

“Why should I worry...the SENCO will do it all”

Recognising the importance of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in our schools in readiness for a post-Covid-19 world.

By Andy Smith

1. ‘The World Turn’d Upside Down’

To put this chapter into a general context, it’s fair to state that we don’t know how the Covid-19 Pandemic will finally impact upon our schools; will it significantly damage the community spirit which sits at the very heart of our inclusive learning communities? Or shall the way in which schools and the teaching profession responded to the crisis with agility, speed, the adoption of new technologies, and the use of different learning environments, herald opportunities for development and exciting ways of working which frees both schools and learners from the restrictive constraints of a performativity-stifled, high-stakes assessment regime in the future? These two questions provide the backdrop to the critical commentary on the role and identity of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) presented in this chapter and what the future will hold – particularly in the working relationship between teachers and teaching assistants and their SENCOs.

As already indicated, Covid has wreaked havoc with our entire education system and will continue to influence national, regional and local policy and practice for years to come. Across the country most pupils, for long periods of time, were ‘home-educated’ with only the most vulnerable pupils and those of essential workers being taught in the actual school environment as school leaders and governing bodies managed part-closures and on-line education at exceptionally short notice. Bush (2021) considered the knock-on effect of the virus effecting staff and pupil welfare; he stated that,

“This is a ‘perfect storm’ of pressure for principals and other senior staff, which provides a severe test of leaders’ crisis management capabilities. Equally serious, but less often considered, is the impact of the pandemic on the strategic leadership and management of the organisation. The inevitable short-term reactions to the frequent changes in policy mean that longer-term considerations may be neglected. Renewing school vision, and recreating the sense of community characteristic of successful organisations, will be essential when education returns to ‘normal’.”

When restrictions did lift, and pupils did begin a managed return to their classrooms, there was no ‘default’ to normal as disruption to teaching, learning, assessment and the limited/controlled use of the environment continued with schools still having to implement their (very necessary) Covid-safe protocols and routines. It felt as if the world was re-enacting scenes from old 1950s science-fiction films where a dystopian future was depicted; a world (borrowing from a phrase much used in the British Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century) which was ‘turn’d upside down’. However, at the time of writing this chapter, the United Kingdom is slowly emerging; the economy is starting to show signs of reviving, the pubs are open, night clubs are pumping out their music, sporting events are taking place ...but infection rates remain a serious cause for concern, Covid-related deaths still occur and overseas travel and holidays abroad are in

‘tatters’. Unfortunately, there is also an increasing concern about deteriorating child and adult mental health/wellbeing and a climate of underpinning fear in our young people where the community spirit which usually sits at the heart of any school has been severely put to the test – too many schools feeling that they have been ‘broken’. In short, there is no ‘happy ever after’ ending to all of this or a return to ‘normal’...just yet.

2. Introducing the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

In the light of this current situation, let’s think of a ‘school’ - be it a small, rural, local authority primary or a large, sprawling inner-city academy. That school will have legions of dedicated and courageous staff who faced their own fears about Covid infection through working in their schools throughout the pandemic; fears for themselves, for their own families and friends and for their pupils for whom they have a duty of care. Now let’s focus on one particular type of teacher – the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The SENCO is an essential member of staff who has a wide and varied role to play across the whole school community, particularly in relation to supporting and meeting the needs of children and young adults who have barriers to learning, participation, interaction and engagement. In this role, SENCOs were true ‘Covid-Heroes’ during the ‘Time of the Great Lockdowns’ as they physically stayed in post in their schools making sure that the most vulnerable pupils were supported. But what does a SENCO do? Smith (2020) stated that the SENCO has his/her, main body of work in the field of special educational needs...

‘but this is not exclusively so as a SENCO can also have a significant role across the whole school, particularly in terms of developing a school’s drive to become an inclusive learning community and in the continuing professional development of their colleagues (teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff members).’
(pg 84)

This whole-school influence and engagement is reflected in the Department for Education/Department for Health’s (DfE/DH) prescribed list of responsibilities for the SENCO as stated in their 2015 Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs: 0 to 25. These are shown in the following table:

