

The Role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in mainstream schools.

The SEN Coordinator (SENCo), in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body, plays a key role in determining the development of the SEN policy and provision in the school in order to raise the achievement of children with SEN.

The SENCo takes day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the SEN policy and coordination of the provision made for individual children with SEN, working closely with staff, parents and carers, and other agencies. The SENCo also provides guidance to colleagues with the aim of securing high quality teaching for children with SEN.

However you could say that all teachers are SEN teachers, as the majority of children with special educational needs receive the help they need from classroom teachers in mainstream schools.

The SENCos responsibilities

The SENCo is responsible for ensuring the following with regard to children with special needs in their school:

1. Seeing that all children with special needs are being helped appropriately, ensuring liaison with parents and other professionals.
2. Talking to and advising any member of staff who is concerned about a child.
3. Co-ordinating provision for children with special needs.
4. Making sure all written records are completed and appropriate Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are in place. (See more detail below.)
5. Ensuring relevant background information about individual children is collected, recorded and up-to-date.

Changes in the regulations for SENCos

The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008/2945) introduce a new requirement to be implemented this year (2009) for SENCos to be qualified teachers. This

requirement will ensure that the SENCo has the standing to influence differentiated teaching and learning matched to pupils' individual needs.

The Regulations are due to come into effect on 1 September 2009, but allow for a two-year transitional period, for SENCos who are not currently teachers, but who have been in post for at least six months as at 31 August 2009, to gain Qualified Teacher Status by September 2011. This period will allow schools that may be affected to make any necessary staffing adjustments.

Some of the SENCo functions will continue to be undertaken by other staff, including teaching assistants, and they will continue to make a significant and important contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of pupils with SEN and disabilities. However, the person designated by the school governing body as responsible for co-ordinating overall provision for pupils with SEN and disabilities i.e. the person with the lead responsibility will need to be a qualified teacher. The Regulations also allow for head teachers or acting head teachers to carry out the role.

Special Educational Needs and schools

Schools place great importance on identifying SEN so they can help children as early as possible. Most children with SEN can have their needs met in a mainstream school.

Once it has been decided that a child has SEN, the child's teachers will plan their education taking account of the guidance given in a document known as the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice is a guide for early education settings (such as nurseries and playgroups), state schools and local authorities, on how they should identify, assess and provide help for children with SEN. You can read a summary of the code in the booklet, 'SEN: A Guide for Parents and Carers' or the full report, which are free from the Dept. for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) ☎ 0845 6 02 22 60 e-mail: dfes@prolog.uk.com. Website: www.dfes.gov.uk

A Step-by-step Approach

Children learn in different ways, and can have different levels or kinds of SEN. So if a child has SEN, the school will increasingly, step by step, bring in specialist expertise to help with the difficulties they may have. This step-by-step approach is set out in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

A school must tell parents if they start giving extra or different help to a child because of their special educational needs. The basic level of extra help is known as **School Action**, and could be:



School Action

- A different way of teaching certain things;
- some extra help from an adult;
- involvement of the school's SENCO;
- use of specialist software on a computer;
- use of a dyslexia teaching programme.

A child may need help through this step-by-step approach for only a short time, or for many years. Remember that you should be consulted at every step, and you should be told about your child's progress.

If a child does **not** make enough progress under School Action, their teacher or SEN Coordinator (SENCO) should talk to the parents about asking for advice from other people outside the school. This kind of extra help is called **School Action Plus** and could include:



School Action Plus

- more detailed assessment of the child's needs;
- advice for the school from one of the Dyslexia Advisors or an Educational Psychologists;
- help from a specialist teacher either one-to-one or in small groups;
- continuing use of a dyslexia teaching programme and use of computer software as appropriate.

Individual Education Plan (IEP).

If a child is on **School Action** or **School Action Plus** the child's school should write a plan setting out the type of help they will give the child in something called an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP could include:



IEP

- what special help is being given;
- how often the child will receive the help;
- who will provide the help;
- what the targets for the child are;
- how and when the child's progress will be checked;
- what help parents can give their child at home.

IEPs should be reviewed at least twice a year, ideally termly or more frequently for children with particular needs. Parents' views on the child's progress should be sought and they should be consulted as part of the review process. Whenever possible the child should also take part in the review process and be involved in setting targets.

Statutory Assessments and Statements

If a child's difficulties are severe and the school still cannot give the child all the help they need, the parents or the school can request a '**statutory assessment**' - a detailed investigation to find out what a child's special educational needs are and what special help the child needs.

If a statutory assessment indicates that a child's difficulties are severe enough a procedure of consultation will begin with a view to a **Statement of SEN** being produced. This is a legal document which sets out the specific difficulties a child has and the specific help they will receive. However only a very small percentage of children are given a statement and it can often be a lengthy and complicated process.

Useful Contacts

Parent Partnership: Local help and information for parents of children with SEN particularly assisting with meetings with schools.

Roger James ☎ 01209 844692 (West) Caroline Smith (East) ☎ 01579 363671

Dyslexia Action (Information about dyslexia, teaching qualifications and courses, resources and other useful information.) ☎ 01784 22 23 00

Website www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

The British Dyslexia Association National Helpline ☎ 0118 9 66 82 71 www.bdadyslexia.org.uk (Many useful information sheets to print out or the website has the facility to read out text.)

IPSEA: Independent Panel of Special Education Advisers - lists Educational Psychologists and other professionals who can give advice on SEN related matters. ☎ 0800 0 18 40 16.

ACE: Advisory Centre for Education National Helpline

☎ 0808 8 00 57 93. 2.00pm - 5.00 pm. Website www.ace-ed.org.uk

If the call is because of an exclusion ☎ 0207 7 04 98 22.

CDAHELPLINE 01872 27 48 27