A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract

This research explores assessment which captures the learning of students with severe learning difficulties (SLD), at a secondary special needs school in London. Since the removal of pre-National Curriculum Levels (P Levels) to assess students with SLD (Rochford, 2016; DfE, 2017) schools have the autonomy to develop their own assessment systems. However, there is little guidance on what areas of academic or non-academic learning to assess and no studies have been identified which assess academic and non-academic areas of learning holistically.

This research contains three phases, all within an Interpretivist paradigm that sought to create, trial, and evaluate a holistic approach to assessment. Phase One involved semi-structured interviews to understand the views of members of staff views with regards to what areas of learning are important to assess. The eight key themes identified through thematic analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were: Academic progress; Adapting to new situations and environments; Behaviour; Communication; Community access; Emotional development and well-being; Independence and Life skills. These areas of learning led to the creation of a holistic assessment chart that also incorporated personalised outcomes from students EHCPs and individual targets. Phase Two involved a trial of the assessment chart before data collection was suspended due to the impact of COVID-19, and some initial evaluations were obtained from members of staff. Phase Three involved a further trial and evaluation of the assessment chart by members of staff through mini case studies, and reflections from students on their learning.

Findings indicate that the assessment charts demonstrated students’ progress in a variety of interrelated learning areas. Non-academic learning was captured through different academic subjects, enabling a fuller picture of the students’ progress. Members of staff gave feedback throughout the lessons linked to the students’ learning in both academic and non-academic areas and highlighted the usefulness of the assessment chart when planning. Interviews with students demonstrated that they could reflect on their learning in both academic and non-academic areas, with support.
Implications for current practice include developing how learning is planned and assessed in a holistic manner that is personalised to individual students. In addition, this research has highlighted the need for further empirical work into how this progress can be meaningfully communicated to students, parents/carers, members of staff and other stakeholders.
Acknowledgements

Throughout my EdD journey, I have been extremely grateful for all the support and guidance that I have received.

Firstly, I would like to thank all the members of staff who have participated in this study. I appreciate the time and energy that you have all given, and value the wonderful insights about learning that have been shared. I would also like to thank the students who participated in this research - you are amazing, and I am always inspired by your enthusiasm and love of learning.

I would also like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisors, Dr Valerie Critten, Dr Naomi Watson, and Dr Robert Vardill. This research project would not have been possible without all your advice, expertise, and guidance.

Finally, thank you to all my friends and family for your support, and especially Kieran. I am extremely grateful for all your unwavering encouragement and belief in my research journey.
Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where otherwise acknowledged, the work presented is entirely my own.

References to Relevant Works:

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<td>ABRSM</td>
<td>Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music</td>
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<td>AQA</td>
<td>Assessment and Qualifications Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASDAN</td>
<td>Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Education Research Association</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
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<td>EHCP</td>
<td>Education and Health Care Plan</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>Educational Psychologist</td>
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<td>EYFS</td>
<td>Early Years Foundation Stage – for students aged 3-5</td>
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<td>Face to Face</td>
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<td>GDPR</td>
<td>General Data Protection Regulation</td>
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<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
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<td>HLTA</td>
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<td>Information Asset Register</td>
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<td>Individual Education Plan</td>
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<td>LM</td>
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<td>Moderate Learning Difficulties</td>
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<td>National Curriculum</td>
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<td>OT</td>
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<td>PMLD</td>
<td>Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties</td>
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<td>Physio</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
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<td>PSD</td>
<td>Personal and Social Development</td>
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<td>SaLT</td>
<td>Speech and Language Therapist</td>
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<td>SATs</td>
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<td>SCERTS</td>
<td>Social, Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEND</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Professional context
I have been a special needs teacher for over 17 years, and I am passionate about inclusive education. Although I originally trained as a mainstream secondary school teacher, I moved into special needs teaching after one year as I wanted to continue my journey to support young people with learning difficulties to achieve through a personalised approach. This included smaller class sizes and greater flexibility with teaching and learning without the pressure of exams and grades. I have always been ardent about assessment, as I see assessment as the way of demonstrating what students can do and achieve and I have had the role of assessment coordinator for over 12 years. Initially, I led on whole school assessments that were based on quantitative data to demonstrate progress; however, in more recent years, and as a result of this research, I have moved to a greater focus on qualitative evidence. Our students constantly amaze and impress me – their resilience, determination, and confidence, from performing at the Royal Festival Hall, to learning to write their name or saying a word for the first time. It is a challenge and an ongoing journey to find a system that can appropriately capture all of this, to reflect everything that the students can achieve.

I currently work as a Deputy Headteacher at a secondary special needs school in London, and my responsibilities include staffing, and safeguarding, as well as assessment. All students have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), and have a variety of learning needs including Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, Autism, and additional complex needs. Until recently, students at my school have been assessed using Performance (P) Levels (formerly ‘Scales’) in all curriculum areas. P Levels are used to assess students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) working below National Curriculum levels (DfE, 2014a) in all curriculum subjects.

1.2 Research context
Over the last 50 years, there has been a significant shift in culture and policy with the manner in which people with disabilities are perceived and treated. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Person’s Act (1970) compelled local authorities to
improve services for people who are disabled, and The Disabled Persons Act (1986) enabled greater autonomy for people who are disabled. However, it was not until The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) that discrimination against people who are disabled became illegal. This was subsequently merged into The Equality Act (2010) which includes disability as a protected characteristic, and further demonstrates the government’s commitment to inclusion. The Equality Act (p4) defines a person (P) as having a disability if:

(a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and
(b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The culture of language has also changed, and terms such as ‘mental handicap’ have been replaced by ‘intellectual disability’ (National Disability Authority, 2014). In addition, language should be person-centred, for example ‘person with learning difficulties’ or ‘person who uses a wheelchair’ rather than ‘wheelchair user.’ This equates with my personal views that students with learning difficulties should have the same opportunities and experiences as their mainstream peers, and I am fervent about student voice being incorporated into everyday learning too.

Approximately 28,700 children in England with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health Care Plan have a disability of severe learning difficulties (Public Health England, 2015). Students with severe learning difficulties (SLD) are defined by DfE (p7, 2013a) as having:

‘significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. This has a major effect on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support. They may also have difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception and the acquisition of self-help skills. Pupils with SLDs will need support in all areas of the curriculum.

In addition, these impairments have a substantial impact on their daily lives, for example their everyday living skills such as dressing and eating, and in some cases physical and sensory impairments. Students with SLD communicate using basic speech, signs and/or symbols, and will need adult support to access the curriculum successfully, often staying within the P Levels of achievement, (below the levels of a neurotypical 5-year-old child) throughout their school life.

Before the Education Act in 1970, students with learning difficulties were seen as ‘other’ and ‘not suitable for education’ (The National Archives, 2019). However,
since the Department for Education (DfE) assumed responsibility for all education, students with learning difficulties were taught in schools (rather than hospitals or institutions) with an adapted curriculum. The formal National Curriculum (NC) was introduced during the Education Reform Act in 1988 along with National Curriculum assessments for students at mainstream schools. However, the NC assessments were not suitable for students with learning difficulties as they were working at levels below their mainstream peers and may not move up a level in their school life; therefore in 1998 Pre-National Curriculum Levels (P Levels) were introduced to assess students with SEND. P Levels allowed schools to target set and track progress both within the school and nationally (Smith, Critten and Vardill, 2020).

Furthermore, there were significant issues with the P Levels as they did not take into consideration the non-linear or spikey progress of students with learning difficulties (DfE, 2018a) or that some students would make lateral progress or improve in other areas of learning outside of academic subjects. In addition, progress across levels can often take years to achieve as students need time to consolidate and generalise new skills (McIntosh, 2015; DfE, 2018a). Typically, lessons are taught from a scheme of work based on one topic and are very much student-centred with an individual focus and individual learning outcomes. Education for students with SLD teaches so much more than the academic subjects, and students can often make significant progress in addition to the academic subject which they are learning (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012). For example, during a block of swimming sessions that I taught, I identified an important development in a student’s communication skills. A student aged 12 with autism had not interacted with other students or staff in the water for weeks; however, after I consistently mirrored her behaviour by copying her actions and movements every week, she then took my hand and started splashing the water with it. This was a momentous breakthrough in communication and interaction for her; yet significantly there was nowhere to record this achievement within the school’s current assessment system, as the progress during the swimming lessons is recorded using Physical Education P Levels. The P4 PE descriptor (DfE, 2014a) states that ‘pupils’ movement patterns are established, and they perform single actions [for example, rolling, running, jumping, or splashing]’. However, this student had demonstrated something far more significant than the
physical skill of ‘splashing’, through the initiation of communication and the development of her social skills.

P Levels have predominantly been used to assess students with SLD since their introduction in 1998, and to this day some schools continue to use them. There are eight performance descriptors from P1i to P8, where P8 is the highest level and precedes the former National Curriculum Level 1 for students in primary school in Year 1 aged five – six. Students with SLD who engage in subject specific learning are typically assessed using P4 to P8 performance descriptors in curriculum areas such as English and Maths. Students with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) are assessed using P1i to P3ii which include non-subject specific descriptors that are the same across all curriculum areas and focus on skills such as communication, awareness, response, and interaction.

Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCP) were introduced to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs from 2014. This occurred as a result of SEND reforms and the introduction of the new Children and Families Act (2014) which enhanced the rights of young people from birth to 25 years old with special educational needs. EHCPs detail the support students require within the five areas of need (DfE, 2015):

- Cognition and Learning
- Communication and Interaction
- Sensory and/or Physical
- Social Emotional and Mental Health
- Preparation for Adulthood (from Year 9).

In addition, students’ learning needs and progress are monitored during a statutory annual review, which includes the progress made towards both long term and short-term outcomes in the five areas of needs. The Cognition and Learning area of need incorporates subject specific learning, formerly reported on using the P Levels. However, there is a disparity in how P Levels and EHCP outcomes show progress, as the P Levels are just used to assess academic areas and do not take into consideration that students with SLD do not make linear progress. EHCP outcomes from the other areas of need are personalised to the student, and progress is captured in a qualitative manner. Furthermore, the areas of need are
reported on separately, even though they are interlinked, as a sensory need might affect how a student may access and progress within academic subjects. For example, a student may need a sensory programme including movement breaks and self-regulation activities to enable them to be ready to focus on their academic work.

It would be beneficial for schools to develop some form of cohesive assessment measure that could encompass not just the academic assessments from the curriculum and include the outcomes from Education and Health Care Plans, as well as the ability to assess students outside of lesson times. The assessment measure would need to be inclusive of all areas of need for each student. Thus, a person-centred or holistic view of each child would be contained within one assessment document (Mills, 2017). Generally, ‘person-centred’ or ‘holistic’ are terms used in the medical world, but they could also be incorporated into the assessment of students with SLD particularly as students have complex learning profiles and make progress throughout a variety of areas. Furthermore, there are a multitude of professionals that support students’ learning such as speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and other multi agency professionals. The assessment measure could also include non-academic areas outside of lesson times such lunch times and on school trips, and even problems when travelling to and from school might be an area that could be addressed.

1.3 Rationale for research
My research focused on one secondary school with an established and exciting curriculum in place that is highly differentiated to meet individual needs. It examined how assessments capture learning that has taken place within a broader context than P Levels for students with SLD who are engaged in subject specific learning. At the school where this research takes place, P Levels have been replaced by School Levels in every curriculum subject, with P Levels ceasing to be used in December 2021. Following the removal of P Levels, School Levels were written in English and Maths in 2017 (Appendix 1); however, it has taken four years to re-write all the assessment levels. Although my school has responded to the new DfE guidance (2017) and removed P Levels, assessments for students with SLD are still conducted for the individual academic areas such as English, Maths, Science and Music.
The updated Ofsted guidance (2019) places a greater emphasis on curriculum Intention, Implementation and Impact. For those with SEND this includes a curriculum Intent to prepare students for further education or adulthood. This enables schools to explore how they teach different subjects, which is intrinsically linked to how areas of learning can then be assessed holistically. The term ‘holistic assessment’ as used in this thesis will be defined in Chapter 2.4.7 within the literature review. Furthermore, Ofsted (2019) describes the expectations of assessing students with SEND to include their learning and development towards outcomes in the areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). If we are developing students’ skills in areas such as communication or independence skills, then an inclusive assessment system which values other skills is needed (Douglas et al., 2016).

Students with SLD do not always progress in a linear manner (Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016). It is therefore essential to create an ethos of acknowledging students’ abilities rather than deficits. As the National College of Teaching and Learning (Lilly et al., 2014) described, ‘instead of levels, detailed information can be shared about what the young person has fully understood and is able to do’ (p38), thus creating an individualised and personalised approach to assessment. This research explores how learning is captured and assessed including both academic and non-academic learning (Bautista et al., 2016) and the importance of both kinds of assessments. Furthermore, it investigates whether a holistic assessment measure designed to capture the progress of students with SLD can be created to measure both academic and non-academic progress.

My research began in September 2018 with Phase One; however, during Phase Two, the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020. This had a substantial impact on my research design, planning and implementation. This resulted in significant amendments being needed for my methodology and data collection stages, as there were considerable ethical implications to be navigated when guidelines were revised. These adaptations and changes during Phase Two and Phase Three will be discussed further in Chapter 3: Methodology.
1.4 Current assessment guidance for students with SLD

Following the National Curriculum Review (Oates, 2011) a new National Curriculum was introduced in September 2014 (DfE, 2014b) and National Curriculum Levels were consequently disapplied from September 2014. The subsequent DfE guidance (2014b) stated that ‘schools should have the freedom to decide how to teach their curriculum and how to track the progress that pupils make’ (p4). The New National Curriculum programmes of study for Key Stage 1 and 2 include end of year expectations, where students are assessed as working towards the expected standard, working at the expected standard, and working at greater depth within the expected standard (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018). In mainstream schools, Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) and progress measures enable schools to benchmark and compare their progress nationally (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018). In secondary schools, a new accountability system was introduced using ‘Progress 8’ measures (DfE, 2016) which allows for comparison and benchmarking nationally. However, for a secondary special school, there are no appropriate external testing for students with learning difficulties, and the P Levels remained in place as statutory assessments.

It was not until 2016 that the Rochford Review recommended that P Levels were no longer fit for purpose, leaving individual schools responsible for assessment and reporting methods. The DfE response (2017) was to disapply P Levels P4 to P8, replacing them with Pre-Key Stage 1 and Pre-Key Stage 2 standards in English and Mathematics (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018) from September 2018 for primary aged pupils. Thus, the statutory duty is currently for primary special schools to report English and Mathematics levels in KS1 and KS2 using the Pre-Key Stage Standards for students with SLD who are engaged in subject-specific learning. Students with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) who are not engaged in subject-specific learning, continued to be assessed using P Levels P1-P3ii in 2020/21, and from September 2021 students with PMLD should be assessed using the Engagement Model (Table 1).
The new Pre-key stage standards 1 - 6 have been adapted from P Levels P5 – P8, with Standard 1 being broadly equivalent to P5, to allow for progress to be monitored against the new national curriculum and provide opportunities for students to show a wider range of skills. For example, the new assessment standards in writing include the addition of creative writing whereas the former P Levels for writing just focused on physical writing skills (Table 2). This allows greater inclusivity for students with physical disabilities who cannot hold a pen or type, by acknowledging their ability to compose work verbally.

Table 2 Example of P7 writing and Pre-Key Stage writing descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P7 Writing</th>
<th>Pre-key Stage 2 Standard 3 Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils group letters and leave spaces between them as though they are writing separate words: • They are aware of the sequence of letters, symbols and words [for example, selecting and linking symbols together, writing their names and one or two other simple words correctly from memory].</td>
<td>Composition The pupil can: • make up their own phrases or short sentences to express their thoughts aloud about stories or their experiences • write a caption or short phrase using the graphemes that they already know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcription The pupil can: • form correctly most of the 20+ lower-case letters in Standard 3 of English language comprehension and reading • identify or write these 20+ graphemes on hearing the corresponding phonemes • spell words (with known graphemes) by identifying the phonemes and representing the phonemes with graphemes (e.g., in, cat, pot).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the disapplication of P Levels, a variety of guidance has been published regarding how to conduct assessments and use data; however there is no specific guidance for students of secondary age with SLD (Smith et al., 2020). Ofsted (2018) examines the effectiveness of schools’ data and its use, not the actual data, and there are no expectations about how assessments are conducted in any subjects beyond statutory assessment in English and Mathematics at KS1 and KS2. Furthermore, during Ofsted inspections, ‘inspectors should consider a wide range of information. No single measure or indicator should determine judgements’ (p29). Therefore, schools have the freedom to develop individual assessment and recording systems, themes central to my research.

The Rochford Review (2016) does not suggest a specific method of assessment. Instead, the review suggests that schools should identify their own systems relevant to individual needs, as learners with SEND make progress in diverse ways. Rochford (2016) called for a new way of thinking, with an assessment approach that is more aligned to the individual needs of students with SLD enabling students to demonstrate progress within the national curriculum. Therefore, an innovative approach to assessment beyond P Levels is required. Furthermore, several publications on assessment methodology, for example, Assessment in Special Schools and AP settings: a Challenge Partners best practice guide (Challenge Partners, 2017) also state six core principles of assessment, leaving the coordination to individual schools, rather than recommending any specific approaches or assessment systems.

Current evidence on what assessment systems work well for recording the progress of students with SLD is mainly anecdotal rather than empirical. For example, during a special school conference ‘Special education – where do we go from here?’ hosted by the Schools, Students and Teachers Network (2017), three schools presented examples of their new assessment systems which involved developing systems to monitor social, emotional, and mental health, as well as writing their own school levels. Furthermore, The National College for Teaching and Leadership completed small-scale research involving 238 schools, of which 12 were special schools: ‘Beyond Levels: alternative assessment approaches developed by teaching schools’ (Lilly et al., 2014). This includes research from the Mary Rose Academy (p29), a special school who explored recording incidental
and spontaneous learning and methods of effectively assessing and recording progress.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all external tests were suspended, and all students were assessed using teacher grades in the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021. In the Autumn Term of 2021, non-statutory guidance was published to promote ‘recovery’ through a broad and balanced curriculum (DfE, 2021a). Both formative and summative assessment formed a key part of this document, with teachers identifying gaps in students’ learning to be able to plan next steps and help them ‘catch up’ following missed learning due to the pandemic. In addition, there was a focus on developing well-being and students’ social, emotional, and mental health needs, and all schools received catch up funding to be used in the most appropriate way to support students to progress to ensure they had not fallen behind.

1.5 Summary

There have been significant developments in the assessment of students with special needs over the years by the introduction of P Levels in 1998 and their subsequent removal in 2017. However, since the P Levels have been removed as a statutory assessment, there has been no replacement for students of secondary age with severe learning difficulties, providing schools with the opportunity to develop their own system based on the DfE’s (2017) recommended guidance. In Chapter 2, the literature review examines:

- curriculum and learning,
- assessment principles including why we assess,
- how to assess, including academic and non-academic progress,
- how students with SLD are assessed,
- how students with SLD can reflect on their learning and have a voice,
- holistic assessment,
- teacher assessment literacy.
Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is an unbiased, comprehensive critical analysis of a research area that provides an in depth view of a current situation (Winchester and Salji, 2016; Rewhorn, 2018). It enables the researcher to identify any gaps in the area, and informs the research questions, as well as places the findings into context when identifying future contributions. This literature review explores key themes relating to assessment including their purpose and the current methods used in special schools. Gaps in empirical evidence with relation to students with SLD are identified. In exploring the types of assessment currently used, it is hoped that key areas of learning will be identified outside of academic learning. Comparisons can be drawn from other fields such as the Early Years sector, as students in Early Years will be working at broadly the same cognitive abilities as older students with SLD.

2.2 Search methods

This literature review was conducted between November 2017 – June 2021, with almost 400 articles being reviewed from 1981 – 2021, with approximately 60 being included in this final review. This period was chosen due to significant cultural and policy changes that occurred from the 1980s onwards (Colley, 2020), such as The International Year for Disabled People (1981), The Education Act (1981), The Disabled Persons Act (1986) and the Education Reform Act (1988). These changes have had a substantial impact on schools in regard to the way students with SLD are taught and assessed, and how inclusion is conducted, for example, with more students with learning difficulties being integrated into mainstream schools. All articles were in the English Language only and were peer reviewed empirical research which was predominantly qualitative. United Kingdom (UK) statutory and non-statutory policy papers were also incorporated, for example from the Department of Education, to ensure practice in schools was included.

Database searches included The Open University Library, Google Scholar, Sage Publishing, Taylor and Francis online, and Mendeley. Key words used comprised of variations of ‘assessment’, ‘P Levels’, ‘Special educational needs’ and ‘holistic assessment’. In particular, the term ‘assessment’ generated a vast amount of
literature, and therefore secondary filters for education were added to exclude the use of ‘assessment’ in other fields such as medical assessments. Zetoc alerts were created for education journals including ‘childhood education’, ‘Journal of Educational Psychology’ and ‘Journal of Special Education Technology’. Many articles were found to be irrelevant as they focused on areas outside of special needs assessment for instance primary assessments or new assessment tools relevant to only mainstream schools such as comparative judgments. In addition, some international articles were discounted as they were from countries with vastly different education systems to the UK, for example South Africa. Nevertheless, international articles were included with themes relevant to this research such as ‘holistic assessment’ from the USA and Singapore, as there is a lack of research about holistic assessment in the UK. However, no studies to date have been found which combine academic and non-academic assessments in a holistic manner.

Follow up searches using the OU library were conducted on key authors in the assessment field, for instance Dylan Black and Roseanna Bourke. Alerts for Ofsted, DfE updates, and weekly newsletters were enabled to remain up-to-date with current UK policy and guidance. Research updates from the SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network), Special Schools and SEND Network, Challenge Partners, and EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) were also set up to stay informed of any UK research projects.

Articles related to the National Curriculum were excluded due to the significant difference of assessment between mainstream schools and special schools. However, articles relating to the Early Years Framework (DfE, 2017) were included as there are similarities with assessment for students with SLD, whereby assessments are conducted using learning stories. Learning stories involve qualitative descriptions through observation of what a child can do and form the main assessment method in Early Years. In addition, due to the researcher’s knowledge of SEND, generalisability could be applied through the comparison of articles, and application to students with learning difficulties. Through games and play, young students aged 0 to 5 are assessed in communication and language, physical development, personal, social, and emotional development, literacy, mathematics, and expressive arts and design. This framework combines some of the academic subjects that students with SLD are also taught, for example
expressive arts consists of DT, music, art, and drama. The areas from the EYFS areas also highlight the importance of early development skills such as communication, which is an important area of need for students with SLD also identified in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). International articles were included where relevant to this research, for example holistic assessment and assessment for those with special needs, particularly from New Zealand, due to the focus on inclusive learning and learning journals which are similar in nature to the UK EYFS research.

Although the term ‘student voice’ is widely used in schools, the term did not generate many articles; therefore, a snowball searching methodology was used by searching for articles found in the reference list (Cohen et al., 2011; Rewhorn, 2018). This identified further literature regarding how the voice of people with learning difficulties is incorporated into research. The topics of the research varied, including seeking views of young people on a new school project. However, the method of giving a person (student or adult) with learning difficulties a voice was the important factor, and therefore these articles were included.

2.3 Reliability and validity

Principles of PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009) were followed to identify a wider range of literature relevant to holistic assessment and learning for students with SLD. This enabled a more appropriate structure for the literature review searches, and to engage critically with relevant literature. Using the PRISMA approach also reduced bias by setting restrictions and using a clear focus for keyword searches, ensuring that all articles within the parameters that were set were included (Winchester and Salji, 2016). Each article was read carefully, and text pertinent to assessment and special needs was highlighted. An Excel document was created to map the articles (Appendix 2).

This literature review included a variety of qualitative research such as case studies and systematic reviews, and although the personal views of participants and researcher may create a small bias, these should be mitigated as much as possible (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, the qualitative nature of the literature and niche research area meant that sample sizes were relatively small; however internal validity was checked carefully within each article. Risk of bias was
considered when viewing blogs or individual school approaches to assessment and were excluded as they were not evidence-based; however, government publications and statutory guidance were included. All articles that are included have been peer reviewed, and therefore risk of bias has been mitigated with these articles. The literature review was conducted between August 2018 and January 2021, though due to the changing nature of assessment guidance the review was kept up to date throughout this research with statutory guidance and updates from Ofsted and DfE.

2.4 Key areas of literature

This next section examines key areas of literature related to curriculum, how students learn, the purpose of assessment, types of assessment including assessments used for students with SLD, how student voice is used in learning and research, holistic assessment, and finally teacher assessment literacy.

2.4.1 Curriculum

The introduction of the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) in 2019 by Ofsted, reinforced the removal of subject levels (both National Curriculum and P Levels), placing a greater focus on teaching and learning, rather than data collection. In addition, there is a strong focus on curriculum Intent, Implementation, and Impact to determine the quality of education in schools. The curriculum Intent explains what the students will learn to develop their knowledge and skills, the Implementation how this will be taught, and the Impact relates to the student outcomes. A greater focus on curriculum enables schools (including special schools) to explore what subjects they teach and how they teach these different subjects, which is intrinsically linked to how areas of learning can then be assessed to demonstrate progress.

Recent developments in the EIF have heightened the need for a knowledge-rich curriculum, with a strong insistence on a broad and balanced curriculum with a clear intent of what is taught (Ofsted, 2019). However, for students with SLD, this poses another difficulty as students find it hard to follow a knowledge-rich curriculum by retaining and building upon knowledge over time as they have little general knowledge and poor strategies for thinking and learning (Lacey, 2009). Furthermore, research has consistently shown that the limitations and rigidity of
the National Curriculum has made it difficult for special schools to develop anything other than subject-specific teaching. Imray and Hinchcliffe’s (2012) research called for a recognition of ‘distinct curriculum models for those with severe and profound learning difficulties’ (p151), questioning the value of focusing on subjects including English and Mathematics for students with SLD. However, there is no current research that explores how numeracy and literacy activities also impact on the progress students make in other areas such as independence. Similarly, Blackburn and Carpenter (2012), DfE (2018), and Lamb et al. (2018) also suggested that, for students with SLD, what is taught incorporates the development of skills beyond the National Curriculum subjects such as communication and independence. Learning should involve significant personalisation, with the students being at the core of the learning (Lamb et al., 2018), implying a need for a person-centred or holistic approach to teaching (Mills, 2017) whereby several elements of learning are assessed at the same time.

The implementation of the curriculum, or how it is taught also needs to be different for students with SLD, as students do not learn in a traditional manner (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012; Steele, 2005). Imray and Hinchcliffe (2012) and Sawyer (2009) show the need for different pedagogical approaches, as well as the need to value incidental learning. This is supported by Black and Wiliam (2006) and Bourke at al. (2018) who all suggest that non-academic learning and incidental learning are just as important as academic learning. Therefore, if students with SLD are following a subject-based curriculum, non-academic learning also needs to be incorporated and acknowledged as a focus and a valued learning outcome.

The impact of the curriculum is shown by the progress that the students have made. Imray and Hinchcliffe (2012) suggested that assessments should capture what is learnt, rather than fitting learning into prescribed levels for skills perceived to be taught, for example with the use of P Levels. Although Imray and Hinchcliffe (2012) called for a different curriculum and pedagogical approach for students with SLD, the focus of this research is on assessment, as all students with SEND should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that is differentiated to meet individual needs (DfE, 2015). If the curriculum is acknowledged as teaching a wide variety of skills through subject-specific lessons, then assessments must be used to capture learning in all areas to show meaningful progress. For example, Physical Education develops students’ personal and social skills such as life skills,
communication and cooperation, as well as sports skills (Opstoel et al., 2020). Similarly, a music lesson will develop a student’s musical skills as well as their ability to listen, work as a group and communicate with others. Therefore, it is important that all these areas of development are captured together to show meaningful, individual progress. Consequently, this research is focused on how assessments can be developed to capture all the progress that takes place within a variety of curriculum subjects, rather than a change of curriculum.

Furthermore, the new EIF (Ofsted, 2019) emphasises the need for the curriculum to be more than just academic subjects, providing substantial evidence for a holistic approach, so that the curriculum focuses on students’ broader development. For instance, the curriculum should ‘support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy’ (p11). This is particularly relevant to students with SLD as the curriculum should be able to develop these skills through a person-centred approach to learning and assessment. In addition, the EIF describes the expectations of assessing students with SEND to include their learning and development towards outcomes in the five areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). If the curriculum is developing students’ skills in areas such as communication or independence skills, then an inclusive or holistic assessment system which values other skills is needed (Douglas et al., 2016). However, to date there has been little agreement on what new assessments for students with SLD could look like, and although some research has been conducted on new assessments for students with SLD (Lilly et al., 2014), no studies have been identified which have explored how academic and non-academic learning can be assessed together holistically. This is an area where further research is needed as there is a current gap in the literature and forms the central premise of my research.

2.4.2 Learning

Sawyer (2009) described learning as the construction of new knowledge and skills with ‘learning always taking place against a backdrop of existing knowledge’ (p6). Similarly, Lacey (2009) explained that learning is the ability to do or know something new. Learning can be both formal and informal. Formal learning refers to learning that is planned for in relation to the curriculum and can include different
pedagogical approaches such as reflection, scaffolding and building on prior knowledge (Sawyer, 2009).

Students with SLD often do not learn in a conventional manner and need a different approach to mainstream peers including activities which are scaffolded, or broken down into exceedingly small steps, lots of repetition and reinforcement, and opportunities to generalise skills (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012). In support, Steele (2005) agreed that separate learning pedagogies are needed for students with SLD. These should include lessons that are repetitive, break down tasks into small steps, have strong routines and structure, incorporate functional tasks related to the real world, modelling, and continuous feedback to support learning. Furthermore, the process of learning itself encourages cognitive improvements, as well as the acquisition of knowledge. For example, it is not necessarily the learning outcome that is the ultimate target, it is the learning along the way such as the benefits of developing communication skills and having fun that are also significant learning events (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012).

Students with SLD work below age-related expectations, and previous research has identified pre-learning skills that lead to academic learning. Montroy et al. (2014) and Brogaard Clausen et al. (2015) found that the early development of social-emotional skills, behaviour and self-regulation had a profound impact on students’ learning within the classroom and could be used as predictors for future progress. Similarly, Popham et al. (2018) found that ‘self-regulatory interventions have demonstrated numerous benefits for helping improve the academic performance of students’ (p239). Blackburn and Carpenter (2012) agreed with the importance of self-regulation but claimed ‘engagement for learning’ is the most significant skill needed for learning to take place. All these areas of development contribute to students being ready to learn, and, for those with SLD for whom academic knowledge may be difficult to acquire, developing readiness for learning skills is essential for academic learning to take place. However, Ware and Healey (2018) disagreed that engagement is an appropriate measure of progress, rather it is a measure of the suitability of the setting and can be seen as a passive experience. Instead, they identified measures of alertness within the context of biobehavioural state as being more meaningful to capture, for example how awake and ‘alert’ the student is, as opposed to being unalert and in a deep sleep.
Informal learning occurs within and outside lessons, and includes non-academic, incidental, and invisible learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2011; Bourke et al., 2018). However, the value of informal learning cannot always be acknowledged by teachers using formal assessments which utilise academic and subject specific measures. For students with SLD, informal learning in non-academic areas can be the focus of assessment through the use of Individual Education Plans (DfE, 2015) that break down annual EHCP outcomes in the five areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice, for example in areas such as independence and sensory processing. In addition, some learning is a by-product of academic learning, for instance developing social skills through group work (Imray and Hinchcliffe 2012) or becoming more independent. For students with SLD they can learn informally through developing their communication or creativity skills and independence during break and play time, which can have an enormous impact on students’ personal development. Therefore, for students with SLD, both formal and informal learning are important as they need to make progress in all areas across school life.

Another approach to learning is Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) that is often used within psychology and education fields to provide an in-depth understanding of students’ progress through social construction (Eun, 2019; Newman and Latifi, 2021). The ZPD provides a framework for learning in both informal and formal contexts (Eun, 2019) by examining what the students can do independently, and what areas of learning are needed to achieve the next step (Figure 1) through the support of a more knowledgeable other and the use of technology and tools.
The ZPD intrinsically links learning and development by means of acquiring skills from a ‘more knowledgeable other’ through a collaborative approach (Eun, 2019). In addition, tasks are scaffolded or broken down into small steps for the learner to achieve as they move towards their ultimate goal. The use of scaffolding to break down tasks into manageable steps with assistance is a common pedagogical approach to support learners (Imray and Hincholiffe, 2012; van de Pol et al., 2010). Furthermore, ZPD is used extensively with students with learning difficulties; however, there is little research in this field. One small-scale project (Chalaye and Male, 2011) involved two case studies of two students with SLD (Gemma) and PMLD (Gary) working together and learning through ZPD. These case studies entailed the collection of observational data of Gemma and Gary interacting with each other over the course of one term during play and snack times. Gemma assumed the ‘teacher’ role of her less able peer Gary, with both students making progress in a variety of areas through the social construction of their exchanges and finding meaning in their interactions. For example, Gemma helped Gary with his eating by scaffolding tasks, and was able to take a lead when using the trampoline together. Findings clearly demonstrated how Gemma, the student with SLD, had made progress with her behaviour, independence, and

Figure 1 The Zone of Proximal Development - https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html
spontaneous communication, and Gary, the student with PMLD, had made progress with his eating skills (life skills) and communication.

Significantly, as previously stated, students with SLD do not always learn in a linear manner, due to, for example, difficulties with their communication skills, or cognitive ability, or physical ability. Therefore, students can often bypass certain developmental stages that they would not be able to complete and move on to a more functional skill. For instance, if a student cannot count to ten, they will learn the concept of number by exchanging a note for a sandwich in a shop, or if they are not able to develop phonics/reading skills they will continue to focus on sight vocabulary and recognising key words in the community by their shape/colour (Frith, 1985). Jenkinson (2000) described functional life skills as an important area of learning for students with SLD, including ‘basic self-care and hygiene, safety, domestic skills, community access, using public transport, and, at secondary level, pre-vocational skills’ (p8). Similarly, Atjonen (2014) placed value on the assessment of ‘effort, participation, and attitudes to learning’ (p241) and Bourke et al. (2018) also called for a wider viewpoint of learning. Finally, learning for students with SLD should be personalised, and tailored for the individual (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b; Lamb et al., 2018), with the students’ different learning styles and interests being at the centre of lessons and teacher planning.

2.4.3 Why assess?
The primary purpose of assessment should be to enable learning (Black et al., 2003), and, as summarised by Ellison (2017), assessment ‘helps teachers to teach and pupils to learn’ (p2). The three main approaches to assessment include assessment ‘for,’ ‘as’ and ‘of’ learning (DeLuca et al., 2016). Assessment for learning enables teachers to evaluate the learning that is taking place within lessons and inform the next steps for teaching. Assessment as learning provides opportunities for students to reflect on their own (self-assessment) and others’ (peer assessment) work, thus developing their skills of self-monitoring. Assessment of learning allows teachers to check students’ knowledge and understanding.

Formative assessment is assessment ‘for’ and ‘as’ learning and is the process of on-going assessment in the classroom. It informs teachers about students'
learning and how to adapt activities to build on prior knowledge (Black et al., 2003), thus enabling teachers to provide the appropriate support and guidance to develop learning (Eun, 2019). Summative assessment quantifies students’ achievement and acquisition of new skills and knowledge (Atjonen 2014, DfE 2014), often being used to show progress to parents/carers and stakeholders, as well as to hold teachers and schools accountable (DfE, 2014b). Initial, or baseline assessments are summative and can be used as a measure from which to show progress (Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015). Teachers use both formative and summative assessment approaches to capture learning within the lesson and over time, enabling teachers to show students’ progress and to plan the next steps in their education.

Progress is the measurement of learning between two points of assessment, both within a lesson using formative assessment, or after a unit of work, or at the end of an academic year using summative assessment. Attainment is the standard the student has reached, for example at the end of an academic year, and it measures the amount of progress they have made. For instance, a student who started the year at National Curriculum Level 5 and finished the year at National Curriculum Level 6 can be said to have achieved one level of progress.

The purpose of assessment for students with PMLD has been questioned by Ware and Healey (2018) as students with complex needs cannot demonstrate quantifiable progress using standard assessments systems. Although their research is based on students with PMLD, it has direct relevance to students with SLD as students with SLD do not progress in a linear manner. They make spikey progress due to their learning difficulties (DfE, 2018a; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016) and progress cannot always be seen across or within a level. Ware and Healey identify the purpose of assessment as to ‘sensitize us to positive changes in the child’ (p13), therefore impacting what the teachers teach next and facilitating further advancement. They identify that new, more appropriate assessment measures are required to demonstrate progress from a student viewpoint to help each individual student develop on their own path.
2.4.4 How to assess

During research into inclusive assessment in New Zealand (Bourke and Mentis, 2014), observations were found to be the most highly valued assessment tool by teachers (p387). Similarly, (Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015) identified observations as essential when completing Early Years’ baseline assessments, forming a key part of the Assessment Framework (DfE, 2013b), whereby assessments are conducted using journals. These teacher baseline observations are the key assessment tool for the Early Years Assessment Framework (DfE, 2013b) in the UK. Figure 2 shows an example of a personal, social, and emotional development record, within developmental Stage 1 for typical developmental age-range of 0-3 months. There are seven EYFS criteria that can be graded emerging, developing, or achieved.

![Personal, social and emotional development journal observation record](image)

Figure 2 Example of Personal, social and emotional development journal observation record

Students with SLD progress in small steps, and it is important to capture their learning over time. Observations are a key method of assessing students with SLD to record learning that is taking place. This is particularly important as students are not always able to complete worksheets; therefore, learning is often assessed through their activities and the dialogue between themselves and members of staff, hence the learning is the process and not the end product. However, there
are issues of validity and reliability with teacher judgements, particularly as these judgements can vary depending on experience and knowledge (Herppich et al., 2018). Similarly, Rochford (2016) highlighted the difficulties of reliability and accuracy with the use of P Levels, and Martin (2006) called for a greater reliability of these teacher judgements through moderation and external validation.

Findings from research projects have identified an integrated assessment approach (which include observations) as the most appropriate to use (Bourke and Mentis, 2014; Herppich et al., 2018; Pyle and Deluca, 2017). Similarly, other research has identified that assessment of students with SLD encompasses a wide range of strategies including observations, photographic and video evidence (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Douglas et al., 2016). As students with SLD learn and make progress in a variety of different ways, an integrated assessment approach allows for flexibility and the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to capture progress in academic and non-academic areas. For example, individual target setting, and monitoring of students’ progress allows for ipsative assessment whereby progress is judged against the learners’ previous work, rather than against a common assessment framework (Bourke and Mentis, 2014). This form of assessment aligns well with EHCP outcomes which are personalised to each individual student. In addition, ipsative assessments can be used in a variety of ways using both quantitative and qualitative data to show progress in both formal and non-formal areas of learning.