Table (2.1) Goes here

This list of responsibilities defines what could be called the SENCO’s ‘Legal Contract’, what a SENCO *has* to do by Law. The bold text in the table is my own, highlighting the key behaviours expected of a teacher holding this specialist role; it’s very interesting to note the emphasis on management functions such as acting in an advisory and liaison capacity across the whole school community, both internally and externally, overseeing/coordinating to ensure that suitable and effective provision is in place for vulnerable learners, and that it’s working well (the ‘quality assurance’ responsibility). Many elements of this role seem to be underpinned by the need for the SENCO to work with other people from a range of settings, organisations and places. However, these responsibilities feel overly ‘procedural’ in nature as they don’t reflect how the SENCO role is enacted as there is, naturally, a diversity of SENCO ‘experience’ due to each individual school’s unique ethos and culture, size/number on roll, level of funding, priorities for SEN, senior leadership team and staff understanding/perception of the SENCO’s role, general understanding of SEN and teachers’ ability and/or willingness to meet the needs of vulnerable learners in their mainstream classrooms. These factors can significantly affect SENCO working conditions and their ability to become transformational

school leaders. As a result, it is impossible to model a realistic ‘generic SENCO exemplar’ which defines a shared identity without a detailed investigation of this diversity across schools.

3. Trying to create the impossible: A generic SENCO model

3.1 *The SENCO’s ‘Legal Contract’*

In the previous section of this chapter I made the point that trying to create this SENCO exemplar would be impossible due to the diversity across schools which impacts upon how the role is enacted, but I’m going to ‘have a go’ anyway! To begin, I’ll set the ‘ground-work’ for the model:

The DfE/DH (2015) states that the SENCO has the day-to-day *responsibility* for the operation of the school’s policy for Special Educational Needs together with the coordination of the provision made to support individual children with barriers to their learning and engagement. The Head-teacher is responsible for the overall *management* and quality of that provision and so the SENCO should work closely with their Headteacher and Governors in the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school.

The DfE/DH (2015) also states that, ‘They [*SENCOs*] will be most effective in that role if they are part of the school leadership team’ (p. 97) and that Governing bodies of maintained mainstream schools and the proprietors of mainstream academy schools (including free schools) ‘**must** ensure that there is a qualified teacher designated as SENCO for the school’ (p. 97). There is a significant emphasis on the SENCO being a qualified teacher, but the DfE/DH’s language is much less forceful when considering how schools should view the status of the SENCO as a member of the Senior Leadership Team. A direction is also made that if the appointed SENCO in the school has not previously been the SENCO at that or any other school for a total period of more than twelve months they ‘**must**’ achieve a National Award in Special Educational Needs Coordination within three years of appointment. Once again, a forceful ‘**must**’ in the official text of the document. It is unfortunate that this clear direction isn’t made in any commentary related to SENCO conditions of service and support – such factors as suitable protected time-tabled time being provided for the SENCO to do their duties during the working week, remission from teaching, dedicated office space, their own telephone line, administrative support and even a suitable level of increased pay becoming the remit of each individual Headteacher/Board of Governors to interpret and provide (or not) thus creating the contextual diversity and the very fractured nature of the SENCO ‘experience’ (a broad range from the SENCOs who are the ‘haves’ to those who are the ‘have nots’). This isn’t a new issue, as all previous Codes of Practice for Special Educational Needs were equally imprecise in supporting SENCO conditions of service (DfE, 1994; DfES, 2001).

The broad ‘Legal Contract’ for the SENCO is established by the list of responsibilities in the 2015 Code of Practice (see Table 2.1) – so it will be useful to break these down into more specific duties. Some of these are listed in the following table:

Table (3.1) goes here

Examining this list, and the emerging factors which have been extracted from it, there is an emphasis on effective communication to establish successful partnerships. These are essential SENCO skills which had been previously identified by Cowne (2000) who stated that SENCOs needed excellent listening skills to be able to participate in productive dialogues; while the

Teacher Training Agency (TTA, 1998) stated that SENCOs required the attributes of confidence, enthusiasm, reliability, flexibility and good communication skills. Although both sources are well over twenty years old, these comments remain valid.

So...we're starting to build up a picture of an 'Idealised SENCO' (the 'stuff' of a detailed job specification with '*communication*' and '*collaboration*' firmly placed in the 'essential skills' column); but how does this compare with the reality? Let's see...

