

Teachers' perceptions of how to effectively involve pupils in the IEP process

Introduction:

- The SEN Code of Practice (2015), states that:

'Staff working directly with young people should be trained to support them and work in partnership with them, enabling them to participate fully in decisions about the outcomes they wish to achieve.' (DfE & DoH 201, p.33).

- Progress of pupils on the SEN register and in receipt of 'school support' is tracked using Individual Education Plans (IEPs). This research set out to investigate teachers' perceptions of including pupils within this process.

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Research Questions:

How do teachers ensure children feel able to contribute to their own support in school?

How are pupil views recorded during the IEP process?

What methods have proven effective in accessing and reporting pupil voice?

Methodology:

- Case study approach – single umbrella partnership of schools
- Small sample size – purposive convenient sampling strategy
- Interpretivist* standpoint – building a rich picture of participants' experiences – not seeking to generalise findings

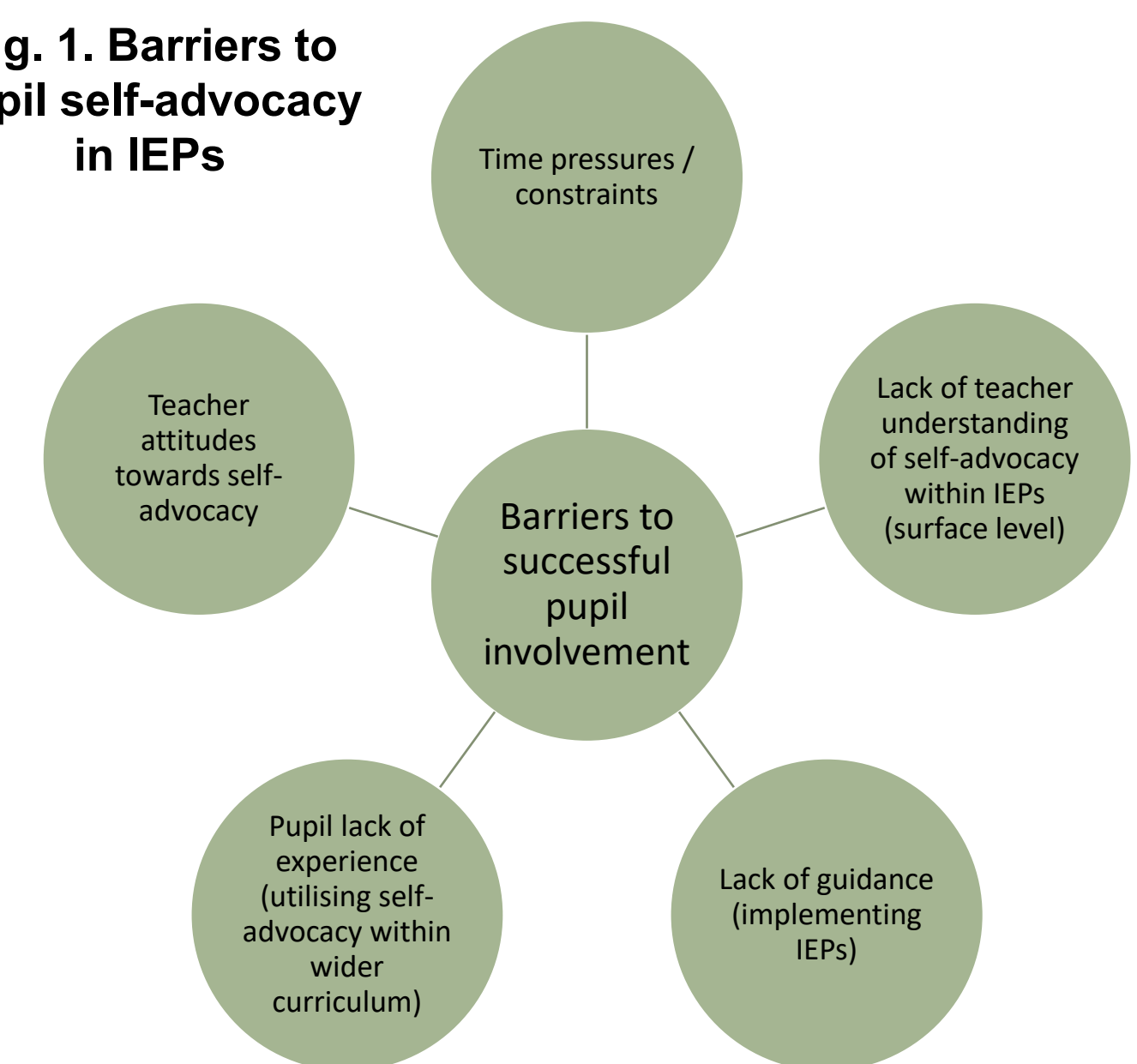
Methods:

- Data gathered from focus groups carried out across 3 primary schools within the South of England.
- Each focus group comprised of 4-6 teachers working directly with students in the IEP process.
- 4 focus groups of 4-6 people (24 people total)

Literature Review:

- A report by Ofsted (2021), into the support processes in place for children with SEND found that there were vastly different experiences for pupils who had similar needs. In some instances, no written support plans were in place, suggesting that the SEND system relies on individual teachers and SENCOs working together effectively.
- Listening to children acknowledges their right to be heard can positively impact how they view and feel about themselves. In actively seeking their views and opinions we can deepen our knowledge of their priorities and interests alongside developing respectful relationships (Dickins, 2011).
- There is difficulty in defining 'pupil involvement' and therefore disparity in what this looks like between schools, from garnering surface level interests to deeper insights and views on targets (Merrick, 2020).
- Strategies for extracting pupil voice are varied and rely upon pupils having experience of actively giving their opinion throughout the year, rather than isolated involvement during IEPs alone. Therefore, a paradox currently exists between affecting pupil participation through the development of good relationships and that of more formal structures and school-wide policies which has resulted in actions remaining tokenistic at best (Merrick, 2020).

Fig. 1. Barriers to pupil self-advocacy in IEPs



'One of the greatest threats to genuine participation is tokenism; unwittingly, or not, adults trivialised children's involvement' (Hart, 1997)

Implications for practice:

- Fulfilling our responsibilities as teachers in strengthening the voices of children with SEND within our current system of reporting remains challenging.
- Barriers to promoting successful self-advocacy include time pressures and lack of opportunity or understanding which can result in more tokenistic reporting of pupil voice.
- The outcomes from this research are to be shared with colleagues and applied within my own practice.

References:

- DfE (Department for Education) and DoH (Department of Health) (2015), *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf (Accessed: 03.01.24).
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- Hart, R. (1997), *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Merrick, R. (2020) 'Pupil participation in planning provision for special educational needs: teacher perspectives', *Support for Learning*, 35(1), pp.101-118.
- Ofsted (2021), *Supporting SEND: a summary for children and young people*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-send/supporting-send-a-summary-for-children-and-young-people> (Accessed 02.04.24).

'Children's involvement also has the potential to be enlightening, and indeed 'empowering', for the pupils themselves. In effect, pupil participation supports better teaching and learning, better outcome for pupils, and helps teachers to do a better job.' (Merrick, 2020)