

# THE PERFECT SENCO

*Updated September 2014 to include  
New SEND Code of Practice*



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Edited by Jackie Beere



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# Introduction

## Wanted: Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

Must be efficient, organised, enthusiastic and flexible.

Must be highly skilled in assessing and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable pupils.

Must be able to motivate and support staff to ensure all pupils make exceptional progress – all day, every day!

Have you ever wondered what it means to be the ‘perfect’ special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)? For those of you who have been a SENCO for a number of years, in the early days it is likely that your role consisted mainly of working with small groups of pupils and writing mountains of targets. Over recent years, however, the job of the SENCO has become more strategic and will now include provision mapping, working in partnership with parents, supporting other colleagues, commissioning services, demonstrating pupil progress and ensuring value for money. In essence, it is a role which contributes significantly to whole-school improvement.

## The Perfect SENCO

It has never been easy to give a clear definition that encompasses the vast nature of the SENCO job and, to some extent, it is open to interpretation by the head teacher and governors of individual schools. However, the importance of the role is clear: the SENCO is currently only one of two statutory school roles (the other, of course, is the head teacher). But only one of these roles requires someone with qualified teacher status (QTS) – and it's not the head!

This requirement for all schools to have a qualified SENCO, in addition to the introduction of the National Award for SENCOs (NASENCO), has helped to raise the status of the role significantly. Along with raised status, however, comes increased responsibility and accountability, not forgetting to mention the challenges of a new national special educational needs (SEN) system. High quality professional development, support and accurate information are essential if the SENCO is to fulfil their role efficiently and effectively.

It could be argued that, ultimately, the purpose of the SENCO is to do themselves out of a job. Why? Because a key priority must be to ensure that all teachers are fulfilling their responsibilities towards pupils with SEN. Providing support for colleagues in school through training, coaching, mentoring or joint planning will enable all staff to become more confident in their own classroom practice. However, although the new *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice*<sup>1</sup> acknowledges that *every* teacher is a teacher of

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (2014b), *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/338195/Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_approved\\_by\\_Parliament\\_290714.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338195/Code_of_Practice_approved_by_Parliament_290714.pdf)

## Introduction

children with special educational needs, the SENCO is there not only to act as an advocate for these children, but because they are instrumental in developing the whole-school processes and practice upon which inclusive teaching and learning can be built.

The aim of this book is to support those professionals in school who have overall responsibility for ensuring high quality provision for, and progress of, pupils with SEN. Its purpose is to provide guidance for SENCOs on working in a strategic way to support improvement. It will be of use not only for potential or newly appointed SENCOs, but also for those who are more experienced and wish to keep their day-to-day practice up to date.

The book can be used in a number of ways:

- As a point of reference for busy SENCOs.
- For SENCOs to use as part of their own professional development.
- To encourage reflection of current policy and practice.
- To support cultural and systemic change in school.

This book has been published at a time when there is significant change occurring within the world of special educational needs. The implications of the Children and Families Act and the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice* is resulting in many challenges for schools, parents and the wide range of services dedicated to improving the life chances of some of our most vulnerable

## Chapter 2

# Leading the way: providing strategic direction and development

‘A SENCO’s power of persuasion and influence to inspire others towards achieving common goals and shared values relating to SEN, is driven by their vision for SEN and their passion to do the very best for pupils with special educational needs within a school.’<sup>1</sup>

The move from a more traditional, operational middle-manager role to that of a strategic senior leadership role has, for some SENCOs, led to a significant change in their working practice. Strategic leadership involves developing vision and direction for growth and improvement in relation to SEN as part of a whole-school approach. It is only really possible to effect change through providing leadership at a strategic level. There are no requirements for SENCOs to be part of the senior leadership team (SLT). However, in most schools this would be

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1 R. Cheminais (2010), *Rita Cheminais’ Handbook for New SENCOs*. London: Sage Publications, p. 24.

## The Perfect SENCO

recommended as it is easier to provide effective strategic leadership if you are part of the SLT or, at least, where the head teacher and governors understand the significance of the role and ensure you are empowered to fulfil it effectively.

The key aspects of strategic planning for a SENCO include:

- Establishing the school's long-term direction for SEN.
- Leading the development of an inclusive culture within the school.
- Effectively managing SEN resources (including TAs).
- Empowering stakeholders to be fully engaged in the SEN process.
- Developing a collaborative, multi-professional approach to meeting needs.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of SEN provision and its impact on progress.

The initial step in your strategic planning will be to develop a clear vision of SEN. Ask yourself: what will our ideal provision look like in five or ten years time? How will this be achieved? How will outcomes have improved as a result?

Your overall vision will then be translated into policy, outlining key information on identification, assessment, provision and expected outcomes. You will need to report to the head teacher and governing body on the effectiveness of the policy (see Chapter 6 for a checklist on reporting to the governing body). As part of your strategic monitoring role, you should be regularly checking that practice matches policy. It is, how-

ever, recommended that you complete a full review of your SEN policy every three years, although many schools are currently reviewing their policy in light of the recent changes. Nasen's website has some useful information on policy review.<sup>2</sup>

All schools, including academies, are now required to publish an annual SEN information report on their website outlining the policy for pupils with SEN. The information required for this report is set out in the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014* and includes:

- The kinds of SEN provided for.
- Arrangements for identification of SEN, assessing and reviewing progress.
- Arrangements for consulting parents and children with SEN.
- The approach to teaching children with SEN, including curriculum adaptations.
- Arrangements for transition.
- How the school involves other organisations in supporting children and young people with SEN.

