The Role of the SENCO

Introduction

This chapter examines the origin and the changing role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The content focuses on relevant legislation, the supporting Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Children with SEN (DENI, 1998) in Northern Ireland and the perspectives of what research has shown in relation to the changing role of the SENCO. It sets out the role of the SENCO and makes suggestions are made as to how SENCOs can effectively ensure inclusive cultures, policies and practice within schools. The chapter concludes by considering some other key issues in relation to the role of the SENCO as well as looking ahead to possible further changes.

Background – Legislation

Throughout the history of SEN, there have been significant changes in educational values and practices, which have influenced the legislative process and the implementation of numerous policies. This has led to on-going change from segregation to inclusion for SEN provision in England and Wales and subsequently in Northern Ireland.

One of the most significant changes which influenced policy and practice in SEN was the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). legislated by the Education Act (1981) and subsequently the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. This 1986 Order provided the initial impetus for the inclusion of children with SEN. It introduced the provision whereby children with a statement of SEN could be educated in mainstream schools where a parent wanted it, the SEN provision met the child's needs, and it was compatible with the efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated and with the efficient use of resources. Warnock (DES, 1978) also suggested that every school should have a special needs teacher and this brought about the appointment of remedial teachers in the 1980s. Support for children with SEN was primarily delivered through withdrawal from class and working on an individual or small group basis.

This approach to the inclusion of children and managing SEN was further enhanced following the introduction of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the supporting Code of Practice (DENI, 1998) (Code) which formally introduced the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in Northern Ireland. This was a substantial change from the remedial teacher approach, where the SENCO would now be responsible for co-ordinating the schools SEN provision.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO) advanced the inclusion agenda even further through strengthening the rights of children and young people with SEN to attend mainstream schools, prohibiting disability discrimination and requiring that all schools have accessibility plans for accessing the premises, the curriculum and information. The introduction of SENDO was supported by a Supplement to the Code which provided schools and others with practical guidance aimed at promoting improvement in inclusive practices, to assist schools and Boards make effective decisions and to encourage schools to develop a whole school acceptance of including children with SEN in the work and life of school.

It is evident that the changes in legislation have led to a climate of change for schools in the diversity of pupil being enrolled in schools and the need to develop, review and evaluate cultures, policies and practices to create a willingness to embrace all pupils as an integral part of school life.

The Changing Role of the SENCO

The role of the SENCO has also changed: the SENCO is now required to develop a knowledge, understanding and range of skills to co-ordinate SEN in schools.

Winter and Kilpatrick (1999) reported how in Northern Ireland the Code (1998) "established a pivotal role for SENCOs" (p180) causing them to change their role. Montgomery (2007) argued that following the introduction of the Code, the SENCO had "to embrace a number of new roles to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in each of the key areas of SEN co-ordination: strategic direction and development of provision in each school, learning and teaching,

leading and managing staff and efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources" (p46).

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Whilst the Code (1998) is not a legal document, schools and boards must have 'regard' to it. It provides schools with a structured framework in which to operate in the identification and assessment of those children who present with SEN (Education (NI) Order, (1996) Article 4(2) and Code (1998), p1).

In all mainstream schools, a designated teacher should be responsible for:

   ❍   the day to day operation of the school's special educational needs policy;

   ❍   responding to requests for advice from other teachers;

   ❍   co-ordinate SEN provision, including, in secondary schools, ensuring appropriate liaison with the various teachers who will teach any given child with special educational needs;

   ❍   maintain a SEN register, with records on pupils with special educational needs;

   ❍   liaison with parents of children with special educational needs;

   ❍   establishing the SEN in-service training requirements of the staff, and contributing as appropriate to their training;

   ❍   liaison with external agencies. (DENI, 1998, p7).

Each of these responsibilities are explored in the following chapters in some detail to provide some suggestions of good practices as to meet effectively those responsibilities and further advance inclusive practice in schools.

1.   **To co-ordinate the day to day operation of the school's special educational needs policy**

The overall responsibility for SEN in a school rests with the Board of Governors. (BOG). One of the ways the BOG have found it useful to drive good practice for SEN and inclusion is to have a governor responsible for SEN. In cases where this takes place, the governor maintains a watching brief on all aspects of SEN and inclusion and may challenge practice ensuring the SEN and inclusion agenda remains at the forefront of school thinking.

○   Specific responsibilities for SEN are delegated to the principal and the SENCO to ensure the day to day operation of the schools SEN policy is embedded in practice.

○   In keeping with an inclusive ethos there should be a whole school approach to SEN and inclusion. That means every teacher needs to be made aware that they have a professional responsibility to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEN and/or disability. [See the Role of the Teacher in the Leadership and Management section of this file.]

○   A whole school approach enhances the capacity of the school to meet the needs of all pupils.

○   The SENCO should work in a co-ordinating role; this means *co-ordinating*, rather than having total responsibility, for the identification, assessment and provision of SEN and inclusion.

○   In order to inform the day to day operation of SEN, it will be necessary for the SENCO to understand the process for identification and assessment of SEN and how that process operates within the school for meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. This is best achieved using a self - evaluative approach, which may include undertaking audits, for example the Quality Indicators for the Work of the Special Education Needs

Co-ordinator, which are in the following section or a SWOT analysis.

