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**Special Educational Needs and  
Disabilities Reforms 2014 - from policy  
to practice:**

**SENCoS' perspectives of the first year  
post implementation**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Bath Spa University for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Institute for Education, Bath Spa University**

**February 2017**

## **Abstract**

This study explores the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) as an implementer of Special Educational Needs policy within mainstream schools, at a time of significant Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) policy reform; the SEND reforms. The study examines the various policy actor roles the SENCo could be seen to assume during this period (Ball et al., 2012) and explores the initial impact of the SEND reforms, from the perspective of the SENCo.

A phenomenological approach to the study has been taken. The data consists of five phases which were conducted during the first year of SEND reform. Phases one and two sought the initial views of SENCos' regarding preparedness for the introduction of the SEND reforms. Data was gathered through questionnaires and interviews respectively. Phase three consisted of six interviews with nine SENCos across the academic year which explored the SENCos experience of SEND reforms implementation. Phases four and five comprised of questionnaires to wider groups of SENCos and sought to explore emerging themes from phase three. Data has been analysed through a thematic analysis approach.

The findings indicate that the SENCos immediately established themselves as leaders of policy implementation; determining priorities and related actions, often without the status Senior Leadership Team membership can bring. The study suggests that, in order to support the implementation of new policy, SENCos assumed various policy actor roles during this period, including narrator, entrepreneur and enthusiast.

The findings suggest that, from the perspective of the SENCo, the SEND reforms have already had an impact, including an expansion of the SENCo role and an increase in engagement between schools and parents. SENCos also reported a reduction in the numbers of children identified as having SEN in response to a number of drivers, directly related to the introduction of the SEND reforms.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to thank my supervisors, Dr Tilly Mortimore, Director of Studies, and Dr Richard Riddell. Both have been relentlessly supportive; managing to inspire, motivate and guide me with not only their help and patience but also through their generosity with their time and knowledge. Thank you also to Dr Glenys Jones who has always been on hand to advise and support.

I would also like to sincerely thank all the participants who took part in this study. In particular, I would like to thank all the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators who gave their time freely, particularly when their time is already so precious. Their willingness to talk and share their insights provided such a rich set of data to draw upon, for which I am indebted.

Thank you to my colleagues who have helped and supported me, through the discussion and debate of ideas, signposting and reading as well as their ongoing support and encouragement.

My thanks to my family and friends who have supported me, motivated me and have read countless chapters without complaint; this would not have been possible without your support.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my family. To Simon, Luke, Essie, and Becky; my brother and cousins. From the very start, running to keep up with you all has been the best source of inspiration and motivation. To my husband and children, Neil, Jamie and Phoebe. Your unfailing faith in me has kept me going, while your humour has kept it all in perspective. As Jamie says, 'It may be a PhD, but it's not as bad as spellings.'

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# Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Contents.....	5
List of acronyms .....	10
List of tables .....	12
List of figures.....	13
Appendices.....	14
Publications.....	16
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	17
1.1 Overview of the study.....	17
1.2 The role of the SENCo .....	17
1.3 The introduction of the SEND reforms .....	18
1.4 Research aims and rationale.....	20
1.5 Theoretical framework .....	21
1.6 Contribution to original knowledge.....	22
1.7 The structure of the thesis.....	22
Chapter 2: Inclusion within education: the development of Special Educational Needs policy from early beginnings to the present day .....	24
2.1 Introduction .....	24
2.2 Defining inclusion within education .....	25
2.3 Defining inclusion within education: a practical perspective .....	27
2.4 Tensions related to inclusive practice.....	28
2.5 Historical beginnings of educational inclusion policy .....	29
2.6 The 1978 Warnock Report .....	30
2.7 Post Warnock .....	30
2.8 New Labour and inclusion.....	32
2.9 The beginnings of SEND reform .....	35
2.10 The introduction of the SEND reforms .....	38
2.11 Implementation of the SEND reforms .....	45
2.12 Criticisms of the SEND reforms.....	46
2.13 Initial impact of the SEND reforms .....	51
2.14 Summary .....	55
Chapter 3: The role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.....	57
3.1 Introduction .....	57

3.2 The creation of the SENCo role.....	58
3.3 Defining the role of the SENCo in policy .....	60
3.4 Defining the role of the SENCo within literature .....	64
3.5 Factors which impact on the effectiveness of the SENCo.....	66
3.6 The status of the SENCo role .....	67
3.7 The role of the SENCo and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) .....	69
3.8 The SENCo: an operational or strategic role? .....	70
3.9 Time: a barrier to the execution of the SENCo role .....	72
3.10 The impact of the SENCo role on the professional .....	73
3.11 The SENCo role and inclusive education.....	73
3.12 The future of the role of the SENCo.....	75
3.13 Summary .....	75
Chapter 4: Theoretical framework.....	77
4.1 Introduction .....	77
4.2 Policy implementation theory .....	77
4.3 Policy implementation as an enactment .....	79
4.4 The role of the policy actors when enacting policy in schools .....	81
4.5 Limitations of the policy actor theory.....	85
4.6 Summary .....	86
Chapter 5: Methodology.....	88
5.1 Introduction .....	88
5.2 Research aims .....	88
5.3 Research questions .....	89
5.4 Epistemological and ontological considerations.....	90
5.5 Considered methodological approaches .....	91
5.6 Adopted methodological approach .....	92
5.7 The research design .....	94
5.8 Overview of methods within each phase .....	94
5.9 Research procedures: Phase one.....	95
5.10 Research procedures: Phase two.....	101
5.11 Research procedures: Phase three .....	107
5.12 Research procedures: Phase four .....	109
5.13 Research procedures: Phase five .....	113
5.14 Overview of data collection phases.....	117
5.15 Quality assurance.....	117
5.16 Summary of methodology .....	120

5.17 Ethical considerations .....	120
5.18 Participants: access, informing and giving consent .....	120
5.19 Protection from harm and minimising disruption .....	122
5.20 The researcher and participant relationship .....	124
5.21 The role of the researcher .....	125
5.22 Reporting of results: anonymity .....	125
5.23 Reporting of results: integrity .....	126
5.24 Summary of ethical considerations .....	127
Chapter 6: Results .....	128
6.1 Introduction .....	128
6.2 Analysis approach .....	128
6.3 Data analysis plan .....	129
6.4 Reporting of results.....	131
6.5 Results: Phases one and two.....	134
6.6 Awareness of the SEND reforms.....	136
6.7 Understanding of the SEND reforms.....	137
6.8 Sources of support .....	137
6.9 Feelings of preparedness for SEND reform.....	138
6.10 Thematic analysis of phase one .....	139
6.11 Summary .....	145
Chapter 7: Phase three: Thematic Map One .....	147
7.1 Introduction .....	147
7.2 Phase three overview .....	147
7.3 Thematic map 1: Response to policy .....	150
7.4 Discussion of themes .....	151
7.5 Summary .....	166
Chapter 8: Phase three: Thematic Map Two .....	168
8.1 Introduction .....	168
8.2 Thematic Map 2: Role of the SENCo .....	170
8.3 Discussion of themes .....	171
8.4 Summary of the chapter .....	187
Chapter 9: Results: Phases four and five .....	188
9.1 Introduction .....	188
9.2 Views regarding the support received with implementing the SEND reforms.....	190
9.3 Barriers and enablers to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms .....	193
9.4 Respondents' views regarding the principles of the SEND reforms .....	193



9.5 Priorities as a result of the SEND reforms.....	194
9.6 Perceived impacts: six and nine months in.....	198
9.7 Summary .....	200
Chapter 10: Discussion of results.....	202
10.1 Introduction .....	202
10.2 The Policy Actor Typology .....	204
10.3 Summary .....	213
10.4 The SEND reforms: the beginnings of impact .....	213
10.5 Summary .....	221
Chapter 11: Conclusions .....	223
11.1 Introduction .....	223
11.2 Implications for the role of the SENCo.....	223
11.3 Implications in relation to policy implementation.....	231
11.4 Implications from the study as an example of educational policy implementation .....	233
11.5 Limitations of the study .....	235
11.6 Implications for research .....	239
11.7 The contribution of knowledge from the central findings of the study .....	240
References .....	244
Appendices.....	267
2.1: Principles of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years.....	267
5.1: Pilot questionnaire Phase one .....	268
5.2 Final questionnaire Phase one .....	271
5.3 Pilot interview schedule Phase two .....	275
5.4 Final interview schedule Phase two.....	276
5.5 Pre-research questionnaire Phase three .....	277
5.6 Ethics and consent form .....	279
5.7 Pilot interview schedule Phase three .....	281
5.8 Final interview schedule Phase three .....	283
5.9 Pilot questionnaire Phase four.....	286
5.10 Final questionnaire Phase four .....	289
5.11 Pilot questionnaire Phase five .....	292
5.12 Final questionnaire Phase five .....	296
5.13: Bath Spa Research Ethics Approval Form .....	300
6.1 Example of transcribed interview .....	304
6.2 List of codes used.....	312

6.3 Statutory requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years.....	313
6.4 Example of a One Page Profile .....	320
9.1 Sample response: Phase four.....	321
9.2 Sample response: Phase five.....	324
10. Publication: Curran, H., Mortimore, T. and Riddell, R. (2016) 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six months.' British Journal of Special Education. 44 (1), pp. 46 – 64. ....	327

## List of acronyms

AEN	Additional Educational Needs
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development
CQC	The Care Quality Commission
DfE	Department of Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
EHC plan	Education, Health and Care plan
FE	Further Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAO	National Audit Office
NASEN	National Association of Special Educational Needs
NA SENCo	The National Award for SENCo
NDTI	The National Development Team for Inclusion
NUT	The National Union of Teachers
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education
QFT	Quality First Teaching
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

TA	Thematic analysis
TDA	The Training and Development Agency for Schools
TES	The Times Educational Supplement
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## List of tables

Chapter	Table	Page number
4.4	Table 4.1: Policy actor typology Ball et al. (2011:626)	82
5.9	Table 5.1: Overview of participants at Phase one	98
5.10	Table 5.2: Overview of participants at Phase two	105
5.11	Table 5.3: Interview dates: Phase three	108
5.11	Table 5.4: Overview of participants at Phase three	109
5.12	Table 5.5: Overview of participants at Phase four	112
5.13	Table 5.6: Overview of participants at Phase five	115
5.14	Table 5.7: Overview of data collection phases	117
6.4	Table 6.1: Overview of presentation of results	133
6.5	Table 6.2: Overview of presentation of results	134
7.1	Table 7.1: Overview of presentation of results	147
7.2	Table 7.2: Overview of participants	148
8.1	Table 8.1: Overview of presentation of results	168
9.1	Table 9.1: Overview of presentation of results	188
9.1	Table 9.2: Overview of participants for Phases four and five	189

## List of figures

Chapter	Figure	Page number
4.3	Figure 4.1:Theoretical framework: Thinking about policy enactment	80
7.3	Figure 7.1: Thematic map 1: Response to policy	150
8.2	Figure 8.1: Thematic map 2: The role of the SENCo	170
9.2	Figure 9.1: Phases four and five: Primary sources of information regarding the SEND reforms	190
9.2	Figure 9.2: Phase four: Pie chart indicating how satisfied SENCos were with the support they received to implement the SEND reforms	191
9.2	Figure 9.3: Phase Five: Pie chart indicating how satisfied SENCos were with the support they received to implement the SEND reforms	192
9.5	Figure 9.4: Most commonly cited activities changed or introduced since the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015).	194
9.5	Figure 9.5: Phase four: Has your SEN register changed this academic year?	195
9.5	Figure 9.6: Phase Five: Has your SEN register changed this academic year?	196
9.5	Figure 9.7: Phases Four and Five: Reasons why the SEN register has changed.	197
9.6	Figure 9.8: Phases four and five: SENCos observed impact of the SEND reforms on groups	198
9.6	Figure 9.9: Phase four Percentage of SENCos who believe the SEND reforms have impacted on their role	199
9.6	Figure 9.10: Phase five Percentage of SENCos who believe the SEND reforms have impacted on their role	199

## Appendices

Chapter	Appendix	Page number
2.10	2.1 Principles of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years	267
5.9	5.1: Pilot questionnaire Phase one	268
5.9	5.2 Final questionnaire Phase one	271
5.10	5.3 Pilot interview schedule Phase two	275
5.10	5.4 Final interview schedule Phase two	276
5.10	5.5 Pre-research questionnaire Phase three	277
5.10/ 5.18	5.6 Ethics and consent form	279
5.11	5.7 Pilot interview schedule Phase three	281
5.11	5.8 Final interview schedule Phase three	283
5.12	5.9 Pilot questionnaire Phase four	286
5.12	5.10 Final questionnaire Phase four	289
5.13	5.11 Pilot questionnaire Phase five	292
5.13	5.12 Final questionnaire Phase five	296
5.17	5.13 Bath Spa Research Ethics Approval Form	300
6.3	6.1 Example of transcribed interview	304
6.3	6.2 List of codes used	312
6.10	6.3 Statutory requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years	313
6.10	6.4 Example of a One page Profile	320
9.1	9.1 Sample response Phase four	321
9.1	9.2 Sample response Phase five	324

10	10. Publication: Curran, H., Mortimore, T. and Riddell, R. (2016) 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six months.' <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> . 44 (1), pp. 46 – 64.	327
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## **Publications**

Curran, H, Mortimore, T and Riddell, R (2016) 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six months.' *British Journal of Special Education*. ISSN 1467-8578 (Forthcoming)

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) as a co-ordinator and implementer of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusive policy within mainstream schools, at a time of significant Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) policy reform: specifically the introduction of the 2014 SEND reforms. In addition to this, the study aims to explore the initial impact of the SEND reforms, from the perspective of the SENCo.

### **1.2 The role of the SENCo**

The role of the SENCo was first formally introduced in 1994, through the 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs' (DfE, 1994, hereafter referred to as the 1994 Code) following the 1993 Education Act. It could be argued that the post had been in existence prior to this point, yet it was this statutory guidance which formalised the position. The role has remained in place to this day, with the nature and related responsibilities of the position recently reaffirmed in the revised 'Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years' (DfE and DoH, 2015, hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code). It is a statutory requirement for every mainstream school to have a SENCo. The post-holder must be a qualified teacher and, within three years of taking on the role, they must achieve the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo), a post-graduate qualification.

The 2015 Code states, 'the SENCo has day-to-day responsibility for the operation of SEN policy and co-ordination of specific provision made to support individual pupils with SEN, including those who have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). In addition to this, the SENCo has 'an important role to play with the head teacher and governing body, in determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). However, despite clear operational and strategic duties, the execution of the role in practice remains ambiguous (Rosen-Webb, 2011). In part, this is because the description of the post in policy does not equate to the practical execution of the role. There are also issues related to the seniority of the role. While it is recommended that SENCos are part of the school Senior Leadership Team (SLT), this is not mandatory. In addition to this, statutory guidance fails to give specific

guidance regarding the time required to execute the role. This has led to a mixed picture regarding how the SENCo position is executed in schools, in part because every context is different (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Many SENCos have additional responsibilities, including teaching responsibilities, with time to execute the strategic and operational aspects varying widely.

