that the focus on preventing future risk actually further generates the idea of risk in our lives rather than the focus of opportunity. Further to technological determinism, other social science theories are highlighted and serve to broaden the narrative around SEN children and the role of technology in shaping and impacting their lives.

Risk society

As previously discussed in chapter 3, risk society is linked to technology and online risk in the fact that it considers how conflict and tensions exist within society and may split society and that different social groups and individuals can consider risk differently. Giddens (1999, p3) defines a risk society as "a society where we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures" and argues that it can be traced back to two fundamental transformations, "*the end of nature*" and the "*end of transition*" which has been increasingly influenced by science and technology (Sørensen, 2012, Van Loon, 2003). Beck (2016, p264) argues that 'risk' is very much a "modern concept, presupposes human decisions and humanly made futures (probability, technology, modernization)." Giddens (1999, p3) argues that the idea of a 'risk society' is not a suggestion that there is more risk in society now than previously but suggests that society has become in recent years more focused on the future and safety which

generates the idea of risk. This reflects online risk and online safety directly where the rhetoric around mitigating risk is very much focused on prevention and limiting opportunities and access (Phippen and Bond, 2020) in order to safeguard children against future risk. Beck (1992, 2016, p264) emphasises the importance of distinguishing between risk and catastrophe. Where “risk does not mean catastrophe. Risk means the anticipation of catastrophe” and concerned about the future within the present. As a society there has been more worry, concern and attention paid to future risk or to the possibility of avoiding potential risk. For example, how do we safeguard against children’s online risk and reduce the odds for exposing them to perceived risks? Beck (2006, p330) argues that “modern society has become a risk society in the sense that it is increasingly occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced.” Matthewman (2011, p23) discusses the impact of technology and the associated complexity and risk by arguing that it is not possible to determine if technology is a help or a hindrance within society until it is used in a concrete context “disjunction between intention and outcome present with technologies as with everything else”. Regardless of this debate, Giddens (1992, p2) states that we live in a society where “new technologies are chronically affecting our lives” and potentially a major source of anxiety (Matthewman, 2011 p26)

Mythen (2004, p12) argues that “Beck has consistently maintained that contemporary western society is embedded in a culture of risk which has profound impacts on the nature of everyday life” and impacts on uncertainty and social anxiety (Matthewman, 2001, p26). Lash (2018, p119) suggests that “with uncertainty, the risk-taking individual was bound to experience anxiety, with, for example, increased possibilities of substantial loss.” Sabates and Dev (2012, p4) discuss risk in association with child development and explore the impact around children being exposed to multiple risks in early childhood and impact this has on their development into functional or dysfunctional adults. The focus of the wider stakeholder environment, as previously discussed is heavily focused on risk and limiting access and exposure online as a solution to safeguarding children online. Consideration and discussion around risk society enables a greater understanding of stakeholders within the online safeguarding environment and their perceptions, consequently facilitating the constructivist approach to analysing those perceptions of risk online for SEN children.

Social theory, technology and children

Within the definition of technology, it has been proposed within the field of social theory that it is not simply the obvious examples defined as technology but a much wider view and understanding here is required if we are to fully embrace concepts and change related to social theory and technology.

Social theories are a framework for understanding social life, which help to frame the social and also to frame technology. Social theory predominantly supports questioning to help frame knowledge. There appears to be no single theory that is all encompassing and helps to fully reach and establish a uniform understanding. It seems a better fit that a number of ideas in this area are considered when discussing technology. A central issue within the study of technology is “who – if anyone – controls technological change?” (Dafoe, 2015, p 1047) and the question of agency. Questions arise around do we control the technologies we engage with and then ultimately our social and cultural (Southerton,2011)? Or are they controlling us?

Mackenzie and Wajcman (1985, p3) define technology as having at least three different layers of meaning. Firstly, as physical objects which include how social factors influence design, secondly as human activity which informs how the technology is used and finally to what extent humans know, so consequently technology as knowledge. For example, a computer could be deemed useless without the software and subsequently the knowledge required to interact with it. Technologies are produced to have outcomes or effects but knowledge is required to use them. Mackenzie and Wajcman (1985, p3) define technology as slippery, meaning that it is many technologies seem in a permanent state of transition and often have multiple uses (Matthewman, 2011, p10)

Matthewman, (2011 p5) identifies how technology can be thought of as contingency and to the 'internal politics of technological artefacts'. This theme around politics of artefacts, whereby politics is or can be built into technology is embedded within social technology studies (STS) and originally proposed by Langdon Winner and explores the relationship between social and technological determinism and the political and the technological. Consideration is given here surrounding goals, social, cultural, economic, political and military – of which these goals may conflict and ultimately impact on the design and implementation of technology. Conflicting and competing agendas of technological artefacts mean that they can be defined as political because they are the outcome of these two factors (Matthewman, 2011 p5). Winner argues that tangible artefacts embody 'social' or 'power' relations and also moral dilemmas around what artefacts should be made (Joerges, 1999, p412). Woolgar (1993, cited in Bijker, Hughes and Pinch, p312) discuss here also moral entitlements of humans in relation to technology, its capacity and "what it can and cannot do, what it should and should not do". Aspects around intention and design are important here and ultimately, the social content of technological form. Mackenzie and Wajcman (1985, p3) agree here on the influence of social factors in relation to design and configuration of physical objects. Perhaps a bigger question here in relation to more modern day technology and communication, for example social media and the interruption or interference with human interaction. Has a human connection here been lost within the politics of the artefact? In a way this is how society has been shaped and will continue to be shaped.

Technology has clearly, as previously discussed above and evidenced become a central part to many children and young people's lives. The high rates of ownership among young people including mobile phones and tablets support their daily activities, engagement and attachment (Livingstone and Smith, 2014, Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). Particularly the daily lives of SEN children where attachment issues and engagement can present a higher risk. Technological developments, have been reported to change the way we think, feel, act and communicate with each other, with information and the social world. Again, consideration of how this influences or is influenced by children with an additional need who may already have different perspectives, barriers to communication and barriers to learning should be considered. Cherlet (2014, p773) discusses technological determinism and states that the term considers that "technology evolves independently from society" and assumes "technological change drives or determines social change." Debates around the role of technology in society, the argument that it re-shapes and creates new practices and behaviours seems to suggest that children are open to being shaped and diverted into new practices and behaviours. Cupples and Thompson (2010) comment on concerns here around attempt to control young people's practices by limiting risk and exposure to harmful content. There could evolve an argument here that risk and opportunity online is different and for SEN children dependent on their level of need and understanding, for example cognitive and emotional development throughout their lives. As previously identified in chapter 3, SEN children are considered vulnerable and will have a diverse range of cognitive and emotional needs that may or may not place them at a greater risk online. Phippen and Bond (2020) suggest for example that people with mental health issues tend to encounter more risk online but

considers that limiting risk and exerting control over the online environment places children as passive consumers online rather than actively engaging with online content. This is true for all children, both SEN and non-SEN with the difference being that the risk and opportunity may be different depending upon a SEN child's need.

Technological determinism

Technological determinism is a reductionist theory proposed by Marshal McLuhan that presumes a society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values and where technologies are extensions of human capacities which argues that attention must be paid to the form of the medium rather than the content it carries. Lin et al (2015) identify that commonly technological determinism can be related to hard and soft approaches. With the hard approach shaping society and the soft approach locating power with respect to social and cultural factors. Technological determinism proposes that development of technology is linear and follows a path from the birth of an idea to development and implementation. This in turn drives the development of social structure and cultural values, moulds society and influences human behaviour and interactions (Matthewman, 2011). Basic ideas surrounding the theory include how new electronic media affect how we think, act and feel and how developments and communication in technology shape culture and human behaviour. Humans become secondary within this theory as the views are more focused on the object, not the activity, knowledge or organisation, which are viewed as effects of material artefacts. Technology structures the social and directly impacts and promotes change, for example within politics, education and sex and drugs. Thrift (2005, p113) suggests that the new economy has itself risen from information and communication technology and the restructuring of economic activity and argues that "ICT technological changes could be akin to those of the cultural industries, involving rapid changes in function and style" and the software as actually having evolved into an organism itself due to the pervasive and complex nature of it. Technologies are viewed as shaping how humans are in the world, framing relationships to the environment and impacting on behaviour and interactions. An example here could be the development of the mobile phones evolving from voice communication to handheld computational devices. Bringing with them opportunities to connect globally but also presenting risks including sexting and bullying. As each new technological development emerges so does both opportunity and risk, thereby inventing future possibilities but also unintended risk.

Callon and Latour (1992, p.359 cited in Matthewman, 2011) state that "there is no thinkable social life without the participation – in all meanings of the word – of non-humans, and especially machines and artefacts." It is here then that consideration needs to be given to ownership, control, access, use and unintended consequences which impact upon society and consequently the behaviours within that society. Technological determinism can be viewed as an anti-humanist approach and simplistic in nature as identified by MacKenzie and Wajcman (1985) and Bijker and Law (1994) who offer more complex ideas around the relationship between technology and culture. Within their rejection of technological determinism and supporting belief putting emphasis on social shaping, with the social environment that shaping the technical characteristic of an artefact. The field of science and technology studies (STS) also largely reject themes around technological determinism (Dafoe, 2015) offering a more social context and human agency.

The emergence of new technologies and radical change, alongside the interactive nature of technology and AI has required a revisiting of technological determinism within social theory debates “becoming active audiences that control rather than be effected upon by media in a multiple and constantly negotiated reality” (Lin et al, 2015, p1528). ‘Audience’ here refers to the participants, whether that is perceived by stakeholders to be passive participants or active engagers of technology and the online world. Livingstone, (2003) suggests that research in relation to audiences of technology are dealing with a moving target and argues that the audience is shaped in respect to the social and cultural contexts which involves a different debate around the nature of an audience. SEN children and their needs could in this context be viewed as an ever-changing participant based on their needs which may evolve with age and subsequently impact on their experiences and/or exposure to risk online. Their risk online is then not perceived as being fixed but as being something which can change over time and can be negotiated. As a result of this SEN as an audience would benefit from developing resilience through understanding how to respond to risk.

Social Shaping of Technology (SST)

The Social Shaping of Technology (SST) developed in some respects to the critique of technological determinism, is concerned with the social factors that shape technological change and refers to questions and insights around society and its relation to the types of technologies that are produced (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1993, p2) or considerations around society’s role and part in technological development or how “social groups construct technological objects (Matthewman, 2011, p92). SST is a broadly defined term that aims to consider the “significance of technology in society and the influences of the broader social context on technological innovation” (Magaudda, 2011, p2). It has been claimed by Williams and Edge (1996, p 867) that SST could help to broaden technology policy agendas. Williams and Edge (1996, p866) suggest that (SST) emerged through a critique of technological determinism and defines technology as a social product “patterned by the conditions of its creation and use.” Obviously, SST rejects the notion of technological determinism and offers a more humanist approach which includes issues of ownership and control and argues technology cannot exist outside of society.

Williams and Edge (1996, p867) argue that two questions emerge within the field of SST, firstly around negotiability of technology and secondly around irreversibility. Negotiability is concerned with “groups or forces which shape technologies” for their own outcomes (both technological and social) and irreversibility which is concerned with the “extent to which the outcome is foreclosed”. SST is considered a broad approach pertaining to two quite specific theories evolving within the field. The first being the social construction of technology (SCOT) which considers the process of negotiation in relation to how technologies or artefacts might be used or their use interpreted differently to how they were originally intended. Actor-network theory (ANT) which references non-human actors explores the emergence of innovation “in society as networks composed of heterogeneous actors, objects, and representations” (Magaudda, 2011, p2).

Social Construction of technology (SCOT)

Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) argues that human action shapes technology and that technology does not determine human action. Ultimately here humans shape technology and its use which can be evolved and developed over a period of time. Humans attach meaning to what is defined as an 'artefact' called interpretive flexibility which means that each technological artefact has different meanings and interpretations (Pinch and Bijker, 1993, cited in Bijker, Hughes and Pinch) The artefacts share a set of meanings as part of a relevant social group, however this social group may include many sub-groups of users with different applications. Problems and conflicts arise here and are associated with a particular social group (Matthewman, 2011). A consensus can be reached in relation to the artefact which means that evolution halts due to the consensus being reached. In the wider context "the sociocultural and political situation of a social group shapes its norms and values, which in turn influence the meaning given to an artefact" (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985). Matthewman (2011, p93) state how SCOT studies the process by "which actions and meanings turn into things in the course of social interaction" and highlights how SCOT has been influenced by three main strands Science-Technology-Society (STS) movement, which involves the study of relationships between society, politics and culture (current example how social media affect people's politics), Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) and the history of technology. STS has largely rejected technological determinism (Dafoe, p1047) and discredited the assumption in this area. Pinch and Bijker (1993, cited in Bijker, Hughes and Pinch, p40) identify how this model does more than describe technological development but brings out the interpretive flexibility and "highlights its multidirectional character" as opposed to a more technological determinist view where development is linear.

Whilst social theory is not guiding and central to this research, this chapter has acknowledged the the prominent theories which inform debates associated with this thesis. . The examples of the varied uses and interactions with technology serves as a reminder that, despite the media affordance, researchers need to consider more than just the anticipated or typical uses but also look at how users might create personal and unique experiences with and through technology which is grounded in their socio-cultural realities. The reality here is that technology cannot be easily generalised. Context matters, and a less deterministic approach to technology could be considered in order to understand user experiences and account for the variation. A narrative and emerging theme which is being proposed here is concerned with the above theories as specific to SEN children, their interactions and construction of own norms and meanings. For example adopting a non-deterministic approach to technology means that it is possible to identify the complex interactions between different aspects of the ecosystem on children's online lives and experiences and subsequently the stakeholders which this thesis proposes influence the development and lives of Sen children.. This chapter has highlighted theory and debates important to consider and demonstrates awareness in relation to technology and online behaviour and interactions.

Chapter 6: Theoretical framework and methodology

This chapter outlines the overarching research philosophy and methodology which guided and informed this study and justifies the approach within the context of the wider discourse and conflicting debates. Qualitative research approaches and inquiry are explored in relation to establishing methods for addressing the research focus and creating meaningful data. Challenges involving children as part of the research process, especially in relation to children with an additional need or disability are discussed and the position of placing children within research which incorporates adult views are addressed. The importance of ensuring that the voices of both children and adults were represented within the field of online safeguarding of SEN, equally, fairly and in accordance with a rigorous and ethical process are explained.

Research exists to establish reliable ways of finding out information or deepening our level of understanding around a topic or subject (Blaxter et al, 2006, p.6) and involves the “the systematic gathering, presenting and analysing of data” (Burton and Barlett, 2009, p.3). On collecting information predictions can be made or theories built about the world (Evans and King, 2006, p.131) in order to understand and explain the world from different perspectives (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009). An exploration into literature around social research strategies and philosophies reveals a confusing collection of thoughts and concepts which seemingly overlap and offer conflicting solutions to seeking answers to research questions. What is further fuelling the confusion is the distinct lack of agreement and ongoing debates around the most appropriate ways to define meaning from social science research and meaning that is reliable and relevant. From the start I would argue that many of the philosophies and methodologies proposed within social research are not mutually exclusive from each other and many elements within each lend themselves to each other. The notion of attributing meaning to human perspective or opinion and subsequently view the world is the overarching philosophy or paradigm in which this study adopts and which locates “research within the meanings people give to their worlds, and of allowing this meaning to emerge” (Holliday, 2016).

Theoretical framework

A qualitative, postmodern paradigm in which can be found the (interpretive) constructivist, humanist (hermeneutics) approach is adopted for this study, which has its roots within and is concerned with the interpretation of human action or understanding human behavior. Holliday (2016) supports that a postmodern approach allows for research strategies to be developed for each social setting and gives space for a more informed exploration of themes as they emerge. Bryman (2012, p28) argues that “understanding human behavior within an interpretive approach is more concerned with an empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it.” In contrast here is a positivist approach, which is more commonly associated with a scientific context that draws a distinction between theory and practice, test theories and provided evidence for the laws (Bryman, 2012, p27). There exists long and raging debates between two epistemological

positions and the differentiation between the human sciences and the natural sciences. Agreement on approaches does not appear to have been agreed by scholars, as a result defining precisely their definitions and explanations is challenging. However, broadly Gimbel (2016, p 73) argues that “positive science is fundamentally suspicious of the idea of an interpretive component in scientific understanding...where observations that require conscious interpretation on the part of the research are suspect.” Holliday (2016) argues however that conversations between individuals and the researcher can result in new knowledge which has deeper meaning as narratives are revealed and explored further. The historical and ongoing debate is an interesting frame of reference in understanding the social sciences and consideration around an interpretive approach to understanding the world and “whether interpretive methods can yield objective science” (Gimbel, 2016, p 73).

David and Sutton (2011, p89) summarises Max Weber’s methodological writings and viewpoint which attempt to view the world from the person or group at the center of a study. To understand this viewpoint is significant due to their own understanding being an essential element to understanding the world in which they exist. The viewpoints, perspectives, beliefs of an individual support reality as it exists and is not something separate (Gergen,2009). This means that there can be gained a greater understanding around why individuals act in a particular way and why they do the things they do. Bryman (2012, p5) differentiates sociology from the sciences (natural) by suggesting that an interpretation of social actions can create meaning through casual explanation by stating that “action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual, it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby orientated in its course.” The starting point for casual explanations is referred to as ‘ideal types’ or the individual person or event which “aims at constructing generalizing theories” and tools to “bridge hermeneutics and statistics” (Pandey, 1983, p372). A prominent consideration here is that the ideal type is formed and informed by one or more points of view and individual phenomena.

The context of this research exists within the world of social research which is rooted in the theories and ideas of the social sciences. Bryman (2012, p5) discusses how developments in society frequently offer scope for research within the gaps that exists or develop within society. With particular reference to society and technology, social research draws upon “literature on technology and on social interaction to provide insights” Bryman (2012, p5) As a result, the existing literature provides the foundation for the research to be conducted and acts as the equivalent of a theory which guides the production of new knowledge in the field. Through exploration of the current literature, there has come to exist a gap within the current field of online behavior and a neglected area of focus and inclusion. An inductive approach is adopted due to the nature of the research being exploratory as opposed to deductive which sets out to test a theory or a hypothesis (David and Sutton, 2011). The study sets out to explore the field of online behavior in relation to safeguarding and SEN children, of which limited research exists in the area to support the study. Inductive methods are in themselves exploratory which aim “to build accounts of what is going on from the data collected” (David and Sutton, 2011, p84). Partly due to the lack of existing evidence, exploration was chosen over establishing a hypothesis due to uncertainty around the right or most appropriate approach to be adopted for the study.

An anti-positivist position is adopted around the philosophy of phenomenology. Bryman (2012, p30) highlights how the study of phenomenology is attributed to the work of Alfred Schults (1899 – 1959)

and is centered around how individuals make sense of the world around them. What is of particular relevance here and to this study is the notion that human action is meaningful and that the job of a researcher “is to gain access to people’s ‘common sense thinking’ and to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view.” Out of this, a perceived truth is created, of which there may be more than one truth which relies on an individual’s interpretation of their world. Rasmussen (1998,p554) attributes phenomenology to Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) who presents phenomenology as the focus on things “as they appear to be” and relates this to an individual’s consciousness, directedness and intentionality. The latter referring to mental thoughts and the direction of consciousness towards something specific, for example an object, concept or idea which then forms cognition which evolves to a person’s perception, thoughts and views. Referred to here as a ‘mental act’. Rasmussen (1998, p555) argues that in order for phenomena to be perceived, attention must be directed and focused toward a conscious life which creates an individual’s environment and creates conscious meaning. A large part of this consciousness creating environment and meaning is reflection, which influences the direction of our attention and the acknowledgement of the way things are presented to one’s consciousness. Embedded within theories and perspectives suggested here, are complex debates, issues and contradictions within the social sciences which ultimately seek to define meaning. However, for the purpose of this study the approaches have been considered in relation to deriving meaning from individuals (or social actors) based on their own understanding of the world around them and in which they exist. Bryman (2012, p31) argues that the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition is best thought of as a general epistemological approach in its own right. Further to this, Seigfried (1976, p253) reinforces this position by quoting Heidegger in that phenomenology is “hermeneutic in the primordial signification of the word” with phenomenology description and foundations having its roots in interpretation.” As a research approach which takes into account meaning derived from an individual’s perceptions, consciousness and understandings, the only thing researchers can be certain of is the individual interpretation of a social environment (May, 2001, p14).

Grover (2004, p11) discusses the relevance of phenomenological data and its implications for research, which includes children, by highlighting the issues of power in such studies and comments on the importance of including children in research where policy making-decisions place them at the center. A qualitative, phenomenological study involving children is discussed by Grover (2004) where children were free to communicate in the manner they were comfortable with. Conclusions here which are also significant for this study suggest that when children are able to tell their own story “the research experience is often personally moving and meaningful, and the data provided rich and complex” Grover (2004, p84) which subsequently gives a voice and some power.

Phenomenology has a constructivist ontology, which involves the social world or social phenomena and their meanings being influenced and constructed by social actors (Appleton and King 2002) or, as highlighted by Bryman (2012, p27) in more recent years has “come to include the notion that researchers’ own accounts of the social world are constructions” which are linked to meanings. A constructionist view identifies that social phenomena and their meanings are produced by social actors (Gergen, 2009) who produce meaning through their own perception and acts which result in an individual’s experience of the world being constructed (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2009). In order to make further sense of this, links can be made back to Husserl, as described by Rasmussen (1998, p565), whereby individuals or social actors exists in a ‘life-world’ created by their own experiences and the role they play in that. A reflexive attitude or approach is suggested to be significant here and facilitates attributing meaning to life where “attention is reversed and turned inward.” In line with this attitude, constructionism supports critical reflexivity and challenges the daily experiences where

an individual takes their reality for granted, which consequently informs new meaning and action (Gergen, 2009). Interestingly, Husserl equates the ontological perspectives as 'the ego' which is not a self-referential system of referring to oneself. The ego is believed to create connection between experiences and acts where experiences are gained and formed from previous experiences. Self-evidence is understood here to be genuine evidence which evolves out of the consciousness of the person and of the self (Hermberg, 2007). What a constructionist view supports further to this, is that individuals construct meaning as they engage with the world rather than meaning being discovered (Crotty, 1998, p43).

Methodology

Research purpose and aims

This research aimed to explore stakeholder perspectives of children's online behavior, particularly regarding safeguarding and SEN children. To do so, qualitative methods were adopted to explore stakeholder perceptions and engagement within the online world both generally and specifically and within specific sectors significant within the field of study. Sampling is discussed, data collection methods, the rationale behind the analytical approach and ethical considerations. The research aimed to produce findings to support stakeholders engaged in or those in a supporting role of safeguarding and children online, with particular focus and emphasis on SEN children. The findings aim to inform stakeholders and expand their awareness of issues related to supporting SEN children online and contributing to the debate around current perceptions of risk and opportunities presented online to SEN children. The research specifically explores stakeholder perspectives from a number of sectors and explores perspectives based on their own understanding and experiences. Online safeguarding stakeholders and SEN children are included as part of the study due to the need to collect data from a range of perspectives which inform the debate.

Data collection methods

Participants were invited to contribute to the study via one-to-one interviews which were conducted either face to face or online. Each participant was interviewed to establish their own perspectives on concerns relevant to them within the arena of online safeguarding of SEN children. Interviews were used in line with a qualitative approach which gave opportunities to broaden the discussion as each participant felt necessary. This allowed a much richer and diverse response which was not directed or engineered in anyway. Bryman (2012) highlights how giving participants space and freedom to divert from a topic reveals insight from their own perspective. I allowed and encouraged participants to divert from the interview schedule, to ask me questions and to introduce any topics that they felt relevant to the discussion. Due to the range of participant backgrounds, it would have been naïve of me to assume that I fully understood their initial involvement in the area prior to the interviews. The approach was semi-structured, flexible and encouraged participants to speak freely which enabled me to follow up on responses unique to each participant and provide a rich amount of data (see appendix IV for interview guide). Miles et al (2014) highlights how qualitative data places an emphasis on individuals' lived experiences from their own viewpoint and position and is well suited to identifying meaning in relation to the world around them. This is particularly suited to this study due to the research objective of establishing perspectives from a range of stakeholders from within a range of sectors. Based on their own experiences, meaning can be understood and interpreted. It is important for the researcher in qualitative research not to impose their own views or understandings which could influence the interview process (Bryman, 2012). With awareness of this, prior to each interview I gained understanding of each of the participants' sector and role which helped to gain a better understanding of their perspectives in context.

The data collection method is in line with a phenomenological approach to gathering data. Crotty (1998) discusses how gathering data using an unstructured or semi-structured approach using open ended questions, allows the participant freedom to discuss concerns relevant to them and not the researcher. As a result, the themes which emerge from the data are true to the study and have not been guided by the researcher. Allowing the interview to be semi-structured and unstructured at times allowed a more natural approach to be established which was more reflective of a conversation than a formal interview which would not have been appropriate to the study. The approach of being flexible and guided by the participant was applied to both adults and children during the study. However, I did acknowledge that communication with children would be different and that they are unlikely to easily share their views and thoughts on particularly sensitive issues with an adult. Lee (1993) argues that children may be uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics due to their previous experiences of adults in relation to this. This was further influenced by the presence of the headteacher, which has been previously discussed in relation to the balance of power. Punch (2002) reinforces this further by arguing that children are often not familiar with freely expressing their views amongst adults and feeling that their views would be taken seriously. However, due to the nature of the research focus being the online environment, children are felt to be experts in the field and could choose to withhold information as they felt necessary (Richmond, 2007). There did exist barriers to forming rapport and establishing a more informal approach due to the nature of the setting and the number of adults present. This was unavoidable due to the limited access I was given to children at the school. A combination of these factors led to some children being open and honest about the more positive online behaviors and activities and some children choosing to withhold information regarding their negative online experiences. The data produced from the interviews with children were still valid and supported the finding of the study due to the insights the children provided into their engagement and behaviors online.

I wanted to establish an environment for both adults and children which encouraged open and honest communication and discussion. I sought to develop a rapport with each of the participants, to make sure they felt comfortable and that they would be able to speak without judgment. Gill et al (2008) emphasises the importance of being yourself and suggests that if the researcher is comfortable and relaxed, the participants will be. This did appear to be the case for all of the adult participants as they were very confident in expressing and sharing their views around the topic. Opdenakker (2006) suggest that face-to-face interviews give lots of possibilities to creating a good atmosphere between researcher and participant. I was aware of how I dressed for all of the interviews and kept to casual attire in order to reflect the nature of the interview. As I had carried out some research within the area of each stakeholder and had some background knowledge, I was able to discuss some relatable issues to demonstrate that I was familiar with aspects of their work. This initial discussion helped to open up a dialogue between myself and the participants. I applied the same approach when interviewing children by dressing casually and making informal conversation about their interests. However, as previously discussed the presence of the headteacher influenced the ambience due to the nature of her role and the school setting. Regardless of this, an informal approach was taken and some of the children appeared relaxed and interested in sharing their stories. During the initial stage of the interview I established the importance of participants meanings and experiences in relation to online behavior and safeguarding of SEN children and shared that each participant is considered knowledgeable and experts in their area about the related issues (Burman et al, 2001) It was important to reinforce that I was interested in participants' views and experiences that were true to them and represented in the expression of their own perspectives and stories (Lee, 1993). Flowing from semi-structured to

unstructured during the interview allowed both myself, as a researcher and the individuals, as participants to have some ownership over the direction of the interview. I remained non-judgmental throughout whilst encouraging all participants to speak freely and share their views and perceptions. Hunter (2006) argues that qualitative interviews should not influence the participants and should be both consistent and flexible due to the exploratory nature of the technique.

Sample

A sample should be reflective of individuals or groups related to the field of study and the research question. The research focus and research question guided the selection of individuals appropriate for this study (Bryman, 2012) and fulfilled the criteria for providing a valid contribution to the study. The sample consisted of stakeholders who sit within the different eco-systems and stakeholder model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Phippen and Bond, 2019). This broad range of stakeholder views was fundamental to providing different stakeholder perspectives and producing relevant outcomes of the study. The sample for this study evolved over a period of twelve to twenty-four months due to the nature of the study and intention to include schools and children. Schools are inherently challenging to recruit and to gain access too. Rice et al (2007, p503) identify that multiple strategies are often necessary in order to overcome the challenging task of recruiting schools and children. It is argued that an understanding of “specific characteristics of the schools, using the proper lines of authority and communication, identifying the gatekeepers, and persuading the schools of the significance and mutual benefits from the study” are important considerations for research in the field. Over the course of a twelve month period a number of schools, both primary and secondary were contacted via email and phone and sent an information sheet about the study (see appendix I and appendix II). Four schools did not acknowledge the email or return phone calls. I acknowledged that schools were very busy and unable to become involved or contribute to such a study. Through a contact within my own university who had previously worked at a SEN school, I contacted a SEN school that became central to this study. I was able to open up lines of communication with the primary gatekeepers at the school to begin a process of establishing a trusted relationship. Other stakeholders which were also central to this study were more commonly recruited from contacts which I already had links to within my current job or were recommended by the participants during or after their interview during the course of this study. For example, during the interviews with adult stakeholders I would be given the details of another stakeholder which may prove beneficial to contact. Stakeholders were contacted in the first instance by email and then a follow-up phone call to discuss further details before arranging the interview. The process of recruitment became an iterative process as more stakeholders were contacted directly by myself and agreed to be a part of the study. As my own knowledge and understanding deepened, further opportunities and lines of enquiry were presented to me. There were fewer barriers to recruiting stakeholders outside of education once the SEN school had agreed to participate.

Sample Criteria – children

Two special schools were initially involved and contributed to the early stage of the research, one in the midlands and one in south-west England. Schools were central to the study as it was felt that a school setting provides the opportunity to connect with a number of stakeholders within education who are uniquely positioned to be influenced by a number of different systems within the stakeholder model. Only one school remained for the duration of the study and became central to the study by allowing access to a number of stakeholders within the field of study. Special schools were not initially targeted for the study, but it became apparent over a 12-month period that it would be challenging to gain access to schools and stakeholders within schools. Approximately 10 schools were contacted in the local area regarding the study by email and phone and either did not respond or were not able to fully participate. Out of the schools contacted two schools were open to a conversation about the study, both of which were special schools. The school which remained for the duration of the study was a special school and happy to participate. It is acknowledged that the focus of the study within the given context does limit data collection and findings due to a lack of analysis and comparison of SEN children within mainstream school, which could potentially offer further insights into SEN online behaviour and engagement. For example, mainstream schools may not have the appropriate access to knowledge and support for a diverse range of SEN children, whilst a special school may be able to provide different opportunities and experiences outside of a mainstream remit. However, it was felt that a specific opportunity was presented that would provide unique opportunities for this study by facilitating access to a range of stakeholders and experiences that would help to develop knowledge and understanding within the field. The school is a specialist SEN schools that caters for children with social emotional and mental health difficulties. Many of the children within the school have an additional and/or complex need which may include Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette's, a mental health disorder, learning difficulty or are on the autistic spectrum. The school accommodates 104 children across primary and secondary provision. Most of the children travel to school on local authority transport and the school has extended team support from parents/carers within the local area and work with a number of organisations related to education, teacher training and early years research and development.

Children are referred to the school with a statement of special educational needs with severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) being the primary need. Children attending the school have had a challenging experience accessing education and learning and where this is recognised, the school aim to support challenging behaviour and barriers to learning by offering alternative ways of responding to difficult situations. The school has a focus of managing and controlling challenging behaviour and implementing support mechanisms to promote independent learning and development.

Including schools and headteachers within the study impacted upon power issues and the subsequent contribution of the children within the school, which is important to acknowledge. Grover (2004, p83) highlights the risk of having “research independence coopted by establishment perspectives and social agendas is lessened to the extent that social scientists allow their vulnerable subjects to have their own voice.” The importance of giving children the opportunity to be heard where the wider policy space and decision-making results impact upon lives, was fully considered. It is unquestionable that children have the right to contribute to such research (Boyden and Ennew, 1997).

Punch (2002, p323) argues that the debate around children and research often focuses on ethics but there are wider issues here to ensuring that children feel they can speak freely (Harden et al, 2000). The development of interest in listening to children as part of research can be linked to the growth in children's rights perspectives around the world, which proposes that children have their own views as well as a view of the world around them (Moss et al, 2005) Further to this Mukherji and Albon (2018) recognise that there are a variety of different experiences of childhood and highlights how this can be attributed specifically to whether the child is able bodied or has a disability. Punch (2002) suggests there is a common assumption that children will not tell the truth and will lie about the own views and perceptions due to a number of reasons including children telling the researcher what they think they want to hear. There is also proposed an argument that many research issues are often ignored including developing rapport, not imposing own views and clarity of questions. There are clearly a number of challenges to be considered in relation to undertaking research in schools and interviewing children and where possible these were addressed and considered before undertaking research in the field. The most prominent challenge appeared to be the unequal power relationship between children and adults which was acknowledged during the research process where a child may be uncertain of an adult's response. Ideally the opportunity to spend more time within the school in order to build rapport and perhaps some trust with the children would have been preferable but it evolved during the course of establishing a relationship with the school that this would not be possible. This undoubtedly influenced the outcomes and insights provided by the study, where it was identified that not all of the children were honest in their responses during data collection. I feel that this was also influenced by the presence of the headteacher, which subsequently influenced the balance of power during the interviews.

