



## CASE STUDY 3

# Appreciating the Role of the SENCO

### Introduction

This is one of six case studies that have been written as 'finger-tip' guides to inform and enrich your support for students with SEND. Each offers an accessible, evidence-informed summary of advice. This support is both immediately actionable and can be used to enrich further discussions. All the case studies are aimed at supporting busy professional colleagues so that they can further develop their inclusive educational practices. Other case studies in the series include:

- Case Study 1: Supporting Students During a National Emergency
- Case Study 2: Supporting Students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
- Case Study 4: Improving Attendance, Behaviour and Inclusion
- Case Study 5: Supporting Vulnerable Groups of Students in Our Schools
- Case Study 6: Supporting the Identification and Assessment of Needs

Each case study follows the same format. They are divided into six short sections, the first being a summary as to why this particular study might be relevant to you. The next section shares selected professional knowledge that could help to inform your context. The third section offers a summary of key motivations for change. Section four offers some ways to address these. The final two sections build on this by highlighting how professional support can be further developed, including identifying selected further sources of support.

We very much hope that you will find these guides to be both informative and actionable. We wish you well in your endeavours and thank you for all that you do for your learners.

### 1. Why this Case Study might be relevant to you.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) recognises that the role of the SENCO includes, the capacity to 'determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in schools' and the 'Day-to-day responsibility for the operation of SEN policy and coordination of specific provision.' This is therefore a key and essential role which can have a positive impact of the transformative work of schools. As such the role benefits from being more fully appreciated and understood by all connected with education. Currently within Stoke-on-Trent, there is a high turnover of SENCOs, many of whom have not benefitted from completing the SENCO award. This case study aims to make explicit the benefits of developing the confidence, knowledge and expertise of SENCOs. This will enable them to play a key influential role in liaising with the local authority.

## 2. Accessing Professional Knowledge

The SENCO Induction Pack (2019) was found to be one of the most useful sources to share when developing an appreciation of the essential work of the SENCO. This can be downloaded from <http://www.nasenco.org.uk/Senco-Induction-Pack.php>

The pack contains essential guidance including sharing an understanding that a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is in a position to inspire inclusive practice in your setting and to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children and young people. The statutory requirements around this role are set out in the Children and Families Act (2014), the SEND Regulations (2014) and The SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) (please see Section 4). The SENCO has responsibility for overseeing the provision that is made for the children and young people in your setting who have been identified as having special educational needs and disability (SEND). ***Take a moment to read through the next paragraph carefully and consider to what extent the nature of the role is appreciated within your school and setting.***

Your SENCO will have a strategic overview of the policy and practice in your setting. Some of their time will be engaged in monitoring the impact of the provision that is in place for those with SEND within your setting. They will also be advising teachers/practitioners on the best ways to ensure that all children or young people in their classes are making sufficient progress, as well as ensuring the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. It is the child or young person's teacher(s) who are responsible for their progress. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2014 (updated 2015)) is very clear about this: 'The class or subject teacher should remain responsible for working with the child on a daily basis. Where the interventions involve group or one-to-one teaching away from the main class or subject teacher, they should still retain responsibility for the pupil. They should work closely with any teaching assistants or specialist staff involved, to plan and assess the impact of support and interventions and how they can be linked to classroom teaching. The SENCO should support the class or subject teacher in the further assessment of the child's particular strengths and weaknesses, in problem solving and advising on the effective implementation of support' (DfE and DoH, 2015:101). Your SENCO should be leading on inclusion in your setting. This means that they will be leading the school community to adopt inclusive values and practices. They should be enabled to lead by example by modelling their commitment to include all children and young people in curricula and extracurricular activities.

***It is worth also taking a moment to consider what the term inclusive practices means to you and your setting. Is this clearly expressed and understood by your staff teams? How is their commitment to this demonstrated?*** A useful resource for considering and informing your response can be found at: Lauchlan, F. and Greig, S., 2015. Educational inclusion in England: origins, perspectives and current directions. *Support for learning*, 30(1), pp.69-82.

### **3. Key Motivations for Change**

As professionals, we are always ambitious to do more for our young people. In order to do this we found that it can often be helpful to clarify both our motivations for change and to identify some of the dilemmas that we face. By making these explicit, we can then prioritise strategies that might help us to address such concerns. We hope that you may find the lists below helpful. There could be both some drivers and dilemmas noted here that you also recognise. As you consider these insights, you may find yourself thinking of others, which are not recorded here. Please share them in your own teams and see if any of the strategies shared in section four might be helpful.