2.4.5 Assessment of learners with severe learning difficulties

Assessment programmes such as Pivats and Connecting Steps have previously been widely used to demonstrate small steps progress within a P Level (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012; Martin, 2006). Such computer based tools are used to break down levels into smaller, more manageable criteria. For example, Connecting Steps (2021) breaks down P6 Reading into 36 steps, which can then show a percentage increase in the overall level between two data collection points to demonstrate progress (Figure 3).
However, prior to the Rochford Review (2016), Martin (2006) described issues with using P Levels to measure progress over a single year, as they are designed as a linear, best fit model, and students with SLD do not always progress a level each year. It is important to note that the ‘best fit’ approach to levelling students does not work well, as students could be moved onto the next level without the understanding to do so and consolidating knowledge can be just as important as gaining new knowledge (McIntosh, 2015; Rochford, 2016). Martin (2006) went on to explain that P Levels are ‘inadequate for describing the irregular assessment profiles of pupils with a range of complex special educational needs’ (p74) as students can often make progress over a number of levels. For example, whilst a student in English may be able to ‘produce or write their name in letters or symbols’ (see P6 Writing Appendix 3), they may be unable to complete the previous level, as they do not have the physical skills to ‘trace, overwrite or copy shapes and straight line patterns’ (see P5 Writing Appendix 3). Furthermore, a student who has excellent counting skills could ‘count reliably to three’ (P5 Number Appendix 3) and ‘count at least 5 objects reliably’ (P6 Number Appendix 3) but they may not be able to ‘demonstrate an understanding of the concept of more’ (P5 Number Appendix 3). Therefore, they are limited to remaining at P5, even though they can achieve a higher skill in counting. This irregular, non-linear or ‘spikey’ cognitive progress is described by DfE, (2018) whereby students have strengths or gaps in areas due to the impact of their learning difficulties. Figure 4 shows an example of the developmental spikey progress of a student from A
Celebratory Approach to SEND Assessment in the Early Years (p5, DfE, 2018a). The profile shows the students’ developmental abilities at 39 months, 43 months, and 47 months, which are all significantly lower than expected for their age. However, you can clearly see that this student has strengths in the areas of moving and handling, making relationships and technology; and the areas they find difficult include speaking, reading, writing, self-confidence, managing feelings and being imaginative.

In addition to Early Years assessments, other assessment tools for students with SLD now track both academic and non-academic areas of assessment such as behaviour and self-regulation. ‘Onwards and upwards’ is an assessment system for students with SEND that tracks progress including ‘life skills, non-subject specific learning, personalised learning plans or EHCPs and measures linear, spikey or cumulative progress’ (Robinson, 2018). Further research into tracking non-academic learning includes Lilly et al.’s (2014) research commissioned by The National College for Teaching and Leadership, where the Mary Rose Academy explored alternative methods of assessing progress in incidental and spontaneous learning, by incorporating assessments from P Levels, Early Years Development Matters, and the new national curriculum framework. This allowed for an individual
assessment approach, and, like the Early Years development profiles, enabled spikey cognitive progress to be shown. Significantly, this study demonstrates that this wide variety of assessment methods shows that there is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach to assessing students with SLD. It is very much an individual approach with the student being at the heart of the learning (Carpenter et al., 2011; Bourke et al., 2018). Therefore, researchers agree that a personalised assessment approach is required for students with learning difficulties that incorporates both academic and non-academic progress in what can be described as an integrated or holistic format.

Previously, the Progression Guidance (DfE, 2009) provided data on target setting and progress that schools could use for comparing progress nationally for students working below age-related expectations, using P Levels. However, it is not a reliable way for schools to be held accountable, as it is based on a small data set which does not take into consideration category of need (learning difficulty, physical difficulty, or additional support needs) nor allow for the progress to be seen within the range of one P Level (Martin, 2006; Norgate, 2011). Current educational pedagogy tends towards personalised teaching and assessment for individuals, making the degree of progress of students, especially those in special schools, more challenging to compare nationally.

Male’s (2000) research examined the perspectives of headteachers on target setting for students with SLD and concluded that targets should be personal and student focused, with an emphasis on experience targets. Experience targets generally related to inclusion opportunities, for example accessing mainstream provision, and therefore ‘broadening’ experiences to demonstrate progression, where progress could not be seen through attainment. In addition, Male identified challenges with assessment as schools seek to ‘measure what they value rather than valuing what they can easily measure’ (US Department of Education, 1992 cited in Male, 2020). Finally Male identifies a gap in literature and suggests further research in the area of how to assess the progress that is valued is needed. Similarly, Bourke et al., (2018) identifies the need for further research into what to assess, how and why, placing value on ‘learning and teaching in the everyday’ (p38), as does Lilly et al., (2014) who calls for a ‘cultural shift’ in the use of assessment due to the new curriculum and removal of levels (p39). Furthermore,
Lilly et al., (2014) described the need for individual assessment and learning journals to show progress in a broad range of areas.

It is important to assess the strengths of students rather than to focus on their deficits and what they cannot do, because students with SLD have different stages of development compared to their neurotypical peers and acknowledging this is essential (DfE, 2018a). Assessing a wide range of developmental areas can ensure successful learning is recorded and achievements are highlighted. Ware and Healey (2018) identified a noteworthy gap when assessing the very small steps that students with learning difficulties make, including difficulties in current thinking about what is assessed, how it is assessed, and how the assessments inform future teaching. They also identify that teachers and parents struggle to deal with an apparent lack of progress, when achievement is related to the curriculum content as described by P Levels.

2.4.6 Student voice

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) identified that children and young people have a right to express their opinions on matters affecting their lives. Within the education profession, incorporating student voice within lessons is becoming common practice and it is especially important when working with students with SLD that student voice is included (Colley, 2020). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) provided statutory guidance on how students with learning difficulties should be enabled and empowered to make decisions. It includes the necessity for staff training so that they can work together with students to enable their views and opinions to be heard. In addition, the Code of Practice states that student voice must be incorporated into their EHCP including student views on future aspirations, and self-assessments should be included during the annual review process.

In education, ‘student voice’ is a term widely used to seek the views and opinions of students to engage them with all aspects of their school life (Robinson and Taylor, 2007). For example, student voice can be sought with regards to their learning topics, their progress through self-assessment, or to make changes to their environment. Obtaining student voice is a broad and varied practice, which includes students constructing their own understanding ‘in the moment’, and
formal approaches to gather student views. More recently in educational research, there has been an increased awareness of incorporating student voice into matters concerning students’ education (Bergmark and Kostenius, 2018). Research involving student voice tends to be qualitative by nature and involves small-scale studies which focus on individual and distinct viewpoints (Cohen et al., 2011). There is significantly more literature relating to neurotypical student voice and a paucity of research involving students with learning difficulties (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016). However, there has been a steady increase in research involving people with learning difficulties since the Mental Capacity Act in 2005 (Bunning et al., 2022). The importance of student voice within learning is highlighted by Rodgers (2006) who explored conversation between teachers and students through reflections and descriptions of the students’ experiences within a small-scale research project involving seven mainstream teachers in the USA. Another small-scale research project (Clark, 2005) involved 28 children within UK Early Years provision and utilised the ‘Mosaic approach’ to ascertain student voice, identifying the following principles: ‘multi-method, participatory, reflexive, adaptable, focused on children’s lived experiences, embedded into practice’ (p13). Both of these studies highlighted the importance of incorporating student voice within learning activities and embedding it within teacher practice.

In examining disability studies, a review (Stack and McDonald, 2014) found only twenty-one action research projects from English language journals involving adults with developmental disabilities. These projects were published between 1996 and 2012, with 68% published after 2005 and the introduction of the Mental Capacity Act. The first systematic review that encompassed people with sensory impairments and/or intellectual impairments was not conducted until 2020 and involved fifty-four papers from fourteen different countries. Rix et al., (2020) highlighted the lack of research involving people with impairments, and only thirty-six of the fifty-four papers identified research involving people with learning difficulties. In particular, only one research paper was identified that meaningfully captured the voice of a person with PMLD, and there was no specific reference to those with SLD or severe intellectual impairments. Although Rix et al., identified a significant issue when obtaining student voice for people with learning difficulties as there has been an over reliance on speech, over 75% of the studies in their review involved using visual support. However, the multimodal Mosaic approach developed by Clark and Moss (2001) for students in Early Years could have
meaningful application to students with learning difficulties, as it is based on collecting data through a wide range of methods such as photographs taken by the child, role play, child conference (mini-interview) to build up a picture of the child’s views. More recently, Rix et al. (2020) developed ‘In-the-Picture’ specifically for students with learning difficulties based on the Mosaic Approach that involves a multimodal listening approach to seek to understand the views and experiences of students. However, there remains a paucity of research in the area of student voice particularly for students with severe learning difficulties.

In support of a multimodal approach to ascertain the voice of the student, another small-scale qualitative research project explored the involvement of eight early-years children with developmental disabilities (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016). Of the eight children, seven had Down Syndrome, and one child had a physical and intellectual disability; however, the cognitive ability of the children was not explained. A Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) led the research, and further identified the need to engage with students with learning difficulties in a variety of ways to elicit responses. This questions the reliability of research studies involving outsider researchers that are not practitioners such as SaLTs or SEND teachers, as they may lack the skill set or not have the knowledge to interpret student voice in its variety of forms including gesture and vocalisations. In addition, Aldridge (2007) identified issues with using verbal questioning through a small-scale research project involving 19 participants with learning difficulties, as one participant answered ‘monkey tree’ to every verbal question. This recognises the need for the most appropriate communication method to be used which is relevant to the students’ cognitive understanding, for example a student with SLD might need symbols to support their understanding. However, Bourke and Loveridge (2016) identified issues with teachers obtaining their students’ opinions as teachers have preconceived views of their abilities and therefore may not listen to or understand what students are saying. Instead, teachers would use their own lens to construct meaning, therefore missing the crux of what the student was saying.

2.4.7 Holistic assessment

The term ‘holistic’ is more widely used in health care than education, integrating both physical and mental health. However, the International Baccalaureate (IB)
programmes which are designed to develop both academic and non-academic skills by supporting the development of ‘creativity, critical thinking, international-mindedness and values’ (Hughes, 2014, p203) may be seen as ‘holistic’. The term holistic development within the IB programme as described by Hare (2010) includes the development of ‘intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative, or intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual potentials’ (p3), identifying the significance of both academic and non-academic development in an integrated way. The IB programme incorporates student profiles and outcomes that reflect a holistic approach to learning. Hare (2010) went on to describe the importance of individual planning for students, acknowledging the need for curriculum, teaching, and assessment to be adapted accordingly. His study further described difficulties when assessing holistically, as non-academic skills or ‘soft skills’ such as ‘integrity, care, consideration, negotiation and active listening’ (p6) are problematic to assess as they can vary according to situation and environment. Therefore, Hare suggested utilising a variety of situations demonstrating students’ behaviours and actions to assess these skills, though he does not specify any examples of what this might look like. In contrast to Hare, a recent study by Rose et al. (2019) did not find noteworthy holistic connections with learning. Rose’s study focused on a small group of mainstream students in the UK and explored the effects of learning a musical instrument on non-academic skills as well as academic. No significant improvements in non-academic skills like memory, visual motor integration or behaviour were seen even when musical (academic) progress took place, although there was evidence for musical aptitude being linked to intelligence.

In support of Hare’s (2010) views on holistic education, holistic development with pre-school children has been identified and described by Bautista et al. (2016) as ‘focusing on both academic and non-academic learning areas’ (p1). This study was based on kindergarten teachers in Singapore, with the aim of investigating learning areas in the ‘Nurturing Early Learners’ curriculum framework. They discovered that teachers viewed non-academic learning as just as important, or more important than academic learning, with social, emotional, language, and motor skill development being the top priorities, integrating both formal and informal learning. Similarly, through his research into child-centred learning, Mcturgan (2017) described holistic learning as developing the ‘physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual bodies’ (p22). In addition, a holistic approach can
also be seen in the new Early Years Framework (DfE, 2017), which uses a holistic assessment system to assess children in the seventeen areas of development, including communication, language, and personal, social, and emotional development (DfE, 2017). Although the Early Years’ curriculum is focused on play-based learning so would not be age appropriate for secondary students with SLD, holistic assessment would be suitable in both academic and non-academic areas through a qualitative approach.

The ‘Final Report of the Commission on Assessment Without Levels’ (McIntosh, 2015) called for the assessment of students with learning difficulties to be holistic and inclusive, as well as to capture learning through the generalisation of skills. Although the term ‘holistic’ is mentioned twice in the report, a definition of its use with regards to assessment is not provided. This study also identifies ‘communication, social skills, physical skills and independence’ (p8) as important areas to assess, as well as progress towards long term goals of further education, employment, and independent living, all of which link into students’ individual EHCPs. This would indicate that areas of learning are intertwined, and there is no hierarchy for non-academic and academic learning, which is particularly important when capturing and reporting on the progress of students with SLD.

In support of this, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) stated that the focus for students with learning difficulties should be on the development of ‘communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health and sensory and/or physical needs’ (p85), which form the areas of need in a student’s EHCP. Moreover, students should access an education that enables them to prepare for adulthood through the development of skills for ‘employment, independent living, health and community participation’ (p120). Therefore, if the curriculum is broad and balanced and incorporates both academic and non-academic development, an assessment system should also capture both types of learning in a holistic manner. The Rochford Review (2016) agreed that assessments should encompass all areas of need as stated in the SEND Code of Practice; however statutory assessment for students with SLD (DfE, 2018a) is limited to English and Maths (academic), which fall within the ‘Cognition and Learning’ area of need. This seems to devalue the progress students with SLD make in other areas of learning, for example with their Communication, or developments in their Social, Emotional and Mental Health.
Developing how non-academic skills are captured through enrichment activities is compatible with the former Education Secretary Damian Hinds ‘Activity Passport’ (DfE 2018b) on developing an education for students that moves beyond academic subjects. Hinds (2019) identified five key areas for developing character and resilience which are: sport; creativity; performing; volunteering and membership; and the world of work. Furthermore in a recent interview with Rodgers (2019), Hinds described education as being ‘so much more than the academic’ and spoke passionately about ways of developing learning through curriculum enrichment and community partnerships.

Another theoretical paradigm that contains a holistic approach is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (1977) which explores how a child develops within their total environment, with the student at the centre. Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystem (Figure 5) contains five systems that each relate to different environments the child is in and how they interconnect with each other, demonstrating a wider use of the term through multiple environments rather than learning areas for example within the International Baccalaureate or Early Years Framework. The microsystem is the first system and includes the child’s immediate environment, for example, their home and school, as well as peers and the local areas they access such as playgrounds. This system then links into the mesosystem, followed by the exosystem and macrosystem with the outer layer being the chronosystem that incorporates environmental changes over the student’s life span.
This ecosystem is relevant to child development and education, with Bronfenbrenner seeing development and learning as social constructs through the environment. This is similar to Vygotsky (1977) who also identified how learning through ZPD identified students’ progress through social construction. Bronfenbrenner’s theory links the home and school environment together holistically, looking at the wider picture of how a child develops. However, in contrast to the student being at the centre with their views and opinions being paramount, in Bronfenbrenner’s system the environment is created to benefit the child; therefore, actions are ‘done to’ rather than ‘done with’ the child. In particular,
Bronfenbrenner highlighted the benefits of proximal process through consistency within the home and school environments to best aid development (Tudge et al., 2021). This is of particular relevance to students with learning difficulties as they require significant support in the home and school environment; however more research is needed in this area (Sontag, 1996). In Bronfenbrenner’s final work he describes six ‘developmental principles’ for the holistic development of a child, including the need for policy change to support these principles (Tudge et al., 2021). This is similar to other researchers such as Bourke et al. (2018), Colley (2020) and Lilly et al. (2014) who also identify the need for change at a policy level.

The term ‘holistic’ has been used in a variety of ways within the education field to describe both learning areas within a curriculum for example the International Baccalaureate, as well as the Early Years Foundation Stage holistic assessment system, whereby different lessons or activities are assessed separately and then viewed together. However, to date there has been no research into how to assess all the learning that takes place within one lesson for students with severe learning difficulties. It is this gap in research that is the focus for this enquiry, as the need for a holistic approach to assessment has been identified (McIntosh, 2015). For the purpose of this research, the term ‘holistic assessment’ is used to capture all the progress that has taken place within one lesson or activity, giving equal value to both academic and non-academic areas.

**2.4.8 Teacher assessment literacy**

The term ‘assessment literacy’ was first used by Stiggins (1991) and is described as the ability to know what, why and how to assess (Khadijeh and Amir, 2015). More recently, assessment literacy is a term used to refer to a teachers’ understanding, knowledge and skills when using assessment to develop students’ learning, enabling teachers to teach more effectively (Pastore and Andrade, 2019). Similarly, Khadijeh and Amir (2015) described assessment literacy as teachers’ ability to scrutinise student achievement to improve their teaching. Continued Professional Development (CPD) is required for teachers to maintain and develop their assessment literacy through the use of training, in class experiences and professional learning initiatives (DeLuca et al., 2018). Furthermore, Newman and Latifi (2021) state that ZPD can also be used as a framework for teachers’
professional development, through learning from more experienced others, and observations of practice. However, although there have been significant changes to statutory assessments, no research articles were found pertaining to the developments needed for teachers’ assessment literacy, creating a clear gap in the literature which would benefit from further research.

In the UK, teachers working in SEND local authority schools need to hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Qualified Teacher Learner Status (QTLS). There are a variety of routes into teaching, for example a four-year BEd, three-year BA with one-year PGCE with QTS or a school-based route, as well as a non-degree route through achieving QTLS. There is no obligation for teachers to have a qualification in SEND to teach in a special school. Whilst the various routes into teaching do cover some SEND issues (Hodkinson, 2009), there are limitations in initial teacher training with developing teacher knowledge of SEND (Golder et al., 2005; Lawson and Jones, 2017). Although the updated teacher standards (TDA 2007) do include reference to SEND, Hodkinson (2009) questioned how teachers are prepared to meet these standards. Furthermore, during the recent School Snapshot Survey (DfE, 2020), only 41% of teachers reported that there is suitable CPD in place with regards to supporting students with SEND.

The introduction of the Engagement Model (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020) as a new statutory assessment system for primary aged students from September 2021 has already proved problematic. In Aidonopoulou-Read’s (2021) review of the Engagement Model, she identifies difficulties with regards to a lack of training for teachers when using observations, subjectivity, and a system not being able to show formal progress and whose purpose is unclear. Furthermore, her research goes on to suggest that whilst the Engagement Model can be a useful formative assessment tool and promotes students towards being ready to learn, it generates increased workload for teachers due to personalised assessments and a non-standardised system.

Whilst all school staff receive five CPD training days per year, each school sets its own agenda related to their individual School Development Plan. Teacher assessment literacy can vary immensely amongst teachers (DeLuca et al., 2018), with some teachers at SEND schools having very limited understanding when conducting and using SEND assessments. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to
receive appropriate training and CPD to conduct assessments for students with SLD as students learn in different ways to their mainstream peers.

2.5 Summary

This literature review has explored a variety of assessment principles and approaches and examined characteristics of how students with SLD learn and are assessed, such as through observation and capturing spikey developmental progress. Areas of learning relating to both formal or academic learning have been explored such as English and Maths, and themes have been identified that fall outside of academic learning, for example learning that is informal, including self-regulation, communication, engagement, and life skills.

Since the removal of P Levels to assess students with SLD (Rochford, 2016; DfE 2017) there is no longer a prescribed format for schools to use, and, therefore, they have the autonomy to develop their own assessment systems. However, there is little guidance on what areas to assess, and no research into how areas of learning can be assessed holistically.

It is this gap in research that has sparked my interest in researching into a holistic approach to assessment for students with severe learning difficulties. I wanted to explore how progress can be captured within a system that incorporates all the learning that takes place, and really values the strengths students with SLD have, and what they can do and achieve, without limiting them through a narrow and unsuitable system of academic levels.

Whilst incorporating the whole environment can also be seen as holistic (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), researching into multiple lessons and activities within the school day, and the home environment is beyond the scope of this research, which is a small-scale study consisting of detailed mini case studies of learning within one lesson. Teachers currently report on progress in all the National Curriculum subject areas for students engaged in subject specific learning, and this thesis focuses on an alternative assessment system whereby both academic and non-academic progress is captured and valued equally within one subject area. In addition, teachers have a duty to focus on learning in the school
environment and cannot judge progress on what is happening outside of school. However, parents and carers can contribute by giving anecdotal evidence of their child’s progress at home during the EHCP annual review process.

2.5.1 Research questions
This thesis comprises of three phases to create, trial, and evaluate a holistic assessment system to demonstrate the progress of students with SLD beyond a levelled system, incorporating both academic and non-academic learning.

Phase One: focuses on investigating what areas of learning are important to assess for students with SLD, resulting in the creation of a holistic assessment chart.

Question 1. What are the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD?

Phase Two: focuses on how the areas of learning identified in Phase One were used to trial a holistic assessment chart. Following the suspension of data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic, feedback was sought from members of staff.

Question 2. How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?
Question 3. What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart?

Phase Three: following the resumption of data collection, a further trial of the holistic assessment chart was conducted. Feedback from members of staff who used the new chart was sought, alongside the viewpoints of students with regards to their academic and non-academic learning.

Question 2. How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?
Question 3. What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart, and the students’ views on their learning?
In Chapter 3, the methodology of this research is explained, including the lengthy ethics process that was undertaken. Research methods are described, and the data collection procedures for each phase.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research involved three stages of data collection. Phase One explored all the learning that takes place for students with severe learning difficulties (SLD) beyond the use of P levels. Phase One sought to understand what areas of learning are important to assess, especially those beyond academic subjects and how this learning can be captured in a meaningful manner to show progress. The culmination of Phase One resulted in the creation of a holistic assessment chart to capture both academic and non-academic progress in key areas of learning, identified through thematic analysis. The focus of Phase Two was on trialling the assessment chart using six mini case studies to explore how teachers could identify and assess the learning of students within one lesson or activity. Phase Two also examined how the holistic assessment chart gave teachers a wider understanding of students’ progress and a means of capturing learning using the key themes (both academic and non-academic learning) identified through Phase One. The Phase Two data collection was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, however some initial evaluations from members of staff were obtained. Phase Three involved three more mini case studies of teachers and students to further trial the use of the assessment chart. The chart was then evaluated by members of staff and reflections on learning sought from students. Phases Two and Three were originally intended as one phase; however, due to the disruptive impact of COVID-19, Phase Two was conducted predominantly pre-COVID-19 and Phase Three during COVID-19. Research methods were adapted accordingly, as discussed in section 3.4.

Table 3 shows an overview of each stage, the participants and their roles, and the research methods used. John participated in both Phase One to identify key themes that were important to assess leading to the creation of the holistic assessment chart, and Phase Two where he started a trial of the assessment chart with Olivia. John subsequently left the school in July 2020 and was therefore unable to participate in Phase Three. In Phase Two, Greg, a class teacher, started the assessment chart with Luke for an English lesson, although he chose not to continue with Phase Three. However, in Phase Three, Thomas, a new Music Enrichment Teacher (who replaced John in September 2020), chose to work with
Luke during choir to trial the assessment chart. Both Kate, an external Music Teacher and Susan, an external Dance Tutor, chose to participate in Phase Two and Phase Three. However, Kate worked with the same student Ben during Phase Two and Phase Three during weekly violin lessons, whereas Susan worked with Jackie during Phase Two and Richard during Phase Three during weekly dance lessons.

Table 3 Overview of research stages, participants, and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One – identification of key areas of learning to assess resulting in the creation of a holistic assessment chart</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants and role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony - Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl - Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine - Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma - Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle - Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike – Class Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John – Music Enrichment Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research methods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with members of staff to identify important areas of learning to assess, followed by thematic analysis to identify eight key themes. Follow up semi-structured interviews with members of staff to clarify themes and discuss how the eight key themes interrelate. Analysis of all the interviews leading to the creation of the holistic assessment chart, a chart incorporating assessment in both academic and non-academic areas that can be personalised alongside individual EHCP outcomes.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Phase Two - trial of the holistic assessment chart through mini case studies, and evaluation of the process of using the chart by members of staff</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants, role, and lesson taught</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia - Class Teacher and student Tom – Maths lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg - Class Teacher and student Luke – English lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John - Music Enrichment Teacher and student Olivia – Music lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate - Local Authority Music Teacher and student Ben – Violin lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly – Class Teacher and student Kevin – PSHE lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan - Dance Tutor and student Jackie – Dance lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research methods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview with members of staff to create the individual holistic assessment chart, including personalised targets Observation data collection by members of staff to complete the holistic assessment chart COVID-19 Pandemic began March 2020 Semi-structured interviews with members of staff to evaluate the chart (online)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase Three Trial and evaluation through mini case studies, and evaluation by members of staff and reflections from students

Participants, role, and lesson taught
Kate - Local Authority Music Teacher and student Ben – Violin lessons
Susan - Dance Enrichment Teacher and student Richard – Dance lessons
Thomas - Music Enrichment Teacher and student Luke – Choir lessons

Research methods
Semi-structured interview with members of staff to create the individual holistic assessment chart, including personalised targets
Observation data collection by members of staff to complete holistic assessment chart
Semi-structured interviews with members of staff to evaluate the chart (f2f or online)
Semi-structured interviews with students to reflect on their learning (f2f)

3.2 Research paradigm

The main research methods used followed an interpretivist paradigm and consisted of the collection of qualitative data. Interpretive researchers focus on the individual, and build meaning from the information obtained from research participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Qualitative research aims to explore and explain (Attride-Stirling, 2002) as well as to identify and understand (Chapman et al., 2015). Educational research involving members of school staff enables the researcher to develop an understanding of the research topic through reflection and action resulting in change (Chapman et al., 2015). Consequently, for this research, qualitative methods within an interpretivist paradigm were the most appropriate methodology to create, trial and evaluate a holistic assessment chart, seeking to understand the different viewpoints or ‘realities’ of members of staff with regards to students’ learning. Research was conducted within one school with a small number of participants, and, therefore, generalisation to other students and schools was not considered (Twining et al., 2009). However, implications for practice learnt from this study will be identified, and research contributions will be examined in Chapter 8.6.

Another consideration of the research methods was the ontological and epistemology perspectives in which the research questions are framed. Utilising what? or how? questions led to members of staff sharing their views based on personal experiences and observations of students. These are constructions or
interpretations from social situations, thus creating multiple realities within an interpretive paradigm, whereby participants use their experiences to create meaning (Freeman et al., 2007; Moss, 2009).

However, there are some limitations with an interpretivist approach, as the interpretations of the participants and researcher are intrinsically linked to their position within the research (Cohen et al., 2011). Working as a deputy headteacher in this secondary SEND school means that I am fully immersed in the research. Consequently, my viewpoint is that of an insider researcher (Unluer, 2012). Being an insider researcher helps to create subjectivity, and as stated by MacLure (2005), ‘different readers will extract differing meaning from texts, according to their background assumptions and their current priorities and beliefs’ (p409) which could create unconscious bias. This is supported by Unluer (2012) who concurred that greater awareness could lead to a loss of impartiality.

However, Attride-Stirling (2002) described the advantages of being an insider researcher when conducting qualitative analysis as being essential as insider researchers understand the significance of the findings. Therefore, the benefits of being immersed in the research and using an interpretivist approach outweigh the negatives. For example, an insider researcher understands the ethos and culture of the school and has established positive relationships with members of staff who will be involved (Unluer, 2012). This meant I had already built rapport with both members of staff and students, and having established relationships made it easier to approach members of staff when searching for participants and conducting interviews with students.

In addition, my position as Deputy Headteacher and Assessment Lead are both positions of power (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, these positions were appropriately acknowledged and reflected on in terms of the duality of roles in order to mitigate the bias of being an insider researcher (MacLure, 2005; Unuler, 2012). For instance, in leading on assessment I might carry bias as for example I might have a preconceived idea of what themes are important, and the direction they wish the research to go in; therefore, it is crucial to be mindful of this. Similarly, certain themes when interpreting data may be identified through personal views (Schiller and Einarsdottir, 2009) and it is essential to reflect and be aware of this.
3.3 Ethics

Ethics are the moral principles that govern research, and throughout this inquiry the question of ethical consent was considered carefully, particularly as this research took place in a school for students with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidance was always followed to ensure research was conducted in an ethical manner, upholding respect for all participants at all times. Prior to the pandemic, the focus was on standard ethical processes including applications to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and consent from the school where this research took place. The start of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March 2020 resulted in changes to HREC guidance, and additional documentation needed to be completed (Table 4). Continuing to maintain a strong ethical code is particularly pertinent when conducting research during a global pandemic (Malila, 2021) due to the challenges that the pandemic brings to both participants and the researcher.

Table 4 Overview of ethics process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ethics (staff interviews)</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13/07/18</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Project Registration and Risk Checklist. Including:</td>
<td>Favourable opinion received 20/07/2018. Full HREC review not required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project outline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Letter to participants, consent form and overview of project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Further information for interviewees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Letter to headteacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• E-mail from the organisation agreeing that the research can take place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project outline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Holistic assessment chart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consent forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participant information sheets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/01/20</td>
<td>Data Protection Impact Assessment form</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/01/20</td>
<td>Information Asset Register</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20</td>
<td>HREC COVID-19 Guidance</td>
<td>Face to face (f2f) data collection suspended. Online interviews could be completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase Three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ethics (staff and student interviews)</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/07/20</td>
<td>Ongoing E-mail/telephone contact with HREC</td>
<td>Approval to continue research with remote interviews and teachers collecting f2f data 21/08/20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/09/20</td>
<td>Guidance on conducting research involving human participants in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>HREC amended application required to resume f2f data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/10/20</td>
<td>Open University Health &amp; Safety – COVID-19 Risk Assessment for research projects involving human participants completed.</td>
<td>Approved by: WELs Faculty University Health &amp; Safety Team University Secretary 11/12/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/01/21</td>
<td>HREC amendment summary form and original application form, highlighted with any changes and updated consent forms and participant information sheets. COVID-19 Health &amp; Safety Risk Assessment for Human Research form COVID-19 health &amp; safety risk assessment review outcome</td>
<td>Rejected due to 3rd National lockdown and updated signatures required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/01/21</td>
<td>Health and Safety Risk Assessment updated.</td>
<td>Approved by: WELs Faculty University Health &amp; Safety Team University Secretary 19/01/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/02/21</td>
<td>Resubmitted HREC amendment summary and updated Health and Safety Risk Assessment</td>
<td>Favourable opinion received to conduct f2f staff and student interviews 12/02/21.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the start of Phase One, the HREC Project Registration and Risk Checklist was completed, and I met with the gatekeeper of the school, the headteacher, and obtained her consent (Appendix 4). All members of staff were e-mailed about the research project, and consent forms were signed by participants before the interviews (Appendix 5.1). A full ethics application to HREC was made for Phase Two, as research involved capturing data from students and interviewing students. Consent was again obtained from the headteacher following a discussion about the research, as well as consent from members of staff participating in the research, and parents and/or carers (Appendix 5.2). During the interviews I explained that after the analysis of the interviews, withdrawal of consent would not be possible, and the results of the study would be available after the thesis had been completed. Students participated in a discussion about the research, and, where possible (Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice, 2016), they gave their consent also (Appendix 5.3).

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 drastically impacted this research, and, following amended HREC guidance, all f2f (face to face) research was suspended. I was conscious of upholding ethics when continuing with this research in these unprecedented times, and, as such, during any e-mail contact with participants I was very mindful of the stresses and pressures of the current situation. This was particularly important as all the members of staff were still working full time, and the majority were working f2f in school.

At the start of Phase Three, following discussions with HREC, approval was obtained for members of staff to collect data from students using the holistic assessment chart, as schools were fully open, and members of staff would be teaching f2f. However, all communication and interviews between the researcher and members of staff needed to remain remote. An amended HREC application form was completed and subsequently approved to enable f2f interviews for members of staff and students to evaluate the assessment chart, and consent obtained from the headteacher. It was particularly important to conduct student interviews f2f due to students’ different communication needs. In person, I would be able to use a total communication approach including using signs, symbols, speech, pictures, and photographs to support a discussion with the students within a familiar learning environment (school), thus eliciting more data than through any remote option. In addition, in the case of remote interviews, the students would
have needed support from a parent/carer or member of staff, which would change the dynamic of the interview and responses received.

Guidelines for researchers from The Open University on the use of personal data for research purposes (2015) were followed; the research was registered on the Information Asset Register (IAR) and all General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) procedures were followed. A record retention schedule for all data obtained was kept. Interviews were recorded using a voice recorder app on both an iPhone and an iPad. Once recordings had been completed, they were transferred to a personal laptop and stored in a password protected folder, and original recordings deleted from the iPhone and iPad. The recordings were transcribed using software (https://transcribe.wreally.com) and checked for accuracy. All names of members of staff, school and students were anonymised; however due to the small size of the school, there were concerns that participants might be identified, for instance there is only one Newly Qualified Teacher, and one male assistant headteacher. Therefore, some data has been omitted to protect anonymity, or further consent was sought. The full research thesis will be shared with participants and a one-page overview will be shared with all stakeholders upon completion of the doctorate.

3.4 Research Methods

Qualitative research methods were used throughout this research, including semi-structured interviews, observation, and thematic analysis. Table 5 shows a summary of the data collection methods, which will be explored in this chapter.
### Table 5 Summary of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
<th>Phase Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creation of the holistic assessment chart</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trial and evaluation through mini case studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trial and evaluation through mini case studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with members of staff to identify themes</td>
<td>Semi-structured staff interview to target create individual holistic assessment chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Follow up semi-structured interviews with members of staff to discuss all themes</td>
<td>Observation data collection by members of staff to complete holistic assessment chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Creation of the holistic assessment chart</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with members of staff to evaluate the chart (online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with students to reflect on their learning (f2f)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.4.1 Case studies

In depth case studies were used to provide intensive detail with regards to capturing student progress using multiple data sources to establish meaning and understanding (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Data sources included semi-structured interviews with members of staff to set up the holistic assessment chart, observational data captured in the assessment chart, semi-structured interviews with members of staff to evaluate the chart and semi-structured interviews with students to seek their views on their learning. These qualitative data collection methods provided rich descriptions (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015) in multiple situations.

A significant benefit of using a case study approach was the ability to obtain data from participants in actual contexts (Cohen et al., 2011), to investigate the issue of how to capture academic and non-academic learning through a holistic assessment approach. This methodology follows the instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2005) whereby the researcher develops knowledge of the research topic by studying several cases. Each ‘case’ consisted of one member of
staff, linked to a specific student. Six mini cases were studied in Phase Two and three mini case studies in Phase Three, with the researcher seeking to understand how each case study is both unique yet similar (Stake, 2005).

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The research questions focused on the member of staff’s perceptions of assessment, including areas important to assess and their evaluation of the holistic assessment chart; therefore, interviews were the best method for data collection to discover the views of members of staff. Furthermore, interviews were the most suitable method for seeking the views of students with SLD, as they could be tailored to the individual and supported through different communication methods such as symbols. Videos were considered as evidence for the assessment chart; however, these were rejected due to the short timescale and quantity of data collection needed for the different activities in lessons to show progress. Interviews, as stated by Fontana and Frey (2005), ‘are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results’ (p698). They can explore the ‘how’s and ‘what’s of people’s experiences and beliefs through an interactive process that allows for the interviewer to ask further questions on areas of interest, seek clarity and obtain detailed viewpoints on individual realities.

According to Kerlinger (1970, cited in Cohen et al., 2011), using a semi-structured approach enables a focus on specific topics, whilst offering opportunities to expand on key areas of interest and generate ‘thick descriptions’ (Cohen et al., 2011) that provide detailed narratives of assessment from teacher and student points of view. This is supported by Fontana and Frey (2005) who highlighted the importance of the open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews, thus providing participants with the best opportunities to answer questions in greater detail, giving a very personal insight. In addition, Brown and Danaher (2017) agreed with the benefits, as semi-structured interviews provide a platform for discussions to happen that were not planned for.

However, during semi-structured interviews it can be difficult for the interviewer to maintain consistency with the different interviews, and additional questions or the way the questions are formed can shape the responses (Hannan, 2011).
Therefore, it is important that the researcher is aware of these issues, checks transcripts for any unconscious bias, and follows up by asking interviewees to clarify or expand on previous discussions as appropriate (Tuckman, 1972 cited in Cohen et al., 2011).

### 3.4.3 Holistic assessment chart

Observations are a key method of assessing students with SLD to describe the learning that has taken place. This is particularly important as students are not always able to complete worksheets and produce physical evidence of knowledge; therefore, progress is often identified by the activities and the dialogue between student and members of staff, thereby through the process rather than the product. Herppich et al. (2018) found that ‘teachers’ judgments were more detail oriented when they should make tracking decisions themselves’ (p189), which bodes well to capturing the learning of students through observation, particularly as the class sizes are small.

Using observation as the main method for data collection to complete a holistic assessment chart (which was designed following Phase One) enables teachers to comment broadly on any progress seen. This is similar to methods identified as being effective during kindergarten research which include the recording of anecdotal data based on teacher observations in both formal and incidental situations (Pyle and Deluca, 2017). However, one of the issues with teacher observations is that they rely purely on teacher judgement and capturing the learning of non-academic skills such as well-being or behaviour, can be very subjective as there are no clear assessment criteria (Herppich et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers’ perceptions of student progress can vary from teacher to teacher, thus affecting the accuracy of the assessments. Nevertheless, teachers’ academic assessments are frequently moderated by colleagues in school, thus ensuring their judgements are valid and robust, and this could prove a useful guide to the assessment of other skills.

Furthermore, the assessment chart allows students’ development to be captured in a variety of areas through qualitative descriptions. It also allows members of staff to capture areas of strength rather than focus on deficits due to the impact of their learning difficulties. In addition, the assessment chart provides a space for
members of staff to describe small learning steps, thus showing progress in the
different areas including academic and non-academic. Whilst the chart focusses
on one lesson taught over a number of weeks, its holistic nature utilises
Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem by incorporating the teacher’s assessment, the
voice of the student and, if selected, communication targets derived from Speech
and Language Therapy guidance.

3.4.4 Online interviews
As previously stated, the global COVID-19 Pandemic has had a disruptive impact
on this research during the Phase Two data collection stage, and subsequent
Phase Three. The school where this research was being conducted remained
open throughout the pandemic, and some members of staff and student
participants were still attending school. HREC guidance (2020) stated all f2f data
collection had to cease; therefore, alternative online methods for the second f2f
interview in Phase Two were explored to seek feedback from members of staff on
any use of the holistic assessment chart.