3.2 Forty schools, forty SENCOs, forty different experiences:

In 2018 (pre-Covid-19 and post-embedding the processes and practices generated through the introduction of the DfE/DoH (2015) Code of Practice across all schools) I conducted a piece of small-scale research into how SENCOs perceived their own status and identity in their specialist role. This was conducted in forty English mainstream primary and secondary schools across the East Midlands region (24 primary and 16 secondary). These schools were a mixture of Local Authority supported and those from Academy Trusts (and their equivalents, including a couple of Free Schools). I apologise to post-compulsory phase readers and those who are special-school orientated, but please stay with me as a great deal of the findings are applicable cross-phase. It wasn't a particularly 'scientific study' as it was underpinned by a heavy degree of pragmatism in terms of the availability of participant schools/settings and their SENCOs in a single region; the findings cannot be generalised across the whole population of SENCOs in all schools across England. The purpose of the research was to create a 'snap-shot' of a SENCO and his/her role by collating the participant SENCOs' data and modelling it into a single A4-sized annotated image – a sort of 'composite' of the participants.

In order to explore the scope of the SENCO role for the annotated image, a 4-piece model was constructed covering the organisational structure, responsibility and scope within the role, and strategic leadership experience (Fig. 1). This model forming the theoretical underpinning for the construction of a SENCO questionnaire.

For the purposes of creating the questionnaire the following brief definitions were adopted:

1. **Experience:** the number of years the SENCO had been teaching and the amount of time they have been working as a SENCO
2. **Responsibility & scope:** the SENCO's status within their school and the autonomy and opportunity available to the SENCO to take the lead in managing the day-to-day operation of SEN provision and policy.
3. **Leadership:** the ability for the SENCO to engage in the evaluation of SEN provision coupled with opportunities to progress planning, the embedding of these within whole-school development and the ability to be able to project a tangible 'vision' for SEN development and influence others to actively promote and realise this vision.
4. **SENCO 'well-being':** focusing on how the SENCO is protected from professional 'burn-out' and how the school supports the SENCO in order for them to be pro-active and efficient in role.

Fig (3.1) goes here

Based on this model the questionnaire was constructed using multiple-choice style questions, covering the SENCOs' experience, provided resources, duties/responsibilities, team leadership, contribution to staff professional development, policy forming, budgeting, their own well-being and reflections on their role.

Through the interrogation of the data collected, a comparison was made which identified areas of shared role experience/consistency and areas where there was a significant degree of diversity.

Table (3.2) goes here

The first 'golden-thread' to be identified relating to consistency was the fact that all SENCOs now had to be qualified teachers; on this point Packer (2014) stated,

'...the importance of the role is clear: the SENCO is currently only one of two statutory school roles (the other...is the head teacher). But only one of these roles requires someone with qualified teacher status (QTS) – and it's not the head!'

(p 2)

The second 'golden thread' related to teacher-based professionalism is set within the sphere of 'caring' which, according to Acker (1995) is an approach and an emotion requiring both '*love and labour*' (p 21); this is the SENCOs' Psychological Contract expressed as emotional labour and is an indication that SENCOs care not only about their pupils' academic progress but also about their social and mental well-being. This caring approach or depth of emotional understanding (Denzin, 1984) has, according to Isenberger and Zembylas (2006), a lot to do with who the SENCO *is* as a teacher and that, generally, teachers do not separate their 'labour' (in terms of teaching, administration, management and leadership) from their 'caring' as all are inter-related as a part of a teacher's sense of personal and intellectual stance. Nias (1989) went so far as to say that this culture of care creates some of the satisfactions of teaching as it depends on taking more care of others and often ignoring oneself. In this study, SENCOs made frequent comments relating to their heavy workload, their multi-roles and the effect upon their work-life balance, but they still liked *being* the SENCO in spite of the emotional cost of their frustrations and disappointments; in short, these 'caring aspects' provided them with the greatest enjoyment and reason for wanting to *be* a SENCO in spite of the emotional labour involved. Smith (2021) identified the SENCOs' whole-school influence as part of their 'Psychological Contract' and stated that it is,

'the main driving force behind any teacher who sees beyond his/her own job description...The SENCO provides a significant cross-school function and their work is threaded through the successful application of a wide-range of school policies beyond the remit of the policy for special educational needs and disability; thus the influence of the SENCO is felt across the whole school population and community and not limited to implementing the practical application of the school's policy for SEN. This whole-school influence sits at the core of the SENCO's Psychological Contract and the opportunities to engage it.' (pg 33)

This Psychological Contract, a combination of emotional labour (doing 'what's right' for children and young adults in the school setting) and a SENCO's influence across the whole-school in a multiple role (as a teacher, specialist, coordinator/manager, sometimes a leader and always an administrator), inter-relates with their Legal Contract. The relationship between

these two being framed within the ethos/culture of their individual school or setting, in turn this framing creates the diversity and variety of experience across the SENCO population.