#### **Drivers**

##### **We identified that we were ambitious to:**

- Develop SEND as a whole school priority.
- Clarify staff roles, responsibilities and expectations under the SEND Code of Practice, 2015.
- Ensure that SENCOs were part of the Senior Leadership Team (a recommendation in the SEND Code of Practice, 2015). This impacted positively upon on the SEND lens being applied to key decisions.
- Support SENCOs who were new to the role to support them in developing the new knowledge essential to such a multi-faceted role in school.
- Enable SENCOs to successful complete and benefit from completion of the SENCO award by providing dedicated time to achieve this.
- Enable SENCOs to support a high-quality TA team who can drive the learning forward for the young people in their community.
- Develop the consistent and timely use of data. This was often facilitated when SENCOs were involved in or given an analysis of whole school data by SEND.

#### **Dilemmas**

##### **We identified that we were concerned by:**

- The number of SENCOs who reported that they did not receive enough dedicated time to effectively carry out the role of the SENCO.
- The extra pressure that some SENCOs felt that they carried because they were leading an area in school that can lead to litigation.
- The inconsistency in the ways teaching assistants were deployed in the classroom.
- The inconsistency of expertise of teaching assistants in leading specific interventions.

### **4. Putting professional knowledge and understanding to work.**

By drawing on the resources associated with the SENCO Induction Pack (2019) in relation to the drivers and dilemmas listed above we then considered evidence informed ways in which

we could develop and improve our professional practices. The list is indicative, rather than exhaustive. We have tried to highlight how each action created the time and space for us to be more effective.

- Schools who had developed a whole school SEND calendar were able to identify, anticipate and plan for key dates and expectations from the SEND department. This enabled clear and timely communications with all staff. The school teams benefited from having clarity with regards to expectations and deadlines. This was particularly the case when the calendar also identified when key assessments were carried out. This helped to reduce workload because colleagues could plan ahead.
- When senior leaders ensured the assess-plan-do-review cycle aligned with the whole-school assessment points/data drops to ensure the most up-to-date information was used and analysed in a more timely and efficient way. This increased impact and reduced workload.
- In some schools, SENCOs held 'SEND surgeries' for teachers and teaching assistants. These were informal meetings for staff to become upskilled in specific interventions or an opportunity to discuss lesson ideas, Quality First Teaching strategies or to seek advice in any aspects of SEND.
- Schools who sought external guidance to upskill themselves in the latest research and advice benefitted from the implementation of evidence informed practices. This included SENCOs who accessed the EEF Toolkit, as well as reaching out to other local SENCOs or SEND advisors for additional support and guidance.
- Schools who worked closely with their SEND governor to ensure they had the expertise and knowledge to support the school were more likely to be able to evidence a shared understanding of and commitment to inclusive practices.
- Staff reported benefits when SENCOs were given time to shadow teachers in year groups where they themselves lacked experience.
- The SENCO led training and signposted classroom-based staff to the NASEN Whole School SEND specific need videos. This allowed SENCOs, teachers and TAs to access support at the point of need.
- Staff benefitted from regular professional learning opportunities and refresher courses.

## **5. Contributing to collective professional knowledge**

The strategies prioritised in section 4 will often be enacted by individual members of our school teams, supported by our whole school ethos. In our reviews we also found it particularly helpful to highlight strategies that will depend on our collective and collaborative endeavours. Here we share some approaches that could usefully inform local area dialogues.

- During Headteacher briefings, it is beneficial to offer reminders that it is best practice for a SENCO to be part of the school's senior team. This helps to secure the

expectation that SEND is a whole school priority. In addition, to remind headteachers of the advantages if they and all their staff are familiar with at least Chapter 6 of the SEND Code of Practice (2015) if not the whole Code of Practice.

- It is beneficial to create a local area culture in which it is the norm for headteachers to review the teaching commitments of the SENCO so as to ensure they have enough time to dedicate to their role.
- Schools will benefit from being signposted to parent engagement groups.
- Local areas will benefit from reviewing transition arrangements and expectations for students with SEND at key points of their educational journey, for example on entry to the Foundation Stage, transitioning from KS2-KS3 and post 16 education.
- Local areas will benefit from engaging with Whole School SEND training for Senior Leaders. This promotes the philosophy that 'Every Leader/Teacher is a Leader/Teacher of SEND'

## 6. Sources of further information:

### Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 years

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/398815/SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf)

### Induction for New SENCOs .Provided by Inclusive Learning Service SEND

This is a three part termly course which provides practical approaches and advice for newly appointed SENCOs. This course is designed to support staff in their role and to provide an opportunity to meet other new SENCOs in the city and local area. Participants can join this course during any term during the academic year.

### The Perfect SENCO By Natalie Packer

Learn.Develop.Achieve (LDA) Resources: <https://www.ldalearning.com/>

- How to identify and support children with Dyslexia
- How to understand and support children with Dyspraxia
- How to understand and support children with hearing difficulties
- How to identify and support children with Speech and Language difficulties