**Education and Childhood Studies: Assessment Report Form**

**Part 1: To be completed by the student and submitted with each piece of assessed work.**

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| Student Number | 452570 | Module Code | EDU6004 |
| Short Title of Assignment | Exploring the wellbeing support mechanisms of children with asd during the transition from primary to secondary school – Part 1 | | |
| Course/Marking Tutor | Module Team | Date of Submission | 27/01/2025 |
| Word Count | 3625 | Feedback Date |  |

***Student statement:*** *In submitting this assignment, I am confirming that I have read and understood the regulations for assessment, and I am aware of the seriousness with which the University regards unfair practice.*

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| **To pass this module all ILOs must be met.** |
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| Criterion | 100-80  Excellent | 79-70  Very good | 69-60  Good | 59-50  Sound | 49-40 Satisfactory | 39-20  Fail | 19-0  Fail |
| **1. Knowledge and application of subject and theories** | Knowledge and understanding of theory are exceptionally detailed and beyond what has been taught. Appreciation of the limits of subject-specific theories demonstrated throughout the work.  Approach to assessment task is clearly, appropriately, and consistently theoretically informed. | Demonstrates an extensive, sophisticated, accurate, systematic theoretical understanding of the subject and a wide range of key theories.  Appropriately selected theoretical knowledge is synergised into the overall assessment task with some appreciation of the limits of subject specific theories. | Shows a sophisticated systematic and accurate understanding of key  subject-specific theories, which are appropriately integrated within the context of the assessment task. | Sound descriptive knowledge of key theories with appropriate application; sometimes balanced towards the descriptive rather than the critical or analytical. | Selection of theory is satisfactory, and terminology, facts and concepts are handled accurately, but application and/or understanding is generalised. | In this assignment some of the theories presented are not appropriate. Terminology, facts, and concepts are presented inaccurately and/or with omissions in key areas. The application and/or understanding demonstrated is limited. | In this assignment there is a lack of relevant  subject-specific theory. |
| **2. Information gathering/ processing** | Uses initiative to seek out new sources of information, evaluates their validity against a broad range of highly relevant information and synthesises and evaluates their validity comprehensively  and with flair. | Selects a broad range of highly relevant information. Demonstrates understanding of the complexity of the information and processes it comprehensively and creatively. | Selects appropriate information and processes it thoroughly with critical evaluation and some creativity. | Selects appropriate information and evaluates and comments on it with some creativity, some readings beyond the set range. | Selects generally appropriate research and primary sources and shows ability to evaluate and comment on them adequately. | The selection of sources/data here is not appropriate to the task and there are not enough evidenced evaluations of readings and research to support the work. | The selection of sources/data here is not appropriate to the task and the evidence gathered is not evaluated systematically. |
| **3. Evaluation of process and the quality of information / data developed** | Evaluates to a high degree complex information and/or data and the inquiry process perceptively and comprehensively using appropriate criteria that are largely  original/self-determined. | Evaluates complex information and/or data and the inquiry process perceptively and comprehensively using appropriate criteria some of which are  self-determined. | Effectively and thoughtfully evaluates information and/or data and the inquiry process, including critique of the techniques used. | Effectively evaluates information and/or data and the inquiry process using prescribed guidelines. | Shows basic evaluation of the inquiry methodology and information and/or data generated. | In this submission, evaluation of process and the information and/or data is incomplete. | The work shows limited or no evaluation of either process or outcomes. |
