

SENCO – KEY INFORMATION GUIDE

The role of a SENCo is varied, challenging, and ultimately rewarding. There are many aspects of this job that require various skills such as team work, time management, prioritising, managing finances, determination and compassion. SENCos must have a love and enthusiasm for the goal they are ultimately working towards: providing the best individual academic opportunities for all pupils with SEN. This guide will provide a basic outline for both people wanting to become a SENCo, and people who already are SENCos.

Key pages in SENCo handbook (2nd edn) (ed Sue Soan):
7, 9, 24-26, 28, 47-48, 79-83, 107-113, 164, 178-181, 241, 283-292, 398

SO YOU WANT TO BE A SENCO:

“WHAT DOES SENCO STAND FOR?”

SENCo stands for a special educational needs coordinator.

“WHAT TRAINING DO YOU HAVE TO COMPLETE TO BE QUALIFIED?”

Under The Education (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) (England) Regulations 2008 (hyperlink) 5: A SENCo must be either: a qualified teacher; head teacher/appointed acting head teacher; or taking steps to become a qualified teacher, and can show has a reasonable likelihood of becoming qualified. There are great similarities in the role of a teacher and a SENCo and so understandably, the requirement to be a qualified or nearly qualified teacher is necessary.

In 2009 The Education (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) (England) (Amended) Regulations 2009 (hyperlink) saw the qualification for new SENCos become legislated. This qualification is called the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination.

“WHERE DOES A SENCO WORK?”

SENCos can work in either mainstream primary or secondary schools.

“DOES A SPECIAL SCHOOL NEED A SENCO?”

By law, all mainstream schools are required to have a SENCo. However, unlike in mainstream schools, where SENCos are legally required to be qualified as a teacher/in the process of qualifying, there is no such requirement in special schools. Some special schools will employ a member of staff to essentially carry out the work a SENCo would be required to complete. They may also employ people to assist with the admin work SENCos have to deal with.

“WHO ARE SENCOS WORKING TO HELP?”

SENCOs work to help pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in their secondary school. SENCOs also support all of the other pupils in a secondary school, but in a less direct way. A SENCO's primary aim is to help and support pupils with SEN. SENCOs are there to provide all the pupils with SEN the best academic chances and development available to them.

“WHO DO SENCOS HAVE TO WORK ALONGSIDE WITH?”

Along with other employees in the school, such as subject teachers and head teacher, heads of department, TAs, SENCOs will work with Governors, pupils' parents, Connexions staff, external agencies and educational Psychologists, to name a few. There is also FE colleges, health services, CAMHS, social services, family support workers, youth groups and many more.

Under the National Standards for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (1998), there are four suggested areas of SEN coordination:

- Strategic direction/development of SEN provision in school
- teaching/learning
- leading and managing staff
- efficient/effective deployment of staff and resources

SENCOs must also support the professional development of colleagues. This is concerned with:

- leading on national and local policies related to SEN
- reviewing and monitoring school systems and resources
- providing an SEN perspective across the whole school framework
- initiating and developing approaches in the classroom

“WHAT WORK DOES A SENCO DO?”

The [SENCOP](#) (hyperlink) provides a clear summary of some of the main duties a SENCO will be required to carry out in a mainstream secondary school:

- overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
- liaising with and advising fellow teachers
- managing the team of SEN teachers and learning support assistants
- following the individual progress of each pupil with SEN
- coordinating provision for pupils with special educational needs
- overseeing the records on all pupils with special educational needs
- liaising with parents of pupils with special educational needs
- contributing to the in-service training of staff

- liaising with external agencies including the LEA's support and educational psychology services, the Connexions PA, health and social services and voluntary bodies

As laid out in the [SENCo handbook](#) (hyperlink), the role of a SENCo can subsequently be divided into six main areas:

1. Whole-school SEN coordination: A SENCo has the ultimate responsibility of managing and coordinating the well-being, learning and education of all SEN pupils in a secondary school. A SENCo is required to be adaptable and deal with tough and sensitive situations in the face of adversity. They must also organise the necessary involvement with external services, such as an Educational Psychologist, and people involved in a pupil's School Action, School Action Plus, or Statement. SENCos must be aware of any changing SEN legislation, practices and policies and potential funding changes that could affect the standard of education for pupils with SEN. SENCos are also responsible for the whole-school improvement of the development and achievement of pupils with SEN. SENCos need to make sure the school's SEN policy is suitable for the pupils with SEN and is providing them with the best opportunities to meet their needs.
2. Good time management: A SENCo must manage their time effectively, to ensure they prioritise their role of a SENCo with their other position as a teacher, if they are currently teaching. SENCos must be able to communicate effectively with the relevant members of teaching staff, Connexions Personal Adviser and external bodies such as parents and governors. A SENCo will be required to observe SEN classes, as well as teach pupils with SEN and successfully manage the learning and development of the SEN team within the school.
3. Strategic planning: SENCos must plan their responsibilities and duties effectively, so as to be able to effectively oversee and manage the school's SEN policies and coordination of provisions made for pupils with SEN. SENCos will have to balance any other teaching commitments alongside their role as a SENCo. Some schools employ additional members of staff to provide admin support for SENCos.
4. Business/money management: Each school is provided with allocated funding to use specifically for their pupils with SEN. A SENCo has the responsibility of knowing their school's funding arrangement and monitoring it. It is vital the allocation of the funds available to the SEN team is used most effectively to maximise the special educational provisions for their pupils with SEN. Here, there are three strategies to consider:
 - Fit strategy
 - Stretch strategy

- Strategic aim
5. Monitoring and evaluation: A SENCo must carefully and regularly monitor the school's SEN practice and policy. This is to ensure all of the SEN pupils are having their educational needs met, and are provided with the best opportunities for maximising their individual educational potential.
 6. Managing and training staff: SENCos also have the important task of improving the knowledge and understanding of the individual needs of pupils with SEN in several areas of staff. This includes colleagues, TAs, support staff, the SLT and to some extent parents and governors. A better and clearer understanding of a pupil with SEN will help both SENCos and the relevant employees of the school to ensure that each pupil is provided with suitable special educational provisions.

"WHAT SHOULD A SENCO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN THEY ARE ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF A CHILD WITH SEN?"

The SENCOP ([hyperlink](#)) recognised four different areas of need that a pupil with SEN will require support in:

- Cognition/learning needs
- Behaviour/emotional/social development needs
- Communication/interaction needs
- Sensory/physical needs

"WHAT ROLE DOES A SENCO HAVE IN WRITING A SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS POLICY?"

One of the key roles of a SENCo is to help create a SEN policy in schools that will ultimately improve the standard of education for pupils with SEN. SENCos will have the support of the head teacher when they write a SEN policy. There are three steps involved in writing a SEN policy:

1. Create a planning process
2. Consult relevant members of school staff
3. Develop the SEN policy with the Senior Leadership Team

There are 17 pieces of statutory information that must be included in a SEN policy (see pages 81-83 SENCo Handbook (2nd edn)).

SO YOU ALREADY ARE A SENCO:

"WHAT ARE THE KEY PIECES OF LEGISLATION AND REPORTS A SENCO WOULD NEED TO KNOW?"

There are several important pieces of legislation and government reports that are concerned with the principles and policies regarding SEN. One vital report was [The Warnock Report \(1978\)](#) (hyperlink). Baroness Warnock provided an in depth examination and discussion into the law on SEN at the time. The Warnock Report clearly identified the need for children with SEN to be viewed and treated as individuals, with individual educational requirements. Baroness Warnock also recognised the concept of inclusion for children with SEN into mainstream classes. The Warnock Report provided the findings for the enactment of The Education Act 1981.

