

SENCO CHARTER: NUT GUIDANCE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CO-ORDINATORS

The NUT believes that special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) can be effective only if they have effective management and school systems which value and empower them in this difficult and complex role.

SENCOs co-ordinate provision across the school for pupils with SEN in order to secure high quality teaching and learning and the effective use of resources to meet the educational needs of children and young people with SEN. It is recommended that a member of the school's administration team is given suitable time and training to carry out the full range of SEN related administrative and clerical tasks.

The SEN Code of Practice provides guidance for schools on the role of the SENCO in early education settings, in the primary phase and in the secondary setting. The TTA 'National Standards for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' provides guidance on training and development for SENCOs.

The NUT believes that a special educational needs co-ordinators should be qualified teachers. The spirit of the SEN Code of Practice implies SENCOs should hold qualified teacher status but this is not explicitly stated. However, the TTA standards say:

"SENCOs will be skilled teachers in their own subject or phase. The skills and attributes which follow are essential, but not exclusive, to the SENCO's role (leadership skills, decision-making skills, communication skills, self management). The head teacher should ensure that the SENCO has access to specific training related to the development of those necessary skills."

SENCOs play a vital role in overseeing their school's SEN provision. An extraordinarily wide range of duties is associated with the post of SENCO, irrespective of whether the post holder works in a primary or secondary school. Some schools refer to single members of staff as 'inclusion managers' or 'inclusion co-ordinators' if they hold other school wide responsibilities in addition to the responsibilities of a SENCO such as for Travellers or Looked After Children.

Regulations require there to be named persons within early education settings, mainstream primary schools and mainstream secondary schools who are responsible for co-ordinating the day-to-day provision of education for pupils with special educational needs at the school. Such persons may or may not be known as SEN co-ordinators. This provision is not applicable in special schools.

The SEN Code of Practice advises *"the role is time consuming and, therefore, it is usually inappropriate for the SENCO to have other school-wide responsibilities"*. Schools requiring SEN co-ordinators to be 'inclusion co-ordinators', alongside responsibilities for 'looked after' children or pupils with specific needs other than SEN, should recognise that the resulting workload may be excessive.

This NUT Charter for SENCOs outlines the conditions which are essential if they are to carry out their key role effectively, coordinating provision across school. The NUT believes that within each unique school context:

- **SENCOs should be teachers with appropriate TLR responsibility payments or who are within the leadership group, able to influence the development of policies for whole school improvement proactively and with a remit to impact on the strategic leadership of their schools and on whole school management issues.**
- **SENCOs should be included in discussions within schools on financial management and on SEN funding so that they can sustain changes in school systems that operate for the benefit of all learners.**
- **SENCOs need to co-ordinate whole school strategies for building the capacity of their schools to include learners effectively by drawing class and subject teachers actively into planning for pupils and into assessment and identification of pupils' needs.**
- **SENCOs should receive support to enable them to carry out the managerial aspects of their role, and to provide strategic direction and leadership in their schools.**
- **SENCOs should have sufficient resources of time, space and administrative back up to fulfil the role they should have sufficient non contact time appropriate to the numbers of children and young people with special educational needs within the school. SENCOs should have non-teaching time within the timetabled teaching day additional to their PPA time.**

SENCOs now have a statutory entitlement to PPA time. DfES Guidance to the STPCD states that:

“Many teachers outside the leadership group... have some form of leadership and management responsibility, including those of subject leaders and co-ordinators, heads of departments or faculties, ASTs, special educational needs co-ordinators and initial teacher training mentors.

Teachers with leadership and management responsibilities are now entitled, as far as is reasonably practicable, to a reasonable allocation of time within school sessions to support the discharge of their responsibilities. This is in addition to the contractual provisions on work/life balance and guaranteed planning preparation and assessment time (PPA), introduced from 1 September 2005.”

- **If the head teacher or deputy head teacher is the SENCO, the work should not be “delegated” to another teacher expected to undertake it without the status of SENCO or without additional payment. SENCOs’ timetables should reflect their responsibilities.**

The SEN Code of Practice advises:

“Many schools find it effective for the SENCO to be a member of the senior leadership team. However, although in very small schools the head or deputy may need to take on the role of SENCO, such a decision should be considered very carefully.”