Telephone interviews were selected as the most appropriate alternative to f2f
interviews for the second interview with members of staff, as they still allowed
synchronous communication (Opdenakker, 2006; Irvine, 2011) and remained
within a qualitative research paradigm. In addition, telephone interviews were
straightforward to schedule as finding a time to both be physically in the room was
not an issue, and members of staff had at least 50% of their working week working
from home. Video calling such as SKYPE, Facetime or Zoom was considered;
however, it was felt that using video would be too invasive as a method as it was a
stressful time for members of staff, and not all members of staff would be
comfortable using this format of technology. Furthermore, the security of platforms
such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet are questionable (Park et al.,
2020) for use in research.

Telephone interviews enabled an open dialogue between the interviewer and
interviewee, with the opportunity for both closed and open questions within a semi-
structured format. The original second interview questions for Phase Two were
used, allowing for descriptions of experiences to be gathered (Freeman et al.,
2007; Moss 2009), and opportunities to expand on key ideas shared by members of staff to create thick descriptions (Cohen et al., 2011) and to provide comprehensive responses. As the pandemic continued, online interviews were also used during Phase Three to set up new holistic assessment charts when the data collection was resumed.

One of the disadvantages of telephone interviews is the difficulty to create rapport between the interview and interviewee (Opdenakker, 2006). However, as an insider researcher (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010), positive relationships were already established with members of staff who participated in this research (Unluer, 2012), and thus it was felt that with a telephone conversation the relationship would still be there. Although when conducting telephone interviews there is an inability to pick up on facial expression and body language, voice and intonation can still provide social cues (Opdenakker, 2006). As the researcher knows the members of staff well, they were able to respond to some of these audio cues, enabling some degree of mitigation of the lack of f2f contact. In addition, telephone interviews were beneficial to the researcher and participants as there was no eye contact to maintain (Johnson, 2014), thus enabling the use of a computer screen to refer to other relevant documentation such as the holistic assessment chart and EHCP.

3.4.5 Interviews with students

It was important to incorporate the voice of the student (Harfitt, 2017; Unicef, 1989) to reflect on their own experiences. Following Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystem (1977) where the child is the focus at the centre, it is essential that children are given the opportunity to add their own reflections to the assessment. As student voice is not always embedded in all lessons, having a focus on the students’ reflections within the assessment chart would also encourage teachers to complete this important area. Obtaining the students’ reflections can help the teacher to assess what learning has taken place in the lesson. Constantly checking on each students’ learning may affect the targets for each lesson and possibly the focus of the assessment chart itself. Furthermore, interviewing the students would capture their views about their work if this was not completed by the teachers.
Semi-structured interviews with students sought to understand their views on their lessons with regards to their learning and progress in both academic and non-academic areas. As an insider-researcher (Unluer, 2012), I had an advantage of 15 years’ experience of working with students with SLD, and as such my knowledge and understanding was essential when supporting student participation (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016). With a good understanding of how students communicate, it was possible for me to use a variety of communication aids such as symbols, signs, and structured questioning (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016; Stack and McDonald, 2014). Photographs and short videos (taken by members of staff) were also shown to the students to encourage them to reflect on the activities (Rix et al., 2020).

3.4.6 Thematic analysis

The inductive approach of thematic analysis was used to examine all the data obtained during the semi-structured interviews with members of staff and students, and the holistic assessment chart. Thematic analysis is a ‘method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p79), which is similar to Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) description of thematic analysis as being the connection of ideas and opinions. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes from the data collected to identify the key areas of learning that formed the basis of the assessment chart. Thematic analysis enabled the descriptions about learning and assessment to be linked together to identify commonalities within each interview and across all interviews, providing detailed and organised data through the exploration of the concept of holistic assessment (Attride-Stirling, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, themes were also identified using my own understanding of SLD and assessment (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) and theoretical knowledge informed by the literature review. Scrutiny techniques including highlighting key descriptive texts or key words and identifying repetition were used to extrapolate themes from the interview transcriptions. Thematic analysis was also used to analyse the assessment charts for all students, to identify common themes to answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Phase One

Phase One consisted of two semi-structured interviews with members of staff. The first interview was to identify academic and non-academic areas of learning, and the second interview one to two months later was used to clarify and discuss themes identified by all participants. Both interviews were allocated 30 minutes, enabling the use of additional questions, opportunities to paraphrase and seek clarification, or to explore an issue further whilst keeping within a reasonable time frame.

Information regarding this research project was sent via e-mail to all members of school staff with the view to selecting four to six members of staff from those who responded to obtain a range of perspectives. Within a week, four responses had been received. As this naturally created a range of perspectives through convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2011) the participants were accepted, and the first interviews were arranged. As more participants were required, the barriers to participation were explored, the most significant of which was time. To remove this barrier, permission was sought from the headteacher to conduct interviews during school hours, which was granted. This meant that members of support staff who worked fixed hours were more likely to participate, which was indeed the case. Two members of support staff were approached directly with whom I already had a good working relationship and an established rapport (Brown and Danaher, 2017). In addition, they gave a different viewpoint due to their roles as Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) and Learning Mentor (LM), and both agreed to be interviewed. The headteacher was also approached for an interview as she had been interested and supportive of this research and she would provide another perspective. Having a range of members of staff interviewed allowed for diverse views, for example it was thought that members of support staff may see the development of skills outside academic subjects more clearly than teachers do, who may be focusing on progress against targets. Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time and location. The seven interviewees consisted of one assistant headteacher, one newly qualified teacher, one acting middle leader, one music enrichment teacher, one higher level teaching assistant, one learning mentor and one headteacher. The spread of teaching experience ranged from two
to thirty years, there were four qualified teachers, four male and three female participants.

To provide the context for my research, common terms such as assessment, progress and learning from the literature review were explained, and the example of communication in a PE swimming lesson was given of learning that is not currently captured. This was followed by 10 interview questions (Appendix 6):

Questions 1 – 3 related to the members of staff roles and knowledge. This enabled the collection of interviewees’ background information, showing a cross-section of participants.
Questions 4 - 5 related to the research questions: what the important areas are to assess that are not currently captured within the present system of P level recording. Open questioning provided the opportunity to examine why these areas of learning are the most important.
Questions 6 - 7 asked for specific examples of progress that takes place that is not captured by P Levels, thus enabling interviewees to explain how students with SLD learn and make progress outside of academic learning.
Using a semi-structured approach allowed for prompts to assist interviewees by referring to previous answers from questions 4 and 5. A semi-structured approach allowed for further questioning in an open-ended manner on how interviewees knew that learning had taken place, with reference to the assessment of students with SLD, for example through observation.
Questions 8 - 9 asked interviewees to consider how this learning could be captured, and to what purpose, thus starting to explore how to assess non-academic learning. Further prompts and questions in a semi-structured manner provided opportunities for interviewees to consider specific elements related to their previous examples of learning arising from Question 6.

As it had been challenging to schedule all the interviews around working school hours, the transcription for each interview was e-mailed and members of staff were asked to read and check the transcript for any misunderstandings. This included checking that the transcript was a correct record of what they had said, and also enabling them the opportunity to elaborate on their answers further during the second interview by offering something additional or different. Thematic analysis
(Braun and Clarke, 2006) was then used to analyse the transcripts. Each transcribed interview was initially read through to become familiar with the text. They were then re-read, and key concepts were highlighted, for example areas of learning such as behaviour and self-regulation (Appendix 7). The transcripts were then reviewed again to highlight specific examples of learning, and where they were not described under an area of learning such as behaviour, this was then linked to a key theme. For example, if the interviewee spoke about a student developing their learning by making more choices throughout the day, the overarching theme was identified as ‘independence’. Finally, the transcriptions were compared to ensure consistency with the analysis.

During the second interviews, interviewees were asked to reflect on their initial interview and expand on previous discussions. Opportunities were created to further explore the relationship between the areas of learning identified by thematic analysis from the first interview. This was achieved by giving the interviewees eight pieces of paper with the eight key themes written on them and asking them to create a layout. A discussion was then had using the layout as a starting point on how the eight key themes related to each other, whether any area of learning was perceived to be more important, or how they fitted together holistically. Further questions were also asked to clarify and expand on areas of interest.

3.5.2 Phase Two

Phase Two consisted of an initial semi-structured interview with each member of staff to set up the holistic assessment chart, including the identification of two targets – one academic and one non-academic. Three non-academic areas of learning were chosen to focus on, all linked to the students EHCP, as well as academic learning. Following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, second semi-structured interviews with some participants were held online to evaluate the use of the chart, but no students were interviewed at this time.

E-mails were sent to all members of staff giving an overview of Phase Two, with the aim of selecting six to ten participants based on a variety of activities that they teach, thus providing a representative sample (Hannan, 2011). Only six members
of staff responded (from a possible 37); therefore, following convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2011), all six members of staff participated in the research project. Prior to the initial interview, individual discussions were held with members of staff, and using their professional knowledge of the students, purposive sampling was used to select a student whom they would like to focus on, who would provide an archetypal representative (Cohen et al., 2011). Parents and carers were sent information about the project and consent was obtained. Student-friendly consent forms which incorporated symbols were also sent home for parents/carers to discuss with their son/daughter where understanding permitted.

Initial semi-structured interviews were held with the teachers to set up the assessment chart (Appendix 8) which was an Excel document and could be handwritten or completed electronically. As well as academic progress, a discussion was had to identify the three most important non-academic areas of learning to be captured in a holistic manner, linked to the students’ long term and short-term EHCP outcomes. Two individual targets were set based on these outcomes, one academic and one non-academic. Guidance was given to members of staff on how to fill out the chart, including the use of specific comments linked to progress, for example, quotes of students’ communication, and not generalised comments such as ‘good’ communication.

During the gathering of data for the assessment chart, all members of staff were encouraged to share targets with their students and seek students’ views and comments throughout the weekly activities. This would create a reflective dialogue between teachers and students (Rodgers, 2006), with the aim of creating descriptive feedback for all the learning that took place. Members of staff began using the assessment chart in the Spring Term 2020; however, all f2f research was suspended in March 2020 following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the updated HREC guidance (2020), and, therefore, the recording on the assessment chart was stopped. Only three to four weeks of recording from members of staff for both academic and non-academic progress on the assessment chart was completed.

An e-mail was sent in April 2020 to all participants notifying them that the research was ceasing, and a telephone interview was offered to members of staff to discuss any data collected before lockdown. The e-mail was sent three and a half weeks
after the national lockdown as it was thought that, given the global pandemic, members of staff needed to absorb the current situation and have space and time to adjust. Furthermore, the school where this research was conducted remained open for students who were most vulnerable, and members of staff were still on site or working from home in rota. The e-mail to members of staff was sent towards the end of the school holidays, when members of staff would have had a chance to have a break from work, and an e-mail from myself could then be viewed as separate from all the work e-mails. Due to the current situation, it was important not to follow up with any participants that did not respond, to ensure participants well-being by not being intrusive or appearing to put pressure on them to participate in a telephone interview.

Of the six members of staff that had participated so far, the second semi-structured interviews were conducted with only three members of staff who consented to a telephone interview. One member of staff did not respond, and another member of staff did agree to a telephone interview; however, this person did not respond to e-mails related to setting this up (this was not followed up due to the pressures and stressfulness caused by the pandemic). One member of staff e-mailed the holistic assessment chart but did not consent to an interview, and one member of staff who had not started the data collection expressed an interest in being involved in the future.

As a deputy headteacher, I have access to members of staff's personal numbers; however, it was essential to remain in the role of a researcher, and, therefore, members of staff were asked to provide a telephone number they would like to be called on and provide either a personal or a work number. I explained when I called, I would block my number so there would be no caller identification, as I was using a personal mobile and this is a phone that number members of staff do not have access to.

The telephone interviews all started with a general chat about the current situation, followed by a reminder of the right to withdraw before consent was obtained to record the interview. The aim of the telephone interview questions with members of staff was to explore their impressions of the holistic assessment chart (Appendix 9) and were as follows:

Questions 1 – clarified the number of lessons taught
Question 2 – sought examples of progress that was made holistically
Questions 3 and 4 – sought reflections on the use of the chart
Question 5 – related to feedback to the students
Question 6 – identified any feedback from the student
Question 7 – related to individual progress towards EHCP outcomes
Question 8 – provided an opportunity for further reflections from the members of staff

The length of the three interviews varied from 20 mins – 40 mins, including the time spent on the initial conversations about the current COVID-19 situation, as well as the time spend on the specific interview questions as detailed above which was between 15 mins – 16 mins. At the beginning of the interview, I enquired about how participants were, and we had a general conversation about the current situation both globally and how it was impacting work and themselves. I reminded each member of staff of the option to withdraw and obtained consent for the telephone interview to be recorded, then the recording was started. I thought rapport was good throughout all three interviews, and all members of staff offered a lot of information and insights into using the holistic assessment chart to capture all the learning that took place. At the end of the interview questions, the recording was stopped. Some members of staff were keen to talk more, enabling further insights to be gained, however, others were happy to end the conversation.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) was used across the interviews to evaluate the chart by reading the transcripts to familiarise myself, and then re-reading and highlighting the key words in different colours. Themes were then extrapolated based on the different key words highlighted, and the transcripts were read again to further identify key themes and concepts for analysis.

Due to all f2f research and data collection being suspended, students were not interviewed during Phase Two. Although one member of staff did take several photos and a short video to aid student voice, I felt that it was too intrusive and inappropriate to contact the family for a video interview, and the data obtained would be different as the student would have a family member supporting them in a home rather than school environment.
All six parents were e-mailed in May 2020, explaining that the data collection had been suspended. Details were given as to whether the second interview with the teacher of their son or daughter took place via telephone, and the three charts were shared. One parent showed an interest in continuing with the research in September; however, they then enquired as to whether their daughter could come back to school. To ensure work and research were kept separate, I e-mailed back, thanking her for her response and explained that research e-mails were separate to my role as deputy headteacher. I explained sharing her e-mail or her contact with me would identify her daughter as being part of the research project, which she could consent to, or preferably she could e-mail the main school address as she usually would, with her question about school placement.

Due to the impact of the pandemic on the whole country, unavailability of participants and my own situation as I was still working full time in a stressful environment, a study break was taken between 1st June 2020 and 1st September 2020.

### 3.5.3 Phase Three

Phase Three of this research started in September 2020 and consisted of a further trial and evaluation of the assessment chart through three mini case studies consisting of three members of staff and three students. Two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with each of the three members of staff. The first interview identified academic and non-academic areas of learning. This was followed by the three members of staff completing the assessment chart for six to ten weeks, and finally a second interview with the same members of staff to evaluate the assessment chart. In addition, interviews with students were held at the end of the assessment chart data collection, to gain students’ views on their learning and progress, however only two student interviews took place, as discussed in Chapter 6.4.

Some amendments were made to the data collection methods with regards to the holistic assessment chart and interview techniques. The assessment chart was not shared with the students at the beginning of the Phase Two; however, on the resumption of data collection for Phase Three, members of staff were encouraged to share the chart with the students. This provided opportunities to aid the students
in understanding feedback on their targets and enabled them to share their opinions in the moment. Feedback to the student could be captured during the weekly activity or lesson, and students' reflections or responses on their lessons could also be captured weekly. Students often do not have the understanding to reflect over time on their progress, and therefore photos and videos were collected, and individual student interviews took place at the end of the 10 weeks.

In addition, when conducting online interviews for Phase Two, notes were taken on the computer, and the computer was used to refer back to the assessment chart and EHCPs. Whilst being able to refer to documents can be seen as a benefit of telephone interviews (Johnson, 2014) when listening to the recording the click of the keyboard can be heard which may have been off putting to members of staff, or implied that the interviewer was not fully listening. Therefore, during Phase Three only pen and paper notes were taken, although computer screens were still used to refer to documentation.

At the beginning of Phase Three, e-mails were again sent to all teaching staff, with the aim of selecting 6-10 volunteers; however only three members of staff (from a possible 37) responded. Given the stressfulness of the pandemic and the knowledge that further volunteers were unlikely to come forward, convenience sampling was used and all three were included in this research for Phase Three. Convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2011) was used to identify students as two of the male students had participated in Phase 2 and had consented with their parents to continue (Appendix 10). The third teacher identified another male student she wanted to focus on, and his parents consented to him participating in this research project too. All initial interviews and the setting up of the holistic assessment charts were completed remotely, either via telephone interview or e-mail conversation.

Members of staff used the assessment chart to record weekly observations with respect to the three areas of learning identified in the initial interview, plus academic progress through their regular f2f teaching activities during the Autumn Term 2020. However, during the 2nd national lockdown in November 2021, one lesson (dance) moved online, and the teacher was unable to continue with the assessment chart. At the end of the 6-10 week recording block, teachers then wrote a summative assessment, to be added to the school assessment system.
Members of staff were encouraged to take photographs and short videos to aid student voice (these were not used for data analysis).

Following consent from all participants and the headteacher, the second interviews to evaluate the assessment chart with members of staff and students were conducted f2f in Spring Term 2021 (Appendix 11). During the second interview, the EHCP outcomes and short-term targets were also reviewed, and questions were asked about the process of using the assessment chart to evaluate its effectiveness at capturing both academic and non-academic learning (Appendix 12).

Questions 1 and 2 - asked for specific examples of non-academic learning that took place, with the semi-structured nature of the interview allowing for follow up questions and clarification.

Questions 3 and 4 - provided an opportunity for members of staff to reflect on how students can give meaningful feedback on both their academic and non-academic lessons.

Questions 5 and 6 – related to research questions to evaluate the effectiveness of a holistic assessment chart in capturing progress in both academic and non-academic areas of learning.

Question 7 – related to members of staff assessment skills and workload.

Question 8 and 9 – related to the impact of COVID-19 on assessment, and relevance of using a holistic assessment chart.

The interviews with students were conducted using a variety of communications methods including speech, sign, and symbols. Questions were differentiated to the students' level of understanding and sought to explore the students' views on their learning during lessons, including academic and non-academic areas (Appendix 13).

Due to the third national lockdown and updated school guidance from 4th January 2021, there were reduced numbers of students in school, and members of staff were on a rota system, alternating working in school and working from home. This meant only one member of staff was working at school, and there were no student participants attending school. Therefore, I waited until 8th March when schools fully reopened (DfE, 2021a) to send out new consent forms for the second
interviews with members of staff and the student interviews, with participants being given the option for f2f or remote interviews.

Of the three members of staff and three students who participated in the initial interviews and recorded progress using the holistic assessment chart, only two second interviews were conducted with members of staff, and two student interviews. One teacher was interviewed f2f, and the interview was recorded using the Voice Memo app on my iPhone, before being transferred onto my computer. Likewise, his student was also interviewed f2f; however, his interview was videoed using a school iPad as he uses a total communication approach including speech, Makaton signing and gestures and therefore it was important to capture all his communication. Although consent was given to record interviews using the researchers’ own devices, I chose to use the school iPad as the student would not be able to understand why a member of staff was using their phone for research as it is a strict school policy for members of staff not to have their personal devices in use around students. The video was transferred immediately to my iPhone, before being transferred onto my computer. The video on the school iPad was permanently deleted.

The second teacher chose to participate in a telephone interview, mainly due to time constraints as she only teaches one hour per week at school. The interview with her student was held f2f, and his interview was recorded using the Voice Memo app on a school iPad, as he is a verbal communicator. The recording was transferred immediately to my iPhone, before being transferred onto my computer. The recording on the school iPad was permanently deleted.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) was again used across the two interviews with members of staff and compared to the evaluation by members of staff from Phase Two. This analysis was used to answer the research questions, as discussed in Chapter 7, however due to the small sample size individual responses were included as well.

All updated consent forms were received from members of staff and parents. Due to the level of the students’ cognitive understanding, and having difficulties with linking passages of time, I also obtained in the moment consent from students immediately before the student voice interview took place. This was accomplished
by asking verbally or with symbols if the student was willing to come with me to talk about their work. Students were also given a choice of locations for the interview to take place.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Due to the small size of the school, there was difficulty getting 10 members of staff to volunteer for all phases of this research. Barriers to members of staff taking part were explored, and where time was a factor, this barrier was removed by gaining consent to conduct interviews during the working school day. In addition, the pressures, and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for members of staff who continued to work f2f throughout the pandemic were immense and participating in a research project was probably not the right time for a lot of these members of staff.

Whilst convenience sampling was used during Phase One as all volunteers were accepted, this did provide a representation from a range of members of staff across the school population (Hannan, 2007). However, although the sample was not truly representative as it contained no full time class teacher or learning support assistants, the group contained a wide variety of experiences, opinions, and knowledge. For Phase Two the sample was somewhat representative as it contained three class teachers and three enrichment teachers although no HLTAs who also teach groups or whole classes (other school members of staff do not teach). However, the Phase Three convenience sampling did not produce a representative sample as all three members of staff were enrichment teachers. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the method of holistic assessment could be applied to other learning activities beyond music and dance.

It was anticipated that there would be some difficulties obtaining consent from parents as not all parents check their child’s school bag every day, letters can get lost and for some parents, English may not be their first language, and therefore phone calls were made to further explain the research and to answer any questions. Difficulties were also anticipated in keeping the focus during interviews on holistic assessment. The activity or lesson is the vehicle for student learning to take place, and therefore its value as a learning activity is not the focus, for example the benefits of teaching music to students with SLD. It was essential to
be mindful to not go down this route, but to stay focused on how the learning is captured holistically from an assessment point of view.

3.7 Summary
This chapter has described a range of qualitative methodology that was utilised throughout this research within an interpretivist paradigm, including semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and observational data collected through the use of the holistic assessment chart. It also has described how the methodology was adapted due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent adaptations to include online data collection methods.

In the next chapter, Chapter 4, the findings from Phase One are presented following interviews with seven members of staff to identify the important areas of learning to assess. The findings from Phase Two and Phase Three are subsequently presented in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.
4.1 Introduction
This next chapter will present the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted during Phase One, to seek the views of members of staff on the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD.

4.2 Initial interviews
Seven participants were interviewed, including one newly qualified teacher, one assistant headteacher, one acting middle leader, one music enrichment teacher, one higher level teaching assistant, one learning mentor and one headteacher. Due to the small nature of the school and to protect anonymity of participants as there is only one headteacher and one male assistant headteacher for example, roles have been generalised (Table 6). The length of the interviews varied from 19 minutes to 34 minutes. Interviewees described a variety of areas of learning that are important to students with SLD and gave examples of students’ learning which are not assessed by P Levels.

Table 6 Overview of participants in Phase One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 What areas of student learning do staff perceive to be important?
Interviewees described a variety of learning areas that are important for students with SLD, some of which were specifically related to their role; however other areas of learning were more general and applied to the overall student group.
Three interviewees referred to academic or P Level assessments, with Michelle stating ‘we should be encouraging our young people to develop their academics’. In addition, Emma described using levels as problematic:

‘There might be something they're really good at and another thing they really struggle with. And so, they end up being a level of the thing they struggle at and don't get to kind of practice this higher skill’.

All interviewees described at least three areas of learning outside of academic subjects, for example:

‘Enrichment, but also students’ emotional well mental health and well-being in those types of things and SEMH’ (Carl)

‘Everything's important because our students don't learn intuitively’ (Michelle)

‘The biggest one is behaviour and behaviour changes’ (Anthony)

‘Adapt[ing] to a whole new environment… social interactions, making new friends’ (Emma)

### 4.2.2 Examples of student learning

Interviewees were then asked to describe specific examples of areas of learning that they had identified. In a music lesson, John described the informal learning of the development of confidence in a student who was ‘quite withdrawn and shy’ to now showing ‘facial expressions of those big smiles, the student holds himself up a lot taller sometimes and seems proud’. John gave another example of a musical activity developing student independence:

‘I'm learning to be a leader and I know this person's listening to me in the room, they’re in the room and… they’re waiting for me to do something and if I do it’s great and if I don't it's ok as well.’

However, Mike described personal development as an example of planned learning when a student worked on their turn taking skills through break and lunchtime activities:

‘Sam was very happy at sharing stuff, she was sharing, you can see that she will get a good reaction from her peers, just because she was sharing the right way’.
Furthermore, during off-site trampolining sessions, Carl commented on the purpose of the activity being to develop social relationships, rather than to develop physical skills, and gave a specific example of the development of positive relationships between two peers in the group:

‘They found it quite difficult to get on even though and they have a lot in common, therefore spent a lot of time together… but they didn’t really have the opportunity to learn how to interact with each other, I guess in a suitable way. So there was an idea that we would send them off with other students as well, to trampolining sessions at the leisure centre and that works on many fronts in terms of improving their relationship, the most obvious was that they were both doing something that they enjoyed, it gave them instantly something that they had in common because they did enjoy it so much they very much wanted to do that, so that kind of helped fortify a positive relationship between the two of them’.

Several interviewees gave examples of students developing positive behaviour and focusing more in the classroom:

You can see the progress they’ve made through the years. I mean some students when you look at them in maybe KS3 or KS4 will not tolerate being in the classroom at all. They will be out walking around the school, sitting about and those students now [in Key Stage 5] are taking more time to be in the classroom.’ (Elaine)

‘Maybe somebody like Kane who spent most of his time in the library in year 7 and, and now successfully goes into class every day.’ (Michelle).

Other examples of improvements in behaviour included students developing better coping skills with others’ behaviours: ‘I’ve recently seen a student ignore negative behaviour from another student where at one point they would have joined in’ (Elaine) and ‘he didn’t react when he was antagonised by, on two occasions by one of our students. So, he responded very well’ (Mike). Mike then went on to link this to his academic work: ‘From his behaviour point of view and… because he was very quiet, he actually finished his work.’

Similarly, Emma commented on improved work production through improved behaviour and a student’s improved well-being due to a greater understanding of routines: ‘I think initially… he’d spend time with me asking about when is it, every
five minutes and I think now with the symbols on the timetable… he’s starting to feel a bit more relaxed about his daily routine’.

**4.2.3 How can this learning be captured and for what purpose?**

Interviewees described a range of assessment methods currently used, for example end of year reports and the school’s P Level recording programme to capture termly evidence; however, there was a strong emphasis on formative assessment. This included methods such as questioning, conversations with support staff, video footage, photographs, annotated lesson plans and anecdotal comments. A key theme that emerged was the use of observations, which was mentioned by four interviewees. For example, Michelle described how ‘some staff would perhaps make records against their lesson plan like little observations… they make a kind of comment each week’.

All interviewees talked at length about both academic and non-academic student learning. Most interviewees expressed how non-academic learning was often shared anecdotally with the student, other colleagues or with parents and carers via the home/schoolbook or a positive phone call home. Mike commented ‘I even wrote in his book because parents should know’ when describing a student learning to manage his emotions. Similarly, Elaine said she communicates students’ progress with parents/carers by ‘positive phone calls home… certificates for students to take home’.

Overall, interviewees saw the purpose of capturing learning to share these achievements with students; however, they also identified accountability and assessment ‘as’ learning:

‘So, you can show that they’re improving and to maybe begin to work out what it is that that helps them progress when they’ve shown the most progression and maybe be able to translate that to other students as well. I guess that’s the same point of any sort of assessment, isn’t it?’ (Emma)

Several interviewees identified how behaviour progress is recorded through students’ Behaviour Support Plans and the school’s behaviour recording system. Although the behaviour recording system only records incidents of ‘negative’ behaviour, interviewees described how past Behaviour Support Plans are kept and
could show improvements. Progress that students make with their behaviour can be seen by comparing old Behaviour Support Plans and identifying behaviours that are no longer included, for example, hitting out. However, this is a complex way of identifying progress with behaviour, and Carl suggested adapting the current behaviour support plan format:

‘It might be worth just listing previous behaviours on their current Behaviour Support plan, previous behaviours that they did exhibit but they no longer do. So that when the person is looking at it whether that be the parent or a person working with them and they’re going through it, they can see the journey that they’ve been on and the behaviours they no longer exhibit but have done in the past’.

Other interviewees made suggestions on how non-academic learning could be recorded. For example, Emma and Michelle both suggested creating a learning journey or profile for each student:

‘Maybe there’s some sort of profile for adapting and managing behaviour, managing life skills, or I don’t know a profile in that sort of sense in a similar way’ (Emma).

‘So, it’s almost like a tiny pen portrait that says, you know, what’s significant about their behaviour and three or four sentences at the end of each year, then that gives you a picture of what their greatest challenge is, because then you might see the next year. Look, this is our Learning Journey in terms of Sam’s behaviour.’ (Michelle)

Michelle then went on to describe how progress looked different for each student: ‘the measures are so individual so you can’t use one measure which is more difficult to say this is progress.’

4.2.4 Identification of key areas of learning for students with SLD
All seven interviewees shared a variety of examples of learning that takes place outside of academic learning, and areas of learning that were important to assess. Using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), eight key themes were identified from the learning examples given (Table 7). They were: Academic progress; Adapting to new situations and environments; Behaviour; Communication; Community access; Emotional development and well-being; Independence and Life skills.
### Table 7 Interview themes: 8 key themes identified through thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes identified from first interviews</th>
<th>8 key themes identified through thematic analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carl</strong></td>
<td>Academic progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Adapting to new situations and environments (different environments, new school, new class, new teachers, new peers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Behaviour (self-regulation, sensory, and self-control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment and community access</td>
<td>Communication (social skills and interactions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Community access (enrichment activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social emotional and well-being</td>
<td>Emotional development and well-being (emotional regulation, expression of thoughts and feelings, happiness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elaine</strong></td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour and social progress</td>
<td>Life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills and interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michelle</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrichment</td>
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<td>Independence</td>
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<td>Life skills</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anthony</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional regulation, happiness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory and physical</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mike</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Behaviour – being settled and able to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>engage in learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emma</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to new situations and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation and self-control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interactions, social intelligence, making friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional development and expression of thoughts and feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness and pride</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The key themes of Communication, Emotional development and well-being and Behaviour can be linked to the areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which are reported on annually as part of students’ EHCPs.
Furthermore, the key theme of ‘Communication’ is intrinsic to the Speech and Language Therapy support for all students, with communication targets written by SaLTs, integrated into long and short-term EHCP outcomes.

The remaining themes can be linked to ‘Preparation for Adulthood’ from the Code of Practice - Adapting to new situations and environments, Community access, Independence, and Life skills. Emma described the development of students as ‘working towards kind of where they're going to fit in the community in the future’ and looking at where the students transition to after KS5 is a key element of the schools Key Stage 5 curriculum. Similarly, Michelle described how students are taught to travel independently, and how they ‘learn to shop, learn to take care of themselves’.

Most themes occurred in several interviews, for example behaviour was explicitly identified several times. For other themes, similar ideas were grouped, for example ‘emotional development and well-being’ which included themes from Carl, John, and Anthony such as social emotional and well-being, emotional regulation, expression of thoughts and feelings, happiness. Some key themes were paraphrased, for example enrichment occurred in three interviews; however, some enrichment activities were situated in the community, such as offsite trampolining, therefore this became community access. Alternatively, other enrichment activities took place in the school such as additional music lessons, and these were situated within academic learning.

Mike described an example of learning as ‘sharing and social skills, because… I think sharing it's a sign of progress.’ Combining this with themes from other interviews - social interactions, social intelligence and making friends, a key theme of communication (social skills and interactions) was created. Furthermore, both the themes of community access and communication are significant areas from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

4.2.5 Second interviews
The second interviews lasted from 18 minutes to 25 minutes. Interviewees were reminded of their key points and asked if there was anything to expand on or clarify from the last interview, as they had all had the opportunity to read the
transcript of their initial interview. Only one interviewee expanded on their initial interview, describing how environmental and other factors can affect learning:

‘You can gauge consistency, does this direction or thing happen once every two times or more? So, with that in mind… I almost take for granted that someone arrives to the session and you know, it’s probably effective practice to consider what sort of day has the student had before they come to the session… kind of check in and then matching up, you know at the end of each half term of the consistency, maybe in terms of the spiky profile if you like, as medications change, people are having a bad day’ (John).

The eight key themes identified by thematic analysis from all the initial interviews were given to interviewees on pieces of paper, and they were asked to sort them into any order or layout. This enabled interviewees the opportunity to comment on all the eight areas, especially if they had not suggested one of the areas in their initial interview. Furthermore, their layout generated a discussion on how the areas were linked holistically, and if any areas of learning were perceived to be of more importance. For example, Michelle did not mention communication as a key theme in her initial interview, however she identified communication as integral during the second interview when describing her layout. The recording was stopped, and most interviewees took between 5-10 minutes to complete this task. The recording was resumed, and interviewees described their layout. A photograph was taken of all the themes layouts (Appendix 14).

4.3 Findings from key themes

Interviewees all had different ways of setting out the areas of learning, either in a linear fashion, horizontally, or by grouping themes together. Of the seven interviewees, only Elaine ranked the eight areas in a hierarchical vertical line (Figure 6), although Carl also used a hierarchical horizontal pattern (Figure 7). Other layouts identified themes that were concurrent with other themes; however, these were all different, and only three layouts were broadly similar, with two to three themes being linked together in a horizontal manner.
Carl described self-regulation (behaviour) as a key skill, because if a student had the ability to regulate their behaviour, this ‘would allow them to access everything else… So, to be able to communicate effectively you need the things above [self-regulation]’. Other interviewees described the themes as:

‘Like a kind of a cycle that carries on so, so one leads to the other’

(Michelle)
‘If he could communicate, and he has independence then and behaviour then the academic will come from all of these three’ (Mike)

‘Emotional development kind of ties quite closely to kind of behaviour regulation, adapting to new… communication as well’ (Emma)

‘So, communication, the emotional development, Independence, which then leads on to the life skills, which may be very different for each person, but once you are independent, perhaps maybe you can embark on different life skills and through the preferences and throughout what your feelings will tell you and through life skills you may adapt to new experiences’ (John)

Some interviewees identified adapting to new situations and community access as being integrated throughout students’ learning, whereas other interviewees identified communication as the driving skill:

‘Communication is important so that you can access your academic progress and your education and that you can be more independent. Communication, that’s one of the ways that we support young people to manage their behaviour and self-regulate.’ (Michelle).

This is supported by John’s views that ‘once someone can communicate then we can start talking about how you feel and your emotions’, and Anthony:

‘I suppose actually communication is more important than behaviour because if you can get them to be able to communicate, the behaviour should happen less frequently, but it does depend on [the] student, on the individual. Unless you can regulate your behaviour and communicate, academic progress is neither here nor there’.

Elaine saw independence as integrated throughout: ‘because I think that’s what we’re all about here as well, is teaching our young people to be as independent as possible.’

Several interviewees commented on how difficult it was to create a layout and stated that on a different day they would do this task differently. Thinking about individual students (rather than generally as requested) would change the layout:

‘So totally depends on the student and their abilities and needs’ (Elaine).

I might well put them in a completely different order, but for now that, that was my very quick thinking’ (Michelle)
‘These two probably swap around - behaviour and communication swap around because it depends on if your behaviour is continuously good, continuously less good or if you have generally good but a crisis every now and again, and then your crisis every now and again will affect your communication ability. So, it depends on the student as to whether behavioural concerns are more important than communication’ (Anthony)

Only two interviewees referred to academic learning being significant:

‘I firmly believe we should be doing, encouraging our young people to develop their academics because it makes a very big statement about their entitlement to education if we don’t have that ranking up there at the top’ (Michelle).

Another interviewee reflected that while academics were not the most important, it needed to be a high priority:

‘I see that the academic skills are important, but they’re not the most important, it’s the other skills that I personally feel are the most important but there has to be some kind of academic link’ (Carl).

All interviewees were given the option to add any additional themes. Only one member of staff took this opportunity and added music:

‘I’m going to put music number one at the top, because we communicate through music all the time. Again, through preferences, which could come in under your expression of thoughts, you know, so we communicate through music, we use lots of different skills. It’s actually, you could connect music to every single one of these, because I truly believe that you know as humans we communicate through music’.

4.4 Creation of the holistic assessment chart

The holistic assessment chart was created based on the data obtained during the interviews from Phase One, as well as key literature and my own personal reflections and experiences as a teacher. The concept of the need for an assessment chart was derived from the interviews, however the inclusion of the EHCP outcomes was derived from literature such as The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and statutory guidance. Again, the eight key areas of learning stemmed from the interviews as well as key literature such as Imray and
Hinchcliffe (2012), Jenkinson (2000) and Rochford (2016), and were used to personalise the assessment chart, a key concept of SLD assessment (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018). Influenced by research into assessment principles that gave equal weighting to both academic and non-academic learning (Bautista et al., 2016), and the responses from participants regarding the valuing of non-academic learning, short-term targets in both academic and non-academic areas were included to ensure the focus of the assessment chart incorporated both. Incorporating weekly observations from teachers was an essential element of the chart that resulted from the interviews, where participants could describe in depth small steps progress that had taken place which was not currently captured. It was also important to create an assessment system that dovetailed into the overarching summative school’s assessment system, and by adding the summative comment, teachers could link the two assessment concepts together. Once again, the student voice section of the chart was influenced by key literature, and the need to include the voice of the student with regards to their progress (DfE, 2015). Finally, the actual design of the chart was my own, based on my experiences as a teacher and the interview responses that identified the need for one system to capture all the learning that takes place.

The findings from the interviews conducted with members of staff have highlighted the need for a new assessment system to be created that is flexible and adaptable to enable teachers to capture all the learning that takes place relevant to each student’s needs. The interviews have brought to light examples of progress that students made within academic lessons beyond the subject itself and highlighted the difficulties and limitations when using a levelled system. The examples of learning included students developing their ability to self-regulate, improving their emotional well-being, and independence through activities such as PE and music. A new system is needed to capture learning in both the academic areas for example English, Maths, Music or PE, and the learning that takes place with regards to other skills such as behaviour or communication. The interviews have also highlighted the need to create a flexible assessment system that can be personalised to each individual student, as their learning needs are so different.

This suggests the need to create an assessment system that can incorporate a variety of sources and learning areas to capture all the progress that takes place.
For example, the assessment system could include targets written by the teacher and other professionals such as Speech and Language therapists, which link to each student’s EHCP, as well as the voice of the student to capture their view of their learning. In addition, to personalise each assessment, the progress should be captured through teacher observation, following a positive approach of what the student can do (DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014). This is similar to Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem (1977) however, in contrast to Bronfenbrenner, this chart focuses on multiple learning dimensions within one lesson or activity, rather than multiple environments. Focusing on one lesson provides opportunities for in depth qualitative data to capture the strengths of each student in detail.