The SEN Code of Practice (1994) saw the development and creation of SENCos. There were several reports that followed, including Every Child Matters (2003) and Removing Barriers to Learning (2004), with the latter noting the Government's requirement for teachers to be trained in SEN.

One of the key pieces of recent legislation SENCos need to know is The Education Act 1996, which contains the key laws on SEN from s.312. It proceeded to encompass all previous legislation since The Education Act 1994. Furthermore, [The Education Act 1996](#) (hyperlink) importantly provided parents of children with SEN with more rights to appeal. There is also the SEN Code of Practice (2001) that provides further legal requirements and guidance on the education of children with SEN.

It is vital that SENCos keep up to date with the ever-changing legislation and Government reports on SEN. This is to ensure that SENCos have the correct and relevant knowledge so they can best support pupils with SEN and their educational rights.

"IS A SENCO RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THERE IS INCLUSION FOR PUPILS WITH SEN INTO MAINSTREAM CLASSES?"

SENCos have a legal duty under [The Education \(Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators\) \(England\) Regulations 2008](#) (hyperlink) 5.(2)(b) (vii) 'promoting the pupil's inclusion in the school community and access to the school's curriculum, facilities and extra-curricular activities'.

A SENCo has the job of working with the whole school to try and promote inclusion for pupils with SEN. The idea of inclusion in short refers to including all pupils (both those with and without SEN) in the educational opportunities and activities available. It also promotes the principle of treating all pupils equally and fairly, whatever their educational needs may be. This may be easier said than done. The varying needs of pupils with SEN will greatly affect how successfully they can, or indeed want to be included with a mainstream class. SENCos must help to maintain an effective school inclusion policy, and review it to ensure inclusion is happening as fully as it can for pupils with SEN. SENCos should know of the inclusion in action model, with the three central fields: inclusion, school development and self-evaluation.

There are also the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement (1999), and the Waves of Intervention model (2002) that further promotes the idea of inclusion for pupils with SEN and acknowledges specialised treatment for some pupils who need it.

“HOW MUCH INVOLVEMENT DOES A SENCO HAVE IN A PUPIL’S TRANSITION THROUGH THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF SCHOOL?”

A SENCo will have to oversee and be involved in the several transition periods that a pupil with SEN will go through as they move up through from primary to secondary school and beyond. From primary to secondary school, SENCos should be aware of Tuckman’s four stages:

- forming
- norming
- storming
- performing

From KS3 to KS4, a SENCo must help pupils with SEN be aware of, and start to consider, their academic career options. SENCos will need to know that any pupils who have a Statement of SEN will be required to have a transition plan for after they complete Year 9. SENCos must also help pupils with SEN when they complete KS4 to think about their post-16 options.

“WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD A SENCO KNOW ABOUT EXAMINATIONS FOR PUPILS WITH SEN?”

A SENCo will need to know in great detail the provisions set out for examinations for pupils with SEN. In KS3 there are Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS), which provide the basic testing for pupils’ entry into secondary school. SENCo will need to closely examine the results of pupils with SEN, and any large discrepancies could suggest a learning difficulty or disability. SENCos also have the responsibility of working out if pupils with SEN require access arrangements or prior preparation for exams. Furthermore, some pupils with SEN will not cope well in exam situations, and so might be more suited to combining school lessons and work experience (ASDAN).

“WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR PUPILS ON THE SEN REGISTER?”

A school will want to put a child on the SEN register if they believe the child requires additional help and support to make sure they are making good academic progress. This is likely to occur after a child appears to have made little/no progress after the teaching styles, learning environment, bringing in additional help, or changing the curriculum have all been undertaken by the school. When a child is put onto the SEN register the individual needs of the child will be addressed by one of three categories of additional support:

- School Action

- School Action Plus
- Statement of SEN

Support will begin at the School Action stage, and will subsequently progress through the categories, should the needs of the child require it.

