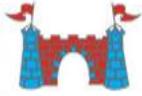


Parental perceptions on the transition to post primary school for their child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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Introduction

In 2008/09, it was estimated that 2,571 pupils with ASD attended mainstream education in Ireland (Parsons et al., 2009). The transition to secondary school is a significant change and life event for a student with ASD. There are many reported factors associated with a positive transition for students with ASD, relating to characteristics of the school and student, the nature of support and social experiences (Dann, 2011). Unfortunately, social isolation, bullying and anxiety commonly feature in a student with ASD experience of secondary school (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008 and Carrington & Graham, 2001). There is limited research into processes for facilitating learning and participation of students with ASD in post primary education (Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000). Parents reported concerns include home /school communications, the change in environment and the nature of support for their child (Dann, 2011). It is acknowledged that students with ASD can be viewed as having a 'distinct need' in terms of educational provision which may not be being met in mainstream education, mainly because of a lack of knowledge and research on how best to meet this need (Humphrey & Lewis 2008).

Aim

This descriptive qualitative study aimed to elicit a parental perspective on the transition to post primary school for their child with ASD in the Irish context.

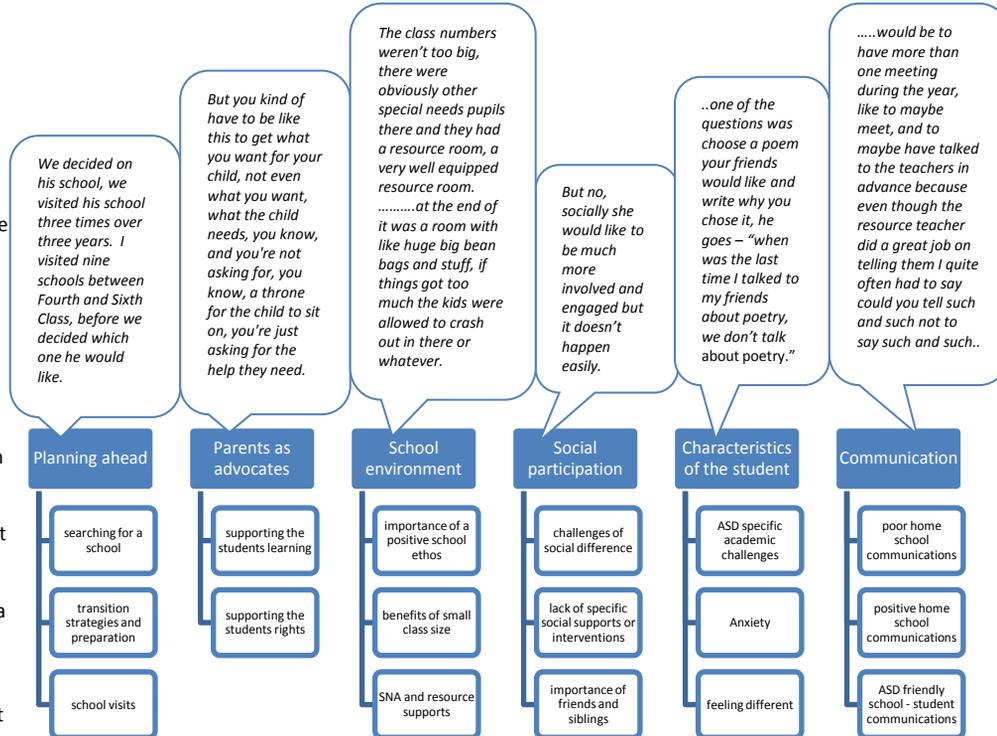
It was designed as the introductory phase to a larger study into the transition to post primary school for students with ASD in Ireland

Method

A purposive sample of six parents of students in mainstream secondary school with a primary diagnosis of ASD were interviewed, in depth, about their perceptions of their child's experience of leaving primary school and starting secondary school. Interviews covered parents perceptions of factors which may have influenced their child's transition and settling into secondary school.

A qualitative description method was used (Sandelowski, 2010) i.e. a straight description of phenomena capturing all the elements of the experiences. Data was inductively analysed using content and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Results are presented as themes and subthemes and grounded in examples from the data.

Results



Conclusion

Parents played a major role in planning and structuring the transition for their child, from carefully selecting the most suitable school, to organising communications and meetings with the school and supporting their children in accessing the curriculum. The school environment and ethos were perceived as important. There was an overall perception that more needs to be done in facilitating schools understanding of the impact of ASD on the child. Every parent reported concerns about their child's social participation in school and their desire for more support of social skills and activities for the students.

Although small, this study has given insights into the parental views on the transition to secondary school in Ireland. It has highlighted the pivotal role that parents play in supporting this transition. More research is required in this area, particularly into the processes of preparation for secondary school, and the factors which may inhibit or support and successful transition.

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