| **5. Referencing** | Sources used are acknowledged in the text and reference list and used perceptively to support discussion.  Referencing follows a systematic approach, appropriate to the discipline. All elements of individual references are present. | Sources used are acknowledged in the text and reference list and used fluently to support discussion. Referencing follows a systematic approach, appropriate to the discipline. All elements of individual references are present. | Sources used are acknowledged in the text and reference list and used to support discussion. Referencing follows a systematic approach, appropriate to the discipline. All elements of individual references are present. | Sources used are acknowledged in the text and reference list.  Referencing follows a systematic approach, appropriate to the discipline. Most elements of individual references are present. | Sources of information acknowledged but integration between text and reference list is mainly effective. Attempts to follow systematic approach, appropriate to the discipline.  Elements of individual references  are generally complete. | Some sources of information are acknowledged here but links between text and reference list are unclear. Referencing does not follow a systematic approach. Elements of individual references are incomplete and/or absent. | Little or no acknowledgement of sources of information in text and/or reference list in this submission. |
| **6. Clarity of objectives and focus of work (*Research focus is con*solidated *and supported through the development of literature*)** | This work defines appropriate objectives in detail and addresses them consistently, logically, coherently, comprehensively and with exceptional creativity, showing sophisticated interpretation of complex ideas. | This work defines appropriate objectives in detail and addresses them comprehensively, logically, coherently and with creativity, interpreting complex ideas clearly. | This work defines appropriate objectives and addresses them coherently and logically throughout the work with creativity while engaging with complex ideas. | This work outlines appropriate objectives and addresses them in a logical and coherent manner which gives a focus to the work with some creativity. | This work uses generalised objectives to provide adequate but limited focus to the work. Overall, logical, and coherent but with limited creativity. | In this piece of work objectives are not appropriate and/or clearly identified – focus is not logical or coherent. | In this piece of work no objectives are identified, and the submission lacks focus and coherence. |
| **7. Selecting research methods (Relationship between method chosen and the nature of the inquiry)** | Methodology selected is effective and appropriate to the aims and objectives of the task and allows for the effective collection and recording of complex data. A convincing, self-determined, and perceptive rationale for the selection of this methodology is provided. | Methodology selected is effective and appropriate to the aims and objectives of the task and allows for the effective collection of complex data. A thorough, convincing, and perceptive rationale for the selection of this methodology is provided. | Methodology selected is effective and appropriate to the aims and objectives of the task and a perceptive rationale for its selection is provided. | Methodology chosen is appropriate to the task and attention given to the selection of a methodology from the range of prescribed ones. | Methodology used is appropriate to the task and brief rationale offered refers to established guidance. | In this piece of work the choice of methodology and relationship to information and/or data being collected is confused and confusing. | In this piece of work the issue of methodology is not addressed and/or an inappropriate methodology is selected. The planning rationale is unclear. |
| 19. Clarity of expression (incl. accuracy, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and numeracy) | Fluent and accomplished writing, appropriate to assignment. grammar, spelling, and numeracy are highly accurate. | Fluent writing, appropriate to the assignment. grammar, spelling, and numeracy are accurate. | Language generally fluent and expressive. grammar, spelling, and numeracy accurate. | Meaning is clear but language not always used fluently. grammar, spelling and/or numeracy is mainly accurate. | Understandable and clear meaning, but language choices include errors which detract from the argument. Accuracy of spelling, punctuation, grammar and numeracy allows understanding but needs to be improved. | In this piece of work the meaning is often unclear with frequent errors in grammar, spelling, and or numeracy | In this piece of work, the meaning is unclear throughout. Errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and/or numeracy make interpretation challenging for an assessor. |