- **SENCOs should be qualified teachers and have completed their induction. The SEN Code of Practice envisages that a SENCO will provide professional guidance to colleagues with the aim of securing high quality teaching for pupils with SEN.**
- **SENCOs should be awarded appropriate TLR payments to recognise their responsibilities in managing and leading:**
 - **strategic direction and development of SEN provision in the school;**
 - **teaching and learning to deliver suitable curricula responses;**
 - **staff including management of learning mentors, teaching assistants and learning support assistants; and**
 - **efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources**
- **SENCOs who teach pupils with SEN, and other teachers similarly involved in such teaching, may be awarded SEN allowances to recognise their SEN teaching involvement. TLR payments and SEN allowances recognise different aspects of a teacher’s role. It is both possible and appropriate for SENCOs who are involved in teaching SEN pupils as well as managing and leading SEN work to receive both payments.**
- **SENCOs should receive training and induction in their roles, including training in managing other colleagues and working with support staff. SENCOs work with a whole range of professionals from outside the school and need to know where and how to find further support from outside agencies or their local authorities.**
- **It is important that SENCOs are able to update their own knowledge and skills. SENCOs’ training needs should be clearly identified, and provided for, in the school development plan. SENCOs need to be able to attend local authority-organised training events, courses in higher education and important conferences. Training for SENCOs can be usefully supplemented by meeting other SENCOs from neighbouring schools. Such meetings enable SENCOs to agree common approaches and avoid duplication of effort, particularly in light of the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda, and to keep up to date with new Government initiatives.**
- **SENCOs need to be involved consistently in appropriate professional development and training through local authorities or accredited courses that enhance managerial and leadership skills as well as skills that focus on more familiar aspects of co-ordination. SENCOs may benefit from support to enable them to access courses such as a postgraduate course leading to certificates in special and inclusive education.**

Fair, clear and accurate job descriptions have a vital role to play in protecting teachers' interests. The purpose of a job description is to set out a fair, clear and mutually understood statement of the grading and salary of a post and the work and responsibility attached to that post. Job descriptions for SENCOs need to specify the responsibilities and 'key tasks' associated with the role. For mainstream schools, the responsibilities are set out in Section 4.15 (for early years settings), Section 5.32 (for mainstream primary settings) and Section 6.35 (for mainstream secondary settings) of the SEN Code of Practice. They form the basis of a SENCO's responsibilities and are set out in the job description:

- overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy;
- liaising with and advising fellow teachers;
- managing the SEN team of teachers and learning support assistants;
- co-ordinating provision for children with special needs;
- overseeing the records on all pupils with special educational needs;
- liaising with parents of children with special educational needs;
- contributing to the in-service training of staff; and
- liaising with external agencies including the LA's support and educational psychology service, Connexions, health and social services and voluntary bodies.

The NUT would expect SENCOs to be provided with the facilities necessary to do their job properly. The facilities which might reasonably be required include:

- office space;
- desk;
- storage and filing facilities;
- access to computer terminals with appropriate software;
- telephone; and
- e-mail.

Annex A provides an example of one local authority agreement with teacher associations on SENCO essential duties time. This agreement can be used to achieve consistency across local schools as to the amount of non-contact time a SENCO receives in order to carry out his/her duties.

The position of SENCO is demanding. It involves obtaining resources, managing the work of learning support assistants, advising and supporting fellow teachers, liaising with statutory bodies and voluntary agencies and with parents and contributing to the in-service training of other staff. Many SENCOs complain of overload.

A 2003 national survey of perceptions of special educational needs co-ordinators commissioned by the NUT revealed a gross mismatch between expectations placed upon SENCOs and the resources, especially in staff time, to meet them.

Under the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), head teachers are specifically required to ensure that teachers at their school, whether classroom teachers or those with significant extra responsibilities such as SENCOs or heads of department, can enjoy a 'satisfactory balance between the time required to discharge their professional duties... and the time required to pursue their personal interests outside work'.

SEN CO-ORDINATION: ESSENTIAL DUTIES TIME – MODEL AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The following provides guidance for schools on recommended minimum non-contact time for essential SENCO duties. This guidance is in two parts. It contains:

1. a clear definition of what should and should not be included in essential duties; and
2. an explanation of the formula that has been used to calculate each school's recommended minimum essential duties time.

PART 1: A DEFINITION OF ESSENTIAL DUTIES

The following activities are a summary of the essential duties that should take place within the recommended 'essential duties time' allocated to SENCOs.