The selection of children chosen for the sample was decided by the headteacher of the school and selected based on her own experiences and beliefs around who would be able to communicate their views and contribute to the study. I was not able to select the sample in any way and was guided and directed by the headteacher. Clark (2010) and Curtis et al (2004) argue that some children are more likely to participate within a school environment and require a level of comprehension and articulation in order to express their voice. This was acknowledged as being particularly significant for the children participating in this study. Prior to the point at which the children were asked to participate, there had been three one-to-one meetings with the headteacher and one meeting with a parent governor of the school to establish trust between myself and the gatekeepers. The age group of the children was decided upon by the headteacher and was based on her intimate knowledge of their additional need and capabilities. Whilst this limited the study in terms of data collected from a broader age range of the children, it was the only option considered by the headteacher at the time. The data collected provides a snapshot of a younger age group within the sample at that time but did not allow for comparisons to an older generation of children and their experiences, which may have proven beneficial and insightful. The headteacher had a thorough understanding of the research focus and had considered the needs of the research alongside the needs of the children. It was felt by the headteacher that the children who were asked to participate would benefit from being asked and be given a sense of importance and responsibility, whilst also be able to provide some valuable contributions and insights. Appropriate permissions were requested before confirmation of participation (see appendix III). O'Reilly et al (2013, p54) acknowledges the challenges of recruiting schools and children and highlights the issues around time pressures of teachers, reliability of pupil contribution and validity, especially in relation to children with emotional and social difficulties. It is suggested that gatekeepers are "reluctant to allow access to children with more severe behavioural and emotional difficulties as they feared that this may

exacerbate the situation.” Gatekeepers are defined as those which have power to grant permission to people within an organization (Burgess, 1993). Gatekeepers included here include parent/carer consent and the consent and views of the headteacher of the school. Whilst this was acknowledged during the recruitment stage of the process, the learning or complex needs of each child were not disclosed and as a result it would be difficult to establish the level of emotional and behavioral issues. The headteacher was best placed to inform and direct this part of the process due to her close relationship with each child, complete understanding of their emotional and behavioral needs and what is in the best interest of each child. I engaged with five children in year 8 and 10 and were aged between 11 and 14. One child was not ultimately able to contribute to the questions being asked and their views did not contribute to the study. The interviews were conducted on school premises, in a meeting room outside of the classroom and away from other children. Within the room I interviewed the children in the presence of the headteacher. As the interviews unfolded, I tried to establish a conversational environment that allowed the children to either respond directly to each question or ask for clarification or elaborate on some of the responses which were given. It was clear that the majority of children were not able to or wanting to respond with particularly lengthy responses which made the process more challenging in seeking information around their online experiences. At times single word responses were given or there was simply a lack of response to the question. This ultimately could be due to a number of factors, from the power relations within the room, the child’s understanding or the child’s additional need. At all times children were free to give any response and able to leave the room at any time if they wished to do so. One child decided they wanted to talk to me from inside a cupboard with the door closed which is something that the child frequently feels compelled to do within the school. This appeared to make the child more comfortable to communicate with me and, with the presence of the headteacher with me outside of the cupboard, provided a way to continue the interview. Each interview with each of the children lasted between 5 and 10 minutes and provided some interesting insights into their online engagement and experiences but provided a limited amount of data in comparison to the data generated by adult stakeholders as part of the study, which lasted for 1 hour in length. Whilst this was not the original intention of the study it did become apparent that the children were not always able to articulate a response as part of an interview and would have benefitted from other methods to support them.

The school was visited on a number of occasions and for a number of reasons which included lessons being observed in order for me to gain an understanding of a typical school day, interviews with the headteacher, parent governor and interviews with children. The number of visits informed and supported my own level of understanding and knowledge and ultimately ensured that as a researcher I gained an awareness within the school setting.

Sample criteria – adults

The adult sample included a range of stakeholders significant to the online safeguarding environment of SEN children. These had been identified during the initial research process and literature search and by stakeholders being identified during the research process and engagement with other stakeholders. A number of stakeholders are linked to education and their level of involvement or experience of SEN children. The headteacher of the above school was identified as a key stakeholder alongside their experiences of working with a number of other key stakeholders contributing and influencing SEN children, education and online safeguarding. The parent governor of the above school

contributed from the view of a parent and a parent governor due to her experience of working within the SEN school, running a charity for children with additional needs and having 5 children of her own with an additional or complex need. A headteacher of the school in south-west England was a significant stakeholder and contributed to the early stages of the research process but did not consent to any children within the school participating in the study. This was understood to be due to the current culture within the school which was perceived by the headteacher to be one which had outdated ideas in relation to technology and children and not open to change. A Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) SENCO within a small primary mainstream school in the midlands was a stakeholder who was able to contribute views from a SENCO perspective and from a non-SEN primary school. Two educational consultants working within the field of sex education and online safety were key contributors and stakeholders due to their experience of working with schools and children, SEN and non-SEN. Both educational consultants work with local county councils to support safeguarding and deliver training within their field of expertise to schools, social care, health and the police. Both educational consultants worked within the midlands and have also been recruited by primary, secondary and special schools to provide curriculum support to staff and children. Finally, within education, an enhanced SEN inspector (Her Majesty's inspector) was identified as a key stakeholder to the research and the debates relating to online behavior and education from a curriculum and policy perspective. Outside of education, further stakeholders included a retired police officer who has also worked as an independent consultant on child internet safety, with previous experience of working within child abuse teams, schools, foster agencies and communities involved in issues related to children learning difficulties and additional needs. A training and development officer for a county council in the east of England was identified as a key stakeholder due to the involvement at a local council level with children and adults with additional and complex needs. The participant has accumulated a vast amount of experience with children and young people with additional and complex needs by having adopted an advocacy role and enabling people with learning disabilities to have a voice. Further to this, the participant works within the field of safeguarding to develop resources which support people with learning disabilities whilst having accumulated a keen interest in mental capacity act which they currently deliver training to the local area. A mental health practitioner who has worked in supporting the mental health of young people and adults was a key stakeholder in contributing views and experiences of working in mental health hospitals in the midlands and providing counselling through a private practice. Finally, two parents of SEN children were recruited as participants due to their experiences of being a parent to SEN children and working closely with non-SEN schools to support their children. Their children were aged 9 and 14 and both attending non-SEN schools in the midlands. I engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and incorporated views from a breadth of sectors influenced by or engaged with online safeguarding of SEN. This allowed for varied and contrasting viewpoints and rich and diverse perspectives.

Recruitment

Adult participants were contacted directly by email to explain about the study and invited to be involved. Adult stakeholders had been previously identified during the literature search stage where it became evident that there were a number of contributions which would support the findings of this study. Initially the headteachers of local schools, both special schools and mainstream school were contacted and invited to contribute to the study, however due to the sometimes challenging nature of research with children and the time involved, there was much hesitancy around this. The headteacher of the special school in the midlands was happy to be involved and pleased to be supporting research within the field aimed at supporting SEN children online. Once the special school

had been recruited, which influenced the direction of the study, I was then able to identify further stakeholders which would be in a position to contribute. Additional stakeholders became evident through discussions with the special school and the parent governor of the school during the early stages of investigation where further issues presented themselves. Each adult stakeholder confirmed either by email or over the phone that they would be in a position to contribute to the study, after which a meeting was set up. The meetings were either face to face or conducted online using Microsoft Teams.

As previously discussed, children were recruited via the special school in the midlands where permissions were sought from gatekeepers including parents/carers and the headteacher. Children were informed about the study and asked if they wanted to contribute by the headteacher. Each child was given an information sheet and a consent form to read and take home (see appendix II and appendix III). Interviews with the children were carried out face to face and took place within their school setting with the headteacher present at all times. The headteacher was helpful and compassionate during the interviews and was able to ensure that each child was entirely happy during the whole interview process and, where necessary their learning or complex need supported.

Sample composition

A total of 18 individuals participated in the study, comprising of four children aged between 12 and 14 and 14 adults. All children participating in the study had been identified as having a learning need and/or a complex emotional and social need. The specific need was not disclosed as this was not deemed necessary for the purpose of this study. Further research to explore different needs of SEN children with specific disorders would perhaps require this information. There was a broad and wide-ranging mix of participants from different sectors which are central to the debates involving online behavior and safeguarding of SEN children. All participants were from a white background which means that the findings of this study would not reflect other ethnic groups or explore the impact of ethnicity within the field. With reference to Bronfenbrenner (1979), table one identifies where within the ecological system each stakeholder sits. It was intended that the study would capture a range of stakeholders within system.

Table one. Participants of study and ecosystem

Ecosystem	Role
Mesosystem	Sex education consultant
Micro system & Mesosystem	Parent Governor – SEN school/Parent SEN children
Exosystem	Retired police officer and independent consultant on child internet safety
Mesosystem	Headteacher – Special school
Mesosystem	Headteacher – SEN school
Exosystem	Training and development officer (MCA, adult social services)
Exosystem	Online safety officer – local county council
Mesosystem	SENCO Coordinator. Non- special school
Exosystem	Her Majesty’s inspector, Enhanced SEN inspector
Micro system	SEN pupil, boy (mainstream) – YR 10 aged 14
Micro system	SEN pupil, boy (SEN school) – YR 10 aged 14
Micro system	SEN pupil, girl (SEN school) – YR 8 aged 12
Micro system	SEN pupil boy (SEN school) – YR 8 aged 12
Micro system	SEN pupil, girl (SEN school) – YR 10 aged 14
Microsystem	Parent of SEN child mainstream primary
Microsystem	Parent of SEN child mainstream secondary
Exosystem	Mental health practitioner
Exosystem	Psychotherapist accredited by the National Counselling Society (MNCS)

Research Approach and analysis

A qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted in order to gain views and perceptions of stakeholders central to this study and allow for new meaning and emerging themes (Bryman, 2012, Dey, 1999) to be explored from interviews. The research was qualitative and consistent with an interpretivist epistemology which is centered around meaning and social actors’ interpretation of the world (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative methodologies were not considered to be appropriate for this research due to its nature of using statistics to validate conclusions and findings using surveys and experiments (Holliday, 2016), and lack the opportunity to find new meaning and explore emerging themes. Previous studies in this area have used a statistical and survey-based approach to produce findings (Machackova, 2020; Smahel et al, 2020; EU kids online, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Ólafsson,, Livingstone,, & Haddon,2014; Chaudron, 2015, Holloway, Green and Livingstone, 2013). Statistical results would not allow for a rich analysis of data to be produced. Dworkin (2012, p1319) argue that qualitative methods allow for depth of knowledge through exploration and “concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon” Qualitative

research was adopted and considered a more suitable approach to exploring emerging themes and providing insight which can build a richer picture, invite the unexpected and enable a more illustrative approach (Holliday, 2016; Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research gives emphasis on collecting data which is non-numerical and rich in dialogue and descriptions to explore emerging themes contributing to findings. Induction and exploration are key to qualitative research and strongly associated with the approach (David and Sutton, 2011). The qualitative approach informed and guided the research process and allowed for the relationships between the literature, data collection and analysis to form an iterative process which was able to respond to emerging themes and impact on the direction of the study. I believe that this provided a fuller reflection of the perspectives of stakeholders, their role and has produced meaningful and relevant findings and recommendations. One of the criticisms of using qualitative data is in the amount of data which is collected which can be troublesome for the researcher to find analytical paths from within the richness of that of which is produced (Bryman, 2012). However, it is in the amount of data produced where the richness of data exists and despite the extensive amount of data produced from this qualitative approach, the time taken to define themes contributed to the relevance and meaning of the findings produced.

To ensure that the outcomes were reliable, analysis had its roots in both grounded theory and thematic analysis. Due to the close nature of both of these strategies, a combination of both was adopted as a strategy to analyse data. It could also be argued that a combination of both produced sound and reliable outcomes. Bryman (2012, p578) argues that thematic analysis does not have any “identifiable heritage” and that the search for themes is embedded within many other more long standing strategies including grounded theory, critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis. As a consequence of this and to support academic rigor, the process of analysis can be argued to cross both. Grounded theory and thematic analysis imply that theory is grounded in the data and propose an inductive and iterative approach where researcher interacts with the data to produce themes (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Bryman 2012, David and Sutton, 2011). Both emphasise coding and constant comparison of data in order to see themes emerging, as previously identified and discussed in relation to the iterative nature of the approach and the themes emerging from the data itself. Further discussion around this and its limitations can be found below where limitations of approach are highlighted. The strategy for analysis was adopted for this study and supported the development of emerging themes which subsequently allowed space for the contribution of unique perspectives of research participants to be considered. Thematic analysis proposes that themes emerge from an iterative process of reading interview transcripts. A theme can be defined as:

- A category identified by the research
- Relates to the research focus
- Builds on transcript data (repetition, categories, similarities, differences, theory)
- Provides theoretical contribution to the literature

Bryman (2012)

To support analysis and the emergence of themes, coding of data is necessary in order to begin to categorise it and start to make sense of the data being produced. Charmaz, (2014, p115) argues that

grounded theory coding is an interactive process that pulls the researcher “deeper into the data and keeps you involved with them far more than casual reading fosters.” Coded text or excerpts of each transcript, as identified by the researcher to establish themes within thematic analysis supports the development of major key themes and associated sub themes to support a deeper level of involvement and interpretation of the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p61) argue that data or categories (or themes) can be deemed complete when “no additional data are being found.” However, this of course could be subjective to the researcher and where it is believed that no new themes are emerging. For the context of this study, data analysis was felt to be complete or exhausted after an iterative process of constant comparison and linking of data to where no new themes or new knowledge or ideas were evolving.

For the purposes of this study data was derived for the purposes of this study, data was derived from one-to-one interviews conducted with stakeholders in the field of online behaviour. Themes and sub-themes were identified out of the data which allowed for the “data to make analytical sense of stories, statements and observations” (Charmaz, 2014, p111) by extracting and placing direct quotes and snippets of conversations into groups. The grouping of data evolved to illuminate key themes which had become emerged and become clearly evident. Where sub themes emerged from within each key theme the process of comparing and contrasting continued until the data had been exhausted and no new ideas or knowledge emerged. At this point insights into the data and the meaning derived from that data began to evolve. The interpretation of the data formed part of the analysis where themes begin to emerge and meaning derived through the iterative process. As interviews were transcribed, at first by hand and then by technology via recording the interviews using Microsoft Teams, the data was collected and analysed by sorting it into themes which were recorded by hand using different coloured post-it notes. Separating the themes out in this way was a preferred method as it facilitated a rich and deep understanding of the data and enabled me to clearly see themes emerging. Upon themes emerging the process was repeated numerous times across all interviews and the themes refined further.

I was open to stakeholder perspectives, new ideas and knowledge within the field of online safeguarding, due to the current lack of research and literature in the area, it was expected that there would be unique perspectives and fresh insights to explore. The process of analysis enabled the constant comparison of data to see emerging themes on an ongoing basis to produce findings which are significant to the area, the research question and the related stakeholders. Emerging ideas were explored and refined several times throughout the data collection and data analysis stages allowing for understanding of the data and for the process of reading and reviewing to be exhausted. Sub-themes of the key themes were established through this process of analysis. Through this iterative process stakeholder perspective were collected, analysed, compared and contrasted to produce themes and sub-themes representing real world phenomena which is meaningful and grounded in data.

All participants were considered a significant stakeholder contributing to the field of online behavior and safeguarding of SEN children. Participants were considered significant due to their connection within the field of SEN, either through being a parent/carer of a SEN child, links within education, social services or the emergency services. These stakeholders were placed within the Bronfenbrenner ecological model (see Table one) and were identified as having had experiences of SEN. All

participants were considered to be equal and were actively able to participate within the study and capable of communicating their ideas (Harden et al, 2000). However, it was acknowledged that their contributions to the research is shaped by “networks of meanings made available to them” and to the wider environments in which they exists (Gergen, 2009; Best, 2003). With regards the inclusion of child views (aged 11 – 13), it was acknowledged that children have the right to be respected and included and for their voice to be heard (Reilly et al, 2013). More recently it has become common for children to be consulted on issues relating to policy decision-making which impact them directly or indirectly (Tisdall and Davis, 2004). As a key stakeholder and active participants online, it was important for this study to attempt to incorporate a view from a child’s perspective alongside the views of adults.

One-to-one interviews

Eighteen semi-structured interviews with a broad range of stakeholders linked to online behavior and safeguarding of SEN children were conducted to explore personal views, experiences and meanings. Four of those interviews were conducted face-to-face with children and with the addition of a headteacher in the room at the same time. The headteacher was present to reinforce the ethical considerations of the study and to support safeguarding of the children. There was not an opportunity to interview children alone and this would not have been ethically viable. All other interviews were conducted either face to face or online (three interviews were conducted online). The interviews with teachers and parents were conducted within a school setting which was important to creating an environment which was familiar to them and put them at ease. Burman et al (2001) discusses how a school environment is particularly important for children in order to maintain a level of familiarity when giving children an opportunity to express their views. Power imbalance and barriers to communication continue to be relevant here and awareness of this was maintained throughout. Interviews with children lasted no more than 30 minutes and interviews with adults lasted no longer than an hour. Adults were comfortable with a longer interview time and often wanted to exceed the length of time. The opportunity to follow up on questions and issues was given from all participants as they had a keen interest in supporting the study. For a number of participants, this was helpful and allowed me to clarify some perspectives and follow-up on questions and issues that evolved from the data analysis. The headteacher, parent, parent governor and SEN inspector were contacted after the initial interview to address evolving themes.

Each adult interview began with an informal conversation about the participant’s role, background and understanding of online safeguarding in relation to SEN children. Broad questions were asked, which gave participants freedom to discuss their own views and personal experiences in the area. The interview questions acted as guidance and prompts to support the area of focus but allowed for freedom of expression. The interview questions for children were frequently led by the children as the response from children was often limited to begin with but still gave them still an opportunity to discuss and share their own personal experiences and views. Interviews which are semi or unstructured allow meanings that individuals attach to experiences to be understood from their own perspective and point of view (May, 2001) and to speak freely without interruption (Heath et al, 2009). Both children and adults were able to contribute their own understanding and experiences of

online behaviour and safeguarding by sharing personal thoughts and examples which were individual and meaningful to them. For children however, I was aware that they may be answering in response to what they thought they should say or what they thought I wanted to hear (Harden et al, 2000). All participants, but particularly children were constructors of knowledge through the collaborative interview process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997). Meaningful data was produced through a collaborative and active process between all participants and the interviewer. There does exist a debate from a positive view that the sole purpose of an interview is to elicit facts and minimize bias, whereas from an interpretivist view, interviews are an interaction that provide meaningful insight from a participant perspective based on their own experiences, understandings and views (Miller and Glassner, 1997). Meaningful and unique insights were shared from all participants which provided me with a wealth of data to support the research question and research focus.

Analysis

Interviews which were held face to face were audio-recorded and transcribed, whilst interviews held virtually where via Microsoft Teams and transcribed via an online service for transcription. Data analysis was informed by a grounded theory and thematic analysis approach which focused on the development of themes as they emerge through the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2014, p247) discusses how a bottom-up approach to data analysis gives grounded theory strength as the researcher's subjectivity provides "a way of viewing, engaging and interrogating data" by asking analytical questions of the data. Categories are split into major or minor or as in a thematic approach themes and sub themes. A constructivist approach empowers the researcher as an active participant in shaping the process and the findings (Charmaz, 1990). As a result, the researcher becomes involved in the discovering of themes or categories which provide an interpretation of the data in relation to the research focus and not an exact representation of it. The data was also informed by the literature review, which was an extensive investigation of the research topic and informed my awareness of a range of concepts and ideas relevant to the field. Charmaz (1990) highlights how a literature review can support depth and breadth of knowledge to guide the formation of questions but should not prevent new ideas and knowledge emerging. The previous research in the area of online behavior and safeguarding of SEN was limited and suggested that SEN children had not been previously included in major studies or had been limited in scope. Partly because of this, I was interested in perspectives from stakeholders around online behavior which place SEN children at the center. Thematic analysis supported the analysis of the creation of thick descriptions which involved the reading of transcripts and paying attention to the evolving issues presented by each participant. Each transcript was read line by line to elicit data where there were common occurrences, affirmations of existing knowledge, conflicting views and interpretations of views which may be influenced by the sector or environment of each participant. I compared how each participant was constructing issues and recorded any differences and contradictions. It was of interest to explore how the literature was being interpreted or acted out by each participant and informing their views and judgements. The literature also supported my own understanding and interpretations of each participant. Naturally there was an inductive and deductive approach where concepts and ideas were considered in light of the data being generated. After each interview additional notes and thoughts were recorded to support data analysis.

A combination of grounded theory analysis and thematic analysis, which are similar in their approach supported the emergence of themes evolving from data which was underpinned by the concepts and ideas explored within the literature review. The analysis of data took place immediately after each

interview and involved the data being explored and interrogated to provide meaningful interpretations of each encounter. The data from each interview supported and informed subsequent interviews by revealing new ideas, knowledge and unique perspectives. The process was iterative which supported the emergence of findings to develop categories or themes and sub themes. Theoretical sampling, where participants are recruited and interviewed until theoretical saturation is linked to a grounded theory approach. May (1999) considers the problem of knowing when to stop and argues that the term itself has connotations of completion. I would argue that theoretical saturation was reached with the data where no new ideas, knowledge or themes emerged through a process of iterative interrogation of the data. Charmaz (2014, p214) reinforces and defines theoretical saturation as the “criterion to apply to your categories” and is a process which supports the emergence of themes and insights. It could be argued that theoretical saturation is subjective and that data for this study has been analysed within the time and resource constraints using a deep, thorough and iterative process until no new themes and sub-themes emerged.

Reilly (2013) highlights the need to be cautious during the analysis stage when interpreting data from children due to a bias that may exist within the researcher and a tendency to focus on what is meaningful to the researcher. As discussed earlier a reflexive approach was taken here to support the emergence of true and meaningful findings (Davis, 1998). Significantly here, Reilly (2013) comments on the importance of paying attention to what is not said by children as much as what is said. Where children did not want to share experiences around their own online behavior or where they were unsure about their interactions online was important to reflect upon after each interview and during the analysis.

Limitations of the research approach included the process being a very lengthy process which ultimately took many months to complete, from the data collection itself to the iterative analysis of the data. Strauss and Corbyn (2008) argue that through grounded theory there is always something new to discover but suggest that it is not always required to complete a thorough literature review before starting the data collection process due to potentially contaminating the data and research findings. One could argue that the process is almost never complete due to the large amount of data that was collected or the fact that there is a danger, due to the absorption in the data, there is a danger that themes and sub-themes could be missed. However, the richness of the data collected provided a wealth of insights and opportunities for analysis from a wide-ranging number of stakeholders within the ecosystem.

Hussein et al (2014) highlight a limitation in relation to adopting only one source of data as part of the data collection process, for example in the use of interviews as part of this study. Glaser (1992) suggests more than one source by, for example adopting interviews and observations to inform and avoid methodological errors. As part of this study, observation was adopted in order to familiarise myself with the school environment and the daily running of the school over a period of time and also to begin to establish a rapport with the headteacher. This is where I observed children’s interactions with teachers and at times, security alerts where children had gone off site and were potentially in some danger. On reflection, further consideration and use of observation could have been adopted over the course of the study. However, again my access to the school was largely dependent on the amount of time the headteacher had to accommodate me, which was a drain on school resources as I had to be accompanied at all times. Due to the limited verbal responses from children during the interview process, it is also recognised that more creative methods would support data collection and

facilitate a greater interest from children and perhaps a better rapport, which proved difficult to establish in the time I had with the children. Spratling et al (2010) identifies a range of methods to support data collection from children including, journaling, use of pictures and group interviews which may also help to build rapport and establish a connection as part of the process.

Reflexivity and Positionality

I was reflexive in my approach and recognized the importance of being value free and objective (Bryman, 2012). Holliday (2016, p146) explains the significance of reflexivity in research and qualitative approaches by recognizing researchers and the methods in which they adopt are interwoven “in the politics of the social world they study.” From a constructivist perspective, Hammersley (1992) argues that it is impossible to guarantee that research is completely clear and direct. Reflexivity requires researchers to reflect on their own beliefs in relation to their study (Porter, 1993) where these beliefs are considered, understood and made explicit rather than being eliminated and ignored (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995.) Hardy et al, (2001) suggest that in order to be reflexive, a researcher should be reflecting on the research methodologies and processes and how they can influence or shape outcomes of a study. Punch (2002, p323) argues that reflexivity should be considered as central to any research which involves children and emphasises the need to be critically reflective of role, assumptions and methodical approach (Davis, 1998). Bryman (2012) recognises that it is difficult to be value-free and possibly not a perspective that is desirable either. My prior experiences of being a mother to two young children and having previously worked in a non-SEN school did contribute and influence the research alongside my knowledge of research methodologies developed during my lecturing role spanning over 15 years. A reflexive approach opened up the opportunity for me to identify potential bias and to become aware of ways to address these biases where necessary (Reilly, 2013). Consequently, I reflected on the voices of the participants, both children and adults and those which may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted where there existed imbalances of power (Burman et al, 2002).

Crotty (1998) argues that research seeks to be sound by producing objective, valid and generalisable conclusions as part of the outcomes of a study. However, this is contested due to human nature and knowledge that research is frequently influenced by. At very best “outcomes will be suggestive rather than conclusive” (Crotty, 1998, p13) and provide a perspective of truth. This research has produced suggestions based on the analysis of stakeholder perspectives which are acknowledged to be unique to this study and influenced by human inquiry, methodological design and theoretical perspective. Bryman (2012) proposes that ‘trustworthiness’ be used as a measure on which to base validity of qualitative research on. Comprising of ‘credibility’, ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’ and ‘confirmability’ which can more commonly be aligned to quantitative research.

For the purposes of this study credibility was achieved by involving a number of stakeholders previously identified within the field of online behaviour and safeguarding of SEN. Long and Johnson (2000, p30) argue that the inclusion of multiple data sources or data collection methods is effective

in supporting the prevention of errors to invalidate research. Transferability was achieved through the thick description of findings and methodological approach. Dependability was achieved through transparency and reflexivity of research strategy, methods and theoretical approach (Silverman, 2011). Confirmability achieved by linking the findings back to sources and detailing interpretations to reflect the stakeholder perspectives. For example, the outcome and findings of the study were shared with two stakeholders for feedback, comment and validity in order to explore relevance of outcomes to current day practice within the field of SEN and online safeguarding. I present a unique and authentic study which has included a range of stakeholder perspectives to generate an understanding of views and to recognize where current challenges may arise from and be contributing too. The study included views of children with learning disabilities or who are classed as having an additional need by their school. Traditionally, this group have been excluded from research (Davis, et al, 2000) but a small sample have contributed to the study as it was important to try to understand and interpret their views and participation within the online environment.

During the research process I considered my own positionality during the study and through the data collection which encouraged me to reflect upon and consider my own interactions with research participants. Miles et al (2014, p296) highlights the position and impact of outsider and insider perspectives within social research and argues that “outsiders to a group influence insiders and vice versa.” There is a high possibility that both perspectives can lead to bias in some form during the data collection and the analysis stages and it was important for me to be aware of this as I proceeded to interview each participant. Bryman (2012) highlights the significance of personal beliefs and values of a researcher during the research process which can impact the research at any point and argues that it would be impossible to prove that the research has been value free. My position as a researcher was as an outsider and an insider in relation to the research focus and research participants. The participants were from a broad range of sectors and environment and I did not directly work within or have experience of each sector intimately. However, where my value and bias would have been a concern, is as a parent of children who actively engage online and are similar ages to the children being interviewed. Brian (2014) argues that the act of recognizing our own bias can support how a researcher might approach a research setting or individuals that they hope to engage with. This was true, as having some knowledge and experience of the area enabled me to establish a position of having some understanding which is relatable to participants (Bourke, 2014). I considered each participant as knowledgeable and engaged with them collaboratively by being an active interviewer and adopting a semi-structured approach during each interview which enabled me to establish rapport and trust. This was particularly important when interviewing children and ensuring that they were given the opportunity to ask questions and express their opinions (Willmott, 2010) whilst I maintain awareness of the power relationship that existed within the room. Reflexivity played a key role here and it was through the approach of self-reflection and questioning the way research was being conducted (Bryman, 2012 ; Cassell et al, 2017), I was able to maintain awareness of value and bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a central part of all research which requires a balance between producing findings for the good of others and society and protecting the rights of the participants (Orb, 2001). Ethics relates to doing the actions of doing something which is good and avoiding harm. Bryman (2012) highlights how ethics links directly to the integrity of data and tends to revolve around certain issues which include, harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy and whether there exists deception in the research. Ethics applies to the collecting, analysing, interpretation and dissemination of findings in an honest and transparent manner alongside the protection of participants (Morrow, 2008). Ethics should be something that is considered throughout the whole of the research process and something which is not forgotten. Ethical considerations should be an ongoing part of the research (Mauthner, 2002). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) argue the most common principle of ethics in research concerns harm which could result from the actions of the researcher. Harm must be avoided and ethical codes and frameworks adhered to in order to protect participants from harm. Wiles (2013) highlights an ethics of care approach where ethical decisions are based on care, compassion “and the desire to act in ways that benefit the individual or group who are the focus of the research.” The approach recognises the relationships and interdependencies of the research and the research participants and is an approach which considers the needs of other, recognises the role of emotion, respects and seeks views of others (Held, 2006).

Online behavior and safeguarding is a topic which involves many perceptions and views and, in some cases, a sensitive topic regarding some of the interactions and activities which take place online. There was sensitivity when interviewing children and the open and informal approach of the interaction gave opportunities for children to share whatever they felt comfortable to share, without any further instruction or pressure. Adults were also given opportunities to share their own thoughts and feelings around the topic and were not pressurized to share anything outside of that. I was open and honest with participants and gatekeepers about the intentions of the study and respectful and compassionate when seeking perspectives during the interview process. Conducting research with children raises some specific issues due to the position of vulnerability of children. Reilly (2013) highlights how ethical guidelines have been heavily influenced by development of policy including the Children’s Act, UN Convention on the rights of Children (UNICEF, 1989;2012) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) ethics framework which have supported the view that children should be seen as active participants in research and not as passive objects. Children’s rights and views were respected throughout this study and their thoughts and perspectives considered by developing a dialogue with each of them through the data collection process. Ethical issues were considered from the start of the study (see appendix VII) and were ongoing throughout. Due to the nature of the research and the difficulty in anticipating any ethical dilemmas which might evolve, my approach was situational and responsive to the unfolding issues as and when they occurred (Morrow, 2008).

Informed Consent

Obtaining consent as part of the research process is an important part but especially important when the research involves children who may be classes as vulnerable in any way. Obtaining consent from a parent or responsible adult must be sought before the study commences. Consent was considered as an ongoing process and subject to change over the course of the study. The British Sociological Association (2002) states that ethical practices within research should,

“as far as possible for participation in sociological research should be based on freely given informed consent of those studies. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to the participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be disseminated and used”

As part of the informed consent process I provided each participant and gatekeeper with full and clear information about the study in which they were being asked to contribute too (see appendix III). Specifically, each participant was made aware of what the research was about, why it is being conducted, who is funding the research, what will happen to the information they share with me and who the results and findings will be shared with. I also identified what their participation in the study will involve, the risk and benefits, issues around anonymity and confidentiality. Further to this I made it clear to all participants that they are not obliged to take part and if at any point they decided not to participate or withdraw from the study they could without any consequence (Wiles, 2013). Information sheets (See appendix I and appendix II) were constructed and tailored to meet the need of both children and adults and consent form issued to gatekeepers and adults. The process of obtaining consent involved information sheets which were tailored to meet the needs of adults and children and a consent form for adults. The consideration of how information is presented and provided was important to the study due to the involvement of both children and adults. The information was presented in a user friendly and child friendly way using language appropriate to both audiences. For children, the information sheet was given to them alongside an overview and a discussion with the headteacher to ensure that they children fully understood what they had read and might be agreeing too, which was important for level of comprehension and capacity (Wiles, 2013). It was important to acknowledge a child’s capacity to make decisions due to their age and the learning need or disability. The headteacher was significant in supporting this, as specific learning needs or disability were not shared and as a result the headteacher was the best placed person to assess comprehension and capacity of each child. Balen et al (2006) highlights the importance of assessment of a child’s comprehension and capacity before they engage with research and give consent. Singh (2007) argues that children with emotional and behavioral disorders should not be excluded from research but be active participants of it. An understanding of oneself and others may not be fully developed in children engaging in research but that “children’s relatively underdeveloped cognitive capacities should not inhibit their active participation in research” (Singh,2007, p36) but should rather encourage and shape research methods. Challenges presented by researching children with emotional and behavioral disabilities should not continue to act as barriers to children’s ability to be “autonomous and reliable research participants” (Singh, 2007, p36).

In the school, children had been made aware of the research and who was conducting the research and why. I had visited the school on at least two occasions and observed classes so that the children were at the very least familiar with who I am and had opportunities to speak with me if they wished. Visiting the school also gave me an insight into the daily running of the school, how the school day

operates and any incidents and challenges that arise during the day. Children, gatekeepers and adults had time to read the information sheets and consider if they wanted to be a part of the study months before the research was due to commence. I provided opportunities for children and adults to ask me questions and there was not any pressure to participate or reward given for their participation. I was guided by the headteacher in terms of how the study was explained to children who was very helpful in identifying children that may want to participate. Level of comprehension and communication varied widely amongst children at the school and as previously discussed it was important to ensure that children understood what they were being asked and how they could contribute. I ensured that all children understood that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to comprehend the information which had been given to them about the study and their potential involvement (Morrow, 2008).

All children as participants were under the age of 16 and could not fully or ethically give consent for themselves. I sought parental consent and consent from the headteacher. Due to the nature of the school, it was explained to me by the headteacher that there was a very low possibility of receiving consent forms back from the children due to a number of reasons including that the form would either not make it home or it might be lost. A number of children at the school come from and live in very challenging situations and experience a lot of upheaval and disruption in their home lives. Where situations similar to this arise, it is acceptable to waive parental consent when seeking it (Valentine et al, 2001; Bryman 2012) and for consent to be authorized by gatekeepers within the school. Coyne (2010) raises the issues of a child's ability and freedom to make decisions about the research they want to participate in and argues that children and young people are competent to share or without information which reflects their competence to decide if they participate in social research. Where it is difficult to gain consent for where this is challenging, Keenan (2015) argues that it is reasonable to seek an adult that can be trusted or who has some form of responsibility. The headteacher, as a gatekeeper to the children had comprehensive understanding of each of the child's learning need, capacity, background and abilities and was able to ensure that children were appropriately consulted and communicated with during the recruitment stage. All children and adults participating in the study showed a keen willingness to contribute to the study and all understood what being involved meant. Skelton (2008) identifies that whilst there exist risks when researching children, there are benefits to a child's voice being heard and their experiences shared. This is especially true when children are central to the research focus and debates. This was carried out as far as was reasonably possible.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants is an important part of the research process. Anonymity refers to the practice of ensuring that the participants cannot be identified, and confidentiality refers to identify and sharing of responses (David and Sutton, 2011). Care was taken from the start of the research process to ensure that the recording of data and information was kept confidential, stored separately from all other work and names of all participants were not stored alongside specific responses. When doing research with children there are limits to confidentiality in line with the Children's Act (1989) which identifies that there may be occasions where there is a breach of confidentiality if an individual suspect that a child is at risk of abuse or that their safety is at risk (Reilly,

2013). I was aware of this from the start of the study and due to the fact that the headteacher was present at all times during my interactions with children, any safeguarding concerns would have been identified and dealt with immediately. All participants have not been identified within the research and have been identified by their position as a stakeholder and in relation their job or environment. Children for example are identified by gender and school class. There was not an issue around participants responses being heard by other participants due to the nature of data collection being one-to-one interviews. The only time this was apparent but not a concern, was where the headteacher was present during the interviews with children. There was at no time any sensitive, personal information shared by any of the participants that required further action or reflection. The headteacher, in the role of safeguarding lead was able to support, decide and act upon information if this had arisen.