3.3 Not a generic but a 'composite' SENCO model

As already stated, the high degree of variety across the SENCOs' roles and experiences make it impossible to construct an *accurate* SENCO model, however a form of SENCO model is possible using the composition of the modal (highest frequency) responses from the questionnaire. This does not fully illustrate the diversity their experience/conditions of service, but it might provide a starting point for an appraisal of how all SENCOs are not alike. This Composite Model is shown in Fig (3.2).

Fig (3.2) Goes here

Although all of the SENCOs had the same shared experience of their Legal Contract, the Composite SENCO Model illustrates that many other experiences were not shared as there was a difference in resourcing, protected time for undertaking SENCO responsibilities/duties, pay levels, status on the senior leadership team, expectations and demands made upon them. An item which frequently appeared within SENCO commentaries in the questionnaire was excessive administration and '*paperwork*' which the role generated leading to SENCOs having to spend time outside of their normal working day completing this, thus negatively affecting their well-being, work-life balance and time for their other duties within the school. However, it was in the restrictions placed on SENCOs to act as leaders that the differences across schools was most evident. Several SENCOs reported how they were given the opportunity to effectively manage provision for SEN(D) with the autonomy to be leaders, however many felt prevented from actively leading as the opportunity was not given to them, even though every evolution of the national guidelines relating to SEN since the first *Code of Practice* was issued in 1994 stated that the SENCO *should* be on the senior leadership team influencing policies for whole-school development while the SENCO Regulations (DCFS, 2008) *suggested* a leadership role for the SENCO. A key indicator of this missed opportunity for actively leading rather than managing or administering was in the area of head-teachers and deputy head-teachers 'micro-managing' and restricting their SENCO's autonomy to act independently by holding back key aspects of the SENCO leadership function for themselves. Examples of restrictions being a high proportion of SENCOs not being allowed to lead and/or deploy the Teaching Assistant team, with a lack of access to understanding and managing finances and budgets as this was controlled by, in the main, their head-teachers. The SENCOs seemed very much aware of their conditions of service with some SENCOs feeling '*undervalued*' and '*badly used*' with their goodwill '*being taken for granted*' by their schools and academies, but they all identified key aspects of their Psychological Contract particularly their significant input in terms of '*making a difference*' for both the pupils and for their colleagues (teachers and TAs).

4. A 'Day in the Life' of a hard-working SENCO

The Composite Model was constructed by pulling together information/data from forty SENCOs, but what is a typical working day like? Again, this is impossible to generalise across the whole population of SENCOs but at least one SENCO's 'typical day' can be presented in

order to complement the Composite Model. A number of SENCOs were invited to complete a 'Day in the Working Life'-style diary (no holds barred...tell it 'as it is'). What follows is a first-hand account from one SENCO so, please meet 'Caz':

4.1 Caz

This is Caz's 'non-teaching day' where she attempts to spend the morning engaged in her SENCO work with the afternoon devoted to preparation time for the remainder of the week where she is the Lead Teacher in the school's Reception Unit. Caz presents a strong image of the SENCO balancing a range of multi-duties in a small primary school but although the school is small it does not naturally follow that her SENCO duties are 'light' as the main theme for Caz is the range and amount of work which comes her way during the working day. This work is mainly in the form of administration relating to applications for funding, reviewing Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP), liaising with external specialists and completing assessments. She is particularly frustrated at the amount of repetition and the lack of certainty as to the desired outcome of generating evidence for sufficient funding for provision; the additional issue arises in her account of the FACT tool being the preferred system for the Local Authority (LA) and its imposition across all schools; Caz calls this process '*...a complete nightmare*' due to the amount of time it takes and the difficulty of getting the teaching staff to complete their part of the target-setting process. Caz, although exceptionally supportive of all the staff in the school, does point out that many of them are not taking the responsibility for pupils with SEN.