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Dissertation Part 1

Exploring the wellbeing support mechanisms of children with asd during the transition from primary to secondary school.

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27/01/2025

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# Introduction

In this dissertation project, the focus will be surrounding different aspects of the transition from primary to secondary school in the UK sector, specifically for those with autism going into mainstream settings. The primary aspect that will be explored is how this transition is currently being facilitated, importantly by whom, and is this currently being done successfully. As well as this, it is incredibly valuable to analyse other factors in this transition, such as friendships, bullying, isolation and routines.

ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), is a heterogeneous neurodiversity, which can have a range of consequences in a child’s life. This means that ASD is a disability that can appear in a variety of ways, therefore ‘one-size-fits-all’ procedures or training has potential to have a detrimental impact on children. As a result, the transition to secondary school for children with ASD is most effective when planned on an individual basis. That being said, it is important to recognise that policies and procedures should also exist prior, but should be adaptable to each child. This also coincides with puberty for many children, which makes it even more complex and important to facilitate effectively (Tobias, 2009; Dillon and Underwood, 2012).

This paper aims to utilise the research of many leading academics, in particular by examining what has been discussed most recently, as the last half-decade has involved the COVID-19 pandemic and a new government. Moreover, despite quite narrow current research in this area, research does illuminate a variety of perspectives from different stakeholders that are involved in an autistic child’s transition, therefore it is important that this project uses the ideas of parents, teachers and the child themselves where ethically possible.

# Literature Review

Despite the infamous primary to secondary school transition being common practice in the UK for nearly a century, it is a relatively new concept to examine the impact this has specifically on children with autism, therefore making research limited and very narrow (Neal and Frederickson 2016; Bagnall *et al.*, 2021; Whelan *et al.*, 2021; Birkett *et al.*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023; Yates *et al.*, 2023), and the research that does currently exist is often contradictory (Neal and Frederickson, 2016). This is due to policy changes within education as part of the Equality Act (2010), which has outlined that those with disabilities should not be discriminated against, and that schools should do their best to make appropriate accommodations. Moreover, research can often be seen to over-emphasise the negatives surrounding transition, while children with ASD can experience a positive transition to secondary school (Richter *et al.*, 2022; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). Contention also remains regarding the most effective ways of supporting autistic children in their transition to secondary school, which is contributed to the varying needs of children with autism, and how an individualised approach should be taken (Whelan *et al.* 2020; Whelan *et al.*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023). The heterogeneity of autism also means that it is not useful to group it with neurotypical children, nor children with other forms of SEND, as will be discussed in this literature review, as well as the impact on these children when poor transition is evident, potentially leading to it impacting themselves, their families and peers. Therefore, in this literature review, the focus will be on examining current support mechanisms, the impact that positive or negative transition can have on children with ASD, as well as those around them.

Impact on child and family

While the discussion section of this dissertation will include a debate whether, or not, transition is typically a positive or negative part of an autistic child’s education, it is crucial to outline some consequences poor transition may have on children. Firstly, transition, whether positive or negative, will disrupt the child’s routines in some way and cause an emotional impact on them, as breaks in routines are exceptionally challenging for autistic people (Birkett *et al.*, 2022; Code *et al.*, 2022; Yates *et al.*, 2023), which is why they will be introduced in this literature review.

The most crucial area surrounding the impact on children with autism during transition, is the consequences it can have on the child’s attainment (Whelan *et al.*, 2021; Richter *et al*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023; Yates *et al.*, 2023; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). The main reason these children are in the situation of moving to secondary school, is for their education, so allowing children to progress further in this new environment is very important to all stakeholders. Despite this, Whelan *et al.* (2021) highlight that this has not yet been studied or compared extensively or been the focus of any previous research. Comparing changes in attainment between neurotypical and autistic children is quite surprising, as there is a typical trend of dips in attainment upon starting secondary school for neurotypical children because of a lack of continuity in content, however, depending on the individual, attainment for autistic children typically does not dip as significantly, and often evidenced to improve academically as the information either is not new or it is more engaging (Whelan *et al.*, 2020; Richter *et al.*, 2022; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). While these trends are interesting, due to varying methods of research across these studies, in particular, each one focusing on different areas of the curriculum, a definitive trend can never perfectly describe the experiences of the individuals.

The most researched area of transition for autistic children, is how it can impact them socially and emotionally. For many children experiencing the move to secondary school, they found that their relationships with their peers and maintaining or forming friendships was a large factor in how they experienced this transition (Dillon and Underwood, 2012; Bagnall et al.*,* 2021; Birkett *et al.*, 2022; Richter *et al.*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023). When strong friendships and relationships with peers is not evident, children often experience isolation which has a detrimental effect on their lives both in and out of the school environment (Birkett *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, a staggering volume of participants in these studies highlighted experiences of bullying, which similarly was seen to impact on their school and home life (Dillon and Underwood, 2012; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023).