Data protection

All interviews were recorded and stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer. The coding and analysis which was drawn from the data used post-it notes and flip chart paper but did not use names to identify direct quotes. They continued to be identifiable by their position as a stakeholder. It was not necessary to collect personal data including names and addresses for the purposes of the study. Communication with participants was carried out by email or telephone conversations which did not include any information about the interview or the responses.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR, research data will be stored for at least 10 years and in line with the University of Bournemouth policy and regulations.

This chapter has discussed the philosophical and methodological research approach, exploring related issues and defining the methods used. Ultimately the research is focused on gaining views and experiences around online behavior of children and safeguarding from the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders including both adults and children. Qualitative research approaches and inquiry were utilised for this study as they were the most appropriate methods for addressing the research focus and creating meaningful data. There are certain challenges to involving children as part of the research, especially in relation to children with an additional need or disability but these challenges were navigated appropriately and sensitively. The methods and form of inquiry were suitable and facilitated an iterative process which allowed themes to evolve from the data itself to produce relevant and meaningful findings. Throughout the process I was committed to ensuring that the voices of both children and adults were represented to provide a holistic view and present the perspectives of a broad number of stakeholders significant to the field. The next chapter presents and analyses the data collected from participants and discusses in relation to the literature.

Chapter 7: Analysis of perceptions and meanings of SEN online behaviours

This chapter discusses participants' perceptions and meanings regarding SEN in relation to online safeguarding. Depending on the participant's role in relation to SEN, there existed different experiences of learning disabilities and social and emotional issues. SEN children as participants were not aware of the impact of their additional need in relation to their own online engagement and behaviour but adults as participants were able to identify an increased level of risk associated with engagement and interactions online (Livingstone and Palmer, 2012, p10). Risk was perceived to be heightened amongst SEN children online in comparison to non-SEN children and those without an additional need, where behaviours were viewed as challenging and difficult to address. A change in additional needs of SEN children were felt to have evolved in recent years to include a higher level of social and emotional needs, which are believed to further impact children's behaviour and interactions online, causing them a greater level of risk and harm (Ansaar and Loof, 2010, p65; Livingstone and Bober, 2002, p3). SEN children are exposed to a greater level of risk due to the advancement in technology, their own additional need and their search for love and belonging. Seeking friendship is a significant factor for SEN children who "are often desperate for friendship, which can make them vulnerable to accepting friends online" (Livingstone et al, 2017, p66). A sense of belonging can be more difficult for SEN children to establish offline which presents the online world in a far more attractive light. The impact of devices facilitates online behaviours with the vast majority of children and young people, within the existing literature, identified as owning a mobile phone or tablet and having access to the internet. It is reported that in recent years nearly all children in England aged 5-15 (97%) go online (Ofcom, 2021). The impact of the internet and other factors including social media, messaging apps and gaming are considered to have impacted mental health and wellbeing of children, specifically children with an additional need who are felt to be exposed to greater challenges and risk online. Table two is a summary of themes identified by stakeholders which are referred to within the chapter.

Table two. Summary of themes chapter seven

Theme	Exemplar quote
SEN and challenging behaviours	<p>"a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her." (dfe, 2015)</p> <p>"SEN don't understand emotional impact or empathise with others." (Retired police officer)</p>

Risk and opportunity	<p><i>“when its in a safe structured way but when the flood gates are too open and anyone can target”(parent governor)</i></p> <p><i>“taking things at face value”(special school headteacher)</i></p>
Blurred lines online and offline	<p>“going to find that really difficult to distinguish between this is reality, this affects me therefore I need to be bothered about it and this is nothing to do with me.” (SENCO)</p> <p>“they are going to have that desperate need to be liked” (SEN parent)</p>
Feelings of love and belonging	<p>“we all want to feel belonged. That’s perhaps where young people are seeking that.” (safeguarding consultant)</p> <p>“friendship is what he thought and it turned into controlling” (Parent governor)</p>
Children as stakeholders	<p>“The internet is dangerous.” (SEN girl, year 8)</p> <p>“Not to follow dodgy links and stuff like that” (SEN boy, year 8)</p>
Impact and range of devices	<p>“what’s been on the phone and we’ve identified inappropriate things on the phone” (special school headteacher)</p> <p>“I think pretty much everyone in year 6 has a phone” (SENCO)</p>
Smart phone and education	<p>“mobile phones are a lifeline and having a mobile phone is some sort of link to a safety network.” (Sex ed consultant)</p> <p>“I advise not to remove the mobile phone.” (Safeguarding officer)</p>

Devices and behaviour of SEN	<p>“it’s a sense of I can be confident over the phone. It’s about understanding who are they texting?” (special school headteacher)</p> <p>“participation and love for want of a better word and they're willing to do things to gain that recognition” (enhanced SEN inspector)</p>
Benefits of devices for SEN	<p>“...for a lot of children it [internet] takes away that physical barrier because there” (SENCO)</p> <p>“we can’t eliminate all risk online and we need to get that into our heads” (sex ed consultant)</p>
Smart devices	<p>“he loved it [Alexa] from the beginning and just asks it random questions” (parent of SEN children)</p> <p>“we have young boy that uses a watch to remind him of the structure in the day” (parent governor)</p>
Impact of technology on mental health	<p>“When that child gets a like on Instagram, its equivalent to how an adult feels on payday” (safeguarding consultant)</p> <p>“understanding online is quite an abstract concept and difficult for kids to understand” (SEN school headteacher)</p>
Mental health, wellbeing and the curriculum	<p>“and wellbeing as well, so there’s a huge pull on positive wellbeing for staff and for students” (special school headteacher)</p> <p>“certainly the OFSTED framework is going to have stronger links to wellbeing and the online world from this September” (safeguarding officer)</p>

SEN and challenging behaviours

There was a common understanding amongst all adult participants around the meaning of the term SEN to mean that there exists an additional need or special need that has been diagnosed and relates to either a physical or cognitive need of a child. The term “inclusion” was not directly discussed or considered here with regards integration of SEN children into mainstream education (Warnock, 2014, p34) but the term “additional” need and “special” need were used interchangeably to mean the same thing. One parent of SEN children was particularly concerned around terminology and suggested the term “additional” needs to be used as she felt the term “special” had different and more negative connotations for a child stating that *“we don’t call them special need because a lot of them don’t like it when they get to an age when they understand what it means. So, we just call it an additional need”*. Further to this, the term “complex” need was suggested to be suitable for children that are not on the SEN register but have been diagnosed with a condition that affects them either mentally or physically or both. It was felt by the parent governor that the terminology *“is quite outdated now.”* Within the context of education however, it was understood by all adult participants the definition and use of the term SEN.

“a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.” (dfe, 2015)

“You put that in SEN terms, children who have got any sort of additional needs.” (SENCO)

One of the common and most significant themes arising here is around the behaviour of SEN children offline and online which was suggested to be challenging to support and address at times. Eleven participants including two headteachers, SENCO, two education consultants, an enhanced SEN inspector, social worker, mental health practitioner, and three parents of SEN children had first hand-experiences of working with or caring for a SEN child, commented on the differences that are perceived to exist for SEN children in relation to their experiences and interactions both offline and online. Parents and teachers shared experiences around the joy and also the difficulties experienced around supporting, caring for and working directly with SEN children. Behaviours and interactions both online and offline were suggested to be different and present different challenges at times than non-SEN children or more ‘mainstream’ behaviours. Where adult participants differentiated, mainstream was frequently used to define a child or young person without an additional need and/or in mainstream education. The meaning of mainstream by participants refers to non-SEN children and mainstream education refers to non-SEN schools. Commentary on SEN was influenced by a range of factors, including their relationship with the child, their workplace setting and environment, alongside their level of direct or indirect involvement with SEN children. Behaviours of SEN children were suggested to be broad and can cover a broad range of behaviours related to a broad range of needs which influence their offline and online interactions. A SENCO lead identified that *“children with Autism and ADHD and attachment issues have very narrow minds and if they set out to do something, they are going to finish it.”* However, regardless of the specific need or learning disability, it was acknowledged by adult participants working in education that SEN children are disadvantaged in some way either offline or online, or both.

It was suggested by eleven participants that the behaviour or interactions of SEN children can present a risk online when compared to non-SEN children and in some cases, it was perceived that the risk was higher for SEN children for a number of reasons which are detailed further below. No participant believed that SEN children were at a lower risk than other non-SEN children. Ansaar and Loof (2010, p65) argue that “due to their particular circumstances it may be easier for the perpetrator to groom these children and pretend that he/she is a person with good and caring intentions.” Findings from UKISS conclude that children with special needs and disabilities are at a greater risk online due to a number of reasons unrelated specifically to this study but include being viewed as an ‘outsider’ resulting in low levels of self-esteem, having more unsupervised time online and a lack of supportive adults in their lives (Livingstone and Palmer, 2012, p10).

Further factors suggested included being due to a specific need and level of cognitive ability or emotional need and also to a range of factors which are influenced by a range of stakeholders. A social worker argued that *“for somebody with autism, this is so hard in the SEN world in particular, let alone the offline world to get your head into that space, which we will take for granted.”* Behaviours were defined as challenging or risky by eleven participants but specifically within a school and home setting and from those participants that had direct contact and daily interaction with SEN children, for example parents and teachers. A parent of a SEN child attending a special school stated that *“it’s harder for parents of SEN both mental and physical needs, dealing with all the usual issues plus their additional need.”*

Challenging behaviours were identified amongst eleven participants as having an impact on a child’s daily life and daily interactions. Challenging behaviours – more specifically meaning children with behavioural, emotional and social needs as well as those children with visible additional needs displaying challenging behaviour as a characteristic of their SEN. Participants suggested that these included attachment issues, autism, ADHD, high functioning, high needs, social and emotional behaviours that potentially raise provide additional issues for online safety. One of her Majesty’s inspector’s and an enhanced SEN inspector commented on an experience within a SEN school where challenging behaviours were observed and stated that *“some of the challenging behaviours are challenging. Let’s say I’ve been to one where most of the staff sat outside the door when I had lunch with the boys because they thought they would murder me.”* From this encounter it was perceived by staff working at the school that the SEN inspector would be in some kind of danger or may be threatened during his time at the school. It was suggested that this was due to a combination of issues which included the children’s social/emotional tendencies towards people that were unknown and their ability to interact and communicate with others. The outcome of which was unfounded, as it was further highlighted that there were no issues presented during the inspector’s time at the school and he formed positive relationships with the children. The risk perceived by adults within the school environment appeared to have been heightened but the reality of the situation, combined with the SEN inspector’s experience of working with SEN children resulted in a more positive outcome. As discussed below, it is perceived that emotional behavioural difficulties can bring with them some challenges and challenging situations which need an appropriate response. A SENCO lead stated that if a child is on *“the autistic spectrum somewhere – their social understanding is possibly impaired slightly, so they can’t control it as much and can’t quite see it as much.”* There was a belief based on first hand experiences within an education setting that the range of needs have changed over time and have come to include more emotional behavioural needs or difficulties. SEN as defined by the Children’s Act (1989, 2014) defines SEN as “a child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.” It was suggested by two headteachers that these needs have evolved in recent years and have grown to include greater levels of emotional difficulties and mental health

concerns. A headteacher of a special school stated that in her experience the children's need in her school have changed over time which has brought with it new challenges "...Well we went from the EBD – emotionally behavioural difficulties, the chair throwers for example to a very high level of mental health need, where they wanted to take their own life etc. So, it's completely different challenges, different knowledge, different training." (Special School, head teacher). A second headteacher of a SEN school believed that the needs are currently focused on attachment issues and social and emotional needs. Landrum et al (2003, p148) identifies that "education for students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) presents a uniquely difficult challenge, given that students with EBD probably experience less school success than any other subgroup of students with or without disabilities". There was not an agreed reason proposed by participants about why this was the case or what has influenced this.

It was perceived that the change of need over recent years presents different challenges that requires new knowledge and training in order to fully equip teachers and those working within education to support children both offline world and online. The current challenge within education was perceived to be how to adequately support SEN children whilst being able to address the current and frequently changing challenges online. A SENCO lead explained some of the challenges faced by children she had experience of working with who "find it difficult to come off of games and online and whatever but I think it makes it harder for them because" and stated that "a lot of SEN children don't understand why they react like they do. Especially those with ASD, ADHD, attachment issues, anything like that." A headteacher of a SEN school argues that SEN children "are quite normal in what they do online" but the difficulties occur in how they approach and respond to situations and others. Referring here to the fact that SEN children are often no different in the types of activities they want to engage in, for example gaming, shopping and communicating with others. However, there was thought to be a concern from an adult perspective that the risk is heightened for children with emotional/social/behavioural challenges due to the complexities that the additional need may present when interacting with others. There is perceived to be a risk that a SEN child may misunderstand a social interaction or verbal clue online which may place them at a greater risk of being taken advantage of or bullied in some way.

The change in behaviour was thought to present new challenges in recent years for schools and adult stakeholders within the school, where it was suggested a new level of knowledge is required in order to address and support the perceived change or evolution of needs which are suggested to influence both offline and online behaviours and interactions. The level of need and complexity of SEN children are proposed by headteachers within the study to contribute to challenging behaviour or experiences of a more challenging environment online alongside a perception that there exists a higher risk due to the nature of their actions. Being online exposes all children to risk with their existing a strong link between opportunity and risk (Livingstone and Bober, 2002, p3) But a child with an additional need was perceived to be at a greater risk due to additional barriers presented by their emotional or cognitive abilities.

There was an awareness that some characteristics of SEN children would result or have already resulted in some risky encounters and experiences both online and offline. Characteristics including level of understanding, interpretation of meaning and the level or lack of empathy of an individual were thought to be relevant here. A retired police officer and a safeguarding officer highlighted their understanding in relation to some of these characteristics:

"SEN don't understand emotional impact or empathise with others." (Retired police officer)

“SEN children, Asperger’s is my understanding of that – if they are struggling to make friends in the real world. That removes that. Again, the gaming community and social media can be wonderful.”
(Safeguarding officer)

A sex education consultant identified two main categories where *“... you’ve got 2 really vulnerable groups of young people, those that have got high needs and those that are high functioning. If your high functioning, like the lad I am working with he can survive in mainstream in lots of aspects, he wouldn’t.”* Different needs and characteristics of SEN children present different challenges and risks and this was highlighted amongst twelve participants including those linked to education, social care, health care and parents. Conditions including autism, ADHD, attachment issues, high needs and high functioning were identified as proposing challenging and complex issues that cause a high level of risk for children.

Two primary categories were identified by three participants who work directly with children and young people, these categories were children who had high needs and children who were high functioning. Katz (2014, 2016) discusses the two categories and believes these are two very distinct groups which may respond and engage online. The categories were highlighted in order to differentiate the level of support that might be needed offline and online and to identify if there were a group of SEN children that were at a higher level of risk. A sex education consultant discussed an example around a high functioning young person he was working with and some related concerns *“...So he’s really very vulnerable cause he’s very naïve, very low in emotional literacy, not very good at reading other people’s emotions so quite often he ends up in fights and things cause he’s not understanding how his behaviour is affecting other peoples or reading other people’s perceptions of him. So he’s actually really very vulnerable.”* Of the two categories, high functioning was focused more on by participants mainly due to the fact that the children who were high functioning were seen to be more vulnerable online which would expose them to a greater level of risk. Vulnerability is discussed by Asam and Katz (2018) who support the view that despite the current research lacking in this area, vulnerable young people are exposed to a greater level of risk online. High functioning children display behaviours where they tend to follow their own desires and beliefs rather than paying attention to the world around them, perhaps communicate less than other children and may have a strong desire to control a situation around them (Baron-Cohen, 2000). High functioning children were described as being seemingly more capable of coping with the demands of daily life or presenting themselves as being better able to cope at school and online. However, it was suggested by the sex educational participant that high functioning children and young people are very vulnerable online due to low levels of emotional literacy, reading or interpreting others behaviour and being able to understand how one’s behaviour may affect other people. This would place them at a greater risk online when communicating with others for example, as it may be more difficult for them to read visual and/or verbal clues, it may be difficult to interpret the behaviour of others towards them and it may also be more challenging for them to empathise with others or understand how their behaviour online may affect others, both positively and negatively. James stated that *“high functioning, most vulnerable.”* High functioning individuals were raised as a specific concern especially in relation to their online behaviour and interactions with others. It was not believed that high functioning children and young people seek risky situations or encounters but that their lack of emotional literacy and empathy could lead them to more risky interactions. There is a level of naivety that was highlighted again which impacts their daily life both online and offline, this naivety may negatively impact on their interactions and understanding of the online world in which they are operating and engaging. Griffen (2006, p108) evidences how social naivety due to their additional need places SEN children at a higher risk of harm online than other non-SEN children. All adult participants perceived that this is something which needs to be considered and something which is

important in relation to SEN children and the online environment. An education consultant reflects this in the response below which illustrates the above points by saying that he believes that there may exist naivety around forming relationships online:

"...Well, that's what makes him really naïve. It's very easy for him to think that somebody is his friend whose maybe not."

Added to this an enhanced SEN inspector commented on how a lack of empathy sometimes displayed by a child with an additional need can impact on the social relationships formed online and stated that:

"So, they don't understand the emotional impact of that kind of forthright, honest answers, or they don't understand and empathize with others online so they can come across as bullying or abusive."

The level of emotional awareness, including a lack of empathy for others was consistently raised as a significant factor by adult participants linked to education and by parents with SEN children as a factor contributing to risk online. It was also perceived that having or developing empathy was significant to experiences of forming friendships and developing relationships online.

The level of need or the complexity of need will impact on the type of interaction online and the perceptions and meaning attached to those interactions by the child, which can place them at an elevated level of risk (Ansaar and Loof, 2010, p65). There did exist a common theme and a consensus from all adult participants that regardless of the specific additional need of a SEN child, some common risks were shared or are apparent in all SEN children. Roles and experiences of participants varied alongside their level of involvement and interactions with SEN. However, all participants were able to contribute experiences in relation to SEN children online. Participants gave examples around some of the risky encounters that they were aware of and how behaviour influenced the outcome. Children as participants did not suggest that they wanted to seek danger or risk. A parent governor discussed own experiences and stated that *"because he doesn't get facial expression and he finds it easier to talk to people online. And that's where he was groomed by people he had never met by giving him what he wanted, friendship is what he thought and it turned into controlling and then it turned into getting him to do things because they had said its ok."* There was a belief from teachers and parents that seeking friendship and social opportunities was often an underlying reason and motive for children with an additional need who are seeking to connect with other. One SENCO acknowledged one of the dangers for SEN is a level of naivety when seeking friendship online stating that *"then I can see why that potentially creates another issue because then you can pretend to be someone you're not"*

These very normal behaviours offline have been established as being very normal online but have the potential to be both positive and negative (Ybarra, 2007). A headteacher of a special school gave an example of one of her own students seeking friendships online *"We've got a young student who we are aware is on Instagram and he says he is messaging Cara who lives in Canada. Ok fair enough and parents fair enough. Ok then. So suddenly Cara, is coming to of all places Corby? Next week...."* Livingstone and Tink (2012) highlight findings from the European Online Grooming Project 2012, which reported on vulnerable children and risk of grooming. Conclusions made here find that vulnerable children are more willing to interact, seek friendship online and are easier to manipulate.

Risk and opportunities

Further issues and complex problems associated with SEN children include an increased level of risk online and was identified amongst twelve adult participants to include sexualised behaviour, peer on peer abuse (specifically using Snapchat), body image, self-harm, fake news, bullying, peer pressure, pornography, balancing emotional behaviour and issues around trust. Participants discussed some of the issues they had encountered with SEN children online that had been of concern and lead to unfortunate outcomes. A special school headteacher identified issues within her own school in recent years, *“searching self-harm with some of our more vulnerable students and then I think it’s the whole messaging inappropriately, you know arguing over whoever, whatever they are choosing too. Also, not just Instagram, the PlayStation, the Xbox etc.”* A safeguarding consultant and a SENCO contributed their experiences and thoughts here also, *“Peer pressure. Peer pressure is huge. I feel a lot of these behaviours are being driven by peer pressure”* and *“most of them have WhatsApp I think. I think pretty much everyone in year 6 has a phone.”*

These issues are of course common and applicable to all children regardless of having any type of learning difficulty or additional need. UKCISS (2017) identifies “eight different aspects of online education” including self-image and identity, online relationships, online reputation, online bullying managing online information, health, wellbeing and lifestyle, privacy and security, copyright and ownership but does not differentiate between SEN children and non-SEN children. Katz and Asam (2018) however do narrow down risks in relation to vulnerable children and state sexting, cyberbullying, self-harm sites, body image and exposure to inappropriate content as heightened risks for this group. Livingstone and Tink (2012, p32) highlight a range of reports which includes data on the increased exposure to online bullying citing that SEN are 16% more likely to be bullied online over a “prolonged period of time.” Examples of risky online behaviour and encounters leading to face-to-face encounters were identified amongst participants and were suggested to include online grooming, bullying, speaking with strangers, coercion and persuasion. Some of these online experiences had led to offline encounters including criminal activity, which in one case led to robbery and theft. An enhanced SEN inspector identified how some of the characteristics of SEN children can present as a weakness online and provide opportunities for criminals *“...now, that, to me is hackers paradise, because they will keep the resilience of persistence moving forward and other online traits such as lack of cognitive understanding of behaviours [which] can actually land them into areas of trouble.”* The risk for SEN children here was perceived by all participants as higher due to some of their complex needs and capabilities which are less of a concern for non-SEN children. Another risk and concern from a parent governor highlighted how a vulnerable child has in her own experience become a target for online abuse, stating that the internet can be very positive *“when it’s in a safe structured way but when the flood gates are too open and anyone can target. We can join a forum that says it’s for people with additional needs, special needs or autism whatever it may be. But how do you know?”* The issue of control and trying to control and curate SEN children’s experiences is relevant here, certainly in relation to the adult perceptions around risk and the fear of there being a lack of control and regulation online that might open up opportunities for greater risks to be encountered. Staksrud and Livingstone (2011, p367) discuss how children exist within a risk-averse culture which ultimately restricts freedom of exploration online and argues that it is “central to adolescence that teenagers learn to anticipate and cope with risk – in short to become resilient”. Whilst there is limited evidence in relation to SEN children, adult perceptions, notably here from a parent governor feel concern and fear for SEN children online and seek safety and structure for a sense of reassurance. Livingstone et al (2008) conclude on findings in relation to non-SEN children which suggest that activities to restrict access, including filtering and monitoring were not effective in reducing risk online.

Byron (2008) supports that the internet and associated technology brings important benefits but also some risk. The differentiator for SEN children and young people is that their additional need can influence the level of risk and lead them to be more open to a greater level of risk. The higher risk for SEN children specifically linked to their behaviour online, were suggested to include factors related to their capacity to read clues and signals online, how messages are interpreted, friendships formed and trust established. Concern by a special school headteacher was expressed in relation to SEN children and young people *“taking things at face value”*, which was believed can cause issues for vulnerable children.

It was perceived that SEN children may misinterpret signals and clues or misunderstand and be overly trusting of others, all of which may result in more risky conversations and interactions. The heightened risk for SEN children and young people was a factor that was raised frequently amongst adult participants and linked to SEN taking other individuals at face value and attributing positive meanings and attachments. There was an assumption that online communication may require skills that SEN children are lacking and need to overcome. There was a perception from two headteachers, two education consultants, an enhanced SEN inspector, SENCO and social worker that a lack of necessary skills and opportunities to practice and develop skills impact on behaviour and increase the level of risk online making them more vulnerable. The lack of visual cues for SEN children may add to risk and was raised by five participants to result in fuelling risky experiences and situations. O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011, p 800) argue that without the skills required to develop healthy relationships offline, children will struggle or are unlikely to develop healthy relationships online. Trust and trusting others was raised by participants here as significant in exposing a child to risks online. A SEN school headteacher believed that issues around trust, taking things as face value and not questioning things children see online are a particular issue for vulnerable children. A safeguarding consultant stated that *“90% of the time when I am working with a vulnerable young person, what is aiding those vulnerabilities is that trust has been shot with the parents or foster parents or carers.”*

The increased risk and level of vulnerability of SEN children online was a concern for all adult participants as there existed a narrative that an additional need, which can include cognitive, emotional or social, contributes to their level of vulnerability online. The level of emotional awareness and emotional maturity was identified as significant here for vulnerable children and an awareness that a low level of both contributes to online experiences. Emotional maturity combined with trust was raised by five participants as a combination which can hinder children as there was a belief that SEN children can be overly trusting of people they do not know online or that they do not question information that is presented to them. It was not clear from participants if this is typical for SEN children with low levels of emotional awareness and emotional maturity or that this could be due to a lack of support or education in the area. There were a number of characteristics and factors identified here which were thought to contribute to risky encounters and interactions that are specific to SEN children and young people and were believed to potentially cause or lead to undesirable outcomes.

Blurred lines between online and offline

Further to a range of behaviours identified of SEN children that can contribute negatively to their online experiences and interactions, it was suggested that the online world can cause another level of confusion which non-SEN children may take for granted. Morton et al, (2019, p22) identifies the

blurring of lines between the offline world and the online world and argues that all children's activities online are subject to this. The virtual world is as much of a reality for children as the offline world, which can contribute to the blurring of lives and boundaries between the two (Miller et al, 2016, Livingstone, 2013, p25). The difference between the two was felt to add to confusion and believed to be another contributing and significant factor. Examples related to a confusing arena of visual clues given online where people may hide or disguise their identity. Cameras maybe off or on or people may use an alias within virtual groups or online gaming. It was suggested that many or all of these factors can add to the challenges for SEN children when trying to make sense of online environments, develop friendships and communicate online. It was acknowledged by all adult participants that the shift from being offline to online can cause confusion and add another layer of complexity when trying to navigate and decide between what is good and bad or right from wrong online. A SENCO lead believed that SEN children are *"going to find that really difficult to distinguish between this is reality, this affects me therefore I need to be bothered about it and this is nothing to do with me."*

It was believed that these lines can be blurred for any children without an additional need and add further confusion for a SEN child. Online and offline lives becoming blurred is a common occurrence for the majority of children (Miller et al, 2016, Livingstone, 2013, p25). It was raised that there exists a blurring of both online and offline for all children but that non-SEN children may be more able to navigate the risks to a greater degree than SEN children. Examples and concerns shared here by all adult participants included trusting others and being honest online. It was felt that this is a concern more specifically for SEN due to lower level of cognitive ability or emotional maturity for some. A parent of a SEN child within mainstream secondary education expressed here concern here *"and they're going to have to, you know as soon as you start getting on to Facebook and Instagram and SnapChat all of that stuff, they are going to have that desperate need to be liked and for SEN children that's another massive thing."* Comments were related to wanting to be liked, being honest and sharing information online whilst trying to navigate the good and the bad. There were concerns raised about how vulnerable children may find it more difficult to distinguish between when to withhold information and when to share information with others. An enhanced SEN inspector added to this by drawing attention to some SEN characteristics which result in *"actually not having that cognitive understanding of the impact of what they've said or what they're doing."* This was felt to be significant to understanding the nuances or aspects of awareness which help to differentiate between online behaviour and offline behaviour. Added to this, the desire to be liked and accepted by others, form friendships and pursue fun and adventure, are accepted to be natural for all children (Steinburg et al, 2006, p1764, Livingstone et al, 2005). This again adds to a level of confusion for some SEN children around what is appropriate, acceptable, lawful and safe online behaviour or how boundaries can be established online to protect themselves.

Feelings of Love and belonging for SEN

A theme which was frequently raised by the majority of adult participants was that of feelings and emotions associated with love and belonging, which were believed to be fundamental to many of the online interactions and activities for many children. It was specifically discussed here amongst seven adult participants to be heightened for SEN children. Wellman and Gulia (1998, p338) argue

that emotional support, friendship and belonging are accessible for all children online with Livingstone et al (2017, p66) identify that SEN children “are often desperate for friendship, which can make them vulnerable to accepting friends online.” The level of need or desire for love and belonging was viewed as contributing to SEN behaviour online and was believed to be fundamental for some vulnerable children influenced by a strong desire to seek friendship and acceptance. A SENCO stated that developing friendships can be more difficult for a SEN child, who on some level already feels different from other children. A SENCO discussed a child *“who already felt different and he already felt excluded to some extent. He was then feeling that more and that was then affecting his behaviour and then his relationships with his peers at school... just adds that other dimension into that kind of you know the friendship thing.”*

SEN children seeking friendship online via social media and gaming is evident in examples given by seven participants including teachers and parents and was understood to be both positive and negative. A safeguarding consultant attributed making friends and being ‘liked’ to children getting lots of ‘likes’ on social media posts, specifically Instagram and Facebook and believed that *“when all of a sudden you are getting lots of likes on Instagram, SEN, Asperger’s for example – if they are struggling to make friends in the real world. That removes that.”* The Children’s Commissioner reported on a study which measured the impact of ‘likes’ on social media and concluded that children as young as 11 were equating feeling good about themselves based on the number of ‘likes’ and comments they received on a social media post (Children’s Commissioner, 2018, p5). There exists some correlation between the feelings children receive from engaging online and from social media popularity with the feelings which children have offline, which can subsequently impact on their search for more of those good feelings. It could be suggested that where children are struggling to find friendships offline, they may find online friendships easier to establish and maintain. UKCIS highlight findings from a small study of SEN children which identify how vulnerable children who tend to have poor social skills and are often desperate for friendship, have a tendency to accept friends on Facebook in order to appear more popular, but are likely to have fewer boundaries and be at a higher risk of inappropriate behaviour. Quayle, Jonsson and Löf (2012, p4) report that vulnerable children may be more likely to respond to inappropriate behaviour towards them due to feeling a gap exists in their life. The report concluded that children with “special needs may have difficulties understanding that people are not always honest online and this may impact on their methods of staying safe online.” Whittle et al (2014, p2) highlights the significance of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979) in explaining some of the reasons why SEN children engage with risky behaviours online and elaborating on how a child does not exist in isolation but relies on external factors “at different ecological levels.” Bronfenbrenner’s work which seeks to identify influences on a child’s development which can be applied here in exploring reasons for risky online behaviour. Roda and Tudge (2013, p2) identify development of a child “as emerging from the interaction of the individual and context” which may help to explain and shine a light on some of the gaps which may exist for a SEN child and the implications of these gaps on their online behaviour and interactions.

Seven adult participants tended to have an awareness around the dangers of seeking friendship online but also an acknowledgement that this can be a very positive and constructive way to support and facilitate social and emotional issues and development. Literature suggests that when used in a safe and structured way, it can potentially enhance a sense of love and belonging for a child facing difficulties communicating face to face or establishing friendships offline due to empowering them to an “equal footing with others” (Quayle, Jonsson and Löf, 2012, p4). It was thought that seeking friendship is a catalyst for SEN that breaks down barriers to communication which would otherwise impact their ability to make friends and develop relationship. A safeguarding consultant stated that

“when I work with professionals, carers, teachers, social workers we just need to take into account that we all want to feel loved, we all want to feel belonged. That’s perhaps where young people are seeking that.”

It is suggested that one of the primary advantages is that the online environment eases and supports communication where low levels of communication exist. Griffen (2006) supports that SEN children can find communicating face to face more challenging whereas online social channels can help to ease some of those challenges. However, there is evidence to suggest that there still may exist a greater level of risk for groups that are ‘psychologically vulnerable’ (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007, p622).

Love and belonging were suggested to be a priority for SEN children seeking friendship online and searching for a sense of belonging and acceptance. A safeguarding consultant believes that *“a lot of that is why its fuelling a lot of those online behaviours is because it’s not just promiscuity, its again that love and belonging.”* It was felt that these feelings and desire to be accepted may be higher for a SEN child. Emmerson and Hatto (2007, p62) report on findings that conclude children with learning disabilities have fewer friends and a smaller social group with further evidence suggesting that individuals lacking in self-esteem or feeling excluded or marginalised in some way may seek emotional and social support online (McKenna and Bargh, 1998, p681. Spears et al 2000, p8).