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
(See links in Further Information section)

○   One of the first tasks a newly appointed SENCO often wishes to undertake is reviewing the school's SEN Policy. It is recommended that this should only happen where detailed audits have taken place and where the SENCO has had at least a year to become familiar with the current policy and practice in school, and with all operational aspects of the role.

The following case study exemplifies how a primary school SENCO became aware of the need to understand the day to day operation of the school before becoming involved in more strategic issues such as policy development:

Case Study – A New Primary SENCO

I was appointed to the role of SENCO in January 2011 after 22 years teaching experience. At first I wanted to start with revising the school's SEN policy. However, I soon realised that I did not know enough about the role to do this. There was also an expectation on me to start taking groups of pupils from the mainstream teachers for withdrawal support.

On taking advice, the starting point for me was to consider which model of SEN I wished to operate in school. I recognised that continuing to do things the way they had been was grounded in the medical model and I wanted to base my practice on the school improvement model.

I wanted to take time to get to know the children whose names were recorded on the SEN Register. Many of the names have been registered for a long time. I

negotiated with teachers to conduct a series of in class observations to focus on the children's learning and see where their strengths and areas for development lay, and any environmental considerations that could be identified as 'barriers' to learning.

My next step was to hold detailed discussions with the teachers and see answers to a number of questions which included:-

▶ When did the pupil's difficulties arise – at specific days or times of the day or during certain subjects?

▶ What exactly was the difficulty?

▶ What data was available to inform decision making, including standardised scores from tests?

▶ How was the child's performance in relation to his/her chronological age and his/her peers?

▶ To what extent did teacher preparation and planning take account of differentiation and personalised targets for the child?

▶ What strategies had been tried, what had worked and what had not worked?

▶ What training had the teacher received in relation to meeting the specific needs of the individual child?

▶ What training requirements existed for the teacher (and classroom assistants where there was one in class)?

▶ What type of intervention was most appropriate for the child – in-class, groupwork, or withdrawal?

▶ Where withdrawal was to be offered, was this going to be over a short, medium or long term period?

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> ❯ What was the focus of intervention going to be?
>
> Once the answers were available, the teacher and I jointly wrote the individualised Education Plan for the child, ensuring that the targets could be addressed in class, at home and also through withdrawal support. In cases where an external agency was involved, discussion also took place to ensure that a unified approach to addressing the child's needs was in place.
>
> It was only after my involvement in one small aspect of the SEN provision within my school that I realised the need to further explore the current policy and practice before embarking on a full review of the school's SEN policy.

❍ SENCOs should understand that policy formulation is a collaborative whole school process. The best school policies are produced through a process of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. When members of the school community operate as a team, they feel involved, valued, and are committed to the successful implementation of the policies.

❍ SENCOs may take a lead role in co-ordinating the formulation of the SEN / inclusion policy and should follow the process for development (4 stage cycle) as recommended in the School Improvement (NI) Programme (DENI, 1998).

1. Review and Assessment Stage.

2. Targeting Setting Stage.

3. Action Planning Stage.

4. Implementation and Evaluation Stage.

❍ SENCOs should understand that the SEN policy is statutory.

○ SENCOs should understand that the SEN policy should be part of a suite of school policies and not seen as a stand alone policy. Where possible, links should be made to other relevant policies, both curricular and pastoral to reflect the ethos of the school.

2. To be responsive to requests for advice from other teachers

○ The SENCO should consider carefully any requests for advice from teachers. While a SENCO does not need to know the answer to everything to do with SEN, support can be given to their colleagues by seeking information and providing direction regarding issues raised.

○ Consideration should include auditing any training the teachers have had in relation to specific areas and deciding on any training that may be required.

○ Teaching and learning is more effective in an appropriate environment, therefore, it may be necessary to consider what barriers to learning exist within structured and unstructured areas throughout the school. There is also a need to make reasonable adjustments/accessibility plans.

○ Before making a referral to the SENCO, teachers should be encouraged to implement and keep a record of a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies aimed at helping overcome difficulties a child may be facing, including those identified in the Good Practice Guidelines For Schools To Meet The Special Educational Needs Of Pupils At The School Based Stages Of The Code Of Practice, (ELBs 2009). These Guidelines act as a useful reference point for teachers and SENCOs in determining strategies or reasonable adjustments that can be made to assist in improving the progress of a child with SEN.

○ It is important that the SENCO supports teachers in meeting their training needs.

❍ The SENCO should develop his/her own role, knowledge and credibility through undertaking research in the context of professional reflective practice. (ETI, 2005; GTCNI, 2007).

❍ The SENCO should also appreciate the importance of self-evaluation as highlighted through the Every School a Good School policy (DE, 2009) and Together Towards Improvement. (ETI, 2011).

3. **To co-ordinate SEN provision, including in secondary schools, ensuring appropriate liaison with the various teachers who will teach any given child with special educational needs**

❍ The SENCO must acknowledge his/her role as a co-ordinator and ensure that class/subject teachers undertake their professional responsibility for the provision for pupils with SEN.