Initiatives have been introduced to try and raise the status of the SENCo, to try and ensure that the post has the necessary authority to execute its function. Primarily this was through the introduction of the NA SENCo, a mandatory postgraduate qualification for all SENCos new to post since 1st September 2009. While it has been argued that this has positive benefits for SENCos regarding conceptualisation of the role, and integration of theory and practice (Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012), questions remain regarding the impact the NA SENCo has had on developing the strategic nature of the position.

Despite confusion and conflict regarding the nature and execution of the role, it remains central to the implementation of SEN and inclusive policy, particularly since the introduction of the 1981 and subsequent 1993 Education Acts. SENCos have a number of operational and strategic responsibilities in relation to the provision of support for children with SEN within mainstream schools; with the role of the SENCo identified as an agent of change (Cowne, 2005; Pearson, 2010; Robertson, 2012). Yet it has also been argued that to have such a position within schools could be considered anti-inclusion (Layton, 2005) which presents a potential further tension. Hence, twenty years later, it is necessary to consider the efficacy and nature of this role at a time of significant SEND policy reform.

### **1.3 The introduction of the SEND reforms**

The introduction of the SEND reforms was hailed, by the then Coalition Government, as 'The biggest transformation to SEND support for thirty years' (DfE, 2014a). The seeds of such change can be traced back over ten years, with the publication of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report on SEN (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) which reported on the failings of the then current SEN system, with specific consideration of how it could be improved. The report highlighted issues with policy and terminology; stating that some elements were contradictory. The report also stated that SEN policy lacked priority, with a recommendation that such policy

should be brought into the 'mainstream education policy agenda' (House of Commons Select Committee, 2006: 7).

The concerns outlined with the House of Commons Select Committee report (2006) were later echoed in the Lamb Inquiry (DCFS, 2009) which investigated parental confidence in the SEN system and the 2010 Ofsted report; A Statement is not enough. This led to the publication of the Green Paper, Support and Aspiration: a new approach to SEND (DfE, 2012). The Green Paper set out the Coalition Government's vision for the new SEND system and was focused on delivering a system which identified needs early, focused on outcomes for children and young people with a long-term, aspirational view. Central to the SEND reforms was the idea of authentic parental participation, with a specific focus on engaging the views of the child and the child's parents and carers.

The culmination of this process resulted in the 2014 Children and Families Act. Statutory guidance setting out the legal framework for the execution of the 2014 Children and Families Act followed and was published in July 2014; The Special Education Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE and DoH, 2014) (hereafter referred to as the 2014 Code). Small amendments followed with the current version of the SEND Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as 2015 Code) published in January 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015). The requirements of the statutory guidance were due to be implemented in the early years, schools and colleges from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. Throughout this study, both the 2014 and 2015 Code have been referred to, as the study overlaps these two publications. However, for consistency, the 2015 Code has been referred to throughout. The term *SEND reforms* has been adopted as an all-encompassing term to refer to the legal and statutory guidance presented to schools.

The central principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) state that the system should be outcome focused and aspirational, with children and families at the centre. The guidance aims to create a system which is less confrontational and adversarial. The 2015 Code also contains some key changes from the previous 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b). These included the extension of focus from 0-25 years, greater collaboration between education, health and care and the replacement of School Action and School Action Plus categories of SEN with a single SEN Support category. Previous statements of SEN were replaced with the more holistic EHC Plan. Schools were required to contribute to the

Local Authority (LA) Local Offer, a central repository for transparent and accessible information for parents, and also had to produce a school SEN information report, which detailed processes and provision for children with SEN in school, which is updated annually.

The role of the SENCo remains central in the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Expectations regarding both the operational and strategic elements remain, and the guidance provides, as per previous Codes, an overview of the potential responsibilities of the SENCo. This infers that the role of the SENCo would be central to the implementation of the new principles of the SEND reforms which remain based on inclusive principles.

## **1.4 Research aims and rationale**

The purpose of the study has emerged from my professional experience. Since qualifying as a teacher, my career quickly moved into the area of SEN. While completing a Master's Degree in SEN, I took on the position of SENCo in a large urban primary school. After a subsequent move of location, I became a SENCo in a different LA which highlighted the disparity of practice, not only between the schools but also the LAs. A subsequent role as an LA SEN advisory teacher to mainstream schools further anecdotally endorsed some of the tensions which I had observed and experienced in the role; particularly regarding time to execute all responsibilities, but more specifically how to develop inclusive practices within a school when there are tensions between the operational and strategic execution of an individualised post. Over ten years later, I have observed through my role as a Senior Lecturer in SENCo and Award Leader for the NA SENCo that such tensions continue to be evident. Students on the NA SENCo typically report conflict between time to execute the role and the tasks required of them. Yet, the 2015 Code, in line with previous Codes, continues to emphasise the role of the SENCo in both an operational and strategic sense (DfE and DoH, 2015). This has led me to consider the juxtaposition where significance and prominence had been attached to a position, yet interpretations at a school level appear to negate this idea (Rosen-Webb, 2011). In addition to this, with the proposed introduction of the SEND reforms, specifically the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), I began to consider the potential additional conflicts that the introduction of new policy may bring to an already contested role, whilst acknowledging that conversely the introduction of such policy may also provide new opportunities.

Therefore the aim of the study evolved from the notion of a contested, confused, yet prominent role which was expected to determine and implement new policy. The study specifically aimed to consider the role over the longer term; the first year of reform.

The study aims to:

1. Explore the role of the SENCo as a policy implementer at a time of SEND reform, focusing on the introduction of the 2014 Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015) and activities in relation to this.
2. Provide the SENCos with an opportunity to narrate their experience regarding policy implementation, specifically preparing for, managing and implementing change over the course of the first year.
3. Consider and explore the views and experiences of the SENCo regarding their role and their perception of the implementation of the SEND reforms.
4. Examine the narrated experience of the SENCo as a policy implementer within the reforms, and whether it is a static, emerging and/ or changing role in relation to the Ball et al. Policy actor typology (2012).

## **1.5 Theoretical framework**

Research has undeniably explored the tensions associated with the role of the SENCo (Szwed, 2007a; Pearson and Ralph, 2007; Qureshi, 2014). Central to such tensions is the problematic nature of trying to define the SENCo role which is so varied, both in position and context (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). It was also my assumption a changing policy landscape could further make exploration of the role problematic. Therefore I drew upon the work of Ball and colleagues (2012) which suggests that policy implementation is an enactment which is impacted by a variety of factors, one of which are the various policy actor positions individuals can be seen to assume during such a period. Such positions can be seen to be assumed individually or concurrently at varying points. To help understand the varied roles which policy actors can be seen to assume, Ball and colleagues produced a policy actor typology which was developed as part of the theoretical model of policy enactment in schools. The use of the typology, which encapsulates roles including narrator, entrepreneur, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translator, critic and receivers seeks to help us understand how teachers make meaning and enact policy. The adoption

of the typology was intended to help to understand the complexities of the SENCo role during this period of transition.

## **1.6 Contribution to original knowledge**

The central contribution of the study to both academic and professional knowledge relates to an exploration of how the SENCo can be seen to act as a policy implementer at a time of significant policy reform. It could be argued that the SEND reforms have presented, for the first time since the inception of the role, a requirement for SENCos to negotiate and implement significant policy reforms which directly impact on SEN provision within their schools. Such reforms have called upon the SENCos to act as a strategic lead (DfE and DoH, 2015), despite the known challenges. This study explores how the SENCo has negotiated these changes and how they have managed their role during this time.

To further explore and explain the complexities of the role, this study has adopted the Ball et al. (2012) policy actor typology. Through adopting the typology, it is possible to consider the policy actor roles which the SENCo could be seen to assume during a strategic period, therefore, adding to the current body of work which has explored the execution of the role.

Research is beginning to emerge regarding the impact of the SEND reforms. Predominantly this has focused on statutory processes and the parental view. Therefore, in addition to adding to the body of knowledge regarding the SENCo role, particularly as a policy implementer, the study seeks to add to emerging research regarding the impact of the SEND reforms. Specifically, the study focuses on an area which, while hypothesised about, has not yet been considered; the impact of the SEND reforms from the perspective of the SENCo. SENCos' perceptions of impact on children, parents, teachers and schools are considered, as well as potential impacts on their role. Such perceptions, it could be argued, are central to how the SENCo proceeds as a policy implementer.

## **1.7 The structure of the thesis**

Chapter two begins with a brief exploration of the principles and definition of inclusion with education, focusing on SEN. The roles of teachers, and potential tensions, are explored. The chapter develops by considering how the principles of inclusion in

education are translated into practice through the tool of policy. Historical developments related to inclusive policy are considered, with a specific focus on the introduction of recent SEN policy; the SEND reforms.

Chapter three extends the idea of policy implementation, through an exploration of the role of SENCo as a central policy actor and policy implementer. The role is explored through both policy and literature, with considerations given to the potential tensions associated with the role and the related impact of such tensions on inclusive policy.

Chapter four frames the study in a theoretical sense, through a brief exploration of policy implementation theory, which centres on the notion of policy implementation as an enactment. The work of Ball and colleagues (2012), specifically the policy actor typology, is focused upon, as a tool through which the complexities of the SENCo role can be explored further.

Chapter five details the methodological approach which was adopted for this study, with justifications for this choice. The chapter further states the data collection methods, including a rationale, and an overview of participants who took part in the research. Ethical considerations, and how ethical issues were mitigated, are discussed.

Chapters six, seven, eight and nine present the findings from the study. Predominantly this is through a thematic analysis approach, presented within two thematic maps. Additional basic quantitative data is also provided.

Chapter ten presents a discussion of the results from the study. The data is discussed in relation to the policy actor typology. The impact of the SEND reforms, as perceived by the SENCo, is reported upon.

The study concludes with chapter eleven. This chapter discusses the potential implications of the study, whilst also acknowledging the limitations. The chapter concludes with the original contribution to knowledge the study claims to make in relation to the SENCo as a policy implementer at a time of policy reform, while also reporting on the observed impact of the SEND reforms from the perspective of the SENCo.



## **Chapter 2: Inclusion within education: the development of Special Educational Needs policy from early beginnings to the present day**

### **2.1 Introduction**

‘Educational inclusion is more than a concern about any one group of pupils such as those pupils who have been or are likely to be excluded from school. Its scope is broad. It is about equal opportunities for all pupils, whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, attainment and background. It pays particular attention to the provision made for, and the achievement of, different groups of pupils within a school.’

(Ofsted, 2000:4)

When the concept of inclusion is discussed and debated, it is often done so in relation to educational contexts (Armstrong et al., 2010; Graham-Matheson, 2012). While the above quote presents a broad view of educational inclusion, frequently the debate is concerned with the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) within mainstream educational provision (Ofsted, 2000; Lewis and Norwich, 2005; Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007; Evans, 2007; Gibson, 2009). Within such debates, it is often argued that the central principle of inclusion relates to the idea of equal opportunity and full participation within education for all children (UNESCO, 1994; Ofsted, 2000; DfES, 2001a).

Social and educational legislation within England have illustrated over time a movement from the segregation, and latterly integration, of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), towards the active inclusion of children with SEN, specifically within mainstream schools (Frederickson and Cline, 2009; Hodkinson, 2016). This is reflected in past and recent educational legislation (DFE, 1994; DfEE, 1997; Children and Families Act, 2014; DfE and DoH, 2015); with O’Brien (2012) suggesting that it is typically necessary to have legislative safeguards in place to ensure the enactment of adopted principles. Therefore, it could be argued that educational reform, and related statutory policy, have not only shaped but have also driven the inclusive movement, with Armstrong et al. stating that policy is considered ‘a key driver for achieving social integration and cohesion’ (2010: 3).

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly consider the definition of inclusion within education in relation to both theory and practice. The discussion will subsequently examine educational reform and related policy, specifically considering how the focus on inclusion for children with SEN has grown within legislation. The introduction of the 1870

Forester Act, the introduction of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and developments post-Warnock will briefly be explored, primarily focusing on the introduction of the 1981 Education Act and the introduction of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DfE, 1994). However, the central discussion will focus on the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms culminating in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015) (Hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code). The discussion will consider why SEND reform was considered necessary and how the principles of the reforms sought to address reported concerns through a change in legislation. The discussion will also explore how the new statutory guidance was implemented, concluding with an exploration of the emerging reported impact of the SEND reforms.

For the purposes of this discussion, the principles, and related policy, of inclusive education will predominantly focus on children with SEN within mainstream schools, unless otherwise specified, while acknowledging that the concept of inclusion within education, and society, has a much wider concern (Armstrong et al., 2010).

## **2.2 Defining inclusion within education**

Farrell (2004) suggests there is something desirable about the term inclusion, which in turn makes us feel that we should subscribe to it. Similarly Armstrong et al. describe inclusion as ‘feel good rhetoric’ (2010: 4). However, it could be argued that the term inclusion is greater than rhetoric. Allan reported, over fifteen years ago, that inclusion was greater than a sense of something positive, suggesting at the time that inclusion was ‘the new orthodoxy of educational thinking’ (1999, cited in Hodkinson, 2016: 87). In addition to the ‘feel good rhetoric’ of inclusion (Armstrong et al., 2010: 4) it is evident that there has been, historically, powerful encouragement from central government for education to move in this direction (Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007). Given the almost *fait accompli* regarding the acceptance of inclusion with education as the current orthodoxy, does an exploration of the definition help us understand why inclusion is viewed in such a way?

It could be argued that the Warnock Committee (DES, 1978) were instrumental regarding the inclusive schooling movement. The 1978 committee report to the Government, led by Warnock, made a number of recommendations. This included the introduction of the

term SEN as well as making specific reference to the integration of children with SEN within mainstream schools. Glazzard and colleagues describe how integration is a concept which ‘focused largely on the assimilation of pupils with SEN into mainstream schools’ (Glazzard et al., 2015: 2). Whilst the practice of integration did not place requirements on schools to adapt learning, it undoubtedly acted as a precursor to the inclusive movement. Certainly since Warnock and the subsequent 1981 Education Act, the term inclusion has undeniably gained greater traction within educational discourses with Booth suggesting in 1996 that the term inclusion, while not yet common, was beginning to replace ‘integration’ (1996: 87). At this time the first SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) had been introduced, the first statutory guidance to schools regarding mainstream educational provision for children with SEN, and Booth predicted that not only would the term remain in use but also that the concept of inclusion should not be regarded as a fixed state but should be regarded as a process. A review of educational policy throughout this chapter demonstrates Booth’s predictions to a degree (DfE and DoH, 2015).

Carrington and Elkins suggest that inclusion is greater than a practical review of approach, and as such, they hold the view that inclusion is ‘...a philosophy of acceptance where all pupils are valued and treated with respect’ (2005: 86, cited in Glazzard et al., 2015:24). Ainscow, in agreement, describes inclusion as a ‘principled approach’ (2006, cited in Elkins, 2012: 27). The central premise of such an approach, as described by Ainscow, is a school and system for all individuals. Glazzard et al. (2015) support the idea that the concept of inclusion relates to valuing all pupils, and suggest that this relates closely to the original idea that Warnock (DES, 1978) was initially proposing. It is noteworthy, however, that Warnock (2005) later reported that inclusion should have an emphasis on the feeling of belonging; something that arguably has to come from the ethos of the school rather than a set of system changes, but equally relates to the notion of the common school for all (McLaughlin, 2003 cited in Haydon, 2007).

