

# Exploring experiences of educational transitions for pupils on the autism spectrum

Hanna Kovshoff, Sarah Parsons, Jessica Baker, Keri Hoy, Felix Perkes, Ellie White on behalf of the ACoRNS network



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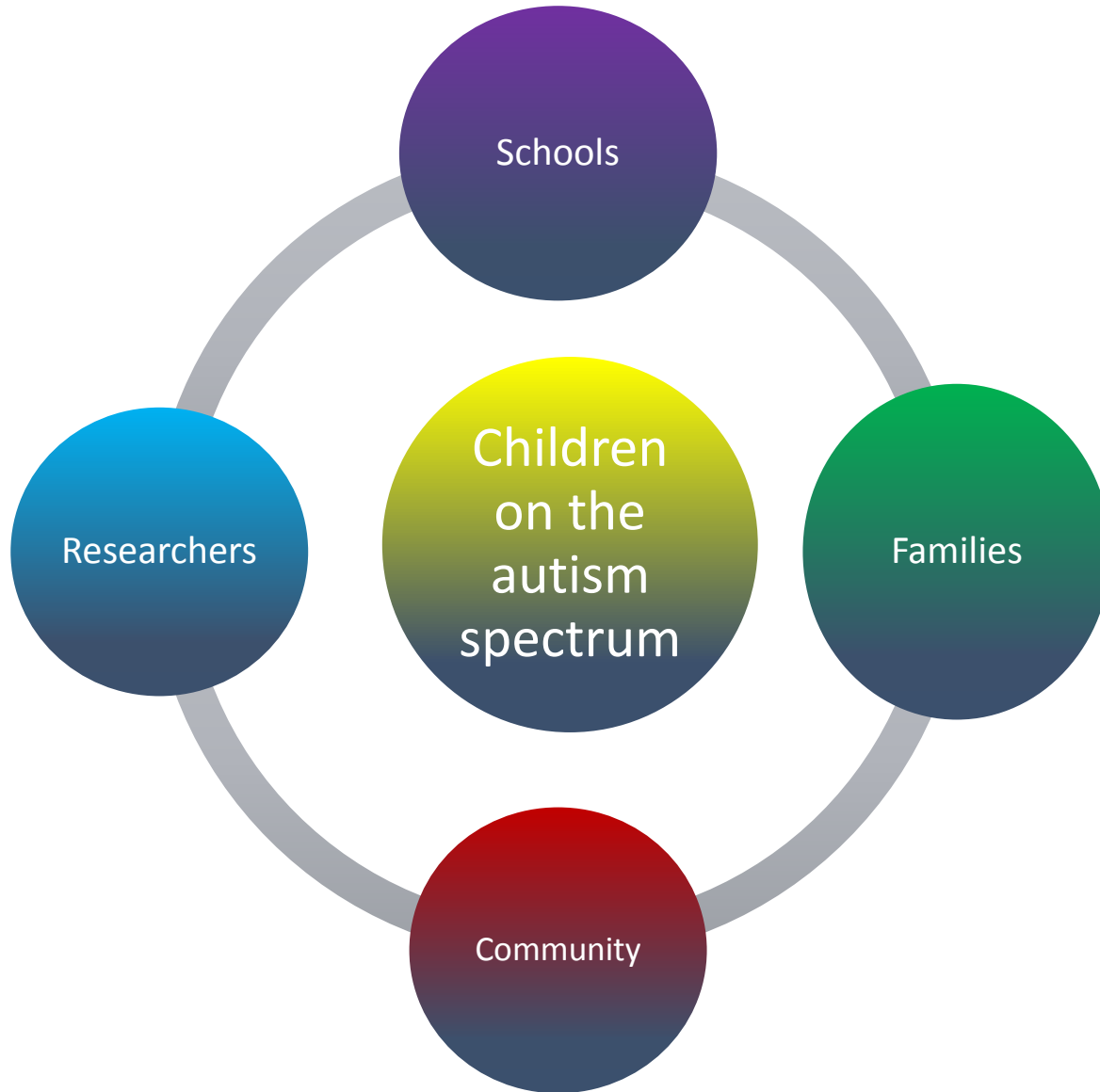


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# What is ACoRNS?



**Improve the lives of children and young people on the autism spectrum**

**Transitions and trajectories in education**

# ACoRNS Partners



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**Richard Cosford**

Senior Assistant Headteacher,  
Director of Inclusion, and  
Specialist Lead in Education at  
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# The ACoRNS Mission



- Our agreed priorities are ‘educational transitions and trajectories’ with a focus on ‘hearing’ the voices of children and young people
- Working together to decide what questions can be addressed by research and that matter to practitioners
- Researching those questions
- Feeding back
- Improving and reflecting on practice
- Sharing practice and knowledge

# ACoRNS Network Launch



- June 2017
- From community → research
- Key issues around transitions and trajectories
- UG linked student projects
- Across different settings and age groups
- Focus on children's experiences and voices
- How do we listen and what do we hear?



# Transitions

**Horizontal**

**Vertical**



# Nursery

- 7 autistic children aged 3-4 years
- 7 parents, 5 staff members
- Adults interviewed about views, worries, hopes & practice
- Children observed in everyday activities
- Key practices to support horizontal transitions



# Key findings



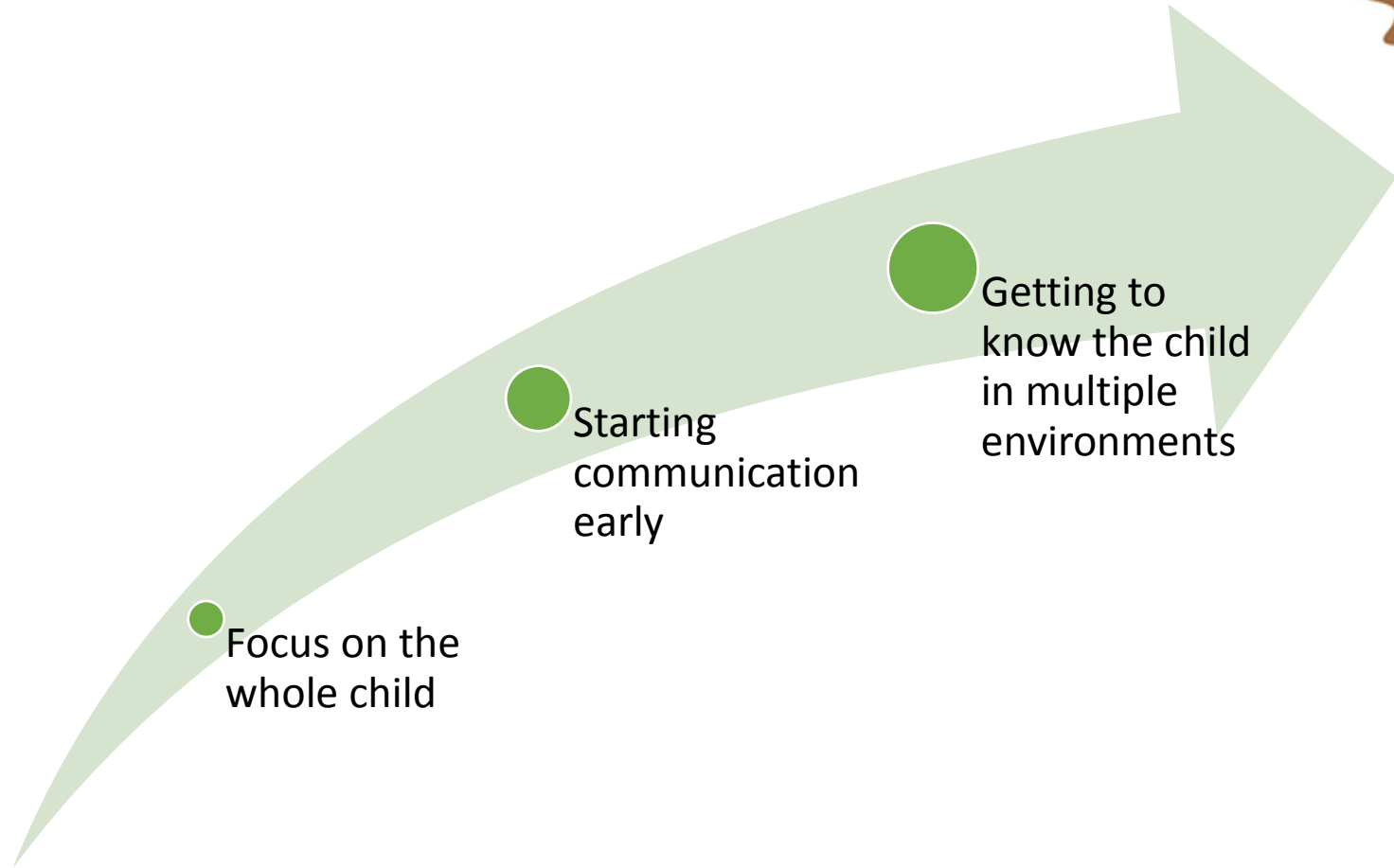
Understanding  
of the child

Enabling voice  
and agency

Learning  
through play



# Key findings



# Primary

- Key Stage 2 aged 7-11 years
- 3 children, 3 parents, 3 teachers
- Interviews with adults about how children experience transitions in school
- Photovoice activity with pupils