The online world may facilitate forming friendships for some SEN children with cognitive and emotional needs, that may impact on their ability to establish healthy relationships and boundaries. Miller et al (2016) argues that relationships online that have the potential to become more intimate can pose a greater risk for vulnerable young people. Asam and Katz (2018) report on findings that evidenced how SEN children and young people are more likely to believe they are in a relationship online as a result of their desire for love and belonging. The theme of love, belonging or seeking friendships was frequently raised by adult participants when discussing online behaviour of SEN with links suggested to exist which may result in both positive outcomes and more negative outcomes for individuals. A parent governor and a parent shared experiences of where their child had developed a friendship online which had resulted negatively on the child. The parent governor stated that *“friendship is what he thought and it turned into controlling and then it turned into getting him to do things because they had said its ok.”* Another parent discussed why an additional need is perceived to open a child up to further risks, *“because he doesn’t get facial expression and he finds it easier to talk to people online. And that’s where he was groomed by people he had never met by giving him what he wanted”* (Parent of SEN child, secondary mainstream education)

An enhanced SEN inspector and SENCO commented on how searching for love online can work in conjunction with an increased level of attention seeking behaviour for vulnerable groups:

“Either vulnerable to abuse because they’re seeking participation and love for want of a better word and they’re willing to do things to gain that recognition”. (Enhanced SEN inspector)

“They’re [SEN] are going to find it really hard to, I think they’ll do more and more extreme things.” (SENCO)

There was a view from participants linked to education that love and belonging were feelings above all others which prompt some risky behaviours online when a SEN child is seeking love, friendship, support or acceptance from others. UKCIS (2012) argue that children who are vulnerable offline are also considered vulnerable online where looking for a sense of love and belonging online is viewed as potentially being easier for a SEN child. Establishing friendships offline was acknowledged to be more difficult at times due to the barriers which may exist for face-to-face communication. However, as previously discussed and evidenced by literature, risks do translate online and are often considerably higher for those children. Consideration was given from eleven participants to the online world

removing barriers and facilitating communication for example, for SEN children lacking verbal skills which may inhibit self-expression face to face. Barriers to communication were suggested to be an area where the internet can provide some support in reducing barriers to communication and facilitating presentation of self. A SENCO commented on how reducing barriers enables children online

“For a lot of children, it [internet] takes away that physical barrier because there, but then I can see why that potentially creates another issue because then you can pretend to be someone you’re not.”
(SENCO)

Smahel (2020, p100) argues that online communication is able to better facilitate “self-control of the self-presentation.” Where some SEN children may experience some difficulty communicating in person for example making eye contact, communicating verbally and or difficulties expressing themselves physically, the internet can ease some of these concerns which could potentially promote more confidence in their ability to communicate with others. The ease of communication online and the support this can give to finding and establishing friendships online was identified as a significant factor and one that can make a powerful combination to finding love and belonging online. This can be a significant factor for SEN children where communication face to face may be more challenging. A SEN school headteacher commented on the challenging behaviour within the school which is associated with attachment, social and emotional needs which can impact on face-to-face communication and interaction. As a result, the opportunity that the internet gives to finding or accessing feelings of love and belonging can be quite significant and enable and empower young people. A safeguarding officer stated that *“I am very passionate and firmly believe that a lot of these vulnerabilities are being pushed on online because of love and belonging.”* This was raised as a contributing factor and the internet was viewed in a positive light at times by all adult participants and was not considered to be entirely negative. Searching for love and belonging brings into focus issues around trust and the level of trust SEN children attribute to online interactions. Trust was raised as significant here and the level of trust that some SEN children may give over to others online. Ofcom (2012) highlight findings which state that one in ten 8–11 year-olds do not consider if results can be trusted when using internet search engine results and believe that if it is listed by Google, it can be trusted. It was suggested by adult participants that SEN children may be willing to trust others in order to be accepted or whilst searching for love and belonging which may also present further issues which can lead to SEN children being lead into some challenging or risky situations that they may not be able to cope with or have had any previous education around how to cope. . Noll, Shenk, Barnes and Haralson (2013, p511) argue that behavioural problems, children who have experienced maltreatment or have low cognitive abilities were at a higher risk of engaging in risky online behaviour and are at a higher risk online.

Previous examples shared from parents and teachers related to seeking friendship are also applicable here. Examples related to seeking love and belonging may be woven into the reasons why SEN children may find themselves in risky situations that they may be naïve too. For example, exploitation and grooming. In addition to these examples a safeguarding consultant expressed beliefs in relation to online grooming and felt that *“when a young person is being groomed online and I have seen and worked with young people that have been groomed in the real world but at the same time that is very evident about that is that those young people need love and belonging.”* In addition to this, a parent governor shared a recent case which involved a SEN child searching for friendship which resulted in online grooming *“online grooming, there’s one boy who was groomed, who wanted friendship, then they were meeting, they were doing friendship things.”* Franklin et al (2015, p19) conclude on a study which identified that there exists less awareness of online risks for children with learning disabilities

or who would otherwise be classed as SEN. Arguably, this then translates into children being less aware of warning signs when trying to establish friendships online which can ultimately place SEN children at a greater risk. The internet was suggested to provide and facilitate a sense of love, belonging and acceptance but it was clear that all adult participants associated a fear with the supposed unknown online and the affordances of the online environment and digital media for example on interpersonal and sociocultural patterns of interaction. a perceived

Love and belonging were discussed by eleven adult participants in relation to SEN online behaviour where it was felt to be a factor contributing or leading to both positive experiences and negative or risky encounters. It was argued by three adult participants related to education that these behaviours have always existed for children but that the internet has provided a new way of seeking friendship and socialising and should not be entirely blamed for some of the more undesirable outcomes. A safeguarding consultant argues that *“the behaviours have always been there, the internet is a vehicle. The internet is not doing it.”* A SENCO also commented on the benefits *“technology has absolutely got its uses and you know it’s very, very beneficial.”* An education consultant highlights how all of the behaviours already existed before the internet, commenting that *“you’ve got a combination of teenagers who have hormones who are horny because they are teenagers.”*

Soto et al (2011, p330,) highlight the impact of child development on risky behaviour and argue that the adolescence stage is a time of immense change for a child in terms of their biology, personal and social relations. Changing levels of hormones are thought to be a factor contributing here in addition to a special need. It was suggested by ten adult participants that SEN children can feel like they are different from other children either within a special school or within a mainstream school which may fuel further their desire to find an environment where they are or feel accepted and consequently be a contextual factor which drives online behaviour. A parent of a SEN child in mainstream primary education stated that her son has very obvious physical disabilities which single him out during the school day because of all the equipment he requires to support his disability, which in the past has made him very upset and different from other children in his class. It was stated that, *“he has a special chair and special shoes which he needs, otherwise he will be in a lot of pain.”* A SENCO commented on her intention to ensure that SEN children within the school do not feel excluded or different from non-SEN children but how this is not always possible, *“They’re still aware that they’ve got a different test or different coloured paper in their books or whatever. You know of course they are. And we try and limit that.”* Taylor, Hume and Welsh (2009, p191) explain how factors related to being labelled or seen as different can have a greater significance for SEN children online when trying to establish an identity, which subsequently could influence behaviours in seeking love and acceptance from others. Seeking someone else who is similar to themselves can be a driver for seeking to belong online and again be a driver for online behaviour.

Access to support groups or support from others with similar experiences was discussed by three adult participants linked to education. The internet can provide access to resources and support that they may not otherwise have had access too or been made aware that certain services or groups even exist. The access to positive support online can be of value for SEN children and support emotional resilience and feelings of self-worth (Wellman and Gulia 1998, p338). The three participants linked to education felt that seeking advice is made easier online where help and support are more readily accessible. Examples related to self-harm or finding support groups related to suicide and sexuality. An education consultant highlighted how online support groups can help to assist individuals seeking help and advice and discussed a young person he had worked with where

“there are people there that will stop him self-harming, stop him committing suicide and make sure he doesn’t feel alone, which is very important.” Where children may seek friendship and support from others with similar feelings or shared experiences, the internet provides an avenue to access this from other like-minded individuals and can be used as a vehicle for accessing professional advice that may not otherwise have been available to them. This results in them feeling less isolated or different from others around them (McKenna & Bargh 1998, p682).

An education consultant continued and shared an example demonstrating the benefits of online support for a young person who feels unable to seek advice and the potential consequences of this:

“lives in a rural village in Warwickshire and he happens to be gay, and he’s not out cause his family have really strict beliefs, you know if you tell him he’s not allowed to meet or speak to people online that he doesn’t know. What’s he going do? You’ve just taken away the only thing that keeps him safe.”

One of the reasons given for this were related to SEN children specifically finding the internet an easier or a more comfortable environment to seek help, support and friendship online. Links to support and advice or more directly like-minded individuals can add to a sense of feeling safe online and feeling a part of a community or not feeling alone and isolated from others. The internet opens up a world of opportunities here to engage and interact with others as part of a community which may have not otherwise been available to access and join due to increased communication opportunities (Smahel, 2020, p100, Livingstone et al, 2012, p14).

Children as stakeholders

Children as participants included boys and girls from school years eight to eleven with an additional need and attending a special school. It was identified that all child participants have access to the internet at school and at home and more commonly access the internet via a phone, a tablet and an X-box. The most popular device was the mobile phone which was used to message friends. The boys and girls suggested that they used their X-box to play games, with one participant mentioning their PlayStation and one girl not having a console. Regular use of gaming consoles was suggested by boys who enjoyed gaming live whilst playing with other friends. It was not suggested that any of the children regularly play online by themselves. No girls suggested that regularly play online with or without friends. One girl commented on not playing online anymore because she couldn’t play Minecraft and believed that nobody was playing online any more anyway. The same girl used no other device other than a Kindle currently and had no access to the internet other than at break times in school. Predominantly, as previously discussed in chapter 6, children were less inclined to share any engagement and activity which was risk-related and felt more comfortable sharing experiences which were more positive. Where a risky situation was shared by the headteacher, it was identified that the child had her access to the internet severely limited. She was only allowed to have access to the Kindle to read books and watch YouTube in order to listen to music, which she enjoyed doing. The comment shared by the headteacher was related to a dangerous situation which had developed online in recent months and which related to grooming and meeting up offline with a perpetrator. This had resulted in her access to the internet being restricted and initially taken away from her. The girl had clearly not felt comfortable enough to share this encounter with me and had been influenced during the interview by the research site and potentially the unequal power relations in the room. This emphasises the

significant need to ensure that there exists trust between the interviewer and the interviewee when collecting data from children and the requirement to try to establish a longer-term relationship before a one-off interview. As this was not possible for this study, the responses given by children gave insights into how children are positioned in research with adults. Children perhaps felt that they were unable to share more risky experiences and activities with an adult that they hadn't been able to build any trust with or with an adult placed in a position of power at the research site.

Where further risk or negative experiences were shared was in relation to bullying online which included both verbal and written comments received online or whilst playing games online. The most common examples shared here concerning risky behaviour online, related to online bullying and receiving "nasty" messages or sending "nasty" comments themselves to other people. The response to addressing these issues online were said to be either telling a parent or leaving a game or the conversation. None of the children said that the bullying or conversations were so bad that they felt worried about being online. Two participants stated that they had received negative comments on pictures that had been posted online which was resolved by the pictures being taken down by the child. The children did not perceive or suggest that online bullying had any long-term damage and said they felt comfortable in knowing how to respond online when they feel upset.

Predominately children shared more positive experiences and stated that they talk to their friends online by messaging or when gaming live. YouTube was a common theme arising here from all child participants and predominantly accessed to watch videos online by people referred to as 'Youtubers' which they were familiar and interested in watching and listening too. The frequency for the majority of children being online at home was high, with the exception of one child who had restricted internet access enforced on her. All stated that they all were online for at least six hours a day, including weekdays and weekends with the suggestion overall that this figure was much higher than this most days. One boy in year ten stated that he played until 1am in the morning most days and went straight online after school at 4pm. The majority of children in the sample did not feel uncomfortable sharing the amount of time that they were online and all children agreed that they spend at least six hours a day online.

The most common social media platforms accessed were Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat with a preference for Instagram. WhatsApp was suggested to be frequently used by children to message and send each other pictures. The children were not forthcoming about their use of social media and suggested that they did not use it frequently to post pictures. Examples shared by children where social media had been used were not positive experiences and related to receiving comments on pictures which were not complementary to them or mocked what had been posted. As a result, two children had taken pictures down because it had upset them and they felt that they didn't want the pictures posted online anymore. One boy commented on how mean messages are deleted and do not stay online and another boy stated that they do not worry about seeing anything upsetting online as rarely anything pops up online for him to see. Children again suggested that they were able to cope with unwanted messages online and did not suggest that upsetting messages or images had any long-lasting negative effects on them.

When discussing what they were learning about in school in relation to online behaviour, there was a mixed response which ranged from not remembering or not knowing what had been taught in school

and by teachers to stating that they understood that the internet was “dangerous” (SEN girl, year 8). The common message from children was that the school do teach about online safety and to be careful online and not to follow “dodgy” links or share your personal information with others (SEN boy, year 8). The majority of children felt they knew more about the internet than parents or teachers but recognised that teachers were teaching about online safety in school and that they would go to their parents if they were worried about something they had seen online. All children perceived that messages from school about the internet suggested that the internet was sometimes a “dangerous” place and to be careful online.

Whilst children’s perspectives and views seemed to be limited in relation to discussing risk online and were more favourable towards more positive experiences online, the data is still valid and provides insights into the experience of including children in the research. Bolshaw and Josephidou (2019) highlight how research with children consider their views, contexts and links an understanding of children’s beliefs and behaviours to determine their thoughts. Views and experiences were shared in relation to online activities and how children felt about some of these experiences, but it became apparent that these views and experiences were influenced heavily by the research context and the power relations in the room at the time of the interviews. Kellert (2005) highlights children as participants and argues that research is often conducted in an environment where adults maintain control of the research which results in unequal power relations. Despite the fact that these did exist, the data from children was valid and reliable in supporting analysis into the perceptions of stakeholders and the experiences of including children as part of research.

Impact and range of devices

Devices were raised amongst participants as a key part of children lives which enable and facilitate online activities, communication and interactions. The use of devices has risen in recent years with nearly all children in England aged 5-15 (97%) going online (Ofcom, 2020). It was identified by all adult participants and children that devices play a significant role in the lives of both children and young people within primary and secondary education and for SEN children specifically here. All child participants either owned or had access to a mobile phone or had owned one in the past. Ofcom (2017) reported that 91% of 12–15 year olds own a smart phone in 2020. All child participants owned or had access to a tablet, smart phone and/or a gaming device and were online daily in all cases. Online being defined and interpreted by children as either messaging others, watching or listening to YouTube, gaming or posting on social media. The range of devices identified by children were common amongst the group and all children discussed using a device and accessing the internet as something in which they were very familiar with and enjoyed. One boy in year 10 at a special school gave the example of using his mobile phone “*before school, after school, every day really*” with another girl in year 10 stating that “*I go on it like throughout the day, in the morning when I get up I go on it, and then when I get home I’ll go on it and then at night time I’ll go on it again.*” All children stated that they were online via multiple devices for more than six hours a day. Asam and Katz (2017, p16) report on studies which suggest that being online for more than three hours a day could be a measure of self-esteem but conclude themselves this may be due also to long periods of isolation and not in fact being online for long periods. There was no comment from children or adult participants that suggested a concern regarding long periods of time online and self-esteem. The most common concern from adults was related to incidents of online grooming and bullying. The devices identified and raised frequently amongst children as participants, was a

smart phone which they all owned with the exception of one girl in year 8 who owned a Kindle. The exception here is that she had previously been the target of grooming and no longer owned a mobile phone or was allowed to access social media and messaging platforms. The action of limiting access to the internet is seemingly based on fear from an adult perspective which often proves counterproductive and unjust. Without knowing and understanding the exact nature of why the girl was no longer allowed to access social media and messaging platforms, it is sufficient to highlight how limiting access and trying to exert some control may be a knee jerk reaction that does not have positive long-term repercussions and immediately punishes a child. Removing access does not potentially keep a child safe in the long term as it lacks foresight in building and developing resilience. Green et al (2019) discusses how building resilience against harm is needed in order for children to develop their capabilities to engage constructively online. Methods to protect children which include physical measures such as taking away devices perhaps do not always prove useful. Wisniewski et al (2015) examined a study where parents used direct intervention to reduce risk online but did so at the cost of limiting the benefits of a child's online interaction. Despite this particular study not focusing on SEN children, there are comparisons to be made. In a study by Just (2017) which examined keeping children with autism safe online it was concluded that some physical protections worked well, although children were able to find alternative ways online. Confiscating a child's device was said to exacerbate behavioural issues for children who have difficulty making sense of the world and who potentially have an impaired ability to socially interact. In relation to SEN children, there are perhaps further behavioural considerations around managing risk that need to be considered in relation to an additional need.

The mobile phone was also viewed as the most popular device evidenced by discussion amongst participants working in or linked to education. A special school headteacher acknowledged a high level of ownership amongst children within her school of mobile phones and tablets, which demonstrated and appeared to suggest that the role of mobile phones and tablets played a considerable role in the lives of children. The inclusion of phone, tablets and smart devices within children's lives can be viewed as having supported SEN children with a variety of social and cognitive issues in many aspects of their life. Ruck (2017, p1)

) argues that technology "promotes greater independence, allowing people to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to do or struggled to accomplish" Devices were considered by all adult participants to offer both opportunities and threats for SEN children and young people and were acknowledged to present various challenges for children regardless of their additional need. Five adult participants addressed mobile phones or associated apps specifically when discussing online safeguarding concerns and solutions. A special school headteacher expressed concern about what had been found on mobile phones and identified this a frequent occurrence stating that *"what's been on the phone and we've identified inappropriate things on the phone"* with *"some of the high level ones [incidents] we have had recently has always been about 'what's on the phone'"* A safeguarding consultant identified his key concern for all children from his own experience of working with schools and stated that, *"Year 5 and 6, it's all about WhatsApp groups, which gives me a headache. Secondary its all about WhatsApp groups and there's some quite nasty things going on at the moment around whatsapp groups. Images, stories, things will be sent out very rapidly on WhatsApp."* A SENCO agreed here and stated that *"most of them [children in the mainstream primary school] have WhatsApp I think. I think pretty much everyone in year 6 has a phone."* Ofcom (2017, 2020) report on the popularity of social media sites and report an increase in the use of Snapchat in 2017 and a rise more recently in Instagram amongst 12 -15 year-olds. Ofcom (2020) also report on internet users' experience of potential online harms and finds that during 2019 the highest level of concern for adults (45%) and 12-15 year-olds (52%) is related to bullying online.

A special school headteacher stated that she had found it difficult to decide upon a policy regarding mobile phones in school and felt uneasy about establishing an appropriate solution. Her main concern and most common problem is discovering inappropriate messages and pictures on children's phones which had been sent and stored. Safeguarding concerns had been raised by teachers and parents of children attending the school.

"we do get a lot of safeguarding concerns through that you know. Is that positive, is that negative? You know, its very tricky to answer that....., I'm going to be brutally honest it can become very very challenging. (Special school headteacher)

A SENCO was particularly concerned about the additional pressures on children of owning a device and expressed her thoughts:

"I wasn't allowed a mister Frosty ice maker thing and there's kids who are moaning that they haven't got the right phone or the right Xbox and I just think it's a whole other level of pressure for parents and for children."

There were varying views and perspectives on the risk associated with devices and different perceptions on how to keep children safe. Two headteachers and a SENCO raised concerns around the use of mobile phones both in school and outside of school with one special school headteacher stating that she felt mobile phones were *"for some children, it's like their dummy. They need it because they have just been set up the whole day where you eat your dinner and you have your YouTube going."* There was acknowledgment here that a mobile phone provides comfort to children within her school. There was a lack of agreement on the benefits of having access to mobile phones in school or allowing mobile phones into school at all. This was balanced by opportunities they provide for SEN children but also the risks they can present.

None of the children explicitly expressed that they were worried or had any negative experiences of using a device. Comments included from one boy in year 10 stated that he wasn't worried and would *"just leave the party"* meaning that they would leave the call when experiencing any potential threat. A high percentage (67%) of all children in England are reported to know how to block people if needed (Ofcom, 2020).

Smart phones and education

Five adult participants linked directly to education felt that mobile phones facilitate some risky behaviour and acknowledged the implications of banning mobile phones in school or identified this as school as a possible solution. Within the schools identified in this study, mobile phones were allowed into school but could not be used within school and had to either be turned off or handed into the school reception at the start of the school day. All adult participants identified that mobile phones provide a level of support and security for some SEN children during the school day, but the difficulty identified by headteachers is establishing what access children should have during the day. The use of mobile phones in school provided a paradox in terms of their role in the lives of SEN children and were suggested to provide both the problem and the solution. Research suggests that

where mobile phones are banned in school there may be little opportunity to explore the online world and to develop important digital skills for current and future life (Katz et al, 2018). Discussion around mobile phones represented an unease about the most appropriate decision for supporting the use of mobile phones in school.

Two educational consultants, one safeguarding and one sex education felt strongly that mobiles phones should not be banned or taken away from children when threats arise:

"...mobile phones are a lifeline and having a mobile phone is some sort of link to a safety network."
(Sex ed consultant)

"...I advise not to remove the mobile phone." (Safeguarding officer)

Banning mobile phones from school and from children was not considered the best way to safeguard a child or to protect children from the associated risks. It was suggested by four adult participants linked to education that despite the risks, a mobile phone actually helps to protect a child and to keep them safe and that the positives do outweigh the negatives. One girl in year 8 had her mobile phone taken away from her by a parent due to being a victim of online grooming:

"... she was groomed online and her parent felt it better to stop her going online so much." (Special school headteacher)

The mixed response around the use of mobile phones specifically for SEN children seemed to be inconclusive but a narrative did emerge around how banning mobile phones or access to the internet for a child may be detrimental and be counterproductive to safeguarding and keeping children safe online. Upon reflecting on the issue of mobile phones in school, a special school headteacher felt that it was ultimately the right decision to allow children to bring their mobile phone into school as she believed that she could safeguard the children to a better standard. It was reflected that by allowing mobile phones into school can help to raise awareness amongst staff of any current issues children were experiencing or concerned about. An example here was given in relation to complaints about bullying, where children felt able to share texts and photos with teachers that were causing them to become upset or concerned about. A dialogue here between children and teachers was believed to be a more appropriate and helpful response.

"Yeah, so we've had one incident, if that child was not allowed his phone in, we wouldn't have known."
(Special school headteacher)

A blog by the Department of Education (Hayhoe, 2020) argues that few people believe that smart phones or tablets can be used to facilitate educational support but identifies that they can often be one of the best ways for children with an additional need to learn. Features on smartphones, which are thought to support SEN children with physical and learning needs include accessing writing and typing, recording voice, taking photos and touch screen for example for children with dyslexia and

communication difficulties. It appeared challenging for headteachers to negotiate and balance the risk of technology with the benefits, due to an underlying narrative by other stakeholders regarding the harm of technology. It was not reported by headteachers or SENCO that mobile phones were used within the classroom to support learning.

Mobile phones and technology were clearly viewed from two perspectives from headteachers, SENCO and parents. The views expressed included both positive and negative opinions and was divided on the role of mobile phones in schools. A SENCO commented on her own views in relation to her daughter without an additional need, *"I know at my daughter's school, they can take their phone to school and they have to take them to the office and they say they can have them because if they walk home on their own, for safety."* Two parents of SEN children both in mainstream education stated that they had concern with the use of smartphones, of which their own children aged, 9 and aged 16 respectively owned. One parent stated that *"having constant access to social media and even texting on the phone means that there is always kind of emotion linked to the phone and what they are doing on it."*

All adult participants agreed that mobile phones appeared to be the most common device amongst children providing many opportunities including giving access to the internet, providing a tool for searching online, online gaming, educational apps, access to social media and uploading of information and sharing information. BT (BT.com, 2020) argue that assistive technology can be used to support specific learning difficulties and can provide tools for SEN children to support learning and engagement. Assistive technology is defined as any device which support specific learning difficulties. There was a common understanding amongst both adult and children as participants, that devices and the internet are not inherently bad and do provide many positive opportunities for children.

Devices and behaviour of SEN

Where the number of devices and access to devices was raised as a potential problem within school, it was suggested that this was due to a lack of understanding or awareness amongst SEN children and their parents of the risks here. One headteacher felt that the rise in the use of mobile phones and tablets was causing a rise in issues for children to address particularly in relation to their behaviour online. Two headteachers of special schools commented on the impact of behaviour specifically in relation to mobile phone usage with one stating that *"mobile phone usage... you see these parents that are constantly on their phone rather than playing with their children. And is this a product, because the needs of our children are up there and they are growing... Without a doubt yep... we've got very much a change of need."* A second headteacher highlighted her growing concern around the increased number of mobile phones coming into school and what they are being used for. A SENCO commented on the increased number of primary school-aged children with mobile phones, which seemed to be a concern. This increase in the number of devices was a concern for teaching staff and understood to be a problem that will get worse and not better if not addressed. Protection of information on devices was not directly raised by the majority of adult participants and was not identified as a primary concern here. One adult participant highlighted protection of data as a key concern. There was less concern and discussion in relation to the sharing of passwords and personal data and more focus and emphasis around owning a mobile phone and the behaviour of children using their phone. The potential risk was suggested to be heightened for SEN children. Password protection and the physical aspects around

online safety was not highlighted from the majority of adult participants. An enhanced SEN inspector commented on risk associated with the number of devices an individual owns in relation to protecting data, but this was not a key concern from other participants:

"...some of their access to some of the devices can lead them into more of a cyber security risk, but also from their online safety, because the more devices they have, if they're not in control of them not having to share passwords and their own personal data, etc." (Enhanced SEN inspector)

It was believed that it is behaviour which requires attention in order to mitigate risks and not directly the device or the technology itself. The primary concern within an education setting in relation to devices and keeping children safe online was the behaviour of a child or young person with an additional need once they were online. The desire to seek adventure combined with adolescence and behavioural and emotional difficulties naturally opens children up to a heightened level of risk online (Steinburg, 2006, Livingstone et al, 2005, Bentley, 2020). The behaviour was acknowledged to be a concern and not the devices themselves. The combination of potential risk, vulnerability of a child and their adolescent state represents an issue for children who are underprepared for or lack the skills to effectively navigate the online world. There was a lack of concern from all participants around children not knowing how to use any of the devices, but rather there existed strong concern around the risks children can be exposed to online and how these risks can be avoided. One of the primary concerns raised by two headteachers, SENCO and two parents of SEN children was the behaviour online, especially when linked to messaging or sexting others. There was a heightened concern based on first hand experiences of the risks children are exposed to and the impact this can have on their lives. Messaging was understood to mean messages being sent using WhatsApp or Snapchat from a mobile phone or messages sent and received via an online messaging service whilst gaming. Concerning behaviours included how a child relates or speak to others online, separating friends from strangers online, exposure to grooming and inappropriate content, the sending and receiving inappropriate pictures and messages. A special school headteacher felt that for SEN children *"it's a sense of I can be confident over the phone. It's about understanding who are they texting"*. An enhanced SEN inspector identified concerning behaviour specific to SEN children and an underlying cause that may put them at a greater risk. It was stated that vulnerable children seeking *"participation and love for want of a better word and they're willing to do things to gain that recognition. You have other SEND pupils with different needs that actually present themselves as persistent so that they will keep going and doing things repeatedly without tiring or becoming bored."*

Inappropriate texting on phones and bullying online from both children and between parents was highlighted as a significant concern from one special school headteacher, parent governor and two parents of SEN children in mainstream education. SEN children are more likely to be bullied online due to them being perceived as different (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2017; Taylor, Hume and Welsh, 2010) which can lead to significant harm including self-harm and suicide (John et al, 2018). The headteacher discussed incidents where bullying had taken place outside of school hours but had been contacted to provide a level of support for the children and the parent: *"I think it's the whole messaging inappropriately which is a bigger problem, you know arguing over whoever. We get a lot of that."* It was suggested that this was a common occurrence within social media, specifically Facebook causing disputes between both children and parents. The headteacher felt powerless at times to resolve issues that were brought to her attention outside of school hours but felt a responsibility to address some concerns which ultimately influenced behaviour in school. It was believed that *"sometimes the parents are as bad as the children, especially the things they say on Facebook."* At times incidents required involving the police to provide support to the school and to families. Social media was identified as playing a significant role in activities outside of school which had led to bullying and harassment incidents. The incidents of bullying online and inappropriate

messaging was felt to occur frequently within one special school, which supports growing research which suggests that this is of great concern for teachers, SEN children and their families. Asam and Katz (2018, p25) report that children with mental health difficulties are 40% more likely to be bullied online than those without mental health difficulties. A headteacher as part of this study said that all of the incidents reported by children were facilitated through the mobile phone and evidence of messages and pictures stored here.

The role of parents during bullying incidents was felt to be at times contributing to the level of bullying and harassment between both children and other parents outside of school. Information and evidence was brought into school by children and parents via mobile phones and shared with teachers and staff in order to help resolve incidents that had occurred outside of school. Where information on phones had been shared with teachers and deemed inappropriate, schools provided a level of support where they felt they could. However, the headteacher did not feel this was entirely her responsibility and did not feel completely confident in how to provide support and guidance around incidents that have taken place outside of school hours. These occurrences were suggested to be a concern for children at the special school where incidents outside of school frequently included inappropriate information being sent, or sexting where inappropriate pictures had been shared via WhatsApp and Snapchat. A safeguarding consultant argues that *“sometime parent do not know how to support their child online because they lack a level of understanding and react badly or they set a bad example and are just on their phone all day ignoring their kids.”*

Where devices were discussed positively, it was felt that they can facilitate a vast range of opportunities both inside and outside of education. It was believed that access to the internet was viewed by children as a place of acceptance for some and a place where a child can escape away from daily life. Two educational consultants suggested that the internet offered more benefits to SEN children than risk and a SENCO acknowledging that SEN children she works with use the internet and gaming as a form of escapism *“they [children] use it a s a bit of an escape. When they get home from school probably just escape on to there.....and I know lots of children do that.”*

Benefits of devices for SEN

The use of the internet in searching and downloading of information was viewed as a positive and empowered children and young people to search for and gain immediate access to information that they may otherwise may not have been able to access. It was identified that devices provide very positive opportunities and tools to facilitate searching for information, gaining new knowledge or accessing support which may be more limited without access to the internet. Sing (2017) identifies that tablets can be used to complement a more suitable way of learning for children with learning disabilities which support their own needs when working and accessing information.

Access to the internet via these devices was acknowledged to remove some barriers for SEN children who may feel they are unable to seek support locally from immediate stakeholders, for example their parents and teachers. Support groups were acknowledged here by four adult participants as providing access to other individuals or groups where they may feel a greater level of acceptance or

freedom and confidence to be themselves or access help. A SENCO believes that “... for a lot of children it [internet] takes away that physical barrier because there” and an sex education consultant agrees that “if you want to know where your local clinic is, you don’t phone someone or find a leaflet. You look on the internet. Websites and support networks, there’s some really good stuff out there, yes there’s some horrible stuff so we teach children to navigate between the good and the bad.” It was believed that mobile phones and tablets primarily provide access to external agencies and support which may not have previously been so easily accessible and available. O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) emphasise how health care can be more easily accessible and may also offer a level of anonymity which could potentially empower individuals. The availability and accessing of information support groups and individuals may have been more physically limiting for some SEN children to find and more difficult to locate. The devices are suggested to have provided flexibility and increased access to support, which was viewed by the parent and participants linked to education to be positive. Topics which may be more difficult to discuss or where children feel they have no one to talk to is an area that was raised by participants. A sex education consultant states that, “you know if you’ve got that young man who can reach out to, you know social networks groups and talk about what’s it like to come out, yes there’s dangers because somebody might groom him online.” It was identified by a special school headteacher that she has an increased awareness around the topic of self-harm which had come to light from children within the school via their mobile phone. The special school headteacher stated that “children have been searching self-harm and self-harm with some of our more vulnerable student has become more common.” It was acknowledged that removing barriers to finding information and support empowers children and is a more common method for them to access information quickly and easily via phones and tablets. However, there was still concern from two headteachers of special schools, a SENCO and two education consultants that it is a challenge to navigate some of the risks when searching online and a challenge to support children and young people with SEN specifically to navigate these risks. A safeguarding consultant stated that:

“we can’t eliminate all risk online and we need to get that into our heads. We also need to understand that children are going be one step ahead of us” alongside a sex education consultant believing that *“it is important to teach children how to navigate the good and the bad online.”*

All of the children, with the exception of one did not discuss having ever seen something that worried them or having been involved in anything risky online or suggest that they did not enjoy going online. There existed a lack of engagement during the interviews in questions that related to risk or behaviour that might be deemed as risky. Children appeared less forthcoming at times and did not contribute fully to a conversation and frequently gave one-word responses. There were a number of barriers which existed here and perhaps limited the level of participation of children which included the child’s own additional need and/or behavioural need, the presence of the headteacher in the room at all times, the lack of a trust and long-term relationship with myself. Fetterman (1989) argues that in order to gain a greater understanding of children, their views and experiences, it is necessary to get to know them beyond a one-off interview and to spend prolonged periods getting to know them. The fact that it had not been possible to build any type of long-term relationship with each child, due to the limited access given to me undoubtedly impacted upon the information shared by children. As a result, it became difficult to determine what risky situations, if any, had been encountered by each child and to ascertain any true experiences for the SEN children. Punch (2002) explores the difference in research with children and states a number of factors which include that children are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships in research which may result in them exaggerating or lying to please the researcher. It is also suggested that the research context and setting may impact on the children being interviewed as research settings are predominantly adult spaces where children have less control. It became evident that the responses

from children were not completely honest or true which is clearly influenced by a number of prominent factors which influenced the type of responses the children felt comfortable to give. It was suggested by the headteacher of the special school, sitting in on the interviews that the children were not being completely honest here and two of them had been involved in grooming incidents and bullying online. All children felt that they spent too much time online but there was no suggestion that this would change in the future. All children discussed the benefits and enjoyment gained from accessing the internet and owning a device. Examples are given below from children in relation to their level of risk online.

“Sometime but not all the time because there’s rarely anything that pops up and if they do pop up and I don’t like it I just close it down straight away” (SEN boy, year 10)

“Not really ok... I sometimes can’t sleep because I am thinking about going online” (SEN girl, year 10)

. It was believed that owning a device and having access to devices of some description was a lifeline for some children and something that they relied heavily on for their daily interactions. A parent governor and parent of a SEN child who relies heavily on Alexa stated that *“Alexa is actually his lifeline. He loved it from the beginning and just asked it random questions.”* Referring back to previous examples from a special school headteacher that believed that some children rely on their mobile phones heavily and are soothed by them, equating it to a child’s dummy was significant here.

There was a common belief amongst all adult participants that there is certainly an element and aspect of the internet which acts to empower children and supports them to feel confident. This was specifically linked to communication for SEN children, where additional needs attributed to low level communication skills. Griffen (2006) discusses how communication can be eased via online interactions where some SEN children may struggle with face-to-face communications which often involve visual clues and signals that can impact the level of communication. Online gaming was given as an example here from six participants linked to education who believed that gaming provided a sense of community and accomplishment.

“[SEN child] he’s gaming at home online, comfortably, confidently talking to others online where he does struggle more in person or doesn’t seem to mix well in school.” (Parent of SEN secondary mainstream education)

“my son lacks verbal skills but is comfortable to communicate online with his friends and playing games” (Parent governor and parent of SEN children)

“Gaming is a legitimate gaming activity and we mustn’t forget that. But both of them come with risks” (Safeguarding consultant)

Smart devices were identified by one parent governor in a very positive light and something that she had become very familiar with to support her own children with additional needs. Smart devices included Alexa, Google and smart watches and it was commented that technology is *“sometimes it’s a gift, sometimes it’s not. We have young boy that’s talks to Alexa to remind him of his structure in the*

day, what's happening to recall information. He is verbal but he hasn't got any writing or verbal skills. So Alexa is actually his lifeline."