As a result, there is a need to acknowledge the detriment that these factors can have to the mental health and well-being of autistic children experiencing the transition to secondary school. There is plenty of evidence in research using the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, that suggests there is the possibility of poor transition leading to extensive issues with their mental health and well-being (Dillon and Underwood, 2012; Neal and Frederickson, 2016; Bagnall *et al.*, 2021; Whelan, *et al.*, 2021; Birkett *et al.*, 2022; Code *et al.*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023; Yates *et al.*, 2023; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). This is partly attributed to the previously outlined area of peer-relationships and these consequences, however much of the issues surrounding mental health problems post-transition, often are pre-existing conditions, that can either be linked or unrelated to autism , or the anxiety of going to a new school continuing throughout their time in secondary school (Neal and Frederickson, 2016; Whelan *et al.*, 2021; Birkett *et al.*, 2022; Code *et al.*, 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023; Yates *et al.*, 2023; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). This is why it is vital for effective support to be provided for autistic children going to secondary school, so that minimal disruption occurs before, during and after their transition.

Due to a lack of research directly with children with ASD, lots of the perspectives around transition to secondary school is given from other stakeholders, commonly the mothers (Neal and Frederickson, 2016; Birkett *et al.,* 2022; Code *et al.*, 2022; Richter *et al.*; 2022). As a result, a wealth of knowledge can be found regarding the effects of the new environment into their homelife by someone who knows them extremely well, but it also gives us insight into how this challenging time can impact on the parents and families. The largest way that this impacts the parents, is that many parents have heightened anxiety and stress from facilitating their child’s transition and being the support system for when they finish their school day (Yates *et al.*, 2023; Whelan *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, some studies did highlight that there could also be a negative impact on the family’s relationships with each other, some stating that the parents begin to have issues in their relationship, and others state that siblings are hesitant to interact as closely as they had done prior (Yates *et al.*, 2023). Alternatively, Neal and Frederickson (2016), suggest that having a sibling or parent that went to the same secondary school both helped the family unit to bond and minimise anxiety all round for the change. Evidently, when transition is poor, this makes it even more crucial that the transition is facilitated effectively, and that there is some sort of pastoral care in place to ensure a balance in school and at home.

Supporting transition

Another component to examine in the transition to secondary school is the effective facilitation and resources of support. This is challenging to confirm how or when this should be done to benefit the children and other stakeholders involved (Bagnall *et al.*, 2021). The primary support mechanism in place that many children are able to access are transition days (Whelan *et al.*, 2020; Bagnall *et al.*, 2021; Code *et al.,* 2022; Strnadova *et al.* 2023). This entails children with additional needs being given the opportunity to go to the secondary school environment before the first day, potentially also when there are less students on the campus, in order to become accustomed to the new environment before their first day. This may involve mock-up lessons, and meeting members of staff they could encounter while at school, including teachers and support staff. Children and parents alike comment on what a useful day this is for children in easing their anxieties, as many view secondary school as a very scary place (Strnadova *et al.*, 2023).

Arguably the most effective way of supporting transition for children with autism is to keep a strong line of communication between the parents and the school (Tobias, 2009; Dillon and Underwood, 2012; Bagnall *et al.*, 2021; Code *et al.,* 2022; Strnadova *et al.*, 2023). This again links to the fact that effective support looks very different for different children with autism, therefore the best tool is to utilise the adults that know their needs and routines the best. Being in touch with the school and specific members of staff was argued by Tobias (2009) to ease parental concerns, and support their children, and was described to be a comfortable interaction for some. However, Dillon and Underwood (2023) argue that it Is vital to recognise that this should be in balance, as some parents report a challenging endeavour to get their voices heard , while too much communication can also overwhelm parents. While challenging, it is undeniable that this balance should be formed from the beginning of their time at the school and carried out throughout.

Even though this sounds straightforward, there are several challenges that come to ensuring that these are in place. Primarily, there is an argument over who the responsibility lies on to make specific arrangements for children with autism (Strnadova *et al*, 2023), often leading to reverting back to the universal model which has already been discussed as problematic. Moreover, many mainstream schools lack specific training on children with autism, and how to effectively support them joining the school (Tobias, 2009; Dillon and Underwood, 2012). However, it is worth highlighting that these studies, while still hold great validity in the field, the age of the studies mean that this is likely to have changed with differences in society and expectations of teacher professionals.

# Methodology

In Part 2 of this dissertation, the primary focus will be on analysing the current research in the field of supporting children with autism with their transition into secondary school, and how this can impact on these children as well as those around them. It will also introduce some specific examples of resources and strategies that are in use so that they can be examined to show if they are effective and what characteristics or traits it would benefit. Therefore, there will be an emphasis around weighing out the strengths and limitations of these studies. Based off this information and what has been discussed prior in the literature review, it will suggest an effective resource that can help to facilitate the transition to secondary school, that continues to adapt the individualised approach that is effective for people with ASD. In previous research, there is no studies that pinpoint what is effective in supporting transition, while remaining critical of the basis of the resource, therefore this would aim to give guidance to professionals in the primary and secondary school what they can do to facilitate the transition effectively, and how they can empower the families and children during the challenging time.

Research questions

The first research question is an overarching question that should be considered in with all the following research questions. This question asks 1) *‘what does positive and negative transition to secondary school look like for children with autism?’* With this in mind, it will provide a more sophisticated understanding when researching what is effective, as this will provide a rough definition to begin with.

The next question is continuing on from the literature review in this section to answer 2a) *‘what support mechanisms are currently available for children with autism?*’ This question will include an analysis of what currently exists to support autistic children during transition, as well as what research proposes would be useful for this situation. This leads on to the secondary part of this research question that ask, 2b) ‘*how effective are current support mechanisms?’*

The final question asks, 3) ‘*what is the impact of transition on children with autism and other stakeholders?’* This will extend from what has previously been discussed in this literature review but will be reviewed more critically and asked in association with the other questions to provide a comprehensive understanding and discussion around effectively supporting children with autism during their transition.

Systematic literature review

The research portion of this dissertation will take the form of a systematic literature review, using predominantly qualitative data. While it is challenging to define a systematic literature review as there is a broad range of approaches and outcomes that are possible, Booth *et al.* (2022) suggests that a good systematic literature review should guide readers through the research that is being used. It should communicate what that piece of research suggests, why it is relevant to your study, and a critical perspective on its accuracy, as well as the strengths and weaknesses that are either evidence, or implied based on the other research that features in the review. This benefits the research aims as this form of research should then facilitate the discussion on what is the most effective strategies for transitioning to secondary school, which will then strengthen the effectiveness of the resource made.

The structure of this systematic literature review will start with Cohen, Manion and Morison (2018) approach of organising the discussion by in order of the research questions that are being discussed. This is beneficial as it makes it clearer of outcomes of comparison and linking together perspectives from different pieces of literature. It is then important that following this, there will then be a discussion that brings together what has been discovered through these comparisons, in order to complete the systematic literature review with a comprehensive overview of the issues being raised.

They also suggest the use qualitative methods, which means gathering thoughts and responses to an idea or approach and comparing them to understand and answer specific questions. The reason it is important for this research to use qualitative instead of quantitative answers is due to the nature of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and the diversity of thoughts, feeling and interactions, a number can never encapsulate this effectively. Moreover, it allows for a more detailed discussion surrounding how they are impacted by the transition to secondary school, which is crucial for this research.

Due to the secondary nature of this research, there is limited ethical concern, which is therefore why it has been approved by the university to be carried out. The main issue surrounded by ethics for secondary research is outlined by Suri (2020), who encourages researchers to be mindful to prevent inappropriate use, or the introduction of bias into the review. While often it is tempting to bend what certain articles discuss to benefit the research, it is essential that their words, perspective and research be used how they intended it to be.

Data selection and management

The data that is used in the systematic literature review needed to be relevant and beneficial to my research. Primarily, the research that will feature in this are from reputable studies that are either peer-reviewed journal articles or chapters in books. This is an important part of collecting data as it both needs to be accurate to maintain the accuracy in this study, but it also needs to have been collected in the first place ethically and approved by an ethics committee. This is even more relevant for this research because of the vulnerable nature of some autistic children. Where possible, to ensure the validity of the data further, there was care taken to ensure that the article was either citated many times or from well-known journals or publishers, rather than finding dissertations or more abstract studies that could lack some accuracy.

To find this data, there was a few software that was used to search for them. The first place that was searched was the *Bath Spa University Library* portal using the advanced search option, which allows for the sorting and filtering of certain criteria to be specific to this study. This involved the key search terms that will be outlined in this methodology, as well as by date to ensure as much current information was accumulated as possible. Similarly, there was an attempt to look at the physical books in this library, however there were more relevant sources found digitally. The next place would by using the *Google Scholar* search engine to ask specific questions or terms that would be useful to have answered in this research. While there is often an issue surrounding access to articles, it remains useful for efficiently gathering literature. The other software that was used for finding data is called *Connect Papers* and is an effective way of finding what literature has been cited in previous papers that had been find. This was another efficient method to finding more relevant literature.

In order to store the research that has been accumulated, the software *Zotero* has been used because it can systematically organise the papers, as well as speed up processes such as finding the attached paper and referencing. It has also been used for adding tags of specific topics so that there is minimal time re-reading literature, therefore identifying which articles to use when quicker.

Search Criteria

To identify the relevant research that would be used in this dissertation, these are the search terms that were used:

1. Children with ASD/Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder
2. Transition to secondary school
3. Support/Supporting
4. Wellbeing
5. Impact
6. Family

After reading the papers that were found using the search terms, these are the questions that were asked to form the criteria that was used to identify further if they were relevant to this research. If the answers to all or most of these were yes, they were included:

1. Are the children in this study transitioning into a mainstream secondary school setting (whether this is from a mainstream or SEND primary school)?
2. Is it set in England or the UK? If not, does it still apply to the English secondary school?
3. Have the children experienced the transition to secondary school yet?
4. Does it use the perspective of someone directly involved in the transition (parent, teacher or child)?
5. Does it discuss support mechanisms for the transition?
6. Does it detail the impact transition has on pupil wellbeing?
7. Is the research qualitative?
8. Is the research peer-reviewed?
9. Does it link to my research questions or aims?

# Summary

In this beginning part of this dissertation, there has been a general outlining of how to facilitate positive transition to the secondary school environment for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as providing limited outcomes that are possible for when transition is done poorly. It has also begun to critically analyse these factors and compare their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the research aims, however this will be done far more extensively in the following section, leading to guidance for future professionals who have involvement in the transition to secondary school to use for both themselves in the school environment, but also to provide insight for parents or carers on what they can appropriately do to benefit the facilitation of their child’s transition, while continuing the balance as previously discussed, on opening the line of communication, but preventing it from becoming a one-sided act for the family. It will also evaluate whether transition to secondary school is all negative, or if there is potential for the transition experience to be positive for some, and a chance for controlled freedoms, and to learn a larger breadth of subjects that are new and exciting to them. Above all, it is vital to recall in both sections of this dissertation, that children with ASD who experience transition are extremely varied based on both the types of autism traits they possess, and the individual’s personality.

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1. Appendices

Link to [ethics](https://bathspaonline-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/personal/jeana_stephens22_bathspa_ac_uk/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B4C4E4EE4-68AE-4BD8-9851-E3D503993EF4%7D&file=Template%20for%20Dissertation%20Ethics%20form%20including%20DMP-%20Scondary%20Research.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true) submission

Link to [research proposal](https://bathspaonline-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/personal/jeana_stephens22_bathspa_ac_uk/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BAF3F286F-495D-4E63-833D-CD7E3E405ADD%7D&file=Template%20for%20Research%20Proposal%20EDU6004_7%20%20-%20Copy.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true)