(See the regulations for a full list.<sup>3</sup>)

In the spirit of the key principles, it is important that schools check that the information is easily accessible to young people and parents, with clear straightforward language – beware the use of unexplained acronyms!

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2 See <http://www.nasen.org.uk/latestnews/?news=245>

3 See The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/1530/schedule/1/made>

### Top tips

- There is an expectation that you will involve parents in developing your SEN policy, so set up a parents' forum or similar group where contributions can be made.
- Consider how aspects of your SEN policy, SEN information report (and contribution to the local offer) can be combined as some of the information will be similar.
- Publish the policy documents on your school website and in leaflet form to give easy access to parents and other stakeholders.

Your policy will determine the direction of the school's SEN strategy. This, in turn, will inform your SEN development or action plan. This should highlight:

- Overall success criteria.
- Aims/areas for development.
- Actions to be taken.
- Who will take the lead/who else will be involved.
- Timescales (including start dates and end dates).
- Resources required (including costs, staffing and time).
- Plans for monitoring the actions (who, when and how).
- An evaluation against each aim/area for development/success criteria.

## SEN action plan template

Date of plan:

Lead person:

Whole-school priority/link to school improvement plan:						
Success criteria:						
Aim/area for development	Actions to be taken	Persons involved	Timescale	Resources (cost in £ and time)	Monitoring (who, when, how)	Evaluation comment
				Total cost:		

## The Perfect SENCO

The action plan should be an integral part of the whole-school improvement plan, and links between the two should be made clear. On page 27 is an example of a SEN action plan template.

An important step in the strategic process is to ensure *everyone* in your school understands the vision and shows a commitment to achieving it. This is often the most challenging part!

### Leading the development of an inclusive culture

All teachers are teachers of pupils with SEN.

This should be the mantra of every fully inclusive school. As SENCO you need to be emphasising that raising achievement for pupils with SEN is a collective responsibility, and then challenging any complacency towards this objective. One SENCO in a secondary school had the above mantra written as a headline on every piece of correspondence she sent out to staff! In schools that are successful in promoting the achievement of pupils with SEN there is a strong sense of purpose and shared values and this promotes an inclusive culture. Such schools develop effective ways of promoting these shared values – for example, appointing staff who identify with the values and taking opportunities to articu-

late the values during discussions with pupils, staff, parents and governors.

You may occasionally come across teachers who feel that there is a conflict between the drive to develop an inclusive culture and the pressure to meet the standards agenda. They may ask: how is it possible to raise overall standards when we are being expected to manage pupils with increasingly complex needs? So, how do you persuade staff that there isn't a conflict and that they are, in fact, both part of the same agenda – increasing achievement?

### Case study

One SENCO from a secondary school in South East England recalls one of the challenges she faced when starting in her new job:

*Many of the teachers still had the view that the SENCO was responsible for pupils with SEN and that the SEN department was a place to send pupils who 'weren't coping in class'. This was partly because some staff lacked confidence in meeting the needs of these students. I began to address the issue in a staff meeting by asking the question: 'If we are successfully including students with SEN in our lessons, is the quality of our teaching different – is there something unique about inclusive practice or not?'*

# THE PERFECT SENCO

is the fully up-to-date, essential guide to supporting children with special educational needs.

Covering the changes resulting from the new *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice*, this book will empower your school to embrace the national changes which came into force in September 2014.

Real education isn't about a race to the top of the class or the league table. It isn't about being better than anyone else or accumulating as many qualifications as you possibly can. It's about being helped to be the best you can possibly be by professionals who are skilled enough to know how to do it and compassionate enough to take the time to do it well. Nowhere is this philosophy more important than when it comes to supporting children with special educational needs and this book, written for our Perfect series by a SEN consultant with many years' experience, will help you apply it to these children.

*"The Perfect SENCO offers all of us in education, not just SENCOs, a fantastic, highly readable guide that ensures that the needs of our most vulnerable pupils and students are fundamental to every school's philosophy, strategy, planning and practice. Most importantly, the book provides clear routes that determine effective outcomes for children and young people."*

Jane Friswell, SEND Consultant, CEO,  
nasen (National Association of Special Educational Needs)

*"[This book] gives a clear insight into how to develop an educational philosophy whilst enabling opportunities for any teacher to be confident in becoming The Perfect SENCO."*

Chris Wheatley, Executive Head,  
The Cotgrave Candleby Lane School, CEO, Flying High Trust

**Natalie Packer** is an education consultant specialising in SEN and School Improvement and has previously worked for the National Strategies SEN team. Her recent headship experience has given her the opportunity to observe all manner of school practice, allowing her to assess the best catalysts for effective teaching and learning.

Education  
Teaching of specific groups  
Persons with special educational needs

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