What shines through is her knowledge of individual pupils' needs, the processes of developing provision for them, an awareness of funding processes, liaison with external agencies, her desire to support and train her colleagues and her sheer resilience in managing the range of incidents and work which she has to do. Caz does have a working relationship with her head-teacher and believes that the senior leadership team does provide her with support but she wishes for more time to undertake her SENCO duties as she is frustrated by the amount of '*paperwork*' and '*...continually chasing teachers for support plans and evidence*'. Caz wants to engage more with parents and teachers and wants remission from class-teaching, she also wants to monitor the provision for SEN through classroom observations and pupil interviews. In spite of the lack of time and the frequent frustrations she has Caz does state that, '*I love my SEN role and I do feel that I have learnt so much and can work together with teachers to find solutions to children's learning and behaviour*'. However, there is an impact on Caz's work-life balance as she does have to complete a great deal of work at home in the evening – usually the work which she has not been able to complete during the working day due to having to react to issues and demands brought to her attention by other teachers.

Caz's diary account shows how the process of meeting the needs of pupils with SEN is so firmly enmeshed with assessment, the imposition of external processes and to generating funding. To do this Caz is immersed in a whirlwind of external liaison, administrative duties and chasing colleagues for information. All of these can be said to contribute to the discourse of performativity as the amount of time devoted to the processes of funding, resourcing and assessing pupils with SEN seems to be proportionally distorted when compared to the support of their needs in the classroom. Caz is aware of this situation when she states that, '*I get that*

SEN is more outcome driven but is it really necessary to include so much information on a form?’

Caz uses the word ‘relentless’ to describe her typical day but with reason, as it is an important word as it can be applied, equally well, to all SENCOs who are balancing their work-life relationship.

4.2 Dear Diary - Thursday 21st November 2019

Today is my non-teaching day. Half spent on SENCO tasks and half is PPA time. But most of this time is doing SENCO tasks about 80-90%. The other four days of the week I am lead teacher in our Reception unit.

Today started well. I had a long ‘to do’ list which was manageable, if I put my head down. This included writing an application for top-up funding for ‘A’ in year 1. She’s arrived from Romania with a diagnosis of ASD, she hit us like a whirlwind in May but was only given temporary top up/high needs funding until Christmas. I’m collating evidence for E’s EHCP. E’s had one application for a statement turned down probably as he didn’t have a medical diagnosis of ASD which he does now. This was frustrating as he can’t function without one-to-one support. I’m meeting a specialist teacher from Behaviour Support, completing a First Assess Communication Tool (FACT) on L (don’t get me started on this total waste of time tool!) and analysing a sensory checklist, then responding to e-mails and finally information sent by Suzanne our independent speech and language therapist.

Started work on A’s top-up funding. This is the first one I’ve filled out since September but they’ve changed the bloody form again. I get that SEN is outcome driven but is it necessary to include so much information on a form? After getting my head around the new layout and deciphering the information they want I begin to fill it in. I have been unable to meet with A’s teacher as she has such a big workload and is stressed managing two children with ASD, so I begin to fill out the form with all the information I have collated on her so far. This is giving me déjà vu as a month ago I collated the same evidence and wrote similar outcomes, interventions, strengths and difficulties on a request for involvement form to the Communication and Interaction team. There must be a more streamlined approach, couldn’t teams link together to information share as it could save hours of form filling?

This time was cut short as the university student I have on placement wanted to meet to go through policies, which I did.

Time is disappearing as I now have to meet a specialist teacher and TA from the Emotional, Social and Mental Health team who have been observing M. They were positive about how staff interact with M which was good. They observed M and commented that he finds transitions hard, and continually sought sensory experiences. They had a suggestion that we can put into place about making him a special sensory treasure chest and gave us a ‘twiddle keyring’ to get started. I agree that he needs this but am apprehensive about saying this to his teacher as I can hear her answer before she says it. ‘He already has a sensory box he doesn’t use it’. It’s hard to get across that it can be the best sensory box in the world but if the adult does not scaffold its use it will be useless! Part of the problem with M, and another child J, is that their teacher has not formed relationships with them and they are currently being taught out of class in the morning by the deputy head. The decision was taken by the head to do this for staff’s well-

being as the challenging behaviour was consuming them and was not making a positive learning environment.