Avramidis and Norwich (2016) echo Warnock’s (2005) proposal that inclusion should have an emphasis on belonging, stating that inclusion can be viewed as a social construct which seeks to move away from the notion of educating children with SEN in separate, specialist settings; this suggests a move away from segregation (Frederickson and Cline, 2010). This is echoed in DfES guidance which states, regarding ethos, ‘inclusion is about engendering a sense of community and belonging and encouraging mainstream and special schools

and others to come together to support each other' (2001a: 3). Such a process encompasses the removal of barriers to including all learners within the same community, therefore suggesting a greater acknowledgement of the rights of the individual to belong as part of their community (Booth, 1996).

Norwich (2008) proposes that the view of inclusion has grown to include a wider perspective since Warnock (DES, 1978) and suggests that there are now multiple meanings of the concept, all of which relate to the experience of the individual. This infers that it may be the experience of the individual which distinguishes the difference between integration and inclusion. It is Norwich's view that inclusion has not gone far enough for some individuals, while for others, it has gone too far. However, the notions of individuality and the concept of a shared understanding regarding belonging are somewhat problematic. Moreover, statutory guidance is lacking in both areas which leaves a vacuum for interpretation (Ekins, 2012; Norwich, 2014).

### **2.3 Defining inclusion within education: a practical perspective**

From a practical perspective, inclusion can be defined as a school making a radical set of changes, through a systematic review, to ensure all children are embraced (Liasidou, 2012; Frederickson and Cline, 2009). Sebba and Sachdev (1997), in agreement, define inclusion as the actions a school takes to reconsider and restructure regarding the curriculum, provision and resources. This enables the school to respond to the needs of the individual and therefore, as a consequence, provide equality of opportunity. In contrast, integration 'places little or no onus on the school to make adaptations or adjustments to meet the specific needs of learners' (Glazzard et al., 2015: 2).

The inference here is that there are practical considerations which impact on the ability to meet the ideals above; notably relating to a sense of belonging and value (Simplican et al., 2015). If the shared aim is inclusion, then a shared philosophy is not enough to realise such ideals; 'commitment to equality and diversity are... enacted practices' (Gibson, 2009: 12). This echoes the views of Frederickson and Cline (2009) and Liasidou (2012) which state that inclusion is about changing structures to embrace all children.

Developing a shared understanding of the definition, rationale and associated aims of inclusion, government legislation and statutory guidance plays a key part in setting out

the national tone for inclusion and how educators understand and enact this term. Yet, despite a potential shared understanding of the term, issues and tensions remain regarding the implementation of inclusive practice, which the following section explores.

## **2.4 Tensions related to inclusive practice**

It could be argued that inclusion means different things to different people (Baker and Zigmond, 1995 cited in Frederickson and Cline, 2009; Soan, 2005). Moreover, the concept of inclusion will mean different things to different people at different times and in different contexts (Glazzard et al., 2015); suggesting that both the individual and collective understanding of the term in schools could present a tension. It could be argued that such a tension has been exacerbated because current educational policy has not progressed with regards to defining inclusion. The 2015 Code does not state a definition of inclusion and no longer makes reference to the CSIE Index for Inclusion (CSIE, 2014; DfE and DoH, 2015), although the term inclusion is referenced within the guidance. The 2015 Code does make reference to the National Curriculum statutory inclusion statement (DfE and DoH, 2015), which states that children should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and sets three key areas of focus: learning challenges, responding to pupils' diverse learning needs, and overcoming barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

Humphrey and Lewis (2008) believe a key tension relates to the gap between inclusion policy and actual classroom practice, which echoes the issues regarding responsibility and the translation of policy. Ideals, they state, had not yet been met. A key issue relates to the prominence of SEN/ inclusive policy within the schools' agenda, in particular under the remit of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). Research by Ellis and Tod (2014) explored the importance of policy, in particular how SEN policy is interpreted and implemented. Their research found that the majority of teachers did not engage directly with policy, noting that policy had a limited practical value. In addition to this, teachers may, in practice, experience conflicting and uncomfortable emotions about the daily practice of inclusion (Norwich, 2008).

It could be argued that this relates to the interplay between inclusive and wider educational policy. Golder et al. (2005) suggest that this is in part related to the experience of students within Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Historically there have been

concerns raised about the experience of students within ITT regarding the support they receive relating to teaching children and young people with SEN. This has been highlighted in recent times, with campaigns by the British Dyslexia Association and the National Autistic Society to include a greater amount of SEN provision for students. There is a specific tension between the idea of inclusion as an educational right (Farrell, 2010) and a lack of training of how teachers need to respond to this.

It could be argued that it is necessary to have processes, procedures and safeguards in place to support the enactment of inclusive principles (O'Brien, 2012). O'Brien suggests that this is typically through legislative means. In addition to this, it could be argued that one potential solution to the tensions described above could come from centrally produced government guidance for teachers and schools; although it should be acknowledged that teachers and SENCos, and other professionals, will be aligned and will respond differently to varying policies, many of which they may find 'controversial and challenging' (Brundrett, 2011: 339). Therefore the following discussion will explore how the principles of inclusive education have grown, and been legislated for, in policy, with a specific exploration of the recent SEND reforms.

## **2.5 Historical beginnings of educational inclusion policy**

The Education Act 1921 stipulated that children should be grouped and educated in settings according to their similar perceived need; an approach which would later be termed segregation (Wearmouth, 2009). By 1945, legislation stated that children with complex SEN would be educated in special schools 'wherever possible' (Graham-Matheson, 2012; 8); this meant that the majority of children with SEN would be educated within mainstream settings (Cigman, 2007). Certainly, by the 1960s and 1970s questions started to be asked regarding the actual benefits of segregation of this nature. Historical rhetoric was being challenged. Evidence was beginning to suggest that the segregation system was not as effective as initially thought, for all groups of children (Loxley, 1978, cited in Cigman, 2007). Perhaps reflecting the change in attitudes at the time, the 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act saw the removal of the 'legal distinction between who was, and was not, educable in school' (Frederickson and Cline, 2009:74). This began to open up the idea of mainstream education for all, with clear responsibilities towards those who had the most significant SEN (Hodkinson, 2016).

## 2.6 The 1978 Warnock Report

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978), and subsequent 1981 Education Act, was the culmination of a review of educational provision for 'children and young people handicapped by disabilities of body and mind' (Evans, 1995: 145 cited in Hodkinson 2016: 79). The report, described as 'landmark' by Graham-Matheson (2012:8), was the government response to groups of parents and educational professionals who were concerned with the standard of provision, at that time, for children with SEN (Cigman, 2007; Hodkinson, 2016). Central to the report was the notion of accessible mainstream education for all and the cessation of segregation (Soan, 2004). Hodkinson suggests that part of the Warnock report's significance is that it 'legitimised' the new integrated system of mainstream education for children with SEN (2016: 86). Hornby describes the Warnock Report as the accelerant, stating the report 'led to acceleration in the move to implement inclusion education in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world' (2011: 321).

Another significant shift, which remains today, was the change in associated terminology. Prior to the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) children had been referred to as 'handicapped by disabilities of body or mind' (Wearmouth, 2009:22) or 'educationally subnormal' (Lindsay, 2007: 16). The Warnock report recommended that the term was replaced with 'children with learning difficulties' which was later coined in the 1981 Education Act as children with *Special Educational Needs* (SEN) (Glazzard et al., 2015). Whilst the term SEN remains a legal term within current legislation, it is often supplemented with additional terms such as disabled or learning difficulties (Ekins, 2012).

## 2.7 Post Warnock

Whilst the Warnock Report may have been central to the changes occurring, there were a number of debates happening concurrently which influenced the discourse at the time. These included concerns regarding the predominantly medical view of SEN and concerns regarding equality and parental involvement (Tomlinson, 1987). Consequently, the Education Acts which followed the Warnock Report gave rise to a number of protections for children with SEN which, it could be argued, has steadily grown since. The first of which was the 1981 Education Act which made provisions for children with SEN; specifically this meant that children with SEN were to be educated within mainstream schools (Tomlinson, 1987).

The 1981 Education Act adopted and legally defined the term 'SEN' as proposed by Warnock. The legal definition states that:

A child has a SEN if he or she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child has a learning difficulty if he or she:

- a. have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; **OR**
- b. have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local authority; **OR**
- c. are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at a. or b. above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them (DfES, 2001: 6).

The purpose of the term SEN was to move away from the earlier terms, which were considered to have negative connotations. The term SEN was perceived to be a move towards a term which was more holistic and transparent, although Booth suggests that this still places the learning difficulty as within the child, or the 'property of pupils' (1985, cited in Candappa, 1986: 62). Tomlinson agrees and suggests that the 'within child' model prevailed (Tomlinson, 1987: 52) despite the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) clearly referring to the medical, social and environmental aspects related to SEN, indicating a move towards a biopsychosocial model of SEN and disability (Pumfrey, 2010). Tensions relating to the retention of this term are explored later in the chapter.

This period also saw the introduction of the Education Reform Act (1988) which introduced the National Curriculum and a national testing system (Norwich, 2010). Norwich cites that this brought about a clear tension between the 'push for externally visible standards' and the provision for inclusivity (2010: 38). While the 1988 Education Reform Act made further requirements for pupils with SEN, a key issue at this time was the localised interpretation of national policy, particularly at Local Educational Authority (LEA) level (Jones, 2004 cited in Hodkinson, 2016).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a shift of focus towards the rights of the child and specifically their educational rights; perhaps indicating a shift regarding the recognition of children's voice and a move towards a social, rather than medical, model of disability. Specifically, this began with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. This stated compulsory and accessible education for all. It also referred



to the need to focus on the potential for the child regardless of 'mental and physical abilities' (UN, 1989: Article 29). Whilst this shows progress regarding rights, and access to education, it does not make exact reference to inclusion.

However, it was the 1993 Education Act which was truly significant regarding policy development. The 1993 Education Act introduced the first SEN Code of Practice; it is a reviewed and updated version of this document which is now central to the SEND reforms (Cheminais, 2015). The SEN Code of Practice was titled the '1994 Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs' (Hereafter referred to the as 1994 Code) (DfE, 1994). The 1994 Code set out the practical guidance to Local Education Authorities and schools in respect of their duties towards children who have SEN, outlining the process for identifying, assessing and making provision for children with SEN (DfE, 1994).

Concurrently, UNESCO held a world conference in 1994 regarding Special Needs Education. While the 1993 Education Act and subsequent 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) set out the legal and statutory guidance to schools, one might argue that it was the agreement of The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) that developed the cultural and philosophical move towards inclusion within education. The statement affirms the right of every individual to an education within a mainstream school, regardless of differences (Ekins, 2012). Ainscow and Cesar suggested that the Salamanca Statement is 'arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education' (2006:231). The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) followed; yet there was no mention of inclusion or access to education, which Graham-Matheson (2012) suggests illustrates a continued tolerance of the current level of discrimination towards children and young people with disabilities.

## **2.8 New Labour and inclusion**

It was in 1996 with the soon to be elected Labour party, when there was a 'decisive repositioning of education on the centre of the policy stage in England' (Ball, 2013: 1). With specific regard to inclusion, Runswick-Cole (2011) suggests that it was the introduction of the New Labour Government that truly began to drive this agenda. Dyson and Gallannaugh (2007) agree, with Hodkinson suggesting that the government 'firmly put [inclusion] on the political agenda' (2016: 86).

It was shortly after the election of the new government that a raft of policies came in to address this fundamental shift in position (Armstrong, 2005). This began with the Green Paper: Excellence for All Children Meeting Special Educational Needs (DfEE, 1997) which detailed the government's commitment to developing inclusive education (Ellis et al., 2008). The Green Paper recommended the Centre of Studies for Inclusive Education's (CSIE) Inclusion Index as a tool which schools could use to carry out an assessment of their inclusive environments. The Green Paper also suggested that the CSIE Inclusion Index was helpful with regards to 'explaining concepts' (1997: 77). The Inclusion Index (CSIE, 2014) currently defines inclusion as:

- Valuing all students and staff equally.
- Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.
- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality.
- Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as 'having special educational needs'.
- Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely.
- Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome.
- Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff as well as for students.
- Emphasising the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

In 1998 an action programme was devised, entitled 'Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action' (DfEE, 1998). Within this document, key priorities were set out which focused on developing inclusion and working with parents. The notion of inclusion was also partly defined, 'Inclusion is a process, not a fixed state' (DfEE, 1998: 23), which relates closely to the idea that developing inclusion develops capacity (Bennett et al., 1998; Liasidou, 2012; Alisauskas et al., 2011).

Further changes took place in 2001. Firstly, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was amended and replaced with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Through the Act parents and carers could seek redress through the new SEN and Disability Tribunal system; indicating a shift in perspective towards parents. Furthermore, the Act stated that providers of education could not discriminate against disabled people. This legislation echoed the statutory guidance and legislation of the time (DfE, 1994; DfES, 2001a; DfES, 2001b) which stated the duty to educate children with SEN in mainstream schools, unless this was incompatible with the wishes of the parent/ carer or it was incompatible with the provision of efficient education for other children. This echoed the statutory guidance and related legislation

Secondly, the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) was revised, and the 2001 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as the 2001 Code) (DfES, 2001b) was produced. Hart (1998) suggests concerns had been raised by teachers regarding the 1994 Code, outlined in the 1997 Green Paper relating to low achievement, standards of teaching and outcomes for children with SEN. The 2001 Code asserted the stronger rights of parents as detailed through the SENDA 2001.

The focused move towards inclusion was also echoed in wider national policy. For example, the Access to Education for children and young people with medical needs (DfES, 2001c), which set out statutory guidance for children who were unable to access school due to medical reasons, and Accessible Schools: planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils (DfES, 2002), which provided specific guidance to schools regarding their statutory duties. It was also at this time that the Department of Health produced policy guidance relating to intellectual disabilities, stating that the idea of inclusion should apply to 'as many disabled young people as possible' (Department of Health, 2001: 123).

Two audit commission reports followed in 2002: Statutory Assessment and Statements: in need of review? and Special Educational Needs: A mainstream issue (Pinney, 2002). The reports raised varying issues regarding the effectiveness of the inclusive processes which had been in place since 1997. The latter report, Special Educational Needs: A mainstream issue, considered the issue of inclusion within mainstream schools. Surprisingly, given the raft of inclusion focused policies and guidance, the report found that the progress

towards inclusion had slowed down over the preceding decade (Ellis et al., 2008). As a consequence, a plethora of policy documents and legislation followed, including:

- The Children Act 2004 and Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a)
- Removing Barriers to Achievement: The Government's strategy for SEN (DfES, 2004b)
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Education and Inspections Act 2006

The premise of this chapter is not to examine each of these in depth, but to give a policy overview to set the context for the current SEND reforms, prior to examining the role of the SENCo. However, of particular note is Removing Barriers to Achievement: the Government's strategy for SEN (DfES, 2004b). Armstrong suggests that this strategy for SEN offered the 'most complete articulation of inclusive education policy' (2005: 144). Certainly, this is echoed in the document, which clearly states the rights of the children to be educated together (DfES, 2004 cited in Baker, 2007).