Smart device – Voice interface and SEN

Smart devices were acknowledged by two parent participants to be particularly helpful for their SEN child who struggles using language or has limited written and verbal skills. There were experiences and examples shared around smart devices being used to support SEN children which was believed to support them educationally, develop their level of knowledge and understanding, build confidence and help to keep them safe and calm. BT.com (2020) argues that assisted technologies can support SEN children to become more self-reliant, increase independence, support communication and boost confidence. Smart devices including Alexa and smart watches were very positively commented on by two parents who felt the introduction of such devices had added to the lives of their children and can be beneficial for SEN (Hegarty, 2004). For some SEN it was suggested that a smart device can be of great benefit both at home, within education and within social settings. The experiences shared demonstrated how the device was being used in ways to support behaviour and address some quite complex needs in sophisticated ways. A parent governor of a special school with 9 children of her own and 5 with an additional need passionately spoke of how Alexa has supported her children. She stated that, *"he loved it [Alexa] from the beginning and just asks it random questions. He just asked Alexa where in China has the highest range, and is it all flat and where's the rice fields, So he's learning without realising."* Alexa was specifically identified as a tool to support a range of SEN needs including autism and children lacking verbal and communication skills and understood to be an advantage for a child with access to this type of technology. One other parent of a SEN child, in year 5 commented also how Alexa supports understanding through completion of homework, *"he uses it a lot to do his homework and can understand a little better what is required."*

Smart devices were thought to support communication and comprehension due to the clear and concise nature of dialogue between a child and the technology. There is less noise around interactions including body language and facial expression, which can cause difficulty for some SEN children and it was believed that their SEN child could communicate more clearly and interpret information more concisely using a smart device. Whilst there exists a sizeable gap in current literature regarding the opportunities that assisted technologies or smart devices can provide for individuals with special needs (2020, p597), there does exist strong links between the two. Assisted technologies utilise artificial technology to support the lives of individuals with special needs "including visual impairment, mobility impairment, hearing aid, autism spectrum disorder, and other mental illnesses" (Pradhan et al., 2018).

An example was shared from the parent governor of an autistic child who stated that:

"it's not face to face, the no expectations, and its [Alexa] actually giving you the direct information. None of the other stuff that most of us have to filter out. You know, so you get an interoccipital conversation, it's just giving him the answers that he needs. He absolutely adores it."

Epley et al (2007) report that technologies such as Alexa can support individuals with special needs lacking social skills by *"acting as a friend."* The positive results reported by a parent governor were clear in the use of assisted technologies to support her child, without any negative impact discussed.

Further to this, smart watches were given as an example of supporting SEN and relied upon as a source of support for a child and also adults who care for the child. Smart watches had been used to set reminders and monitor the location of a child with attachment issues, which was felt to be helpful for both parent and child. The parent governor explained, *“we have young boy that uses a watch to remind him of the structure in the day, what’s happening to recall information and where I am during the day.”* It was believed that the attachment issues lead to a severe level of anxiety for her child if he didn’t know where his parents were. The smart watch had been used to support and provide comfort here which was acknowledged has resulted in some very positive outcomes and improvements in the behaviour of their child. Ramadan et al (2020, p602) identify that individuals begin to depend on and trust assisted technologies with their own safety and security. This was clearly expressed by the parent governor who suggested that anxiety and levels of stress were lowered with the inclusion of assisted technologies and smart device in their lives.

The levels of anxiety were suggested to be lower when using a watch with the child experiencing fewer stressful situations when away from his parent. Having access to information about their location or their parent or carer’s location had been experienced and perceived as a positive step towards supporting their child here and alleviating some worries or fears. There were no concerns raised here in relation to using a smart device to either support SEN within the home, within education or when socialising and away from home. Smart devices were perceived to provide positive outcomes for SEN and able to support some very specific needs without any additional input from parents or teachers. It was felt that a child can work and act independently of an adult when using a smart device due to its intuitive nature. The parent governor concluded that *“because they have attachment and stuff, they can see where the parent is so they know, so they are not panicking as much. So, I think we are using a lot more technology to help us out, to alleviate worries.”*

Impact of technology on mental health and wellbeing

Eight adult participants linked with education, social care and mental health care raised mental health and wellbeing with links to children and online behaviour. It was felt children who already have an additional need may be experiencing higher levels of anxiety, which may subsequently contribute or potentially impact their behaviour online. Comments were linked to current perceptions around mental health and often linked to the participant’s own experience of mental health and attitudes towards the internet. There was a common perception that the internet and social media has impacted on an increased level of children’s mental health in recent years. A parent governor commented that *“[police] I think they are a lot more proactive because Northampton has a higher ratio of additional needs, complex needs and mental health issues than the national average.”*

It was clear that participants felt strongly about a link existing between an assumed increase in mental health of children and the use of the internet and social media. NHS (2020) report that levels of mental health have increased in recent years to include one in six children in England, a rise from one in nine in 2017. There is further evidence to suggest that adolescence is a critical time for the development of a child’s emotional and psychological health and a peak period for the potential onset of mental health issues (Dahl, 2001). A combination of issues could be suggested to be adding to an increased level of mental health within children. A safeguarding consultant believed that *“during adolescences because it is part of the brain development between 11 and 24/25 is the most significant change the brain will go through. When that child gets a like on Instagram, its equivalent to how an adult feels on payday.”* Examples shared were anecdotal from participants but there were

suggestions from five adult participants that they each had a greater level of awareness of mental health and they had seen school's cases of poor mental health increasing. The participants were concerned about an increase in mental health amongst children and felt that the internet was in some way responsible for fuelling a decline in mental health. Asam et al (2019, p428) highlighted that consistently, it has been demonstrated that excessive time spent online can impact mental health and wellbeing. Whilst Dillman-Carpentier (2008, p144) argue that the internet can also support mental health and serve as a coping mechanism some adolescents.

A safeguarding consultant stated that there is a direct link between mental health and social media and highlighted that *"there is no conclusive evidence to say that gaming and social media is addictive and isn't affective wellbeing and mental health, however in the four years I have been doing this role for the past 18 months [it has been] one of my main concerns or top concerns."* A report by Internet Matters argues that those children with poor mental health remain a high priority for stakeholders (Asam and Katz, 2018). Participants commenting on mental health clearly had a heightened level of awareness around mental health, which could be suggested to be due to a raised level of awareness in the media more generally.

As was discussed previously, children were less inclined to share anything that may be perceived as negative in relation to being online, which was also true of any other topics during the interviews. Children as participants did not raise mental health issues or make any reference to being affected or being impacted by associated issues here. Mental health was raised only by adult participants as a concern. Two special school headteachers and six other participants commented on an increase in mental health issues specifically for SEN children with a clear belief that the increased use of technology in recent years had led to a rise in mental health issues amongst SEN children. Emmerson and Hatton (2007) highlight findings which suggest that young people with learning disabilities are six times more likely to have been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder than children without a disability. There emerged a narrative from adult participants that the internet was contributing to mental health and that there had been an increase of this more recently. Children as participants may not have been aware of any changes in themselves, which could also have been due to a number of other factors, for example age or in relation to their additional need.

There was a perception from six participants including a special school headteacher, two parents, SENCO, mental health practitioner and a safeguarding consultant that there exists a link with the use of social media, the internet and messaging apps having a detrimental effect on children and their mental health. Within a special school there was a concern that was linked to the use of messaging apps, WhatsApp and Snapchat, the latter being banned from the household by the parent governor. *"Snapchat I won't have 'cause I think it's just lethal. It's like you can be horrible and you can never see that message again unless your friends took a screen shot on their phone."* The banning of the app was felt to be a solution aimed at helping and protecting the child from bullying. It was felt that these apps had caused further distress to her own children and should not be used. There were examples shared around the use of social media and messaging apps which were of significance here and felt to be impacting on mental health of children within school. A special school headteacher and teachers within the school had been shown exchanges online, observed examples of bullying and seen pictures which had been saved to phones and used as evidence to implicate others.

Ansaar and Loof,(2010, p65) identified that mental disorders could be exacerbated when online, which may put individuals at a higher risk and identified correlation between depressive states and

risky behaviours online. Specific concerns relating to SEN children included the array of apps and social media platforms available which was felt added to the complexity for SEN children. This included how to behave online, interpret others behaviour and their level of understanding around the use of apps and social media platforms. Miller et al (2016) argue that social media can facilitate intimacy and intimidation when more vulnerable groups are trying to establish friendships. Evidence to support this had been shared from a special school headteacher and three parents previously. Adverse effects of this were felt to link to poor levels of mental health. Katz, (2016, p23) further support this by reporting that vulnerable groups were more likely to experience depression and unhappiness when exposed to high risk online. The special school headteacher and a safeguarding consultant commented on 'likes' on social media with the safeguarding consultant believing that a culture of 'likes' online and on social media platforms was contributing and often fuelling some of the behaviours of both children and their parents. It was stated that *"so when we put something online and get 100 likes, the next things we want is to get more likes and all the time feeding that. A lot of the work should be around self-worth and love."* There was a perception that posts on social media or a pressure to post pictures and comment online were a contributing factor. Children have been reported to experience poor levels of mental health and feeling low due to the number of 'likes' they have received on social media (NHS, 2017). The increased awareness around the topic of mental health was consistent with the belief that there had been a rise in levels of poor mental health amongst children and that this was in some way linked to online behaviour, social media and bullying. Research does suggest that there are links between poor mental health and engagement with social media and messaging apps when high risk situations occur. There existed a firm belief from participants that there does exist a link between the two. These conclusions from participants are based on first hand experiences of working with or caring for SEN children. Participants talked firmly and passionately about social media which was informed by their own experiences and use of social media also. A SENCO described how a primary school child, non-SEN *"has significant mental health issues about her self-image and self-confidence and it concerns me a lot how she will be impacted when she gets to secondary school with cyber bullying and social media."*

Fears from participants were supported by their own adult experiences of seeing social media content, posting and liking content posted by others and the impact it had on their own feelings and emotions. Concern around how a child with special needs may interact and interpret behaviour online was raised. Where a SEN child may have social and emotional needs which are challenging for them offline, it was felt that social media could add further complexities that are difficult to navigate. Negative consequences for vulnerable groups online frequently have a greater negative impact which demonstrates *"a powerful relationship between their internet use and their wellbeing (Katz, 2016, p8).* A combination of primary factors emerged from discussions which were thought to impact on level of poor mental health including the constant access to devices and the internet, ambiguity for SEN children online alongside access to social media. A SEN school headteacher stated that *"understanding online is quite an abstract concept and difficult for kids to understand,"* which was further supported by a special school headteacher believing that social media, mobile phone use and NHS cuts in mental health care, could all be partly to blame for a decline in mental health.

Wider factors were linked to local authority funding, health care, educational policy and the curriculum. It was believed by two headteachers that there is an increased pressure from government for schools to reach set targets and achieve specific outcomes which impacts the curriculum and adds pressure onto children to achieve higher grades. This was felt to be less than realistic for some SEN children. A sex education consultant suggested that *"SEN schools tend to a lot more work around PSHE, because of the education is a lot less formal and they don't approach GCSEs and stuff in the same sort of way so they are preparing children for life."* A greater focus on vocational skills than academic attainment was felt to be more important for SEN. Further pressure outside of technology and social media were identified here as adding to pressure for

children and young people currently. A SENCO added to this by stating her belief that social media is adding to a pot of pressure that children are currently under within education *“lots of things [mental health] pressure from curriculum, pressure from social media technology.”*

Mental health was also identified as an issue for parents of SEN children by participants working within education. There had been first hand experiences and accounts of working with parents to provide support for their children online or working with parents to resolve a situation that had developed online. There had been experiences and encounters of liaising with parents of SEN children who were thought to have either an additional need of their own or a mental health issue. Conclusions were made by headteachers and teachers working with parents and were not based on any medical information that had been disclosed. Emerson and Hatton (2007, p62) report on findings that conclude that 33% of children with learning disabilities in the UK have an increased chance of having a mother affected by poor mental health. There were assumptions around mental health from a special school headteacher based on encounters of working with parents or carers to support as SEN child. Thoughts were shared around the difficulty of liaising with some parents within the school when trying to resolve a developing situation online or when attempting to raise a concern about a child's behaviour. It was felt by a special school headteacher and a parent governor that working in partnership with parents can itself provide some challenges outside of trying to directly support a child. Contributing factors when working with parents included varying levels of understanding around technology and social media. A special school headteacher acknowledged that working with parents was a positive step and one that was needed in order to fully support a child but at times this had been limited or challenging. It was stated that *“there's some very challenging parents here. And then you have to really.....be in tune with what you are saying, and how you are challenging them over certain things, and pick your timing correctly.... Lots of mental health needs.”* Hornby (2010, p93) believes that for SEN children to receive optimum education, there needs to exist a collaborative working relationship between parents and teachers. Parent and teacher relationships were viewed as important from the special school headteacher expressed through continues efforts to provide support and maintain a dialogue. However, the challenges of this were acknowledged, citing mental health as one of those challenges. A parent governor had organised a forum to provide additional support for parents of SEN children as a way of addressing some of the issues they may have and stated that, *“so having parents support each other or having a forum and talk to each other and help out is good.”* Hornby (2010, p97) reinforces the effectiveness of forums which combine education and opportunities for parents to share thoughts and concerns. The use of a parent forum was understood here to be an effective solution to facilitate the parent/teacher dialogue.

The narrative that the level of mental health combined with an additional need added another layer of complexity to an already often challenging environment for SEN children was considered both online and offline. There was also an acknowledgement from six adult participants including a special school headteacher, SENCO, two parents, a safeguarding consultant and a mental health practitioner that the rise in mental health was applicable to all children, not only SEN. Adult participants linked to education and with experience of working with mainstream schools raised awareness of mental health more generally in both children and adults. A SENCO identified a rise in her mainstream school of mental health disorders of non-SEN children and stated that due to some non-SEN children presenting symptoms of mental health there had been an increase in children being monitored within the primary school. This had been applied more generally to children that did not have an educational health care plan (EHCP) and without being acknowledged to have an additional need. The behaviours presented

by these children included raised levels of anxiety seen in school or reported by parent which had resulted in concern but does not directly imply that they should be on the SEN register. It was explained by a SENCO, that SENCOs are not allocated to these children but that monitoring these children is necessary in order to provide a level of support. *“Especially higher up the school anxiety and yeah you know those sort of mental health issues that we don’t want getting bigger as they leave us and move onto secondary school.”* A mental health practitioner comments on thoughts regarding the links to the internet and social media and mental health by stating that, *“yes, definitely there is a link without a doubt. Technology is a drug.”* Participants here spoke very passionately about their views on the links between mental health and the internet. A study by Coyne et al (2020, p1) raises concern that the public response to social media may be part of a moral panic which does not fully understand the root of the problem. The study concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that there exists a link between time spent online on social media and poor mental health. Context and content are proposed as factors requiring further research surrounding social media use.

Mental health, wellbeing and the curriculum

Supporting children at a younger age with mental health and educating around coping strategies were seen to provide proactive opportunities and potentially positive outcomes as children progress from primary school to secondary school. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012, p10) report on the link between mental health and academic performance citing that positive emotional wellbeing is significant for younger children in primary school and for older children’s engagement during adolescence. A special school headteacher, an enhanced SEN inspector, SENCO and a safeguarding consultant identified that offering support to children at a younger age with managing their offline and online behaviour and wellbeing were considered positive steps. It was believed by a SENCO that the transition to secondary school coupled with online activities could be a combination for a more challenging environment for children already struggling with their mental health. An emphasis had been placed on wellbeing within two schools, one special school and one mainstream primary school which was being used to support wellbeing of all children and their mental health. Wellbeing week, alongside the topic of wellbeing being covered within assemblies, had been introduced recently as a strategy to support all children within the SENCO’s primary school. A special school headteacher also explained how additional external support is sought to support online safety and wellbeing, stating that, *“I mean if we are talking about wellbeing and bits like that we are doing loads on this next year. There would be more people like [safeguarding and online safety officer] more people like him to provide support.”* It was acknowledged that additional support from external sources was employed in two schools to inform teachers around coping with and addressing raised levels of stress and anxiety in both SEN and non-SEN children. Porter (2019) discusses Ofsted’s most recent framework which has a greater focus on mental health and believes that the focus on children’s mental wellbeing is a step in the right direction for children and teachers.

Mental health and the school curriculum was raised by four adult participants linked to education. The national curriculum and Ofsted guidance was discussed in relation to the impact of the curriculum in supporting teachers and children within the area of wellbeing. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012, p8) suggest that the link between wellbeing and educational outcomes is more complex for SEN due to the diversity of behaviours. Embedding wellbeing into the curriculum was felt to be a positive step to support SEN. There was hope from a special school headteacher and a safeguarding officer regarding the updated guidance which was thought to be making stronger links to mental

health and wellbeing. However, there was uncertainty what this would look like or mean for schools and their current teaching practices. One special school headteacher stated that:

“because now the thing is, it’s going to be around positive mental health. Within the new OFSTED framework, so that could mean anything. And wellbeing as well, so there’s a huge pull on positive wellbeing for staff and for students.”

There was hesitancy regarding what the implications of this would be for the schools as full guidance was currently unavailable, but it was believed that the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing would be a welcome update to the guidance that would support both children and teachers in this area. The UK’s Health and Safety Executive has recently reported that teaching staff and education professionals have high levels of stress, depression and anxiety and identify that wellbeing at work is “the most important dimensions of an individual’s overall wellbeing.” Evidence suggests that mental health and wellbeing is a significant issue within schools for both teachers and staff and has been considered by Ofsted as a priority for education. A headteacher of a SEN school believed that the previous curriculum did not address many of the social and emotional needs of SEN children and required a move toward this to fully support them in the future. A safeguarding officer stated that *“certainly the OFSTED framework is going to have stronger links to wellbeing and the online world from this September.”*

Chapter 8: Analysis of stakeholders and multi-stakeholder approach

The previous chapter explored SEN children and young people in relation to online behaviour and showed how SEN are perceived to be at a greater risk online due to a number of factors influencing their behaviour, including an additional need, a social, emotional or cognitive disability. The majority of children were established to have access to the internet and there were varying perceptions from adults around how to manage the opportunities and risk presented by the internet alongside acknowledgement that the internet is not inherently bad. The impact on mental health was also discussed and it was proposed that the internet and associated online activities of SEN children can have a detrimental impact on mental health. Benefits of devices were explored with an awareness of the opportunities that owning a device can have for SEN children both social and educationally. Voice assisted technology was considered as an excellent example of how technology can be used to support SEN positively.

This chapter explores the role of stakeholders in relation to SEN children and online safeguarding. Stakeholders currently working together in some instances are proposed to be a solution towards minimising risk and maximising opportunities for SEN children (RSPC, 2017). Stakeholders are perceived to exist in a number of sectors which are significant to supporting SEN children online including headteachers, teachers, children, parents, safeguarding team, social workers, charities, crown prosecution service (CPS), SENCO, government, social media companies, police and mental health practitioners. Engaging multiple stakeholders and a multi-agency approach is explored and perceived to present an optimistic solution. Table three is a summary of themes identified by stakeholders which are referred to within the chapter.

Table Three. Summary of themes chapter eight

Theme	Exemplar quote
Stakeholder engagement	<p>“social media companies do have a responsibility” (safeguarding consultant)</p> <p>“teachers will probably develop their expertise as workarounds” (enhanced SEN inspector)</p>
Difficulty working with stakeholders	<p>“severe lack of communication from teachers and the school, it’s always a fight” (SEN parent)</p> <p>“The expertise has to be there. Someone with experience and common sense in</p>

	that field and empathy” (parent governor)
Placing child at centre	<p>“basically, a multiagency team” (social care worker)</p> <p>“we're still going to be speaking to Mum and Dad. Yeah. Oh, you need to be getting consent to these” (social care worker)</p>
Multi-stakeholder approach	<p>“as I’ve taken over the role as SENCO I’ve really tried to foster really positive relations with parents” (SENCO)</p> <p>“But also then it's the things of governors and their understanding” (enhanced SEN inspector)</p>
Multi-stakeholder best practice	<p>So effectively I run workshop sessions, one to ones, parent support, student support around keeping children safe online) (parent governor)</p> <p>“what they should then be able to do is liaise with agencies who have skill and knowledge in this” (retired police officer)</p>

Stakeholder Engagement

A significant theme arising from the majority of adult participants when discussing online behaviour and safeguarding was related to stakeholder engagement across multiple levels. Within the field of supporting and safeguarding SEN children offline and online there were multiple stakeholders that are understood by participants to contribute or be of relevance here. Stakeholders were understood to include headteachers, teachers, children, parent, safeguarding team, social workers, charities, crown prosecution service (CPS), SENCO, government, social media companies, police and mental health experts, all of which were raised by adult participants. A special school headteacher noted that *“Yeah, give advice or get other agencies involved, which, so a social worker would be another stakeholder.”* A safeguarding consultant identified social media companies as a key stakeholder within the debate also stating that, *“social media companies do have a responsibility.”* Social workers and social media companies would be an example of the wider stakeholder community that sit within the ecosystems model and is suggested to have an impact on the behaviour and development of a child. For example, social workers would be placed within the microsystem and social media companies would sit with industry and the exosystem.

Children as participants, placed within the microsystem were less aware of how the wider stakeholder community contribute to their experiences online. All adult participants commented on the relationship of stakeholders and were aware of a number of challenges and triumphs of stakeholders working together to support a SEN child. As previously discussed, the ecosystems model proposes that the interactions between each system influence behaviour and development but there were raised a number of issues to address and overcome in order for this to be fluid. Examples of stakeholders working together to support a child was raised by all participants excluding children. A headteacher of a special school highlighted a number of existing relationships with other stakeholders that had been central to safeguarding children both offline and online, for example the police. The police were discussed and recognised as a key stakeholder in supporting responses to some of the risky or concerning SEN online and had been necessary to involve on occasions. Full details around the incidents that had triggered police involvement were not discussed fully but views were shared regarding why it is sometimes necessary to involve the police. It was perceived by a headteacher and an adult care social worker that the police involvement had *“got a lot better recently”* they had not been as supportive or understanding in the past. It was felt that working with the police is unavoidable as some incidents within school related to both offline behaviour and online behaviour resulting in the police being contacted. Within the examples given the police were involved in responding to an incident rather than supporting a more proactive response which was felt to be a concern, *“No I don’t think they [police] see that and putting them on the floor and doing you know...that will trauma them, rather than stop the behaviours.”* Further incidents which were reported to the police were discussed by the special school headteacher where children had sent or received sexualised images to other children or where there had been bullying or threatening behaviour evident online. Views regarding the police were discussed and their level of support. In line with the ecosystems model, the police would sit within the exosystem which, if interacting with other systems would include effective interaction between other systems including teachers and schools. There are clearly challenges associated with this which may be related to perceptions of SEN schools and SEN children. Whilst this was not explicitly mentioned, it did evolve that there existed perceptions from teachers, that police did not follow the best course of action when visiting a school.

Another example given by a special school headteacher, SENCO and an enhanced SEN inspector related to relying on external education consultants to provide either training for teachers on specific parts of the curriculum or delivering bespoke workshops to children. External consultants included online safety leads from local safeguarding teams, advisors and wellbeing support and would be situated within the microsystem of the model. A SENCO identified how a local parent had been running wellbeing sessions within the school and felt fortunate to be able to offer this to children; *“we are lucky that we have a parent to run wellbeing sessions within the school.”* The need to offer expertise outside of a school’s capabilities was common amongst the schools in this study and also acknowledged by an enhanced SEN inspector who stated that *“teachers will probably develop their expertise as workarounds or support to deal with what they’re building their experience around.”* Suggesting that there is not always adequate support or access to support within the same system (as part of the ecosystem) or outside of their system. For example, resources within schools may not adequately address concerns or meet the needs of SEN children and access to resources outside of the school may be limited. The UKs Health and Safety Executive outline some of the factors contributing to a poor work life balance for teachers and proposes that the challenging behaviour of children, a lack of skills in certain areas combined with a lack of support from external specialist agencies specifically in relation to SEN are significant here (Ofsted, 2019). Schools reported searching outside of their own expertise to find support for educating around online behaviour and online safety. Working with external stakeholders was viewed very positively as a welcome addition to support the level of knowledge and understanding within teaching teams and to provide additional knowledge and workshops for children. It was suggested that working with other stakeholders to provide a more

rounded and holistic approach within an education setting was helpful where knowledge in particular areas felt to be limited or lacking. An enhanced SEN inspector highlighted a national need for teacher training for online safety and stated that *“it's finding appropriate training because the research we found in 2015, there was two things that came out as real weaknesses across the whole country. One was the availability, the frequency and the quality of training that staff had for online safety across the board, not just with ACMD, but when you focus into SEND and you are going into those nuances and those niches.”*

Another key relationship identified is the relationship with a parent or carer of a child within a school. The parent teacher relationship was identified as important but not always easy to navigate, as was discussed in relation to the challenges which can arise here. A SENCO agreed in recognising the benefits of a successful, two-way relationship with parents and stated that, *“we have to say to parents now, we have to try and teach the parents to spend quality time with their children and turn phones off.”* One special school headteacher did identify also that relationships with parents of a SEN child can be “challenging” and commented (as previously noted), that in her own experience a good majority of the children attending her school have parents who have mental health issues or an additional need themselves. It was understood that this has created a more challenging environment when trying to support a child both online and offline. There had be consideration within the school around how to appropriately engage and involve parents. Both of these stakeholders, parents and teachers exist within different systems of the ecosystems model, where it is identified that forming relationships between each system is again a challenge. It was highlighted that parents (within the microsystem) and teachers (within the mesosystem) had some difficulties communicating and engaging for the best interest of the child. It was perceived that some parents had mental health or additional needs as well as the child, which was suggested to cause further barriers. It was acknowledged communication with some parents of children within the school required further intervention. One of the reasons proposed by a parent governor of the special school was thought to be a feeling of intimidation or inadequacy that some parents feel when communicating and approaching teachers. This was based on her own experience as a parent and as a parent governor. Feedback from parents locally, had suggested that they had not approached the school for this reason and were more comfortable communicating with other parents at the school. It was concluded that this was a preferred method for some parents who felt able to ask questions and discuss issues relating to their child. The challenges were suggested here to exist both ways, for example from micro to mesosystem and from meso to microsystem for both parents and teachers.

The narrative from within schools both special schools and mainstream is that they work towards maintaining an open level of communication and knowledge sharing with parents as part of their safeguarding strategy. This involves organising online safety events and information packs to share with parents and to try to establish a dialogue. A safeguarding consultant discussed his own experience of running workshops for parents and stated that *“when I stand up in front of parents in terms of, you know leading by example 90% of 12 to 16 years olds believe their parent don't follow their own rules on screen time.”* Staksrud and Livingstone (2009, p3) highlight how solutions to the online debate include raising awareness amongst parents alongside teacher training as well as supporting the coping response of children online. Working closely with parents was identified as a key stakeholder relationship in supporting children's online behaviour regardless of the challenges with the value of a successful and trusting relationship acknowledged by participants. There was a level of frustration from all parent participants who felt they were proactively trying to support their child but frequently met with barriers which inhibited or delayed progress. As previously discussed, where different stakeholders exist in different systems, there appears to be barriers to effective communication and engagement towards the best interest of the child. This was raised frequently by participants. Despite the perception that working with the broader stakeholder community would be a desirable outcome, it was suggested that liaising with a number of stakeholders causes a layer of frustration for all adult

participants when trying to find a solution and consider how to best safeguard a child online. Stakeholders included within this discussion included, local safeguarding teams, local police and social media organisations. A Special school headteacher spoke positively around the parent forum which had been set-up to overcome some of the challenges and stated that *“we have our parent group. There has been some online training there.”*

With reference to the above example of parents working with teachers and schools involving police where challenges were focused on and discussed, it was felt that working with small groups of stakeholders was not specifically acknowledged or realised by the majority of adult participants to currently be effective in addressing overall, the online behavioural concerns of SEN children, but there did exist an awareness of and presentation of situations where stakeholders had worked together towards a common goal or solution. The focus was broadly upon the difficulties of working with other stakeholders, as opposed to the positives and benefits. Engaging a range of stakeholders to support online behaviour was suggested to have been a necessary step for all adult participants as both a reactive response or a more proactive response at times. Engagement of the broader stakeholder community was clearly unavoidable but welcomed by participants when trying to effectively safeguard a child online. All adult participants commented on other stakeholders and their level of accountability and responsibility within the online arena, but responses varied amongst adult participants on their level of success. There emerged a perception that at least some stakeholders were not entirely supportive of SEN children or lacked understanding to provide a sufficient level of support. Specifically, police have been previously discussed by a special school headteacher, but social media companies were also not viewed in a positive light by parents and a safeguarding consultant who believes that *“I think social media companies have a massive role to play.”* A parent of a SEN child within mainstream primary education shared an example of a social media company being less than supportive *“I reported the behaviour but nothing happened and I couldn’t get in touch with anyone at Facebook to follow-up.”* A parent governor had negative feelings towards social media stating that *“Facebook, the same with Instagram, Snapchat I won’t have cause I think it’s just lethal.”* Social media companies were one of the few stakeholders which were identified within the exosystem and were consistently perceived as being influential on children and online behaviour. There was perceived to be a lack of support from social media companies either from personal experience or from a perceived threat or fear from parents and teachers. It was suggested that social media companies, situated in the exosystem were difficult to communicate and engage with in relation to SEN children and online engagement.

Social media companies were specifically identified here by three parent participants as providing less than helpful advice and being perceived as being unwilling to help. Social media had been suggested to be a stakeholder which had been central to some safeguarding concerns linked to the online behaviour of their children. The use of social media was thought by stakeholders within the micro and meso systems to facilitate risky behaviour without any level of accountability for some of the consequences it was contributing too. Parents felt let down by social media for the level of support and advice they were able to offer and provide for SEN children. Griffen (2014, p116) argues that the challenges are amplified for vulnerable children and may actually require more protection online. All adult participants and children had an awareness of social media with varying perspectives on the benefits of it. Ofcom (2017) reported that 53% of 8-11 year-olds and 87% of 12-15 year-olds have visited social media sites or apps including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube. It was perceived that social media companies need to do more to support parent and children in order to reduce risk online, but there was little clarity about what this meant or how social media could specifically reduce risk online for SEN children.

Parents, headteachers and a mental health practitioner had the highest level of concern regarding children accessing social media, as previously discussed, having negative implications for some SEN

children. Marchant et al (2017) argues that social media and the act of sharing online can be therapeutic for some children but destructive for others. The destructive nature of social media was more commonly the focus for the participants specifically for SEN children and managing their online behaviour and interactions. It was expressed overall that social media companies could go further and do more to support SEN. Experience of contacting a social media company or raising concerns was met by one participant with a limited response. Details were not discussed but the view expressed here was one of frustration. A parent governor explained an experience of trying to resolve an online issue for a SEN child and stated that *“so we all kept reporting the thing and it all came back that it hadn’t breached any of their guidelines. Well how is that, but you can post a picture up of your grandchild and it breached nudity, you know. It’s too fluid, it doesn’t make sense.”* The response from the social media company was felt to be less than satisfactory and that the guidelines were unsuitable or not fit for purpose, specifically for SEN children.

Difficulty working with stakeholders

Limitations of working with other stakeholders within the arena of online safety was identified from all adult participants and were thought to stem from the varying perspectives, attitudes around SEN children and more broadly personal perceptions related to online behaviour. There appeared to be a consensus that working with stakeholders within different systems within the ecosystems model was a desired outcome towards providing support for SEN children, but it was felt that the reality was potentially more challenging to navigate. Perceptions from teachers, parents, headteachers, SENCO, police, safeguarding leads and mental health were united in an agreement that a multi-agency approach should be part of the solution and it should be a reasonable approach to share knowledge and resources. Parents as stakeholders were commonly discussed amongst participants in relation to the role and influence they can have in supporting their SEN children online. There were common difficulties discussed from a parental perspective of working with schools and the wider safeguarding and education environment. Challenges parents perceived in relation to working with a number of different stakeholders, included the difficulty in finding support for their child, in the form of either a person, a team or finding resources in areas linked to safeguarding to help with a specific issue. Two parents of SEN children discussed the difficulty in finding or being signposted to information that would help their child. One parent stated that *“I was never told by the school or given any information, it just wasn’t shared with me.”* Another parent stated that there was a *“severe lack of communication from teachers and the school, it’s always a fight and it shouldn’t be that way.”* Of concern from parents was a belief that the help and support is limited due to lack of funding, training or knowledge. Both parents felt that teachers were not informed or perhaps fully trained in the area of SEN and at times didn’t have the time to help, which left the parents feeling very frustrated and not knowing where to seek help. Livingstone et al (2017, p79) argue that schools are the primary source of information for online safety and represent the *“most preferred and accessible source of information for learning about online child safety across all age groups.”* Other sources including internet service providers and friends and families were considerably less preferred. Evidence suggests that parents may be unaware of where to look for support and resources outside of education adding to a level of frustration that they feel resources are not available. As a consequence of this it could be suggested that it can be challenging to seek information and/or resources from the broader stakeholder community or from stakeholders sitting in a different system. There appeared to evolve a level of frustration from participants where these challenges were encountered.