The specialist teacher had mentioned to our head that we could apply for group top-up funding for our four boys who are taught out of class. I asked her which form it is and she said, 'ermmm there isn't one, you will have to put them all on the same form'; she said she would come in to do an observation and give notes to support this and I agreed but on reflection it's another frustrating thing. We are often told to apply for top-up funding and people think it is a problem solver but realistically it doesn't help at all. The likeliness of someone highly skilled being employed for two terms on a temporary contract is very slim, it is more likely that resources are deployed from elsewhere in the school but this has a huge impact on teaching and learning for other children and teachers. It is also frustrating as without hours of form filling and collating evidence the request would be rejected at panel. It also makes your heart sink at filling in another form when I already have five different forms in process (2 EHC's, 2 Top-up funding and a request for involvement).

I then asked to talk to our head to ask which form needs to be the priority, does it need to be this group top-up funding request or A's? She was frustrated as she thought it was something we could apply for, not just made up as a lovely idea by the specialist teacher! This meeting lasted five minutes as she was called to year 1 to remove E who was destroying the classroom. Since moving into temporary accommodation after being made homeless he's been unable to access his class for learning. He shows high levels of anxiety, aggression and violence. It's crucial that we complete his EHCP as soon as possible but I need to pin his teacher down to fill a form in and collate more evidence!

I then left a 'help' e-mail and a voicemail for our Communication and Interaction teacher. We're at crisis point with E, he's making himself, staff and other children unsafe. We've a calm room at school but if he ends up in there it means it can't be used by our other four children who've anger outbursts.

We then had a member of staff faint so I dealt with her for 30 mins. I'm now slightly concerned that I haven't ticked anything off my 'to do' list. I go back to A's form-filling but our learning mentor comes to see requesting feedback from the observation today. She's positive with the outcome. I haven't managed to catch up with M's teacher for feedback as she's busy at lunch. I make a mental note to e-mail her later.

Quick 10-minute lunch break then pop to my class to check on my children. It's now 1.30 and I feel like I've achieved nothing.

I manage to fill in part of A's form, then I have a visit from our deputy head who asks about the feedback for M. She agrees to make the treasure basket with him. I do feel supported by my SLT, I just wish they could give me a lot more time to do the SENCo role but we're a small school with 180 children and we all need to be hands on deck. This chat is cut short as she has to go, yet again, to E who is 'kicking off' in the calm room and has bitten his TA.

I then have a meeting with our head who has spoken to the specialist teacher I left the help message for. She has given advice, one of those was, 'do you know you can apply for top-up funding' 'You're having a laugh!' goes through my head. I don't believe this'll help and I haven't got the time to fill in any more forms. He already has top-up funding and full-time 1:1. There are no more adults we could release and couldn't employ a skilled person for a couple

of terms. We make a plan and chat to his teacher. The specialist teacher has agreed to come in to school and do an observation and the head has said that she will liaise with her. This is helpful as it feels like Chinese Whispers having to feed-back to so many people; the head can sort out his provision so, 'phew!'

I then help E's teacher to make a timetable with her to support his new provision.

I then quickly complete a FACT tool on L in my class. I have spoken to his Mum about her concerns. She believes that he has ASD but we haven't seen anything to concern us in school so I promised I would complete a FACT tool for home time. I missed the deadline but hopefully can share the findings with her tomorrow; he scored age appropriately and it shows no concerns. I will get her to fill it in from a home perspective and do a sensory checklist. I then need to feed this back to her Children & Family Practice (CFP) worker and talk about where to go next.

The FACT tool is a complete nightmare, it's advertised as an effective resource which it would be if it didn't take so long to fill in. To get help from the specialist teaching teams or request top-up funding you have to show two FACT cycles. It's frustrating as most of the recommendations are Wave 1 Quality First Teaching and stated on our provision map. We have our own independent speech and language therapist who can set personalised targets and a skilled staff team who can deliver interventions. It is a complete nightmare to get teachers to fill in and then get them to write targets after reading pages of recommendations, get parents to sign then actually put the support into place and then review the outcomes. I've heard a few say things like, 'why should I worry...the SENCO will do it all' ...not helpful! I have made up about five FACT cycles, the children were receiving the interventions and targets were recorded in other places just not on the FACT. The LA SEN team is very protective of it! The FACT + is even worse and the Early Years Fact + took me two hours to fill in for one child who already receives so much support from different agencies the FACT is pointless!