Therefore, as a result of the findings from these interviews, and relevant literature notably Bronfenbrenner (1977), a holistic assessment chart was designed to capture students’ learning (Figure 8), incorporating both academic and non-academic learning during each lesson. The chart offers flexibility for teachers, enabling them to choose the most appropriate learning areas to ensure assessments are personalised and appropriate, giving teachers greater autonomy to personalise the chart to individual needs, using their own expertise of where the student is at and where their learning should progress next. Furthermore, the chart links with each student’s EHCP long- and short-term outcomes, in the five areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), including communication targets from SaLTs.
4.4.1 EHCP long-term and short-term outcomes

Every student with an EHCP has long term and short-term outcomes in the five areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE 2015): Cognition and learning; Communication and interaction; Social, emotional and mental health difficulties; Sensory and/physical; and preparation for adulthood (from Year 9). In addition, there is a sixth area ‘Good health’; however, this has been excluded as it is not relevant to this research.

EHCP Outcomes are set by teachers, with long term targets lasting for a key stage (two to three years depending on the key stage) and generally between one to three short-term targets lasting for one year, written by teachers and derived from the long-term targets. In addition, communication and interaction outcomes are set by Speech and Language Therapists, and physical outcomes by Physiotherapists.
Teachers then translate these outcomes into annual targets in conjunction with the therapists. All these short-term targets are further broken down by teachers into termly Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets (Table 8).

Table 8 Summary of EHCP outcomes for KS4 in Cognition and Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Year 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognition and Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term target(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition and Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term target(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targets set should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Set) and personalised for each student. The holistic assessment chart incorporates the students’ long and short-term EHCP outcomes from the different areas of need alongside the academic learning, thus providing a system to capture progress in all areas of learning.

4.4.2 Areas of Learning
In Phase One, members of staff identified eight key areas of learning that are important to capture (in alphabetical order):

- Academic progress
- Adapting to new situations and environments
- Behaviour
- Communication
- Community access
- Emotional development and well-being
- Independence
- Life skills.
The holistic assessment chart allows teachers to select from these eight areas, academic learning and three additional learning areas (non-academic), thus personalising the assessments. For example, a student who struggles with their behaviour would have a learning area of ‘behaviour’, and another student who is accessing the community for an activity would have ‘community access’ as one of their three learning areas.

4.4.3 Short-term targets

Using the chosen three important areas of learning and the EHCP long- and short-term outcomes, teachers then set an academic and non-academic short-term target specifically for the activity. This helps keep the focus of capturing learning equally within academic and non-academic areas of learning, as opposed to the typical recording of academic achievement.

4.4.4 Formative assessment

Teachers use the chart on a weekly basis to capture learning in the three learning areas, and the academic learning from the activity, using formative assessment. There is space on the chart for additional learning that may have occurred as a by-product of the intended learning. This enables teachers to record all the learning that takes place within a lesson, using detailed, qualitative descriptions.

4.4.5 Summative assessment

The summative assessment progress section provides space for teachers to comment on progress at the end of the 10-week recording period, with an equal focus on academic and non-academic learning. Furthermore, the summative comment can also be used as part of the school’s current assessment system.

4.4.6 Student Voice

Although student voice was not an area suggested by any participants, it is an important area to include when working with students with SLD, and statutory guidance form SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) states that student voice should be included within the EHCP process. Therefore, including a section within this chart enables students to focus and reflect on their own learning, supported where appropriate by members of staff. In using the EHCP long term outcomes within the holistic assessment chart, linking student voice to short-term targets and
areas of learning that the teacher has identified, provides a relevant and meaningful opportunity for students to contribute towards their goals. This in turn could result in the holistic assessment chart being used as evidence of students’ views as well as teacher assessment, within the annual review process of their EHCP.

4.5 Summary
This chapter has presented the findings from Phase One, following semi-structured interviews with seven members of staff. The results, which will be discussed in Chapter 7, identified eight key areas of learning to assess, which were derived from the interviews, and incorporated into the creation of a holistic assessment chart. This chart was created in response to data collected during the Phase One interviews where participants identified different areas of learning, however also included influence from my own reflective practice, and significant literature such as Bourke et al. (2018), Bronfenbrenner (1977), and McIntosh (2015).

Chapter 5 presents the findings from Phase Two, during which the assessment chart was trialled.
Chapter 5 Findings - Phase Two

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings from the initial trial and evaluation of the holistic assessment chart to measure both academic and non-academic progress will be presented. The trial was conducted with six members of staff and six students through mini case studies, before data collection was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A further trial and evaluation was conducted in Phase Three, to be presented in Chapter 6. The discussion of these findings will be presented in Chapter 7, alongside the discussion of the findings from Phases One and Three.

5.2 Participants

Six members of staff and six students participated in the Phase Two data collection, with only John, the music enrichment teacher, having participated in Phase One. Table 9 shows an overview of students and members of staff who participated in Phase Two of this research, as well as a description of the activity the holistic assessments chart was being used for. P Levels are used as a common language to describe the level of the student, despite being unfit for purpose (Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016) as discussed in Chapter 2. The members of staff who participated in this research used convenience sampling by selecting students to work with, which naturally included a wide range of ages, abilities, and activities, as well as a gender mix.
### Table 9 Overview of participants in Phase Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Name (pseudonym) &amp; gender</th>
<th>Year group/Key stage/Age</th>
<th>Learning need</th>
<th>Approx. English/Maths P Level</th>
<th>Communication method</th>
<th>Staff &amp; role (pseudonym)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music – weekly 2:1 violin lesson.</td>
<td>Ben M</td>
<td>Y11 KS4 15 years</td>
<td>GLD ASD</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Kate Local Authority Music Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance – weekly Step into Dance group enrichment lesson (12 students).</td>
<td>Jackie F</td>
<td>Y9 KS3 13 years</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Verbal Makaton</td>
<td>Susan Dance Tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English IEP work – 2 x weekly session as part of individual work.</td>
<td>Luke M</td>
<td>Y7 KS3 11 years</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Verbal Makaton Symbols</td>
<td>Greg Class Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths IEP work – 1 x weekly session as part of individual work.</td>
<td>Tom M</td>
<td>Y12 KS5 16 years</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Amelia Class Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSHE IEP work – daily independent work, and daily lunchtime routine. 1:1 support.</td>
<td>Kevin M</td>
<td>Y10 KS4 14 years</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>Kelly Class Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**  
*ASD* – Autistic Spectrum Disorder  
*DS* – Down Syndrome  
*GLD* – Global learning delay  
*HI* – Hearing Impairment  
*SLC* – Speech, Language and Communication
5.3 Initial interview to set up the holistic assessment charts

Six initial semi-structured interviews were held individually with members of staff to set up the assessment chart together with the researcher, following methodology described in Chapter 4.

During the initial interviews, a discussion took place to identify three non-academic areas to capture learning, from the key themes from Phase One (Chapter 4) that staff perceived to be important to assess, as well as academic learning. Of the six participants, five assessment charts focused on independence, four on communication, three on emotional development and well-being, two on behaviour and two on adapting to new situations (Table 10). The learning areas of life skills and community access were chosen for one student each, thus showing how individual the chart can be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Learning area 1</th>
<th>Learning area 2</th>
<th>Learning area 3</th>
<th>Academic learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Adapting to new situations</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Community access</td>
<td>Maths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Emotional development and well-being</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Emotional development and well-being</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>PSHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Adapting to new situations</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Emotional development and well-being</td>
<td>PE (dance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The benefits of the holistic assessment chart came through in all the initial interviews. Furthermore, the principles of holistic assessment and how the areas of learning are interconnected were further evidenced through discussions to set up the charts:

‘It could either be Independence or life skills. It fits into both’ (Amelia)
‘So, independence in terms of behaviour, suppose that runs throughout all the lessons, so that’s an ongoing thing.’ (Greg)

‘It's [areas of learning] so overlapping’ (Kelly)

Two short-term targets (one academic and one non-academic) were then set together related to the students' long term EHCP outcomes, two examples of which can be seen in Figure 9 and Figure 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Term Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic:</strong> To use fast and slow movements within a dance piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-academic:</strong> To develop confidence through leading a dance routine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9 Jackie’s short-term targets written by Susan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Term Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic:</strong> Maths IEP target - To use google maps to navigate to 3 different locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-academic:</strong> To develop his independence by accessing the community by leading a trip/visit to a local venue (with adult shadowing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 10 Tom’s short-term targets written by Amelia*

The quality of the EHCPs (Education Health Care Plans) were variable, and some students’ academic and non-academic short-term targets were easier to link to the long term and short-term EHCP outcomes than others. For example, Tom is working on maths skills related to place and position; however, he is going into the community to develop these skills in a functional manner, and as such this learning then relates well to his long term EHCP outcomes of developing his independence skills for college and self-help skills (Figure 11).
Likewise, Susan saw that Jackie’s EHCP had relevant long term outcomes (Figure 12) and explained that ‘you’ve got communication, emotional development and well-being both of which fit into the wider EHCP goals. In addition, Jackie’s long term Communication outcomes were derived from her individual Speech and Language Therapy guidance with her short-term targets written in conjunction with her therapist and class teacher.
However, for other students, members of staff identified relevant targets for the student, which did not fit within the wider EHCP outcomes. In particular, even though it was not part of Kevin’s EHCP outcomes (Figure 13), Kelly felt emotional development and well-being was a significant learning area of importance for Kevin:

‘He had no social emotional mental health needs or descriptions on his EHCP, which I thought was quite surprising… when he’s not very happy for whatever reasons that can have a big impact like on his behaviour’ (Kelly)
Following the initial interviews, the assessment chart was typed and e-mailed to the individual members of staff to check. The capturing of student learning through the holistic assessment chart was completed weekly, until data collection ceased due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

5.4 Findings from the holistic assessment chart data

Of the six members of staff who were participating in the research, only three assessment charts were shared. Kelly (class teacher) shared the assessment chart for Kevin, and Kate (violin teacher) the chart for Ben, with both members of staff participating in a second interview. Greg (class teacher) shared the assessment chart for Luke but chose not to participate in an interview. Susan (dance tutor) chose to participate in a second interview to discuss Jackie’s progress; however, she did not share her assessment chart. Amelia (class teacher) did not respond to any e-mails, and Kelly (class teacher) and John (music enrichment teacher) responded to my first e-mail to set up an interview and share the assessment chart; however, subsequently they did not engage in any further
communication, therefore the chart was not shared, nor the second interview completed.

Kelly’s assessment chart was kept for two weeks (Figure 14); however, she was still able to describe Kevin’s learning using the three areas of non-academic learning she had chosen, as well as the academic (PSHE). Kevin was asked to preselect his dinner choice in the classroom, then at lunchtime transition to the dinner hall before using his chosen symbols to request to the catering staff his meal choice. This activity was completed daily; however, Kelly completed a summary each week using the chart. Within two weeks, Kevin had made clear progress with his communication by verbally requesting food in week 2. Furthermore, the structured meal choosing activity had helped him to regulate his behaviour, which was also captured by the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative (weekly) progress</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Life skills</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Academic - PSHE</th>
<th>Any other learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing picture of items that he would like for dinner that day. Making a request to the dinner team for his meal.</td>
<td>Given a choice of two symbols Kevin will point to the item that he would like. Kevin by the end of the week was able to make a request by following his teacher’s malation prompt of “I want” and then pointing to the item of what he wants. He was not yet able to say the item that he wanted and relied on his previous method of communication.</td>
<td>Kevin was reluctant to carry his dinner menu from the classroom to the dinner hall.</td>
<td>Kevin completed the activity happily each morning, this suggests that he sees some relevance in the activity. Kevin has been settled throughout his dinner routine each day this week. It is pleasing to see Kevin completing this activity willingly.</td>
<td>Kevin is able to make a choice between two items.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing picture of items that he would like for dinner that day. Making a request to the dinner team for his meal.</td>
<td>Kevin is able to make a verbal request of the item that he wants by being given a choice of two i.e. “Do you want fish or nuggets Kevin?”. Kevin will say “fish”.</td>
<td>Kevin was reluctant to carry his dinner menu from the classroom to the dinner hall.</td>
<td>Prior to dinner Kevin was unsettled on one occasion this week. After he settled he was shown his daily menu and he said “dinner”. This seemed to settle Kevin and he was able to transition to the dinner hall independently.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 14 Kelly’s chart with Kevin’s formative progress*

Kate kept detailed records of Ben’s learning during his violin lessons for three weeks in all learning areas (Figure 15). Although progress is not seen with Ben’s communication as he continues to use mostly single words, he is clearly engaging well during the lessons, and working towards achieving his non-academic target ‘to be able to share his views verbally in a group’. Ben is very independent in his learning and has also made progress with his violin playing (academic learning).
Furthermore, Kate made additional comments on Ben’s learning, particularly with regard to the wider picture of his school day including how he had been in class prior to the lesson, compared to in the lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Emotional development</th>
<th>Independence</th>
<th>Music - violin</th>
<th>Any other learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warm up – long bow and then 4 shorter (controlled sounds) Focus on counting and following. Copying rhythms on 2 strings, inventing rhythms on two strings. Revision of Little Star.</td>
<td>Ben seemed a bit dependent at the beginning of the session - he didn't hold up his violin and used only a small amount of bow. However, once we moved to a piece he has been engaging in his attitude changed. He was keen to demonstrate phrases that he had remembered and offered information more voluntarily. He responded well to the praise and encouragement that was given. Ben had really good focus throughout the 25 minute session.</td>
<td>See Table 1 for Ben's formative progress.</td>
<td>Ben confidently made up two phrases for the rest of the group to copy. He is able to get the violin ready independently.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Week 2 | Warm up - physical movements to help bowing. In Flight - long bow. Warm up Rhythms and Little Star.  | Ben was in a good mood today and smiled a bit. He was happy to engage in conversation when I asked him what he had done over half term, and told me he had been to Birmingham. He is still using one word phrases, but there is a lot of smiling and nodding and he made more eye contact today. | Ben was slightly embarrassed to join in some physical warm ups but me and Y were modelling his activity. He was very confident with his playing today - particularly around when I showed him a video which showed he was using lots of bow to make a good sound. He was very proud of his playing of Little Star and showed increased confidence and independence. | Ben confidently demonstrated a tricky part of the piece that we were learning and seemed pleased with what he is achieving. | Ben was the only member of the group that successfully copied a rhythm over two strings. He is very good at remembering and copying. | Ben had a really good attitude to learning today and was very positive. |  |

| Week 3 | Group activities with all violin learners. Games (pass the sound), copying rhythms, sharing pieces. | Ben didn't vocally much, but in the group game of passing a sound to others in the group, he made good eye contact and was really clear. He taught the rest of the group a melody he had invented. | Ben remained focused throughout the session and followed all instructions. He was respectful of others in the group and balanced well to their ideas. He was able to make choices, and express an opinion. | At first in the session, Ben was not confident to teach others the songs he had learnt, but he has gained the confidence and particularly for making up rhythms for others to copy. | Ben is much more confident to copy rhythms and uses two strings to invent new ones. For the first time, he chose to use first finger to make up a rhythm. | Ben enjoyed exploring sounds today and sharing with the group. He had arrived in school in not such a good mood - his class teacher said that he was "not making good choices", but there was no evidence of this in the violin lesson and he settled in well. |  |

Figure 15 Kate’s chart with Ben’s formative progress

Greg completed the assessment chart for Luke for four weeks and was able to complete a summative progress comment (Figure 16). Although Greg’s comments each week were quite brief and sometimes described the activity rather than Luke’s learning, the chart still shows how Luke is starting to make progress in his areas of learning. For example, he was beginning to be more independent with his work and has clearly made progress with his English reading skills.
The three recording charts were mixed in quality, with Kate’s chart (Figure 15) having significantly more detail than the others across the areas identified to capture learning in. All three charts demonstrated that both academic and non-academic learning could be recorded together in a simple format. Although there was not enough data to show significant student learning over time, the second semi-structured interviews were able to obtain data pertaining to the capturing of progress in a holistic manner.

5.5 Second interview (telephone)

Three semi-structured interviews were held individually with members of staff to evaluate the use of the holistic assessment chart.
5.5.1 How is non-academic learning recognised through subject specific learning?

In all three subjects – PSHE, dance and music, there are many ways in which non-academic learning takes place. All three members of staff interviewed commented that they could see that learning was taking place, and the value of it. Kelly described Kevin as developing a variety of skills, including reading symbols, verbally communicating as well as developing his PSHE skills, which she also recorded in Kevin’s holistic assessment chart (Figure 17).

During the interview, Kate described Ben as being ‘more comfortable communicating… more social’ through his violin lessons. In addition, Susan described learning through dance as ‘learning without realising they’re learning’, going on to say:

‘I think [dance] has a real potential to develops people’s kind of resilience and self-esteem because you have to do things in front of people, and you also have to make choices quickly sometimes … and have the confidence’
5.5.2 How effective is a holistic assessment chart (tracking system) for capturing learning in both academic and non-academic areas?

Again, all three members of staff found the holistic assessment chart useful when capturing learning in non-academic and academic areas:

‘It really helped me as a facilitator to focus on just specifics with her that I wouldn’t have necessarily focused… there is real achievement going on here’ (Susan)

‘Really reflect on what you're trying to achieve out of the activity that the students doing’ (Kelly)

‘I found the areas were quite overlapped… when he was more confident, he was better musically and technically’ (Kate)

In reflecting back to the themes from Phase One where seven of the eight areas of learning were non-academic themes, Kate also described Ben’s ability to adapt to new situations (key theme) as another student had joined his group violin lessons:

‘So, there was, when Louise joined, a little sort of, a noticed change in his behaviour. So that sort of brings something different in the situation, made [him] a little bit more wary and I think it made him definitely a bit more insecure for a few weeks… he was fine to join in there was no reluctance, but he went into much more of an observing role himself. But interestingly, he still kept the focus and participated. But you could feel him just assessing, regrouping a little bit.’

The practicalities and workload of using the chart for whole class groups was discussed. All three members of staff thought it would be manageable to use with a group; however, the need to capture individual learning was also recognised and capturing learning less frequently than weekly was suggested by Kate ‘maybe do it [use the assessment chart] once every few weeks as a sort of little sort of checking’.
5.5.3 How can teachers give meaningful feedback to students on their learning and help students to recognise their own learning in all these areas?

All three members of staff had used in the moment or live feedback with their students, which helped them to develop and work on their targets in the lesson:

‘I did give her live feedback, briefly in the class like prompting her to change her action, which was part of the exercise’ (Susan)

‘Gave a lot of positive praise’ (Kate)

‘Really specific feedback at that point in time’ (Kelly)

The feedback also encompassed other areas of learning, for example students were praised for communicating clearly, or being independent. In addition, one member of staff identified that the student was not aware of the targets on his holistic chart, but that if he was this would enable him to understand his progress more.

5.5.4 How does a holistic assessment system show progress towards EHCP (Education and Health Care Plans) short-term outcomes?

All three members of staff could identify how this assessment chart could show progress towards EHCP outcomes, although they would only be relevant to one or two outcomes. For example, Kate identified that Ben was making progress towards his short-term outcome (Figure 18) of developing his communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Ben</th>
<th>Activity: Violin lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EHCP outcomes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term: Ben will develop his expressive and receptive language skills, specifically his ability to hold conversations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term: Ben will be encouraged to use polite language throughout the day and will be encouraged to express himself and put in words what he thinks and feels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18 Ben’s EHCP Communication and interaction outcomes

In addition, Susan saw how Jackie was developing her social and emotional skills in relation to her EHCP outcomes, and Kelly described the chart as supporting the holistic nature of the EHCP:
'I think because it's an EHCP goal then it should be around that holistic development, and I guess it really reflects that you're meeting that students' needs on the EHCP’ (Kelly)

5.6 Additional findings

A subsequent benefit of this research identified by all three members of staff has been the usefulness of the holistic assessment chart when planning.

‘It kind of pushed me to just focus a bit more than I usually would but not in a bad way… It helps me to like shine this light a bit more brightly on areas that might just not be so kind of obvious to me’ (Susan)

‘I think it's not so much the recording but having the mindset, so I think in my planning and to think about students a little bit more… It broadens the teachers’ kind of sort of way of looking at things more holistically as well as capturing the students’ progress’ (Kate)

‘I think it is a really valuable planning document’ (Kelly)

5.7 Changes for Phase Three

Although the original intention of this data collection was to capture 10 weeks’ recording on the holistic assessment chart, limited data during Phase Two was collected due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, the results were promising from the charts and the feedback from three members of staff during the second interviews. Although this data collection involved a low number of participants, Phase Two enabled further reflection on the chart, and the implementation of developments for Phase Three which conducted further trials of the holistic assessment chart.

During Phase Two, not enough data was collected from the students. This was in part because the full data collection period was not completed due to the COVID-19 restrictions, and also because teachers had not collected weekly student views on their learning. As key literature and policy has shown (Colley, 2020; DfE, 2015) the need to incorporate student voice is essential, however the practice of obtaining student voice is not embedded by participants which the Phase Two data collection showed. During Phase Three a greater emphasis was placed on
teachers sharing the targets with their students and capturing their voice and seeking their views on their learning and progress. Following updated ethical guidance, the planned interviews with students will be conducted to seek their views of their learning during Phase Three, which will also support any gaps that may have been created by the teachers if their voice has not been captured weekly. Giving more detailed guidance to participants on how to complete the chart will incorporate the above identified need to record student voice. In addition, further guidance will also support participants with their assessment literacy and use of a completely new system to record progress.

Questions during the second interview for Phase Three was revised, to elicit the advantages and disadvantages of using the chart more clearly. This enabled clearer evaluations from participants, to really identify strengths and weaknesses of the assessment chart, building on the picture already presented during Phase Two with key themes such as its use as a planning tool, and workload implications.

In summary, the following amendments were made:

- Members of staff to share the chart with their student
- More guidance on how to complete the chart given to members of staff
- Student voice to be captured weekly and at the end of the recording period
- Revised second interview questions to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the chart
- Paper notes would be taken during any telephone interviews.

5.8 Summary

The findings of Phase One has led to the creation of a holistic assessment chart which was trialled and evaluated during Phase Two by six members of staff. Although only three charts were shared and three second interviews conducted, data has shown how learning could be captured in academic and non-academic areas through a personalised holistic assessment chart. All six members of staff chose three different areas of learning to focus on, with Independence and Communication being the most common. Members of staff were able to make weekly formative assessments using descriptive qualitative comments to capture learning based on these three non-academic learning areas, as well as the
students' academic progress. In addition, one member of staff completed a summative progress comment linking both academic (English reading) and non-academic learning (Independence and Behaviour).

Three members of staff also gave an initial evaluation of the holistic assessment chart during their second semi-structured interviews, with all three members of staff being positive about its use. Members of staff gave examples of how students had made progress in non-academic areas as well as through their academic learning, and one staff member identified a further benefit of the chart in aiding her planning.

The findings from Phase Two will be discussed in Chapter 7, with reference to how the assessment chart can measure both academic and non-academic progress. Chapter 6 now presents the final findings of this research from Phase Three, regarding a further trial of the chart through mini case studies, and the reflections and evaluations of members of staff and students.
Chapter 6 Findings – Phase Three

6.1 Introduction
Chapter 6 will present the findings from Phase Three of this research carried out between September 2020 and March 2021, following my three month study break. Three members of staff (Thomas, Kate, and Susan) and three students (Luke, Ben and Richard) participated in Phase Three (Table 11); however, Susan and Richard did not complete the full data collection. Luke had participated in Phase Two with Greg focusing on holistic assessment in an English activity; however, for Phase Three he participated in a key stage choir led by Thomas. Ben had participated in Phase Two with Kate during violin lessons, and this remained the same for Phase Three.

Table 11 Overview of participants in Phase Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Name &amp; gender</th>
<th>Year group/Key stage/Age</th>
<th>Learning need</th>
<th>Approx. English/Maths P Level</th>
<th>Communication method</th>
<th>Staff &amp; role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music – weekly 2:1 violin lesson (f2f)</td>
<td>Ben M</td>
<td>Y12 KS5 16 years</td>
<td>Global learning delay</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Kate Local Authority Music Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance – weekly Step into Dance enrichment (f2f/online)</td>
<td>Richard M</td>
<td>Y11 KS4 15 years</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Symbols Makaton gestures single words</td>
<td>Susan Dance Enrichment Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Phase Three – Luke and Thomas
Thomas had consented to participate in Phase Two (Chapter 6); however, consent had not been gained for a student he taught before the impact of COVID-19 suspended data collection. Thomas worked with both Luke and Olivia from Phase
Two, and both students and parents had consented to continue the research; therefore, Thomas was given a choice of who to use the assessment chart with, and he chose to focus on Luke during weekly choir.

6.2.1 Luke
Luke is a 13-year-old male student in Year 8. He has ‘a diagnosis of Down Syndrome and associated learning disability. He presents with significant receptive and expressive language difficulties, together with attention and listening difficulties and delayed social and interactive, behaviour management and self-help skills.’ (EHCP). Luke uses a total communication approach including speech, Makaton signing and gestures to communicate. Luke’s speech can often be illegible; however, he is a very proactive and persistent communicator, and will use gesture, sign, symbols and expression to support his speech and make himself understood. Luke has a receptive understanding of two-three key words and understands simple instructions in the context of his daily routines. He can understand and discriminate between individual symbols and understands questions such as who? and what?. When communicating with Luke, members of staff support all language with visual cues such as Makaton, pictures, and symbols, and with visual support, he is able to extend his sentences. Luke is a very sociable student who enjoys drama and role play, as well as football and music. Luke’s behaviour is excellent; however, he can be stubborn or get upset for example when he does not win a game. Luke is working within school Level 5 in English (Appendix 15).

6.2.2 Thomas
Thomas is a music enrichment teacher (unqualified teacher), who started at the school in this role in September 2020. Prior to this, he had worked at the school through the local music hub as a peripatetic music teacher for the last two years. Thomas teaches a variety of individual, group, and class music enrichment activities.

6.2.3 Choir and assessment
Choir is usually a whole school activity, and students are given the choice to attend; however due to the COVID-19 guidance and school organisation, between September 2020 and November 2020 the choir has consisted of a small group of
students from one key stage, with numbers limited to five students to ensure appropriate social distancing when singing. Thomas leads the choir by himself and does not have any support staff with him. Thomas would usually record progress in choir using P Levels in music on an enrichment platform, and Luke is working within P5 (Table 12).

Table 12 P Level 5 music assessment criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P5 Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils take part in simple musical performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They respond to signs given by a musical conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They pick out a specific musical instrument when asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They play loudly, quietly, quickly and slowly in imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They play an instrument when prompted by a cue card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They listen to, and imitate, distinctive sounds played on a particular instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They listen to a familiar instrument played behind a screen and match the sound to the correct instrument on a table</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2.4 Data collection

Thomas first met Luke when he started teaching him in September 2020. The initial interview and holistic assessment chart data collection took place during the Autumn Term 2020. During the Spring Term 2021, when school was both online and f2f, Luke stayed at home and engaged in online learning, attending weekly choir sessions via Zoom. These sessions were open to all students both in school and at home, with approximately 15 participants each week and at least one member of support staff. There were several complications with using choir lessons for this research, as there was a delayed start to the group in the Autumn Term due to the need for a further school risk assessment for singing to take place. As such, the choir was held in the hall, and included a reduced group of five students from the same key stage. From March 8th (DfE, 2021a) choir restarted f2f; however due to the use of the school hall as a lateral flow testing centre and improved weather, choir was held outside in class groups, with the class teacher and two support staff present. Thomas’ initial interview was held via telephone (Appendix 16) as although both of us were f2f at school, ethics guidelines did not permit research being conducted f2f. The final interview with Thomas and the interview with Luke took place at the end of the Spring Term 2021 and were both conducted f2f.
During a week of absence due to self-isolation, I covered the choir (I am also the music Coordinator) so Thomas sent me his chart with three weeks data, and I was able to complete week four. This gave me the opportunity to complete the recording, thus providing an example for Thomas who had been focusing on describing the activities, rather than Luke’s response. Following my example, we had an e-mail conversation and the following weeks’ recording had more specific details about Luke’s learning.

6.2.5 Thomas initial interview

During the initial interviews, a discussion was held with Thomas to identify three non-academic areas to capture learning, from the key themes from Phase One (Chapter 5) that members of staff perceived to be important to assess: Adapting to new situations and environments, Behaviour, Communication, Community access, Emotional development and well-being, Independence, and Life skills, as well as academic learning. Two short-term targets (one academic and one non-academic) were then set together, related to Luke’s long and short-term EHCP outcomes.

Thomas identified the themes of Communication, Emotional development and well-being and Independence (all non-academic) as well as Music (academic). In addition, Thomas was encouraged to specifically share the two targets with Luke. Luke’s targets for choir were:

**Academic:** To learn a new song and perform expressively, articulating some words and phrases clearly.

**Non-academic:** To develop his ability to work in a group by taking turns with peers and listening and responding to their music too.

Following the initial interview with Thomas, the holistic assessment chart was typed and e-mailed to Thomas to check (Figure 19).
Figure 19 Luke’s holistic assessment chart
6.2.6 Holistic assessment chart

Thomas completed nine weeks of the assessment chart for Luke, and one week was completed by myself (Appendix 16). Thomas also completed a summative progress comment for Luke (Figure 20) to summarise all Luke’s progress in choir including academic and non-academic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summative (end of term ) progress (to be added to school assessment system) to include all areas of learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Despite COVID induced timetable disruptions throughout the Autumn and Spring term, Luke has progressed with the targets laid out in this chart. His musical experience has grown to include music making with others within a group, while referencing material familiar to him from elsewhere (his own song suggestion - Old Town Road). Through regular choir warm ups, and structured singing activities, he is becoming more familiar with ‘call &amp; response’ within music and verbal group settings, especially gaining confidence taking turns. His awareness and consideration of other students has directly influenced this, and it is nice to see him so comfortable with others currently making music in his class setting, albeit in a different space (outside). He has been focused and keen throughout all sessions, with familiarity helping him gain further control of his expressive behaviour and performance during choir.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 20 Summative comment from holistic assessment chart*

6.2.7 Thomas final interview

Thomas consented to a f2f interview which was conducted in the music room during the school day. All Open University and school risk assessments were followed, for example maintaining social distancing, hand washing, and having the windows open etc. Thomas’ interview took place before Luke’s interview (Appendix 17).

6.2.7.1 How has Luke made progress in the non-academic areas you identified through choir? Communication, Emotional Development and well-being, Independence.

Luke finds it difficult to communicate in a group, for example he struggles to take turns and listen to others, and he can often become too excited and speak over others. Thomas had set Luke’s short-term target to develop his ability to work in a group during our first interview, and he noticed significant progress through choir in this area:

‘I feel like the choirs helped him with that stuff because we’ve been doing things like taking turns even doing things like following the leader, waiting, having moments of shout out to be really loud and doing your thing and then moments of quiet and restraint again.’
Thomas described how Luke had progressed with his emotional development and well-being throughout the Autumn Term. Luke was clearly happy and excited to go to choir, seeing it as a special event to go to the hall for a group activity with different peers: ‘I remember thinking it was a sign of how, it means a lot to be doing that different thing, he was aware of that, this is me, this is important to me’.

In addition, since the start of choir in September 2020, Luke had developed his focus and concentration. Thomas explained:

I think he is more relaxed about it [choir], he's more, there's a familiarity now he didn't have before and I mean lots of students get this, lots of people get this, is that when you do music for the first time, we just got yeah this is great, you got a bit crazy. You just want to bash everything, and then once you've done it for a while becomes like, I know this situation where this process, the nuances of how you can express yourself come out a bit better, so I think that's starting to happen with him.

6.2.7.2 How effective is a holistic tracking system for capturing learning in both academically and non-academic areas?

Thomas found the chart very useful in tracking Luke’s learning, not just as an assessment tool, ‘It's like an extra thing to check which is definitely helping be more aware of what he's up to’. In addition, the assessment chart also helped Thomas to reflect on his own practice, making him more aware of holistic assessment:

Yeah, I guess, it’s made me think more deeply about some things that I would be thinking about, his emotional well-being for example. I'm always trying to be aware of how everyone's doing in a group but when you really start thinking about how you’re supposed to, what's the state of their well-being it’s quite a deep complicated question isn’t it for anybody… I've probably been thinking about it more but that's probably fed into what I've been doing with the online choir as well and from my whole experience of running the choir here, it's been, it's kind of changed, you know, all these things, it's been very holistic, it hasn't been a purely musical experience.
6.2.7.3 Has this chart supported you to give meaningful feedback to students on their learning?

Thomas had continued to give Luke feedback in the moment during weekly choir sessions, including on his behaviour and communication; however, his feedback was predominantly music related (academic). Thomas had shared the two short-term targets with Luke.

6.2.7.4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a holistic assessment chart as opposed to usual school systems?

Whole school assessment requirements had changed to reflect the blended learning throughout the year at home and at school, and the introduction of the school’s recovery curriculum. However, for Thomas, his school assessment requirements remained the same as he records using an enrichment platform, consisting of context, evidence and a photograph. Thomas sees himself very much as a music teacher, and his role to capture music progress as a music teacher. Through using the chart, he reflected on how he perceived his role had changed:

‘It's a different thing because I don’t feel I'm assessing his music here. I'm just assessing him and how he's getting on, and I sort of feel more like a class teacher all of a sudden… I'm having to write things down that I wouldn't have done using another system, I suppose I did a load of recording for Blue Class and most of what I wrote was purely musical there’.

Thomas identifies several advantages of using the chart to capture learning:

‘Yes, it fits perfectly well’

‘It's made me think a bit more about things like well-being, that kind of angle. So normally I'd just have that popped up here [indicated head] and I wouldn't be writing it down, so I guess it's not being recorded otherwise.’

‘It definitely would be more rounded having done that [used holistic chart], it’s made me think of more with every student’

‘If I was working with someone all the time [the chart would be useful]. I guess you really want to tie into the way you're assessing everything they’re doing for it to make sense, it doesn't want to be something separate, that's definitely the thing it’s made me think about because if at any point you’re
teaching someone and they aren't happy, then it’s very rare that they were unhappy, but their work is going well.’

However, Thomas also identified issues with workload when using the holistic chart, and that it was not practical to use for every student: ‘When I see lots of students every week it is something that gets in the way of my timetabling and my planning, but that's what you do when you do research projects, that's fine’.

6.2.7.5 How has COVID-19 impacted Luke’s learning?

Whilst the data collection was conducted in the Autumn Term 2020, Luke had participated in the choir online and more recently as a class group. This change in organisation provided opportunities to capture Luke’s learning holistically, including how the environment and class relationships with peers and members of staff impacted his learning.

In the hall, Luke was very excited and saw choir as a special event, whereas when he was with his class outside, he seemed ‘much more kind of chilled out but he's still very engaged. So that's like a nice step. It's hard to say if that's progress or just different because it's a different context, you know?’ Whilst this change in behaviour and focus can be attributed to the change in group to include class peers and staff, it provides another example of the importance of capturing learning holistically and how students adapt to different situations, a theme identified through Phase One.

6.2.7.6 Holistic assessment chart and COVID-19

Thomas shared his views on using the holistic assessment chart to capture learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and identified the need to support and develop student’s well-being which intrinsically links to academic achievement:

‘The interruptions COVID caused to everybody's educational journeys, and the heightened awareness about the well-being is really essential if you want their academic work to do anything, they need to be feeling OK, I think it’s very relevant, useful to think that way.’

Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview, I asked Thomas to clarify and expand on several points discussed, particular with reference to members of staff
collaborating when assessing students holistically. In particular, a discussion was had on a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment. Thomas initially described how a multi-disciplinary approach was used to share safeguarding concerns about a student. After further questioning, he went on to explain how a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment could also be effective:

‘I actually think the stuff like well-being, the sharing of stuff between teachers is probably, in the same way as in the safeguarding world, that’s the most, the fairest representation probably of the student, because it’s all about relationships, and if a student is doing really well and is happy all the time then everybody can see it and if they’re upset and you know people notice.’

6.2.8 Interview with Luke

I already had an established relationship with Luke, he knows me well, and in addition, I taught Luke Maths the previous year. Luke was very happy and excited to come with me to talk about his work. He chose to go to the art room, and the location of where he would sit in the room. Luke was asked if he was happy if I videoed our conversation and he responded by saying ‘yes’ and nodding his head. Luke’s interview was conducted using symbols, signs, and speech, as well as showing video clips and photos of Luke singing during choir. The interview was video recorded to enable analysis, and photographs were taken of all Luke’s symbol responses.

At the beginning of the interview, I modelled how to use the symbols, by giving an example of something that I liked and did not like. To establish Luke’s understanding and ensure I was pitching my questions at the correct communication level, I also asked Luke questions, the answer to which I knew was a negative e.g. ‘Do you play the violin?’ Luke was able to use the symbols to tell me no, and also shook his head (Figure 21).
I then started asking Luke questions and gave him the symbols one at a time. Luke’s questions were kept simple, and used one key concept at a time, for example asking Luke about his speaking and then his listening, rather than asking him to comment on his short-term targets set by Thomas as a whole.

Luke was clearly able to tell me he liked choir with Thomas, both verbally by saying ‘yes’, and placing the choir symbol under the ‘like’ symbol (Figure 22). In addition, when I took a photo of his answer, he gave a double thumbs up to indicate ‘yes’. Luke used symbols to communicate that the choir at school made him happy, but the choir at home made him sad. He also shook his head and said ‘no’ to indicate he did not like the choir when he was at home.

Figure 21 Luke’s response to ‘Do you play the violin?’

Figure 22 Luke’s response to ‘Do you like choir?’ ‘How does choir at school make you feel?’ and ‘How does choir at home make you feel?’
Next, I asked Luke about the different activities he had been doing in choir. He responded using symbols to tell me he liked the hello and goodbye song, vocal warmups and all the songs he had learnt with Thomas. Luke was particularly animated when telling me about ‘Old Town Road’ which was his favourite song (Figure 23). He also gave a short rendition of the chorus, singing with a good sense of phrase with some legible key words, as well as standing up to dance and sign key words such as ‘ride’ and ‘horse’.

![Figure 23 Luke's response to 'Do you like singing Old Town Road?' and 'Have you got better at group work?'](image)

When I asked Luke in turn if he had got better at singing, communicating, speaking, listening and choir, Luke was very positive with his responses, saying ‘yes’ to everything except ‘group work’ which he was unsure of. I then asked Luke if there was anything else he wanted to say, he kept putting his fingers to his lips in a ‘ssh’ motion. During the interview I was not able to clarify what he meant as I interpreted this as a sign Luke was being quiet. After the interview I followed up with Thomas and established making a ‘ssh’ sound was part of the vocal warmups he did in choir every week.

At the end of the interview, I stopped the video recording and asked Luke if he wanted to see the video. He signed and said ‘yes’, so we watched his interview back together on the iPad. Luke was smiling and pointing at himself on the video and seemed happy to have participated.
6.2.9 Further reflections

Thomas had spoken about working with Luke’s class teacher in choir from 8th March and how it was really useful as they both knew Luke well but had taught him in different contexts. Thomas then went on to give another example of a different student he taught in Luke’s class, and how he and Luke’s teacher had both shared similar examples of how this student engages in learning, but in different contexts.