All parents discussed the difficulty in finding the right person to speak to or locating information needed to support their child. There were experiences shared from all parents around being sent from one organisation to another organisation in one continuous loop without finding a solution with one parent identifying that, *“if we had been given the right information at the start, it would have been a lot less complicated.”* There were suggestions from all parents that a number of stakeholders or organisations, which are well placed to provide a level of advice or support did not want to take responsibility, especially when more risky or taboo issues were trying to be resolved. Charities were raised here by four adult participants as one of these organisations where there was hope that advice or signposting could be offered. However, the views of charities were overwhelmingly negative in the advice they were able to give, described by one parent governor as *“misguided”*. It was perceived that charities were often risk averse with the predominant view from stakeholders within the micro and meso systems, that charities could go further in providing support for SEN children. Specifically, it was raised here that SEN children have often complex, unique and individual needs which cannot be addressed more broadly. It was suggested that there were challenges here for some charities. There was a view that whilst charities are a key stakeholder, further resources need to be developed that are specific to SEN children and online safeguarding. Again, evidence suggests that there is a lack of awareness around where to seek help or if the appropriate resources are available. The parent governor highlighted a need for any stakeholders engaging in the online safety area and SEN should, *“have a knowledge base. Not someone that oversees all of them and only knows about one thing. It’s a bit like going to a dentist for a verruca, you know. They don’t deal with that, it’s not conducive. The expertise has to be there. Someone with experience and common sense in that field and empathy.”* There was raised a concern that a lack of knowledge of SEN is contributing to a level of frustration and some stakeholders are not able to address concerns because they are not fully informed. This is predominantly applied to the wider stakeholder community sitting within the meso and exo systems, for example social media companies being unable to support a specific additional need or being unable to respond appropriately. Experiences shared from all parent participants in relation to their own child supported this concern.

Placing the child at the centre

One participant working in primary health and adult social care shared experiences of working successfully with a number of agencies to support SEN children and adults within the care system and individuals that are identified as vulnerable. Agencies relevant here include GPs, mental health practitioners, community health care workers, social workers at all levels including senior management level and children’s disability services. The approach shared here was an example of stakeholders placed within different systems of the ecosystems model working effectively with each other towards a common goal. The approach was deemed as successful in sharing knowledge and educating stakeholders in different ecosystems when supporting SEN children and children with disabilities. The approach was discussed in relation to placing, the individual at the centre, for example the child and utilising knowledge and support from external stakeholders within the community. The value of working with a number of stakeholders was significant as it was the only experience shared by a participant which was deemed to be working successfully. It was stated from the participant working in social care and learning disability that the strategy is, *“basically, a multiagency team where you have social workers, health, mental health, police, majority, social workers, probably then place a couple of mental health. Maybe one nurse. And they work collaboratively.”* There was an emphasis on placing the child at the centre and there existing interaction between different systems which are bi-directional. The role of the child as primary stakeholder was highlighted from the social care

participant with a view from a wider policy perspective which considered the issue of decision-making and consent within legislation. Disability law was stated by the social care participant as being *“incredibly paternalistic”* and suggested that this removed rights from a child regarding their care. It was argued that consent should always include a dialogue with the child at the centre and should not be the sole responsibility or decision of a parent. The inclusion of the child as the primary stakeholder within any decision-making process was viewed as paramount alongside the involvement of all stakeholders to truly provide an informed and appropriate response to safeguarding issues both offline and online. It was argued that *“we're still going to be speaking to Mum and Dad. Yeah. Oh, you need to be getting consent to these arrangements from the person. Of course, the family are important. That's not taking them away.”*

Placing the child at the centre of any decision made in relation to them was felt to be highly significant to ensuring the correct decision is made in relation to them. Phippen and Bond (2019) argue that a more holistic approach to safeguarding children online is required, which places the child at the centre but still takes into account the role of other stakeholders in the wider community. This approach is supported further by the Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystems model which places children at the heart of the model and recognises the external factors and entities which contribute to the development of a child. Evidence supports a narrative around a stakeholder model of online safety for SEN children which encourages a multi stakeholder approach, placing the children at the centre of interactions and decision making. Oliver and Knight (2007, p116) identify that disabled children and additional needs have frequently been excluded from being a part of the decision-making process around issues which affect their lives, which is viewed as a common problem. Without potentially understanding issues from a child's perspectives it may be difficult to gain a greater understanding of factors influencing the child's development, both positively and negatively (Roda and Tudge, 2003). Consequently, there may evolve a further justification for placing a SEN child at the centre of the ecosystems model or a framework which aims to extend understanding by recognising entities and factors contributing to development.

All adult participants identified challenges for all stakeholders at an individual level and it was perceived that not one single stakeholder was solely responsible or could contribute fully to safeguarding without at least one other stakeholder involved. The wider stakeholder community was recognised by all participants at various levels and with varying accountability. Each stakeholder was seen as having an important role to play in safeguarding children online and each of the participants spoke around particular stakeholders that they felt had contributed and supported both positively and negatively within their setting. The most common stakeholders were identified as children, parents, teachers, local safeguarding support and the police. There were varying perceptions and experiences from participants around the most commonly identified stakeholders and their level of responsibility.

Multi-stakeholder approach

All adult participants identified stakeholders other than themselves that could provide support for SEN safeguarding outside of their current field who could, or currently do provide a level of support and advice outside of their current level of knowledge and understanding. It was the experience of all adult participants that working with at least one other stakeholder in order to safeguard a SEN child was necessary. This included headteachers, teachers, children, parent, safeguarding team, social workers,

charities, crown prosecution service (CPS), SENCO, government, social media companies, police and mental health experts. It was believed by all adult participants that more stakeholders working together would or has been beneficial towards a more joined-up approach towards safeguarding. A multi-stakeholder approach was broadly suggested by all adult participants to be helpful in supporting and safeguarding SEN children online and it was not believed that a single stakeholder could support a child alone. All adult participants referred to at least one other stakeholder. Franklin et al (2015, p76) highlight from their study the significance of a multi-agency approach for vulnerable children and young people at risk from child sexual exploitation and argue it is critical to response and safeguarding of a child. One response from the study:

'I think it is important to adopt a multi-agency approach in working with all young people and very important for schools and those caring for them to be trained in CSE to be able to 'spot the signs', raise concerns and work with agencies to help them communicate and support young people. Also improved access to and communication with health professionals and those responsible for assessing and diagnosing learning disabilities would help as it can be difficult to determine how to help and support a young person.'

With reference to the ecosystems model, the multi-stakeholder approach which was perceived to be effectively working towards a sound approach to safeguarding children and young people online, reflected different stakeholders placed within different systems of the model. For example, placing the child at the centre and involving a dialogue with children at the micro level, including parents, schools and health care professionals at the meso and exo level and ultimately the social and cultural values adopted towards working with children with disabilities. Interactions between all systems are believed to enable a deeper understanding of the child whilst developing positive relationships which influence the development of a child ((Phippen and Bond,2019 Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p9).

The importance of stakeholders working together was discussed with examples of participants liaising with other stakeholders to support a child online and within the field of safeguarding. A special school headteacher stated, *"that would be a stage further and getting more agencies together to try and triangulate that support for the family and for the child."* Further comments from other participants included:

"Now, in practice, that doesn't often happen. That's where they should be going with it." (Police)

Whilst it was perceived from the majority of adult participants that a multi-stakeholder approach is difficult to achieve, sharing knowledge, experience and resources was viewed as being part of a solution to supporting SEN children online. The sharing of knowledge between stakeholders was believed to contribute to a more positive outcome for SEN children specifically due to some of the often, niche concerns and needs of a child. Staksrud and Livingstone (2009, p365) support that solutions to addressing online safety and education require a number of stakeholders which are able to balance risk and opportunity and argue that "solutions may include state or industry self-regulation, awareness-raising among parents, teacher training or supporting and guiding the coping responses of children themselves" (Staksrud and Livingstone, 2009, p3). Raising the level of knowledge and awareness of SEN within each part of the ecosystem may support a more effective approach to safeguarding whilst balancing the risk and opportunities online. Clearly evidence suggests a strong case for a multi-stakeholder approach to supporting children online, however there is an increased need specifically for SEN children where the demand is even greater. Katz and Asam (2018) report how

vulnerable children are likely to require specialist support and guidance to address often complex needs.

Providing the right kind of support and developing appropriate resources was a key concern for special school headteachers, the parent governor and two external consultants, where it was felt that some resources online are unhelpful for SEN children and complex needs. Noll et al (2009) argue that stakeholders placed within the microsystem, which includes parents and educators, should be equipped to support and respond appropriately to situations where it is believed that vulnerable children are more likely to experience harm online but received less than adequate online support and guidance (Asam and Katz, 2018, p285). A level of frustration was raised by all parents of SEN children from both mainstream schools and SEN schools at primary and secondary level. The frustration from parents were primarily associated to finding additional and current information to support a special need or finding satisfactory advice from external stakeholders. It was perceived by parents that it is difficult to find help based on experiences of having to go to a number of stakeholders with limited results around a range of issues related to their child. Working independently as a parent to find additional support or information was said to be a challenge and was illustrated with examples relating to offline behaviour, online behaviour, supporting a specific additional need and the transition of children from primary to secondary mainstream education.

Multi-stakeholder best practice

Additional training for multiple stakeholders was highlighted by a local safeguarding consultant as being carried out at local levels both within education and the wider safeguarding environment to address online safeguarding concerns. It was suggested by nine adult participants that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding in the area which is contributing to challenges when working with multiple stakeholders. Training had been provided by a local safeguarding lead and was suggested to have been provided to local teachers, police, social workers and mental health experts to fill gaps in this area. It was stated that, *“I work with young as early years all the way up to secondary. I work with Police, Social workers, Mental health experts all around online safety. So effectively I run workshop sessions, one to ones, parent support, student support around keeping children safe online.”* There was an assumption that gaps in knowledge included many issues or topics not currently being addressed in primary and secondary schools that would support children and both offline and online. It was believed that training delivered via workshops were supporting stakeholders to increase their knowledge base and awareness of current issues in the area. There was a concern around current gaps in knowledge amongst a number of stakeholders which was prohibiting effectively working together to safeguard SEN children online. It was highlighted from a police perspective that skills and knowledge should be sought from the wider safeguarding and online environment to holistically support SEN. It was argued that *“what they should then be able to do is liaise with agencies who have skill and knowledge in this. So, the likes of young minds or becomes team or any of the mental health providers or mental illness advisers, including NHS.”* Subsequently this may suggest that adopting an approach which includes stakeholders from across the ecosystems model, who have adequate knowledge of SEN children may be appropriate. The participant reflected upon liaising with multiple agencies as opposed to stakeholders operating in isolation. Phippen and Bond (2019) highlight how there is not one part of the system that can work independently of each other to ensure the “positive development of the child.” Further to this, Street and Katz (2016) report that agencies are less able to support vulnerable children due to a lack of specialist training to deal with complex online cases. The

lack of sufficient knowledge and training was perceived to be a barrier to appropriately safeguarding SEN children.

With reference back to the example shared by one participant working in social care, who had established that they were part of a multi-agency approach commented on why this strategy had been working well. A multi-agency approach that capitalises on a broad range of stakeholders, from different systems within the ecosystems model including social care, mental health and police to liaise with each other and share knowledge to support local individuals and groups. It was explained as *“basically, a multiagency team where you have social workers, health, mental health, police, majority, social workers, probably then place a couple of mental health. Maybe one nurse. And they work collaboratively. In these cases, the police will always say the officers in these teams listen.”* It was highlighted as being a successful collaborative approach relying on specialist knowledge and expertise to provide local support and care for children, young people and adults with disabilities. The specialist knowledge from individuals worked to inform other stakeholders working within the area and was suggested to develop a level of trust between them which had supported a good level of interaction and enabled external agencies to liaise with each other. The multi-agency had been established by the local council as a way of sharing information and facilitating a dialogue between a number of stakeholders with the outcome of supporting those affected. Bond (2013) argues that a whole-community commitment with enormous expertise and resources are required to empower young people to overcome challenges and risk online. Data suggests that this has been achievable in practice where a coordinated and focused response is established.

An enhanced SEN inspector also identified that there had been established pockets of good practice around the country that had been working well in relation to online safety and where agencies and individuals had been able to share knowledge and resources. It was argued that there had been some success here. However, one of the key challenges identified by an enhanced SEN inspector specifically and also from ten other adult participants including special school headteachers, parents, two external consultants, mental health practitioner and the police, is the scarcity of resources that are specific to SEN. It was believed that there exists a lack of awareness around finding resources appropriate for specific needs or a perception that they do not exist which make collaborating with other stakeholders more challenging. This was said to be true across SEN but was considered of particular significance when exploring online behaviour. Pockets of good practice for SEN safeguarding was suggested to exist but was not believed to be common across the country and had required further research to extend knowledge and understanding in the area. Pockets of good practice alongside some outstanding practice across the UK was suggested to exist by an enhanced SEN inspector and argued that, *“pockets of good practice, there's pockets of it. There was outstanding practice and there's pockets of absolutely inadequate practice. The problem is, if the pockets never meet, they'll never be able to compare themselves and do what they know.”*

There was suggested that there should exist a system which pulls together experiences and practice past and present from a range of stakeholders to inform current knowledge base, reflective of the chronosystem within the ecosystems model which considers developments over time which will potentially influence practice. As previously discussed in chapter 2, the narrative around SEN children, children's rights and policy have been highly influential upon the development of children, primarily towards including children as part of the decision making process and giving them a voice. The areas of outstanding practice which currently exist in isolation draw conclusions from resources and practice which have been effectively implemented by stakeholders to improve and attend to current needs and gaps of SEN. The pockets of good practice remain in bubbles and are contained within a specific group of people, local sector or local area, it was suggested by the enhanced SEN inspector. Conclusions from a 2017 Cybersurvey (Asam and Katz, 2017, p54), propose that sharing knowledge

amongst families, groups and peers is useful so that children and young people can be advised and supported adequately.

The idea of a forum was proposed by the parent governor and an enhanced SEN inspector as part of the solution to sharing good practice and knowledge that was considered to exist. A forum where questions can be asked of other stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally was thought to be needed and could be a place where sound advice and experiences can be shared with stakeholders. It was stated by an enhanced SEN inspector, *“the idea of a forum where you can put up your questions and you can get people from all around the country, both Wales, England, around the world, even that can come together and get knowledge based.”* It was suggested that there had been some examples of inadequate practice seen across the UK which had been detrimental to SEN. It was not discussed what or where inadequate practice existed, only that the outstanding practice should be shared in order to facilitate a dialogue and support inadequacies within the groups more widely. Katz and Asam (2018) recognise that specialist knowledge and guidance is required from a range of stakeholder to support vulnerable children online and acknowledge that this is currently lacking within education. Three parents of SEN commented on the difficulty in accessing knowledge and guidance at a time when they needed it. Schools were recognised as doing as much as they can to provide support but there was a perception from two parents that schools could go further. There was a belief from one mainstream primary SEN parent that there is *“a lack of time and funding for schools to support SEN children. They just don’t have the money.”* A lack of funding was perceived to be contributing to the issue.

The eleven adult participants suggested that increasing the level of knowledge around online behaviour and SEN, raising awareness of current resources, sharing good practice and experiences would be a positive approach and strategy to addressing some of the current online safeguarding concerns for SEN. One parent of a mainstream primary SEN child stated that *“some of the resources out there are fantastic but I was never told about them, even by the school or teachers.”* It was considered that working together with other relevant stakeholders, providing support to other stakeholders in line with a more fluid or joined up approach would be helpful. There had been evidence to support this proposed by the eleven participants. Tan (2003, p112) comments on how a multi-stakeholder approach in children’s services supports deepening partnerships between a range of stakeholders including parents, stakeholders at institutional and professional levels.

An approach linking a broader range of stakeholders together within an efficient system or framework which is transparent and easily accessible was considered by one headteacher as a solution which would be difficult to implement but makes sense. It was believed it would provide a more robust approach and make allowances for individual stakeholders, which may otherwise not be fully present or fully equipped to provide support to a child. It was acknowledged that *“if you take one stakeholder out for that child. At least then there is still that support. 70% of the time there is that person but then that person...you know we will give suggestions.”* Parents were given as an example here of being a key stakeholder who may lack skills and knowledge to provide support. This example was based on her own experiences of some parents not being fully present or entirely capable of supporting their child. Where one stakeholder may be less able to provide support for a child, there could be a strategy or infrastructure in place which provides a level of support provided by other stakeholders to better safeguard a child. An online safety consultant stated that *“I think that everybody has a responsibility”*

Liaising or working with other stakeholders was perceived as being a positive and workable practice and had been reported as being successful by those working in education or those working closely with education. As discussed previously, these views were supported with examples around where this had already happened with positive results. Working successfully with a small number of

stakeholders was a more common experience shared by adult participants as opposed to a successful working relationship within a larger and wider range of stakeholders working within the area. Working more broadly with stakeholders in the wider system was discussed as being more challenging. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that the wider environment consisting of the exosystem and macrosystem sits outside of a child's immediate environment and encompasses social and cultural values which can operate individually or in unison to influence the child at the centre. The significance of these wider systems can yield power and direct the wellbeing and development of a society and subsequently indirectly influencing a child. Interactions between a broad number of stakeholders is recognised to support the healthy development of a child and their wellbeing as opposed to stakeholders working in isolation and produce more positive outcomes (Vanervan, 2008; Sabates and Dev, 2012, Phippen and Bond, 2020). Liaising with stakeholders sitting in these wider systems proved difficult for stakeholders placed within the microsystems which immediately impact a child.

Adult participants all acknowledged that fostering or developing relationships with other stakeholders is beneficial for developing a deeper and more consistent experience and body of knowledge, specifically related to online behaviour and SEN children. A lack of understanding and knowledge was suggested to exist by eleven participants working within or with strong links to SEN education, social care and the emergency services. It was suggested that there is a lack of awareness around the role of some stakeholders in supporting SEN children fully, alongside a lack of either training or knowledge.

There was an overall majority of participants suggesting that there does exist a lack of knowledge and training amongst key stakeholders in relation to SEN and online safeguarding. Research supports that a more consistent and united approach was needed to fulfil a multi-agency approach placing the child at the centre.

The role of stakeholders in relation to SEN children and online safeguarding have been explored here and examples around stakeholders working together have been shared by participants. Perceptions in relation to the effectiveness of a multi-stakeholder approach have been identified alongside the perceived challenges towards a multi-stakeholder response to SEN children's online safeguarding. RSPH (2017) called for action to be taken from stakeholders to support children's emotional and mental wellbeing specifically in relation to their online interactions. Stakeholder engagement and relationships has been recognised as a significant step towards creating a positive environment supporting children online, but is one that is sometimes difficult to establish and navigate towards the best interests of the child, as identified within this chapter. Further perceptions from stakeholders are discussed in the next chapter within the context of policy and guidance and the broader stakeholder and ecosystem environment.

Chapter 9: Stakeholder views on resources and policy guidance

The previous chapter showed the links between supporting SEN children online and a multi-stakeholder strategy to provide a holistic solution. A range of stakeholders were identified which are significant to the debate around minimising risk whilst ensuring opportunities for children with an additional need. Lack of training and knowledge in the area were perceived to be a contributing factor to some of the problems encountered by some stakeholders. With reference to Bronfenbrenner (1979), which proposes that stakeholders might sit within different systems external to the child, it was argued that a more seamless approach which involves stakeholders working together to share knowledge and experiences would be a workable solution. Current limitations and difficulties were acknowledged alongside practical solutions proposed which would support a child when placed at the centre.

This chapter explores the available resources to support SEN children online and identifies that there is suggested to be a lack of appropriate resources available for stakeholders to provide adequate support. Asam and Katz (2018) report that age-appropriate distinct and tailored approaches are required for more vulnerable groups which are not widely available for SEN. Educating SEN children offline in healthy relationships and sex education are felt to be fundamental to supporting online behaviour by establishing a solid foundation to build upon. A link between offline behaviour and online behaviour is proposed which is suggested to subsequently impact on current and future lives of vulnerable children. A child that is at risk offline has a strong possibility to be at risk and vulnerable online (UKCCIS, 2017). Healthy relationships and sex education were introduced into the school curriculum in England in September 2020 and made compulsory to teach. It was argued that these have not been appropriately addressed previously within the school curriculum in order to fully support SEN children. The curriculum and online safety are proposed to be useful to supporting online safeguarding when taught in collaboration with other subjects within schools and embedded as part of a whole school approach. Policy and guidance are discussed with an overarching perspective according to perceptions around how it directs and impacts education and associated stakeholders. Table four is a summary of themes identified by stakeholders which are referred to within the chapter.

Table four. Summary of themes chapter nine

Theme	Exemplar quote	
Resources and strategies to support online behaviours of SEN	<p>“the parents trying to find the things that help as well, you just seem to get NSPCC, Barnado’s and then sent back to your local safeguarding” (parent governor)</p> <p>“there seems to be nothing just on the safety part” (SEN school headteacher)</p>	
Teaching healthy relationships	<p>“I’ll do some work with him [SEN child] around healthy relationships about</p>	

	<p>consent and personal boundaries, around what's ok online and what's not ok online" (sex ed consultant)</p> <p>"possibly SEND may have different online safety requirements or capacities or competencies" (enhanced Ofsted inspector)</p>	
Online safety curriculum	<p>"traditional curriculum doesn't address social and emotional needs" (special school headteacher)</p> <p>"I think online safety teaching has moved from being kind of ad hoc, not on the radar, not within the landscape to a phase of, oh, my goodness, we've got to do something" (enhanced SEN inspector)</p>	

Resources and strategies to support online behaviour of SEN

Twelve adult participants identified that access to good advice and resources to support SEN children online are lacking. Finding information and resources related to searching for information about SEN, additional needs and online safeguarding was felt to be limited. All adult participants expressed their thoughts and experiences around the difficulty in finding information and were concerned that the resources were difficult to find or were non-existent. Views were expressed here from two headteachers, a SENCO, three parents of SEN, a parent governor, two educational consultants, an enhanced SEN inspector, a retired police officer and a mental health practitioner. A parent governor previously identified that, *"the parents trying to find the things that help as well, you just seem to get NSPCC, Barnado's and then sent back to your local safeguarding"* and had setup and established her own forum for providing support and resources to SEN children and their families. Another parent expressed dismay at the difficulty in seeking information and advice to support her child at school with his additional need, *"the school knew nothing and I had to find the information to give them to support [childs name]."* Resources appear to be a challenge to access and are believed to be scarce to non-existent especially in relation to SEN (Rose, 2009, p6). A Cybersurvey 2017 (Asam and Katz, 2017, p54) identified that there exists a lack of advice for parent regarding online safeguarding, which supports the findings that the appropriate advice is lacking.

One special school headteacher stated that *"there seems to be nothing just on the safety part. Because me and our online safety lead did some training on it and actually if you google esafety [online] training not a lot comes up."*

There was perceived to be a lack of understanding or awareness in relation to finding training or seeking information about online safety. The terminology used in this example used the currently outdated term 'esafety' and referred to the more commonly used term online safeguarding but the experience from the headteacher was one of frustration regarding her difficulty in finding information and training.

Reliable and sound information and advice were widely viewed as being needed and understood to be something that is difficult to find to support SEN online. It was felt that due to some of the nuances and quite specialist needs of SEN, these resources were difficult to find. Perceptions around the types of resources which would be useful in supporting online safeguarding varied, but it was felt from all adult participants that further advice and support had been required previously and had not been available or had not been sufficient. A parent governor discussed trying to source advice from charities and stated that, *"I think when it is the bigger charities and when it comes to a child of SEN or additional need or a different way of thinking. None of them are geared up to understanding, you know neurotypicals."* An adult social worker argues that the current advice is *"so wet. It does not portray the online life of individuals in any way, shape or form. The guidance out there is just rubbish."* Several reports suggest a lack of sound advice for SEN and disabled children across a range of areas including healthy relationships and personal safety skills. Several reports identify a lack of effective sex and relationships education for disabled children, including those with learning disabilities, as well as a dearth of personal safety skills education (Blake and Muttock, 2004, NSPCC, 2021). Ofsted (2019) report that teachers are impacted by a range of issues which prevent them from sufficiently managing children's behaviour including a lack of support from senior managers and a perceived lack of resources. A special school headteacher explained how timely access to support and advice would be helpful to addressing social media storms as they arise and argued that *"if we have instant information somehow because, well we got it off somewhere but then it was about 3 days later that it was coming in, you know onto the key and stuff like that."*

Finding resources to support SEN needs had been identified as a problem alongside finding resources or help to support a new and emerging issue. For example, where social media storms previously had stirred up worry or concern amongst children, it was felt there had been a pressure for staff to respond. Phippen and Bond (2020, p27) discuss the Momo challenge which is described as a social media storm that instructed children to self-harm during 2019. Phippen and Bond (2020, p 27) argue that Momo became *"the key safeguarding issue affecting young people in primary settings and on social media."* Regardless of the reasons for becoming a social media storm, stakeholders were required to respond. The special school headteacher described how due to the attention in the media, children were getting scared, *"because it's just news everywhere. But then we can educate them and speak to them about that, any worries, any concerns, and that this isn't true. So, when the next MoMo comes up, when JoJo comes up we will know what to do."*

It was identified that staff felt unprepared or lacked confidence to respond to the situation. It was suggested faster access to information would be helpful as the time it can take to find resources is time consuming. The special school headteacher argued that she needs *"more tools, more up to date you know we have the local safeguarding board, so you know is there an government esafety board?"* and that *"faster and more up to date"* information would be helpful. Four adult participants including two special school headteachers and two educational consultants argued that frequently a more reactive approach is called for rather than a proactive response. Teachers and headteachers felt that they were doing their best with their current resources and had found some sources which

were useful. Charities and local safeguarding support and agencies were discussed in relation to providing support including NSPCC, Barnardos and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The feedback however was less than positive and suggested that participants were not entirely satisfied with the advice and resources available. It was suggested that the advice available does not fully support stakeholders in addressing wide ranging SEN needs. An adult social worker argued that *“[high functioning] needs to be proper, tailored and accessible information for this client group going through the age span.”* Asam and Katz (2018, p297) discuss how vulnerable groups are at a higher risk than non-vulnerable groups and require an age-appropriate distinct and tailored approach. Evidence and research suggest that the resources are not widely available to fully support SEN children online, suggesting that there is a group of children that may not have been adequately educated in this area. A one size fits all is not acceptable and does not acknowledge nuances of SEN children and their changing needs over time (Phippen, 2018, Asam and Katz, 2018, Emmens and Phippen, 2010). An enhanced SEN inspector states that availability of resources to train educational staff in SEN is limited, suggesting further that the online safety needs of SEN children are not being met:

“but when you focus into SEND and you’re going into those nuances and those niches. So, the training becomes even more rare.”

Schools are a significant resource for educating children around staying safe online and supporting the development of healthy relationship both online and offline (DfE, 2014). With reference to the Byron review (2008) it is suggested safeguarding advice through the curriculum should raise skills of both parents and children. A sex education consultant identified that, *“generally schools seem to lead on a lot of the work on this [healthy relationships]. There’s no agencies locally that specialise in working with special schools around anything.”* It could be suggested that schools are lacking appropriate resources or access to resources to enable them to fully support and prepare children to navigate the online world whilst minimising risk. A SENCO discussed resources that she had pulled together some resources which were helpful and not UK based. *“Australia seems to do really good online safety resources online. So, we use quite a lot of those. We’ve just kind of pulled in bits and bobs from all over the place.”*

SEN resources for online safeguarding were perceived as being vague or non-existent and the resources which do exist, are not believed to address issues for SEN children. A number of participants have expressed concern or confusion about where to find appropriate resources with two headteachers, SENCO and two educational consultants believing that the types of resources available were felt to require improving. A safeguarding consultant questioned the areas which could be addressed to support SEN children online and asked *“are we better at educating young people around healthy relationships, around consent, around you know ways to use it safely?”*

Teaching healthy relationships

Teaching healthy relationships was raised from two educational consultants, working within the field of safeguarding and sex education, two headteachers, a SENCO and an adult social worker. Participants suggested that teaching about healthy relationships offline and providing support for SEN children in relation to social and emotional issues would have a significant impact on how SEN are able to navigate risks and determine healthy relationships online. It was believed that by providing support and education around healthy relationships, risks could be managed to a greater degree. It was suggested that a greater level of awareness and understanding here could impact

behaviour both online and offline and that these would complement each other. A sex education consultant described how *"I'll do some work with him [SEN child] around healthy relationships about consent and personal boundaries, around what's ok online and what's not ok online and what the law says."* A social worker argued that *"it starts with problems in the offline. So, you've got a group of people in SEND who aren't supported to understand relationships."*

It was suggested that there is an assumption from some stakeholders that children develop an understanding around healthy relationships prior to going online and potentially forming friendships online but it was acknowledged by participants working within education, that for SEN children this can be a very complex issue. There were certain factors considered important to supporting SEN children to facilitate and establish healthy relationship, which included setting boundaries, understanding about consent, sex education and developing resilience. From September 2020 it was made compulsory for schools to teach healthy relationships as part of the new relationships and sex education curriculum (DfE, 2019), which is believed to be a step towards offering age specific advice and guidance (Katz and Asam, 2018, p28). A safeguarding consultant agrees and discussed the importance of *"having age-appropriate conversations with them. When I am working with teenagers, we will have that discussion around porn and consent."* All adult participants acknowledged that there is a link between healthy relationships online and healthy relationships offline with solutions proposed that teaching healthy relationships offline to all children would contribute to a more positive experience online and less risk. Teaching healthy relationships to SEN children was felt to provide some challenges and obstacles due to the complex nature of additional needs and social and emotional issues. An enhanced SEN stated that, *"possibly SEND may have different online safety requirements or capacities or competencies, but it doesn't prohibit them from developing their interest in using the Internet effectively to help them."*

It was felt that some of the capacities or competencies linked to emotional and cognitive differences or challenges for SEN need to be taken into consideration in order to be fully supported. The link between teaching healthy offline behaviours as a precursor to teaching healthy online behaviours was identified by all participants working within education, as a solution or a part of the solution for addressing challenging or risky behaviour online. It was felt that many of the problems online have their roots in offline behaviour, which can set a pattern for online behaviour. O'Keefe and Clarke Pearson (2011, p 800) argue that children and young people who have poor social skills offline will struggle to develop healthy relationships online and if not addressed are unlikely to develop healthy relationships online at all. A narrative emerged associating social skills and behaviour offline significantly impacting behaviour and interactions online. It was argued from all adult participants that there does exist a vulnerable group of SEN that are unsupported with their online behaviour and lack understanding around how to behave appropriately, has led to risky behaviour and experiences. A safeguarding consultant believes that some children *"don't understand the emotional impact of that kind of forthright, honest answers, or they don't understand and empathize with others online."* Emotional and social abilities and difficulties was widely acknowledged from the participants working within education, to be an issue for SEN children offline and online. An enhanced SEN inspector stated that *"you get that from online safety that children with different needs will have completely disparate experiences and requirements."* Livingstone and Helsper (2007, p620) argue that there exists strong and direct links between what happens online and what happens offline, reporting that interactions online will inevitably open children up to risk as *"opportunity and risk go hand in hand"* (Livingstone and Bober, 2002, p3). A child that is at risk offline has a strong possibility to be at risk and vulnerable online (UKCCIS, 2017).

Adequate teaching around these topics was considered to be particularly important for SEN children and it was suggested should play a part within their education. Delivering and educating

children around issues related to consent, boundaries, healthy relationships and acceptable behaviour were felt to be significant here by nine participants.

Nine participants including two education consultants, one parent governor, two headteachers, a SENCO, an enhanced SEN inspector, a mental health practitioner and a social worker highlighted that there could be more focus on educating children on healthy relationships offline which would act as a good support mechanism for establishing and building healthier relationships online. An adult social worker stated that, *"I think there needs to be support and education. Just generally. About relationships. About friendship. About sex. About just the general things. Yes, offline world."* It was felt that challenges exist for all children but there was special consideration around SEN children and their interpretation of healthy relationships which could be based on a lower level of emotional literacy and awareness. Whilst it was not suggested that there needed to be a different approach for SEN children within education around teaching healthy relationships, it was suggested that this may be an area that is more widely taught across the curriculum or placed more centrally to their learning. A social worker stated that *"none of these sorts of offline world preparation has taken place to enable them to envisage some of this in the online space as well."*

Research suggests that children with an additional need have a greater need for developing attitudes towards healthy relationships regardless of their need being physical, emotional or cognitive, because they would naturally sit within a more vulnerable group who are less likely to recognise and report abuse (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Horowitz, 2007 cited in Franklin, Raws, & Smeaton, 2015 and Taylor et al, 2015). Within education it was established that healthy relationships form part of the PSHE curriculum but there was concern from participants that currently the topic is not adequately understood to be effectively delivered to fully support SEN children with their online. The impact of how building healthy relationships offline can significantly support the online behaviour was an issue that was raised by nine participants and a topic that was suggested could be explored further. A special school headteacher expressed her belief around the importance of teaching SEN life skills and argues that it is, *"not so important to come out with a certificate but a shift needed towards addressing what is important for the children – not just academic."*

A lack of preparation before going online was identified in relation to adequately supporting offline behaviour which could prepare children for some of the more difficult or challenging behaviours they may experience online. An assumption deducted from this was that preparation could impact future behaviours and support a more proactive approach going forward. Preparation related to exploring issues around acceptable and appropriate behaviour within a healthy relationship, establishing boundaries and addressing some of the nuances may be more difficult for SEN children to interpret. A lack of resources was acknowledged alongside a lack of confidence or awareness of the issues within schools, was believed to be a contributing factor here. An enhanced SEN inspector raised the lack of training for teachers alongside other factors which may contribute:

"so not only is staff limited by their experiences and the budgets of their time, but also then you've got strategic leadership limited because governors don't understand it because they don't receive the training as much."

Teaching around healthy relationships offline and in advance of going online was viewed as a positive way to support SEN online safeguarding. There was a view that this was a necessary within education, both within mainstream schools and special schools as part of the curriculum. Healthy relationships within the PSHE curriculum were relied upon to support delivery and feed into current teaching practices within schools. However, there was a view that this does not go far enough, is not

fully reflected within current guidance or that resources and knowledge in this area are lacking. Healthy relationships were linked to staying within the law here and ensuring that SEN children are able to operate both offline and online without breaking the law or putting themselves in any danger or causing harm to others.

Online Safety Curriculum

The primary and secondary school curriculum in England was discussed by participants in relation to online safeguarding and healthy relationship in supporting SEN children. The current curriculum in England was discussed by six participants linked to education including two head teachers, SENCO, parent governor, and two education consultants. The curriculum covers the traditional core academic subjects of English, maths and sciences alongside teaching and developing skills and ability that will develop children as individuals both academically and personally. The national curriculum covers four key stages as well as religious and sex education to both primary and secondary schools, “so children learn the same things. It covers what subjects are taught and the standards children should reach in each subject” (Gov.uk). The curriculum is the same for mainstream schools and special schools.

