

ADVICE & GUIDANCE

The role of the SENCo in schools

What is a SENCo?

A Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator must have the strategic overview of a school's SEN policy as they hold responsibility for the day to day practical implementation by all teaching and support staff.

Does the SENCo have to be a qualified teacher?

Yes. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 [Part 3 paragraph 49 [a] and [c]] states that governing bodies of maintained mainstream schools and proprietors of mainstream academies and free schools must ensure the SENCo is a qualified teacher employed by the school.

Should the SENCo hold or be working towards the National Award in Special Educational Needs Co-ordination?

Yes. The SEND Regulations 2014 [Part 3 paragraph 49 - 4] state that if a person becomes a SENCo at a relevant school after 1 September 2009, and has not previously been employed in the role of SENCo in that school, or any other school, for a period of 12 months or more, the appropriate authority [governing body] must ensure that if they are the SENCo at the school after the third anniversary of being appointed, they hold the relevant qualification.

What are the requirements of the Award?

A National Award in Special Educational Needs Co-ordination must be accredited at post-graduate level by a recognised higher education provider [SEND Regulations Part 3 Paragraph 49 [4]]. The course selected should be equivalent to 60 post graduate study credits. When a SENCo is appointed, and provision is made for them to study for an award, the school should ensure the chosen course meets the necessary outcomes and will equip them to perform the duties outlined in the DFE Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice.

Should the SENCo be part of the school leadership team?

This will be dependent on size and capacity of the school, but the SENCo should have direct access to the school leadership team with the support of the head teacher.

The SENCo can perform their role most effectively if they are part of the school leadership team. In any case, they have an important role to play with the governing body and head teacher in the development of the strategic SEN policy and overall provision for SEN in the school.

What are the responsibilities and provisions of the SENCo?

The SENCo is responsible for the daily implementation of the SEN policy and the specific provisions made to support pupils with SEN including those with Education Health Care Plans. They should ensure the school keeps the records of all pupils with SEN up to date.

The SENCo will work with the head teacher and the governing body to ensure the school's responsibilities are met under the Equality Act [2010] with reference to reasonable adjustments and access arrangements. They will also work with the head teacher and governing body to advise on the deployment of the school's delegated budget, other resources, and the graduated approach to providing SEN support to ensure the needs of pupils are met.

The SENCo works closely with, and is a key point of contact for, parents, other educational establishments, educational psychologists, health and social care professionals and independent and voluntary bodies. They will be aware of the Local Offer and provision within it and must be able to work with other professionals to provide a supportive role to families to ensure pupils with SEN receive appropriate support and that the teaching is of a high standard. The SENCo will also liaise with possible providers of the next stage of education for a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and ensure both they, and their parents, are informed of options to plan a smooth transition.

The SENCo will provide professional guidance to colleagues and where looked-after children have SEN, the SENCo will liaise with the designated teacher.

Should the SENCo have additional time to carry out their duties?

Yes. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that sufficient time away from teaching and resources including administrative support are allocated to the SENCo to enable them to carry out required functions in the same way as other important strategic roles within the school.

What if a small school does not have sufficient resources to employ a SENCo?

A number of small schools could employ a SENCo together to work across the schools, as long as they meet the requirements set out in Chapter 6 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. The schools can consider such an arrangement as long as the SENCo receives sufficient time away from teaching and administrative support to enable them to perform the role effectively for all of the registered children in each of the schools. If such an arrangement is put in place the SENCo should not have a significant class teaching commitment and the shared role should not be carried out by any of the head teachers of the schools involved. The school might also nominate several staff to become members of the school's SEN Team, working under the supervision of the cluster SENCo so that continuity exists on a daily basis within the school for those identified SEN pupils.

The shared SENCo role should be reviewed regularly to ensure its effectiveness. Where there is evidence of a negative impact on the quality of the SEN provision or progress of pupils, the schools should not continue with the arrangement.

Relevant Legislation: Children and Families Act 2014 [2014 c6] Part 3 Children and Young People in England with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities [ss19-83]/67 SEN co-ordinators.

Regulations: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014