A further discussion was held on the purpose of the holistic chart. As a music enrichment teacher, Thomas uses student documents such as profiles, behaviour support plans, EHCPs, and IEPs to find out information about the student before he teaches them. Thomas felt these forms were useful, but that there were too many: ‘it’s good, there’s just too many of them.’ I then asked if a holistic profile of how students learn would be useful, and Thomas felt this would be a useful document:

‘Yeah, because all the forms are there, there’s a load of stuff, and it’s those kind of like it makes it harder to find all that information. So, I guess this holistic idea is nice because it’s yeah grouping it.’

6.2.10 Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that Luke has made progress in academic (singing/music) and non-academic areas (behaviour, communication, and emotional development). This progress was captured by Thomas using the holistic assessment chart, for example Luke’s improved ability to concentrate and turn take with peers. The assessment chart showed a much more detailed diversity of learning than Luke’s school levels that are used to assess him in music. However, whilst Thomas did find the chart useful in understanding Luke’s learning further, he also highlighted the additional workload as a disadvantage of using the chart for more than one student.

6.3 Phase Three – Ben and Kate

Ben and Kate participated in Phase Two (Chapter 5) before data collection was suspended in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ben continued his violin lessons online with Kate throughout the Summer term via telephone, as he
and his family were not able to use Zoom. In September 2020, f2f violin lessons resumed in school, and data collection by Kate using the assessment chart resumed. The targets remained the same, however as Ben had moved into KS5, his EHCP outcomes were updated.

6.3.1 Ben

Ben is a 16-year-old male student in Year 12, who has global learning difficulties and ‘experiences difficulties with his speech and language and progress with learning.’ (EHCP). Ben also has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Ben can communicate verbally, using full sentences and details; however, he often only uses one or two key words, and needs prompting to extend his sentences. Ben can understand verbal language, and does not need any additional support e.g., symbols; however, his learning needs to be broken down into smaller steps. Ben answers who? what? why? and where? questions, but finds it difficult to answer when? questions, and needs support by being given options e.g., today, or tomorrow. Ben can be shy to speak in front of others, and will often answer with one or two words, although with prompting with a connection (because… but…), he can expand his sentences. Ben is very motivated and enjoys learning; he is proud when he has done something well and does not like to make mistakes. Ben is working within Entry Level 1 in English and Maths (Appendix 18), and at National Curriculum Level 2 in Music (Figure 24), which is the expected level to be attained by 7-year-old neurotypical students.

![Figure 24 Music NC Level 2 descriptor](image-url)
6.3.2 Kate
Kate is a peripatetic music teacher who has been working at the school for several years. She also has past experience as an Early Years Teacher. She teaches violin and cello to students individually and in small groups.

6.3.3 Violin and assessment
Ben has been learning the violin since 2018 and has a weekly 30-minute lesson in a pair of students. This pair has changed over the years; however, the current pair has been consistent since September 2019. The other student who has lessons with Ben has 1:1 medical support, and therefore there is a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) always in the room, as well as Kate. Ben has ten violin lessons per term.

As Kate is an external peripatetic music teacher, she would usually record Ben’s progress in a quantitative manner, using the pre-Grade 1 violin assessments in areas of ensemble, solo and composition, as per her local music hub assessment requirements. Ben is working within Bronze Musical Medal Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) pre-grade 1 standard, with the pass assessment criteria as follows:

‘Although in their ensemble performance there may be some small problems – for example with tempi, phrasing or balance – candidates play with a sense of ensemble and are responsive to the group. They control their sound with general security, and their playing is mostly accurate in notes and intonation. They pay some attention to the dynamics and there is evidence of tonal awareness. They maintain a suitable tempo in performance and play with a sense of rhythm. Their phrases are mostly well shaped, and their articulation is generally secure. They play with a reasonable sense of continuity and recover from slips promptly. The broad intention of the music they play is conveyed. They demonstrate musicianship skills adequate to the demands of the chosen Option test.’

In addition, the music medal criteria further break down musical assessment into different musical elements. Figure 25 shows an example of the criteria for ensemble playing.
6.3.4 Data collection

As Kate was an external tutor, a school risk assessment was conducted to ensure violin lessons were safe to carry out, and as both students in her lessons could understand and comply with social distancing and mask wearing, violin lessons resumed f2f in the Autumn Term 2020. During the Spring Term 2021 when school was both online and f2f, Ben stayed at home; however, he did not manage any remote lessons and resumed f2f violin lessons from 8th March 2021 in school.

6.3.5 Kate’s initial interview

E-mail correspondence was held with Kate in September 2020, and a short telephone conversation. As Ben had moved to Key Stage 5 (KS5) in September 2020, his Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) short-term outcomes changed, so the holistic chart was updated to reflect this (Figure 26). As Kate and Ben have already participated in Phase Two, the three non-academic areas identified – Communication, Emotional development and well-being and Independence, and the two targets for his violin lessons (academic and non-academic) remained appropriate and stayed the same. Ben’s short-term targets for violin were:

**Academic:** To be able to play a response to a given phrase on the violin that is different

**Non-academic:** To be able to share his views verbally in a group.

| Figure 25 Ensemble assessment criteria for Musical Medals |
The quality of Kate’s holistic assessment chart was excellent from Phase Two, providing a lot of detail about Ben’s progress. At the end of the Autumn Term, Kate e-mailed her chart to me, and the second interview was planned for the Spring Term 2021 (Appendix 19).

Kate started the assessment chart again on week three of her resumed f2f teaching at school. There are two other weeks missing due to absence; however, in total six weeks of data was collected. It is clear from the chart that Ben has made progress in several areas (not just musically), however, Kate’s summative comment was based on his musical progress (Figure 27). Therefore, this was an area identified to be discussed during Kate’s final interview, as it was hoped that the summative comment would include non-academic progress.

**6.3.6 Holistic assessment chart**

Ben has continued to show focus and determination in violin lessons. He listens carefully to his sound and is able to copy rhythm patterns, although not always able to identify notes. When making up his own patterns, he prefers long notes, so needs to develop strategies to make up rhythms. Technically, he is progressing well, although his posture needs work, his bow is straight on the string, making a strong sound and his intonation is very good.
6.3.7 Kate’s final interview

Kate chose to conduct the final interview via telephone. Kate’s interview took place after Ben’s interview.

6.3.7.1 How has Ben made progress in the non-academic areas you identified through choir? Communication, Emotional Development and well-being, Independence.

Kate was clearly able to identify how Ben had developed his communication skills throughout his violin lessons in the Autumn Term, which was also reflected in her notes in the assessment chart:

‘Certainly, on the first box when teaching Ben was pretty monosyllabic, what he would come up with and not a lot of eye contact, but I think probably he has gained confidence through the routine each week.’

In particular, Kate identified the transition to the violin lessons as a key time when Ben developed his communication, and would now start conversations on a one-to-one basis:

‘Definitely, he will now start a conversation. Particular that time when I go and pick him up. It’s quite a nice sort of warmup to the lesson, sort of walk up to the music room, and that’s when this term he did say to me that he wants to do violin at college.’

Within the paired violin lessons, Ben was not as communicative as he was when walking to the lessons; however, Kate still saw progress in his communication through how he communicated musically, and how focused he was:

‘So definitely he seems to have gained a lot of confidence with communicating. Less so in the lesson, he doesn’t say a lot in the actual lesson, but I think what he does in the lessons is focused, he’s 100% there all the time… So, I think it’s kind of shows in the way that he interacts more than in how he communicates verbally in the group.’

Ben had also made significant progress with his independence skills, and now takes the time to practise on his own before playing together in the group to ensure he gets the music right:
And what he does independently is when I ask him to do something and I'm demonstrating, he works through it, and he will want to take the time to practise on his own in the lesson and that's quite marked…. He likes that little bit of time to work it out on his own, and that's been really good.’

In addition, Ben has developed his independence and communication skills through improvising, developing his ability to make and communicate choices:

‘There was one point where Ben changed something, and I asked the question did you want to do this or that? And Ben was very confident in what he wanted to do. He changed it, and he wanted to stick with the changed thing. And I think that has become really evident that he's making more choices and we always have a time in the lesson where we will start usually with some improvisation, it starts with them copying me, but then they make up their own things and recently we've been putting little pieces together and they make decisions or how many times should use that pattern and he'll always absolutely know what he wants to do. So that's been really interesting to see him grow in that confidence for making decisions.’

During Week 3, a new student who was very verbal and chatty joined the violin lessons. Kate was able to capture and describe the impact on Ben's communications skills:

‘When Laura joined, there was a little sort of, a noticed change in his behaviour. So that sort of brings something different in the situation, makes him a little bit more wary and I think it made him definitely a bit more insecure for a few weeks… he was fine to join in, there was no reluctance, but he went into much more of an observing role himself. But interestingly, he still kept the focus and participated. But you could feel him just assessing, regrouping a little bit.’

6.3.7.2 How effective is a holistic tracking system for capturing learning in both academically and non-academic areas?

Kate was able to identify benefits of using the assessment chart by examining all the different areas of learning:
‘It’s just so lovely to get a whole picture of the person that you’re working with, and I think to have on your radar really it’s like instead of just planning a lesson and sort of looking for the targets or whatever you want to achieve, just actually really thinking about their whole journey, it’s probably something I did anyway, but to sort of formalise it, is really it’s interesting.’

Kate further explained the benefits of tracking holistically, as she was able to identify progress in other areas of learning, particularly as students like Ben make slow progress with academic learning through the violin:

‘It’s interesting to track because where there might not be a lot of progress in their learning, it’s been a very slow journey particularly in that group for them to get to use their left hand and everything, but you see the progress in the other areas and it all sort of fits together. So, I think it’s interesting to log it definitely.’

6.3.7.3 Has this chart supported you to give meaningful feedback to students and to enable them to reflect on their own learning?

Kate gave regular feedback to Ben in every violin lesson, but had not particularly used the chart to support this:

‘That’s probably something I haven’t done as much in honesty. Not in addition to what I would normally do, I would always refer back to what we’ve been learning and share the progress with them. I think it’s been less of an element with Ben. Maybe if it was with a student who was more verbal it would be easier to have the dialogue about it.’

I asked a follow up question as to whether feedback was just musical, and Kate clarified:

‘Yes, and no, I mean obviously if they play confidently. Even with not being able to do concerts, I’ve tried to put an element of performance in the learning because we did the recording and we worked up to that and that’s a real opportunity to speak to them about how they’re feeling. So, we do cover that. I would say it’s probably less formal covering that side of things.’

Kate described how Ben knew when something was not musically right, and he reflected that in his emotions, taking the time to practise:
‘Because he isn't happy if it's not right. So, I think he's quite honest in his reflection… He does know if it's not right, and that's why he likes that time to work it out.’

6.3.7.4 How do you think this chart shows progress for the long and short-term EHCP outcomes?

Ben’s EHCP outcomes were quite narrow, and the majority did not relate to learning the violin; however, Kate was able to identify his progress in violin lessons and was helping him to develop his assertiveness and decision-making skills:

‘I mean assertiveness, I think I touched on that with him making decisions definitely. I think showing more his preferences.’

6.3.7.5 How would you normally record violin sessions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a holistic assessment chart compared to your usual recording?

Kate described how, as a peripatetic music teacher, she would have termly plans, which ideally, she would write a reflection on each week. In addition, Kate uses a summative pre-grade 1 assessment tracking system, although this was not as useful in showing the small steps in progress that Ben made:

‘I've not used it so much with them because their progress is slower, it's in a way it needs to be broken down further for them, but it's probably interesting to do on an annual basis to see where they've got to.’

Kate found her personal reflection notes that she usually kept, and the assessment chart very similar and complementary of each other, and much more meaningful to use then the pre-grade 1 assessments:

‘I think the notes that I make and reflect on, they often do incorporate ‘oh they really liked doing that or they weren't confident’. That's actually really valuable information in their approach to learning and their well-being. It's really important to know what went well and if there was something that threw them, in in that lesson. To me that's really important information because I can easily put together the technical and all the music side but actually how they respond to it is really important.’

I then asked a follow up question – ‘And how does that compare say with somebody in mainstream that you were teaching at this level. Would that be
somebody presumably, I was going to say younger but not necessarily, somebody just starting out?’ Kate then clarified that the chart had a particular use for holistically assessing students with learning difficulties:

‘So, at the moment, I don’t actually do any other sort of group teaching. I’m just doing whole class, which is really hard to be bespoke, make individual. You have to kind of look at the overall how are we getting on? But in past group teaching I’d say it’s more important in special needs to have the overall picture and really connect with their other learning and their other targets and to really understand. I mean it’s obviously useful to have all the pictures you can of any young person, but in terms I'd say, really very useful working with special needs.’

6.3.7.6 How have you found using the recording chart?
Kate had found the assessment chart really beneficial, and as she only taught four students once a week at school, it was manageable to complete for one student. She had previously commented during Phase Two on the usefulness of the chart to support her planning, so I asked her to comment again on the impact on her planning during the Autumn Term:

‘I think maybe the impact was greater when I first started doing it. I've started to think that way more automatically as it were, rather than using it specifically. I think it was because I was doing the PGCE as well last year and really focusing on teaching, it hopefully made a bit of a change in the way that I plan and teach.’

In addition, I asked for feedback on the way I had explained how to complete the chart, and that I had decided not to give any written guidance:

‘Maybe, a bit more guidance. But I think sometimes that can actually work against it, because if you’re too prescriptive then that can constrain how people respond so in a way, we’re all individuals as teachers as well, so it’s kind of nice to be given a little bit of freedom, but maybe to have check in - is this okay? Do you want me to add or do any differently would have been helpful.’
6.3.7.7 How has COVID-19 impacted Ben’s learning?
Ben has had several breaks in his violin lessons over the past year, with lessons via telephone in the Summer Term 2020, and no lessons between January – March 8th, 2021; however, Kate felt that Ben had had a positive start to the resumption of his lessons:

‘I was surprised at how confident he was this term coming back, I was expecting a little reluctance, for him to be a little bit more anxious and he wasn’t, so I think it’s not something we talk about but I think it’s something that is evident in the way that he is more communicative, certainly, he doesn’t run out of class [to go to the lesson], but as he sees me he’ll stop what he’s doing to come to violin which is always a really positive time. I think back to demonstrating to me the focus that he has and then Autumn I think he really did start to fly in the Autumn. And then I've only seen him a few weeks, but again really pleasantly surprised that nothing is forgotten, and he could pick it up. Yes, probably there’s been a bit that has been missed learning and things that we weren't able to do and make as quick progress on but I’m quite confident that he will catch up.’

6.3.7.8 Current school assessment systems have been suspended (due to COVID-19, online learning, adapted RC), do you think this chart is still relevant? Does it have a place as an assessment tool? Why/why not?
Kate also described how the assessment chart could be even more relevant post-COVID-19, and how important it was that students needed to feel ‘okay about everything’ before they were able to engage in learning:

‘I think it does, it does remind me of, and I don't like often making the comparison with special needs and early years, but it does remind me of when I used to, well both of my youngsters and they were in childcare when they were little, and the actual really important thing for me was to get the feedback on how they've been emotionally. I've often think for every student it is to see their development, their growth as a person, isn't it? And I think it is well reflected in this chart. So, I think it is quite a valuable way of recording their sort of progress. I think particularly after the year that we’ve had I think for all young people it’s just so important to pick up those other qualities and their resilience, their well-being, in order to catch that and recognise that they might need support as well in other areas, I think it’s
really important, I think it isn't valued enough in our education system full stop, but I think it could be particularly important in Special Needs.’

6.3.7.9 Further reflections
In Kate’s assessment chart, she had completed the summative comment predominantly based on Ben’s violin playing, rather than including all his assessments, so I clarified her thinking behind this:

‘That’s probably just reverting back to being the music teacher. I mean I put focus and determination and I think those are key things that he has definitely brought into violin lessons. That’s probably a misunderstanding for me.’

6.3.8 Interview with Ben
I already had a well-established relationship with Ben, having worked with him in the school orchestra for several years. When I went to Ben’s classroom and asked if I could speak to him about his violin, he immediately said yes and came out of the room with me. Ben chose to sit with me on a bench in the school garden to conduct our interview, and again consented to the interview being audio recorded. Ben’s interview was conducted verbally, using some sentence starters and verbal prompts to support Ben to answer.

Ben was asked who he had been learning the violin with, and he was able to name his teacher (Kate), and the other student he has lessons with. When asked how long he had been learning, Ben was silent, and therefore I gave him options of one year, two years, five years, and then he interrupted me and said ‘four years. When asked ‘do you like your lessons?’ Ben responded by saying ‘yeah, because I make new music.’ Ben was also able to say that he had violin lessons on the phone with Kate last year; however, he was not able to identify that this year he had not had any phone lessons and said he had kept learning with Kate.

I asked Ben some more questions about his violin, and what pieces he liked to play. Ben was not able to recall the names of any pieces (I clarified the names during Kate’s interview) but told me the names of the notes ‘G, D, A, E’ and showed me how he was using his first finger by miming playing the violin. Ben
knew he learnt music with paper (sheet music) as well as playing music by listening and copying Kate.

I reminded Ben of his two targets, and asked ‘Have you got better at making something up on the violin? So, Kate plays something like doo doo doo doo, and then Ben plays something back?’ Ben responded with ‘yeah’; therefore, to encourage him to say more I asked ‘How do you know? I know because….’ Ben was then able to respond ‘she said it. When she plays something, I copy her, and she says it’s good.’ Ben identified that he plays the same notes as Kate does. Ben is able to do this when learning a piece of music; however, his target was related to improvising, and Kate was able to confirm that Ben was able to create and play his own response when I followed up with her.

I then asked Ben if he was good at talking in his lessons, or was he quiet? Ben was able to identify that he had got better at talking and responded by saying ‘I'm good, actually.’ I again asked him how he knew with a sentence starter – ‘I am good at talking because…’, but Ben shook his head and chose not to answer or was not able to answer.

I asked Ben ‘how does the violin make you feel when you’re playing?’ and he responded by saying ‘Happy, excited and calm’ with large pauses in between each word as he thought of his response. He was given time and space to answer to fully process the questions, rather than taking the first answer ‘happy’ and moving on. To further identify Ben’s feelings, I asked him how performing made him feel. Ben said, ‘nervous’ but that afterwards he felt ‘happy’. In response to me saying ‘because…’ Ben finished the sentence by saying ‘because I'm playing the music’.

At the end of the interview, I asked Ben if there was anything else he wanted to tell me? Ben told me ‘When I'm older, I would like to play, play it,’ and I explained that I would speak to Kate about options for continuing playing the violin when he leaves school in two years. After I had stopped recording, I asked Ben if he wanted to listen back to his interview, and he said yes. We listened together, and he seemed pleased and proud by his facial expressions to have spoken to me about his learning.
6.3.9 Summary
Kate was able to identify a variety of examples where Ben had made improvements in his confidence and independence, as well as his violin playing. Furthermore, she was able to capture this progress in the assessment chart, and although her summary comment was musically focused, Kate was able to summarise Ben’s progress in non-academic areas of learning during the second interview. Compared to the Bronze pre-grade 1 assessment criteria that Ben is working towards, Kate was able to capture his progress holistically, showing the full impact his violin lessons were having. Kate also identified how the assessment chart had helped with her planning, and to think more deeply about Ben’s learning in all areas. In addition, through his interview, Ben was also able to reflect on his own learning.

6.4 Phase Three - Richard and Susan
Susan had participated in Phase Two (Chapter 5) with Jackie, before data collection was suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19. In September 2021, Susan worked with different students, and therefore Phase Three was conducted with Richard.

6.4.1 Richard
Richard is a 15-year-old male student in Year 11, who ‘has Down Syndrome and is developmentally delayed in all areas of the curriculum. His speech and language skills are still developing, and he has difficulties with attention and listening, play, social interaction and motor skills. He requires a high level of support to access a range of activities within the learning environment.’ (EHCP). Richard also has a school Positive Behaviour Support Plan to help him manage his behaviour and changes in routine appropriately. Richard uses symbol support, and a ‘now and next’ card and ‘working for’ card to help keep him focused. Sometimes he can find transitions difficult and can get upset and throw himself on the floor. Richard can get distracted by things out of place or other people around him. Richard communicates using symbols, Makaton, gestures, and single words although his speech can be difficult to understand. He understands sentences with one-two key words and can speak using single words.
6.4.2 Susan
Susan is a dance tutor who has been working at the school for several years through the Jack Petchey Step into Dance scheme. She teaches dance in key stage groups for students that choose to participate in weekly dance enrichment, and to some whole classes.

6.4.3 Dance
Richard had chosen (using symbols) to be part of the dance lessons for over a year, and usually has ten sessions per term. Richard participates in dance lessons with a group of 12 peers from his key stage.

6.4.4 Susan initial interview
Susan participated in Phase Two; however, Richard had not participated before, and consent was obtained in September 2020 from his family. As Susan had previously completed a holistic assessment chart for another student, we were able to use e-mail conversations to set up the assessment chart for Richard. There was a discussion about how to separate academic and non-academic targets (Figure 28).

Hi Liz,
I have started to record for Richard. Please can you just check that I am on the right page with the targets that I've set. I'm slightly confused by the difference between academic and non-academic.
Thank you
Susan

Hi Susan
Thanks for starting this and doing the targets. Academic means dance, non-academic something related to the other areas such as independence. So, for Richard’s non-academic target, how about to develop independence by making up own moves, or to develop social skills by copying peers? They’re kind of dance things anyway, but that is point I’m trying to prove is that it all overlaps, so great that not much distinction.
Thanks
Liz

Figure 28 E-mail conversation between Liz and Susan to set up the chart
6.4.5 Holistic assessment chart

Although I made suggestions for possible targets and we had identified three non-academic areas to assess (communication, emotional development and well-being, and independence), Susan recorded Richard’s learning generally each week (rather than under the three separate headings). However, this still does show how Richard’s learning has progressed in non-academic areas and how this can be captured (Figure 29).

Due to the dance sessions starting later in the term and school organisation, as well as the setup of the chart, Susan completed three weeks recording. During the second lockdown in November 2020, dance moved online for four weeks, which made it difficult for Susan to continue using the assessment chart as with group online teaching, it is much harder to observe individual progress. Dance lessons remained online in the Spring Term 2021; therefore, Susan was unable to continue completing the assessment chart for Richard.
It is clear from the chart that Richard has enjoyed his dance lessons and achieved a sense of well-being, especially through the bigger expressive dance moves that he had created. There is definite potential to have utilised this chart further for the full ten weeks; however due to COVID-19 implications, this was not possible.

6.5 Summary

Phase Three of this research conducted a further trial of the assessment chart, and an evaluation with members of staff. Students’ reflections on their academic and non-academic learning was also sought. A summary of the findings are as follows:

Holistic assessment charts
- Three personalised charts were created by Thomas, Kate and Susan for Luke, Ben, and Richard
- Non-academic learning areas identified included emotional development and wellbeing, independence, and communication
- Two personalised targets including one academic and one non-academic were written linked to each student’s EHCP outcomes

Trial of the chart
- The chart was trialled in three academic learning areas including music (choir), music (violin), and PE (dance)
- Progress was captured on all three charts incorporating both academic and non-academic progress
- Progress was linked to some EHCP outcomes
- Summative progress was completed on two charts, with one chart containing a holistic comment and the other an academic comment

Evaluation of the chart
- Thomas, Kate, and Susan all gave positive feedback about the chart as a tool to capture progress holistically
- The chart developed their way of thinking for planning, teaching, and assessment
• The chart enabled personalised progress to be captured in a descriptive manner, not limited by levels
• Thomas felt it was not practical to keep the chart for every student he taught due to workload
• Luke and Ben were able to reflect on their learning through identifying what they had enjoyed, and what skills (both academic and non-academic) they had improved

Chapter 7 will now discuss the research findings from all three Phases, presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, with reference to relevant literature from Chapter 2, and the research questions.
Chapter 7 Discussion

7.1 Introduction
Following the removal of P Levels as a statutory system to assess students with SLD (Rochford, 2016; DfE, 2017), schools were given the autonomy to create their own assessment systems. This research was conducted to examine a gap in literature of how progress can be measured for students with SLD that values both academic and non-academic learning in a holistic manner. Emphasis was given to a system that could be personalised without the limit of levels, therefore ensuring all the progress students with SLD make can be depicted and celebrated.

This research aimed to create, trial, and evaluate a holistic assessment chart to capture student progress in all areas of learning, including academic and non-academic areas. The research was conducted in three phases, with each phase linking to a research question(s):

Phase One - Creation
1. What are the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD?

Phase Two and Phase Three - Trial
2. How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?

Phase Two and Phase Three - Evaluation
3. What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart, and the students’ views on their learning?

The findings for these phases will be discussed separately with reference to relevant literature from Chapter 2. Phase One identified eight areas of learning that were important to assess for students with SLD, resulting in the creation of a holistic assessment chart. Phase Two trialled the assessment chart with six students, before data collection ceased due to the impact of COVID-19. An evaluation was held using online interviews with some members of staff. Phase Three conducted a further trial in the form of case studies. This was followed by an evaluation of the holistic assessment chart from members of staff, and reflections from students on their learning.
7.2 What are the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD?

In this section I will be discussing the findings from the interviews conducted during Phase One with seven members of staff. These interviews focused on investigating what areas of learning (including academic and non-academic) were important to assess when teaching students with SLD. I will discuss examples of learning in both academic and non-academic areas described by members of staff, linking these findings to the eight key areas of learning identified, and relevant literature from Chapter 2. Following these interviews, I will then discuss the creation of the holistic assessment chart.

From the different learning examples interviewees described, eight key areas of learning were identified that staff perceive to be important. These were: Academic progress; Adapting to new situations and environments; Behaviour; Communication; Community access; Emotional development and well-being, and Independence and Life skills. These key themes coincide with the areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which the Rochford Review (2016) also described as important areas to assess. The area of ‘communication’ is further supported by SaLT guidance for each individual student, with EHCP outcomes written together by therapists and teachers. In addition, McIntosh (2015) identified areas such as communication and independence as key areas of learning for students with SLD, thus supporting the importance of assessing non-academic and academic learning.

Like Bautista et al.'s (2016) research, which described holistic development, interviewees identified how these areas of learning are intertwined. For example, one member of staff commented on how behaviour was a form of communication (Anthony), and another considered skills such as adapting to new environments as a form of independence (Emma). These principles follow the interconnectivity of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) eco system that links a child’s immediate environment. Although the inner microsystem examines the total environment for the student, parallels can be drawn within one learning experience and how the themes are interconnected.
However, some interviewees identified that communication could be recorded within Speaking and Listening P Levels, and behaviour incidents are recorded on a school system. Only two members of staff identified how important it was as a school to capture academic progress and were both members of the senior leadership team. The Rochford Review (2016) recommended a statutory duty to report on ‘Cognition and Learning’ or academic progress in English and Mathematics, and, therefore, as leaders, they were probably more focused on the accountability of data.

Several members of staff described areas of learning within life skills including shopping skills, learning how to cook, learning how to use public transport, and developing ways to look after themselves, as well as mentioning life skills explicitly. Therefore, Life Skills was included as a theme as it had been identified by previous researchers such as Jenkinson (2000) as a key skill. Only one member of staff identified ‘physical development’, similar to ‘motor-skills development’ as one of the top three areas of non-academic learning as suggested by Bautista et al. (2016). The rationale for excluding this theme was that their research focused on Early Years where students were learning to develop their physical skills. However, this research was conducted at a secondary school where Physical Education (PE) P Levels are used to capture progress in physical development. Furthermore, for those students with physical needs, physiotherapy and/or PE is predominantly about maintaining movements due to students’ physical disabilities, and not the progress of physical skills. However, the input of the physiotherapists within the EHCP area of ‘physical needs’ further supports the concept of a microsystem and the holistic nature of students’ learning environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Enrichment came across as a key theme during several interviews, however it was incorporated within different areas of learning depending on the activity. For example, an off-site trampolining activity to develop social skills was seen as community access, which was also a key theme from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). This gives a further example of how environmental changes can contribute to students’ learning and development through interactions with different people such as other peers in the group, reception staff or sports coaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, in school enrichment groups such as those for music and dance were incorporated into academic learning as this was part of the
curriculum provision, within a wider environment for the student to make progress during lessons with different teachers. Additionally, enrichment can also fit into different areas of learning depending on the purpose of the activity, for example, music activities can be the medium in which well-being is developed. Similarly, a Geography visit to a local supermarket whilst developing community access can also include the development of communication and independence skills (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012).

There were many specific examples of students' learning in a variety of areas that members of staff perceived to be important throughout the day. For instance, spending more time in the classroom rather than opting out of learning and walking around the school, developing relationships, and improving well-being. The examples described included both planned and incidental learning, for example, Mike described planned social activities to develop sharing skills. Likewise, Carl described a planned trampolining activity to develop students' social skills, demonstrating the need to teach non-academic skills and focus on a different curriculum for learners with SLD (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012).

In contrast, John saw the developments in confidence and well-being as by-products of the academic activity (music) and these were not planned learning objectives. This suggests that the formal learning (musical development) is more important than the informal learning (increased confidence). However previous research suggests that both incidental and academic learning are just as important (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2018) and there is a need to integrate both formal and informal learning to show progress (Bautista et al., 2016; Mcgurgan, 2017). When capturing learning incorporating both academic (music), and non-academic (confidence and well-being) areas, teachers would be able to demonstrate how students with SLD have made progress in a variety of learning areas but from one activity, using an inclusive assessment system (Douglas et al., 2016).

During the second interview, interviewees identified the importance of capturing learning to show progress through the eight areas of learning through their layouts and discussions. They were asked to identify which area they felt was the most important; however, no clear theme was identified as the most important. Anthony, Elaine, and Michelle all reflected upon the significance of these areas, with
different students having different needs; therefore, this would affect which areas of learning are the most important. This suggests the need for an individual and personalised assessment approach (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018). Michelle described progress as being non-linear, and as a ‘breadth of activities and experiences’ (Male, 2000) suggesting that consolidating knowledge in different environments and situations is just as important as gaining new knowledge (McIntosh, 2015; Rochford, 2016). The highlighting of the need to develop skills across different environments corresponds with the interconnectivity of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) eco system, and how different environments surrounding the child are all interrelated. However, other research has suggested that some themes such as communication are more important than others (Bautista et al., 2016; DfE, 2018a; McIntosh, 2015). Furthermore, the key theme layouts that members of staff created to show how the themes linked predominantly (five out of seven members of staff) identified academic progress as the least important. This supported the need for research into a more holistic approach to the assessment of learning and highlighted the importance of capturing and valuing non-academic learning.

Members of staff gave detailed descriptions of how the learning areas were linked in some way, demonstrating how personalised the learning can be for each student. For example, Elaine described how a student might exhibit poor behaviour as they are using behaviour as a method of communication; thus, if their communication skills develop, their behaviour should also improve (McIntosh, 2015). However, John and Anthony described how developing communication skills leads to better access to the curriculum and academic learning. A similar link between the areas of learning was seen by other members of staff, who thought that an improvement in independence would enable students to access the community. For instance, Michelle saw independence as leading towards the development of life skills, which arguably could include accessing the community as a life skill. Her examples included students learning to travel in the community as well as learning to shop. These interrelationships between the themes suggest the need to develop a more holistic approach to planning and teaching as well as assessment (McIntosh, 2015), similar to the Early Years Framework (DfE, 2017).

Several members of staff commented on the need to have certain skills in place before students were able to access academic learning. Blackburn and
Carpenter’s (2012) concept of engagement for learning states that students need to be in a position of being able and ready to learn. For instance, Elaine and Michelle described in their interviews how students’ behaviour hinders their access to the curriculum. They both described different students who found it difficult to sit and concentrate in class, so would run out of the room, and walk around school as they did not have the ability and behaviour skills required to focus in the classroom. This suggests that, for these students, improved behaviour will be the most important factor in having a significant impact on academic progress (Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015; Montroy et al., 2015). Similarly, Ware and Healey (2018) identified alertness and an appropriate biobehavioural state as an important learning area. Furthermore, students need to be engaged before learning can take place (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012) and for them to be engaged they need to be in a suitable learning environment and ready to learn. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified the significance of the right environment to impact on child development through positive duplex relationships.

7.2.1 How can this learning be captured?

The layout of the eight key areas of learning (Appendix 14), created by interviewees, showed that they predominantly viewed the areas as being interrelated with only one interviewee (Elaine) placing the themes in a vertical order (Figure 6 shown in Chapter 4). In describing their layouts, the majority of interviewees identified value with capturing academic and non-academic learning, thus suggesting the need for a holistic and inclusive assessment system (Douglas et al., 2016). Furthermore, the seven different layouts demonstrated how staff felt assessment systems should be versatile. This would ensure they could be adapted to meet the needs of each learner, rather than being limited by fixed P Levels which are considered not fit for purpose (Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016).

During Emma’s interview, she described using P Levels as being problematic due to limiting students to a lower level, even though they were really good at a skill in a higher level. This describes the difficulties with using a ‘best fit’ model as identified by McIntosh (2015) and Rochford (2016), as students could get stuck at a lower level, or moved onto the next level without the full understanding to progress. This further supports the concept of a ‘spikey profile of achievement’ (Butler, 2021; DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016) as
learners with SLD do not necessarily progress in a linear manner. It is essential to assess all the learning they make within a variety of areas to capture their strengths rather than focus on deficits due to the impact of their learning difficulties. Therefore, assessments should not be constrained by a prescribed levelled system (Ware and Healey, 2018) that is narrow and does not reflect or capture the student’s progress.

Hare (2010) identified difficulties assessing non-academic skills due to variations in situation and environment. Similarly, members of staff identified these difficulties when assessing non-academic skills (Mike, Anthony, and Elaine), making suggestions to celebrate achievement through assemblies and recording progress in a personalised manner. More generic assessment ideas such as profiles and learning journeys were also suggested, similar to the Early Years Assessment framework (DfE, 2013b), whereby assessments are conducted using learning stories. These learning stories incorporate qualitative assessments mostly based on observation and are made individually for each student based on what they can achieve and not against a levelled assessment system.

Another important theme transpired as several members of staff moved around the key themes during their interview, commenting on how they might alter the layout of the eight key themes depending on what student they were thinking about. For example, Anthony saw behaviour and communication as interchangeable, depending on the student. For instance, when a student is in crisis, this could affect their communication; however, if their communication was effective, they may not go into a crisis. Therefore, creating an assessment chart that could be personalised, would enable a student’s individual learning to be shown (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b; Lamb et al., 2018).

Interviewees felt that the learning should be captured for the students to understand where they were at and what they had done well (Clark, 2005; Rodgers, 2006). They also saw the value of learning being shared with parents and carers, and with other members of staff, thus creating a microsystem whereby different learning environments can be assimilated for the benefit of the students (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Some interviewees also identified the importance of sharing progress with governors and senior leaders as they are ultimately accountable for the progress of the students (Rochford, 2016).
7.2.2 **Creation of a holistic assessment chart**

Although Imray and Hinchcliffe (2012) suggested a new curriculum is required including the development of personal skills such as resilience, Ware and Healey (2018) identified difficulties with progress being linked to curriculum content. Therefore, in order to capture all learning that takes place including learning and progress which is beyond the formal curriculum, this research has focused on assessment. As a result, the assessment chart was created to capture both academic and non-academic learning following the analysis of the interviews with seven members of staff.

The creation of the chart, similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) inner ecosystem, places the student at the centre, however the environment of the microsystem for this chart focuses on one lesson or activity such as Music, PSHE or English. The holistic nature of the assessments capture both the academic and non-academic progress by the teacher, demonstrating how different areas of learning interconnect with each other. It also provides a space for teachers to comment on progress and learning in relation to peers and group work, and through different environments as the lessons are adapted or changed due to the impact of COVID-19 regulations.

Learning in a special school happens both within and beyond the curriculum and incorporates many informal learning opportunities (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke *et al.*, 2011; Bourke *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, the assessment chart was created to capture academic and non-academic or formal and informal learning that takes place within various activities. These include academic subjects such as English, Maths and music and dance enrichment activities, as well as other activities during the day such as making a lunch choice as part of PSHE.

Although there has been little research into new assessment systems for students with SLD (Lilly *et al.*, 2014), the updated Ofsted criteria (2019) recommends assessments for learners with SLD to include all areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). Similarly, McIntosh (2015) also suggested that assessment should be holistic and inclusive, in common with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (1977) which utilises a holistic approach.
with the student at the centre. The fundamental microsystem focuses on the student's immediate environment, as such the chart has been designed to incorporate teachers targets, outcomes written in conjunction with therapists, teacher observations and the voice of the students. Furthermore, the holistic assessment chart has been created to capture all the learning that takes place in a variety of areas including those from the SEND Code of Practice, academic, and non-academic learning. The assessment chart includes options for member of staff to choose the three most important areas of learning from the eight themes identified as well as academic learning, thus personalising the focus of the assessment (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016). Formative weekly learning can then be recorded in these four areas.

In addition, the long-term and short-term outcomes from the student's EHCP were included in the chart, and two short-term targets (academic and non-academic) written by the members of staff linked to the students' EHCP outcomes. This meant all targets were set without the limit of levels or a standardised assessment system (Martin, 2006; Ware and Healey, 2018) thus providing the best method to demonstrate progress in a variety of areas through qualitative data. Personalised target setting enabled teachers to value learning appropriate to the student (Male, 2000) focusing on each individual's needs to progress on their own learning path (Ware and Healey, 2018). In comparison to the Zone of Proximal Development framework (Vygotsky, 1977), the holistic assessment chart provides a framework where learning can be captured in both formal and informal contexts and teachers can capture the achievement of the students and assess what they can do to plan the next steps in their education, carefully scaffolding tasks to promote learning and build on prior knowledge.

The summative progress section provided an opportunity for members of staff to capture all progress over a module (Douglas et al., 2016) and the student voice section enables teachers to obtain students' views of their own learning (Bergmark and Kostenius, 2018). Furthermore, the chart can be completed digitally, and, therefore, it is straightforward to copy across summative assessments to the school's assessment programme, or to add photos of students completing the activity to support the teacher's comment.
7.3 How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?

In this next section I will be discussing how the assessment chart was trialled within Phase Two and Phase Three of this research, to measure both academic and non-academic progress. I will be relating my findings to the interviews with members of staff and the data captured on the assessment charts, with reference to relevant literature from Chapter 2. The holistic assessment chart was then evaluated by members of staff in Phase Two and by members of staff and students in Phase Three, to be discussed in 7.4.