❍ The SENCO must liaise with the class teacher (primary) or subject teacher (post primary) in the drawing up of the Action Plans or individualised Education Plans (IEPs) in order to ensure that appropriate meaningful targets are set for the pupils by the staff who teach them and understand how best to meet their needs.

❍ It is sometimes difficult to liaise with perhaps 10 teachers in a post primary school; therefore the SENCO may wish to consider liaising with the English Teacher, Maths Teacher and Form Teacher or Year Head to ensure that a balance of appropriate literacy, numeracy and behaviour targets are included in the IEP.

❍ The SENCO needs to develop appropriate monitoring arrangements to ensure that IEPs are used effectively and meaningfully to measure progress and raise achievement.

❍ The SENCO must develop effective reviewing processes; liaise with appropriate staff in reviewing IEPs, evaluating the child's progress and set new targets, as appropriate.

○   The SENCO should encourage staff to identify and collate evidence of attainment of targets as part of the monitoring process. Evidence could include mark books, examples of pupils' work and photographs to exemplify targets attained.

○   Classroom Assistants or other appropriate support staff should be included where possible in the target setting, monitoring and reviewing of the education planning process.

○   The SENCO needs to develop and implement a strategy for sharing information with all other staff regarding SEN issues. Possibilities for doing so include:

> ▶   regular input in INSET days;

> ▶   regular input at staff meetings;

> ▶   having SEN as a standard item on agenda of all departmental meetings;

> ▶   in school online communication; and

> ▶   the development of electronic individualised IEPs where staff monitor and review online and where the SENCO has on-going and continual access to these processes.

○   The SENCO should identify a teacher within each large department in post primary schools to act as a link between the SENCO and the teaching and learning in the Department, including providing information on how to meet the specific needs of pupils within a particular area of learning. Ideally this could be a Head of Department (HOD) or to develop expertise other teachers could volunteer for the role on an annual rotational basis. The HOD still needs to ensure that all members of their department maintain their professional responsibilities for managing SEN.

The following case study exemplifies how a post primary school developed better liaison with appropriate staff to meet the needs of pupils with SEN:

Case Study – IEP Development in a Post Primary School

One of the issues faced by post primary schools is the assumption that the Code of Practice is easier to operate in a primary school than in a large post primary school. Despite this, there is an expectation that all schools should follow the Code. This case study highlights the school improvement process one SENCO led to enhance capacity within the teaching staff in the school.

As part of my Performance Review Staff Development (PRSD) targets, one of the tasks I decided to undertake as a SENCO, was to explore ways in which a whole school approach could be taken to following the Code of Practice to ensure that pupils with SEN were getting the best possible deal.

After securing senior management approval, the starting point was to conduct an audit of all staff to discover what was actually happening. The audit was conducted by means of a short questionnaire to staff which was completed on a closure day in August. A number of issues came to light through the process of analysing questionnaire responses.

- The responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils with SEN was perceived by the majority of staff as being the sole responsibility of the SENCO.

- Although staff would have been provided with details of the pupils who were on the SEN register on an annual basis, many staff were unaware of who the pupils were, unless it was immediately obvious.

◗ Teacher planning did not take account of the needs of pupils with SEN.

Despite the issues identified, the open response area of the questionnaire highlighted a genuine willingness amongst the majority of staff to bring about whole school improvements in this area.

A small working group was established to examine ways in which the issues could be addressed, and one of the preferred options was to utilise the school's ICT resources. Initially the SENCO wrote all the IEPs for the pupils, but this process was changed over the course of a year.

Step One involved a process whereby, following training, the responsibility for writing IEPs for pupils at Stage 1-4 of the Code transferred to the Form Tutor, who had pastoral responsibility for the class. (The SENCO continued to write the IEPs for pupils with a Statement of SEN). For the first step, the SENCO and the Form Tutor wrote the plans together.

Step Two involved a process whereby the Form Tutor worked with a small group of teachers to write the plans, i.e. English and Maths teachers. This ensured a better balance of literacy, numeracy and behaviour targets. Where amendment was made, the SENCO worked alongside the small group of teachers in a coaching approach to bring about improvement.

Step Three was a process whereby the responsibility for writing IEPs was left to the small group of teachers and the SENCO maintained a co-ordinating role and kept a watching brief or monitoring role to ensure consistency and appropriateness. The SENCO continued to write the IEPs for pupils with a Statement of SEN, and this was carried out alongside the classroom assistant for the pupil.

All of the IEPs for every pupil in the school were then placed in a folder on the school's Intranet that only staff had access to. Staff were encouraged to take account of the specific targets that had been established for the pupils in planning and designing their lessons. In the majority of cases the pupil targets were for literacy, numeracy or behaviour.

Senior Management support was in place for the developments taking place, and this included support for the amending of all subject planners to ensure that the extent to which individual pupil needs and objectives were taken account of. An example of this was ensuring that pupils with hearing or visual problems were seated near the front of the class and that the teacher maintained (where possible) face to face contact with the pupils when providing instruction. Another example was for pupils with literacy difficulties where banks of key words that would be used in specialist subjects were provided.