At a similar time, Warnock (2005) was also beginning to re-evaluate the notion of SEN provision, in particular issues related to the lack of clarity regarding statements of SEN and how these were being used, and the challenge of inclusion; specifically questioning how effective this had been in practice. A point which Baker (2007) contests, with the suggestion that the central issue is that provision is viewed as 'either or' inclusion or specialist, rather than a consideration that the two can not only co-exist, but also complement each other. Roulstone and Prideaux (2008) agree, to a degree, suggesting that Warnock's rejections were not evidence based. However, despite such misgivings, Warnock later suggested that 'a radical revolution is now required' (2010: 15).

## **2.9 The beginnings of SEND reform**

Through the audit commission reports, the Labour Government's strategy for SEN (DfES, 2004b) and Warnock's report on SEN (2005) it is possible to see how the foundations for SEND policy reform were beginning to be laid. Ekins describes how 'flaws in the existing system have been identified, with calls for radical reform of the system' (2012: 32). Significant to these developments was the publication of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report on SEN (House of Commons Education and Skills

Committee, 2006). The report was tasked with exploring the current SEN system, with specific consideration to its failings and how it could be improved. In line with earlier reports (Audit Commission, 2002; Warnock, 2005) it was through this report that concerns were formally expressed regarding SEN policy, specifically in relation to inclusion (Baker, 2007). Central to the concerns was the idea that policies and terminology were contradictory (House of Commons Select Committee, 2006; Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007; Roulstone and Prideaux, 2008). The report urged that the Government should clarify its position on SEN, both regarding inclusion and strategic direction. A vision was required for the future with, potentially, updated strategy and non-statutory guidance (House of Commons Select Committee, 2006). The report further stated, 'Special Educational Needs should be prioritised, brought into the mainstream education policy agenda, and radically improved' (House of Commons Select Committee, 2006: 7).

Later in 2006, the Government responded to the House of Commons Select Committee report (2006). The formal response from the Government stated that a number of recommendations would be acted upon, for example, the introduction of national accreditation for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), although a fundamental review was not needed. The Government's response drew upon evidence from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and data, suggesting that to action a formal review now would hinder the progress already made (Ofsted, 2006).

However, less than two years later in 2008, Brian Lamb was tasked by the Secretary of State to undertake a government inquiry and examine the SEN system, specifically focusing on parental confidence (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). The outcome of the inquiry was unequivocal, '...there needs to be a major reform of the current system' (DCFS, 2009a: 1). Lamb argued that in part the difficulty lay with the piecemeal nature of the various educational policies, therefore giving further weight to an overall review of the SEN framework. At this time additional information was published in relation to SEN. This included the Rose Report (2009), which reported on the identification and teaching of children and young people with dyslexia, and the Progression guidance (DCFS, 2009b), which focused on raising expectations and progress for pupils with SEN. Additionally, the first national data analysis regarding pupils with SEN in terms of types of SEN, attainment,

progression, absence, exclusion and the views of the pupils was published and made publicly available (Cheminais, 2015). It could be argued that this signified the continued spotlight on SEN and provision.

Following the Lamb Inquiry (2009a) Ofsted was commissioned by the then Secretary of State to conduct a review which endeavoured to evaluate the legislative framework for children with SEND. The review focused on three aspects: assessment and identification, access to and quality of provision, evaluation and accountability (Cheminais, 2015). The report, *The Special Educational Needs and Disability Review: a statement is not enough* (Ofsted, 2010), concluded that children, at that time, were being over-identified as having a SEN. The report suggested that more effective teaching could mitigate the resulting difficulties the children were experiencing. In addition to this, the report identified that not only were children from disadvantaged backgrounds over-represented as having a SEN, but children identified as such were also more likely to be absent or be excluded and would not achieve as well as their peers. Practice to support children was inconsistent. Crucially, the report drew upon the views and wishes of the children and young people and parents concerned.

*The Special Educational Needs and Disability Review: a statement is not enough* (Ofsted, 2010) echoed concerns raised by Warnock (2005), the House of Commons Select Committee (2006) and Lamb (2009a). The report added further weight to a call for wider SEND reform and was central to informing the Coalition Government's SEND reform strategy (Ofsted, 2010; Robertson, 2012). Ekins suggests that the collective findings of the reports indicated that the failings of the previous system included:

- Problems with the lack of definition and subsequent identification of SEN;
- Continued lack of achievement and gap between pupils with SEN and their peers;
- Overly bureaucratic;
- Adversarial for parents who find they have to battle for the rights of their child with SEN;
- Problems with the current statementing system (2012: 33).

The Coalition Government came to power in 2010, and the Government immediately began the process of overhauling the SEN system (Hodkinson, 2016) with David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, proclaimed there was a need to 'shift the bias from inclusion'

(Runswick-Cole, 2011: 112) suggesting that some children were forced to attend mainstream schools (Hodkinson, 2016). However, SEN policy reform was also taking place within wider educational reform, which some would argue has taken place at an unprecedented rate since the introduction of the Coalition government. Policy changes, for example, the new curriculum, pupil premium, Progress 8, two new Ofsted frameworks, all inter-relate with the SEND reforms to a degree. Norwich suggests that the SEND system is 'interdependent' on the general educational system which encompasses 'the National Curriculum and assessment, school inspection, the governance of schools and equality legislation' (2014: 404). This suggests that there are a number of external influencing factors during SEND policy enactment.

## **2.10 The introduction of the SEND reforms**

The culmination of the reports led to the publication of the Green Paper, 'Support and Aspiration: a new approach to SEND' (DfE, 2012). The Green Paper set out the Coalition Government's vision for the new SEND system and directly responded to the criticism of the previous system which stated that the system at the time was too complicated, identified issues too late, had too much duplication and did not focus on outcomes for children with SEN (Glazzard et al., 2015). Glazzard and colleagues (2015) state how the green paper also sought to address concerns related to an overly bureaucratic system, which disadvantaged parents and impinged on their collective and individual voice. Frustration with the previous system was evident, with the Green Paper stating that the document was responding to,

'the frustrations of children, young people and their families and the professionals who work with them. We want to put in place a radically different system to support better life outcomes for young people; give parents confidence by giving them more control; and transfer power to professionals on the front line and to local communities' (DfE, 2012: 4)

The central premise of the Green paper focused on better outcomes through five central themes:

- Early identification and assessment
- Giving parents control

- Learning and achieving
- Preparing for adulthood
- Services working together for families (Robertson, 2012: 77).

The indicated changes included:

- A new approach to identifying SEN
- A new single assessment process and 'Education, Health and Care Plan' by 2014
- A Local offer of all services available
- The option of a personal budget by 2014
- Give parents a real choice of school
- Greater independence to the assessment of children's needs (DfE, 2012: 5 – 6)

The suggestion throughout the Green Paper was that the whole SEND system was entirely dysfunctional; a point partially supported by the Lamb Inquiry (DCFS, 2009a; Robertson, 2012). Yet, the proposals were not without their critics. Robertson argued that there was uncertainty regarding such change, despite the promise of a radical overhaul of the SEN system, because the direction and nature of inclusive education were 'consigned to the recycle bin' (2012:77). Robertson goes on to state, in agreement with Norwich (2014), that changes to SEN structures were taking place within wider radical changes to the schooling structure. Schools were working in 'quasi-market conditions out without the superintendence of Local Authorities (LAs) but still under the first jurisdiction of central government' (2012:77). Such views were echoed by George et al (2011) who suggested that whilst the Green paper has a strong emphasis on local decision making, there were concerns regarding the inconsistent application of approaches and how, in particular, this would relate to accountability and workforce development. Hodkinson (2016), in extension of this idea, suggests that a key political tension, in relation to the inclusion agenda, is how equality and social justice can coexist within an education system based on neo-liberalist principles of marketisation and competition. Glazzard, in agreement, argues that that Green Paper did not offer 'hope for advancing educational inclusion' (2013: 186). Lehane (2016) agrees and suggests that part of the issue relates to the priority of the standards agenda, and how related challenges were not acknowledge within the Green paper.



Yet, there were also more specific concerns at an individual and school level. There was no recognition within the Green Paper that the curriculum or assessment processes might be inappropriate for vulnerable learners (Glazzard, 2013). Glazzard took the view that whilst the proposed legislation noted concerns with the progress of children with SEN, the proposal to sharpen the focus on accountability, through progress indicators, could 'potentially be disastrous for the inclusion agenda' (2013:185) due to schools' potential unwillingness to admit children who may negatively impact their progress data. In addition to these concerns, George and colleagues suggest that the introduction of a single category of SEN could be potentially problematic, as pupils may be left unsupported and creating a single category may impact on early identification.

The following stage of the SEND reforms focused on the pathfinders programmes. 20 trials took place over 31 LAs, testing out the recommendations of the Green Paper; specifically the introduction of a new single assessment process and personal budgets. However, Norwich argues that 'much of what was proposed was not radically new, but involved extending, integrating and tightening up existing principles and practice' (2014: 415). Lamb (2016) reported on the early findings of the pathfinder programmes, which indicated mixed results. Lamb reported that parents had issues with accessing the Local Offer, 12% of families had looked at the information, with half of those having found it useful. However, Lamb does add that the pathfinder programmes were reporting increased levels of parent satisfaction with the pilot EHC plan process in comparison to the previous system. These findings were echoed by the Driver Youth Trust report (LkMco, 2015).

Draft legislation followed (DfE, 2012) which outlined how the proposals would be put into practice. The culmination of this process was the Children and Families Bill 2014 and the Indicative Draft of the (0-25) Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2013). The Children and Families Bill 2014 came into force on 1 September 2014 as the Children and Families Act. Another two drafts of the SEN Code were published (October 2013 and March 2013) with the final version, the Special Education Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE and DoH, 2014) (hereafter referred to as the 2014 Code) published July 2014. The requirements, as set out in the 2014 Code, were due to be implemented in the early years, schools and colleges from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 and set out guidance and the legal framework for the execution of the principles of the Children and

Families Act (LkMco, 2015). Small amendments followed with the current version of the SEND Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code) published in January 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015). Lamb described this process as a 'long gestation' (2016: 8).

### **Principles of the SEND reforms**

The SEND reforms 2014 have been documented as the most significant SEND reforms for 30 years (DfE, 2014a). The 2015 Code states that the vision for children with special educational needs and disabilities 'is the same as for all children and young people – that they achieve well in their early years, at school and in college, and lead happy and fulfilled lives' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 11). The 2015 Code goes on to describe how the new guidance is 'vital in the major reform programme' (2015:11).

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is underpinned by three key principles. The principles state that LAs, when executing their statutory functions in relation to children and young people with SEND, must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents;
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions;
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood (DfE and DoH, 2015: 19).

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is emphatic regarding equality and inclusion. It states that 'Local Authorities should promote equality and inclusion for children with disabilities or SEN' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 80). The 2015 Code also states that all pupils should 'have access to a broad and balanced curriculum' and crucially expectations should be 'high... for every pupil' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 94). This infers that there is a direct relationship between the SEND reforms, the 2015 Code and the inclusion agenda. This is reflected in the relationship between the DfE and the National Development Team for Inclusion

(NDTI) who have been commissioned by the DfE to lead on a number of projects related to the SEND reforms, for example relating to SEN leadership, which infers again that inclusion remains part of the educational agenda; although it should be noted that the 2015 Code does not refer to a definition of inclusion.

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is clear that the reforms are seeking to achieve a fundamental shift in cultural position. Such cultural changes include the new ‘outcomes based’ approach; with ‘outcomes’ figuring clearly in other initiatives including Progress 8. The message is that the system needs to be aspirational and must focus on what we *want* to achieve for our children and young people, rather than what we *can* achieve. It is interesting to contrast this view with previous educational policy, to question whether the policy was considered aspirational or not.

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) states that the aim is for a more efficient system, which is less confrontational for those who navigate the system. Additional needs will be identified early, and parents will be clear about the support their child/ young person will receive. Outcomes can, and will, refer to progress but will also focus on health, well-being, making friends and developing a voice, amongst others. The role of the parent/ carer is central to the guidance, which throughout states the need for collaboration and involvement between schools and parents. Such a position has been paramount from the beginning of the reforms; terms such as cooperate and communicate have been replaced with ‘coproduce’ with the 2015 Code stating that this term means that parents should ‘feel they have participated fully in the process and have a sense of co-ownership’ (2015: 61). There are greater provisions for parents regarding the concept of choice within the reforms, which are set within a changing educational landscape which also reflects choice at varying levels. The 2015 Code also stipulates how cohesive working across partners, including education, health and social care will be developed (See Appendix 2.1 for detailed principles from the 2015 Code).

### **Changes within the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015)**

The principles detailed with the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) are reflected in the new requirements and processes, notably for schools and LAs. The 2015 Code presents a number of changes since the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001). The changes relate to approach and to processes for those who are required to follow the statutory guidance. Ekins (2012)

suggests that a number of the changes were intended to reduce the bureaucracy of the previous system, for example the guidance to complete Individual Education Plans (IEP) was removed. It is Norwich's (2017) view that a number of the changes introduced were predominantly procedural. However, Lehane when carrying out a comparison of the SEN Codes, suggests that the 2015 Code is, 'relatively complex and tends to be technicist' (2016: 57), which indicates that the changes may be more than procedural.

One of the key changes is that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) now applies to children and young people from 0-25 years; a specific focus of the 2015 Code is the need to ensure children are prepared effectively for adulthood, which relates closely to the new outcome focused approach. The 2015 Code now relates to disabled children and young people, as well as those who have a SEN. The guidance stipulates that children may have a disability, but not a SEN, and as such they are also covered by the guidance as well as the Equality Act (NASEN, 2014).

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) also presents an increased focus on the participation of the individual in decision making, and greater cooperation between education, health and social care (Lauchlan and Greig, 2015). Notably, the 2015 Code states that the involvement of children and young people in decision making should be 'at individual and strategic levels' (2015: 14), a principle which is reflected in part in the introduction of 'personal budgets', which enables the young person or parent/ carers to be involved in securing provision, via direct access to funding. In relation to this, one of the changes to the guidance is the increased focus on 'high aspirations and on improving outcomes for children and young people' (NASEN, 2015: 3). Norwich (2017) suggests that this reflects the increased focus on person centred planning within the 2015 Code, which he states is transferred from the adult learning disability field.

Arguably a key change is that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) has replaced the previous system of the School Action and School Action Plus SEN categories of need with a single category called SEN Support. This is described as 'new guidance... on taking a graduated approach to identifying and supporting pupils and students with SEN' (2015: 14). The approach schools take, as part of the graduated approach, must be clear and transparent (DfE and DoH, 2015; Hodgkinson, 2016). Tutt and Williams (2015) cite this particular change as one of the most significant for schools. One of the suggested benefits

is that this change allows for needs to be met sooner, as external agencies can be brought in at any time; although it should be noted that access is dependent on availability and funding (Tutt and Williams, 2015).

Whilst the guidance for identifying and supporting children and young people with SEN is new, the legal definition of SEN, as per the 1981 Education Act, remains the same. However, the categories of SEN have changed since the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001). The subcategory of Behaviour, Emotional and Social development (BESD), which was present in the 2001 Code, has been removed and replaced with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The purpose of such a change is to move the focus away from the behaviour and to consider the behaviour as a symptom or a 'possible unmet SEN' (2105: 4). Tutt and Williams agree and propose that SEMH is a 'more helpful label' (2015: 115) due to the focus on the underlying cause, rather than the specific behaviour as well as providing greater recognition of mental health issues.