7.3.1 EHCP long- and short-term outcomes

EHCP long- and short-term outcomes (or targets) were included in the chart as they are already established outcomes written by the class teacher for each key stage (long term) and annual target (short-term), that derive from a student’s EHCP document. In addition, the communication outcomes had been written by the class teacher in conjunction with Speech and Language Therapists, and students, parents and carers had input into the outcomes during the annual review process. During his second interview in Phase Three, Thomas had previously looked at his student’s EHCP when planning his lessons; however, he had also commented that there were too many profiles and information documents to look at, finding that the holistic assessment chart provided an excellent overview of the key learning areas for the student. The EHCP document focuses on the needs and provision from the areas of need outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), therefore creating a holistic base from which to personalise assessment further. The areas of need: Cognition and learning; Communication and interaction; Social, emotional, and mental health difficulties; Sensory and/physical; and Preparation for Adulthood from Year 9 have been highlighted by the Rochford Review (2016) as important areas to assess. Furthermore, the SEND Code of Practice states the focus of learning should incorporate all these areas of need, and, therefore, the assessment should reflect all the learning and progress that students make.
7.3.2 Areas of learning
The eight learning areas identified through thematic analysis from Phase Two were used as a basis for members of staff to focus their assessments. The rationale for these eight areas has been discussed in 7.2 Phase One discussion. As seen in the holistic assessment charts, members of staff have chosen different learning areas to focus on, thus demonstrating the personalisation of the new assessment system (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018). During Phase Two, the six assessment charts provided different learning areas to be prioritised depending on the student’s needs, with Greg explaining how behaviour was important for Luke to develop and Amelia identifying life skills for Tom.

7.3.3 Short-term targets
Short-term targets for each activity were written by the members of staff to include both academic and non-academic targets. These linked to the students EHCP outcomes and in the areas of learning identified, as recommended in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and the ‘Final Report of the Commission on Assessment Without Levels’ (McIntosh, 2015). Although the quality of EHCP outcomes varied as discussed previously and learning was not always directly linked to EHCP outcomes, the members of staff were able to plan the most appropriate targets for the students. They ensured that equal value was given to both academic and non-academic learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2018), as opposed to the typical recording of academic achievement. Furthermore, linking the academic and non-academic short-term targets written by the member of staff to the four learning areas chosen and the students’ individual EHCP outcomes, ensured learning is focused on these areas that are a priority for them (Vygotsky, 1977). For example, Susan had purposely chosen communication, emotional development, and well-being as key learning areas to focus on as they linked in with Jackie’s EHCP outcomes.

7.3.4 Formative assessment
Using formative assessment (Black et al., 2003), members of staff used the chart on a weekly basis to capture learning in the three learning areas, and the academic learning from the activity using detailed, qualitative descriptions from observations (Bourke and Mentis, 2014; Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015; DfE,
The academic progress is recorded without the limit of levels (McIntosh, 2015; Rochford, 2016; Smith et al., 2020) using rich qualitative descriptions, and therefore the chart can demonstrate accurate assessments of all the students’ skills in an academic area. Furthermore, this enables all the learning that has taken place to be recorded, using a positive approach to capture what the student can do, rather than a deficit approach to identify what they cannot do. This is particularly important as the qualitative descriptions demonstrate learning strengths, as students with SLD often learn in a non-linear manner, rather than using a best fit approach or the reporting of their achievements limited by academic assessments such as P Levels (DfE, 2018a; Martin, 2006).

The holistic assessment chart allowed members of staff to capture the students’ learning within a variety of areas on an individual basis (Martin, 2006; Rochford 2016), enabling students’ progress to be reviewed against their own learning through ipsative assessment (Bourke and Mentis, 2014). The chart also enabled a fuller picture of the student to be captured, which is particularly important as often the areas are interrelated in a holistic manner (McIntosh, 2015). This ensured that teachers were able to comment on the whole learning experience and environment, including interactions with peers and other members of staff in the lesson and different environmental factors, for example when a new peer joined Ben’s group, or when the location of the choir lesson changed for Luke (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In addition, there is a column for staff to comment on any other incidental or informal learning that may take place as a by-product to the intended learning, whilst valuing this learning as much as the planned learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2018). The holistic assessment chart also showed the potential to create a ‘learning journal’ (DfE, 2017; Lily et al., 2014) for each student, as it contained weekly formative detailed descriptions of learning and progress in at least four areas.

In capturing both academic and non-academic learning in the four key areas, members of staff can demonstrate progress in a holistic manner (Douglas et al., 2016), creating personalised assessments that capture all the learning that has taken place in that week. For example, Susan’s assessment chart described Richard’s progress in dance in the assessment chart by incorporating other learning areas such as Independence and Behaviour, demonstrating that the chart is able to capture all the non-academic and academic learning that takes place. In
addition, Ben’s assessment chart demonstrated that his violin lessons also had a positive impact on his emotional development, and Kevin’s chart demonstrated that his academic learning had a calming effect on his behaviour. This further supports the concept that areas of learning are interrelated, and that there are more areas of significance than just academic learning when reporting progress (McIntosh, 2015). Although these findings are contrary to Rose et al. (2019) research, where no significant developments were seen in non-academic areas as a result of music lessons, that study was based on mainstream students. Due to Ben’s learning difficulty and spikey progress, his chart clearly demonstrated how he had progressed in different areas of learning.

7.3.5 Summative assessment and student voice

Whilst statutory assessments for students with SLD are limited to English and Maths (DfE, 2018a), the Rochford Review (2016) recommended that all areas of need as stated in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) should be reported. The summative progress section (Atjonen, 2014; DfE, 2014b) provides the opportunity for teachers to make an overall assessment for all of the learning that took place in that module. Furthermore, the summative comment section enables teachers to comment on progress with an equal focus on academic and non-academic learning (Douglas et al., 2016).

Although the summative assessment section was only completed by three members of staff across Phase Two and Phase Three, these demonstrated how the chart can be used to capture progress in a holistic manner from one activity. For example, Luke’s chart clearly showed how he had made progress with his English IEP target as well as with his independence and behaviour. Furthermore, comments in the summative assessment can also be used as part of the school’s current assessment system.

The student voice section in the chart provides a place to capture student views on their own learning during the activity through dialogue with teachers, including both their academic and non-academic progress (Bergmark and Kostenius, 2018; Rodgers, 2006). Furthermore, as the targets fit into the students EHCP outcomes, this follows the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) guidance to seek student
voice to contribute to their annual reviews. Obtaining student voice within learning activities, and especially enabling students to reflect on their own learning are important aspects within educational practice. All members of staff have the skill set to elicit students’ voice appropriately and meaningfully, using a multifaceted approach, similar to the mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) or the ‘In-the-Picture’ method devised by Rix et al. (2020). During Phase Two, all three members of staff interviewed (Susan, Kate, and Kelly) had given praise in the moment linked to the students’ learning, relating to both the academic and non-academic learning, which the students had acknowledged. Members of staff captured student voice within their own recording each week, often using observation to represent their voice. For example, Kelly was able to share Kevin’s views as he was happy to be engaged in choosing his lunch option.

Further research needs to be conducted with regards to student voice, as this was not always included by teachers during their lessons, and no members of staff completed the summary student voice section. This highlights the need for further professional development for teachers to ensure they incorporate student voice throughout their lessons in line with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and through developing their assessment literacy (DeLuca et al., 2018). However, in Phase Three, the two students from the case studies both participated in a student voice interview to share their views directly, and their evaluation of their work will be discussed further in Chapter 7.4.

### 7.4 What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart, and the students’ views on their learning?

#### 7.4.1 Introduction

In this next section I will be discussing the findings from the interviews with members of staff during Phase Two and Three to evaluate the holistic assessment chart, and their impressions on using the chart. I will also discuss the findings from the student interviews in Phase Three to seek their views on their learning, with reference to relevant literature from Chapter 2.
During Phase Two, only three of the six members of staff participated in a second telephone interview. Of the three that did not continue to participate, I did not follow up reasons why they chose not to continue, due to the work pressures and stressful nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, two of these participants did leave the school within six months, and one participant had complex family issues; therefore, it was presumed that participating in this research was not the right time for these participants to continue.

**7.4.2 Staff evaluation and reflection**

During the second semi-structured interview for Phase Two and Phase Three, members of staff evaluated the use of the holistic assessment chart with respect to the advantages and disadvantages and compared the use of the chart to current schools’ assessments.

**7.4.3 Advantages**

All members of staff that participated were very positive about the use of a holistic assessment chart. It allowed them to capture learning in a variety of areas that they perhaps would not have consciously thought that the student was making progress in, for example with their communication, social skills, confidence, and independence.

Thomas saw the benefit of a holistic assessment chart through grouping the areas of learning together in one document, rather than having to utilise many different documents such as EHCPs and Communication Profiles. This ensured the holistic nature of his assessments through a personalised view of Luke’s learning needs (Carpenter et al., 2011; Male, 2000). Susan also saw the benefits of using the chart to focus on areas she would not usually have thought of such as developing resilience and self-esteem and could see how Jackie’s progress linked with her EHCPs targets. Similarly, Kate identified how the assessment chart was able to capture improvements in Ben’s communication skills, with particular reference to his assertiveness and decision-making skills, which link with Ben’s EHCP outcomes (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018).

Kate also saw the assessment chart as being of great significance for students with SLD. It enabled her to understand Ben’s learning strengths, similar to the
guidance in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which focuses on the five areas of need. Although Kate felt this was something she did intuitively, she identified advantages with using the chart through being able to see a whole picture of the student. The chart enabled her to look at her student’s whole journey in all the different areas of learning using a prescribed assessment chart (Eun, 2019; Sontag, 1996) rather than anecdotally.

Both Thomas and Kate usually assessed progress using quantitative, academic levels in Music. Through using a holistic approach and qualitative data, this granted them greater freedom to capture all progress that was made within the choir and violin lessons. Thomas compared the assessment chart to the school system of levelling and highlighted the advantages of the holistic nature of the assessment chart beyond a purely musical experience. This further supports the need to assess students with SLD using an inclusive holistic assessment system that values and identifies the capturing of both academic and non-academic learning (Douglas et al., 2016).

Kate described how her usual recording method against the pre-grade 1 criteria was problematic to use to demonstrate progress for Ben as he was developing his musical skills in very small steps. Therefore, musical progress for Ben would be difficult to assess when using levels, leading to a negative approach for what Ben cannot do rather than what he can do (Martin, 2006). However, Kate was able to record how Ben was progressing significantly in areas such as his independence and communication, even though he made only small progress in music. This enabled Kate to demonstrate Ben’s spikey progress (DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016) through his violin lessons. Furthermore, Kate was able to identify the benefits of tracking progress holistically, as she could capture learning beyond musical learning, using the holistic assessment chart to capture all learning without the limit of academic music levels (McIntosh, 2015; Rochford, 2016; Smith et al., 2020).

Using the assessment chart was similar to how Kate would anecdotally record her reflections each week on her termly plan, with regards to what the students had enjoyed, or were confident at. Kate found both her informal notes and the assessment chart really useful tools to reflect and capture learning. This in turn informed her planning for the next sessions, with the chart having a significant
impact on the way she planned and taught (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Rochford, 2016). This was particularly important to Kate as she is an experienced music teacher and therefore highly competent at planning music lessons. However, the assessment chart introduced a new way of thinking for Kate as to how students accessed the lesson and how to meet their other needs with regards to communication or well-being (Ware and Healey, 2018). Significantly, Kelly and Susan also identified the impact on their planning as a key advantage of using the chart. For Kelly, it was a valuable planning document, and for Susan, it helped her to focus more on different areas that were important to the student. Similarly, Thomas informally thought about the non-academic areas of learning, and identified the benefits of the assessment chart by giving him extra areas of learning to think about formally, which helped him to further personalise learning for Luke, for example, with regards to his emotional well-being (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b; Lamb et al., 2018).

Thomas had also identified the benefits of a holistic approach to assessment when discussing progress with Luke’s class teacher, and comparing different environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The choir moved from a Key Stage choir in the school hall, to a class choir in the playground, where Tomás worked directly with Luke’s class teacher. As a result, the different relationships from class peers and how his class staff supported him in different ways impacted his progress and development. The assessment chart provided a format which successfully captured the changing nature of Luke’s microsystem, which Thomas was able to describe during his interview. Therefore, this chart could be kept by the class teacher, with additional professionals such as the enrichment teachers and therapists contributing, consequently widening the microsystem. This would also help to moderate teacher judgements, thus reducing bias and improving validity and reliability (Hare, 2010). In addition, the progress during respite care provision, church groups or other activities outside school could also be explored, and how these environments interconnect with the school and class environment.

Similarly, during Ben’s violin lessons, Kate was able to capture the change in environment through the impact of another student joining his lessons who had more advanced communication skills. Although initially this had a negative impact on his own communication, Ben was able to adjust to the new environment and the assessment chart showed how he then went on to make improvements in his
communication. This demonstrates how peers and the environment impact on learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Chalaye and Male, 2011). Although the introduction of the new student was not planned to impact on Ben’s learning, it did have a positive effect and provides evidence to consider mixed ability groupings in the future.

### 7.4.4 Disadvantages

Feedback on the assessment chart was predominantly positive, but disadvantages were also identified. During Phase Two Kate had felt that more guidance was needed when completing the chart, thus identifying the need to develop her assessment literacy (DeLuca et al., 2018). Although Thomas saw the research benefits of the assessment chart and was able to complete the chart on a weekly basis for one student, he highlighted a disadvantage of the chart with regards to workload. Thomas felt it was not realistic to complete the chart for all the students that he taught, as during the two days that he teaches Thomas sees lots of students in music enrichment groups of varying sizes comprising three to fifteen students, and over 50 in total. This is in agreement with Aidonopoulou-Read’s (2021) research on the recent Engagement Model, who identified workload as an issue when completing qualitative, descriptive assessments beyond a standardised system. In contrast, Kate found the workload manageable and thought she could complete this for all her students as she only teaches four students each week. Furthermore, no issues of workload have been identified through the literature on the EYFS learning journals comprising of 17 areas of development.

Kate was clear on the benefit of recording holistically; however, Thomas felt more conflicted in his role. Ultimately, he saw himself as the music teacher, and perceived the main purpose of his assessments to capture musical progress, with class teachers capturing progress more holistically. This brings into question the notion of the curriculum and the intention of what is taught (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012) as students like Luke do engage in subject-specific learning and can make quantifiable progress in music. However, Luke’s progress is so much more than just the academic; therefore, just capturing progress in academic areas is limiting (Ware and Healey, 2018).
Although not mentioned by any members of staff, another disadvantage of the holistic assessment chart is its qualitative nature. This limits the comparisons of students’ progress both within school, and externally, making the moderation of teacher judgements more complex (Herppich et al., 2018). However, these limits are mitigated by the individual holistic approach and ability to compare progress against students’ own learning through ipsative assessment (Bourke and Mentis, 2014). Furthermore, the assessments are not limited by using a levelled system; therefore, assessments can be more accurate as they include what the student can do, rather than using a best fit approach (Martin, 2006).

### 7.4.5 Further reflections on the use of the assessment chart

Members of staff were able to identify non-academic learning through their academic learning activity, both during the second telephone interviews and the examples on the assessment chart from Phase Two and Three. Susan, the dance tutor, identified benefits in developing fine and gross motor skills as well as dance skills, similar to Bautista et al. (2016) who identified ‘motor-skills development’ as one of the top three areas of non-academic learning. Although this was an area that was not included in the eight key themes, the assessment chart still provided the opportunity for this progress to be captured within the column ‘other learning’, where Susan could freely comment on motor skills development.

During the second interviews with members of staff during Phase Three, Thomas was able to describe Luke’s progress with turn taking and waiting skills, as well as his behaviour and concentration. Furthermore, Kate also identified that Ben had made progress in concentration skills and described Ben’s ability to adapt to new situations as another student had joined his group violin lessons. In adapting to this new situation, Ben then went on to become more comfortable and confident with his new group, which had a direct impact on his progress with the violin, thus demonstrating how environmental changes can have a positive effect (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These examples strongly support the need for a holistic assessment system for students with SLD as so much more learning can be captured than just the academic (music) through P Levels (Douglas et al., 2016). In addition, these examples further highlight the relationships between the different areas of learning (Popham et al., 2018).
It is clear from the assessment charts for Richard, Ben and Luke from Phase Three that progress was recorded regarding their emotional well-being through these activities. This is particularly important as progress and learning is usually captured using an academic approach in dance and music, and developing emotional well-being is of huge significance to students with SLD. In his music lessons, Ben also made progress with his independence skills, by practising his parts independently before playing as a group and becoming more independent with his choices during improvisation activities. This is similar to the holistic benefits of a Geography lesson identified by Imray and Hinchcliffe (2012).

Luke’s progress can be examined from Phase Two in Maths, and Phase Three in Choir, with both assessment charts drawing parallels to his improved concentration and behaviour in different subjects. Similarly, during his final Phase Three interview, Thomas highlighted the benefits of the chart to compliment a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment and spoke about discussing Luke’s progress with his class teacher. Both teachers could identify similar progress for Luke but in different contexts, similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) eco system where different environments for each student interconnect. This suggests there is a benefit in sharing the assessment chart with other professionals such as class teachers and therapists. Therefore, a holistic approach to assessment involving stakeholders was identified as being important to create a wider view of how a student develops, through a consistent approach within different school environments. Furthermore, involving the home environment and parents and carers too would also illustrate a student’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and can be utilised throughout the student’s whole environment, across home and school, to promote learning (Sontag, 1996; Tudge et al., 2021).

7.4.6 Assessment literacy

As the use of a holistic assessment chart was a new concept, feedback was sought from the members of staff on the explanation of how to complete the chart. Kate felt that more guidance was needed; however, she also felt she had the freedom to make her own teacher judgements on Ben’s areas of learning, and Thomas found it beneficial to have the recording modelled for him during Week Four. Not enough guidance was given on how to incorporate student voice into assessments, which again was a new concept as student voice is usually captured
separately to school assessments. Additionally, neither Kate or Thomas had completed the final student voice section, therefore indicating that more guidance was needed on the use of the student voice section and how to incorporate student voice throughout this holistic assessment chat. Whilst giving teachers’ autonomy over their own recording generated rich description (Herppich et al., 2018) there is a need to develop teachers assessment literacy (DeLuca et al., 2018) in using this chart, so that teachers know what, why and how to assess (Khadijeh & Amir, 2015).

Formative progress in all areas of learning was described in both Thomas’ and Kate’s assessment chart, although they both felt they could have commented on other areas of learning more with the students during the lessons. In contrast, Thomas’ summative comment was holistic; however, Kate’s summative comment focused predominantly on musical progress. This suggests the need for further CPD (DeLuca et al., 2018; Irvine, 2011), to aid teachers to change their way of thinking from assessing students using levels or within one subject area, to a holistic approach incorporating all learning from multiple areas including academic and non-academic learning. These changes should be made at government level, with policy supporting new developments in practice (Bourke et al., 2018; Colley, 2020; Lilly et al., 2014; Tudge, et al., 2021). Further considerations also need to be explored to ensure teacher judgements when using the holistic assessment charts are accurate. These could be verified through the use of moderation, video and observational evidence, or formal teacher observations, all of which could be used to triangulate teacher assessments. In addition, the use of holistic assessments to generate whole school data and identify trends and areas of improvement for accountability purposes (Ofsted 2018) also needs to be explored further.

An unexpected concept that arose during the initial staff interviews during Phase Two and Phase Three was the benefit to teachers of using the holistic assessment chart as a planning tool (Ware and Healey, 2018). The chart enabled both Thomas and Kate to consider in more depth all the student’s needs such as their emotional well-being. As a result, they were able to reflect, plan, and teach what was important for each student in a holistic manner (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018; Rochford, 2016). Furthermore, Thomas and Kate could capture their students’ learning through the holistic assessment chart. This suggests that a new curriculum that goes beyond academic subjects such as
English and Mathematics is needed to facilitate teachers to focus on both academic and non-academic skills (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012). However, this research has shown that both formal and non-formal or academic and non-academic learning can be integrated, and should be assessed together, holistically.

### 7.4.7 Student voice and feedback

Incorporating student voice throughout the activities and conducting a student voice interview, placed the students at the centre of their learning, an essential element when personalising learning for each individual (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013, Lamb et al., 2018). This also supports students learning through regular dialogue in their lessons, enabling teachers to assess zones of proximal development (Eun, 2019; Newman and Latifi, 2021). Giving regular feedback and listening to students’ own views enables teachers to check understanding (DeLuca et al. 2016; Rodgers, 2006) and then plan the next learning steps through scaffolding tasks (van de Pol et al., 2010). Giving feedback to students within their lesson provided opportunities for the students to reflect on their academic and non-academic learning (DfE, 2015; Rodgers, 2006; UNICEF, 1989). This shift in focus created by the assessment chart enabled members of staff to give feedback to students on a wider variety of learning areas, with Susan, Kate and Kelly specifically commenting on how their feedback had helped them to recognise the students’ progress.

However, student voice was not captured as well as expected by the teachers during recording on the chart, even though amendments had been made from Phase Two such as including a student voice section. Therefore, the interviews conducted with students were able to provide supplementary information to support the student voice element of this research (Colley, 2020; DfE, 2015). In addition, the student’s reflections were able to identify areas for improvement within the chart and highlight the need to improve teacher assessment literacy with regards to student voice (DeLuca et al., 2018). A variety of approaches could be implemented to elicit student voice, such as greater use of photographs, videos and different methodology similar to the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005). In addition, the chart could be developed to incorporate a weekly student reflections...
and comments, to ensure teachers regularly checked in formally with their students to seek their views on their learning.

The expertise of this researcher as described by Carroll and Sixsmith (2016) and the relationship developed with both students due to her position as an insider researcher (Unluer, 2012), enabled both Luke and Ben to complete an interview during Phase Three, based on the completed holistic assessment chart from their teachers (Bergmark and Kostenius, 2018). Although Luke and Ben’s level of understanding and communication methods are very different, both students were able to reflect on their progress in a way that was meaningful to them.

Luke understands sentences containing up to two key words; therefore, it was important to conduct a student interview that matched his level of understanding, and not overly rely on speech (Rix et al., 2020). Using symbols, photos, and videos to support his interview, Luke was able to answer simple one-two key word questions on different aspects of his learning (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016; Clark 2005). For example, Luke was able to say how he felt about his choir lessons (happy or sad) and identify his favourite song. With symbols to support him, Luke could answer simple questions on the learning and progress he had made with his communication, his behaviour and listening skills as well as his singing, thus demonstrating he could reflect on both his academic and non-academic progress. Furthermore, Luke made additional comments that demonstrated he could communicate about his learning captured in the holistic assessment chart, by demonstrating his favourite song and saying ‘sshh’ to describe a warm up activity.

Ben communicates verbally however he finds it difficult to answer When? questions and needs support by having options, and time to respond. Due to the researchers experience as a SEND teacher, she was able to interview Ben by tailoring her questions to his level of understanding, for example giving Ben options or prompts to answer questions such as how long he had been playing the violin (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016). Ben was able to provide descriptive feedback (Rodgers, 2006) on both his academic and non-academic learning. He could identify strengths with his violin playing and talk about his favourite songs that he was learning. Furthermore, Ben was able to reflect on his progress with his communication skills by explaining ‘I'm good, actually’ and smiling when asked if he had improved. This demonstrated to me, as the interviewer, that Ben was
happy and proud of his communication progress. Although his language was limited, in knowing Ben and how he communicates, when he identifies something as ‘good’ this is an extremely positive reflection.

Both Luke and Ben chose to listen and/or watch their interview recordings with me immediately after their interviews. Although neither student had a wider understanding of this research project, this did clearly demonstrate their consent to take part in these interviews (Mental Capacity Act, 2005). Furthermore, if Luke or Ben had not wanted to talk with me neither one of them would have come with me for the interview, thus demonstrating their consent in the moment. They were both happy to hear the recording, and their body language demonstrated they were proud of their achievements and participating by smiling and giving me thumbs up, therefore they were involved in their learning through reflection, a key concept in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

During Phase Three, members of staff were further encouraged to share the two short-term targets, and to give feedback on all areas of learning, which they were able to do in the moment, more so than on the assessment chart. Thomas had given regular feedback to Luke during weekly choir sessions, although he had not always linked this feedback to the targets in the chart; therefore, his feedback was predominantly music related. During her second interview, Kate described how she had given feedback to Ben on developing his confidence to perform although she had not captured this in the chart. However, within the assessment chart she was able to capture Ben’s response to praise and encouragement linked with his academic learning and his engagement (DfE, 2015; Rodgers, 2006; Unicef 1989). Kate then went on to describe during her interview how Ben was able to reflect through his emotions whether something he had played was right or not. However, the gap in feedback from the students was filled by the student voice interviews. A further recommendation of the chart is to add a weekly student voice section and give better instructions to the teachers on how to complete the chart to ensure student voice is captured throughout. Reflections on their learning could then be used as evidence for student voice for the EHCP annual review process.
7.4.8 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on schools, statutory assessments for students did not take place in the 2019/20 or 2020/21 academic years (DfE, 2021b). During Kate’s final interview in Phase Three, she highlighted the need for a greater focus on developing and capturing progress in areas of learning outside of the academic, such as resilience and well-being, as students needed to feel ready to learn (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; Popham et al., 2018) following the impact of the pandemic. Similarly, Thomas highlighted the importance of students needing to feel ‘happy’ and ‘OK’ before learning could take place. This suggests that this research has even more value because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as students may need to develop their non-academic skills before academic learning can continue to take place. New non-statutory guidance from the Department of Education was released in June 2021 entitled ‘Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery’ which described how school curriculums may need to be adapted ‘substantially’ (p4) to promote education recovery after the lockdown limited how learning could take place. Therefore, if the curriculum is adapted, assessments need to be adapted to match what is taught, and a holistic approach is best able to capture progress in all areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

7.5 Summary

Phase One identified the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD, beyond the use of P Levels. Specific focus was given to both planned and unplanned examples of everyday learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2011; Bourke et al. 2018). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), Rochford Review (2016), and McIntosh (2015) all identified the need to capture both academic and non-academic progress of students with SLD. The main findings identified eight key areas of learning which staff perceive to be important when capturing learning:

- Academic progress
- Adapting to new situations and environments
- Behaviour
- Communication
- Community access
- Emotional development and well-being
• Independence
• Life skills.

The holistic assessment chart was created to enable personalised learning (Carpenter et al., 2011) to be captured, linked to students' EHCP outcomes from the five areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and two short-term targets written by the teacher. Formative weekly learning was captured in the three most important areas of non-academic learning chosen from the interview key themes, as well as academic learning, and a summative assessment was completed at the end of the 6-10 week activity (Atjonen, 2014; DfE, 2014b).

Students were encouraged to share their reflections on their learning throughout their lessons (DfE, 2015; Rodgers, 2006; Unicef, 1989), and the chart incorporated a student voice section.

Phase Two and Phase Three trialled the holistic assessment chart to measure both academic and non-academic progress, with each chart being personalised to meet individual needs (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018). Progress captured in a qualitative manner demonstrated all the learning that took place within the four chosen learning areas, and against the two new short-term targets. Students were involved in their learning, and feedback was regularly given on their learning and progress. At the end of the recording period, students' summative progress was captured.

Phase Two and Phase Three also included an evaluation by both members of staff and students, through mini case studies, to seek members of staff impressions when using the chart, and reflections from students on their learning. The advantages of using a holistic assessment chart included its use to capture progress in all areas of learning (Douglas et al., 2016; Rochford, 2016) and utilising a personalised approach (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018). Additional benefits identified included helping members of staff change their thinking about students' learning, which impacted on their planning and teaching (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012; Khadijeh & Amir, 2015) and the charts relevance to assess a variety of non-academic learning following the COVID-19 pandemic. Disadvantages of using the chart included the impact on teacher
workload, difficulties with moderating, and some questioning of relevance if students were engaged in subject specific learning.

The final section of this thesis, Chapter 8, concludes with an outline of this research, and a reflection of the research journey. Limitations, validity, and reliability are discussed, before research contributions and recommendations are identified. Finally, this thesis ends by signposting future work.
Chapter 8 Conclusion and recommendations

8.1 Introduction
This last chapter concludes the research on a holistic approach to assessment for students with severe learning difficulties. It begins with an overview of the research and a summary of the main findings, followed by a reflection on the research journey. Limitations of this research are identified, and research contributions and recommendations for practice are made. Finally, areas for further work are identified.

8.2 Research overview
This research sought to examine how academic and non-academic learning can be captured to assess the abilities of students with severe learning difficulties (SLD) beyond the use of P Levels. Following the recommendation for the removal of P Levels to assess students with SLD (Rochford, 2016), schools have autonomy to create their own assessment systems. Research was conducted in a secondary special needs school, and involved the creation, trial, and evaluation of a holistic assessment chart through three phases of research. Phase One focused on investigating what areas of learning are important to assess for students with SLD, resulting in the creation of a holistic assessment chart to capture progress in multiple key areas of learning. Phase Two involved data collection using the assessment chart through mini case studies, before data collection was suspended due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some evaluations on the chart were obtained from members of staff, and changes made to data collection, for example incorporating more opportunities to seek student’s opinions of their learning. Following a study break, data collection was resumed and Phase Three involved a further trial of the holistic assessment chart with adapted methodology, and feedback from members of staff who used the new chart. In addition, reflections on students’ own learning were sought. The research questions identified were:

1. What are the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD?
2. How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?
3. What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart, and the students’ views on their learning?

This qualitative study used an interpretive approach to focus on individual views and opinions. Semi-structured interviews were held both face to face and online with members of staff, and face to face student interviews were also conducted. Through mini case studies, the holistic assessment chart was used to capture students’ progress in multiple areas of learning, related to students’ EHCP outcomes. The case studies provided me, as the researcher, with in-depth knowledge and deepened my understanding of assessment through individual cases (Stake, 2005). Finally, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to identify common traits across the case studies throughout the distinct phases. During all the research, ethical considerations have been paramount, and a lengthy process was conducted to obtain ethical approval during the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.3 Research summary

This next section summaries this research with regards to the three research questions.

8.3.1 What are the important areas of assessment when teaching students with SLD?

During Phase One, semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2011; Fontana and Frey, 2005) were held with seven members of staff to examine the key areas of learning that members of staff felt were important to capture and how this learning could be assessed to show progress. Secondary interviews were conducted to clarify themes and explore how these themes or areas of learning related to each other. A holistic assessment chart was then created based on the eight areas identified through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) at the end of Phase One.

The approach taken in this research builds upon some of the conceptual ideas identified in previous research that identifies the need for students with SLD to develop skills beyond the academic (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a, Lamb et al., 2018). Previous literature has also identified the need to value
informal and incidental learning as much as academic learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2011; Bourke et al., 2018; Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012; Sawyer, 2009) through an inclusive system (Douglas et al., 2016), with assessments capturing what is learnt (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012) rather than using a best fit model and being limited by levels (Martin, 2006; Smith et al., 2020).

The non-academic areas of learning which have previously been identified to have an impact on academic learning include social-emotional skills, behaviour, and self-regulation (Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015; Montroy et al., 2015; Popham et al., 2018), life skills (Jenkinson, 2000), and engagement for learning (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012). Furthermore, Bautista et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of ‘motor-skills development’ in early years; however, as this research was focused on students of secondary age rather than primary or early years, this was omitted. Although research has suggested some themes are more noteworthy than others, such as communication (Bautista et al., 2016; DfE, 2015; McIntosh, 2015), there has been little agreement as to which of the areas of learning are the most important to assess. Furthermore, there have been few examples of how to assess, and no suggestions to date have been made as to how to conduct assessments holistically. This suggests the need for a system to be created that can be flexible and personalised (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b, Lamb et al., 2018) that incorporates both academic and non-academic learning (including incidental learning) with equal value (Douglas et al., 2016).

Government policy documents have also identified the need to capture learning beyond the academic, with the introduction of the new Education Inspection Framework or EIF (Ofsted, 2019). Following the removal of levels, a greater emphasis was placed on curriculum Intent, Impact, and Implementation to establish high quality outcomes rather than the data driven approach of levels. Furthermore, the new EIF suggests a holistic approach to learning and assessment is required, with students being supported to develop their ‘resilience, confidence and independence’ (p11). In addition, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) provides statutory guidance for students with SLD to be supported to develop in the five areas of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; physical health and development; social, emotional, and mental health; and preparation for adulthood. However, there is a paucity of research that examines what to assess and how to assess, with only one study commissioned
by The National College for Teaching and Leadership which explored the assessment of incidental and spontaneous learning (Lily et al., 2014). It is from this gap in the literature and policy that this research is situated, seeking to find a solution to how learning in both non-academic and academic areas can be captured together to demonstrate meaningful progress.

Phase One confirmed that members of staff perceived capturing non-academic learning to be just as important, if not more so than capturing academic learning. In addition, there was evidence for both the academic and the non-academic skills being the focus of the learning. For example, in a music activity the focus was on developing music skills (John); however, in a trampolining activity the focus was on developing social skills (Carl).

During the initial semi-structured interviews, members of staff gave many examples whereby students had made progress which was not captured by the current school system of P Levels, including improvements in behaviour, emotional well-being, and communication skills. In line with Jenkinson (2000), several members of staff spoke about different life skills as being significant, including independence skills such as cooking and learning how to use public transport, as well as life skills explicitly. Using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), eight areas of learning were identified as important to assess:

- Academic progress
- Adapting to new situations and environments (from primary to secondary, leaving to college)
- Behaviour (self-regulation, sensory, and self-control)
- Communication (social skills and interactions)
- Community access (enrichment activities)
- Emotional development and well-being (emotional regulation, expression of thoughts and feelings, happiness)
- Independence
- Life skills.

Secondary semi-structured interviews highlighted the importance that the seven areas of non-academic learning along with academic progress (making eight areas in total) could form the basis of a holistic assessment system. Additionally,
interviewees highlighted how the areas of learning were interrelated and often improvements in one area led to improvements in others (Popham et al., 2018). This suggests the need for a holistic approach to assessment for students with SLD to encompass these key areas, with the student at the centre of the learning (Sontag, 1996; Tudge et al., 2021). Blackburn and Carpenter (2012) and Bourke et al. (2018) all identified a need for individual approaches to learning, and interviewees also confirmed this by identifying how different key areas are of more significance depending on the student and the subject.

These findings were then used to create a holistic assessment chart, which included three chosen non-academic areas of learning, academic learning, EHCP short and long term outcomes, and two personalised academic and non-academic short-term targets (Figure 30).

![Figure 30 Holistic assessment chart](image)

Figure 30 Holistic assessment chart
8.3.2 How can a holistic assessment chart measure both academic and non-academic progress?

A trial of the holistic assessment chart was conducted in Phase Two with six members of staff and six students, before data collection was suspended due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some online interviews with members of staff were held to evaluate the chart thus far. Following ethical approval on resumption of this research, a further trial of the assessment chart was conducted through mini case studies involving three members of staff and three students. The chart was then evaluated by members of staff, and students reflected on their learning, which will be covered in Chapter 8.3.3.

Whilst existing literature has mentioned the need to assess students with SLD in a variety of areas (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Lamb et al., 2018) no systems have been created to capture progress holistically by focusing on just one subject but many areas of learning. The creation of the holistic assessment chart allowed flexibility for members of staff to personalise the chart by choosing the three most important non-academic areas of learning on which to focus (Lamb et al., 2018). Academic progress was captured alongside non-academic progress, as well as progress towards short-term EHCP targets.

The chart enabled teachers to capture weekly observations (Bourke et al., 2011; Brogaard Clausen et al., 2015) of students’ learning and progress in a holistic manner, capturing learning in a positive approach without the restrictions of levels (Martin, 2006; Smith, et al., 2020). The qualitative nature of the chart demonstrates students’ progress in a variety of areas of learning, thus enabling non-linear progress to be captured (Butler, 2021; DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016). For example, Ben made significant progress with his communication, whilst making small steps progress with his musical development, thus indicating a spikey profile within his assessment chart. This further validates how the chart empowered teachers to capture learning strengths rather than focus on deficits due to the impact of their learning difficulties.
8.3.3 *What were the impressions of members of staff when using the holistic assessment chart, and the students’ views on their learning?*

During Phase Two the assessment chart was evaluated by three members of staff, and amendments were made for the Phase Three data collection. After this data collection, the chart was evaluated by members of staff and students’ reflections on their learning was sought using semi-structured interviews. The assessment charts and interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006).

This research has shown how a holistic approach to assessment for students with learning difficulties was successfully used by members of staff to capture relevant and meaningful progress in both academic and non-academic learning areas (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE 2018; Lamb et al., 2018). A summary of the advantages and disadvantages of using the holistic assessment chart as described by members of staff are as follows:

**Advantages:**
- Creating personalised assessments linked to students’ EHCPs
- Capturing progress qualitatively rather than being limited by levels
- Capturing progress in four learning areas
- Improved planning and teaching
- Incorporating student voice within assessments

**Disadvantages:**
- Impact on workload
- Difficulties with generating whole school data or comparing progress with other schools for accountability purposes

Members of staff saw the benefits of using the chart as a single document to support both their planning, teaching, and assessment of students in an individual manner. This gave them the opportunity to capture progress in a variety of areas of learning that they perhaps would not have consciously thought that the student was making progress in (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Bourke et al., 2018). The formalisation of the incidental or invisible learning suggests the need to value both non-academic and academic learning equally (Douglas et al., 2016). Therefore,
the chart was able to provide a more comprehensive profile of each student’s learning needs, both through the areas of learning and the EHCP outcomes (DfE, 2015).

Both Thomas and Kate in their final interviews from Phase Three were able to describe the benefits of the holistic assessment chart when capturing progress that had been made, not just with singing or violin playing, but with their students’ communication, independence and emotional development and well-being. This supports the research aim of creating an inclusive holistic assessment system that acknowledges and identifies both academic and non-academic progress (Douglas et al., 2016).

The qualitative nature of the chart was seen as a significant advantage, as members of staff could capture learning without being constrained by levels that were not fit for purpose (Martin, 2006; Smith, et al., 2020). In addition, without the limit of levels, progress could be shown in a variety of areas, recognising the spikey assessment profiles of students with SLD in a positive manner, rather than focusing on students’ deficits (DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016). This is of significant importance as students with SLD learn and progress in different ways, therefore a system that can incorporate personalised assessments is essential at capturing and valuing progress.

Further benefits of the assessment chart included its impact on members of staff planning and teaching (Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012). The creation of the chart for each student enabled the members of staff to really focus on students’ learning and personalise their lessons to meet their individual needs (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Rochford, 2016). This facilitated the progression of learning to be seen in a variety of areas linked to students EHCP outcomes (DfE, 2015) including areas such as emotional well-being (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b; Lamb et al., 2018).