At the end of the year, a further audit was conducted to examine the extent to which the approach had been successful. Once the results were analysed it was clear that improvements had taken place and that in the vast majority of cases, teaching staff had accepted the fact that meeting the needs of pupils with SEN was everyone's responsibility and that their lessons were deemed to be better through ensuring that pupil needs were met.

For the next school year I aim to develop ways in which the pupils can have greater input to the IEP process.

4.   **To maintain a SEN register, with records on pupils with special educational needs**

❍   The SEN register should only be for the groups outlined in the Code (DENI, 1998, p1) as follows:

The term "special educational needs" is defined in the legislation as "a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made". "Learning difficulty" means that the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his or her age, and/or has a disability which hinders his or her use of everyday educational facilities (or, where the child is below school age, would hinder such use if the child were of school age). "Special educational provision" means educational provision which is different from,

or additional to, the provision made generally for children of comparable age.

❍ Professional judgement is required and the SENCO should encourage teachers to consult with them regarding pupils for whom placement on the register is appropriate.

❍ The register should include information such as, the pupil name, date of birth, class and the category of SEN as outlined in Guidance for Schools - Recording Children with SEN DE (2005). The pupils needs may fall under the following broad headings:

▶ Cognitive and Learning;

▶ Social, Emotional and Behavioural;

▶ Communication and Interaction;

▶ Sensory;

▶ Physical;

▶ Medical conditions/syndromes;

▶ Other.

❍ Schools are legally required to inform parents that they are making SEN provision for their child. Good practice would be to put this in writing and seek confirmation from the parent(s) that they have read, understood and are supportive of the school's approach. (SENDO (2005), Article 9).

❍ A range of approaches, such as how data and teacher observation should be used to identify pupils whose names should be recorded on the SEN register.

○ Schools may also wish to have a register for those pupils with medical or health related difficulties which may not impact on pupil learning. Further information is available from Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs, DE (2008).

○ To facilitate the wide diversity of pupils, some schools have found it useful to also maintain a register of other supported groups, for example newcomer children; Gifted and Talented (CCEA, 2008).

○ Where pupils' names are added to the register it is imperative that the provision is available in school to meet their needs.

○ Once a pupils' name is recorded on the register, an Action Plan (at Stage 1 of the COP) or IEP (at Stages 2-5 of the Code) should be developed, written and reviewed regularly. In most cases, schools find that a termly or twice a year review of progress against the targets set in the Action Plan or IEP is appropriate; this will depend on the individual pupil needs and efficient use of resources.

○ It is imperative that the child (subject to their age and understanding) has a voice in the process of establishing and reviewing their IEP (UN, 1989 and 2008).

○ Where the child has a statement of special educational needs or an educational psychologists report at stage 3 of the Code, the objectives should be reflected in the IEP.

○ Data should be used alongside appropriate provision to ensure that pupils whose names are recorded on the SEN register make appropriate progress.

○ The C2K SIMS system has a specific area for the recording of pupils on the SEN register. Where possible this should be used to aid the completion of the annual school census.

❍ The SEN register should be updated regularly to accurately reflect the number of pupils with SEN and/or disability in the school.

❍ In line with guidance under Co-ordinating SEN provision, regular reviews should be held to ensure that the provision being made for pupils on the register continues to be appropriate.

❍ In addition to maintaining the school's SEN register, it is important that the SENCO takes account of the need to also maintain a number of other records.

Good Practice: Record Keeping

Record keeping is important in order that:

◗ a child's academic progress/achievements can be monitored;

◗ a record of any concerns about a child's safety / welfare is maintained;

◗ a record of the school's involvement with the pupil and with parents/carers is available;

◗ school accountability and responsibility is taken account of;

◗ continuity is maintained if a change of staff takes place;

◗ Should an appeal be made that the school has the information to respond;

◗ records keep the child's SEN data together; and

◗ relevant and reliable information is easily accessible.

The records maintained on a pupil with SEN and/or disability will vary, depending upon the individual needs of the pupil and the available school resources. The following list provides an exemplar as to what should be considered:-

◗ the SEN Register;

◗ individualised Education Plans and Reviews at relevant stages of the Code;

◗ exemplars of pupils work from each term. In Numeracy and Literacy, and relevant subsets, e.g. Talking and Listening, Shape and Space etc.;

◗ copies of all correspondence;

◗ reports;

◗ test results and papers;

◗ minutes of meetings;?]

◗ incident reports; and

◗ anything else the SENCO feels is relevant or important.

If the pupil has an educational psychology report available at Stage 3, or a Statement of SEN at Stage 5 of the COP, these should also be maintained, along with annual review or transition plan documentation.