# Pupil voice findings



- Positive relationships with teachers highly valued
- Worried about changes to those relationships
- Peer relationships / difficulties important
- Strategies:
  - Support to spend time out of classroom when needed
- *“And then Miss F, so I talk to her a lot about how I’m, how I’m feeling... [She’s] one of the ones I usually talk to to make me feel better”*

# Parents



- Getting to know the whole child, individual needs and personalities
- Vital role of the teacher in helping children belong
- Concerns that children hide struggles at school
- *“He’s had a fantastic teacher this year and he’s built up a lovely bond with the teacher that he’s got so, that’s amazing... But like, that sometimes makes me worry more because I think, if he doesn’t get on with his teacher next year... he won’t want to come in”*

# Teachers

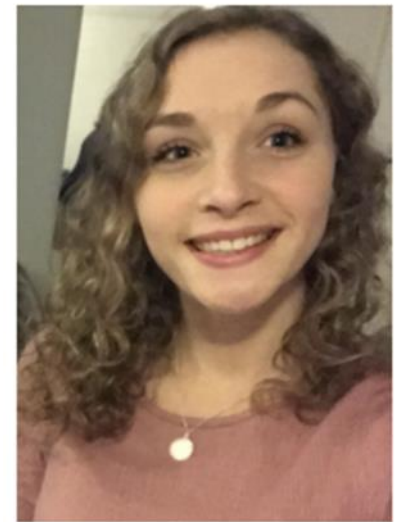


- Importance of pre-transition meetings and visits
- Spending extra time with autistic children transitioning to their class
- Effective communication between school and home
- *“If parents know you’re there and they know you’re trying your best, and they can see that that’s what’s happening, then they’ll be on board with you. If they can’t see it, and they don’t feel that it’s happening, then they won’t be, and you could end up, you know, either upsetting them or upsetting the child, or losing the child to another school, which doesn’t help with an autistic child one little bit, so...”*



# Secondary

- 5 pupils aged 12-16 years
- 6 parents, 4 teachers
- Photovoice activity with pupils
- Interviews with teachers and parents
- Experiences of vertical transition to the school and how horizontal transitions are managed

