

Supportive Learning Environments for Autistic Pupils

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My background

30 years working in education

Lived experience of autism

PhD in Psychology - Friendship, Bullying and the Impact of Inclusion on Attitudes towards Autistic Children

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Outline

1. What we know about learning environments for autistic children
2. The effectiveness of a specialist resource base model
3. Teachers' capacity to implement inclusive principles

What we know about learning environments for autistic children

Inclusion policy

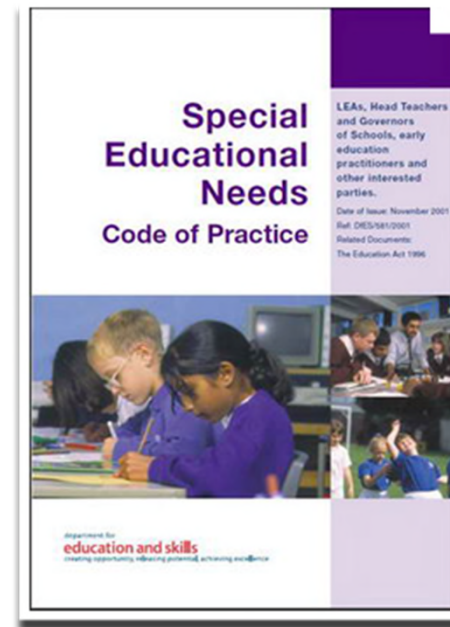


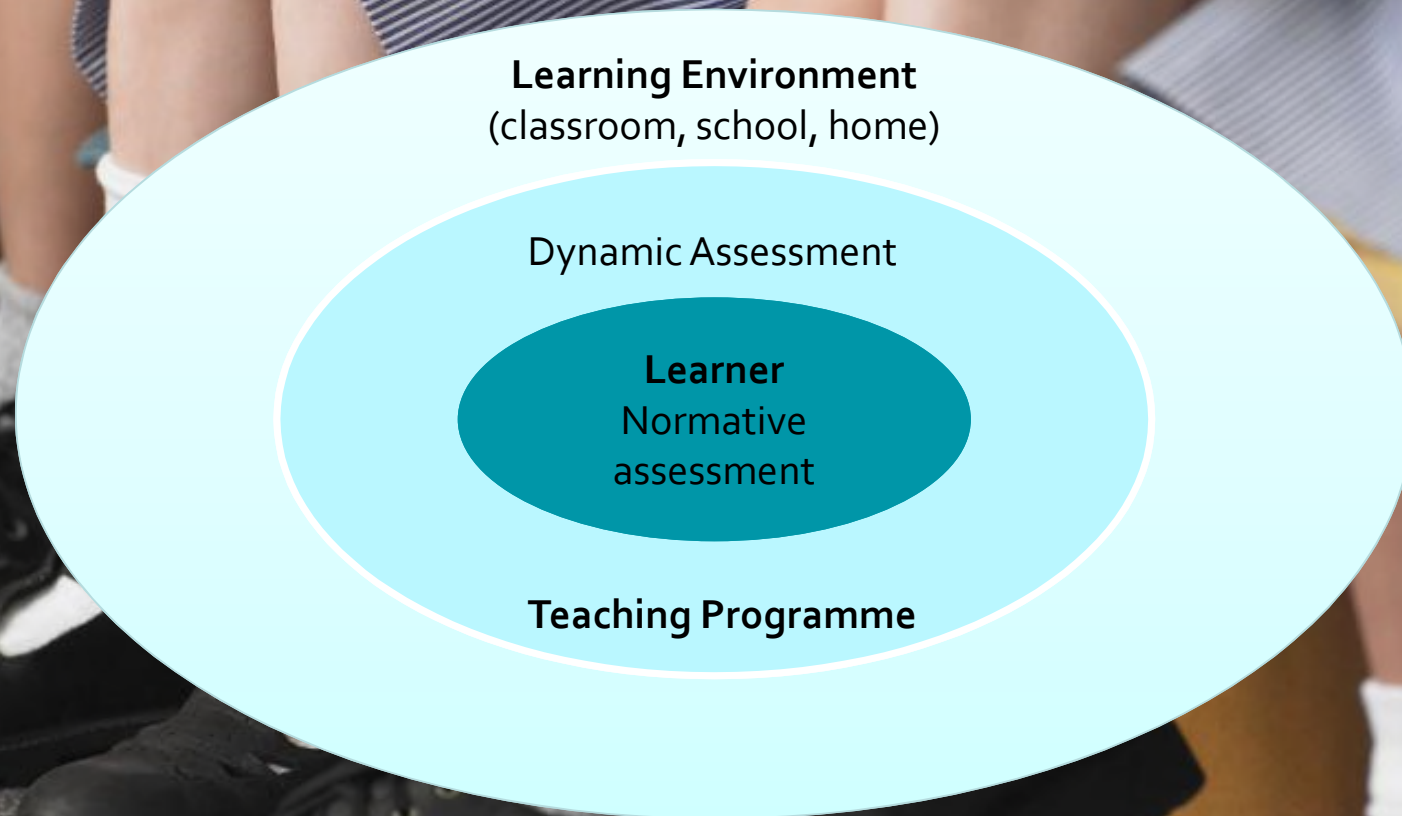
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Report of the Committee of
Enquiry into the Education of
Handicapped Children and
Young People