In terms of statutory assessment processes, statements of SEN are replaced with a single Education, Health, Care (EHC) assessment and plan, which reflects the multi-agency model within the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015); although it should be noted that EHC plans 'cover health and care provision when these types of provision support education' (Norwich, 2017: 7). EHC plans should be 'forward looking documents' and should specify how 'best to achieve the outcomes sought across education, health and social care for the child or young person' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 143). EHC plans remain statutory documents for children with the most complex needs, with the 2015 Code detailing the specific timescales and content, which must be adhered to.

A key change for both schools and LAs relates to the increased focus on ensuring transparency of services and processes. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) places a requirement on LAs to publish their Local Offers, designed to be an accessible method so all stakeholders, especially parents, can access services in a clear and transparent manner (DfE and DoH, 2015). The 2015 Code states that the Local Offer should be: collaborative, accessible, comprehensive, up to date and transparent. In relation to this, a new requirement was placed on schools to publish a school SEN information report on their website which must clearly state the schools' approach to identifying and supporting

children with SEN, including how parents are consulted and approaches to teaching and learning (DfE and DoH, 2015).

Finally, a strong emphasis has been placed in the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) on the role of the teacher. While the Special Educational Need Co-ordinator (SENCo) remains responsible for the co-ordination of provision for children with SEN (DfE and DoH, 2015) the 2015 Code states that 'teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of the pupils in their class' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 99). At a school level, this suggests that inclusion directly relates to the teachers' application of different educational strategies and models which help overcome differences in the classroom, suggesting that the teacher has a responsibility regarding inclusive policy enactment. (Sebba and Sachdev, 1997; Alisauskas et al., 2011; Simplican et al., 2015). However, the 2015 Code also states that the role of the SENCo is also to support and guide colleagues. This infers that there is an important role to be played by the SENCo regarding supporting colleagues understanding of the concept of inclusion (DfE and DoH, 2015).

### **2.11 Implementation of the SEND reforms**

There has been various support and information available with regards to implementing the SEND reforms, specifically for schools and LAs. In addition to the initial guidance published, there has also been additional funding allocated to support the implementation of the SEND reforms. This includes an announcement in January 2016 when the then Children's Minister, Edward Timpson, pledged an additional £80.4 million for the continued implementation of the SEND reforms (DfE, 2016b). This funding is split into varying components, with £35.8 million going to LAs to support the transfer to EHC plans. Additional funding was for small family grants, the independent supporters programme to help families navigate the SEND system and £2.3 million for the parent and carers forums (DfE, 2016b). Funding, however, is not ring-fenced. In addition to this, funding for the final year of SEND reform implementation, 2017 – 2018, was announced in January 2017. The funding equates to £60 million with the beneficiaries, as cited above, remaining the same as the previous year (DfE, 2017a).

In March 2017 the DfE announced that there would be a further £215 million funding 'boost' which would help schools increase their capacity and help children with SEN access 'good schools'. Every council is to be award at least £500,000 over three years, and

councils can allocate the money as they see fit. The purpose of the funding is to 'build on the success of the SEND reforms' (DfE, 2017b). Examples such as building specialised classroom for children with SEMH difficulties were suggested, which is an interesting suggestion when considering the definition of inclusion as discussed earlier in this chapter. In line with the principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) which stated children, young people and parents must be involved in strategic decision making, the DfE has stated that councils must also consult parents and schools regarding how the funding is allocated.

However, Kennedy (2015) proposed that there may be a number of specific issues which were likely to arise during the period of implementation at a school level, and these included the sharpened focus on the role of the teacher and their responsibilities regarding children with SEN, the introduction of the SEN Support category and the removal of the term behaviour, which Kennedy believed may present challenges when not only initially identifying children, but also when broaching concerns with parents. In addition to this Kennedy suggested that the implementation of the SEND reforms would mean that for many, the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) would mean reviewing existing practice, identifying gaps in approach and seeking how to address these. As Lehane stated, the summer and early autumn of 2014 was a 'busy time for those concerned with SEN coordination' (2016: 51). Such issues indicate a need for support regarding implementation at a school. Guidance produced for schools by the DfE (DfE 2014b; DfE and DoH, 2015) and by organisations such as NASEN, IPSEA and the Council for Disabled Children were instrumental in providing advice and support to SENCos through training (online and face to face) and written guidance (Council for Disabled Children, 2014; NASEN, 2014; IPSEA, 2015; NASEN, 2015). LAs also provided support through training and information directly to schools, although it should be noted that not only is this within a context of reducing services, but also a school-led system (Smith, 2014).

## **2.12 Criticisms of the SEND reforms**

Whilst it could be argued that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), and its underlying principles, has been well received (Kennedy, 2015), the content within the 2015 Code is not without its critics. A number of issues have been raised regarding the new processes,

for example concerns regarding the introduction of EHC plans and support for those who are implementing the SEND reforms.

One of the criticisms muted is the retention of the term and definition of Special Educational Needs as set in out the 1981 Education Act. The use of the term has been retained despite the recommendation of the Ofsted report (2010) which suggested that the term SEN was used too widely and that it did not represent children accurately. The suggestion from the Ofsted report was that while the term SEN was problematic in its application, the use of additional terms could equally impact on outcomes for the child or young person. The report suggested that categorisation should be moved away from, and a more critical approach was required when using such terms.

A further criticism of retaining the term SEN is the impact on the individual. Glazzard (2013) argues that the term SEN is pathological regarding the individual and creates division, thus working against the notion of inclusion and, as a consequence, fails the child. Norwich (2010), in agreement, has further identified a range of issues with the term SEN, including negative labelling, issues with defining the category, the issue of creating a separatist field, inconsistencies with other frameworks, for example, the Common Assessment Framework and the issue of fitting alongside disability legislation. Issues also relate to the application of the term. As an alternative, Norwich suggests that the term additional educational needs may be appropriate; the term is currently used within the Scottish System. However, he does also suggest that perhaps it is the model that should be changing, signifying a move from an individual model to a social one. However, while Lamb (DCFS, 2009a) counters the argument by suggesting that there is usefulness to the term, as the notion of SEN leads to recognition of individual needs, he does acknowledge that there are ongoing challenges with its use.

Certainly Ekins is in agreement and suggests that the continued use of the term is 'complex and ambiguous' (2012: 5), although Ekins accepts that this is the current choice. It is certainly noteworthy that Warnock herself views the introduction of the term SEN as one of the major flaws of the original report, noting that the aim of the term was to integrate children within mainstream education but in reality set them further apart (Ekins, 2012). However, as Petersen (cited in Williams et al., 2009) argues, the term is enshrined within law, which in turn is cited in a raft of educational policy. To change the



terminology, Petersen argues, may create an even more disjointed system and draw away from the key aims of legislation and therefore further dent confidence, particularly in relation to parents, which may present the argument for the continued retention of the term in the new statutory guidance. It could equally be argued that the terminology is distracting from the more pressing issue of what is a school's core offer to support children with SEN and how does this impact on progress for our most vulnerable children? As Stobbs (2014) highlights, the Ofsted report (2010) which suggested children were over-identified, found good practice in schools with both high and low rates of SEN. Stobbs (2014) goes on to add that the key issue is when the label leads to low expectations as per Ofsted (2010).

In relation to the retention of the term SEN, it is noteworthy that one of the changes introduced is the new term of 'SEN Support Category' which replaces the earlier categories of School Action and School Action Plus (DfE and DoH, 2015). The introduction of this term moves away from defining the level of need a child is experiencing to a single category (DfE and DoH, 2015). However, George and colleagues (2011) report that this change has been greeted with some concern, stating that this move might lead to some children being unsupported in the future and may impinge on early identification.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the nature of the statutory guidance and whether it is specific enough for application. One perspective is that the content of the 2015 Code (DfE and DfE, 2015) tends to be lacking. Whilst there are a number of mandatory activities, the document lacks substance (Allan and Youdell, 2015), with Lehane describing the content as, 'a grey area in terms of statutory guidance' (2016: 61), adding that the verbose nature of the document suggests that it is not intended for the classroom practitioner or individual parent. However, it is Norwich's (2014) view that the lack of prescriptive guidance will particularly impact on the assessment and identification of SEN post reform. The argument that the Government is reluctant to regulate practice (Norwich, 2014) may lead to a greater disparity in practice with an interpretation of the term based on experience, knowledge, school priorities and budget amongst other external and internal influencing factors. Norwich (2014) suggests that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is deliberately unclear, while research carried out by Ellis and Tod illustrates that a fault of the 2015 Code is the 'interpretable nature of the guidance' (2014: 209) with Allan and Youdell suggesting that as a consequence the interpretation of

the content will fall to the 'various actors in the process' (2015: 70). Therefore this suggests that in addition to potential disparity of practice, as a result of different interpretations, the idea of inclusion may also remain an undefined concept with varied interpretations at various levels. This may suggest difficulties for the role of the SENCo who is intrinsically involved in inclusive policy in mainstream schools, both operationally and strategically.

In addition to a perception that the statutory guidance lacks specificity, an additional concern relates to the models of disability which are present within the statutory guidance and how this relates to inclusion. Whilst it could be argued that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) promotes a social model of inclusion, it could also be argued that within the guidance the medical model of inclusion prevails. Thus presenting a mixed picture and varying perspectives within the guidance itself.

The 2015 Code states that inclusive schooling means that the majority of children will be educated within a mainstream environment; '[the] UK Government is committed to the inclusive education of disabled children and young people and the progressive removal of barriers to learning and participation in mainstream education' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 25). The concept of removing barriers and promoting access to learning potentially signifies a move away from a medical model of disability where the difficulty is inherently within the child, to the idea that disability is socially created and comes as a result of the (inappropriate) environment; therefore adaptations must be made within the environment, further highlighting the practical aspects of the inclusive model (Glazzard et al., 2015). It could be argued that the model reflected in the 2015 Code is the social model of inclusion (Ainscow, 2007) in which it tasks LAs, schools and teachers with identifying potential areas of difficulty and removing barriers. The 2015 Code does also state that in most cases planning will enable pupils to study the national curriculum (DfE, 2014).

However, it is noteworthy, that prior to the formalisation of the 2015 Code, the Coalition Government published 'Support and Aspiration: a new approach to SEND' which stated that there would be a 'removing of the bias towards inclusion' (DfE, 2012: 4) perhaps symptomatic of the confusion previously reported in relation to the term inclusion. In addition to this additional resources are often accessed via statutory assessment which

demands the involvement of external agencies and typically diagnosis of some kind, reflective of the medical model of disability. Support for children with complex needs is based on a model of accessing external support often post diagnosis; with the Cabinet Office stating that the focus should be on improving diagnostic assessment to ensure the most vulnerable children access the correct level of support (Cabinet Office, 2010 cited in Runswick-Cole, 2011). It could also be argued that the retention of the 1981 legal definition of SEN in the Children and Families Act (2014) was a retrograde step, as the language retained is 'additional to' and 'different from' which suggests amendments on the fringes of the mainly accessible system (Norwich, 2014). In addition to this one could suggest that the continued use of terms and groupings such as 'SEN' prevent a move towards structural change, despite the apparent focus within school policy on the social model of disability.

It is Thomas and Loxley's (2007) view that one of the biggest tensions for inclusion relates to the pervading medical model of disability. Such a model focuses on diagnosis and cures, thus prompting teachers and parents to look to external agencies, such as doctors, for advice and support (Hodkinson, 2016). Such an approach infers that the remit of SEN education is that of specialists, rather than teachers. To a degree Martin and Cobigo (2011) concur, and state that the currently accepted discourse of inclusion works on a needs based (medical) model which, as discussed above, does not necessarily reflect the social values of inclusion. A move away from the medical model towards the social model of disability takes the emphasis away from the individual and centres it in the environment. This suggests that inclusion is everyone's responsibility; reflecting the accountability measures within the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Therefore, it could be argued that the current education system is entrenched in the two models of disability; thus promoting a conflict of inclusion policies.

Finally a potential criticism of the SEND reforms relates to the position of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) in relation to wider educational policy. Norwich suggests that the SEND system is 'interdependent' on the general educational system which encompasses 'the National Curriculum and assessment, school inspection, the governance of schools and equality legislation' (2014: 404). This suggests that there are a number of external influencing factors during SEN policy enactment, which in turn infers a potential tension with the enactment of inclusive policy. A number of educational policies are currently

being critiqued in the media, primarily highlighting tensions between a 'policy for inclusion and a policy for the standards raising agenda' (Ellis and Tod, 2014: 2015). The suggestion is that the inclusion agenda has been consistently undermined by the standards agenda, creating an impossible situation for schools; consequently creating multiple discourses within school relating to the practice of inclusion (Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007).

### **2.13 Initial impact of the SEND reforms**

Due to the relatively recent introduction of the SEND reforms, research is currently limited regarding impact (Kennedy, 2015). There is, however, an emerging picture and it is important to appreciate that it is a complex one. The purpose of this section is not to give a comprehensive review of the surveys carried out by DfE and other organisations, but to give an overview of emerging research. The focus of this study is to explore the experiences of the SENCo at a time of significant policy reform; as a policy implementer as well as their perceptions of impact. It is, therefore, noteworthy that the majority of children which a SENCo in a mainstream school will be concerned with will be on SEN Support, with a much smaller number who are part of the statutory process. However, as Robertson (2012) argued at the time of the Green Paper proposals, the recommendations were focused on the minority of children who have Statements of SEN. As a consequence, much of the emerging research relates to the relationship between the LAs and parent – carers and their experiences of the statutory processes, for example, their experience of the Education, Health, and Care process (NAS, 2015; NDCS, 2015).

One of the first reports to emerge reporting on the impact of the SEND reforms was 'Joining the Dots: Have recent reforms worked for those with SEND?' (LkMCo, 2015). The report was commissioned by the Driver Youth Trust and has a specific focus on literacy. The report found that the system remained fragmented, which as a consequence was impacting on the sharing of knowledge and information. This, in turn, meant many children were not getting the help they needed. The SEND reforms, the report stated, were difficult to navigate. In part the report links the new 'autonomous' school system as a risk factor, stating that this has led to disparity amongst schools (LkMCo, 2015:3). Such issues reflected the earlier issues raised by the Lamb Inquiry (2009a) (Lehane, 2016).

A further report by the National Deaf Children's Society reported that only 6% of parents reported improvements to the support their child/ren received since the introduction of the reforms (NDCS, 2015). This was echoed by a National Autistic Society (NAS) report, which suggested that only 23% of those who had been through the new statutory assessment process were satisfied with it (NAS, 2015). However, in contrast the Driver Youth Trust report (LkMco, 2015) found that parents were more satisfied with the new EHC plan process, although they did report that a lack of coordination continued to be an issue. Lamb (2016) suggests that part of the issue is that two systems were working at the same time – the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001) and the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). This suggests that this may not be a long term issue. It does, however, suggest a mixed picture regarding early impact with Lehané commenting that 'early indications are that the 2015 Code has not actually improved provision for children and young people' (2016: 52). Part of the issue, as suggested by Broach et al. (2016 cited in Lehané 2016) seems to be the rushed nature of the introduction of the reforms, despite the long lead up to the statutory guidance (Lamb, 2016).

