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“Juggling Elephants”: A study about SENCO Impact

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1. Who is a SENCO?

A Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in England coordinates services around children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and helps teachers to develop and implement appropriate planning, provision and resources for children with SEN in mainstream schools. (DfE, 1994)

2. Research Aims

- To consider factors through which SENCOs contribute to teachers’ skills of dealing with pupils who have SEN
- To identify how the impact of SENCOs is currently being assessed within schools
- To investigate how SENCOs are able to successfully motivate teachers to manage needs of pupils with SEN

3. Sampling and Methodology

Phase One

Purposive, cross-sectional survey of SENCOs on the National Award for SEN Coordination

Phase Two

Semi-structured interviews of SENCOs from Northamptonshire and Leicestershire

Phase Three

Case studies of 3 schools: semi-structured interviews of SENCOs, teachers and headteachers; along with document scrutiny of the work of students with SEN

4. Preliminary Findings

- A complex role, involving varied skill ranges across different contexts and social interactions
- Membership of School Leadership Teams (SLT) and subsequent SLT priorities affects SENCOs’ impact on teachers

“As a teaching SENCO, it is difficult to juggle so many responsibilities... a dedicated SENCO may impact more on SEN across the school, as opposed to someone like me who is ‘juggling so many elephants at a go’... however (this is)... affected by the school budget.”

“SENCOs are... expected to monitor and complete CAFs (Common Assessment Frameworks) which add extra paperwork and time to the very busy role; meetings are also a large part of the role with reviews taking considerable time; much of the work I often have to do at home.”

- Time management a constant concern in balancing competing priorities and demands

“(SENCOs) ... are not sagacious banks of knowledge ... even though, it’s almost as if you have to be.”

- Liaising and arranging external support affects provisions

“It would also help if the turnaround from identifying a child with SEN to getting the help/advice/support needed for them was a lot quicker. .”



How effectively are SENCOs enabling teachers to address the needs of children with SEN?

5. Projected Outcomes

Research outcomes will inform the nature of support mechanisms for SENCOs, teachers and headteachers, who will be able to utilise findings to facilitate effective initiatives and exchanges which meet the needs of children with SEN.

Reference: Department for Education (DfE). (1994) *Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*. London: HMSO.

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