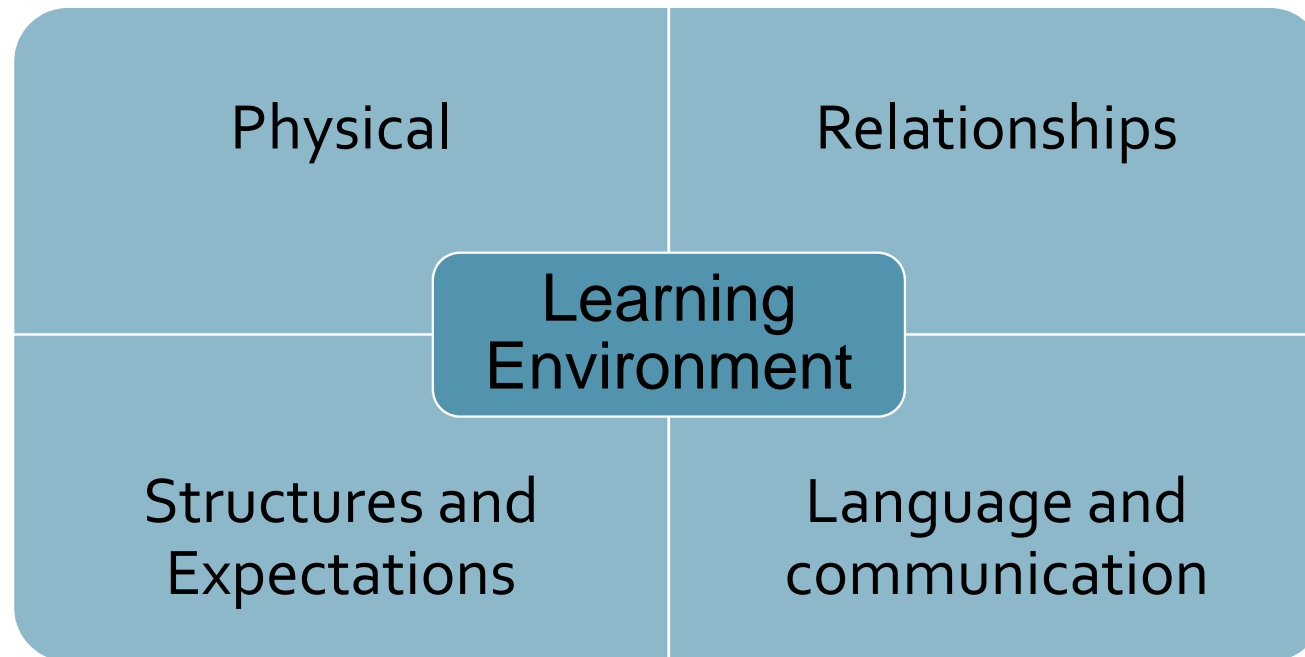
Chairman: Mrs HM Warnock

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education and
Science, the
Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales by
Command
of Her Majesty
May 1978*





Four factors that make up the learning environment



The physical environment

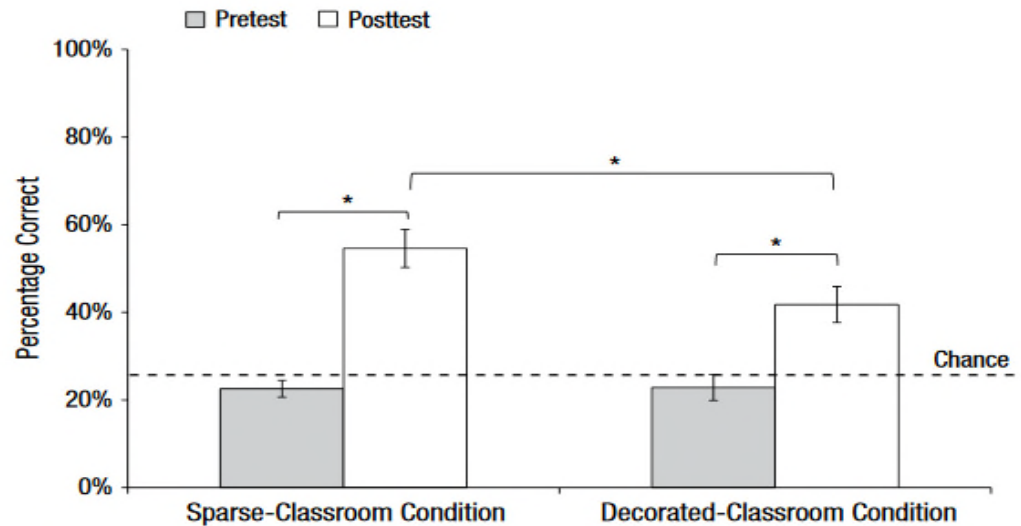


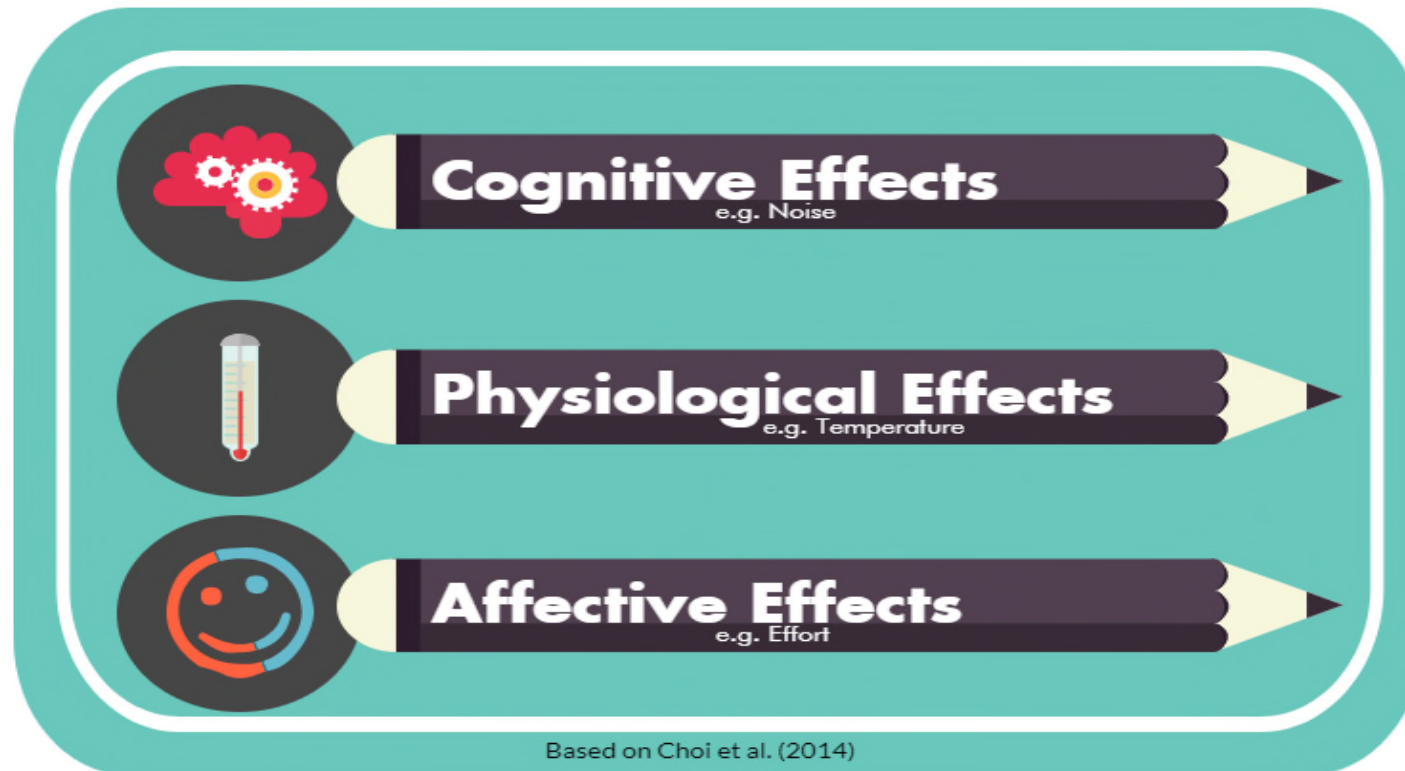
Fig. 4. Percentage of correct answers on the pretest and the posttest as a function of experimental condition. Error bars represent ± 1 SEM. Asterisks indicate significant differences ($p < .01$).

Fisher et al. (2014)



Considerations for autistic pupils

- Painful reactions to light and sound
- Anxiety caused by crowds in corridors (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008)
- Sensory stimuli affecting concentration
- Noise has the largest impact



Relationships in the learning environment

Fostering social/emotional development

- 'Affective' teaching
- Student-centred; attitudes, feelings, beliefs, personal experiences

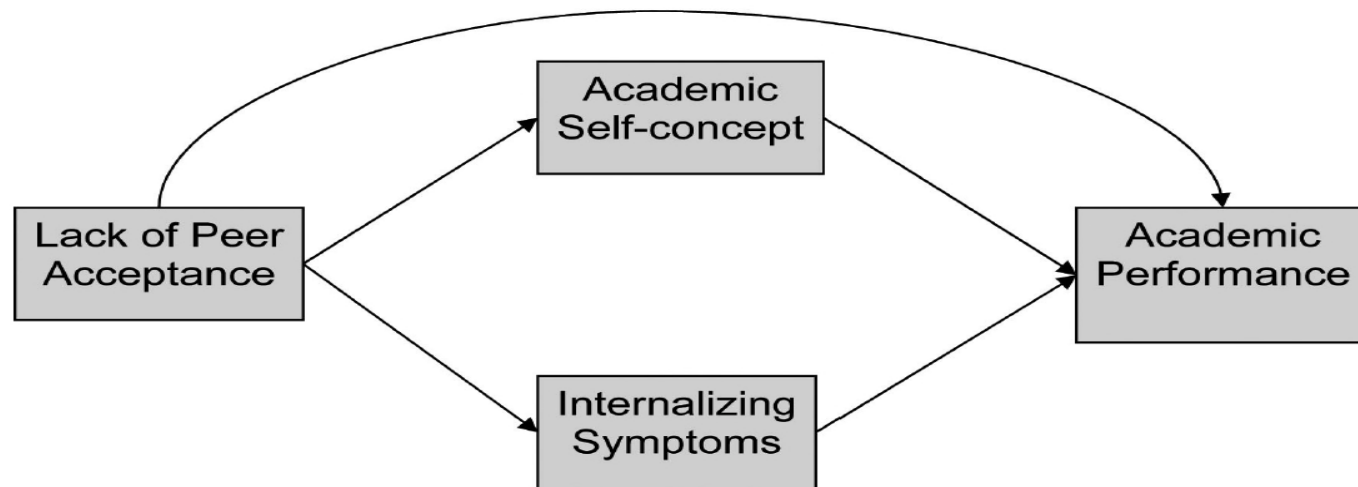
Creating a 'prosocial' classroom

- Teachers' social/emotional competence
- Optimal classroom 'climate' comes from teacher's behaviour

Changing how we communicate and interact

- Our ability to think is tied up with social interaction
- Differences in intentionality
- Willingness to change how we communicate

Peers in the classroom



Good autism practice guidance

Autism Education Trust (2019)

1. Understanding the individual
2. Positive relationships
3. Learning and development
4. Enabling environments

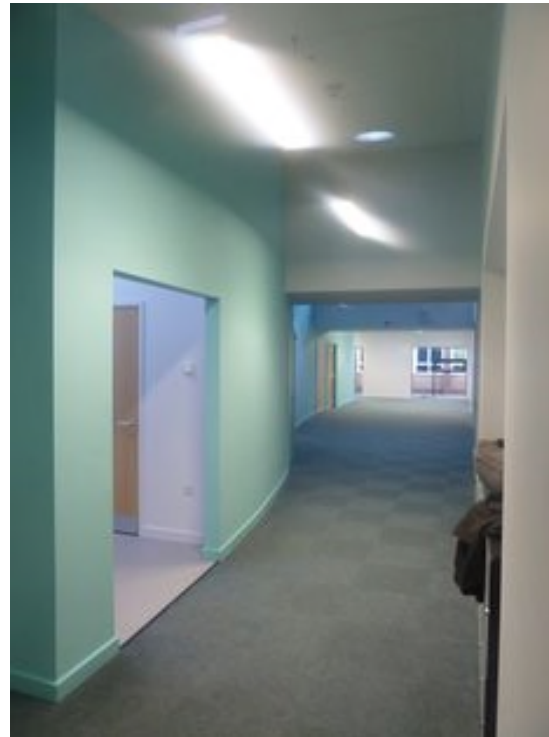
<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/good-autism-practice-guidance>



Research in the social domain

This perspective changes the focus from 'fixing' the person (or trying to normalise them) to removing the barriers and adapting the environment.

National Autistic Society Cullum Centres



Aims of the evaluation

1. To investigate the impact of this model for pupils, families and the wider school
2. To learn lessons on how to implement this approach
3. To determine which elements of the approach can be considered good practice for adoption more widely

Evaluation activities

- Surveys and focus groups with 100 autistic pupils from Years 7-9
- Surveys with non-autistic peers in Years 7-9
- Interviews with autistic pupils, parents and staff (Heads of CC, SENCOs, Specialist Teachers and Teaching Assistants)
- Routine data on attendance, exclusions and progress

1. The impact for pupils, families and the wider school

- Support and resources
- Parental endorsement
- Attendance and exclusions
- Preparation for life after school
- Benefits for autistic girls

"I do come here when I'm overwhelmed as well - when I need, you know, need to let some things off my chest and that, and I find it helps"
(Boy in Year 10 CC)

"He's come on leaps and bounds since he's been here. Middle school he was hiding in the cupboard listening into lessons. Here he goes to every lesson. He's doing really well. He's doing all his GCSEs. He's not cut back on subjects. It's just unbelievable how much progress he's made - which I'd never have seen coming."
(Mother of boy in Year 10)

Mental health and wellbeing outcomes for girls

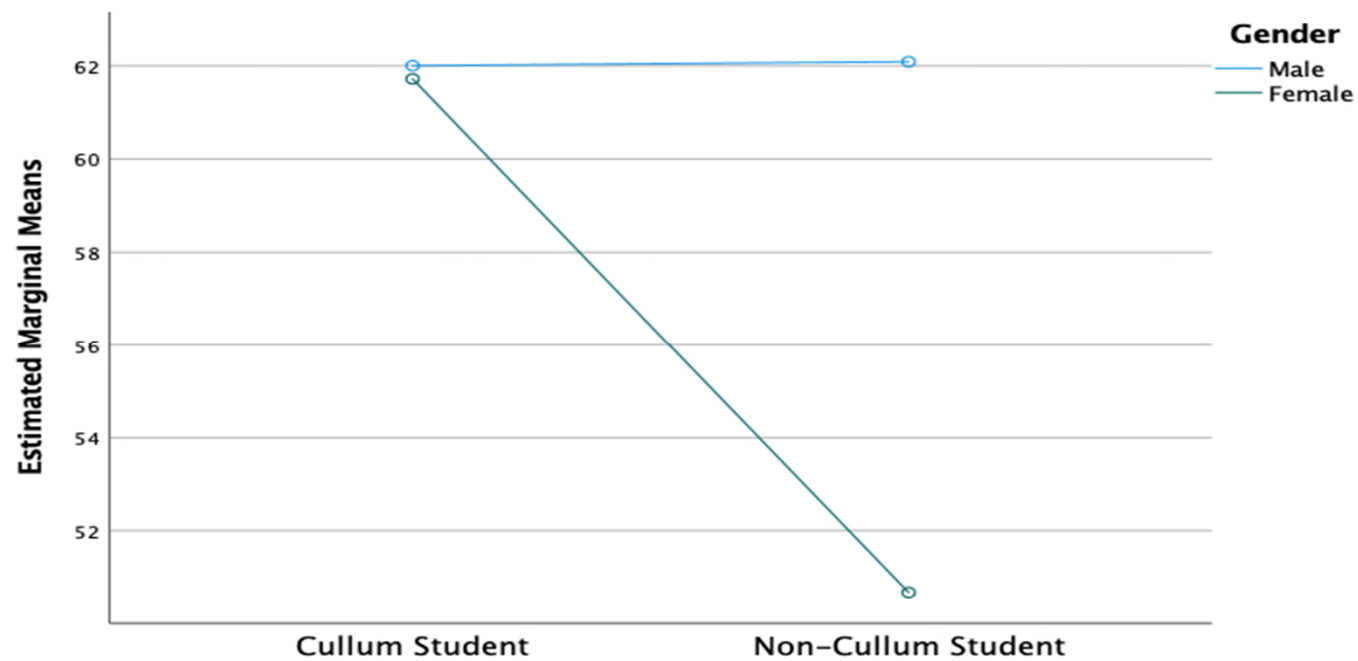


Mental health problems
Victimisation
Aggression

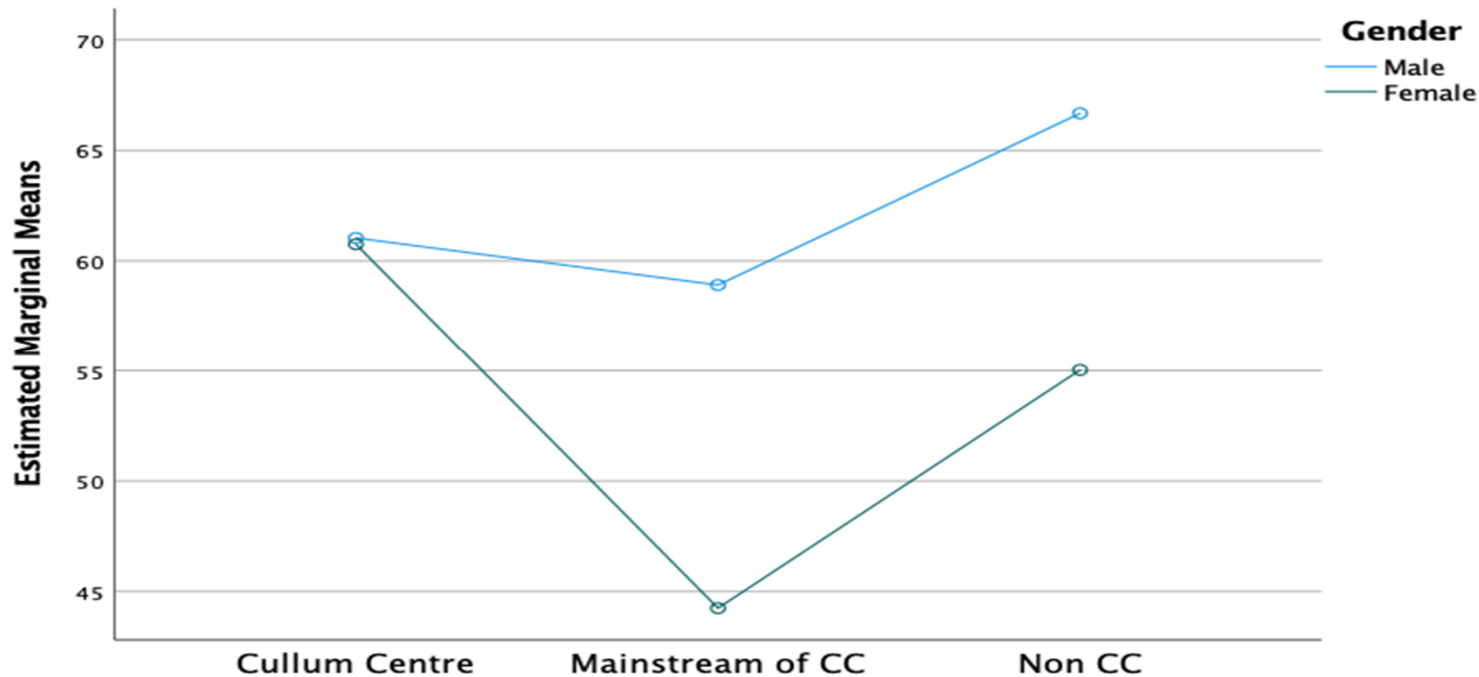


Sense of school belongingness
Friendship quality

Gender difference in sense of school belongingness by school setting



Gender difference in sense of school belongingness by school setting

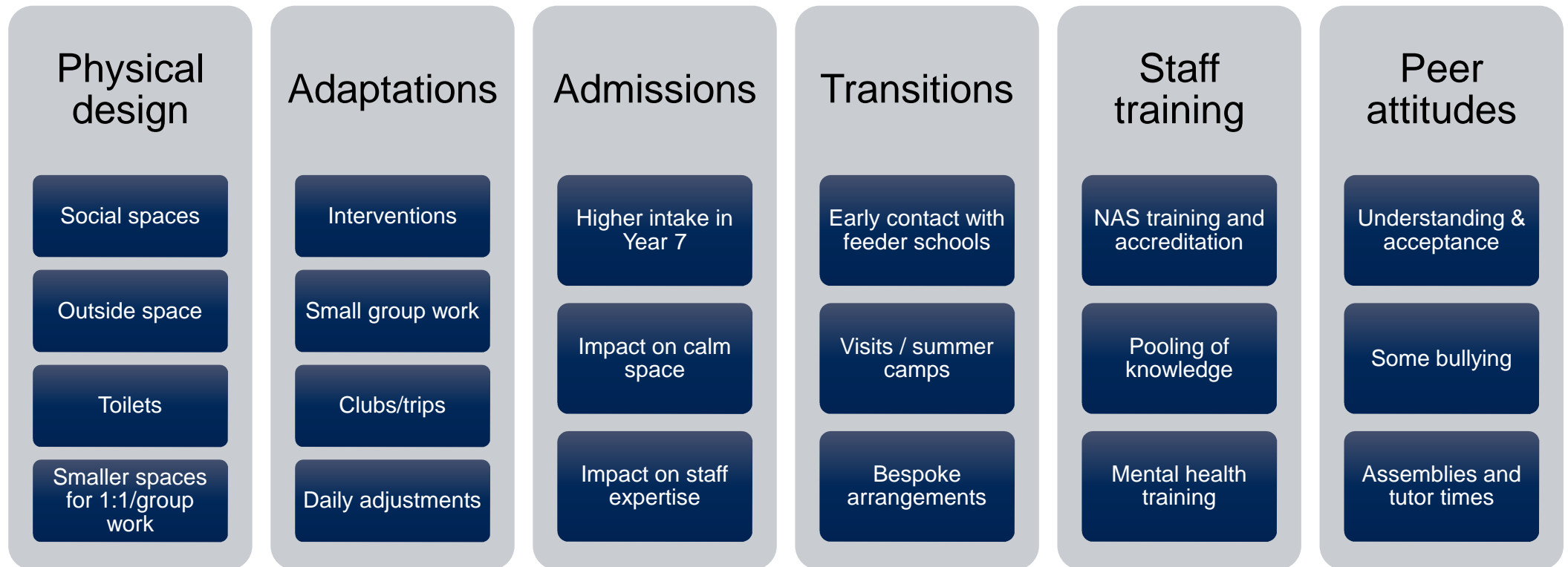


"I used to come every day at break and lunch and I would talk to them and tell them about my day and ask about their day and they would support me"
(Y10 girl CC)

"I don't really get along with most people in the mainstream, I just like to be friends with the few people in the Cullum Centre"
(Y10 girl CC)

- Friendship quality: similar interaction
- Victimisation: similar interaction

2. Learning lessons for how to implement this approach



3. Elements considered good practice for adoption more widely



Future Research Plans:

Conceptualisations of neurodiversity and barriers to inclusive pedagogy for early career teachers



Conceptualisations of neurodiversity

- Conceptualisations of neurodiversity may contribute to capacity/willingness to adapt an inclusive approach
- Conceptualising difference as impairment ➡ less willingness to adapt ➡ impact on mental health
- Reflective thinking promotes change

Conceptualisations of neurodiversity

- Connections between conceptions, reflective thinking and ECTs' capacity to implement inclusive principles
- Perspective of teacher educators
- Co-production groups
- Online resource providing strategies for ECTs and wider school communities

Thank you for listening
Please don't hesitate to get in touch:



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