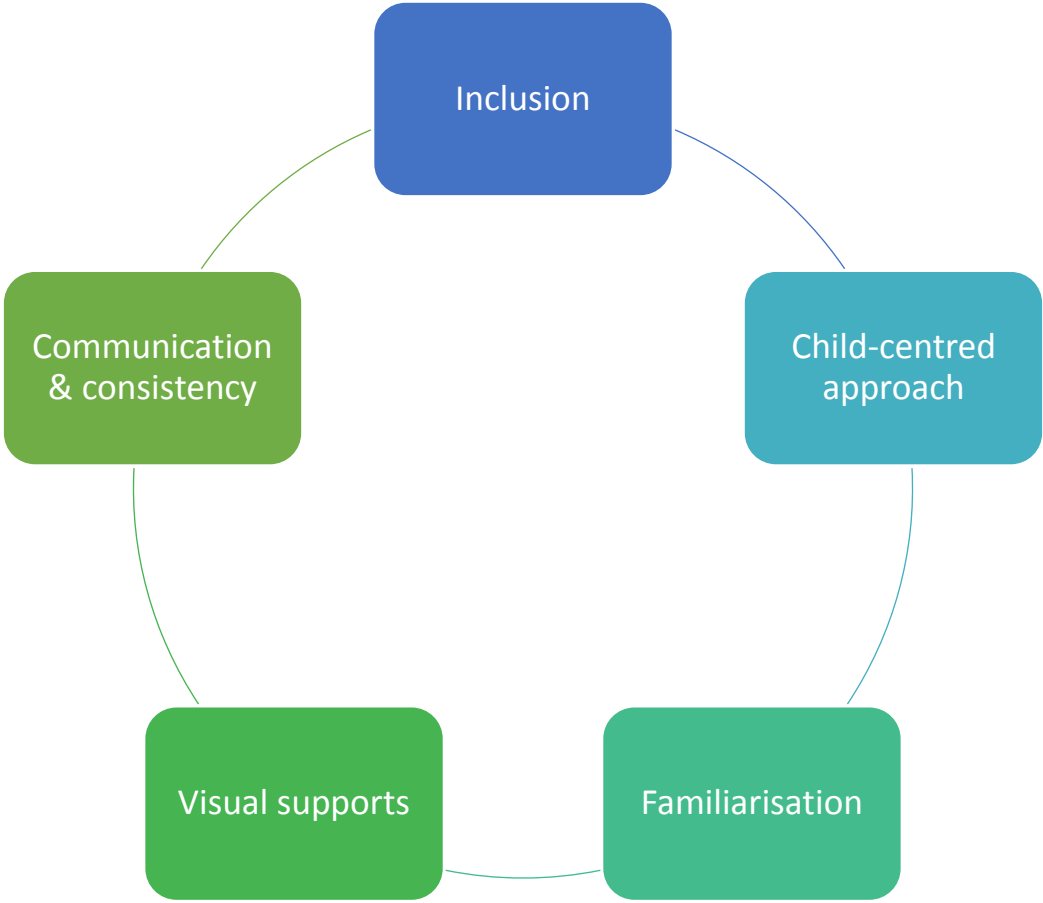


# Liked and not liked

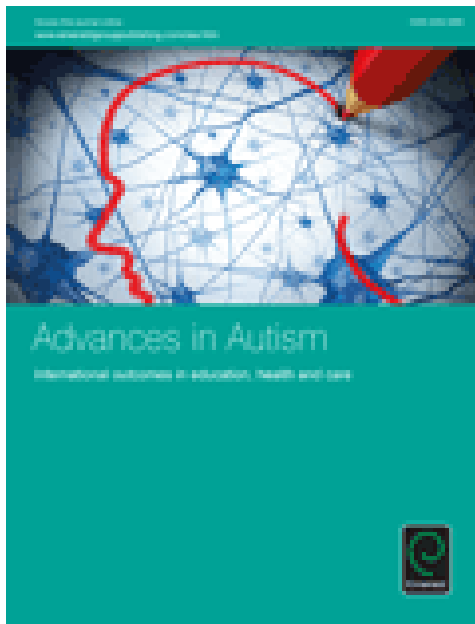




# Five key themes







# Inclusive school practices supporting the primary to secondary transition for autistic children: pupil, teacher, and parental perspectives

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Keri Hoy, Sarah Parsons and Hanna Kovshoff

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The primary to secondary school transition can have a significant and long-lasting impact on young people. Autistic children are particularly vulnerable to negative transition experiences; however, there is a lack of research examining effective practices and provision for these pupils. This case study involves a mainstream secondary school in the South of England, which has a dedicated Learning Support base. The purpose of this paper is to collect qualitative data on experiences of the primary to secondary school transition from multiple stakeholders.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *A photovoice activity followed by a semi-structured interview was conducted with five autistic pupils aged 12–16 years; semi-structured interviews were also carried out with six parents and four teachers.*

**Findings** – *Five key themes emerged from the data in relation to effective practices: inclusion, child-centred approach, familiarisation, visual supports and communication and consistency.*

**Research limitations/implications** – *As a small-scale case study, there are limitations regarding generalisation. However, this research illuminates transition practices that are experienced as effective by autistic children, their families and teachers.*

**Practical implications** – *Practical implications related to each of these themes are highlighted. These*

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# Conclusions

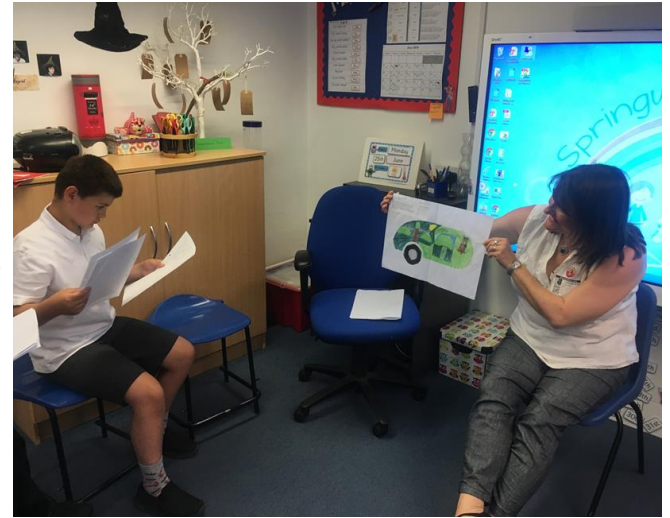
- Focus on the child or young person first
- Effective home-school communication
- Relationship building within and across settings
- Importance of the incoming school or teacher getting to know pupils
  - Personalities
  - Special educational needs
  - Interests
- Flexible timetables
- Visual supports
- 'Safe base'

# The ACoRNS Listening Pod!



# The ACoRNS Listening Pod!





Thank you



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