I had a visit from an upset teacher, all our KS1 teachers are currently consumed by the few children with very challenging behaviour. She had a chair thrown at her yesterday and is becoming very stressed with E's anxiety-driven behavior, finding him incredible hard to manage; his two meltdowns today tipped her over the edge. She has many children with low achievement in her mixed year class and she's feeling the strain. We talked about what was working well, how she was going to support through the Christmas timetable, the things she needed to complete and who could help. I do feel that if I had more time I could be more effective in supporting other teachers especially emotionally. I hate to see teachers so upset and to feel so powerless

My afternoon targets are to monitor the SEN provision in the school through observations, monitoring, pupil interviews etc. but I haven't managed to get away from form-filling to do that now. I do love my SEN role and I do feel that I have learnt so much and can work together with teachers to find solutions to children's learning and behavior but I feel frustrated by the amount of paperwork involved – it is totally ridiculous. It's frustrating to be continually chasing teachers for support plans and evidence, but I feel powerless sometimes and unable to support our teachers who've had an awful start to the year managing very challenging children. I feel if I had more time out of class I could help towards this. I feel that I don't have time to work with parents and I don't feel that we really get their voice or children's voice into our provision.

Home to start my planning and to write e-mails summarising the feedback from the visit for M. I didn't get any PPA done today.

5. Main Learning Points (from Caz's day)

- (i) The SENCO in a multi-role- balancing whole class teaching with SENCO duties
- (ii) Time allocated for SENCO work is limited. SENCO asks for more time to engage fully with workload (SENCO as negotiator)
- (iii) The amount of 'paperwork' undertaken is perceived as excessive (the SENCO as administrator)
- (iv) The high level of SENCO knowledge about pupil needs
- (v) SENCO reviewing and evaluating (auditing)
- (vi) SENCO supports all staff (perceived by staff as the 'expert'; acts as a 'rescuer' of colleagues; a frequent collaborator with external services) this being a part of the SENCO's Emotional Labour.
- (vii) SENCO's positive relationship with parents
- (viii) Direct SENCO-Head liaison (sustaining the relationship between head as overall manager of provision for SEN and SENCO as day-to-day manager) but SENCO *not* on Senior Leadership Team.
- (ix) Attitude of staff to SEN provision and their own role in teaching children with SEN frustrates the SENCO ('*Why should I worry...the SENCO will do it all!*')
- (x) SENCO well-being and work-life balance compromised both in and out of school due to workload.
- (xi) Caz loves being SENCO (Emotional labour)

Thank you, Caz. Edwards (2015) stated that, 'The SENCO role is huge!' (p.28) but I think we can also add Caz's phrase that the SENCO role is also 'relentless'...and will be increasingly more so in our post-Covid world.

References

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Table (2.1) SENCO Responsibilities

Key Behaviour	Responsibility
Overseeing	the day-to-day operation of the school's policy for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
Co-ordinating	provision for children with SEN
Liaising	with the relevant Designated Teacher where a looked after pupil has SEN
Advising	on the graduated approach to providing SEN support
Advising	on the deployment of the school's delegated budget and other resources to meet pupils' needs effectively
Liaising	with parents of pupils with SEN
Liaising	with early years providers, other schools, educational psychologists, health and social care professionals, and independent or voluntary bodies
Key point of contact	with external agencies, especially the local authority and its support services
Liaising	with potential next providers of education to ensure a pupil and their parents are informed about options and a smooth transition is planned
Working with	the Head-teacher and school governors to ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010) with regard to reasonable adjustments and access arrangements
Ensuring	that the school keeps the records of all pupils with SEN up to date.

(adapted from the DfE/DH (2015) *Code of Practice: 0 to 25 pgs 97-98*)

Table (3.1) Specific SENCO Duties (embedded within their Responsibilities)

Specific Duty	Key Factors
SENCOs need to be pro-active and proficient in <i>identifying, assessing and analysing learners' needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of needs • Assessment of needs • Analysis of needs
SENCOs need to engage in robust and effective <i>collaborative working with teachers & partnerships with parents-</i> planning adjustments and then putting in place effective interventions and provision <i>the teacher remaining responsible for working with the learners on a daily basis</i> but with the <i>SENCO supporting/advising</i> the class teacher on the implementation of provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher partnerships • Parent partnerships • Teacher responsibility • SENCO as advisor & supporter
The SENCO plays a key part in <i>reviewing the effectiveness of the support and interventions for learners</i> holding Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCP) - reviewed every twelve months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance (support & Interventions) • EHCP review
The 'graduated approach' at the centre of the Code of Practice present learner progress on having their personal needs addressed – this provides the core of a SENCOs' duties, along with the <i>planning and preparation for transition</i> for learners with SEN (into, through and out of the school).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for transitions • Understanding and applying the Graduated Response (Assess, Plan, Do, Review)
SENCOs should be <i>aware of the local offer</i> for the provision of learners with SEN as provided by the Local Authority and school and that they should <i>work with other professionals</i> in order to <i>support families, making sure that learners with SEN received support and high-quality teaching</i> (adapted from the DfE/DH, 2015. 6.89)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of 'Local Offer' • Partnerships with external agencies & professionals

Fig. (3.1) The 4-piece model underpinning the SENCO questionnaire.