In addition, Luke, and Ben both showed pleasure at the progress they had made and were able to communicate in different ways how they had made progress through their student interviews (DfE, 2015). Although their views were not depicted appropriately by teachers, this demonstrates that more clarity is needed
on the use of the chart to improve teacher assessment literacy to capture student voice throughout their lessons (DeLuca et al., 2018).

In summary, this research demonstrates the need to move away from just using subject specific assessment levels or individually assessing the areas of need in EHCPs (communication, independence SEMH) to a combined, holistic approach to capture all learning and progress in an integrated manner.

8.4 Reflections and Implications

Reflective practice is an essential element of both research and teaching that enables the growth and development of practice (Schön, 1983). It is commonly used within work-based environments, where, instead of formal learning, experiences are reflected on systematically, and learning from these experiences are used to improve future practice and work. A reflective framework is relevant to this thesis as this research was conducted using an interpretivist paradigm developed by a professional in the field of special needs and assessment. Furthermore, the research involved seeking the views and opinions of members of staff and students to improve assessment practice to capture learning holistically, resulting in change (Chapman et al., 2015).

As an experienced Deputy Headteacher, I have been teaching students with SLD for over 17 years and leading on assessment for over 12 years and can thus be seen as a technical expert (Schön, 1983). In reflecting on my research and the implications of this research as a practitioner, I have gained significant insights into assessment for students with SLD. I will now reflect on my research journey using Brookfield’s (2017) four interrelated lenses of reflective practice:

- the autobiographical
- students' views
- colleagues' experiences
- theoretical literature.

8.4.1 Autobiographical

Brookfield (2017) viewed the autobiographical lens as the most significant aspect of reflection, and, as a practitioner, it is essential to critically reflect on our
experiences in order to ‘become aware of the paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasonings that frame how we work’ (p30). Furthermore, Brookfield described how we must examine our past and present to draw conclusions to move forward to improve our practice. I have thoroughly enjoyed this research journey, and it has had a significant impact on developing my skills as an evidence-based practitioner. Nevertheless, there have been many issues along the way to overcome. In particular, navigating the challenges of full time work, and the complexities resulting from the COVID-19 restrictions on the research enquiry process have been immense. Special schools never closed, and throughout the pandemic we remained open with between 20-60% of students continuing to attend face to face (f2f). However, this encouraged my tenacity with the ethical journey, resulting in approval to commence f2f research. With hindsight, I would have taken a longer study break with the aim of having more participants in Phase Three, although the impact of the pandemic has been long lasting, and a further lockdown occurred. However, on resumption of my studies I was able to conduct mini case studies in further depth and adapt my methodology accordingly.

This research has had a significant impact on my own practice as both teacher and senior leader. In my own teaching of a physiotherapy group, I have used the ideas from the holistic assessment chart to set targets for students in areas of need from their EHCP – Communication, Independence, Social Emotional and Mental Health, as well as English and Maths (Cognition and Learning). This has enabled me to capture the progress of students holistically through the use of summative comments. As the assessment lead, I have applied my findings from this research and reviewed and rewritten assessment practice at the school, moving the focus away from solely academic assessments to a holistic approach. Furthermore, as the assessment coordinator my assessment methodology has changed, utilising a qualitative approach to encompass all progress in a descriptive manner, rather than using quantitative data in only English and Maths levels which is limited when assessing student with SLD.

8.4.2 Students’ views
Brookfield (2017) expressed how important it is for teachers to reflect on students’ learning, seeking to understand their views in order to teach more effectively and improve their practice. Similarly, Rodgers (2006) identified student voice as an
essential element of research, providing students opportunities to reflect on their own learning. Student reflections involve reviewing students’ work and achievements, as well as seeking to understand their experiences through evaluations, making teaching more intuitive. Furthermore, Brookfield (2017) described how, on ascertaining students’ views, the teacher can reflect on the power dynamic and adjust practice accordingly. This is similar to issues identified by Bourke and Loveridge (2016) who identified difficulties with teachers having preconceived views of students, using their own lens to construct meaning rather than the students. However, Brookfield’s framework is offering a solution through reflection, with teachers focusing on the students’ lens rather than their own.

During Phase Three, members of staff were further encouraged to share the two short-term targets, and to give feedback on all areas of learning to students, which they were able to do in the moment more so than on the holistic assessment chart. Thomas had given regular feedback to Luke during weekly choir sessions, although he had not always linked this feedback to the targets in the holistic assessment chart; therefore, his feedback was predominantly music related. During her second interview, Kate described how she had given feedback to Ben on developing his confidence to perform although she had not captured this in the chart. However, within the assessment chart she was able to capture Ben’s response to praise and encouragement linked to his academic learning and his engagement (DfE, 2015; Rodgers, 2006; Unicef, 1989). Kate then went on to describe how Ben was able to reflect through his emotions whether something he had played was right or not.

During the student interviews, it was clear that both students showed pride in their work. I was mindful of my relationship with both students, and whilst this enabled an easy dialogue during both interviews, during analysis I reflected on the students’ responses carefully. Whilst student voice was used as a tool for students to reflect on their learning in terms of what went well and how they felt, it was not formally linked to their individual specific targets. This suggests that additional research is needed with regards to how students with SLD reflect on their own learning and progress. Furthermore, in reflecting on their own work, the holistic assessment chart incorporating students’ views could be used as part of their student reflections during the annual review for their EHCP (DfE, 2015).
Whilst feedback to the students was given verbally during all lessons and student views sought, these views were not encapsulated in the assessment chart. However, during the interviews with the students at the end of the assessment chart data collection period, students could clearly share their views. Students used pictures, symbols and words to comment on their progress (Rix et al., 2020), supplementing the student voice data teachers did not collect. Although capturing student voice weekly was something that was expected, the lack of student views collected in the chart suggests the need to better prepare teachers and develop their assessment literacy (DeLuca et al., 2018). In addition, amendments to the chart could be made, for example adding a weekly student voice section to highlight the importance of depicting student voice (DfE, 2015).

8.4.3 Colleagues’ experiences

Brookfield (2017) described how dialogues with colleagues can provide insights and suggestions to problems in education, thus leading to improvements in practice. Through collaboration with colleagues, teachers gain more conviction in their practice by sharing ideas and theories. Using colleagues at my school as research participants has allowed valuable insights into what to assess, and how to assess students with SLD. Through the use of semi-structured interviews during Phase One, opinions and experiences from colleagues were sought. As a result, the eight learning areas were identified using thematic analysis. This follows Brookfield’s concept of dialogue and associations with colleagues, with this research further demonstrating how different learning examples were shared amongst members of staff, for example how Thomas shared Luke’s progress with Luke’s class teacher.

These dialogues with colleagues to hear their views and opinions then led to the creation of the holistic assessment chart, which was trialled by members of staff. The evaluation in Phase Two and Three from members of staff was instrumental in identifying strengths and weaknesses when using the chart, resulting in further reflection from the researcher. Furthermore, the use of the chart had a significant impact on both teachers’ planning and assessment practices, thus through colleagues’ own reflections on their learning, this improved their own practice.
8.4.4 Theoretical literature

In Brookfield’s (2017) reflective model, engaging with theoretical literature provides teachers with a framework of knowledge of research and government policy whereby they can improve their practice. The research direction was shaped due to recent UK government policy changes such as the removal of P Levels (DfE, 2018a) and the introduction of a new Ofsted framework (2019). A wide variety of literature was examined relating to curriculum, learning, and assessment. Due to the paucity of research for students with severe learning difficulties relating to these areas, research involving mainstream students from both UK and abroad was included. A particular focus was given to Early Years in the UK, as students in the early years are assessed holistically using the 17 areas of development.

Key themes from the literature review focused on why we assess, how to assess, and what to assess. Significantly, a gap was identified with what to assess for students with severe learning difficulties, as the statutory duty to report on English and Maths is limiting. These limits come both from the use of levels, and the limitations on demonstrating all the progress student can make beyond English and Maths. This formed my inductive theoretical position for this research, to explore a holistic approach to assessment for students with severe learning difficulties. The findings have greatly impacted on my own practice, resulting in changes made following reflection. For example, I now report on a wide range of skills following swimming lessons such as life skills and independence and swimming skills, rather than just the academic progress in PE.

During the literature review, teachers assessment literacy was explored, and this research has identified the need to develop teachers skills when assessing academic and non-academic learning together. This suggest the need for policy change with regards to how students with SLD are assessed (Bourke et al., 2018; Colley, 2020; Lilly et al., 2014 and Tudge et al., 2021)

McIntosh (2015) identified the need for assessments of students with severe learning difficulties to be holistic, however a definition of this term was not explained in his report. For the purpose of this research, the term ‘holistic assessment’ was used to describe a person-centred assessment chart that focussed on one subject and multiple learning areas to capture progress. Students
made progress in for example, a maths or music lesson in a variety of different academic and non-academic areas, and as such the assessment chart was successful in its holistic nature by assessing several learning elements at the same time within one document (Mills, 2017). By incorporating eight key learning areas, EHCP outcomes and two new short-term targets, the chart encompassed a variety of elements within the paradigm of holism covering a wide range of elements and skills within one subject area. In addition, the use of the term ‘holistic’ reflects the interconnectivity of Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem (1977) focussing on the students immediate environment – in this case within one subject, incorporating student views, teachers assessments and EHCP targets decided by therapists. The completion of the chart using teacher observations also further supported the assessment chart’s description as being holistic, as teachers described how students interacted with other peers and members of staff in the group.

This research used the term ‘holistic’ to describe multiple learning areas within one subject, setting clear limitations. However, the term ‘holistic’ could also be used to describe a wider concept than one lesson, using the students’ whole environment including home and all aspects of the school day, which several participants did discuss during their interviews. A wider holistic view would enable progress to be captured through greater depth by utilising a multi-disciplinary approach including therapists, class teachers, and parents/carers. This suggests the need for a similar system to Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem and mesosystem (1977) to be developed, so that progress can be identified across multiple learning environments. Therefore, how progress is captured holistically across home and school including the input from all the professionals involved with the student, is worthy of further inquiry (Sontag, 1996; Tudge et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the creation of the assessment chart was effective by producing a holistic format whereby teachers could personalise the chart to include targets from therapists. In addition, there was space for a focus on four chosen key learning areas, as well as the addition of two new short-term targets, incorporating elements from Bronfenbrenner’s inner microsystem (1977). The flexible design of the chart meant teachers assessed using observations and could describe progress relating to different parts of the students environment such as
interactions between peers or other members of staff, also mirroring Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) inner microsystem.

Furthermore, adopting a wider holistic approach to capturing progress could enhance the assessment chart which has been successfully created and trialled within one subject. As discussed previously, the eight key areas of learning can be adapted to meet individual student’s needs, and this ecosystem can be kept for a short period of time to focus on different learning activity too. For example, Luke’s progress in multiple learning areas was captured through his English lessons in Phase Two, and music lessons in Phase Three. Combining these different learning activities as part of Luke’s ecosystem, would be beneficial for assessment purposes as he is taught and supported by different members of staff.

As the termly targets derived from each students EHCP annual targets are written to form IEPs, an ecosystem could also be created to include targets from therapists such as Physiotherapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupation Therapist and Music Therapists. This reflects the inner microsystem of Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystem by including ‘health’ as well as including all the professionals from school who are working with each student. The collaboration with therapists to develop an ecosystem in addition to the assessment chart would enable progress to be captured in different environments within the school.

In addition, several participants mentioned the benefits of collaborating between the home and school environment, both by communicating progress to parents, and promoting learning across home and school during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sontag, 1996; Tudge et al., 2021). Figure 31 shows a possible framework for Ben’s ecosystem for learning, based on the research findings and utilising a structure similar to Bronfenbrenner (1977).
Ben is at the centre of the chart, with his three main environments interlinked – Home and Community, School, and the Multi-disciplinary Team. Around Ben’s environments are the four areas he is currently focusing on developing – Communication, Independence, Emotional development and well-being, and Academic progress in music. Ben’s assessment chart focussed on his violin lessons from a local authority music teacher, however he also has a number of other professionals involved in his school day. Ben’s school environment includes his class teacher, and three members of support staff. He also regularly has contact with his KS Learning Mentor, and KS coordinator, and is taught by other teachers for option lessons and functional skills lessons. Ben is supported at school by a SaLT, and at home by his mother, father, and siblings. Kate had identified how the change in peers in Ben’s violin lessons had affected him, therefore further research into Ben’s different learning environments would be beneficial to assess his wider development.
Furthermore, Thomas, the music enrichment teacher, identified how useful it was to have discussions with Luke’s class teacher on his progress, as he had taught Luke within a mixed KS4 choir group, and as a whole class group with Lukes class teacher. Figure 32 shows another possible framework for Luke’s ecosystem for learning, with Luke at the centre of the chart, and his three main environments interlinked – Home and Community, School, and the multi-disciplinary team. Around Luke’s environments are the four areas he is currently focusing on developing – Communication, Independence, Emotional development and well-being, and Academic progress in music.

Luke’s school environment includes his class teacher, and three members of support staff, a mealtime supervisor, an interventions teacher with whom he participated in small groups communication interventions, a KS learning mentor, and a KS Coordinator. Across the school day, they all see Luke in different situations such as formal lessons, and break and lunch times. In Year 7 Luke had
whole class music therapy, and is supported by SaLT and OT, as well as physiotherapists, in a variety of environments. Luke is assisted at home by his family and is an active member of the local Down Syndrome community, participating in football and tennis clubs. It would be an additional worthy piece of research to capture Luke’s progress in his community sports clubs, as well as through PE at school. This would further support the subjective assessments of non-academic skills across different environments to improve their validity (Hare, 2010).

8.5 Limitations, validity, and reliability

During Phase One, a range of members of staff were interviewed including three school leaders; however, only one class teacher was interviewed, and no Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) were interviewed. Exploration of the views of additional members of staff could establish whether there are different key learning areas that could form a holistic assessment approach. For example, a LSA might identify different areas of learning to assess based on their own experiences of the student within the school. However, as this was a small-scale project based in one school this is beyond the scope of this research.

The roles of the interviewees led to some bias in their answers. For example, during Phase One, the enrichment teacher identified enrichment as a key area of learning to assess, the learning mentor identified behaviour, and the music teacher identified music. The second interviews during Phase One did provide opportunities to discuss other areas of learning and typically job roles and responsibilities did not have a correlation with what members of staff perceived to be the more important themes. For example, the enrichment teacher went on to identify behaviour as the most important area of learning. However, two members of the leadership team valued academic progress more than the other interviewees, probably due to their roles and being accountable for student progress.

During the interview process, data collection and analysis, there were factors that could make the data and analysis and the findings less reliable and valid including my own subjective thoughts and opinions. For example, during Phase One during
the second interview, when some interviewees moved their themes around as they spoke after they had ordered them, it was not always clear listening back to the recordings which themes were being moved. Videoing this task would have improved reliability. Several interviewees also commented that on a different day they might put things in a different order, thus different themes, and further rationales for capturing different areas of learning could be discovered.

On occasion, I had to steer the conversations back to students with SLD, as opposed to those with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) or those who have moderate learning difficulties (MLD). To make this clearer, the focus group of students with SLD could be re-shared at the beginning of the interview, so that answers pertained to only students with SLD.

The key themes were not explained in the second interviews, as it was presumed, they were topics that the members of staff were familiar with. In retrospect the themes should have been explained. For example, ‘behaviour’ included how students manage their behaviour in terms of making good choices, as well as those needing a sensory programme to help self-regulate such as using movement breaks. However as previously discussed, there are some overlaps with all the areas, for example independence skills such as developing skills to use public transport can also be considered a life skill. Alternatively, independence skills were described as being able to work with less adult support. Additionally, members of staff identified that the different areas of learning to assess in a holistic manner may vary according to the student and their needs and abilities. For example, a student struggling to manage their behaviour and spend time in class would have behaviour as one of their learning areas, whereas another student who was always focused and on task in the class might have communication as one of their areas. However, these complications further highlight the need for a personalised assessment system that is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of each individual student (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012; DfE, 2018a; Douglas et al., 2016 Lamb et al., 2018).

Instructions were not always given consistently and had slight variations too, for example to sort or to order the themes, or to produce a layout of the themes and describe it. Further exploration of students’ specific difficulties could be explored, as there is a significant range of abilities and areas of need for students with SLD,
both in terms of cognitive ability and learning need. For example, a student with autism who is non-verbal may need to focus on self-regulation and communication, whereas a student with Down Syndrome may need to focus on independence and behaviour.

However, it would be unrealistic to suggest that teachers can report all the progress all their students make in all areas of learning all the time, and indeed it may be difficult for teachers to even retain all the different targets to refer to during lessons. Therefore, using this chart at specific periods with individual students in turn may be more manageable, for example by identifying a particular activity or focus such as an offsite activity like swimming in the community.

In addition, further exploration of different stakeholders’ views is needed, especially parents and carers. Of the seven members of staff that were interviewed in Phase One, five were parents and two spoke about their dual role as parents, identifying different learning priorities for parents such as community access and independence (Elaine and Mike). Furthermore, Kate referenced her role as a parent during her interview in Phase Three. This suggests the need to explore how learning occurs both within the home and school environment, utilising to Bronfenbrenner's eco system (1977), and how parents or carers and school staff can work together to improve progress for students (Tudge et al., 2021).

The focus of this research was a small-scale project, with an in-depth exploration of capturing progress in multiple areas of learning, with the primary focus on the individual nature of assessment beyond the use of a levelled system. Therefore, generalisation to other students in the school and beyond the school will be difficult to make as the assessment system is very personalised (Carpenter et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the principles of a holistic assessment approach that have been identified could be applied to other students and schools, with further research used to inform individual approaches to holistic assessment.

Whilst Phase Two contained a variety of subjects, staff roles and student abilities, Phase Three involved only enrichment activities (music and dance) led by tutors, although the three students who participated in Phase Three all varied in their ability. During Phase Three, there were no class teachers who participated, and,
therefore, further trials from class teachers using the holistic assessment chart and
evaluating its use would be beneficial. However, the holistic approach is relevant
when students are learning academic, or core subjects as demonstrated by Luke
in Phase Two through his English lessons. Consequently, there is scope for
generalisability with class teachers assessing holistically too. Furthermore,
Thomas did work with Luke’s class teacher for some choir sessions and engaged
in dialogues about Luke’s learning, thus demonstrating how multiple environments
had an impact on Luke (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Moreover, Ben’s progress was
captured in the context of a changing ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) when a
new peer joined his violin lessons.

Both the assessment charts from Thomas and Ben during Phase Three were
completed to a high standard. Kate’s recording chart from Phase Two was of an
excellent quality, and although there were some initial worries about Thomas’
recording in Phase Three, in my role as Music Coordinator I had covered choir
during Week Four for Thomas who was absent and had the opportunity to model
how to complete the chart. This enabled Thomas to focus more on Luke’s
learning, rather than just describing the activities Luke had participated in.

As previously identified, there have been several challenges to overcome when
collecting data, due to staff workload and stresses brought about by the COVID-19
pandemic. As such, data collection was extended to include Phase Three, and
research methods were adapted. Second interviews with members of staff and
interviews with students during Phase Three were completed three months after
the holistic assessment chart was completed to enable f2f interviews. However,
Thomas continued to collect data for Luke to obtain 10 weeks of data, and thus
during his second interview described Luke’s progress during the Spring Term as
well.

Throughout this research, it has been difficult to completely separate my role as a
researcher from my school role as deputy headteacher (Cohen et al., 2011). Most
of the interviews were conducted in my office, and although this was an easily
available space and private, there were several occasions where the interview was
interrupted. As all three staff participants in Phase Three work part time (1 hour –
2 days per week) any contact I have with them is also likely to provide an
opportunity for them to ask questions about school or discuss school issues too.
Whilst I have made every effort to keep the research role and deputy headteacher role separate and I have not initiated dual conversations, it has been logical to respond to school issues after the research discussion has taken place. In particular I have had to remind one member of staff and one parent of my separate role as researcher and not as deputy headteacher; however, both of these issues were resolved smoothly (Unluer, 2012). During e-mail conversations, work and research have again been mixed by staff participants. If any e-mails received via my OU account contained work queries, I would always reply with my work e-mail, and vice versa.

The social structure of the power imbalance of my position as a Deputy Headteacher did have some impact on the research; therefore, I have been reflective throughout this process on the power dynamics between myself as deputy headteacher and the participants, and myself as a researcher and the participants (Brookfield, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). For example, it is uncertain whether the two participants I approached ‘volunteered’ and what the motivations were for other participants – was it because of my position in school? Did they want something in return?

Although as the assessment lead my beliefs and viewpoints could have skewed the data as an insider researcher (MacLure, 2005), there are significantly more advantages to being an insider researcher than an outsider (Attride-Stirling, 2002). One of the key benefits is the rapport already established with members of staff (Unluer, 2012), and significantly with students, thus enabling meaningful dialogue during interviews (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016).

8.6 Research contributions and recommendations for practice

The two major contributions for practice that can be taken from this research are the new concept of assessing academic and non-academic progress of students with learning difficulties in an integrated manner, and the holistic assessment chart itself which can be adapted for use with other students and by other special schools. The findings of this research provide important evidence for the concept that progress for students with SLD should be captured in both academic and non-academic areas, and how this progress can be captured in a holistic manner. It is
essential that assessment practice for students with SLD are kept in line with current research, and that training is also implemented to support new developments in what and how to assess.

8.6.1 A new way of thinking
The literature review and findings from Phase One identified a significant gap in research with regards to what to assess. Since the removal of P Levels (DfE, 2018a), assessment guidance has called for future systems to be holistic and inclusive (McIntosh, 2015) without any specific principles or examples. Additionally, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and The Rochford Review (2016) both identify multiple areas to assess such as communication and independence, however they do not make any suggestions of how to assess these areas. Douglas et al., (2016) identified the need for an inclusive assessment system that includes both academic and non-academic areas of learning, however, he did not identify any specific concepts. This research has demonstrated a unique new concept of assessment for students with severe learning difficulties, which uses one system and incorporates both academic and non-academic areas with equal value, rather than assessing using a variety of different systems for each area. This research has discovered eight key areas of learning that can be personalised and integrated together, connecting into each student’s EHCP. Through holistic assessment, progress can be captured through one subject in a variety of learning areas, using qualitative methods.

Key themes from the data analyses in both Phase Two and Phase Three identified the need to develop a holistic approach to planning, as well as a need for CPD to support this new way of thinking. Therefore, a change of mindset from assessing in subject specific areas against a levelled system, to assessing holistically in a qualitative manner to demonstrate progress in different areas of learning is needed. The implications for a new system include developing training for all members of staff on how to plan, and assess holistically, thus ensuring teacher judgments are accurate (DeLuca et al., 2018).
8.6.2 A new assessment chart

In support of this new way of thinking, this research has also demonstrated a concrete example of how academic and non-academic areas of learning can be assessed together through the creation, trial, and evaluation of the holistic assessment chart (Appendix 8). The chart enabled personalised targets to be set, incorporated four chosen areas of learning from eight key areas identified, linked to students EHCP outcomes, included a place for teachers to complete weekly observations, and opportunities for student voice. The chart also allows space for flexibility of any additional areas beyond the eight learning areas identified by this research.

Through the trial and evaluation of the chart, this research has demonstrated how a holistic assessment chart can capture students' progress beyond the limit of levels (Martin, 2006; Smith et al., 2020) across a variety of areas of learning personalised to the student (Blackburn and Carpenter, 2012, DfE 2018, Rochford, 2016). The chart has also created opportunities for students to reflect more on their learning (DfE, 2015; Rodgers, 2006; UNICEF, 1989) which although needing further development in this research, the interviews with students demonstrated how they can be involved in reflections on their progress.

8.6.3 Recommendations

A significant recommendation from this research is for other special needs schools to adopt a holistic approach to assessment, by following this identified new way of thinking. Schools should consider integrating both academic and non-academic assessments to capture all the learning and progress that takes place within lessons and activities, rather than using separate assessment systems to assess academic progress in areas such as communication or behaviour. Schools can use the new assessment chart to assess students with severe learning difficulties in multiple areas holistically or use the principles from this research to develop their own bespoke integrated system across the areas of need from SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

Further recommendations from this research include the need for policy change to acknowledge the benefits of assessing students’ academic and non-academic
learning together within one subject (Bourke et al., 2018; Colley, 2020; Lilly et al., 2014; Tudge et al., 2021), rather than a system which uses a variety of different measures for each area. This research has shown a lack of student voice being used in everyday learning by the participants. Changes in practice linked to policy is also needed to incorporate student voice more into the use of a holistic assessment chart (Colley, 2020). In addition, further consideration should be given to how assessments can be moderated both within schools and with other schools.

**8.6.4 Impact on practice**

This research has had a significant impact on my own practice as an educator. A variety of separate systems are used to capture progress at my school in both non-academic and academic areas. Figure 33 displays a Venn diagram of different areas of learning where progress is captured using multiple data sources.

As a result of this research, these systems have been developed to incorporate a more person-centred approach. Improvements to school assessment systems include amendments to baseline assessments for new students, reviewing how positive behaviour is captured and creating new school assessments for all
subjects, as well as new assessment platforms to capture more qualitative progress.

I have led the development and implementation of new school levels in all academic subject areas, including English and Mathematics (Appendix 20). These levels were written as a result of the disapplication of P Levels (DfE, 2017), through mini research projects. Levels have been designed to assess the development of students’ skills and included bridging levels (9 and 10) to support the progression into Entry Level 1. For example, Ben is working within School Level 9 in Writing, as previously he had completed P Level 8 but was not quite ready to access Entry Level 1. The English levels are based on functional communication, identified by Bautista et al. (2016) and McIntosh (2015) as a significant area of importance, as well as by some interviewees. In addition, the levels include functional age appropriate assessments related to life skills (Jenkinson, 2000). The data sources used to write these new levels included P Levels, Pre-Key stage standards (2018), Early Years foundation stage profile (2018), Early Learning Goals (2018) and Functional Skills Entry Level 1 assessments.

Our whole school assessments have also developed to include a more holistic approach. Previously, students were only baselined in academic areas using P Levels; however, following this research, baseline assessments are now written in a descriptive manner, similar to the baseline observations as part of the Early Years Assessment Framework (DfE, 2013b). These assessments capture what the students can do through observation in the areas of learning including communication, independence, and emotional development and well-being. This new baseline enables teachers to describe what students can do, often showing a spikey profile (DfE 2018) when capturing the different strengths of a student with SLD. The end of year report format has also been reviewed to provide more opportunities for teachers to comment on non-academic skills; however, it still includes school levels in all academic subjects. Furthermore, the holistic assessment chart could also be incorporated into the annual review of students’ EHCPs, and their reflections on their learning too (DfE, 2015). This would demonstrate the positive improvements each student has made within a wide range of areas from the SEND Code of Practice, providing specific and authentic examples of their progress.
Positive behaviour progress is now captured on the school’s behaviour recording system, enabling staff to record behaviour developments rather than just capturing incidents of challenging behaviour. The capturing of ‘interventions and strategies’ has also been added, ensuring personalised learning approaches for individuals are recorded (Carpenter et al., 2011; DfE, 2013b). This allows staff to clearly review behaviour progress alongside academic progress (Popham et al., 2018), and although the systems are separate, the discussions that now take place about students’ progress have become more holistic.

Furthermore, several assessment platforms have been created, for example an enrichment recording platform, and a Key Stage 5 recording platform (Figure 34) to empower teachers to describe progress qualitatively, with opportunities for additional comments. This enables members of staff to use summative assessment to incorporate progress in academic and non-academic areas within one activity.

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*Figure 34 Key Stage 5 recording platform (blank)*

The Key Stage 5 platform (Figure 34) joins together academic learning areas such as music, art, and drama within creative arts, to provide opportunities to focus on skills such as communication and independence through these academic areas.
Each star is completed by entering a comment and uploading evidence such as a photograph or short video.

A new learning platform was created to capture progress for 2020-2021 following disruptions to assessments due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 35). It includes areas of learning such as core subjects and home learning, as well as the Recovery Curriculum. For example, the recovery curriculum focused on the Five Areas of well-being: Connect with other people; Be physically active; Learn new skills; Give to others; and Pay attention to the present; therefore, students were assessed in skills such as their communication, and their emotional development and well-being.

![Figure 35 2020-2021 adapted assessment framework (completed)](image)

8.7 Future Work

Notably, the scalability of the holistic assessment chart needs further research due to the impact on workload for members of staff, and its use as a planning tool or as a student learning profile could also be explored. In addition, further research needs to be conducted on how to incorporate the voice of students with SLD into assessments, as there is a substantial gap in this research area (Rix et al., 2020; Stack and McDonald, 2014).

Significantly, if the assessment principles and systems are changing, further consideration needs to be given to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continued Professional Development (CPD) which already has a paucity of training available.
to those who work with students with SEND (Hodkinson, 2009). Further training for teachers is required to develop the concept of holistic assessment so that they can develop their knowledge and understanding to capture all the learning that takes place beyond the academic (DeLuca et al., 2018; Pastore and Andrade, 2019). The reflections on the holistic assessment chart by members of staff illustrate how the chart can develop a teacher’s ability to plan, as well as to assess.

The policy response to the removal of levels was for schools to create their own systems of assessment; however, there is no policy guidance as to what this may look like, and individual school responses to the disapplication of levels was to create their own systems that are rarely grounded in research. Therefore, policy change is needed to support the next steps from this research (Bourke et al., 2018; Colley, 2020; Lilly et al., 2014; Tudge et al., 2021). Drawing on the findings from this research, schools could use concepts of holistic assessment to create their own personalised systems to meet the needs of their learners. This would enable teachers to understand the spikey profiles of students with SLDD and capture progress within multiple areas of learning (DfE, 2018a; Lilly et al., 2014; Martin, 2006; Rochford, 2016).

Over the course of this research, further DfE guidance and publications have been released, most significantly, a review setting out the government’s intentions to ‘level up’ support and provision for those with SEND. The SEND Review: Right support Right place Right time (HM Government, 2022) proposes key areas of improvements including developing a standardised EHCP and making improvements with the Initial Teacher Training framework to include more training on how to support students with SEND. Both of these will have a significant impact on teachers’ ability to assess students with learning difficulties, as this research has demonstrated.

Education for students with SLD encompasses so much more than academic knowledge, skills, and understandings. The terms ‘informal’ ‘non-core’ or ‘non-academic’ do not adequately represent the value of these skills, and additional exploration is needed to develop new, more appropriate terminology.

Further empirical work should research how teachers and schools are held accountable through individual, holistic assessments, which remains a perplexing
task, as students are individuals with different learning needs. This makes benchmarking progress against other students and other schools who all use different systems problematic. However, special schools still need to be held accountable beyond a broken levelled system.

In conclusion, this research has identified eight key areas of learning important to assess holistically for students with SLD. A new assessment chart has been created, trialled, and evaluated by members of staff with progress reflected on by students, with a noteworthy degree of success. Future research should examine further how other special schools can create their own holistic approach to assessment, how stakeholders can contribute to these holistic assessment systems, and how training and CPD can support a new holistic way of assessing, and a new way of thinking.


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Appendices

Appendix 1 School Levels - examples in English reading

**Level 4** *(Responding, anticipation, reading single word/ symbols/Selecting by exchanging)*
- Students will read and respond appropriately to one symbol/sign given (e.g., when shown symbol of outside, student goes outside)
- Students will match symbols to symbols (e.g., matching the same symbols linked to a familiar story)
- Students will anticipate what is going to happen next in well-known texts, for example a familiar story (e.g., laughing in anticipation of an event)
- Students will actively listen and respond to a familiar story being read by an adult (one-to-one or in a small group (e.g., by pointing to a character)
- Students will recognise their own picture from a selection of two.

**Level 5** *(Reading two pictures/ 2 events/ Recognise few familiar words/ names/ respond to questions (2 key word).*
- Students will read and respond appropriately to a routine/ timetable of two symbols/events (e.g., Now work then leisure)
- Students will match objects to pictures and symbols. (e.g., towel when going swimming; spoon when eating lunch)
- Students will read two symbols, during reading activities (e.g., I can see apple and banana)
- Students will recognise familiar names (e.g., class staff and students).
- Students will indicate correctly pictures of characters and objects in response to questions such as ‘Where is (the)…?’
- Students will participate in a dramatic reconstruction of a familiar story, reading a line of 2 symbols/signs/words.
- Students will identify the corresponding prop for a character (e.g., Willy Wonka/top hat, Augustus Gloop/chocolate bar)

**Level 6** *(Recognise s small number of words)*
- Students will read few letters of the alphabet by name
- Students will read few letters of the alphabet by sound
- Students will read 10 familiar blended sounds
- Students will select and recognise 5 words or symbols linked to a familiar vocabulary (e.g., names, people, objects or actions).
- Students will read and follow a timetable with activities.

**Level 7** *(recognise words (10)/ and read 3 familiar words by memory + Phonics – blending read words with 2/3 g)*
- Students will read 50% letters of the alphabet by name
- Students will read 50% letters of the alphabet by sound
- Students will read accurately by blending the sounds in words with two and three known graphemes (e.g., cat = 3 sounds / 3 graphemes)
- Students will distinguish between print or symbols and pictures in texts. (e.g., by pointing to words in a shared text as opposed to symbols and pictures)
- Students will select and recognise or read 10 words or symbols linked to a familiar vocabulary (e.g., names, people, objects or actions)
- Students will predict elements of a text when adult pauses reading.
- Students will respond to texts by answering simple questions that require simple recall.

**Level 8** *(Read familiar words + phonics+ blending, read words with 5 g)*
- Students will read the letters of the alphabet by name
- Students will read the letters of the alphabet by sound
• Students will read accurately by blending the sounds in words with up to five known graphemes (e.g., stand = 5 sounds /5 graphemes)
• Students will read some common exception words (e.g., The word 'school' has a 'ch' in it but makes a sound like 'k')
• Students will read some familiar words or symbols, including their own names. (e.g., school topics, leisure choices etc.)
• Students will sight read familiar signs in the environment (e.g., exit, toilet, lift)
• Students will use knowledge of letter-sound correspondences to help predict new words when reading.
• Students will read some high frequency words (e.g., a, about, all, an, are, as etc.)
• Students will respond to texts by answering simple questions on what they have just read (e.g., Who did _____?)

**Level 9 (Read and understand simple regular words/ read and understand simple sentences)**

• Students will read and understand simple regular words. (e.g.
• Students will read and understand short simple sentence (e.g., the cat sat on the mat)
• Students will read and understand short texts on familiar topics/ experiences (e.g., poster, TV guide, job advert, restaurant menu)
• Students will read and follow a work plan (written in words).
• Students will read texts on different reading media (e.g., read texts on the whiteboard, computer, kindle, on paper)
• Students will read a variety of short texts (e.g., read texts that explain, read texts that describe etc.)

**Level 10 (Read and respond to questions)**

• Students will read and answer simple literal questions on a variety of texts (e.g., Ones where we can find the answer directly in the text such as 'What time does the restaurant close?'
• Students will answer inferential questions on a variety of texts (e.g., Ones where the text does not actually tell us, but we can work out the answer by considering the hints, words and clues in the text such as 'What type of food does the restaurant sell?')
## Appendix 2 Extract of literature review summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<td>Inclusive and adaptive teaching</td>
<td>Peter Winstanley</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Inclusive assessment</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
<td>What starts to happen to assessment when learners learn about their children’s informal learning?</td>
<td>Rourke J O’Hall J Loveridge</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Context of removing levels. 3 types of assessment. Assessment process: SEN long-term outcomes - higher education, employment and independent living. Schools should consider meaningful ways of measuring all aspects of progress including communication.</td>
<td>Assessment definition</td>
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<td>Barry Carpenter</td>
<td>Engaging Learners with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities</td>
<td>Barry Carpenter</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>The Engagement for Learning Framework. Engagement relates learning.</td>
<td>Link to RR.</td>
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<td>Barry Carpenter</td>
<td>Engaging Learners with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities</td>
<td>Barry Carpenter, C Blackburn</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>The Engagement for Learning Framework. Engagement relates learning.</td>
<td>Link to RR.</td>
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<td>Barry Carpenter</td>
<td>The complex learning difficulties and disabilities research project</td>
<td>Barry Carpenter et al.</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>ESIAT. Engagement scale and inquiry framework for learning. Personalised learning</td>
<td>Link to RR and areas of assessment</td>
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<td>DE</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Guidance on effective assessment systems.</td>
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<td>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage Assessment</td>
<td>DE 2017</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Updated 17 areas of holistic assessment for EYFS.</td>
<td>Assessment definition</td>
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<td>DE 2015</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Statutory guidance. 4 areas of preparation for adulthood - employment, independent living, health and community participation. Mental capacity act.</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
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<td>Penny Lacey</td>
<td>Smart and scruffy targets</td>
<td>Penny Lacey</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>The learner must show that learning has taken place by doing tasks that is difficult. Subset: Assessment threshold.</td>
<td>Definition of learning. Purpose of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Legend:**
- **SEN assessment**
- **EYFS assessment**
- **NC assessment**
- **Holistic**
- **Methodology**
- **Ethics**
- **Not used**

205
Appendix 3 English and Maths P Levels

Writing

P4 Pupils show that they understand that marks and symbols convey meaning [for example, placing photographs or symbols on a timetable or in a sequence]
- They make marks or symbols in their preferred mode of communication.

P5 Pupils produce meaningful marks or symbols associated with their own name or familiar spoken words, actions, images or events [for example, contributing to records of their own achievements or to books about themselves, their families and interests]
- They trace, over-write or copy shapes and straight line patterns.

P6 Pupils produce or write their name in letters or symbols
- They copy letter forms [for example, labels and/or captions for pictures or for displays].

P7 Pupils group letters and leave spaces between them as though they are writing separate words
- They are aware of the sequence of letters, symbols and words [for example, selecting and linking symbols together, writing their names and one or two other simple words correctly from memory].

P8 Pupils show awareness that writing can have a range of purposes [for example, in relation to letters, lists or stories]
- They show understanding of how text is arranged on the page [for example, by writing or producing letter sequences going to left to right]
- They write or use their preferred mode of communication to set down their names with appropriate use of upper- and lower-case letters or appropriate symbols.

Number

P4 Pupils show an awareness of number activities and counting [for example copying some actions during number rhymes, songs and number games; following a sequence of pictures or numbers as indicated by a known person during number rhymes and songs].

P5 Pupils respond to and join in with familiar number rhymes, stories, songs and games [for example, using a series of actions during the singing of a familiar song; joining in by saying, signing or indicating at least one of the numbers in a familiar number rhyme]
- Pupils can indicate one or two [for example by using eye pointing, blinks, gestures or any other means to indicate one or two, as required]
- They demonstrate that they are aware of contrasting quantities [for example ‘one’ and ‘lots’ by making groups of one or lots of food items on plates].