WHAT IF A PUPIL WITH SEN NEEDS MORE SUPPORT THAN THE SCHOOL CAN OFFER?"

If a pupil with SEN is found to need additional support than what is currently provided at the child's school, then parents should discuss with the school ways of adapting the teaching style, alternating the National Curriculum and use of resources and materials. Also, a SENCo would need to ensure that the school followed the guidance set out in the [SENCOP](#) (hyperlink). The SENCOP provides help for schools on how to offer extra support for a child with SEN.

If these changes do not mark any improvement for a child with SEN, then a SENCo would need to look at the option of implementing a School Action for the child.

A SENCo could also look into the option of setting up a child with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This should build on the requirement of the National Curriculum, and work with the child's strengths in learning. An IEP will set individual targets, provisions and outcomes for the child. The school must make sure that the additional support and strategies in place are suitable to help the child.

"WHAT IS SCHOOL ACTION?"

School Action is the first level of additional support provided for children with SEN at a mainstream school. If there is evidence to show that a child with SEN is not making as much progress as they could be, then the school will issue a School Action for them. The School Action will aim to address a child who is struggling compared to their peers by providing them with additional support in school. This could include:

- involvement of extra teachers
- the use of different learning materials or special equipment
- a different teaching strategy

SENcos will work alongside a child's teacher to help find ways of supporting and improving the child's learning whilst they're receiving support on a School Action. They must also ensure the child's progress is regularly monitored and reviewed, and could also set up an IEP for the child.

"WHAT IS SCHOOL ACTION PLUS?"

If a child is shown to have not made adequate progress following a School Action, then the school will implement a School Action Plus. This is essentially the next step in providing additional educational support for a child with SEN. The school will ask for advice from the LA's support services, the local Health Authority or from Social Services on the individual needs of the child. This could include advice from:

- a Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT)
- an Occupational Therapist (OT)
- Physiotherapist (PT)
- Specialist Advisory Services

Under a School Action Plus, one-to-one support and the involvement of an Educational Psychologist may be included. A child on School Action Plus will also need to have their progress regularly reviewed, as well as having an IEP written to help them.

“WHAT IF A PUPIL WITH SEN NEEDS EVEN MORE SUPPORT?”

If a child with SEN has received both a School Action and School Action Plus with little or no success, it is then the responsibility of a SENCo to assess if the child should be formally assessed for a Statement of SEN.

“WHAT IS A STATEMENT OF SEN?”

A Statement of SEN is a legally enforceable document detailing a child's needs and the additional measures necessary to support them at school. A Statement of SEN must comply with the required format and contain the necessary information prescribed by [schedule 2 of the Education \(Special Educational Needs\) \(England\) \(Consolidation\) Regulations 2001](#) (hyperlink).

If a SENCo believes a child with SEN could need a Statement, they must make a request to the LA for the child to be assessed. During an assessment, the LA carries out a multi-disciplinary investigation to try and establish what the child's needs are and then determine what provision is required to meet those needs. The LA will request relevant advice from the child's parents, school, (or any other education settings or any other education professionals involved), medical professional (usually a paediatrician), Educational Psychologist, Social Services and any other relevant professional considered necessary. The LA must decide if the child's needs are being met by the provisions currently in place at their school. If the LA, after taking into account the results of the child's assessment and the advice from the relevant people, decide the child's needs cannot be met solely through the school-based provision they could choose to issue the child with a Statement.

The layout of a Statement consists of six sections:

Part 1. Introduction and child's details

- Part 2. Special Educational Needs
- Part 3. Special Educational Provision
- Part 4. Placement
- Part 5. Non-Educational Needs
- Part 6. Non-Educational Provision

Parents will be issued with a draft Statement prior to it being finalised. This provides parents with an opportunity to state a named preference of school to go into Part 4 (Placement).