The Department for Education (DfE) has also sought to gather information about the early implementation of the SEND reforms. The DfE has sought the views of parents and carers, through parent carer forums. A survey carried out in November 2015, one year post implementation, sought to gauge views, identify issues and find examples of good practice (DfE et al., 2016). The survey was represented by 104 parent carer forums and was the sixth survey to be carried out by the DfE post implementation. While the focus of this chapter is not to examine the view of the parents and carers, the survey primarily focused on the relationship between the LA and the parent/ carer and, as noted above, the statutory elements. 64% of forums felt that parents were involved with LA strategic planning. The findings also indicated that 40% of parents were 'largely or fully involved in decision making' regarding their child's SEN provision (DfE et al., 2016:1). It did not report on the child or parent's experience of assessment, identification and support in school and therefore raises further questions about the facilitation of this aspect, and in particular the role the SENCo has to play. Although as Lamb (2016) suggests, such views may not be representative of all parents as the views come from those involved with the parent-carer forums. A further challenge which Lamb refers to is the difficulty of seeking views from those who do not have experience of the previous system; comparison is not possible.

Considering the wider view, and the impact of the SEND reforms within schools, perhaps one indicator is that there has been a noticeable reduction regarding the numbers of children who were identified by their schools as having additional needs, recorded as having SEN. Historically it has generally been accepted that 20% of the school population will have an identified SEN at some point in their school career; a figure in line with the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). In 2010 18.3% of children were identified as having a SEN, and the number had since been steadily decreasing, albeit at a small rate. This was reflective of the Ofsted (2010) report which suggested that children were over-identified with SEN; particularly vulnerable groups for example children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is interesting to note, however, that there was a marked drop from 2014 to 2015 from 17.9% to 15.4% (DfE, 2015). A DfE response to the reduction in numbers suggested that this was the result of a clearer understanding of the legal definition of SEN and a clear distinction of the SEN Support category (Tirraoro, 2015a). A consequence of this may be that SENCos can target their work more accurately (Stobbs, 2014). When the Green Paper was published, Pearson et al. (2015) suggested that the fundamental issue of which pupils would be identified as SEN remained unexplained. However, others have suggested that the purpose of the SEND reforms and the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) was to 'narrow the scope of the SEN category rather than broaden it' (Cline et al., 2014 cited in Lauchlan and Greig, 2015: 73; Gray and Norwich, 2014).

An additional indicator regarding the impact of the SEND reforms relates to exclusions, both permanent and fixed term. Glazzard's (2013) view was that the Green Paper (DfE, 2012) did not go far enough and exclusion remained a very real possibility for children with SEN, with Florian (2010) highlighting wider, historical exclusion issues. Certainly, the most recent annual report from the Government reporting on exclusions identifies that pupils with SEN have the highest rate of permanent exclusion. Pupils with SEN, including those with a statement, are around nine times more likely to receive a fixed term or permanent exclusion (DfE, 2015) which, to a degree, raises questions about the effectiveness of our current provision.

The current view of the DfE is that the SEND reforms are already making a 'real and lasting difference' (Timpson and Ellison, 2016). A recent Ofsted consultation (2016) which preceded the launch of the Local Area joint inspections by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted suggested that respondents, primarily parents and carers, wanted

Ofsted inspections to include a review of children on SEN support (SNJ, 2016). Such concerns were echoed by parents and carers in December 2015, when they met with Edward Timpson, Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families (Tirraoro, 2015b). Concerns centred on schools failing to acknowledge the need to support children, or have the capacity to make adequate provision; this concern was particularly related to academy schools and admissions. Additional concerns related to accountability and responsibility for children who were on SEN Support, concerns which have later been echoed through Local Area Joint Inspections (CQC and Ofsted, 2016), despite the statement within the 2015 Code that all children, including those on SEN Support, were the class teachers' responsibility (DfE and DoH, 2015). Yet, recent research from The Key (Sellgren, 2016) suggests that of the 1100 school leaders surveyed, 82% reported that they have insufficient funding to support children with SEN, with nearly 90% reporting that the cuts to support from the LAs have detrimentally affected children. Given that this report follows two years post the introduction of the 2015 Code, it is interesting that 68% of school leaders were calling for a greater focus on children with SEN within mainstream schooling policy.

Research in this area, by the Government and independently, will grow. Nicky Morgan, the former Secretary of State for Education, announced a review of the SEND reforms. Former Member of Parliament (MP) Les Scott was appointed to collect evidence, to present a report to the Secretary of State for Education regarding the experiences of children and young people with SEND in the school and college system. Scott's (2016) report found that effective communication was essential among all parties; greater consistency between systems is needed; schools and colleges should make provision for basic health needs; there should be more transparency regarding SEND funding; local areas need to further support children and young people with SEND regarding training and work.

Sharon Hodgson, the then Shadow Education Minister, announced in May 2016 that Labour would be conducting an independent review of the SEND reforms. The prompt for the review was the issues relating to children in alternative provision and the high exclusion rate for children with SEN (Hodgson, 2016). The aim of the review was to consider the impact of the 2014 Children and Families Act in addition to the Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper (DfE, 2016a). The review was to consider the impact

of proposals for every school to become an academy, the process of EHC plans, the Local Offer, provision of SEND in Initial Teacher Training and accessing specialist services within the school sessions; in relation to the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). However, with the shadow cabinet reshuffle, Sharon Hodgson is no longer Shadow Education Minister, and plans for the review are not clear.

## **2.14 Summary**

This chapter has explored the definition and the potential tensions related to inclusive education within mainstream schools. Central to the argument are the tensions regarding the varied interpretation of this statutory right and the subsequent experience of the individual. In addition to this teachers' understanding, attitudes and experiences shape the implementation of inclusive policy; suggesting that whilst the role of the SENCo is a prominent one, it also poses a number of challenges. This chapter has also identified the rapid movement of inclusive policy in relation to SEN, particularly with the advent of the Labour Government in 1997. Such a movement has not slowed down with the introduction of the Coalition and subsequent Conservative Governments. Certainly, within the current Government, we have seen, what has been described as, the greatest SEND reform for a generation (DfE, 2014a). The SEND reforms are based on principles which aim to keep the child and family at the centre of the decision-making process as well as ensuring early identification and an outcome focused system (DfE and DoH, 2015). Research regarding the impact of the SEND reforms is beginning to emerge. However, this primarily relates to the statutory processes experienced by parents (NAS, 2015; LkMCo, 2015).

It could be argued that, at a school level, there has been a central actor navigating, mitigating and narrating the changes in policy since the formal advent of inclusive education; the SENCo. The SENCo has had a consistent role through all policy changes, with the role growing in both strategic and operational responsibility since its inception in 1994 (DfE, 1994) and remaining in place with the introduction of the most recent 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Throughout all the policy changes the SENCo has played a central role in the school, translating policy into practice; certainly Layton suggests that, when citing the Teacher Training Agency SENCo standards, there was an assumption by policy makers that the SENCo would be, 'the agent for achieving a whole-school approach to SEN, thus promoting the inclusion of all pupils' (2005: 54). However, the role itself has



from its inception until the current day experienced challenges related to the understanding and execution of the role (Szwed, 2007a; Pearson et al., 2015). Robertson (2012) argues that the SENCo will be central in bringing about the changes of the SEND reforms; as Pearson et al. remark, SENCos 'are familiar with the turbulence of policy change' (2015: 55). Therefore the following chapter will explore the role of the SENCo, from its introduction to current day expectations.

## **Chapter 3: The role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) was first formally introduced in the 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs' (DfE, 1994, hereafter referred to as the 1994 Code) following the 1993 Education Act. This was the first piece of statutory central government guidance to Local Authorities and schools, following the 1981 Education Act, Part III, which laid down the responsibilities of schools regarding children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). In particular, the guidance placed a requirement on schools to appoint a named person in school as the SENCo (Pearson, 2010).

The SENCo role has remained in existence since this time and was recently re-affirmed within the revised statutory SEN guidance to schools: 'Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years' (DfE and DoH, 2015, hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code). With the 2015 Code, the role of the SENCo remains a statutory requirement within maintained nursery schools, maintained mainstream schools and academies. Additional early years providers typically have access to an Early Years SENCo, while at Further Education (FE) level there should be a named person with the setting who has 'oversight of SEN provision... similar to the role of the SEN Co-ordinator' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 116).

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is emphatic regarding the central purpose of the SENCo position within schools, with the guidance stating:

The SENCo has an important role to play with the head teacher and governing body, in determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school. They will be most effective in that role if they are part of the school leadership team. (DfE and DoH, 2015: 106)

While the role has been a statutory requirement for 20 years, its scope has been considered unclear in both literature and policy (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005; Tissot, 2013). While this may be attributed in part to the complex and diverse nature of the role, execution in varying contexts has also contributed to this disparity (Cole, 2005; Layton, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Pearson, 2010). Hallett and Hallett note that the position is 'as varied as the schools and settings in which the post-

holders are employed, and the role is delivered' (2010:1). A further complexity is that the role has been 'perceived as low status and operational rather than as a senior, strategic management level' (Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013:34). This was reflected in the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report (2006), which acknowledged that the role of the SENCo did not have the status which was required to execute strategic influence.

Despite the complexity and variation of the role, as described by Pearson (2010) and Rosen-Webb (2011), the role has been described as 'pivotal' (DfES, 2004b: 116) and such importance continues to be reflected in statutory guidance (DfE and DoH, 2015). Hallett and Hallett echo this, suggesting that 'it is clear that best practice has the role of the SENCo at the heart of the education processes occurring within a setting' (2010: 1).

This, therefore, draws a direct link between SEN, inclusive policy and the role of the SENCo. Therefore this chapter will explore the creation of the SENCo role, beginning with the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) with a subsequent exploration into the definition of the role, which was later revised in the statutory guidance. Specific tensions will be explored, including but not limited to, the perceived status of the role, barriers to the execution of responsibilities and the impact that this can have on the individual performing it. The discussion will centre on the central purpose of the role and its relationship to the growing inclusive movement, with the consideration that development can be considered as a response to direct and indirect educational policy (Mackenzie, 2007). The role in its present and future tense will be considered. For this chapter, focus will be on the role of the SENCo in the primary and secondary phases.

### **3.2 The creation of the SENCo role**

The role of the SENCo was first introduced, defined and made statutory within legislation in 1994, with the introduction of the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994), the first official guidance for schools regarding SEN (Layton, 2005). However, this is not to suggest that the role did not exist before this time. Cowne (2005) suggests that the role had been in development since the introduction of the 1981 Education Act. The nature of this varied; a typical position may have been the Head of a SEN department (Garner, 1996). Norwich (2010), in agreement, argues that the development of this role was concurrent with the publication of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and the following Education Act (1981).

These 'landmark' publications saw an increased commitment to the education of pupils with SEN within the 'ordinary' school (Norwich 2010: 37). Norwich further argues that it was this commitment to inclusion which meant that schools were required to think about how to enable the development of SEN provision from a whole school perspective; therefore the SENCo role emerged.

As such, it could be argued that it was the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) which gave the role 'legitimacy' (Cowne, 2005: 61). Mackenzie (2007), in agreement with Cowne, suggests that while many schools had already appointed a person to be responsible for children with SEN prior to 1994, this was the school's choice. It was the 1994 Code which placed the statutory obligation on the schools to ensure that there was a person appointed.

In addition to stating the requirement for the role, the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) outlined the responsibilities which should be the remit of the SENCo. The 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) stipulated that the SENCo should be responsible for:

- The day to day operation of the school's SEN policy
- Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
- Co-ordination provision for children with SEN
- Maintaining the school's SEN register and overseeing the records on all pupils with SEN
- Liaising with parents of children with SEN contributing to the in-service training of staff
- Liaising with external agencies including the education psychology service and other support agencies, medical and social services and voluntary bodies (DfE, 1994: 20 -21).

Interestingly the 1994 Code notes that in a small school, 'one person may take on the role' (DfE, 1994: 21), and it suggests this may be the head or deputy head teacher. In a larger school, a team may be more appropriate. While there is no specific recommendation as to how the role should be executed, it is suggested that 'careful thought' is given by the head teacher and governing body as to how the role will work (DfE, 1994: 21).

As a consequence of the statutory obligation placed on schools to have a designated person, the status of the role sharply increased, and a 'pivotal manager' was established (Garner, 1996: 179). In part, Garner (1996) attributes this to the increased focus on the management and advisory aspects of the role, which situated the role of SENCo as part of

a career progression trajectory. This aspect of increased management responsibility was not something all SENCos were comfortable with (Garner, 1996), with Gross (2000) describing this as signifying a move from being a teacher to a consultant.

Immediately there was a tension for those who were taking on this role. In the first instance, it was often current SEN staff who were appointed to the role (Soan, 2010). Szwed suggests that 'renaming of the remedial teacher... [was] commonplace' (2007c: 439). This was problematic for a number of reasons. Derrington (1997) suggests that the introduction of the role brought with it a considerable range of duties and responsibilities and with such a broad range, there came the issue of bureaucracy and proceduralism. The workload for the appointee immediately increased, and as a consequence there was a lack of time to complete responsibilities (Garner, 1996), which was likely to prove problematic depending on the how the role was allocated, for example as a 'renaming' of role (Szwed, 2007c: 439). This was further exacerbated because this was a cost neutral initiative (Garner, 1996).

In addition to the demands placed on the SENCo within the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994), there were external educational policy influences which helped shape and define the role early on from its inception. Cowne (2005) argues that the 1998 National Teaching Standards particularly played a part early on, in particular, due to the demanding set of roles, responsibilities and competencies stated, which therefore further highlighted the need for additional training. Despite further guidance, such as the publication of the SENCo Guide (DfEE, 1997), there remained a high level of localised interpretation of the 1994 Code (Gross, 2000) and so defining the role became increasingly problematic.

### **3.3 Defining the role of the SENCo in policy**

In 2001, the 1994 Code was revised and replaced with the Special Education Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b hereafter referred to as the 2001 Code). The revised version followed the 1996 Education Act and subsequent Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001, and was created following consultation with stakeholders in 1999. Key differences between the 1994 and 2001 Codes were highlighted in the earlier chapter, however, the requirement to have a designated person as SENCo remained.

With regard to the SENCo role, a key change with the introduction of the 2001 Code was the term 'strategic' (DfES, 2001b: 15; Soan, 2010). Day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the school's SEN policy remained, yet there was a clear expectation that the SENCo would work strategically with the head teacher and senior management team (SMT) when developing and planning for SEN provision within the school (DfES, 2001b). Additionally, a subtle change in the language used to describe the responsibilities opened the role up to more interpretation. The 2001 Code stated that 'the key responsibilities of the SENCo **may** include':

- Overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
- Co-ordinating provision for children with SEN
- Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
- Managing learning support assistants
- Overseeing the records of all children with SEN
- Liaising with parents of children with SEN
- Contributing to the in-service training of staff
- Liaising with external agencies including the LEA's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies (DfES, 2001b: 50).

Gross (2000) takes the view that the lack of prescription in the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) allowed for greater flexibility when interpreting the guidance. Certainly, the subtle change of the wording from 'should' (DfE, 1994: 20) to 'may' (DfES, 2001b: 50) could have allowed for even greater flexibility when interpreting the role in the school context.