- 1a) Liaison – Individual pupil matters, including:
 - teachers, learning mentors, teaching assistants, clerical assistants etc
 - pupils
 - parents/carers
 - agencies outside the school
 - other schools
- 1b) Liaison – Policy and Practice
 - Governors
 - SMT
 - Curriculum and Pastoral Co-ordinators/Link Teachers
- 2) Policy and Provision
 - Development
 - Implementation
 - Reviewing
 - Contributing to interventions and initiatives such as SULP, Peer Assisted Learning, Catch-up etc

- 3) Developing Inclusive Practice through contributing to the implementation of:
 - Standards for Inclusion
 - SENDA
 - Accessibility plan
- 4) Training, Advice, Guidance and Observation of staff
- 5) Management and Deployment of Staff
 - Teaching Assistants
 - SEN Teachers
 - Administrative Staff
 - Adult Volunteers
- 6) Co-ordinating IEPs and Reviews etc
 - High Focus Reviews
 - Proposed Provision Plans
 - Annual Reviews
- 7) Transition Arrangements
- 8) Assessment Co-ordination
 - SEN Audit
 - CRISP
 - Additional, short-term assessments
 - Providing feedback
 - Common Assessment Framework
- 9) Resource Management
 - Information
 - Information giving
 - Advising
 - Organisation/distribution/access
 - Monitoring effectiveness etc

10) Contributing to the management of SEN Notional Budget

Identified Pressure Points

There are a number of activities within the SENCO's responsibilities, as well as particular times of year, that are likely to require intensive additional input and/or flexibility within essential duties time. These include:

- Record keeping and report writing for external agencies
- SEN Audit
- Organising exam concessions
- High Focus IEPs and Provision Plans
- Newly admitted pupils
- Tribunals and appeals
- Transition arrangements
- Situations that require significant immediate short-term input
- Annual Reviews
- Involvement with A Behaviour Co-ordinator (BECO) at School Action + with BESD pupils
- Common Assessment Framework

Activities that are not part of the SENCO Role

There are a number of activities that are often carried out by SENCOs that do not form part of the essential duties as described above. If SENCOs are involved in such activities, as they frequently are, they cannot be included within the essential duties time and will therefore require an additional time allocation.

These activities include:

- working in the capacity of a Behaviour Co-ordinator (BeCO);
- work related to child protection, including children in public care or in the role of (or supporting) the child protection designated teacher;
- SEN group or support teaching;
- EAL work;
- covering classes (NB: in exceptional circumstances SENCOs may reasonably be required to cover during designated essential duties time but are entitled to time back);

Note on cover:

Contractual changes in 2004 have resulted in the following entitlements:

1. *A 38 hour limit on the amount of cover that can be provided by an individual teacher; and*
2. *An amended duty for head teachers to ensure that cover for absent teachers is shared equitably among all teachers in the school (including the head teacher), taking account of their teaching and other duties and of the desirability of not using a teacher at the school until all other reasonable means of providing cover have been exhausted.*

Given that the 'other duties' required of a SENCO are likely to be significant, it follows that in order to comply with these contractual changes, heads should ensure that SENCOs are only very rarely deployed for cover.

- responsibility for administering, co-ordinating and scoring of whole school screening tests;
- advice, guidance and training of student teachers;
- responsibility for Asylum Seeker, Refugee or Traveller Children;
- overall responsibility for inclusion;
- routine administrative tasks*.

* SENCOs should use their professional judgement in following the wording of the School Teachers' Pay and Condition Document defining the administrative and clerical tasks that should not be routinely carried out by teachers. It is recommended that a member of the school's administrative team is given suitable time and training to carry out the full range of SEN related administrative and clerical tasks.

PART 2: FORMULA FOR GUIDING SENCO ESSENTIAL DUTIES TIME (PER WEEK)

The following objective measures were used in devising the formula to act as a guide for allocating SENCOs an appropriate minimum number of hours for their essential duties.

- A. The **notional SEN budget** allocated to the school to the nearest thousand (e.g., School X has a notional budget of £67,755 = **68 points**)
- B. A points allocation based upon the **PLASC data** as follows:
 - (a) No. of Pupils at School Action (x 1)
 - (b) No. of Pupils at School Action Plus (x 5)
 - (c) No. of Pupils with Statements (x 5)

(School X has 10 pupils at SA = 10 points; 5 pupils at SA+ = 25 points; 6 pupils with statements = 30 points making a total of **65 points**)

Adding A + B = 133 points

Every 40 points = 1 hour so the SENCO for School X is recommended **3 hours**.

C. **Pupil mobility** – annual pupil turnover is both a major factor in, and an indicator of, the workload of SENCOs. Thus an **additional** factor (based on a local authority’s annual mobility data) has been built into the formula thus:

Pupil turnover greater than 20%	=	1 additional hour
Pupil turnover greater than 30%	=	2 additional hours
Pupil turnover greater than 40%	=	3 additional hours

School X has a pupil turnover of 34% and thus the SENCO gains 2 hours making a **total overall of 5 hours**.