Any special educational provision that is listed in Part 3 to address a child's SEN legally falls to the LA to potentially fund and at least provide the provision. Some form of therapeutic support such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy ([hyperlink*](#)) may be required under Part 3, Part 6 or both. It is important to try and get any therapeutic support into Part 3 of a child's Statement, as under their legal obligation the LA will have to provide the support detailed. If a type of therapeutic support is placed in Part 6 of a Statement, meaning it is held to be a non-educational provision, then the LA are under no legal obligation to provide that therapeutic support.

Significant case law (Bromley, Lancashire, B v Isle of Wight) ([hyperlink](#)) has provided guidance to parents on when these types of therapies should be classified under Part 3 or Part 6. The general concept is that the individual needs of the child must be the main factor in deciding if a therapy is to be classified as a special educational or non-educational provision. The judgement in Lancashire echoed the SENCOP on where speech and language therapy should fall in a Statement: it should be seen as an educational need, unless there are exceptional reasons otherwise.

Parents have a right to appeal to the Special educational needs and disability tribunal (SENDIST) if they disagree with the contents of Parts 2 or 3, or the named school by the LA in Part 4.

However, parents need to be aware that even if the LA do not believe the child's needs are being met through the provisions currently in place at their school, they may decide to issue a Note in Lieu ([hyperlink](#)) instead of a Statement. Unlike a Statement, a Note in Lieu is not legally binding on LAs to provide a child with SEN with the correct special educational provisions to meet their SEN. The LA will also state why these decided not to issue a Statement. Parents have a right of appeal if they disagree with the LA not issuing a Statement.

[\(hyperlink *\)](#) **"SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, PHYSIOTHERAPY"**

Speech and language therapy (SaLT): SaLT is used to help children with communication difficulties, as well as children who have difficulties with

eating and swallowing. Children who have other disabilities, such as Autism, who require SaLT are described as having a 'secondary impairment'. A speech and language therapist will work with a child to help them communicate as best they can. This is achieved through examining how able the child uses sound and whether they understand spoken language. The therapist will then issue a programme of care for the child's parents and school to follow, with the aim to assist the child's use, development and understanding of their speech and language.

Occupational therapy (OT): OT is used to help children with SEN to become better accustomed at completing everyday tasks, such as walking, eating, drinking, dressing, toileting and bathing. The primary aim of OT is to maximise the child's potential to participate in activities of everyday life by minimising the impact of their disability through the use of purposeful activity, or modifying the environment to better support participation.

Physiotherapy (PT): PT is concerned with helping children with SEN gain control and maximise the use of their limbs and movements. It also helps deal with aches and pains in the bones, joints and muscles. PT does not involve any medication. A PT program typically focuses on educating the child about the physical problems caused by their disability. It also creates an individualised exercise program to address the problems suffered by the child. PT may also include the use of specialised equipment to enhance a child's mobility.

"WHAT HAPPENS IF A CHILD WITH SEN NEEDS ADDITIONAL THERAPY TO WHAT THEY ARE CURRENTLY BEING PROVIDED?"

If a child with a Statement of SEN is held to need more hours of therapy than they are currently being provided by their school, then this concern would need to be raised at the annual review of the child's Statement. The question of whether more hours of therapeutic support need to be offered to a child could be established by Educational Psychologist reports, SaLT, OT, PT etc reports. The parents and LA would need to agree on the new amount of support that the child needs, and to what part of their Statement it would fall under – Part 3 or Part 6, or both.

"WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD SENCOS KNOW ABOUT TRIBUNALS?"

SENCos will need to know the process of SENDisT (special educational needs and disability tribunal) ([hyperlink](#)) (see pages 107-108 SENCo Handbook (2nd edn)).

The TCE Act 2007 saw the creation of the first-tier and upper tribunal. Details of the appeal process and reasons for an appeal can be found on pages 107-113 SENCo Handbook (2nd edn). During a Hearing, the tribunal panel will

consist of three people and a judge. The decision reached, must be reached by a majority verdict.