PSHE is taught as part of the national curriculum within mainstream schools and special schools in supporting a child’s education (PSHE, 2016). RSPC (2017, p25) identify the significance of PSHE education for vulnerable groups and recommend that safe use of social media be taught in PSHE classes to promote mental health and enhance online safeguarding education. It was perceived by adult participants that the curriculum and the range of topics within PSHE has improved in recent years to include topics from online safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing within the weekly schedule. Topics taught within PSHE were also identified as being covered in assemblies and as the focus for whole school activity weeks for example, internet safety week and wellbeing week. The PSHE Association describes the subject that will develop a child’s knowledge, skills and attributes which are needed to help keep them safe and health and will prepare them for future life. It is argued that “when delivered well, PSHE education has an impact on both academic and non-academic outcome for pupils, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged” (PSHE Association, 2016). Previous suggestions from participants reinforce the need for a focus outside of the academic curriculum to support SEN children fully. Two special school headteachers identified the differences for SEN children and their requirement for learning outside of the academic curriculum stating that “*traditional curriculum doesn’t address social and emotional needs*” and a second special school headteacher stating that the curriculum doesn’t always go far enough to support SEN:

“Have I covered this – tick, have I covered this – tick. You know, which is nice to have some kind of guidance and guidelines. However, you do have to bespoke it to your own school, ‘cause every school is very different, different challenges.”

It was identified by six participants that there is a lack of joined up thinking within the curriculum for fully supporting SEN children online and a perception that a more coordinated approach to online safeguarding would be beneficial. The importance of a robust PSHE curriculum is highlighted by Bond (2013) who discusses the importance having online safety training for all teaching and support staff not just for staff teaching the computing curriculum.

Suggestions and solutions assume that there should be consideration of the PSHE curriculum being embedded within other subjects throughout a school and not taught in isolation. The inclusion of PSHE and its curriculum was perceived positively by participants linked to education and all parents where it was acknowledged to be an area that has seen improvements and changes within recent years. It is argued by Katz and Asam (2018) that online safeguarding needs to be embedded *“into the life of the school”*, with sessions repeated throughout the year rather than one-off sessions.

Participants linked to education, spoke positively around PSHE and linked this specifically to developing and supporting children’s behaviour both in school and outside of schools alongside discussions around supporting online behaviour and offline behaviour. Participants were aware of the contribution of PSHE within education and the rationale behind its inclusion, however it was also stated that it may not go far enough in supporting SEN children and some of their additional needs. Recommendations from Whittle et al (2014, p10) argue that the *“early onset internet safety education”* is paramount for children as young as 4 and needs to be rolled out consistently in order to support high risk groups. Evidence suggests that this is being called for within schools in order to support SEN children where needs and requirements may be more complex and require more sophisticated approaches and solutions. Embedding online safeguarding into other areas of the curriculum would be a step towards addressing healthy relationships and online behaviours. Participants here, did identify the importance of PSHE education here and did not suggest that it has not been helpful for children in both primary and secondary education.

Online safeguarding was identified by six participants including two special school headteachers, SENCO, two education consultants and an enhanced SEN inspector as being a key part of the curriculum and a welcome inclusion in recent years. Online safeguarding was suggested by participants to have been an add on to the core curriculum when first introduced without consideration of it needing to be embedded within other subjects. An enhanced SEN inspector highlighted that *“I think online safety teaching has moved from being kind of ad hoc, not on the radar, not within the landscape to a phase of, oh, my goodness, we've got to do something.”* A SENCO highlighted how online safety sits within *“normal computing lessons and we’ve got various resources that we draw on.”* A special school headteacher described *“how the internet safety can’t just be a standalone lesson, actually it needs to be a part of everything we do.”* Asam and Katz (2018, 2018, p297) argue that the current approach to online safeguarding in schools needs revising, which suggests that the current approach and strategy is not addressing the online safeguarding needs of all children across a range of issues. Of concern are the more vulnerable groups who frequently sit within a higher risk category online and whose education needs a more age appropriate distinct and tailored approach (Asam and Katz, 2018).

Chapter 10 - Dissemination of results and contribution to research

This chapter discusses the outcomes of this study which have been disseminated to key stakeholders for feedback and concludes by presenting the significant contributions to research in the field. The outcomes are underpinned by the literature, data collected and analysis of the data which have contributed to the findings. Links are made between the literature and analysis to demonstrate significance around the development and evolution of a framework for SEN online behaviour which has been developed. As a pre-cursor to the framework, the ecosystems approach for child online safety (Phippen and Bond, 2019) has been revised to reflect and consider any adjustments that are specific for SEN online safeguarding and which have subsequently informed the development of the final framework presented. The framework has evolved as a holistic approach to SEN online safeguarding which encompasses guiding principles that can be used to support stakeholders within the field. To add further credibility to the framework, feedback and comments from key stakeholders has been considered, and has informed the revised, final framework which is presented as part of this chapter. Contributions to research are presented towards the end of this chapter to highlight the significance of the research both academically and professionally.

This research has revealed that the online environment presents many opportunities and risks for SEN children who have been identified as being at a higher risk than non-SEN children (Griffin, 2014; Rose, et al, 2009; Steinburg et al,2006), due to their increased levels of vulnerability and challenging behaviours. Research suggest that there exists a perception that there are varying levels of exposure to risk dependant on their particular need, age and parental and social support which impact upon a SEN child's engagement with activities online (Rose, et al, 2009; Livingstone et al, 2005; Bentley et al, 2020). Learning needs impacted by poor levels of mental health, mental disorders and low self-esteem can heighten the risk further and leave this most vulnerable of groups open to experiencing increased levels of online bullying, grooming and risk taking (Asam and Katz, 2018; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Mesch and Talmund, 2006). Skills which do not exist or are underdeveloped in some SEN children can impact on both their offline lives as well as their online lives and contribute to the forming of healthy relationships and interactions (O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). There is perceived to be many opportunities which exist alongside the risks online and include a wealth of opportunities for supporting levels of communication, developing social skills, establishing and maintaining friendships, fun, love and a sense of belonging whilst providing unique opportunities for education and learning, now and in the future (O'Neill and Dinh, 2014; Machackova et al, 2020; EU Kids Online, 2014, Mishna et al, 2009, Jones et al, 2010, 2013). Adult and child perspectives as part of this study highlighted the positive experiences and opportunities available online but also had raised awareness of the risks online. Predominantly, the adult population of the study discussed greater risks online when compared to the children, who were more comfortable sharing the more positive experiences online. Similar research suggests that many of the online opportunities for SEN children can support areas of their lives which may be lacking and that which may benefit from engagement with others to increase a sense of self-worth and acceptance (Wellman and Gulia 1998; McKenna & Bargh 1998). The findings of this research suggest that the adult population of this study perceive there to be concern for SEN children and their level of exposure to online risk and danger. This is perpetuated by their own experiences of working with and engagement with SEN children. The adult perceptions alongside existing research within the field support that SEN children are predominantly seeking social connection, friendship and fun online but that there are safeguarding concerns around how to

sufficiently support online safeguarding, engagement and interactions to mitigate risks. The findings support that there are perceived to exist challenges for SEN children both offline and online which may have a significant impact on their lives. Previous research in this area found that online and offline lives have continued to blur for all children (Miller et al, 2016; Livingstone, 2013, p25) but for children with an additional need, the online world can cause further confusion due to social and emotional factors including trust, cognitive ability and emotional maturity. The findings support similar research around stakeholder views that a more nuanced approach to addressing SEN online safeguarding is needed.

Perceptions of adults within education, social care, police, mental health and family units, within this study all consider that the internet, whilst providing many opportunities for SEN children, does present a number of risks exacerbated by learning needs and disabilities which call for attention and additional support. The findings suggest that adult stakeholders perceive that further support and guidance is needed for stakeholders to support effective safeguarding of SEN children online. Adult participants perceived greater levels of risk than children and a growing concern for the future direction for SEN children online, fearing that there is a lack of guidance and awareness of how best to support. All adult participants had in some way been involved or had responded to an online incident which had either caused harm or had the potential to cause harm and place a child at risk. The findings suggest that perceptions of risk outweigh the perceptions around the opportunities presented for SEN children and there is a growing concern from adult stakeholders that there exists a lack of support and guidance which could contribute to a more positive outcome. There is also a perception from the majority of adults that children need to be protected online and away from danger as opposed to an alternative view of building resilience amongst children which was suggested by a small number of participants. Risk online was discussed to a lesser extent by children within the study due to a number of factors which influenced the data provided by children. These included, as previously discussed in chapter 2 the research site being set within an adult controlled environment, power imbalances and potentially a lack of trust having been adequately established before the interview. As a result, children were less empowered to share more risky experiences and views which ultimately influenced the outcome of the study but provided insights into the experience of including SEN children in research. Bolshaw and Josephidou (2019) highlight how research with children “ask for their views, consider their contexts and also make an effort to understand children’s beliefs and behaviours to determine the rationale behind what they think.” Findings suggests from the study that a balanced approach is required to fully support and safeguard SEN children online, taking into account views from both adults and children in order for an environment to be established which empowers SEN children to navigate between the good and the bad, the opportunities and the risks. The ecosystems approach recognises that there exists a number of interconnected entities and factors which contribute to child development and specifically identifies the significance of including a child’s position in relation to their environmental settings (Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Seeking love and belonging has been presented as fuelling some of the challenging behaviours online as perceived by adults. Existing research suggests that SEN children are believed to be more likely to be seeking love and friendship online due to their increased need for belonging and acceptance (Livingstone et al, 2017), and with the advantages of the internet breaking down barriers to communication, online interactions have become very attractive (Quayle, Jonsson and Lööf, 2012). Findings of this study are similar to previous research which reveals that many of the offline behaviours which exist for children impact on their online behaviours and a link between the two are proposed to influence each other. Adult participants perceived there to exist at times a lack social

skills offline for SEN children, which may result in a lack of social skills online. Adults perceived that SEN children face barriers offline seeking love and belonging which may influence their online experiences. Both offline behaviours and online behaviours can result in both positive and negative outcomes, however the focus for adults is towards the negative outcomes and the lack of knowledge, resources and training to adequately safeguard SEN children online. Children as part of the study did not share these views or suggest that they needed additional safety online. More recently, headteachers and teachers within the study perceived, from their own experiences, there to exist behaviours which include more emotional and social behavioural disorders amongst SEN children which present new challenges for stakeholders. The findings suggest that these changes in behaviours need, have contributed to the uncertainty around how best to safeguard SEN children online.

The findings from adults and children suggest that SEN children's priority and main purpose online is to engage socially with friends, watch media and play games. Low levels of online risk were experienced by children, including receiving nasty messages online and upsetting social media posts, which had impacted negatively on their feelings at the time. There lacked any acknowledgement from children of danger or risk online that they could not cope with. However, as previously discussed this was impacted in part by the presence of an authority figure (headteacher) in the room during interviews with children. It was stated by the headteacher that some children were not being honest during interviews and gave an example of one child who had been exposed to online grooming which had resulted in their internet access at home being restricted. Consistent with current research and findings, the internet plays a major role in the lives of children with the vast majority owning a smart phone and/or tablet (Ofcom, 2020). Devices were viewed as something which is fun and a part of daily life. Children did not acknowledge the role of technology in the classroom or identify that they used technology for anything other than leisure activities. Teachers had a more negative view of mobile phones and their use in school due to insights into bullying and sexting experiences of children, however it was acknowledged that mobile phones and tablets provide safety and support for some SEN children. Risks and opportunities were considered by adult participants. Online gaming was discussed by children as an activity they engage in and is fun and did not suggest an awareness of being unable to manage any risk they encountered online. Online gaming can contribute positively to SEN children both emotionally and socially (Mark, 2020) and support the development of skills and communication skills.

The impact of technology on mental health was raised as a factor contributing to SEN children and their behaviours online. It is argued from previous research that children with an existing additional need are more likely to experience depression and unhappiness when exposed to risk online (Katz, 2016). Findings from this study suggest that there is increased concern from adult participants that the internet, specifically social media can influence mental health, especially when pre-existing conditions are present. The combination of a learning need, age and social and emotional development are felt to contribute to a link between the internet and SEN children's mental health and wellbeing. Whilst there is no firm evidence within the study to suggest a strong link between the internet, social media and mental health, adults participants felt strongly that wellbeing was an important factor to support SEN children online and felt underprepared in this area to adequately support. Wellbeing has been included within the national curriculum for England (Ofsted, 2020) where

it is believed that embedding wellbeing into school life will provide a positive way forward for both teachers and children. Previous research suggest a link between wellbeing and educational outcomes for children, although this is noted to be more complex for SEN children due to their diversity of need (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012). Findings from adults reveal there exists ambiguity and uncertainty around how to implement sound online support within an educational setting and how this would be resourced.

The findings suggest that stakeholder engagement is fundamental to supporting online safeguarding of SEN children. Stakeholders are recognised here to include headteachers, teachers, children, parent, safeguarding team, social workers, charities, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), SENCO, government, social media companies, police and mental health experts. Whilst not all stakeholders have been included as part of this study, the vast majority have either been included or recognised by other stakeholders. With reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development, each stakeholder identified sits within a different eco system including the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono system and can sit independently of each other operating in different spheres or sectors. More importantly the child is placed at the centre of this system and subsequently impacted by factors and activities which sit in systems outside of their reach and control, and consequently shape the development of the child. Adult participants identified the importance of each stakeholder and their contribution to supporting SEN children online and raised concerns and problems which exist for each stakeholder. Whilst this thesis argues alongside previous research that all stakeholders are partly responsible for online safeguarding of SEN children, it is acknowledged that not one single stakeholder can work in isolation.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that it is the interconnection between each system which is key when applied to any given context. Specifically, here, we relate the framework to an educational setting which proposes that stakeholders working together would have a positive influence on the outcomes for SEN online safeguarding. However, in order for this to be effectively applied, the findings from this study suggest that each stakeholder placed within each system requires further knowledge, understanding or awareness of SEN. More significantly the findings suggest that a more joined up approach with a multi-stakeholder strategy would more adequately provide a step towards supporting SEN children online. As suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979) systems can work independently of each other or together towards the development of a child, however where systems work together within the context of online safeguarding, there can exist positive outcomes for the child (Phippen and Bond, 2019). Similar research suggests that including children within the decision-making process for online safeguarding impacts on the immediate and wider environment by creating opportunities to truly reflect current challenges and concerns which will significantly impact on the child. The existing research proposes that interactions between a number of stakeholders is recognised as supporting healthy child development and wellbeing and be the difference between a positive and a negative outcome (Vanervan, 2008; Sabates and Dev, 2012).

Adult participants perceived that where problems existed for stakeholders working together which included, a sound understanding of SEN children and their safeguarding difficulties, accessing information to support a response and accessing resources. It was perceived that resources were lacking or difficult to find by all adult participants. Teachers and parents reported explicitly not knowing who to contact and where to find helpful information and resources. Whilst the remainder of participants acknowledged that further training is needed in the area and gaps in knowledge exist

to support children with complex learning needs. To support a more joined up approach to safeguarding SEN children online, it is suggested by this study that local and national forums are established, or existing forums joined together as a starting point to broaden knowledge and relationships in the area. Where good practice and resources do currently exist, it was suggested by adult participants that they should be shared with the wider safeguarding environment. Findings of this study propose that awareness of the unique and diverse needs of SEN children is required by all stakeholders and is fundamental to balancing the opportunities and risk. Bronfenbrenner (1979) discusses the significance of change over time within the wider ecosystem which impact child development and argues that the influence of time on human development is significant. Rosa and Tudge (2013, p7) supports that on application of an ecosystems framework the process of continuity and change over time is a factor that needs to be considered as it is the wider external factors which also yield power and affect wellbeing and condition of lives. With reference to the previously discussed perceptions around the changing needs and behaviours of SEN, alongside the evolution of the online environment in recent years, consideration of the chronosystem is proposed within this thesis to be significant to effectively safeguarding SEN children. Stakeholders are likely to require ongoing and updated information in relation to SEN behaviour and the online environment.

Findings from this study suggest that understanding both the opportunities and risks are important to providing a competent approach to safeguarding SEN children online and supporting their wellbeing. Safeguarding SEN children online is the responsibility of a diverse number of stakeholders who need to recognise that children with learning needs are likely to require bespoke and specialist support and guidance. The close link between offline lives and online lives which is reflected in similar studies is presented here as being significant to online safeguarding and an area which can contribute to supporting the broader needs of seeking friendships, love and belonging, previously recognised as significant for SEN children. What happens online and what happens offline go hand in hand (Livingstone and Helsper (2007). Teaching healthy relationships is acknowledged to potentially be more challenging for children with complex social and emotional issues but still significant. O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) argue that children and young people who have poor social skills offline will struggle to develop healthy relationships online and if not addressed are unlikely to develop healthy relationships online at all. Adult participants perceived there to be risk and concern for SEN children establishing healthy relationships online. Considerations around consent, boundaries, friendships and acceptable and unacceptable behaviours are important here and were reflected by adult participants within the study. SEN children did not share experiences or views in relation to this but this study does not suggest that they lack awareness or personal views in this area.

Participants acknowledged that there exists a lack of online preparation within education and the belief that teaching online safety in isolation from other subjects is not beneficial or helpful to children. Teaching around healthy relationships as part of PSHE was viewed by adults working within education as being very positive and a step towards educating children around more positive behaviours both offline and online. However, findings suggest that both online safety and healthy relationship and sex education require bespoke resources to fully support SEN children online, which either currently do not exist or are perceived to be difficult to locate. Understanding about healthy relationships at an early age is important to building and maintaining relationships as children get older. Existing research supports that teachers currently lack confidence in teaching taboo topics (Sex Education Forum, 2018), which when combined with a perceived lack of resources and training can result in an inadequate level of teaching and effective safeguarding. Similar research has found that where SEN children have not established a foundation for healthy relationships offline and online, have poor social skills and

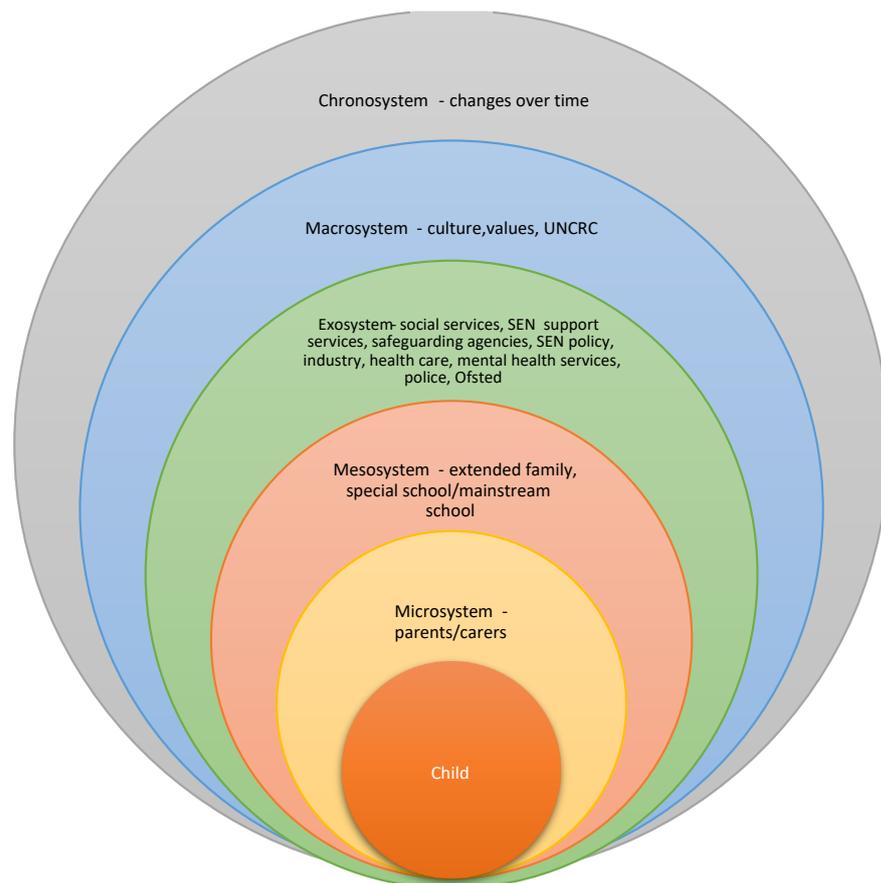
emotional immaturity, are argued to struggle to develop these as an adult if at all (O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Ecosystems approach for SEN online safety

As previously discussed in chapter four Phippen and Bond (2019) presented an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory for child online safety to address online safeguarding issues and the influence of stakeholder interactions. The theory proposes that healthy child development and safeguarding is strongly influenced by the interactions between stakeholders within each system which subsequently influence the environment of a child, in this instance the online environment. Both theories lend themselves to the focus and outcomes of this study for a number of reasons previously discussed in chapter four. As a result, a further adaptation is being presented with a focus of SEN children (see diagram 2). The theory presented within this study allows for greater insights around how the interaction of key stakeholders contribute to healthy development and safeguarding of SEN children online. The ecosystems approach for SEN online safety underpins the final framework being proposed as an outcome of this study which takes a holistic approach to providing principles for stakeholders within the field of SEN online behaviour and safeguarding.

Proposed ecosystems approach for SEN online safety

Diagram 2. Ecosystems approach for SEN online safety



Each system has evolved from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and presents amendments to this and the ecosystems approach for online safeguarding. The amendments are reflective of the context and environment of SEN children and the subsequent influences of stakeholders on their development. The interactions of stakeholders within each system is proposed to be significant to the healthy development of a SEN child, interactions online and subsequently their online safeguarding. Where the interactions of stakeholders within each system are fluid, both within each system and across boundaries into other systems, the probability of improving experiences and interactions online is increased. One system should not function independently of

another system to increase the level of safeguarding of SEN children online, regardless of disability or learning need at this point, stakeholders should be working with each other for a more positive outcome. For example, a multi-stakeholder approach to support SEN children online should involve all systems interacting. Starting with the child at the centre, who consistently remains central to SEN online safeguarding, followed by parents/carers engaging with the school, the school engaging with local support where needed to seek advice or guidance and subsequently engaging with resources to provide information and support which is reflective of current needs. The interactions are not suggested to be linear but are multi-faceted, where interactions could potentially take place between any of the stakeholders. All interactions should emphasise children's rights and privacy reflected in the UNCRC and the surrounding macrosystem. Ensuring that stakeholders remain mindful of safeguarding SEN children online whilst respecting their rights to freedom and privacy, is significant within any interaction. The chronosystem is particularly significant for SEN children and has been included here to reflect the changes that have taken place and continue to take place over time. The chronosystem reflects the changes which have taken place over long and short periods of time within all other systems and which continue to do so. The chronosystem is particularly significant here within online safeguarding due to the ever-changing nature and landscape of technology and the online environment. A number of systems specific to SEN have also seen substantial change and development over time. The SEN environment for example, has seen changes in terminology and interpretation over time, the development of SEN policy has been dynamic in recent years including changes to the education system. Children's rights and freedom of expression is also considered here with respect to communication challenges that some SEN children experience both offline and online.

SEN online safeguarding framework and stakeholder feedback

A SEN online safeguarding framework was initially developed as an outcome of this study (please see appendix V for initial framework and appendix VI for final framework and guiding principles). The framework evolved in line with the outcomes and findings of this study as part of a linear process and included the drawing together of data which was reflected of factors which were suggested and perceived to contribute to the effective safeguarding of SEN children online. Adult stakeholders overwhelmingly held the belief that a range of stakeholders working together with access to appropriate training and resources would be better equipped to support a SEN child. The framework was developed with consideration of five key areas which were drawn from the data and the findings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that there should exist a number of interconnected entities and factors working together in any given context which influence the development of a child. The framework draws from theory to promote and suggest application of 5 key areas which may support a range of stakeholders existing within different ecosystems towards effective safeguarding of SEN children online. The proposed framework was sent out to stakeholders for feedback, comment and review, to verify the relevance of the model to current practice within the field of SEN and online safeguarding. All stakeholders were contacted over a period of six months using the most recent contact details I had available. Due to the period of time which had passed since my interviews with some of the stakeholders, the contact details were potentially not now valid. It would have been desirable to gain feedback from a number of stakeholders situated within each ecosystem but unfortunately this was not possible. There was also a possibility that some participants were not able to give feedback due to limits on their time or did not feel able in some

way to give feedback. One of the stakeholders who has given feedback was contacted through my wider network which has been established during the development of this thesis and was very well placed to provide comment on the proposed framework due to the nature of his job and role in relation to SEN children. The feedback received from two stakeholders, who did respond to my request is detailed below and provides insights into the relevance, robustness and reliability of the framework. The two stakeholders sharing feedback included firstly, a sex educational consultant, who was a participant of this study and secondly a deputy head college and SEN safeguarding lead. Both stakeholders are well positioned within the field to give feedback. Feedback was constructive and informed the development of the final framework which reflects the stakeholder feedback and suggested amendments. In response to the overall framework, including categories and guiding principles, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive where it was agreed by both stakeholders that the five core categories do need to be better understood and targeted for improvements to safeguard SEN children. The feedback from stakeholders which follows, has been broken down by categories contained within the framework and reflects the responses of each stakeholder.

Healthy relationships - stakeholder feedback

It was agreed that healthy relationships were of paramount importance within the field of SEN online safeguarding, where online behaviour should reflect offline behaviour. However, DDSL suggested that a blanket statement referring to healthy relationships and SEN could be misleading. The concern here was that the challenges of addressing a range of diverse vulnerabilities and changing challenges could be overlooked if a 'one size fits all' approach was suggested. Examples were shared here on the differences between some autistic students who are significantly less vulnerable to peer pressure when compared to neurotypical peers because socialising is less significant to them. Also, some disabilities limit reading and engaging in text-based conversations which mitigates them from many online risks. The sex education consultant suggested that educating children around online behaviour reflecting offline behaviour is significant in teaching about friendships and supporting children to develop online healthy friendships and relationships. It was argued that *"there is no reason why you can't build a friendship with someone you've met over time – but it should never be a secret."* It was strongly supported by DDSL that the link between developing healthy online relationships as a precursor to developing online healthy relationships is something that is hugely important but very often missed.

The role of technology in the lives of SEN was argued to be hugely important by both stakeholders and potentially being incredibly powerful for physical, learning disabilities and sensory impairment. However, it is important to highlight that the diverse range of disabilities and learning needs presents major differences and challenges which need to be outlined and highlighted at the forefront of this guiding principle. By outlining that healthy relationship education can be very different for SEN children and diverse needs, would leave less room for interpretation that healthy relationship education is the same for all. Both stakeholders agreed that special schools have always been better at relationship education, where mainstream providers lack the skills and expertise to meet the educational needs of more complex SEN, particularly in non-academic areas such as relationship education. It was suggested that although the guidance would be essentially the same or similar here, having greater emphasis at the start on the distinction between different needs and challenges, would prompt stakeholders to think and consider how healthy relationships apply to their own circumstances. The framework was amended to reflect the diverse needs of SEN children and to

promote a healthy relationship mindset which accommodates a range of learning needs and does not suggest that there is a 'one size fits all' approach.

Resources - stakeholder feedback

It was agreed by both stakeholders that SEN resources are lacking within the area of online safeguarding and the development of tailored resources have been a real problem. Where resources do currently exist, it was argued that the most appropriate resources are aimed at very young children and tend to use imagery to attract them, which leads to a very non age-appropriate level of resources for low level learners. DDSL stated that the way that the current schemes of work are set up within the school curriculum results in lots of sessions across a very wide area which leads to surface learning and *“not gaining adequate skills or knowledge in depth across specific areas that make them very vulnerable.”* He stated that one of the main problems is many teachers do not want to miss out any areas on a broad scheme of work and would rather skim over all the basics – which makes children vulnerable. The sex education consultant stated and agreed with the outcomes of the study, that resources have a very negative perspective by many services and at worst are completely ignored. Resources need to be flexible for SEN as it was stated that, *“SEN children are notoriously individual in their needs and anyone supporting SEN needs to have flexibility.”*

Interestingly it was suggested here that a greater focus on young people's rights to access should be more of a focus rather than risk and that young people's rights should be central to the framework and reflected within the central part of the model. The framework was adjusted in respect of this to ensure that the child remains central to all categories and the central focus.

It was agreed by DDSL that pockets of good practice around the country do exist but rarely meet or cross over to share good practice, which was highlighted within this guidance. DDSL stated that he has previously tried to establish a network of good practice around online safety which had been unsuccessful. The reason for this was thought to be due to a lack of confidence and time from teaching staff and support services when trying to come up with solutions to address the many problems. Access to people doing the work means that they may be less accessible and able to meet and share best practice or do not feel confident enough to share with others.

It was agreed that resources should be consistent and widely available to all stakeholders. DDSL highlighted the difficulty and problem for SEN is when they change services and there exists no standardisation of risk assessments or descriptors. An example shared here was the use of the term 'vulnerable', which can often mean different things to different people both in relation to offline and online. This was another outcome of the study and explored within the literature review. It was argued that there needs to be some agreed or common barometer to accessing risks then targeting education or placing safeguards to protect. The feedback for this category required no changes or amendments to the framework as it was agreed that it reflects the current dilemma around resources adequately.

Specialist knowledge stakeholder feedback

DDSL very strongly agreed that accessing specialist knowledge is challenging. It was stated that there is a lot of advice and guidance for mainstream but seldom are they experienced with SEN and as a result do not know how to navigate some of the complexities around SEN. These complexities were suggested to include the ability to understand, liberty protection safeguards and unique behaviours or tendencies of a young person with learning disabilities. It was recommended that special schools and colleagues should 'step-up' and be providing wider services to the SEN community, but it was also acknowledged that it can be very difficult to gain engagement due to limitations on time. The sex education consultant agreed that specialist knowledge can be difficult to access and felt that the key is to empower those with specialist knowledge in SEN to gain knowledge in online education and safeguarding. There seems to exist two groups of experts who never meet alongside parents who cannot access this specialist knowledge. The feedback required no changes to be made within this category but did raise awareness and consideration around how SEN schools could play a more prominent role in supporting and serving the wider SEN community where they can.

Training stakeholder feedback

Both stakeholders agreed that this was an important area to address and slightly overlaps with resources and specialist knowledge as would be expected. The sex education consultant argued that all stakeholders, specifically parents and teachers need the right resources to be developed in combination with specialist knowledge from SEN and online safeguarding. With regards police as a stakeholder, it was highlighted that it is important for this group to have access to specialist knowledge on how to manage SEN young people who offend.

DDSL supported that training and access to adequate training is limited and stated that he himself has no formal training. It was stated that there had been discussions with CEOP three years ago about developing SEN training for stakeholders, but nothing has been developed currently. The type of training is also significant here where it was argued and agreed that where SEN training requires insights into the nuances of complex needs, there exists a further lack of availability. DDSL suggested that training would be more appropriate in targeted areas for example, supporting online safeguarding for those with high functioning autism or supporting online safeguarding for those with sensory impairment and moderate to severe learning disabilities. Continuity of support was also noted and where the outcome of this study suggested that there needs to be continuity, both stakeholders agreed that this is a real and current problem. DDSL stated that this is still sadly lacking and *"in some services they will have very high levels of filtering and monitoring to mitigate risks and then they (Sen person) may transition to another placement with none, due to the fact they are an adult or just different rules."* As a result, a SEN child is ill prepared for the sort of content on the internet they may inevitably encounter.

The sex education consultant stated that designing any training, resources and support needs to consider the key messages around healthy relationships, making friends, behaviour/respect, data/sharing/reporting and work towards building a sense of online citizenship in a step-by-step

approach. The feedback from stakeholders required no changes to be made to the framework but did raise awareness around gaps in stakeholder training which currently exist and the type of training which would be beneficial.

Multiple stakeholder engagement stakeholder feedback

It was agreed that a multiple stakeholder approach is a highly significant area which needs to be considered and addressed. DDSL linked this to stakeholders having specialist knowledge of SEN and understanding around the associated complexities. Social workers were given as an example of the transient nature of some stakeholders which is a challenge. Not knowing or being familiar with young people was suggested to jeopardise the success of effective joined up support. Local safeguarding triage teams were suggested to provide some support and an effective link for very complex issues, but DDSL would be surprised if they were not out of their depth and unable to understand the nuances of online safeguarding issues. It was agreed that a national or international forum would be an excellent outcome as it does not exist currently. It was also suggested that it would be helpful to have a national reporting tool for SEN – such as CEOP reporting. For example, *“this could triage with professionals with SEN expertise, so mistakes are not made and greater understanding could be gained about the size of the problem with SEN, how this differs and how to target training and awareness.”* The framework was thought to reflect the need for a multistakeholder approach to a good level and detail the need for strategies and initiatives which would seek to reach a wider audience.

The sex education consultant discussed the importance and role of parents as a major gatekeeper and the need to be central to many interventions. Parents were identified as fitting into two camps and *“they are either majorly overprotective and restrictive when it comes to mobile phones/internet access – this can be counterproductive even when well-intended.”* Children rights were identified as central to the framework, where it was suggested that each section of the framework should evolve out of children rights. The sex education consultant argued that charities such as the NSPCC and the government give false messages to many stakeholders, often with a focus on child protection and removing young people’s rights and access. The sex education consultant also argues that the Online Harms bill seems to be the continued direction of travel where in fact young people’s rights should be at the heart of any model. Young people’s rights should be key and as *“we noticed in lockdown, the benefits of being able to connect online for education, mental health, emotional wellbeing and relationships in general.”* However, it was suggested that the focus of stakeholders has been focused on risks more than rights. Placing the child at the centre of the framework where the child and their rights are central to any discussions and decision making was felt to adequately reflect the feedback from stakeholders.