In addition to the change in semantics, the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) introduced a new managerial aspect to the role, with suggested responsibility for 'overseeing' and 'managing learning support assistants' (DfES, 2001b: 50). Aside from these changes, the description remained static. Yet, Mackenzie (2007) argues that the demands on the SENCo increased significantly; a possible product of not only the increasing inclusion agenda (Pearson and Ralph, 2007; Szwed 2007b) but also the increased flexibility of the role, which may have led to an increase of demands such as the management of learning support assistants.

As described in the previous chapter, 2014 was a crucial year in the realm of SEN, with the introduction of the 2014 (now 2015) Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). The current 2015 Code, as per previous versions, outlines the key responsibilities which may be part of the SENCo role. Cheminais (2005, cited in Szwed, 2007c) stated that following the introduction of the

2001 Code (DfES, 2001b), there was a need to reconceptualise the role, owing to its expansion. To a degree, there has been a review of the SENCo role with the 2015 Code, but certainly not a reconceptualization. Some the key points from the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) remain; however there were some key differences. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) states that the responsibilities may include the following (new/ amended responsibilities have been highlighted in bold):

- Overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
- 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
- **Being a 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 (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108- 109)**

It is interesting to note that there have been some subtle alterations to the language, alongside some key changes which are reflective of the introduction of the Children and Families Act, 2014, as well as the principles outlined in the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). These include the introduction of the graduated approach and a more detailed and collaborative approach to identifying and support children with SEN. It is notable that the SENCo is an advisor, rather than someone who takes a more instrumental role, echoing the key principle of the 2015 Code that every teacher is responsible for all children in their class, including those with SEND. However, some of the changes may be described as more subtle. For example, the SENCo's responsibilities may include liaising with the designated teacher for Looked after children. Whilst this is seemingly innocuous, it may be reflective of the increased focus on vulnerable groups (Children and Young Persons Act, 2008; Children and Families Act, 2014) as well as the increasing number of roles coming under the umbrella term 'SENCo' (Mackenzie, 2007).

It could also be argued that the strategic nature of the role has been emphasised, with a focus on the SENCo as a point of contact and one of liaison, suggesting co-ordination and leadership. The 2001 Code stated that many schools found it 'effective' if the SENCo was part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) (DfES, 2001b: 51). This is echoed in the 2015 Code: 'They [the SENCo] will be most effective in that role if they are part of the school leadership team' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108).

As well as noting the introductions, it is notable that some aspects of the 2001 Code have been omitted. This includes:

- Liaising with and advising fellow teachers (replaced with 'provides professional guidance to colleagues' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108)
- Managing learning support assistants
- Contributing to the in-service training of staff

It could also be argued that the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) suggests a broader view of provision, and potentially indicates a move away from the idea that teaching assistants automatically have a direct role to play when supporting children with SEN, a role which historically has had significant responsibility for providing support both in and out of the classroom (Blatchford et al., 2009). However, it is clear in the 2015 Code that a broader view has been taken with regard to support, with direct reference to the SENCo's responsibility for provision, budgets and resources, rather than the management of teaching assistants.

The introduction of the 2008 SENCo regulations, reflected in the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), also impacted on the strategic nature of the SENCo role. The 2008 SENCo regulations stated that, from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009, the SENCo must be a qualified teacher and they must achieve the 'National Award in Special Education Needs Co-ordination [NA SENCo] within three years of appointment' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). The NA SENCo is a postgraduate qualification that must be at least 60 credits at Level 7. The regulations also state that the Governing Body must monitor the actions of the SENCo in 'advising, participating in, monitoring the effectiveness of and supporting members of staff' (SENCo regulations, 2009: 3), again, perhaps signifying a move to a greater leadership and more strategic role, emphasised in the 2015 Code as providing 'professional guidance' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108).



While policy can go some way to determining the role of the SENCo, Szwed (2007b) holds the view that to try and define the role may be counterproductive because context is paramount, indicating therefore that each SENCo will hold a different role in each setting. Pearson and Ralph (2007) are in agreement and suggest that it may be necessary for SENCos themselves to define their role. Despite this, it could equally be argued that to problematise this issue may consequently help SENCos further when defining their role; therefore the following section will consider how the role of the SENCo has been defined within research.

### **3.4 Defining the role of the SENCo within literature**

Pearson (2010) suggests that there is a difference between the description of the SENCo role at a national level and school level arrangements, inferring that practice does not reflect policy. In part, this may be attributed to the varying interpretations of the role (Gross, 2000). As a consequence, the position can be described as complex (Szwed, 2007b; Szwed, 2007c; Qureshi, 2014). Szwed, in agreement with Pearson, suggests that this complexity is not necessarily reflected in government documents, an issue which has been recognised as problematic at an international level (Lindqvist, 2013). This is not to suggest, as per Cowne (2005), that national guidance is not useful. Pearson sees value in the common language that a national framework provides, as well as the shared agenda. However, while the role of the SENCo is directly linked to policy (Layton, 2005) and in particular the increasing prominence of inclusion (Szwed, 2007c; Pearson, 2008), it is also linked to context (Pearson, 2010), all of which will influence how the role is enacted.

Griffiths and Dubsky (2012) explicitly state that the SENCo has a key role in ensuring appropriate support and access to the curriculum for children with SEN, although s/he may not necessarily be involved in the practical implementation of this. Rosen-Webb, in agreement, describes the SENCo as ‘a teacher-led practitioner’... who can balance ‘on the job’ activity, strategic thinking and planning proactively, as well as ‘fire-fighting reactively’ (2011: 166). This suggests a multi-faceted pro-active and re-active role. It is of note that Layton’s research also states that SENCos used the term ‘fire-fighter’ when describing the role (2005: 55). Cowne (2005) suggests that, in reality, many SENCos see themselves as a consultant, echoing the view of Gross (2000). These descriptions reflect the suggestions within the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) and 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) that the SENCo is someone who advises, and does not necessarily execute. The 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b)

and the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) suggest a role broader than one of advisor or consultant. Certainly, the work of Rosen-Webb (2011) and Szwed (2007c) echo this. However, it is relevant to note that the role of SENCo is often one given in addition to the responsibility of class or subject teacher, or deputy head (Rosen-Webb, 2011).

The research of Kearns (2005) provides insight into the developing role of the SENCo. Kearns's work focused specifically on varying roles the SENCo may assume through the use of metaphor, and suggested the following:

- The SENCo as an arbiter
- The SENCo as a rescuer
- The SENCo as an auditor
- The SENCo as a collaborator
- The SENCo as an expert

Further exploration of these various roles suggested that there was much crossover for SENCos at various points depending on the task at hand (Kearns, 2005). However, many of these aspects focused on the necessary skills of leadership and management, through negotiating, rationalising, advising and leading, certainly suggestive of a diverse skill set, with central prominence on leadership. Kearns describes the various roles, which continue to be reflected in current policy (DfE and DoH, 2015). This included managing resources effectively, supporting pupils, parents and teachers through 'SENCo as Rescue' (2005: 139) as well as focusing on specific policy elements such as auditing. However, Kearns' descriptions did not explicitly take into account the parent as a stakeholder and therefore reference to the link between the SENCo and parent/ carer was limited. Cole (2005), however, also suggested that the SENCo was an advocate, a role, which it could be argued, is set to develop in response to the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) and the increased focus on the role of the parent/ carer.

Hallett and Hallett (2010) suggest that it is the breadth of role, as portrayed by Kearns (2005), which highlights the need for the responsibilities to be fulfilled by more than one person. Mackenzie (2007), in agreement with Hallett and Hallett, suggests that the SENCo was never intended to be the sole person responsible for SEND. Certainly, Szwed (2007b) would argue that the term SENCo should have a plurality. This is not echoed in policy; the

statutory requirement echoed in the NA SENCo Learning Outcomes (NCTL, 2014) is to have one person overseeing SEN in schools (DfES, 2001b; DfE and DoH, 2015).

Beyond Kearns's (2005) descriptions, literature is limited when defining the role. However, there is agreement that the school setting dictates, at least in part, the execution of the role (Pearson and Ralph, 2007; Szwed, 2007b). There is also a high level of local interpretation due to the lack of prescription (Gross, 2000). The counter argument is that schools should not necessarily be exercising such flexibility, and the responsibilities of the SENCo should be aligned more closely to the areas as defined by the government through central guidance (Tissot, 2013). A third argument may be that the notion of defining the role beyond the school context is academic because the central focus should be on how effective the SENCo is.

### **3.5 Factors which impact on the effectiveness of the SENCo**

It could be argued that an effective SENCo is a necessary part of the team to enable a school community to develop an inclusive agenda, and that true leadership is demonstrated when cultural, rather than structural, change has been effected (Szwed, 2007c). This seems particularly pertinent given that the SEND reforms and the related 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) are seeking to achieve cultural change (DfE, 2014a).

However, as Cole (2005) argues, the terms *effective* is problematic, echoing the argument of Simplican et al. (2015) that the term *inclusion* is problematic due to the multiplicity of individual interpretations. Mackenzie (2007) supports the idea that defining the efficacy of the SENCo is problematic but suggests this is because the work of the SENCo cannot always be easily measured, again highlighting further issues due to the current progress driven education agenda. Certainly, Cowne (2005) suggests that good management support and sufficient resources in terms of time, space and administrative support all impact on the efficacy of a SENCo. Crucially, Cowne states that the positive attitudes of teachers and confident SENCos are also necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the role; these are elements which one could argue are difficult to quantify and influence. This also raises questions regarding the efficacy and leadership and whether leadership needs to be transformative to be effective.

### **3.6 The status of the SENCo role**

Yet Tissot (2013) would suggest that leadership is central to affecting cultural change. This, therefore, implies that the status of the SENCo role is imperative to ensure its effectiveness. However, Pearson (2008) suggests that the role of the SENCo is typically not in a senior position and, as a consequence, the role itself can be ineffective at influencing whole school policy. It could equally be argued that the lack of status stems from its definition, which has partly focused on the specialist, rather than managerial, nature of the role (Imants et al., 2001 cited in Szwed, 2007c). This echoes the view of Hodkinson (2016) that the area of SEN is often viewed as specialist, and as a consequence, the remit of supporting children with SEN is not within the responsibilities or capabilities of the class teacher.

Szwed's (2007c) suggestion that the role may be ineffective at influencing policy challenges the 2001 and 2015 Codes (DfES, 2001b: DfE and DoH, 2015), both of which clearly state that the role should be strategic in nature, suggesting a higher status role. While Mackenzie (2007) suggests that a specialist role can bring status, Rosen-Webb (2011), in agreement with Szwed, suggests that a lack of status for the SENCo has created barriers and has therefore impacted on the effectiveness of the position.

It could be argued that the perceived status of the SENCo role has been an issue since its inception (Lewis et al., 1995, cited in Derrington, 1997) and, in part, this has been linked to training and qualifications. In 1998 the National Teaching Standards stipulated that while there was a need for teachers to have specific experience and training (Cowne, 2005), this was not a requirement. Training and qualifications have been offered, although not universally. For example, the SENCo standards suggested that the person undertaking the role should be educated to be degree level. However, the need for qualified teacher status (QTS) was not stipulated, resulting in some SENCos not being qualified teachers (Pearson, 2008). During this time, Birmingham University offered a postgraduate qualification based on the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) standards (Layton, 2005), and in 2006 the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) developed national standards which reflected the TTA SENCo standards (Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012). However, these were not mandatory.

Regarding mandatory qualifications, the most significant shift in legislation was the adoption of the SENCo regulations which came into force in 2009. The 2008 SENCo regulations stated that the person undertaking the role must be a qualified teacher, working at the school, and must have completed the induction period for new teachers. The later amended 2009 SENCo regulations further stated that SENCos new to the post from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009 had to achieve the NA SENCo (Robertson, 2012). This illustrates a dramatic shift regarding the level of qualifications required for the role, where historically it may have been undertaken by a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) under the supervision of the SLT (Cowne, 2005; Pearson, 2008). While the requirement to be a qualified teacher was significant, it was the introduction of the NA SENCo through the SENCo regulations (2009) that raised the profile and significance of the role (Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012). It is the dual focus at a national and local policy level that had crucially had an impact (Robertson, 2012).

Given the changes brought in with the 2008 and later amended 2009 SENCo regulations, it is notable that there remain issues relating to status, despite wider recognition of the role (Qureshi, 2014). Interestingly, Mackenzie (2007) highlights that parents viewed the SENCo position as more high status, as parents would typically go to the SENCo for advice, relating to resources, contacts or general knowledge regarding SEN. Such interpretations further indicate the tensions between the specialist and strategic role (Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007b; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Qureshi, 2014). In contrast to this view, research by Layton (2005) suggests that the SENCos did not consider that their role was viewed as a leadership role, and consequently, they wanted higher status. Interestingly, it was Layton who suggested that SENCo training should be mandatory.

However, Pearson (2010) argues that the SENCo can only be truly effective if SEN becomes a whole school issue, stating that there needs to be a shared philosophical position; reflective of the notion of inclusive education as stipulated by Humphrey and Lewis (2008). This develops the argument beyond that of status. Pearson goes on to argue that the SENCo needs to be embedded within the school leadership structure to facilitate this, echoing previous work (Cowne, 2005; Szwed, 2007c). This, therefore, is the focus of the next section.

### **3.7 The role of the SENCo and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**

Oldham and Radford (2011) argue that formal managerial status, through SLT membership, would give the SENCo more influence within the school and, as a consequence, raise the profile of children with SEN. They further argue that leadership is highly relevant to the role.

The 2001 and 2015 Codes (DfES, 2001b; DfE and DoH, 2015) both stipulate that it is advantageous for the SENCo to be part of the SLT. The 2001 Code states, 'Many schools find it effective for the SENCo to be a member of the senior leadership team' (DfES, 2001b: 51). This was later echoed in the government document, *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004b). The 2015 Code subtly emphasises this point further by stating, 'They [the SENCo] will be most effective in that role if they are part of the school leadership team' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). However, this is not a mandatory requirement and was not adopted despite the suggestion of the 2006 Select Committee. The 2009 SENCo regulations state that it is the responsibility of the governing body to determine the leadership and management role of the SENCo.

Shortly after the role was formally introduced, research by Derrington (1997) found that nearly half of the SENCos questioned were also appointed deputy head teachers. This is echoed by the research undertaken by Pearson (2008) who suggested at the time that fewer than 50% of SENCos were on the leadership team and that if they were, this was often due to additional roles within the school, such as that of deputy head teacher. The inference is that being a SENCo was not enough to warrant automatic membership of the leadership team.

Research typically suggests that for a SENCo to adopt a strong strategic role within the school and to be an effective SENCo, it is crucial to be a member of the leadership team (Szwed, 2007c; Pearson, 2010; Oldham and Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013). Szwed's (2007c) research found that if the SENCo is a member of the leadership team, then there is a greater chance of the SENCo fulfilling their duties, with the key influencing factor being the credibility of the role. Mackenzie (2007) agrees, stating that leadership and management are implicit within the position. Tissot (2013) concurs and suggests that if the SENCo is not part of the SLT, then this can stifle the vision of the role as well as the implementation of the role in practice, a view supported by Qureshi (2014). Layton (2005)

takes this idea further, suggesting that not only did SENCoS themselves think that membership to the SLT was imperative, but also that non-membership was the greatest barrier to achieving the moral purpose of the role.