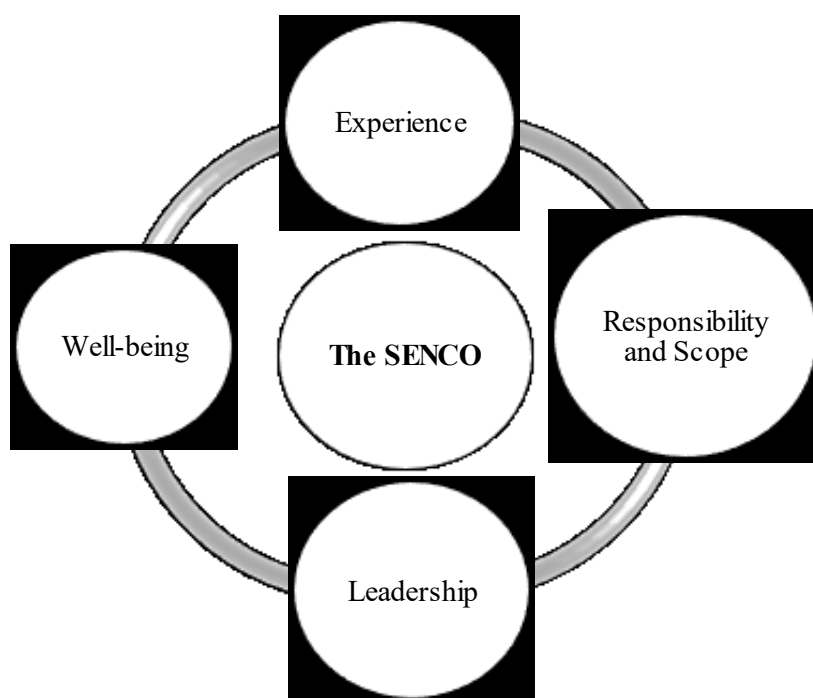


Table (3.2) Comparison of SENCO Status across participant schools

The Scope of the SENCO Role (from the 4-Piece Questionnaire Model)	Area of Consistency	Area of Variety
EXPERIENCE	All hold QTS Attended formal SENCO training	Years qualified as a teacher Time in service as SENCO
RESPONSIBILITY & SCOPE	Duties directly related to DfE/DH (2015) <i>CoP</i> (Legal Contract) SENCO having multi-role in school (SENCO and class teacher/subject teacher and/or other cross-school role) SENCOs tasked to deliver in-house CPD (SEN) to teachers and TAs in the school SENCOs liaising with external agencies Opportunities for SENCO-teacher communication	SENCO knowledge of, and responsibility for, funding mechanisms for SEN Priority for SEN in the school Membership of SLT

	<p>SENCOs Seen as the ‘expert’ by other teachers with some teachers not taking responsibility for pupils with SEN</p> <p>Opportunities for SENCO-parent communication & liaison</p> <p>SENCO as Administrator</p>	
LEADERSHIP	<p>Recognition by other staff of the status of the SENCO</p>	<p>Payment/allowance for being a SENCO</p> <p>Leading and deploying the TA team</p> <p>Level of SENCO autonomy</p> <p>SENCO duties as manager and transformational & strategic leader</p>
WELLBEING	<p>Ability to ‘make a difference’ for pupils</p> <p>(high level of ‘<i>Emotional Labour</i>’)</p>	<p>Level of resourcing (office, telephone)</p> <p>Amount of protected time given per week for SENCO duties</p> <p>Administrative workload</p> <p>Support for administration</p> <p>Opportunity to work alongside colleagues in their classrooms</p> <p>Work-life balance</p> <p>Wellbeing supported and/or addressed by the school</p>

Fig (3.2) The Composite SENCO is:

