

**A research project examining the participation of children and young people
in special educational needs decisions**

Project Aims:

The aim of this ESRC-funded research project is to examine how children's rights are being promoted in the area of special educational and additional support needs. The research is being conducted by two teams, one based at the University of Edinburgh and one at the University of Manchester. Further information is available at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/centres-groups/creid/projects/autonomy-rights-sen-asn-children>

Parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs have for some time had a right to have a say in their child's education. But there has been an increasing emphasis on ensuring that the views of children and young people themselves are reflected in the educational decisions which are taken. This research aims to explore the extent to which children and young people with these needs are being given opportunities to participate in everyday decisions about their education and also in disagreement resolution processes. The research will provide information, in the context of special educational needs, on:

1. the strategies used by schools and local authorities to engage children and young people in educational decision-making;
2. children's and young people's views on their involvement in decision-making relating to their education;
3. parents/carers' views on the extent to which their children are active participants in the decision-making process;
4. factors which promote or inhibit the ability of children's and young people's views to be heard and taken into account.

Research with schools and local authorities:

In order to further understand the issues highlighted above, and as part of our research, we intend to carry out eight case studies within each of three local authorities in England. Within each authority, we would like to engage with children and young people with SEN/D in different family/care and school contexts. As part of each case study, we would also like to talk to parents and carers and up to two significant professionals that are involved in their child's education and support. All participation will be voluntary and with a guarantee of anonymity.

Each case study will involve the following research activities:

Interviews and observations with children and young people with special educational needs.

A member of our research team, trained in participatory research with vulnerable children and young people, would like to engage with selected pupils in research activities that explore factors affecting the exercise of rights of participation and redress. Proposed activities will be planned in conversation with the setting in order to ensure that these are sensitive to the prospective child's or young person's age, type of difficulty and learning environment. For example, a digital camera or art-based activity might be used to prompt discussion about a child's or young person's life and opportunities for autonomous decision making. Alternatively, the researcher might present a vignette that illustrates successful and unsuccessful attempts to involve children and young people in decision making as a means to support further discussion. Sign language interpreters or assistive communication technologies will also be used where necessary and expert advice will be provided by colleagues in the Moray House School of Education's Scottish Sensory Centre and Call Scotland (Communication and Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities).

Interviews with adults and significant others

We would also like to contrast the views of children and young people with those of adults who are involved in SEN provision and support. Therefore we intend to examine adults' views of children and young people's capacity to exercise choice, and to consider the ways in which disagreements between adults and children/young people are resolved as part of semi-structured interviews with a parent and up to two significant others. (For example, a teacher, educational psychologist or parent partnership officer.) During the interview we would also like to discuss how children and young people's rights shape, and are shaped by, educational systems.

Interviews with significant others will be planned in advance and in accordance with the operational needs of the setting. Parents will be contacted separately and these interviews will take place at the child or young person's home or more convenient location. All data collected during the course of the project will remain confidential and the names of participants will only be known to project team members.

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about this project. For further information about the project please contact Professor Neville Harris or Dr Gail Davidge:

AutonomyProject@manchester.ac.uk