To maintain an overview of planning for individual pupils with SEN, schools have found it useful to adopt a log file approach as illustrated below:-

Pupil: John Jones	Class: 2	COP Stage: 5	Year: 2010-2011

| Date	Time	Member(s) of Staff involved	Notes	Action Required
24/11/10	10.30	Ms Topley, SENCO	Call from Mrs Jones – requested meeting to discuss John's problems with homework	Arranged meeting for 27/11/10 at 3.30
27/11/10	3.30	Mr Ryan (Principal)	Ms Topley, SENCO Meeting with Mrs Jones and John. Discussed homework difficulties and possible ways forward. Agreed that John would join homework club each day after school for 15 minutes and that Mrs Jones would check John's homework each afternoon.	Copy of notes of meeting requested by Mrs Jones – send by post on 28/11/10

Other considerations have to be taken on board in relation to record keeping:-

◗ Data Protection Act 1998 – individuals have a right to see any information held on them;

◗ Freedom of Information Act 2000 – members of the public can request copies of schools policies;

◗ Confidentiality – all SEN information must be securely maintained in school and pupil's must not be discussed in public places;

◗ Records should be held for a period of 7 years after a young person has reached the upper limit of school attendance.

5.   To liaise with parents of children with special educational needs

Guidance on Partnership with Parents is included in paragraphs 2.21 to 2.27
of the SEN Code of Practice and further guidance included in paragraphs 1.13
to1.17 of the Supplement to the SEN Code of Practice.

○   The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland)
      Order (SENDO) 2005 states that where a school is making special
      educational provision for a pupil that the parents should be
      notified. (SENDO Article 9). Good practice would be to put this in
      writing and seek confirmation from the parent(s) that they have
      read, understood and are supportive of the school's approach.

○   On occasions, parents may not have come to the realisation
      that their child has special educational needs, and a sensitive
      approach is required by the SENCO. Some SENCOs have found it
      useful to refer to the Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle (shown below) to
      help them understand the stages that a parent may go through
      when coming to terms with their situation. This understanding
      will enable the SENCO to adjust their approach accordingly when
      liaising with the parent.

The Kübler–Ross Grief Cycle
Source: **www.changingminds.org**
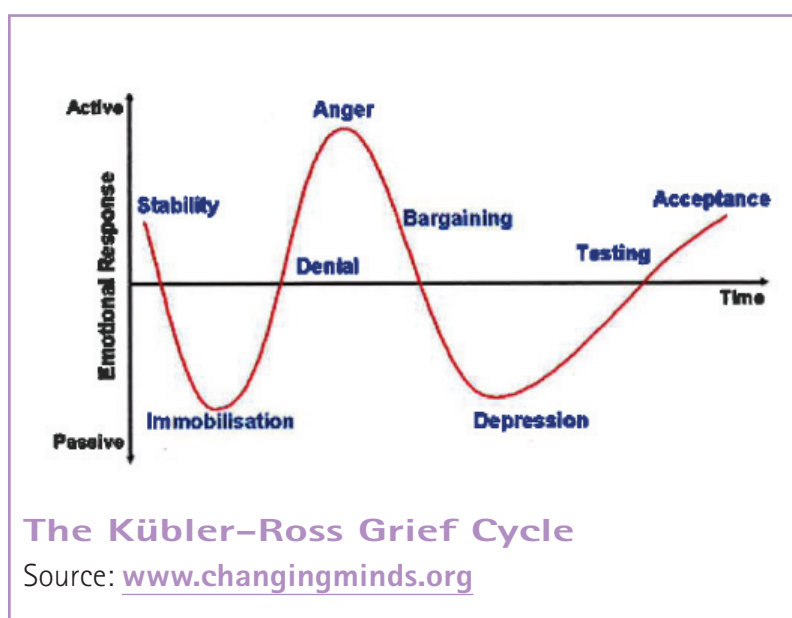
❍ Whilst parental permission is not required for a school to place a child's name on the SEN register, good practice suggests that a partnership approach be adopted.

❍ In all cases the school should remember that the rights of the child are paramount (Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995). (Stationery Office, 1995).

❍ Outcomes for pupils with special educational needs have been found to be better where all stakeholders have worked together.

❍ In cases where a child requires out of school provision, for example, speech and language therapy, a good relationship with the parent should be maintained as it may be the parent has to provide transport and also inform the school of the programme being followed.

❍ Liaising with parents can be done in a number of ways, for example through parent-teacher interviews, informal discussions pre and after school, appointments, parents evenings, written communication (newsletters, email etc.), telephone, school website etc. Schools should have clear concern/complaints procedures for all children and in particular for pupils with SEN and/or disability.

Good Practice –
## Working in Partnership with Parents and Carers

Families in the 21st Century

○ Studies from the European Union would suggest that the stereotypical notion of 'the family' (two married parents of the opposite sex with two children) is a reality for only one family in <u>seven</u> in the European Union. (Carpenter, 2008). Educators should take this into account when thinking about their understanding of the definition of a family.

○ It has been suggested that professionals struggle to include families at the most basic levels, let alone to implement not only relational but also participatory, family centred practices (Carpenter and Towers, 2008, p139).

○ Research by Carpenter (2002) discovered that when it came to annual reviews that schools had the expectation that only mothers should attend and they were given little if any notice of the meeting. Many fathers of children with statements would welcome the opportunity to attend.

○ Mitchell (2008, p127 & p130) found that:-

   ▶ 1 in 5 children under 16 years are looked after by grandparents during the daytime.

   ▶ There has been little research on grandparent support in families.

   ▶ For schools, intergenerational learning provides an important mechanism to extend school/home links and draw home learning into the classroom.

Enhancing the Partnership Role

❍ It is important to believe in the merits of working with parents and carers as equal partners to enhance relationships.

❍ SENCOs should be *welcoming, communicative, involved* and *responsive*;

  ◗ it teaches parents to be responsible;

  ◗ it supports parents with their child at home;

  ◗ it gives teachers more information about children they teach; and

  ◗ it breaks down barriers between home and school.

❍ Actively listen to the parents.

❍ Use empathy and try to understand – what stage of the grief cycle they may be at, and how should the SENCO respond.

❍ Don't pretend to be an expert - remember – the parent knows the child better than the teacher.

❍ The parent may have more knowledge of the special needs of the child than the SENCO.

The following diagram which illustrates 'circles of success' acts as a reminder that the child learns best when the three main partners are working together in harmony:

Parent or Carer

Pupil   **Teacher**
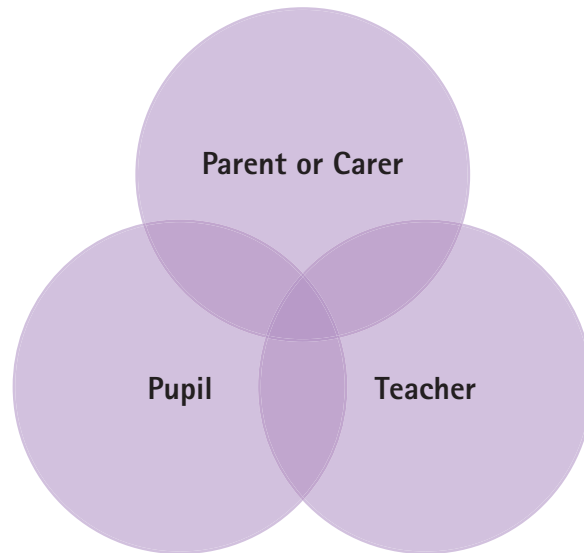
6.   **To establish the SEN in-service training requirements of the staff, and contributing as appropriate to their training**

- ❍   Within the inclusive education and school improvement model this is one of the most important roles for the SENCO. This will contribute to building the capacity of teachers to meet a wider range of pupil needs.

- ❍   A register should be maintained of expertise teachers may have, and all training that has taken place in relation to special educational needs and inclusion for teachers and classroom assistants. This may include accredited courses, for example a MEd in Inclusion, and In-service education and training (INSET).

- ❍   An annual audit should take place to address a number of areas, to ensure that:

    ▶   teachers have the necessary expertise or training to meet the full range of pupil needs;

◗ priorities are identified which will, in turn, feed into the school development plan;

◗ all staff become more self-reflective;

◗ all the good work that is taking place is affirmed;

◗ school strengths and areas for improvement are identified;

◗ opportunities for monitoring, evaluation and review are in place; and

◗ data are up to date.

❍ It is recognised that for some SENCOs, leading and managing training may prove to be daunting task, however, the SENCO can commission training from other providers.

❍ There are a range of training methods available, for example coaching, counselling, mentoring, presentation and online. SENCOs should co-ordinate whatever type is appropriate to the needs of the individual and school and contribute as appropriate.

7.   To liaise with external agencies

Effective action on behalf of children with special educational needs will often depend upon close co-operation between education and health and social services, who have statutory duties to help each other. Each Trust should have a designated officer to act as point of reference in dealing with parents, officers of ELBs and other professionals. The SEN Code of Practice paragraphs 2.31 to 2.40 provides guidance for schools in relation to Child Health Services and Social Services. It is important that the SENCO is fully conversant with that guidance.

There can be a wide range of external agencies involved with children with SEN and/or disability. These include Educational Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist; Educational Welfare Officer, Statement(ing) Officer; Senior Clinical Medical

Officer; Consultant Community Paediatrician; Speech and Language Therapist;
Nurse; Occupational Therapist; Physiotherapist; Transitions Officer, Careers
Officer and Social Worker.
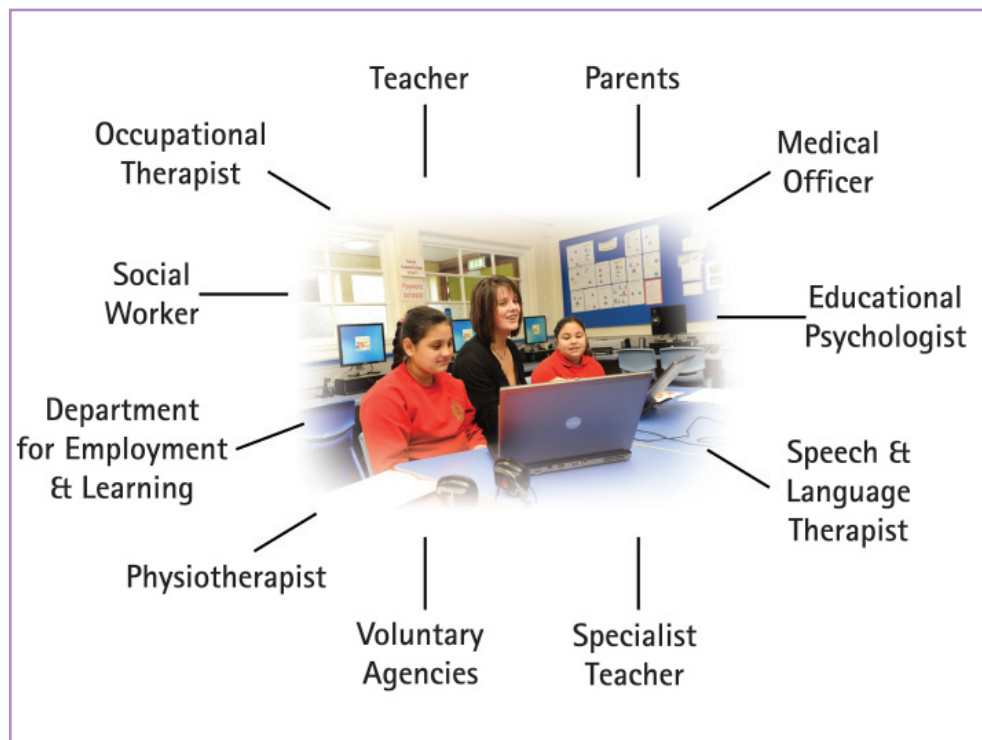
Considerations when working with other professionals

○ Other professionals are not governed by timetables (like schools) – this has implications for arranging times for meeting or phone calls.

○ Terms and Conditions of Employment vary.

○ Holidays may be able to be taken in term time and they may not be available.

○ Shortages exist in some professions and difficulties may be faced during recruitment.

○ Other professionals may not understand teaching.

○ Other professionals are expert in areas where teachers are not. It is important to consider their advice.

○ Other professionals may insist upon different modes of titles or address (this may have implications for meetings and for minutes).

○ A flexible approach that draws on a wide range of expertise is best.

○ Try to develop positive working partnerships. It may be an idea to discuss how collaboration should take place in advance.

○ It is useful to create a list of relevant external agencies which contains names, roles, addresses and phone numbers.

○ SENCOs should consider the following advice in relation to managing meetings with anyone, including external agencies:

Good Practice – Managing Meetings

There will be many meetings for a SENCO to manage. Examples may include informal discussions with class teachers through to formal meetings such as an Annual Review for a pupil with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The following points provide some considerations that the SENCO should take account of when planning for and conducting meetings:

Planning a Meeting

▌ Decide if a meeting is the best way to address the issue – would a letter or an email be a better approach.

▌ Decide on the purpose of the meeting, e.g. Annual Review, IEP establishment, IEP Review.

▌ Decide who needs to attend – don't just invite everyone who has ever had anything to do with a pupil.

▌ Establish a date and time - use attendance grid to find the best date and time that suits everyone. Software can assist with this, (for example Meet-O-Matic).

▌ Decide on an appropriate length of time for the meeting and stick to it.

▌ Think about access arrangements for people attending who may have a disability.

A sample attendance grid is provided below:

Required Attendees	Monday 7/2/11			Thursday 10/2/11	Friday 11/2/11	Monday 14/2/11
	9.00–9.30	10.00–10.30	3.30–4.00	3.30–4.00	8.30–9.00	10.00–10.30
John Jones (pupil)	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Ms Topley (SENCO)		☑				☑
Mr Ryan (Principal)				☑	☑	☑
Mrs Jones (Mum)			☑			☑
Mrs Nelson (Educational Psychologist)	Not available during these times but agreed to forward a report					

In this case, the best time for a meeting is Monday 14/2/11 at 10.00-10.30

Agenda Issues

▌ Try to offer attendees the opportunity to contribute to the agenda by (5 days before).

▌ Try to avoid situations where agendas or papers are being introduced on the day of the meeting.

▌ When organising an Annual Review, the timescales for notification are covered by regulation and timescales are outlined for notification and issue of documentation. Education and Library Boards have guidance for schools on this.

Good Practice – Managing Meetings

Managing the Meeting

▶ Choose a venue suitable for the purpose of the meeting as getting the wrong venue can annoy attendees.

▶ If the school is large – do participants know how to get from the entrance to where the meeting is taking place?

▶ Offering coffee is a good way to diffuse difficult situations.

▶ Consider a neutral venue (some parents don't like schools).

▶ Think about issues such as seating and tables – formal or informal, lighting, heat, noise, clutter, and interruptions.

▶ Ensure the venue is welcoming – try and avoid showing parents that 'pre-meetings' have taken place, introduce all present, outline management arrangements for the meeting (length of time, purpose, how long people will be allowed to speak for, who is the chair and secretary etc).

▶ In difficult situations – employ active listening skills and maintain a focus on solutions rather than problems.

▶ When chairing – summarise what has been said and what has been agreed, ensure that all participants are clear.

Minutes

▶ It can be frustrating having to write up minutes of meetings. A different approach is to take notes of a meeting using a grid as illustrated below:

No	Agenda Item	Discussion and points agreed	Actions
1	Welcome and introductions	Chair introduced all present Agreed that first names would be used	
2	Notes of previous meeting	Agreed as accurate	
3	Actions from previous meeting	All complete	
4	Concerns about learning	Examples outlined of where teachers were concerned; Discussed strategies that had been tried at stages 1 and 2 of COP; Discussed possible referral to educational psychology; Mum uncertain about this but agreed to think about and let SENCO know on Monday.	Issue notes of meeting to Mum Follow up phone call to mum
5	Summary	Chair summarised discussion and what had been agreed	
6	Follow up meeting	To be arranged following mum's decision as appropriate.	

▶ Keep notes brief and to the point.

▶ Ensure that the notes are issued within the time period promised.

○ In addition to working with external specialists, SENCOs may also wish to collaborate with other schools. The introduction of the Entitlement Framework means that post primary schools will already have established links with other schools. A number of special schools are active in supporting pupils with SEN and/or disabilities in mainstream schools. It is likely that there is further scope for development, as was highlighted by ETI (2006, p11):

Special schools, in the future, will be expected to provide a range of interventions which address low support needs, commonly occurring needs, rarely occurring needs, and high support needs.

All special schools should have a major supporting role in the assessment of a pupil's needs and the preparation of individual intervention plans. Educational plans, of necessity, should contain an inclusion statement identifying the experiences and resources available to support the education of pupils with SEN. Intervention should be matched to the categories of support and monitored as the assessment indicates.

○ SENCOs in mainstream schools are encouraged to establish links with local special schools. The links should be seen as a two-way process:

▶ inclusion can be enhanced through greater interaction between mainstream and special school pupils;

▶ mainstream capacity to meet the needs of pupils can be developed;

▶ specialist expertise in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN and/ or disability can be shared from the special school; and

▶ specialist curriculum expertise can be shared with the mainstream school.

❍ In post-primary schools, there are now more opportunities than existed previously through Area Learning Communities (ALCs) for working partnerships between mainstream and special schools as established through the Entitlement Framework.

❍ In addition to the requirements for the SENCO from the SEN Code of Practice (1998), there are a number of other areas through which the learning support capacity of a school can be enhanced, and these are considered in the next section.

Enhancing Learning Support Capacity in Schools

Leadership and Management of SEN and Inclusion

Models of inclusion have evolved over a number of years; the **medical model** sees the pupil with SEN as being the problem and the expectation is that s/he needs to change and adapt to circumstances that are presented to her/him with no acknowledgement that society needs to change. In the **social model** schools are encouraged to identify the barriers to achievement and seek to address these along with developing the whole pupil. The **school improvement model** suggests that where a pupil with SEN and or disability fails to thrive in a school, that the focus should be improving the school to impact on meeting the needs of the pupil.

A number of questions can then be asked -

❍ Which model is currently operating within our school?

❍ How do we know?

❍ Which is the preferred model for our school to further enhance inclusion?

❍ What would this look like in our school?

○ What needs to be changed at whole school level to ensure the new model is working?

○ What timescale is needed for the change?

Managing Change

The most recent role of the SENCO is to manage inclusion (Feldman and Khademian, 2007), another consideration is that the SENCO should also be a manager of productive change (Fullan, 1993). Fullan (1994) also suggests that effective managers are those who can manage change as change is the only constant; therefore it is important that the SENCO embraces their changing role to include being a manager of change.

To enable this to happen effectively, the SENCO should ideally be a member of the school's senior management team, where they have the opportunity to provide regular updates on the theme of school improvement through inclusive practice. It would also be preferable that the SENCO should work closely with the governor responsible for SEN.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has produced new quality indicators for the work of the SENCO as part of the Together Towards Improvement (TTI) documentation. These indicators are in the following section and can be used to enable the SENCO to audit their practice within the school, so that they can develop their role regarding:

○ where they currently are;

○ where they need to be; and

○ what they need to do to get there.

This process would enable the SENCO to continually manage change and take cognisance of future developments.

Summary

This chapter aims to contribute to the continual professional development for SENCOs and to aid in the development of a SENCO's knowledge, understanding and skills at both operational and strategic levels.

Suggestions have been made to enable the SENCO to carry out the role efficiently and effectively and also to further enhance capacity to ensure inclusive cultures, policies and practice within schools.

SENCOs should find the information in this chapter beneficial in adequately preparing them for the challenges ahead through being an agent of change, a reflective practitioner, self-evaluative and taking a professional responsibility for continuous professional development, through a research based approach to school improvement.

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Further Information

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Guidance for writing IEPs	Ryan, D. (2010) Getting Smarter: *Teacher Guidance for Writing Individual Education Plans and Targets for pupils with Special Educational Needs.* LULU Press. www.lulu.com
Ryan Inclusion analysis (v4)	(Forthcoming)
The Inclusion Quality Mark	http://www.inclusionmark.co.uk/
Index for Inclusion	http://www.csie.org.uk/publications/inclusion-index-explained.shtml
Quality Indicators for the work of the SENCO	http://etini.gov.uk
Together Towards Improvement (TTI)	http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement.htm
SWOT Analysis	http://www.quickmba.com/strategy/swot/
Meet-O-Matic (meeting attendance software)	www.meetomatic.com

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