P6 Pupils demonstrate an understanding of one-to-one correspondence in a range of contexts [for example: matching objects such as cups to saucers, straws to drink cartons].
Pupils join in rote counting up to five [for example, saying or signing number names to 5 in counting activities]
- They count reliably to three, make sets of up to three objects and use numbers to three in familiar activities and games [for example, touching one, two, three items as an adult counts, counting toys or pictures, counting out sets of three, such as knife, fork and spoon]
- They demonstrate an understanding of the concept of ‘more’ [for example, indicating that more cups, counters, food items are required]. They join in with new number rhymes, songs, stories and games.

P7 Pupils join in rote counting to 10 [for example, saying or signing number names to 10 in counting activities]
- They can count at least 5 objects reliably [for example, candles on a cake, bricks in a tower]
- They recognise numerals from one to five and to understand that each represents a constant number or amount [for example, putting correct number of objects (one to five) into containers marked with the numeral; collecting the correct number of items up to five]
- Pupils demonstrate an understanding of ‘less’ [for example, indicating which bottle has less water in it]. In practical situations they respond to ‘add one’ to a number of objects [for example, responding to requests such as add one pencil to the pencils in the pot, add one sweet to the dish].
Appendix 4 HREC Approval Phase One

Research-REC-Review <research-rec-review@open.ac.uk>
Mon 23/07/2018, 10:16
You;
CC: R.J. Wardill

Project title: Life beyond levels – developing a holistic approach to the assessment of progress for students with severe learning difficulties.

Date application submitted: 13/07/2018  
HREC response date: 20/07/2018

This message confirms that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review via a Human Research Ethics Committee Project Registration and Risk Checklist, has been given a favourable opinion by HREC Chair's action.

As part of your favourable opinion, it is essential that you are aware of and comply with the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, information in your original application, in order to ensure your continued safety and the good conduct of the research.

2. It is essential that you contact the HREC with any proposed amendments to your research, for example - a change in location or participants. HREC agreement needs to be in place before any changes are implemented, except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected.

3. Your HREC reference number has to be included in any publicity or correspondence related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research, so it is clear that it has been agreed by the HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.

4. Researchers should have discussed any project-related risks with their Line Manager and/or Supervisor, to ensure that all the relevant checks have been made and permissions are in place, prior to a project commencing, for example compliance with IT security and Data protection regulations.

5. Researchers need to have read and adhere to relevant OU policies and guidance, in particular the Ethics Principles for Research involving Human Participants and the Code of Practice for Research - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

6. The Open University’s research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of research council, professional organisations and grant awarding bodies research ethics guidelines. Where required, this message is evidence of OU HREC support and can be included in an external research ethics review application. The HREC should be sent a copy of any external applications, and their outcome, so we have a full ethics review record.

Sent on behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee

Professor Louise Westwood  
Chair

Dr Duncan Banks  
Deputy Chair

Dr Claire Hewson  
Deputy Chair

Human Research Ethics Committee  
The Open University  
Watson Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
Appendix 5 Example of consent forms and communication

5.1 E-mail to participants - Phase One

Wed 26/09/2018, 20:21
SCHOOL - All Staff
Sent Items; Inbox

Dear all,

I am currently undertaking a research project as part of a Research Degree with the Open University. My research is supervised by Dr Robert Vardill, who can be contacted on r.j.vardill@open.ac.uk.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in two interviews regarding student learning and progress, as part of my Year 1 initial study. I attach an information sheet for further details on the research project. I am looking for approximately 6 volunteers.

The initial interview will last approximately 30 mins, and the follow up interview approximately 30 mins. I will arrange a time and location at your convenience.

The interviews will be recorded, and you will be asked to choose a name so that your answers can be anonymised. The interviews will be transcribed, and the data will all be stored securely. Should you wish to revoke your consent to be involved in this study, you may do so before January 1st, 2019, whereby all the data will be collated.

The results of the study will be available after April 2019.

Should you wish to participate, please sign and return the attached permission form. If you have any questions regarding this project, please feel free to get in touch either personally or via e-mail.

Kind regards

Liz

Liz Smith
5.2 Consent form – Phase One

I give permission for Elizabeth Smith to conduct 2 interviews with myself lasting approximately 30 mins each for her Year 1 Initial Study as part of her doctoral research project 'Life beyond levels – developing a holistic approach to the assessment of progress for students with severe learning difficulties'.

I understand the focus of the research will be on learning and assessment, and the interview will focus on what learning takes place throughout the day and how this can be captured beyond P levels.

I understand that all data collected will be confidential and stored securely. I understand I have the right to withdraw my consent for any of the data from my interview to be used at any time before 1st January 2019, whereby the results will all be collated.

Name:  
Position:  
Signed:  
Date:  

5.3 Student consent form – Phase Two and Phase Three
Appendix 6 Interview questions – Phase One

Introduction notes  
Explain purpose – Research project for EdD Phase One with OU.  
Who is the researcher/point of contact – Liz – Open University.  
Confidentiality – interview is being recorded and will be secured safely. It will be transcribed and used with other interviews to find common themes.  
How the data is going to be used – analysed for Phase One, seen by tutors. Used to inform study for Year 2 and Year 3  
Instructions – please respond openly and honestly, approx. 30 mins.

Explanation/discussion on terms  
Assessment – formative (on-going) and summative (SOLAR, end of year reports).  
Progress – capturing evidence between 2 points to show improvements in learning.  
Learning – students learn all the time outside of our individual learning outcomes and lesson aims. This project is about capturing learning in the broadest sense. Give examples of everyday learning e.g., swimming group.

Questions

1. Can you describe your role in school?  
2. What area(s) of learning do you currently assess? (Support staff - or are assessed at school).  
3. What assessment methods do you use? (Support staff - or are used at school).  
4. What other areas can you think of that are not currently captured by P Levels?  
5. Which of these areas do you think is the most important and why?  
6. Can you think of any specific examples of learning that takes place that is not captured by these assessments?  
7. How do you know learning has taken place?  
8. How do you think this learning can be captured?  
9. What purpose do you think capturing this learning will have? (Who will we share this information with? Why would we want to capture this?)  
10. Further questions on answers to 6-8 as appropriate.
Appendix 7 Extract from initial interview showing highlighted themes

Key:
Yellow – assessment methods
Pink – examples of learning areas
Blue – examples of student learning

STAFF: Yes, and so some staff would perhaps make records against their lesson plan like little observations, some staff at the end of the week might record onto SOLAR or might sit with their team. There’s a lot of formative assessment going on, staff would set learning outcomes, which would determine what the learning was within the lesson and then according to what happened in the lesson continue on that, that same part of the learning outcomes will set new ones, set records of the kinds of progress that they’ve made within those lessons, and they would obviously take photographs, write a comment, or ticket a star on SOLAR. Sometimes like in the interventions base or the LSB, they make sort of, or with physio or Hydro, they make a kind of comment each week. So, there’s a degree of formative assessment that goes on that leads to a kind of more summative assessment.

Liz: That’s great. Thank you. So, what other areas of learning that are not currently captured by the P Levels do you think are important?

STAFF: Well at SCHOOL everything’s important because our students don’t learn intuitively. Where there are things that kids in mainstream would learn just by being around it, we teach everything discreetly. So PSHE is hugely important for young people, and life skills. So, so we don’t capture them. They’re not well captured on P Levels. So, things like our young people doing travel training for instance would be really important, learning to shop, learning to take care of themselves. And we have to discreetly teach a lot of those things like keeping safe wouldn’t be something that you would naturally teach in any other type of environment, but we would want to teach that and then record against it but equally I think what’s really important here and maybe we don’t make it clear enough, but we just so much enrichment and that’s about supporting young people to be able to make the most of their lives to be able to enjoy themselves and be inspired and passionate about things – does that make sense?

Liz: Yeah, absolutely. So, if we sort of group the travel training together and perhaps independence and then we’ve got the life skills keeping safe and enrichment. So out of those four, is there one that you feel is the most important? So, keeping safe, life skills, independence and enrichment?

STAFF: No… So, the other thing is behaviour. So, for some of our High Needs classes, for all of our young people actually being able to manage their own behaviour. And manage their behaviour, there’s no point in teaching them how to go out and enjoy the community and how to enrich their lives because they’re not able to manage that ahead they’re not able to manage and be independent until they can independently manage their own behaviour. So perhaps that’s, that’s kind of an overarching and that’s so variable according to which young person it is. So, behaviour and sort of that personal development is really really important.

Liz: Thank you. And would you say the personal development is more important than the academic development in terms of sort of English, Maths, geography history

STAFF: It depends on the young person. So, for some of our young people who have more challenging behaviour or who have real issues managing their behaviour, it can become the most important one, but it’s very difficult because I think all of those things should go hand-in-hand. I firmly believe we should be doing, encouraging our young people to develop their academics because it makes a very big statement about their entitlement to education if we don’t have that ranking up there at the top, but unlike other schools, it’s it’s equal with all those other things.

……

Liz: Can you think of an example of a student that has made really amazing progress that perhaps has not been captured?
STAFF: Maybe like T. Yeah, so that anecdotally we can describe how her behaviour has improved from year 7. Similarly, maybe somebody like V who spent most of his time in the library in year 7 and, and now successfully goes into class every day and that’s because it’s about behaviour and there’s not an absolute, there hasn’t been a platform to say, so this was our baseline and this, so you could do it maybe by looking at how the Behaviour Support Plan has changed over the years, but there isn’t a kind of a sense of this is their journey. So, I think that probably… The enrichment because it’s not a kind of an assessment but we have a record of some things we’ve done because I really, you know, I feel very strongly that when you assess people, you’re not just going to see linear progress, you’re not just seeing building skill on skill. Progress can also be a breadth of activities and experiences. So, and that’s really important say for our PMLD students. So, with the enrichment we can see, because we have records of what students have done, that they’ve got a broad, you know spread of enrichment and that’s changed as they move the school. So, when they get into key stage five, they’ve got lunch club they’ve got adult education they’ve got swimming at the spa, so you can see that that kind of develops, but the behaviour it’s quite difficult to capture.

……

MICHELLE: What we do do, and I think we do it very well is we look for every tiny indication that behaviour has improved. So as someone D the fact that he isn’t grabbing people but it’s how you measure because again, it’s going back to that thing that every student their progress has very person specific steps that you record against so for V it was really important that we got him into class to engage in learning and he wasn’t kind of running around the school but for D it was that he was very calm and engaged with learning, but for T, maybe it was that we’ve reduced how much she was swearing so for each child, the measures are so individual so you can’t use one measure which is it more difficult to say this is progress. So, I guess it’s about thinking maybe what or where our baseline is and then how there’s a way of recording periodically how their behaviour is changed.
Appendix 8 Holistic assessment chart

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<th>Name:</th>
<th>Activity:</th>
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<td>EHCP outcomes:</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Cognition &amp; learning</td>
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<td>Social, emotional and mental health</td>
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<td>Non-academic:</td>
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| Learning areas: |  |
| Adapting to new situations and environments |  |
| Academic learning |  |
| Behaviour |  |
| Communication |  |
| Community access |  |
| Emotional development and well-being |  |
| Independence |  |
| Life skills |  |

### Formative (weekly) progress

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<th>Week</th>
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<th>Learning area 3</th>
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### Summative (end of term) progress (to be added to school assessment system) to include all areas of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student voice</th>
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</table>
Appendix 9 Telephone interview questions – Phase Two

General chat about current situation.
Remind staff of option to withdraw.
Ask for consent to record interview.

1. How many A sessions have you had with B last term?

2. How has B made progress in the non-academic areas you identified through his A lessons? Include 3 areas identified in initial interview e.g., communication, emotional development and well-being, independence.

3. Have you managed to use the holistic tracker, and if so, how have you found it as a recording tool?

4. How effective/how can a holistic tracking system be used to capture learning in both academically and non-academic areas?

5. Have you fed back to B on his/her progress (academic and non) and how has this gone?

6. Has B been able to reflect on his/her own learning?

7. How do you think this chart shows progress (or can show progress) for the long and short-term EHCP outcomes?

8. Any other thoughts and comments/feedback? Do you think you would be willing to participate in Sept all being OK to resume data collection?
Appendix 10 Consent Form example – Phase Three

Human Research Ethics Committee
Informed Consent form – parent/carer
Life beyond levels – developing a holistic approach to the assessment of progress for students with severe learning difficulties.

Researcher: Elizabeth Smith Elizabeth.smith1@open.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr Valerie Critten valerie.critten@open.ac.uk

Dear [parent/carer]

Thank you for consenting for your [son/daughter] to be part of my research into holistic assessment. I have completed an online interview with their teacher, and their teacher has also completed a holistic recording chart.

I have now completed a ‘Covid-19 Risk Assessment for research projects involving human participants’ which has been approved by The Open University Health & Safety Team and my Faculty, and as such can resume face to face interviews.

If you would be willing for your son/daughter to have a face-to-face interview to discuss their holistic progress and seek their views on their learning, please complete the below form by ticking the appropriate boxes and return to me via email.

Face to face interviews
I have read and understood the ‘Open University Health & Safety – Covid-19 Risk Assessment for research projects involving human participants’ or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the risk assessment and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ ☐

I consent to my son/daughter having a face-to-face interview at school and understand that they must follow the safety measured outline in the risk assessment (for example maintaining social distancing, hand washing and wearing a mask if appropriate).

Signatures
__________________________________________________________________________
Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]                                     Signature                                      Date

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing
I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

ELIZABETH SMITH
__________________________________________________________________________
Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS]                                         Signature                                      Date

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/3429/Smith. HREC approval date: 08/03/2020
http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/
Appendix 11 Favourable opinion E-mail – Phase Three

Dear Liz,

You will need updated signatures for the lead of Unit and University Secretary declarations. I would advise you to contact the Faculty Recovery Group on web.research.admin@open.ac.uk as they should be able to help you with this.

Best wishes

Jane

---

Research REC Review

Fri 12/02/2021 12:18

To: Elizabeth SmithI Research REC Review

CC: Valerie Crittenden Research REC Review

Dear Liz,

Many thanks for sending this.

Good luck with your project.

Best wishes

Jane

---

HREC/3429/Smith

Dr Valerie Crittenden

Research REC Review

Fri 12/02/2021 12:10

To: Elizabeth SmithI Research REC Review

CC: Valerie Crittenden Research REC Review

Dear Liz,

Many thanks for sending this.

Good luck with your project.

Best wishes

Jane

---

RA 569 Human-research-vers...

137 KB

Dear Jane,

Please find attached my RA, with updated signatures.

Kind regards

Liz
Appendix 12 Interview questions Phase Three – staff

L – violin
Weekly sessions Autumn Term
Spring – none – several phone calls and E-mails. Zooms didn’t work
March 8th – back to f2f


2. How effective can a holistic tracking system be used to capture learning in both academically and non-academic areas?

3. Has this chart supported you to give meaningful feedback to students on their learning? How? Example?

4. Were the targets shared with L? Has the holistic assessment chart helped L to recognise their own learning in all these areas? How? Has L been able to reflect on his own learning?

5. How do you think this chart shows progress for the long and short-term EHCP outcomes?

6. How would you normally record violin sessions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a holistic assessment chart as opposed to recording in GV music level etc?

7. How have you found using the recording chart? Workload? Impacted planning? Would you have liked more support/guidance with using the chart before starting?

8. How has COVID-19 impacted L’s learning?

9. Current school assessment systems have been suspended (due to COVID-19, online learning, adapted RC), do you think this chart is still relevant? Does it have a place as an assessment tool? Why/why not?

10. Any other thoughts and comments/feedback?

I noticed you have just commented on violin lessons in the summative box – what about other areas?
Appendix 13 Interview questions – student

L – violin. Weekly sessions Autumn Term. Spring – online. No sessions attended. March 8th – back to f2f

**Academic:** To be able to play a response to a given phrase on the violin that is different

**Non-academic:** To be able to share his views verbally in a group

1. Do you like violin?
   a. At home?
   b. At school?

2. What pieces do you like?

3. Have you got better at:
   a. Making up and playing phrases on the violin after Kate plays something?
   b. Sharing your views verbally in a group?

4. *Emotional Development and well-being – how does violin make you feel?*

5. Any other thoughts and comments/feedback?
Appendix 14 Key theme photos

For the second interviews, interviewees were given the key themes on separate pieces of paper and asked to sort them. The recording was stopped, and most interviewees took between 5-10 mins to complete this task. The recording was resumed, and interviewees were asked to describe their layout. A photograph was taken of all the themes layouts. Photograph numbers correspond to Staff numbers.
## Appendix 15 Luke’s school levels in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School level description (working within)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong> Level 5&lt;br&gt;Students will communicate by combining two key words for person and object&lt;br&gt;Students will name characters from a story using two corresponding words (e.g., king and crown, soldier and sword)&lt;br&gt;Students will participate in drama games, learning one-word (line) to use: e.g., ‘Potion!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong> Level 5&lt;br&gt;Students will respond appropriately to instructions containing two key words/ symbols/ signs: e.g., ‘put the bag in the box, get your coat and go outside’.&lt;br&gt;Students will respond to familiar questions using their preferred mode of communication e.g., question e.g. ‘How are you? - Good’.&lt;br&gt;Students will respond appropriately to ‘where’ and ‘what’ questions about familiar or immediate events or experiences containing two key words e.g., ‘where is the iPad?’ ‘What are you doing?’&lt;br&gt;Students will follow simple stage instructions containing two key words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong> Level 5&lt;br&gt;Students will read and respond appropriately to a routine/ timetable of two symbols/events (e.g., Now work then leisure)&lt;br&gt;Students will match objects to pictures and symbols&lt;br&gt;Students will read two symbols, during reading activities&lt;br&gt;Students will recognise familiar names (e.g., class staff and students).&lt;br&gt;Students will indicate correctly pictures of characters and objects in response to questions such as ‘Where is (the)…?’&lt;br&gt;Students will participate in a dramatic reconstruction of a familiar story, reading a line of 2 symbols/signs/words.&lt;br&gt;Students will identify the corresponding prop for a character (e.g., Willy Wonka/top hat, Augustus Gloop/chocolate bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong> Level 6&lt;br&gt;Students will label their work by tracing their names.&lt;br&gt;Students will sequence two pictures to show understanding about the order of even&lt;br&gt;Students will create a sentence by adding two symbols/photos, to a sentence strip&lt;br&gt;Students will use an appropriate word/symbol/sign to complete a sentence when the adult pauses (e.g., ‘We’re going to…. zoo/park/shop/beach’)&lt;br&gt;Students will trace, overwrite or copy shapes and straight line patterns.&lt;br&gt;Students combine two key ideas/concepts during creative writing activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maths</strong> Level 5&lt;br&gt;Students count reliably to three, make sets of up to three objects and use numbers to three in familiar activities and games&lt;br&gt;Students compare two groups of objects, saying when they have the same number&lt;br&gt;Students demonstrate an understanding of one-to-one correspondence in a range of functional contexts&lt;br&gt;Students complete a range of sorting activities using a given criterion&lt;br&gt;Students copy simple patterns or sequences&lt;br&gt;Students understand the concept of ‘more’&lt;br&gt;Students show understanding of words, signs and symbols that describe positions – in and out, on and under.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 16  Luke’s holistic assessment chart completed by Thomas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Luke</th>
<th>Activity: Choir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes:</td>
<td>Adapting to new situations and environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Academic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term: To develop his speech, expressive and receptive language and communication skills.</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term: To use symbols and grid paper to draw things in his chart.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, Emotional and Mental Health</td>
<td>Community access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term: To develop his social interaction and behaviour skills.</td>
<td>Emotional development and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term: To take turns with other students during speaking and listening activities.</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for adulthood</td>
<td>Life skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Formative (weekly) progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Communicate</th>
<th>Emotional Development and well-being</th>
<th>Independence</th>
<th>Skills, chart</th>
<th>Any other learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hello song, goodbyes, singing, exploring visual sounds, actions</td>
<td>Introducing new term, new setting.</td>
<td>Finding two spaces to sit and maintaining personal spaces in group.</td>
<td>Exploring sound sources, silence, attention, modelling, introducing</td>
<td>Learning, maintaining attention and concentration on tasks for 20-30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hello song, goodbyes, singing, exploring visual sounds, actions</td>
<td>Singing as part of a group, taking turns.</td>
<td>Maintaining personal spaces, singing as a group.</td>
<td>Vocal warm ups, encores, Happy - Pharrell Williams</td>
<td>Learning, maintaining attention and concentration on tasks for 20-30 minutes, understanding structure of lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exploring visual sounds, singing, actions</td>
<td>Working on a past, collective music appreciation, taking turns.</td>
<td>Suggesting songs to sing</td>
<td>Vocal warm ups, Old Town Road - Lil Nas X</td>
<td>Learning, maintaining attention and concentration on tasks for 20-30 minutes, approaching other group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Warm-up routines, visual and auditory routines, responding to music and the environment.</td>
<td>Good engagement with physical ideas and actions - rubbing tummies for &quot;furry&quot;, as a group and individually - focusing on overall development - including learning, following visual schema.</td>
<td>Singing suggestion brought in, consistent heading or chore. Headed to the point of a group member remembered who started. Good engagement with visual ideas.</td>
<td>Have participation with all singing, developing rhythms, singing with topics.</td>
<td>Learning, maintaining attention and concentration on tasks for 20-30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learning Old Town Road. Each student takes turns singing their songs from when they first learned. Luke also communicated using gesture, singing and smile.</td>
<td>Luke was very happy, enthusiastic and engaged throughout the session. On many occasions he maintained eye contact with the teacher and followed the music, and showed a variety of expressions. He left quietly after the song.</td>
<td>Luke sang a good verse of &quot;Chicken in the road&quot;, singing in time to the backing track and rhythmic patterns. Luke sang with some shaping of pitch, short lack of expression in the tune.</td>
<td>Engaged throughout the whole lesson (25mins). Luke was very keen to participate, which also meant he was needing prompts to listen to others and the teacher. Luke was happy to leave the room and bring his own scan. By the end of the lesson he was successfully putting the ideas and the whole group was engaged with the teacher. Conducting during the session &quot;He really tells the story&quot; while singing the whole song, which was a great pre-cue of the end of the class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Same routine as above. (no video)</td>
<td>Very happy and enthusiastic throughout. Big smiles and enjoying some ideas and getting to know others in the group. Riots from chair in excitement with actions at times. Talkative and interested when prompted.</td>
<td>Keep the first one to follow whatever was being worked on. Confident leading in standing and sitting gently singing &quot;Gold&quot;. Following others’ ideas or not needing encouragement in their songs.</td>
<td>Engaged throughout the whole lesson. Good body language to others when they were sharing individually. Able to join discussion towards end of session over what the next songs would be to have fun. Enjoying the engaging atmosphere.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Warm ups: bells and maracas, rhythm (singing)</td>
<td>Keep group participation for whole session, good body language.</td>
<td>Keep group participation for whole session, good body language.</td>
<td>Engaged from the start and happy to participate until ignited, remained well and undisturbed structure of the session well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Warm ups: using different utensils (e.g. wooden spoon, plastic cup)</td>
<td>Singing in time to the backing track and rhythmic patterns. Luke sang with some shaping of pitch, short lack of expression in the tune.</td>
<td>Engaged throughout the whole lesson. Good body language to others when they were sharing individually. Able to join discussion towards end of session over what the next songs would be to have fun. Enjoying the engaging atmosphere.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Warm ups: using different utensils, singing, exploring visual sounds, actions</td>
<td>Singing in time to the backing track and rhythmic patterns. Luke sang with some shaping of pitch, short lack of expression in the tune.</td>
<td>Engaged throughout the whole lesson. Good body language to others when they were sharing individually. Able to join discussion towards end of session over what the next songs would be to have fun. Enjoying the engaging atmosphere.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summative (end of term) progress (to be added in school assessment summary) to include all areas of learning

- Develops confidence in Autumn and Spring term. Luke has progressed the most since the start of this chart. His teacher experiences include joining groups with other children in the classroom, which are beneficial to his development. His song singing is not yet consistent but he is making progress. Luke is currently developing his language skills, especially recognizing facial expressions. His awareness and consideration of other students has directly influenced this, and it is nice to see him contributing in a positive way. Luke is currently making notes in his class setting, abed in a different table (outside). He has been focused and keen throughout all sessions, particularly improving his fine motor control.

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**Appendix 17 Interview with Thomas October 2020**

**Liz:** OK so I’ve started recording. Just to clarify that this is completely voluntary and it has nothing to do with my role as a deputy head of [school] It is something that I’m doing separate to the school, but I’ve obviously got [headteacher] consent to do the research at school and to approach staff and students and collect the data, but it’s really important to kind of I guess split the difference between my role as deputy and my role as researcher, so this is very much me I’m a researcher so really feel free to say no if it’s not the right time for you or ask any questions.

**Thomas:** Okay, sounds good.

**Liz:** So, I know you showed an interest before, but I don’t think we ever had a conversation because I didn’t get, it was a E as at the time I never got E’s consent. So, where I’m at. I’m actually in year 3 of my research. So, the first year was about looking at different aspects that was important to a student with learning difficulties for developing progress in and so that was a staff interviews and came up with eight areas which was on the holistic chart and sort of for the main part which started in January but turned into a sort of more of a pilot [Phase Two]. So, this is now hoping to be the main part is to get 10 weeks of data to look at how students develop holistically. So, for instance in like music enrichment not just musically but in becoming like more independent by leading some music or developing their social emotional mental well-being that kind of thing. So rather than just assessing them with music levels that it would just become a wider and kind of, so it’s not about arguing the case for say something like music showing progress in those areas because I think it definitely does, it’s about how as a school we capture that progress if that makes sense.

**Thomas:** Yes

**Liz:** I'm not disputing or arguing at all. It just is you know; we're accepting the fact that things like music and dance and all those extra things are amazing for young people in developing their skills. It's just that schools do not capture them very well.

**Thomas:** Yeah

**Liz:** They put them into just music that lesson levels, or they put them into just reading levels and it's so much more than that. So, it would be identifying a student and then basically capturing progress in three areas for ten weeks. So, writing two or three sentences in things like social emotional well-being and music and Independence, linked to their EHCP. So, I’d set up the chart for you, and then you just have to write a comment each week four. Well, it's kind of like 7 to 10 weeks basically the rest of the Autumn term and then we would have hopefully a face-to-face interview at the end of this term or the beginning of next term to kind of go through how that progress was captured.

**Thomas:** Yeah. Sure. That sounds good. Do you want me to nominate the student?

**Liz:** Um yes, so I actually have permission from Olivia who participated last year, and I've got permission from Olivia to continue. But if you would prefer me to approach other students, I'm more than happy to approach other students and then we can take it from there. I don't know if you see Luke. I've got permission from him as well from last year to continue.

**Thomas:** Yeah, great. I've got Luke in the choir

**Liz:** Lovely.

**Thomas:** So, I'm thinking of the people - is it better for someone who I see more? Because there are some students who have two sessions with include, you know, because I've got open orchestra as well with that. Does that help or is it would you rather is just someone to see once a week?

**Liz:** Either's fine Thomas, I think whatever suits you as well what you would find easier

**Thomas:** Okay. Well, if you've got permission for Luke, why don't we do it Luke?

**Liz:** Luke and choir - fantastic.

**Thomas:** Okay, that would be lovely.
Liz: So what I can do is I'll drop in the consent form if you are happy to sign and then I will set up Luke’s chart for choir and then he will just need to set him to target so a musical one and a non-musical one, which will be for the term and they’ll basically fit into his EHCP but once I set up the chart, it will become more explanatory if that makes sense.


Liz: And then there's like an example of sort of how to make the comment. So, like focused on the learning rather than Luke had a nice time today, but you know all that.

Thomas: Yeah, perfect.

Liz: Do you have any questions?

Thomas: No, I mean the main thing I think is if you’re going to prompt me to do the things, I need to do for you. That's fine. That makes it very easy. If you're going to send me things I need to then fill out.

Liz: Yeah.

Thomas: So, if you want me to keep track of things by myself in the meantime other than what I'd be doing with the choir, that's fine. That's the only question really do I need to do anything other than what I normally do in that in the session with Luke or do what you want me to keep like a separate, separate record of what Luke has been doing.

Liz: Yeah, they’ll be a separate record which would be the holistic chart, but I’ll need to set that up to link in with his EHCP outcomes, and then I can't meet with Luke because I can't meet with anyone face to face but it would be really good if you could share Luke's two targets with him because one of the things that came up from the pilot [Phase Two] is that whilst we'd set all these targets with the students for them, we hadn't actually shared them with the students. So, Luke would totally understand what his two targets were once we set so if you could specifically share those two targets with Luke, that would be amazing.

Thomas: Yeah.

Liz: Then each week just make a note, but I'll set up the chart for you. And then what I'll do is probably E-mail you just a sort of how's it going every couple of weeks just to see if you need that to do as well. But and you're also fine to use school time to do it because [headteacher]'s given me permission to interview staff during school time and for them to use the time if they need it to finish the chart if that makes sense to encourage people to participate.

Thomas: good. Yeah. That was great. That all sounds fine.

Liz: Thank you. Is there any other questions?

Thomas: no not at the moment.

Recording stopped; participant thanked.
## Appendix 18 Entry level descriptions of Ben’s current levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry level description (working within)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking &amp; Listening EL1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say the names of the letters of the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and extract the main information from short statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow single-step instructions, asking for them to be repeated if necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make requests and ask straightforward questions using appropriate terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to questions about specific information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make clear statements about basic information and communicate feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and participate in simple discussions or exchanges with another person about a straightforward topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading EL1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read correctly words designated for Entry Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand a short piece of text on a simple subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read simple sentences containing one clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing School Level 9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuate simple sentences with a capital letter and a full stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a capital letter for the personal pronoun ‘I’ and the first letter of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use lower-case letters when there is no reason to use capital letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write the letters of the alphabet in sequence and in both upper and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell correctly words designated for Entry Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate information in words, phrases and simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maths EL1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read, write, order and compare numbers up to 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use whole numbers to count up to 20 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add numbers which total up to 20, and subtract numbers from numbers up to 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise and interpret the symbols +, - and = appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise coins and notes and write them in numbers with the correct symbols (£ &amp; P), where these involve numbers up to 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 12-hour digital and analogue clocks in hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the number of days in a week, months and seasons in a year; be able to name and sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe and make comparisons in words between measures of items including size, length, width, height, weight and capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and recognise common 2-D and 3-D shapes, including circle, cube, rectangle (including square) and triangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use every day positional vocabulary to describe position and direction, including left, right, in front, behind, under and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read numerical information from lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort and classify objects using a single criterion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read and draw simple charts and diagrams including a tally chart, block diagram/graph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 19 Ben’s completed holistic assessment chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Ben</th>
<th>Activity: Violin lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVOL outcomes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term: To develop reading comprehension skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term: Develop reading skills needed in practical situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition &amp; Learning:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term: To gain Entry Level Functional Skills in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term: To gain Entry Level Functional Skills in Maths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term: To complete AGA 98/98 Reading from a menu (Units 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term: To complete AGA 199/99 Writing: Vocational number skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, Emotional and Mental Health:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term: To develop independent living skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term: Ben to increase his assessment so that he can successfully participate in a range of tasks and activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for Ad Hoc:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term: To complete ASDAN PSD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term: Complete ASDAN PSD: Community Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics: To be able to play a response to a given phrase on the violin that is different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic: To be able to show his views uniquely in a group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative (weeks 1) progress</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping and reading rhythms, matching rhythms. Learning a piece with 1st finger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben communicated how much music activity he was doing in this week and appeared extremely excited to be part of the new pitch group. Ben showed enthusiasm for his lesson today. Ben presented parts of the piece independently and showed determination to correct any mistake he had made. Ben played a piece that he had been working on for 2 weeks with form and good control. He listened well and played in tune and with the correct rhythms. Ben was able to play on his own to the rest of the group with confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading rhythms, matching rhythms, concentrating to play with 1st finger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben was more subdued this week, as there was a break over the weekend and another student was absent from lessons. Ben was focused but less verbal. Ben was able to play the first finger piece on his own to the rest of the group. Ben remains a good player, good concentration and his sound is improving. Ben showed persistence and determination to complete tasks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with each and how to conduct a new member in the group (improving using the first finger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben was happy that he had met when I played them up for his lesson, but was more subdued in the group (more with a new addition to the group who is very communicative) Ben concentrated well but was not enthusiastic to play in physical warm-ups, or to use key movements with the voice. Ben was student to play in the group, but with some persuasion played improving using his left finger. Ben continues to listen carefully and play well in tune.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving improvisation rhythms for playing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben was communicative on the way to the lesson (always open and ready) he was particular during the lesson and maintained interest with the teacher. Ben was very content to play a solo, but was very content to play a duet at the end of the lesson. When playing with me, Ben stuck to his own part; played in time with the teacher and showed understanding of the musical structure of the piece. Ben shows a preference for the lower sounds and playing melody taking carefully to his sound. Ben shows a confidence for the lower sounds and playing melody taking carefully to his sound. Ben shows a confidence and assurance in his abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing piece from the Christmas concert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben asked about the possibility of continuing playing the violin when he grew up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben was happy and confident in the violin and not phased by being tested. Ben maintained an independent part throughout the recording. Ben fully understand the structure of the piece and when to play together and when to play independently. He followed the pulse and improved his playing carefully to his contributions. Ben shows a confidence and assurance in his abilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning how to use the second finger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben is still quiet verbally in the group, but more active on the violin from the classroom. Ben showed interest to learn the new notes and experimented on the violin. Ben needed very little guidance to understand how to produce the new notes and was happy to practice independently referring to his playing. Ben picked up a new piece really quickly and was able to copy both the notes and rhythms accurately. Ben is definitely showing that he is ready to take on new challenges.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summative (end of term) progress** (to be added to school assessment system) to include all areas of learning

Ben has continued to show focus and determination in violin lessons. He listens carefully to his sound and is able to copy rhythm patterns, although not always able to identify notes. When making up his own patterns, he prefers to use notes, as he needs to develop strategies to make up of them. Technically, he is progressing well, although his posture needs work. His bow is straight on the string, making a strong sound and his intonation is very good.
Appendix 20 New school levels examples

Example of new School Levels in English reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(Responding, anticipation, reading single word/ symbols/Selecting by exchanging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read and respond appropriately to one symbol/sign given (e.g., when shown symbol of outside, student goes outside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will match symbols to symbols (e.g., matching the same symbols linked to a familiar story)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will anticipate what is going to happen next in well-known texts, for example a familiar story (e.g., laughing in anticipation of an event)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will actively listen and respond to a familiar story being read by an adult (one-to-one or in a small group (e.g., by pointing to a character)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will recognise their own picture from a selection of two.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(Reading two pictures/ 2 events/ Recognise few familiar words/ names/ respond to questions (2 key word).)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read and respond appropriately to a routine/ timetable of two symbols/events (e.g. Now work then leisure)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will match objects to pictures and symbols. (e.g., towel when going swimming; spoon when eating lunch)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read two symbols, during reading activities (e.g., I can see apple and banana)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will recognise familiar names (e.g., class staff and students).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will indicate correctly pictures of characters and objects in response to questions such as ‘Where is (the)...?’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will participate in a dramatic reconstruction of a familiar story, reading a line of 2 symbols/signs/words.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will identify the corresponding prop for a character (e.g., Willy Wonka/top hat, Augustus Gloop/chocolate bar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(Recognise small number of words)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read few letters of the alphabet by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read few letters of the alphabet by sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read 10 familiar blended sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will select and recognise 5 words or symbols linked to a familiar vocabulary (e.g., names, people, objects or actions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read and follow a timetable with activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(recognise words (10)/ and read 3 familiar words by memory + Phonics –blending read words with 2/3 g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read 50% letters of the alphabet by name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read 50% letters of the alphabet by sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will read accurately by blending the sounds in words with two and three known graphemes (e.g., cat = 3 sounds / 3 graphemes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will distinguish between print or symbols and pictures in texts. (e.g., by pointing to words in a shared text as opposed to symbols and pictures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students will select and recognise or read 10 words or symbols linked to a familiar vocabulary (e.g., names, people, objects or actions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Students will predict elements of a text when adult pauses reading.
- Students will respond to texts by answering simple questions that require simple recall.

**GV8 (Read familiar words + phonics+ blending, read words with 5 g)**

- Students will read the letters of the alphabet by name
- Students will read the letters of the alphabet by sound
- Students will read accurately by blending the sounds in words with up to five known graphemes (e.g., stand = 5 sounds /5 graphemes)
- Students will read some common exception words (e.g., The word 'school' has a 'ch' in it but makes a sound like 'k')
- Students will read some familiar words or symbols, including their own names. (e.g., school topics, leisure choices etc.)
- Students will sight read familiar signs in the environment (e.g., exit, toilet, lift)
- Students will use knowledge of letter-sound correspondences to help predict new words when reading.
- Students will read some high frequency words (e.g., a, about, all, an, are, as etc.)
- Students will respond to texts by answering simple questions on what they have just read (e.g., Who did _____?)

**9 (Read and understand simple regular words/ read and understand simple sentences)**

- Students will read and understand simple regular words. (e.g.
- Students will read and understand short simple sentence (e.g., the cat sat on the mat)
- Students will read and understand short texts on familiar topics/ experiences (e.g., poster, TV guide, job advert, restaurant menu)
- Students will read and follow a work plan (written in words).
- Students will read texts on different reading media (e.g., read texts on the whiteboard, computer, kindle, on paper)
- Students will read a variety of short texts (e.g., read texts that explain, read texts that describe etc.)

**10 (Read and respond to questions)**

- Students will read and answer simple literal questions on a variety of texts (e.g., Ones where we can find the answer directly in the text such as ‘What time does the restaurant close?’
- Students will answer inferential questions on a variety of texts (e.g., Ones where the text does not actually tell us, but we can work out the answer by considering the hints, words and clues in the text such as ‘What type of food does the restaurant sell?’
### Example of former P5 Music and new School Level 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P Level 5</th>
<th>School Level 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils take part in simple musical performances</td>
<td>Recognises prominent structural features (e.g., chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They respond to signs given by a musical conductor</td>
<td>Responds to changes in characteristics (e.g., volume, speed/tempo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They pick out a specific musical instrument when asked</td>
<td>Improvises with short familiar musical phrases e.g., Canon in D melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They play loudly, quietly, quickly and slowly in imitation</td>
<td>Responds to cues (visual, auditory or tactile) as to when to stop and when to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They play an instrument when prompted by a cue card</td>
<td>start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They listen to, and imitate, distinctive sounds played on a particular instrument</td>
<td>Incorporates silence in their music e.g., before the start of a piece, or during a piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They listen to a familiar instrument played behind a screen and match the sound to the correct instrument on a table</td>
<td>Performs or improvises as a group, showing listening skills through an awareness of other members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>