The feedback and comments from stakeholders have informed the final proposed framework which is presented in appendix VI. Changes to the diagram reflect placing the child at the centre and ensuring that there is consideration of children’s rights, privacy and freedom as central to any action or decision made by stakeholders in relation to SEN children’s online safeguarding. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and constructive, where it was thought that the framework does support and reflect many of the current problems and dilemmas associated with the field of SEN online safeguarding and encourage relevant

Contributions to research – Overview

This research has revealed stakeholder perceptions around SEN children's online safeguarding. There currently exists a gap in the literature pertaining to SEN children's online safeguarding, including their online engagement and interactions. This thesis has attempted to contribute to the field, from an academic perspective to inform practitioners and stakeholders. The impact of the research is significant to both fields and has begun to explore themes emerging from current issues and concerns within SEN online safeguarding. There clearly exists a deficit in research relating to SEN children, where the primary focus has predominantly been children in mainstream schools, without a learning need or disability. This could be due to a number of reasons relating to the difficulty in conducting research with children or the apprehension around approaching research with children with learning needs or disabilities. The value of this research is important and necessary to the online safeguarding debates if we are to work towards effectively supporting and safeguarding SEN children online. The lack of research within the area has led to SEN children and their diverse range of needs been inadequately considered and addressed.

The outcomes of this study have supported the development of the SEN online safeguarding framework and provide insights into five key areas which are significant to the effective safeguarding of SEN children online. Fundamental to the framework are guiding principles which can be considered by all stakeholders working across sectors. The analysis has shone a light on the different perceptions of stakeholders and enabled a detailed examination around the role of each stakeholder and their contribution to the effective safeguarding of SEN children online. This research highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder and multi-agency approach to SEN online safeguarding, which places the child at the centre of any decision-making process. A multi-agency approach is felt to be difficult and challenging to attain but is an approach that is needed. There does, of course exist many barriers to attaining this which are outside the scope of this study. The study has highlighted that there currently exists a perception from stakeholders that there is a lack of adequate resources and specialist training to support stakeholders to effectively safeguard SEN children online. Good resources do exist in small pockets, but the vast majority are felt to inadequately address the diverse range of needs of SEN children. Contributions to research suggest that there needs to be developed sound resources and specialist training for all stakeholders in relation to SEN children. The study has also drawn attention to the challenges of addressing the diverse needs of SEN children and how a 'one-size fits all' approach is not always appropriate.

Chapter 11: Conclusions and ways forward

This research set out to explore the area of SEN children's online safeguarding and to identify issues and concerns which may be contributing both positively and negatively in the area. The dearth of research (Griffin, 2014) within the field revealed a gap and a lack of knowledge and understanding, with a vast amount of research focused on children in mainstream schools without a learning need or disability. This poses a dilemma for stakeholders currently trying to support SEN children online, who remain at a higher risk online (Asam and Katz, 2018) to navigate both the risk and opportunities safely (SEN, 2019; Balantyne, Duncalf and Daly, 2010; Livingstone, 2013). This study focused predominantly on the interactions and engagement of key stakeholders working with and supporting SEN children and those which are significant to the current debate.

An ecosystems approach facilitated and supported the study and facilitated exploration and analysis around the role and responsibility of stakeholders and their contribution to the effective safeguarding of SEN children online. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems approach (1979) provided insights into stakeholder interaction and analysis of the links which exist between a child's development and their environment and subsequently their online interactions and safety. There are differences which exist for SEN children which have been acknowledged to influence the direction of the SEN online safeguarding framework, proposed as part of this study. An ecosystems approach can be applied to any person, relationship or setting and proposes that there exists a system of interconnected factors which influence and impact the development of children both within their immediate environment and their extended environment (Eddy, 1981, p643, Neal and Neal, 2013, p722). Stakeholders contributing to this study were significant due to their own setting and place within the ecosystems model (Micro, Meso, Exo, Chrono) which supported analysis of interactions of the individual and their context or relationships to the SEN environment. The research advances the state of knowledge regarding the engagement of stakeholders within the SEN environment and how SEN children can be better supported online to exploit the opportunities and mitigates the risks.

Analysis of data revealed different perceptions linked to the position of stakeholders to the SEN environment and their role and contribution to the field. However common themes arose across many stakeholders which were clearly significant to a SEN child and their experiences online. These included and were linked to SEN children being exposed to a greater level of risk online and their often frequent need to seek love and belonging, which places them at a greater level of risk. The increased and rising level of social and emotional issues and difficulties is also felt to be contributing to some of the more challenging behaviours being reported online for SEN. The lack of current research within the field is suggested to be contributing to inadequate stakeholder engagement and support in some areas and has resulted in a lack of confidence for some stakeholders in supporting SEN children online or understanding how to effectively support SEN children online. Outside of the risks online there are many opportunities for SEN children online which can support development of their social and emotional needs. However, this is largely being ignored, whilst the risks are felt to be more prominent (Livingstone et al, 2017, p66; Gulia, 1998, p338). A multi-stakeholder approach is being presented as part of the framework in order to provide a more holistic approach to addressing some of the concerns raised within this study.

Supported by theory and themes arising from analysis where stakeholders are currently working together, suggests that stakeholders working together is encouraging for minimising risk and maximising opportunities for SEN children online. Where a range of stakeholders, for example, police, social workers, mental health experts, parents and teachers are working together, there is suggested to be greater success and confidence (Bradwell, 2019, p112). Sharing good practice, raising awareness of sound resources and sharing experiences is a step towards a more consistent joined-up approach. Engaging multiple stakeholders and a multi-stakeholder approach which places the child at the centre, presents an optimistic solution. Bronfenbrenner (1979) supports that the wider environment which consists of the systems which sit outside of the microsystem can operate in unison to influence the child at the centre and argues that they can yield power and subsequently indirectly influence a child and their healthy development. For the purposes of this study this is suggested to be healthy development contributing to the online interactions and safeguarding. Stakeholders working in isolation from each other and without consideration of the child at the centre and their rights, is not suggested to be the best or safest approach for effectively supporting child development and their wellbeing (Vanervan, 2008; Sabates and Dev; 2012, Phippen and Bond, 2019).

Children's rights are proposed to be central to decision making of stakeholders and specifically to SEN children where disabled children have more commonly been ignored in decisions made about them (Armstrong and Barton, 1999; Oliver and Knight, 2008, p116). Children's rights, with particular reference to Article 12 and Article 13 of the UNCRC which highlight freedom of expression and the CRPD, which supports that a person with disabilities should be viewed as active participants within society. The current online safety approach from government and within education is suggested to predominantly ignore children with learning needs and frequently deny these children access to opportunities and participation in a complete disregard of their rights (Porter, 2016). Where more positive steps have been taken in the UK to support and inform stakeholders, it became compulsory for schools to teach young people about positive and healthy relationships within the Relationships and Sex education curriculum (DfE, 2019). The focus for schools going forward is to address some of the more social, emotional and physical aspects of sex and relationships, including issues related to sex and digital practice. Of relevance here is where healthy relationships and sound sex education advise can positively impact on children's lives and has been reported to reduce risky behaviours online and promote more healthy relationships both offline and online (Kirby and Laris, 2009; Brown and McCann, 2018). Where stakeholders are lacking in providing a sound level of support for SEN children, is thought to be partly due to a lack of adequate resources and training available to stakeholders working in the area. There was felt to be a lack of resources and training for stakeholders supporting children with complex learning, social and emotional issues. Resources and appropriate training are suggested to be non-existent or difficult to access which contributes to providing adequate online safeguarding support.

The analysis has identified and explored the challenges which currently exist for SEN children online and which can impact upon their learning, development and safety online. The role and involvement of many stakeholders has been presented and how their engagement and interactions across ecosystems can significantly impact upon the development of a SEN child. The perspectives of individual stakeholders have been extensively explored and detailed in order to support the development of a framework for supporting SEN children online and to ensure that there is a sensible approach to balancing risk and opportunity. The outcomes of the study have proposed a framework which has considered the current debates and current challenges for all stakeholders existing in and

working within the field of SEN online safeguarding. The final framework, which has been further influenced and refined from feedback received from stakeholders, focuses on five core areas or categories which act as guiding principles to supporting stakeholders. These include, healthy relationships, resources, specialist knowledge, training and multiple stakeholder engagement. Healthy relationships offline are proposed to provide a solid foundation for determining healthy relationships online and where stakeholders understand this, children can be better supported online. Resources are required to be accessible to all stakeholders and provide tailored and appropriate advice for a diverse range of needs. Specialist knowledge should be available for stakeholders to access when needed and provide expertise to meet a diverse range of needs. Training should be available and developed to support stakeholders and empower them to confidently support and safeguard SEN children online. Finally, a multiple stakeholder approach allows for a holistic approach which facilitates collaborative working and sharing of best practice to support stakeholders locally and within the wider community. All categories place the child at the centre and propose that they should be central to and involved in decisions made about them where possible. The outcomes of this study are proposed to support and address current challenges and concerns for all stakeholders working within the field of SEN online safeguarding and provide principles which inform and provide guidance based on current literature.

Limitations and future research

Challenges to recruiting stakeholders existed from the start of the study where it was initially difficult to recruit schools where I sought to seek views and perceptions of stakeholders central to education. Recruitment of schools and subsequently teachers and children caused quite a lot of delay in the early stages of the study and impacted on the collection of data over time. It had been originally intended that a number of schools would be included within the study in order to capture a greater number of perceptions from within education and also from children. However, due to the challenges of recruiting schools, this was not ultimately possible. As a result, a single SEN school became the focus of this study and the children as a sample of that. There has now been established a good working relationship with the SEN school in the local area. Because of the relationship that has now been built with the school, further research to support the school and the children may be possible. Children represented a small sample, where it had been originally intended that a greater number of children would be recruited to provide richer insights into their own interactions and behaviours online. Challenges were presented when including SEN children as part of the study due to their learning need and/or disability, which resulted in the headteacher selecting who she felt to be most appropriate for the interviews. This was due to her relationship with the children and her knowledge of their learning need and disability. Some of the children within the school were felt to be unsuitable and would not enjoy the experience of being interviewed. As a gatekeeper at the school, I was advised and guided by the headteacher. Another challenge presented when interviewing children was the presence of the headteacher during the interviews. The presence of a gatekeeper during the interviews was an obstacle to gaining trust with the children and their own freedom of expression which subsequently impacted upon results. The balance of power in the room were felt to be unequal and there was not sufficient time spent with the children to address this and to gain a good level of trust. Further studies would attempt to address this challenge. More innovative methods to incorporate a child's view and engage children further may be helpful in

order to encourage honest participation or where there may have been some difficulty communicating or expressing views. A less traditional and less formal research approach could be considered in future research to include focus groups or observations which would also support the approach adopted for this study, which seeks to interpret human action and human behaviour. A longitudinal study which could examine different variables over a period of time could be employed, which would also help to develop trust with children and support their contribution to a greater extent. Further research with SEN children specifically would be beneficial to the online safeguarding debate where their views could be expressed and articulated more clearly, and their true position and perceptions explored.

The findings of this research present further avenues for research and propose questions considering the outcomes of this study. The sample for this study represented a diverse range of perspectives and views within the field of SEN and online safeguarding and is representative of stakeholders which exist within the environment or ecosystems surrounding a child. Further samples containing a greater number of stakeholders or from stakeholders within other parts of the ecosystem could present other perspectives in which meaning could be deconstructed from.

Future research could be directed towards individual learning needs or disabilities of a child, which would enable specific needs to be addressed alongside a detailed examination of risks and opportunities presented online. For example, autism was identified by stakeholders on a number of occasions which could be supported further. Autistic behaviours were linked to difficulty communicating and interacting with others, lack of empathy, anxiety and taking longer to understand information (Cerebra, 2015). These specific behaviours could be explored further in relation to online behaviour to produce some very interesting and relevant contributions.

Further studies could be expanded to include perceptions from other stakeholders working within the field and who were not included as part of this study, for example local government, health care and the crown prosecution services (CPS). Expanding the number of stakeholders would support further exploration of views and perceptions pertaining to SEN children online and enable the issues and concerns of each stakeholder to be addressed.

Appendix I Information sheet for participants

SEN children's online behaviour and stakeholder engagement – Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Hayley Henderson and I am embarking on a PhD at University of Plymouth and funded by the University of Northampton. I would like to invite you to participate in the study which explores and closely examines stakeholder perspectives around and in relation to children's online behaviour, specifically SEN children. The following sections will help to support your decision to be involved.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study will explore the current approach to online safety and behaviour online with a number of stakeholders including but not limited to schools, parents, police and children themselves. Consideration around current attitudes and how online safety is currently understood to be delivered in schools within the wider government and police space. How online safety and attitudes towards online safety will be explored and the impact that this is potentially having on the development needs and support of SEN children online. Children's rights will be considered in order to support the development of the study.

Why have I been approached to be involved in the study?

I am approaching stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in SEN children and young people's online behaviour

What will my involvement require?

If you decide and agree to be involved in the study it would involve one hour of your time The methods I intend to use are as follows:

- One-to-one interviews with each stakeholder lasting up to one hour

Children will asked if they wish to be involved and be fully supported by a teacher or headteacher of the school they are attending.

After the findings have been analysed, they will be shared with you for comment. If you wish to provide feedback on the outcomes and recommendations, this would be greatly appreciated and would be incorporated into the final submission.

The research will be conducted within your place of work or we can arrange mutually convenient times and locations to conduct the research.

What do I have to do if I would like to be involved in the study?

If you are happy to be involved in the study, please email me at the address on the bottom of this letter to confirm that you would like to take part

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

All stakeholders will remain anonymous within the thesis. The researcher will not directly question staff or participants about practices or policies related to their involvement with education where applicable. Information shared during the interview will be recorded and written to maintain complete anonymity.

If at any point you wish not to answer a question or share information, you do not need to do so. If you become upset or distressed at any point during the interview you will not be forced to continue. If you become uncomfortable and decide to stop the interview and would like to end the interview and leave without giving any reason, you can choose to do so. If you decide you would like to rearrange an interview at any time, please contact me directly.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your involvement in the study will be highly valuable and will support findings around a topic which is significant to the developmental and behavioural need of SEN children and young people. There is a greater focus on children and young people's online behaviour today and it is an issue which will continue to impact them now and in the future. A greater focus of SEN children and their needs is needed and this study hopes to contribute positively in this area. Revealing the opportunities and risks here is fundamental to the study.

The output and recommendations of the study will be shared with you and you may find them insightful and helpful. I will provide you with the full findings and final submission on completion.

What happens when the research study stops?

The full findings, discussions and recommendations will be shared with you and that will conclude the study.

Confidentiality, anonymity and safeguarding

Each stakeholder will remain completely anonymous. Confidentiality and anonymity will be upheld for all of the participants. Interviews with children and young people will be conducted with a teacher or headteacher in the room. Interviews will be conducted privately and be recorded. The recordings will not be shared with anybody and be destroyed 3 months after the completion of the study. Participant names or any identifying details will not be presented in the findings and all responses will be anonymised.

Interviews will be recorded on an audio recorder, with the consent of participants. Again these will not be shared with anyone else.

All data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Contact details of the researcher and supervisors

If you would like to be involved in the study or would like to ask me any questions at all in relation to the study and your involvement please contact me via the detail below:

Hayley Henderson; Faculty of Business and Law, University of Northampton

Hayley.henderson@northampton.ac.uk

My Director of Studies is Professor Andy Phippen (andy.phippen@plymouth.ac.uk) **Thank**

you

Appendix II Information sheet for children

Invitation to participate in research: children

My name is Hayley Henderson and I am a PhD student at the University of Plymouth. I am inviting you to take part in a study as part of my PhD. Please read the information below which will help you to make a decision about participating in the study.

What is the study about?

The study is looking at esafety and online behaviour and I would like to understand more about your thoughts on these areas. I am interested to know what you enjoy doing online and what your experiences are both good and bad. I would also like to know about what you learn about being online at school and how you feel about esafety education, again both good and bad!. Your opinions and experiences would be very helpful and I would be pleased for you to share them with me.

Why am I doing this?

I think this is an important area and it is important to hear your voice as part of the study. Your opinions and experiences would be really helpful to inform the study and help me to understand more about online behavior and safety education.

What will your participation involve?

If you decide and agree to be involved in the study, it would involve 30 minutes of your time and will involve one-to-one interviews with a teacher present who is also involved in the study. I will ask you questions about your views, opinions and experiences related to what you do online, what you enjoy and what you don't. After the interviews the information will help to form a report that I will write based on all of the interviews I have conducted. The report will be shared with if you wish to read it.

The interviews will be conducted at school in a private space with a teacher present.

Do you have to take part?

It is completely your decision if you decide to take part and you do not have to take part or be interviewed at all. You will not be treated any differently whatever decision you decide to make. You can choose to take part and if you change your mind at any point you can decide to stop at any point. If you change your mind after the interview, you can still decide not to take part and I will not use your interview, which will be destroyed.

What happens after the research stops?

I will share the report with all participants I interviewed. It is your choice if you decide to read it or not.

What will the research be used for?

The interviews will be used to support the final report and will be submitted as part of my PhD. There may be further publications, for example journal articles or books after that.

What are the benefits of taking part?

I would very much appreciate your help which includes your views, opinions and experiences. I think it is important to hear your voice and understand things from your perspective.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

You may feel that there are questions that you do not want to answer or that you may find upsetting. During the interview, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to and nobody will force you to do so. If you feel upset or distressed I will stop the interview and if you need some support you can ask me or a teacher.

Will anyone know what you have said?

Each interview will remain completely anonymous. This means that your name or anything that identifies you will be written or shared with anyone. Interviews will be conducted in a private space with myself and a teacher or headteacher in the room. Interviews will be conducted privately and be recorded. The recordings will not be shared with anybody and be destroyed 3 months after the completion of the study.

Interviews will be recorded on an audio recorder, with your consent. Again these will not be shared with anyone else.

All the data you provide will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Your information will be safe.

What should you do if you want to take part?

If you would like to take part in the study and you are under the age of 16, please give your parent or guardian the information sheet and consent form. If they are happy and agree for you to participate, please ask them to sign the forms and return the letter to your teacher.

Please also sign your consent form overleaf. If you are 16 years of age or over, please just sign and return your consent form to me or your teacher.

Contact details of the researcher and supervisors

If you would like to be involved in the study or you or your parent/guardian would like to ask me any questions at all in relation to the study and your involvement, please contact me via the details below:

Hayley Henderson; Faculty of Business and Law, University of Northampton

Hayley.henderson@northampton.ac.uk

My Director of Studies is Professor Andy Phippen (andy.phippen@plymouth.ac.uk)

Thank you 😊

Appendix III Consent form

Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the study. Please read the statements below and tick the box to show you have understood. Please then sign in the space provided over the other side of the page. Please ask if there is anything you don't understand.

- I have read and understood the information sheet.
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.
- I know what the research is about and how I can be involved.
- I am happy to have what I say audio recorded.
- I understand that my data and information will be dealt with in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). The data will only use the data for the purposes of the project and will keep the data secure at all times.
- I understand that participant details will remain anonymous and my name will not be used. Any personal details that might identify me will be removed
- If participating in the group discussion, I agree to keep everything anyone says private and
- I know that I can decide not to continue with the research at any time without giving a reason. If I decide that I do not want to be involved in the research after the study has stopped, I understand I can tell the researcher and the researcher will remove my responses, as long as I have informed the researcher before the report starts being written
- I understand that the researcher will send me a summary of the results if I wish to receive this.
- I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study.

Please confirm what you would like to do in the research (please tick the boxes - you can change your mind about this at any time):

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signed

Appendix IV Interview questions (guide)

Example of interview questions

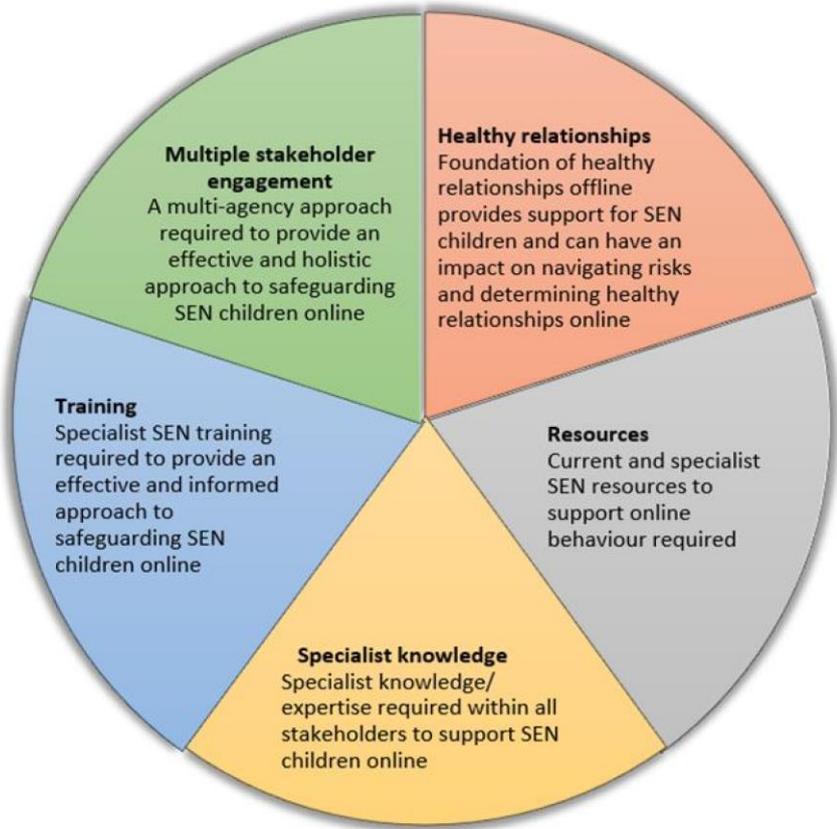
Outline, structure and length of interview:

- It will last approx 30 to 60 minutes.
- I am will be asking questions relating to your role within the field of online safeguarding and your perspectives in relation to your role and other stakehodholders
- It is up to you what you share with me and if there is anything that you are not comfortable sharing, you do not need to share. I will accept your response and move onto the next question.
- Anything you tell me will be kept anonymous.
- Confirmation that you are happy for the interview to be recorded.

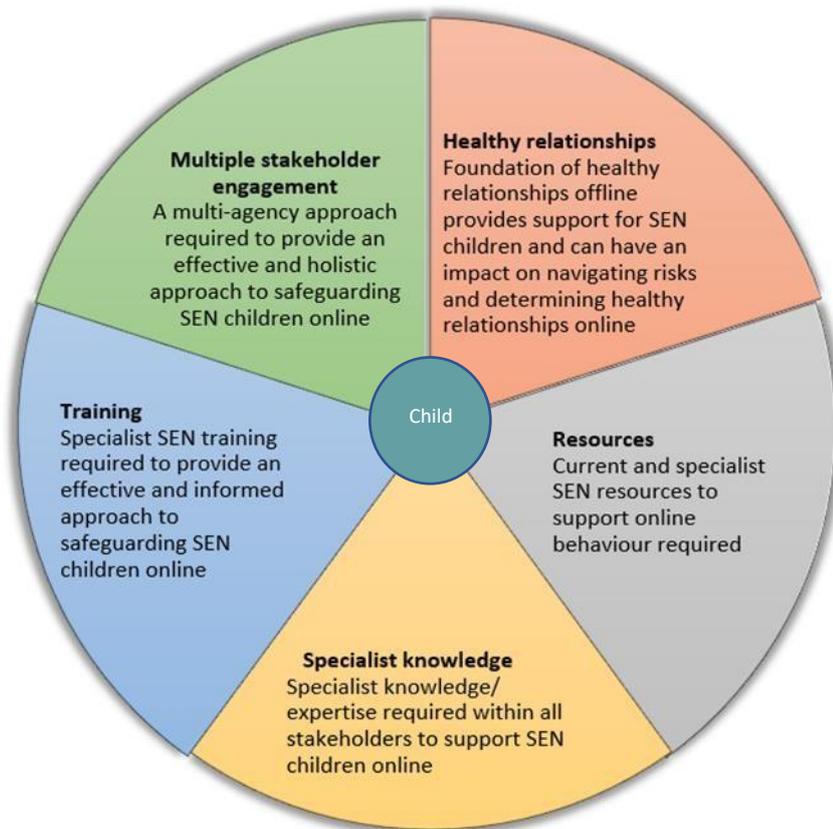
Question outline

1. **Role of participant, job role and relationship to children's online safeguarding**
2. **Discussion relating to the current approach to online behaviour/safety in school**
3. **How has safeguarding evolved over the years (perhaps in relation to wellbeing?)**
4. **Thoughts on how OFSTED have approached SEN in the past and challenges here?**
5. **The role of schools and teachers in supporting online safety**
6. **Do you see there being a greater risk for SEND and online safeguarding?**
7. **As a key stakeholder do you see the role of education as being any greater than other stakeholders (parents, social workers, police, children, mental health workers)?**
8. **How do you think should be priorities of inspectors in a SEN school**
9. **Are the safeguarding practices more important for SEN children given the nature of the difficulties they may face?**
10. **Resources and differentiation of different LDs?**

Appendix V Initial SEN online safeguarding framework



Appendix VI Proposed SEN online safeguarding framework and guiding principles



Healthy relationships

Why

SEN needs are broad and wide ranging which influence their offline and online behaviours and interactions. These are suggested to include attachment issues, autism, ADHD, high functioning, high needs and more recently the perceived rise in social and emotional behaviours. A rise in social and emotional disorders combined with the ever-changing landscape online create a challenging environment to fully support and safeguard SEN children online. SEN children are likely to have fewer boundaries online, misinterpret signals, be more accepting of dishonest and inappropriate behaviour and have limited opportunity to practice and develop skills to help keep them safe online.

Seeking connection, acceptance and social opportunities are perceived as the primary catalysts for interactions online which can offer many great opportunities for finding friendship, love and belonging.

“for somebody with autism, this is so hard in the SEN world in particular, let alone the offline world to get your head into that space, which we will take for granted.” (SENCO)

“Well that’s what makes him really naïve is it’s very easy for him [SEN child] to think that somebody is his friend whose maybe not.” (Sex education consultant)

SEN children and young people are disadvantaged online which can present a high risk and result in low levels of self-esteem and poor mental health. A ‘one size fits’ all approach is not possible. What is possible, is consideration around the type of learning need or disability and reflection on the most appropriate and effective approach.

“a lot of that is why its fuelling those online behaviours is because it’s not just promiscuity, its again that love and belonging.” (Safeguarding consultant)

The opportunities presented by the online environment are undeniable and include facilitating access to support groups, encouraging friendship, easing and supporting communication, increasing confidence, having fun and an increased sense of belonging.

“for a lot of children, it [internet] takes away that physical barrier” (SENCO)

How?

Teaching healthy relationships offline provides support for SEN children in relation to social and emotional issues and can have a significant impact on how SEN are able to navigate risks and determine healthy relationships online. Managing and educating SEN children to a greater degree around healthy relationships offline could impact upon their interactions and management of risk online.

“healthy relationships about consent and personal boundaries, around what’s ok online and what’s not ok online and what the law says.” (Sex education consultant)

“it starts with problems in the offline. So, you’ve got a group of people in SEND who aren’t supported to understand relationships.” (Social worker)

Overwhelmingly there is evidence of a link between offline and online relationships and a need to support healthy offline relationships as a pre-cursor to online interactions.

“possibly SEND may have different online safety requirements or capacities or competencies, but it doesn't prohibit them from developing their interest in using the Internet effectively to help them.” (Enhanced SEN inspector)

Healthy relationships apply to **all stakeholders**, but it is important to highlight that;

For education, healthy relationships place the child at the centre and reflect the current curriculum in England. As a minimum it should include education around friendships, social skills, healthy behaviours, boundaries and consent. These should also be considered alongside additional needs and how behaviours translate online (what is and what is not acceptable behaviour).

For police, healthy relationships feed into educational intervention and contribute to PSHE to support SEN children to stay safe online whilst building positive interactions between young people and the police.

Resources

Why?

Sound advice and resources to support SEN children online are challenging to locate due to the resources being non-existent, unsuitable or difficult to find. Where pockets of good practice do exist, they are believed to sit in isolation and are not readily shared as best practice with the wider online safeguarding environment.

“pockets of good practice, there's pockets of it. There was outstanding practice and there's pockets of absolutely inadequate practice. The problem is, if the pockets never meet, they'll never be able to compare themselves and do what they know.” (Enhanced SEN inspector)

“when it comes to a child of SEN or additional need or a different way of thinking. None of them [charities] are geared up to understanding, you know neurotypicals.” (Parent governor of SEN school)

Evidence suggests that there is a dearth of resources for safety skills education for children with learning difficulties which impact on children and their ability to manage online risk and participate and engage safely. Educators feel inadequately equipped and lack confidence to respond to the challenges SEN children face online and call for high quality guidance and advice to suit both broader needs and also more specialist needs of SEN.

“[high functioning] needs to be proper, tailored and accessible information for this client group going through the age span.” (Social worker)

How?

Age-appropriate, distinct, child centred, and tailored approaches are required for SEN children which reflect current challenges and issues for stakeholders working with and supporting SEN children and young people.

Resources need to be developed for a diverse range of learning needs and disabilities in order to effectively support developing healthy relationships offline as a precursor to online engagement and activities.

Resources should reflect current gaps in knowledge and be widely available to all stakeholders to ensure a consistent approach. Resources should capitalise on using technology to facilitate learning and be developed based on identifiable needs informed by regular reviews from stakeholders. Raising awareness of available resources should also be considered.

All stakeholders should have access to appropriate resources which can be used to support innovation to promote positive and healthy offline and online behaviours.

Specialist knowledge

Why?

There is evidence to suggest that accessing specialist knowledge is challenging and perpetuated by stakeholders not knowing who to contact for the appropriate help and guidance. A lack of understanding around the diverse range of SEN needs was felt to be contributing to ineffective support and safeguarding of SEN children online.

*“if we had been given the right information at the start, it would have been a lot less complicated.”
(Parent of SEN child)*

“I reported the behaviour but nothing happened and I couldn’t get in touch with anyone at Facebook to follow-up.” (Parent governor of SEN school)

Expertise and specialist knowledge was not recognised to exist from within a range of stakeholders which impacts approaches and interventions to provide appropriate support. Expertise should exist within all major stakeholders within the field or appropriate access to specialist knowledge should be available and clearly signposted for SEN children and young people.

“teachers will probably develop their expertise as workarounds or support to deal with what they’re building their experience around.” (Enhanced SEN inspector)

How?

Expertise should be accessible to stakeholders supporting SEN children online and include awareness around diversity of need. Sufficient SEN expertise and knowledge is fundamental to providing an environment which meets the needs of the child and the wider online safeguarding environment.

Specialist knowledge and nuanced approaches to supporting the needs of a SEN child should be recognised as fundamental in order to provide support and respond to the challenges and opportunities presented online. Where expertise is evident in Special schools, the wider community should be able to benefit and access this knowledge.

All stakeholders should have appropriate access to resources and expertise to ensure that they can meet and adapt to the needs of SEN children online and provide sufficient levels of support when required.

Training

Why?

There exists a lack of training amongst stakeholders who have either not received sufficient training around online behaviour and safeguarding of SEN children or who have been unable to access appropriate training in the area.

“there seems to be nothing just on the safety part. Because me and our online safety lead did some training on it and actually if you google esafety [online] training not a lot comes up.” (SEN school headteacher)

“when you focus into SEND and you’re going into those nuances and those niches. So, the training becomes even more rare.” (Enhanced SEN inspector)

Stakeholders felt that they were doing their best, especially within education but felt underprepared and lacked confidence within the area. The diversity of additional needs presents a number of challenges that require specialist knowledge and training in order to fully equip stakeholders working with SEN children and young. The current challenge is perceived to be how to adequately support SEN children and young people online whilst being able to address the current and ever evolving challenges of the environment.

How?

All stakeholders - Specialist training is required across stakeholders engaged in supporting SEN children online where knowledge and experience are lacking. Specialist training resources should exist and be accessible for stakeholders to empower them to confidently support online behaviour and safeguarding of SEN within their field.

Training should be undertaken and reviewed regularly to ensure that stakeholders have the relevant expertise to provide continuity of support and respond proactively to online challenges and concerns. Awareness of both the online opportunities and risks should be included as part of the training to ensure a balanced and meaningful approach.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is considered fundamental to meet the diverse needs of SEN and the ongoing and constantly changing challenges presented online.

Multiple stakeholder engagement

Why?

A broad number of stakeholders support online behaviour and safeguarding of SEN children including headteachers, teachers, children, parent, safeguarding team, social workers, charities, crown prosecution service (CPS), SENCO, government, social media companies, police and mental health experts. Working with a range of stakeholders is viewed very positively to assist SEN children online but a number of barriers exist which impact stakeholders and prohibit them from providing effective and consistent support.

A multi-agency approach is proposed where stakeholders liaise with each other and share knowledge to support local individuals and groups. Currently this approach is limited and at best involves a small number of stakeholders working together.

“what they [police] should then be able to do is liaise with agencies who have skill and knowledge in this. So the likes of young minds or team or any of the mental health providers or mental illness advisers, including NHS.” (Police officer)

Each stakeholder can contribute positively to safeguarding children online but there are enhanced benefits and outputs from many stakeholders working proactively together, sharing knowledge, resources and experiences around online safety and behaviour.

How?

All stakeholders to establish a collaborative approach building upon specialist knowledge/training and expertise to provide local support for SEN children and young people. This multi-agency approach should facilitate sharing of information through a dialogue between a number of stakeholders relevant to the field. A knowledge base of best practice which draws conclusions from children’s perspectives, specialist resources and experiences can be developed from this and shared with the wider community.

A local and national and international forum (if not already established) should be formed from a broad range of stakeholders to share best practice and knowledge. A forum where questions can be asked of other stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally and where sound advice and experiences can be shared with stakeholders.

“the idea of a forum where you can put up your questions and you can get people from all around the country, both Wales, England, around the world, even that can come together and get knowledge based.” (Enhanced SEN inspector)



Appendix VII – Ethics Approval



Date: 20 March 2018

Dear Hayley,

Ethical Approval Application No: FREIC1718.20
Title: Stakeholder Perspectives Towards Online Safeguarding of Children With Special Educational Needs (SEN)
(amendment to FREIC1718.9)

Thank you for your application to the Faculty Research Ethics & Integrity Committee (FREIC) seeking ethical approval for your proposed research.

The committee has considered your revised application and is fully satisfied that the project complies with Plymouth University's ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Approval is for the duration of the project. However, please resubmit your application to the committee if the information provided in the form alters or is likely to alter significantly.

The FREIC members wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely
(Sent as email attachment)

Mr Derek Shepherd
Chair
Faculty Research Ethics & Integrity Committee
Faculty of Arts & Humanities (SoLCG & PBS)

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