As stated previously, policy, in agreement with the literature, states that the SENCo being a member of SLT is the most effective way to execute the role (DfES, 2001b; DfES, 2004b; Mackenzie, 2007; Tissot, 2013; DfE and DoH, 2015). In part, this relates back to the previously discussed issue of whether the role is considered a universal or a specialist one. Oldham and Radford (2011) argue that while it is preferable for the SENCo to be part of the SLT, the question is redundant, as both require leadership, perhaps suggesting that there is a difference between being a formal leader and demonstrating leadership.

This is not to suggest that membership on the leadership team is automatically viewed in a positive light. Pearson (2008) suggests that SENCoS can become marginalised when part of the SLT. Equally, to have an SLT without a SENCo can mean that inclusion and SEN are then the responsibility of all on the SLT, rather than the remit of one person. There are also practical issues. Some SENCoS in Pearson's research stated that they were 'content not to have the additional responsibilities associated with being a member of the management team' (2008: 104). With tensions regarding the seniority of the role, a connected issue relates to how the role is viewed and what, as a consequence, the expectations of the role are (Cole, 2005).

### **3.8 The SENCo: an operational or strategic role?**

When the role was first established, it signified for many teachers an immediate move from SEN teacher to SEN Manager (Garner, 1996). This signified a crucial shift for SENCoS as it was often the case that the specialist SEN teacher became the SENCo, a move many regarded as a waste of specialism and knowledge (Derrington, 1997). Certainly, as the role developed, it appeared that there was a difficulty of balancing contact with pupils and the management of the responsibilities (Bowers et al., 1998).

Yet, the early incarnation of the role was expected to incorporate a managerial aspect, as well as time supporting and teaching children with SEN. Many SENCoS, and it could be argued colleagues, saw the element of providing specialist support as important (Cowne, 2005). Following the introduction of the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b), Cole (2005) queried

whether there was room within the role to develop the strategic nature required. However, it could be argued that accountability in respect of inclusion, progress and school agendas such as value for money has made it imperative for the SENCo to develop the strategic side of their role to ensure that they have influence (Tissot, 2013); further highlighting the link between the SENCo role and inclusive policy.

While there may have been an early expectation of focusing on operational aspects, research has shown that an over-focus in this area means that influence at a decision-making level is minimal (Shuttleworth, 2000 cited in Szwed, 2007c). This is supported by Griffiths and Dubsky (2012), who suggested that SENCos often experienced frustration at the lack of opportunity to engage with strategic opportunities. This lack of opportunity was often linked to the perception of the SENCo role by their colleagues, which Griffiths and Dubsky refer to as 'ground level managers – gardeners' (2012:165). This is suggestive that a lack of influence may lead to frustrations for those undertaking the role. This could be exacerbated if induction for a SENCo new to post was carried out by their predecessor, as the focus typically tended to be on the operational level (Pearson, 2010). As a consequence, Layton (2005) describes the frustrations experienced by many SENCos which mean that they are faced with 'fire-fighting' rather than having adequate opportunity to develop the strategic elements of the role.

Rosen-Webb (2011) argues that the SENCo role must incorporate both elements, operational and strategic. Morewood (2012) agrees with this view, stating that both elements are necessary, with Griffiths and Dubsky (2012) referring to the dual roles of gardening and landscaping. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) and the revised NA SENCo Learning Outcomes (NCTL, 2014) also echo this point.

However, whilst the term strategic is frequently used, the meaning it not always clear. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) refer to provision mapping and data as strategic tools to develop provision, therefore contribute to the improvement of the school offer through the identification of needs and training. Griffiths and Dubsky (2012) suggest that a strategic role is one which influences whole school practices. Tissot (2013) suggests that best practice does not separate operational and strategic elements; the conflicting and competing elements need to co-exist within the one role. Szwed suggests there are both managerial and leadership aspects of the role, stating the latter refers to 'building



collaborative cultures and partnerships to drive improvement and development in the area' (2007b: 448). However, whilst SLT membership and status can impact on the strategic development of the role, time to execute the functions of the role can also be an inhibiting factor.

### **3.9 Time: a barrier to the execution of the SENCo role**

When the role was introduced, it quickly became apparent that lack of time to execute the responsibilities was a factor, with Garner describing this as a 'crucial concern' (1996: 180). This can be attributed to the increase in bureaucracy for the person appointed, due to the range of duties and responsibilities (Derrington, 1997). However, the introduction of the role was also deemed to be cost neutral (Garner, 1996). At the time of introduction, Derrington suggested that 'there was general agreement at the time that the outlook for SENCos looked somewhat bleak (1997: 111).

It was proposed that the introduction of the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) would reduce the level of paperwork SENCos were experiencing (Bowers et al., 1998). However, this aim was not realised, and the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001) continued to place an unnecessary burden on SENCos (Lingard, 2001). Lingard stated that in particular, too much time was spent focused on the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for children with SEN. While these were not a requirement of the 1994 or 2001 Code, Lingard argues that there was an understanding that Ofsted required these, hence their adoption by SENCos and schools. Certainly, Cowne's (2005) research found that time to execute the role was a key concern for many SENCos, with Szwed (2007a) stating that too many SENCos were overwhelmed by the role, in part due to the diverse nature but also the related bureaucracy. This led, in part, to a lack of time to execute the role (Rosen-Webb, 2011; Qureshi, 2014). School leaders were not investing adequately, in terms of time or money, in the role of the SENCo to address such issues (Layton, 2005). This was particularly true for primary SENCos (Szwed, 2007c) which in part again suggests that the role is greater than one person and should encompass a team (Pearson and Ralph, 2001; Szwed, 2007b).

The 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) and the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) do not stipulate how much time is necessary for the SENCo to fulfil their duties. As Cowne (2005) states, context is imperative, and therefore it could be problematic to create a formula to work this out, although Cowne concedes that SENCos often have inadequate non-contact time

to fulfil their responsibilities. However, overlapping roles and shifting priorities can also impact on the time a SENCo can have to dedicate to the role (Derrington, 1997; Bowers et al., 1998; Cole, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007a). It could be argued that this specific barrier has, in part, impacted on the strategic nature of the role.

### **3.10 The impact of the SENCo role on the professional**

Shortly after the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994) was introduced, Bowers et al. (1998) noted that the role was likely to have a personal impact on the professional undertaking it, with Mackenzie later describing the post as ‘enormously demanding’ (2007: 212). Derrington (1997) suggested that a large number of SENCos undertook a significant amount of out of hours work to fulfil their duties. In addition to the complex nature of the role which can cause stress (Rosen-Webb, 2011); the role has been described as unmanageable (Mackenzie, 2007). While head teachers can be sources of support (Mackenzie, 2007), the nature of the role can leave SENCos vulnerable to becoming over-burdened (Szwed, 2007b). This perhaps explains in part why traditionally the role of the SENCo has had a high turnover (Pearson, 2008).

### **3.11 The SENCo role and inclusive education**

It has been suggested that there is a potential personal impact experienced by the SENCo undertaking the role (Bowers et al., 1998; Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007b; Pearson, 2008; Rosen-Webb, 2011). Equally, there is also a potential impact on the nature, or perception, of inclusion within the school. It has been argued that to have one person solely responsible for SEN in a school is not inclusive (Layton, 2005; Oldham and Radford, 2011), nor is it feasible (Pearson and Ralph, 2007), with Pearson suggesting that some viewed the role of the SENCo as ‘retrogressive’ (2010: 30). However, the idea of having one person responsible for SEN provision is further advocated through educational policy; for example, the National Standards for Subject leaders made no specific reference to children with SEND (Szwed, 2007b). However, since the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) there has been a move towards collective responsibility, with the 2015 Code stating that all class/ subject teachers have responsibility for all children in their class, including those with SEN. Yet, the role of the SENCo continues to be referred to in a singular sense (DfE and DoH, 2015).

This could suggest a move back to the pre-1994 Code and the role of the specialist teacher (DfE, 1994). Oldham and Radford (2011) suggest that this move would then force the issue of SEN to become one that is for the whole school to consider, going as far to suggest that the head teacher should take the lead as this would then set the tone for SEN throughout the whole school. Morewood (2012) agrees and suggests that the role of the SENCo, at least in its current form, could be potentially harmful to the inclusion agenda. This is echoed by Glazzard (2013), who suggests that the focus on the inclusion agenda has resulted in greater exclusions.

However, it is equally important to think about the role of the SENCo in relation to the development of the inclusion agenda. The 2015 Code, echoing the 2001 Code, states that the 'UK Government is committed to inclusive education of disabled children and young people and the progressive removal of barriers to learning and participation in mainstream education' (2015: 25). The Code goes on to state that children with SEN will be educated within mainstream schools, 'except in specific circumstances' (2015: 25). The 2015 Code later states that the SENCo is responsible for co-ordination SEN provision and has an 'important role to play... in determining the strategic develop of SEN policy and provision in the school' (2015: 108). Whilst this does not stipulate that the SENCo is solely responsible for the development of inclusive policy in schools, the guidance clearly stipulates that the SENCo is a central figure in such development. Cole (2005) suggests that the SENCo is directly involved with delivering inclusion. Kearns echoes this view and through his research suggested that SENCos were questioning 'all forms of exclusive practice' (2005: 143). This suggests that, in relation to the earlier discussion which explored the tensions between the operational and strategic aspects of the role, there may be a further tension with regards to the role the SENCo plays with the furthering of inclusive policy in schools (Oldham and Radford, 2011). Kearns also suggests that the 'learning needs of SENCos can be expected to change' in response to the growth of inclusion in schools (2005: 133). However, this does not consider the potential view of the SENCo and their 'experiential and theoretical backgrounds [and] diverse personally-held views of inclusion (Soan, 2005: 39). Views which may be influenced by feelings of how inclusion will impact on a range of areas, including their children, them personally and their role.

### **3.12 The future of the role of the SENCo**

Beyond the debates regarding the execution of the SENCo role are the arguments surrounding the nature of the role and the impact this has on our view of inclusion. Since the introduction of the 1994 Code (DfE, 1994), a key message has been that all teachers are responsible regarding the education of children with SEN; it is not solely the responsibility of the SENCo, although it should be noted that this was emphatically restated with the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Pearson and Ralph (2007) suggest that for this to happen, it is essential to consider the relationship between the SENCo and their colleagues to ensure that there is an understanding of the role.

Reflecting on the changing nature of the role in relation to the SEND reforms, Pearson et al. (2015) suggest that a key focus in the future will be parental involvement, financial stringency, and issues related to the identification of SEND and managing regional school variations. This, therefore, raises a question: does this suggest that there needs to be a recasting of the role within the school to meet our current educational agenda?

### **3.13 Summary**

This chapter has identified that there are specific issues related to how the role of the SENCo is understood and executed, both in policy and practice. Legislation has sought to not only define but also to strengthen the position of the SENCo, specifically identifying that the role should be both operational and strategic regarding co-ordinating provision for children with SEN (DfE, 1994; DfES, 2001b; DfE, 2015). However, literature has identified that there are a number of issues which impact on the execution of the role. This includes clarity regarding the role, status, and SLT membership in addition to time to execute responsibilities (Szwed, 2007c; Pearson, 2010; Oldham and Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013).

Despite the identified challenges and barriers, research has identified that the SENCo is an agent of change, specifically regarding inclusive principles. (Cowne, 2005; Layton, 2005; Pearson, 2010; Robertson, 2012; Qureshi, 2014). The role is one of enactment, from which change can follow (Rosen-Webb, 2011; Morewood, 2012); suggesting a dynamic, active role.

The work of Kearns (2005) has suggested a number of varying roles which a SENCo can assume, individually or concurrently, during specific SENCo activities. Yet, there remain questions regarding how the role is executed during a period of significant policy reform. Kearns alludes to this, 'it is not clear to what extent policy for SEN, schools relationships, the actions of colleagues or the characteristics of the participants themselves explain the diversity [of the role] observed' (2005: 145). Therefore it might be prudent to look to the work of Ball and colleagues (2012) who present a typology of policy actor positions which they suggest individuals can be seen to assume during periods of policy interpretation, translation and implementation. The adoption of the typology presents an opportunity to build upon the work of Kearns, to enable the consideration of the varying policy actor roles the SENCo could be seen to assume during a period of policy implementation and therefore help further understand the complexities of the role.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical framework**

### **4.1 Introduction**

There are several factors to consider when reflecting on the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), particularly at a time of policy implementation. This study specifically examines the role, and the experience, of the SENCo with regards to the implementation of specific Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) policy. Therefore in addition to exploring the position of the SENCo in terms of its history, purpose, and role it is also necessary to explore their role as a policy implementer and specifically the way in which the post-holder executes policy.

‘Theory is indispensable to the understanding of policy work and policy effects’ (Ball et al., 2012: 138). In line with this view, the purpose of this chapter is to state, describe and justify the theoretical approach adopted to help explain and answer the research aims and questions, to help further understand the SENCo role. While the sociology of policy and related theories of implementation, historical and otherwise, lie beyond the scope of this chapter, this chapter does provide a brief overview of policy implementation theory. This chapter explores the policy implementation as an enactment and looks to the work of Ball and colleagues (2011; 2012) and the typology they developed related to the role of policy actors enacting policy. The purpose of this chapter is to use the typology as suggested by Ball et al. to situate this study within a framework to help explore, explain and address the research aims and questions in relation to the role of the SENCo.

### **4.2 Policy implementation theory**

The idea of policy implementation as an active process is central to this study. Ball and colleagues suggest that the purpose of policy is to ‘solve a problem’ (2012: 2). This suggests that one reason for the creation of policy may be in response to an identified problem. This also infers that a solution is required and sought, at the very least by the policy developers, typically from an ideological standpoint. The caveat here is that there is an assumption that policy implementers agree with the existence, and definition, of the identified problem, as well as agreeing with the policy solution (Ball et al., 2012). Notwithstanding this view, my ontological and epistemological assumptions suggest that the key participants who ‘receive’ policy will then do something with it. Whilst the opposite may also be true, and policy receivers may choose to ignore specific directives, I

have approached this research project with the view that the SENCos will actively respond to the introduction of the SEND reforms, albeit in potentially different ways because there are statutory requirements and SENCos will be required, by law, to act.

While acknowledging that the process of adopting policy may vary, there was an initial expectation on my part, perhaps due to my experience as a SENCo, that the participants would acknowledge and to varying degrees adopt the principles and related actions as set out by the SEND reforms; reflecting the view of Cole (2005) and Kearns (2005). This approach is often described as a 'top-down' or 'managerial' approach (Trowler, 2003: 124) and the approach suggests that policy can be directly implemented as envisaged by the policy makers, assuming that there are adequate resources to support implementation; an issue already highlighted as problematic for SENCos (Rosen-Webb, 2011; Qureshi, 2014). This suggests that the enactment of policy is often viewed as hierarchical in nature; Datnow and Park describe it as follows: 'the casual arrow of change flows in one direction from action, through designers to passive pragmatic implementers' (2009: 348). This position reflects Clayton who previously suggested that policymakers 'control the processes that affect implementation' (1994: 1). Furthermore, this suggests that the processes of policy design and implementation are separate and as such this fails to account for the impact of external factors, including the response of the policy implementer (Datnow and Park, 2009).

However, as Ward et al. (2016) report, our understanding of policy workings has moved beyond the idea that 'policy is a process that brings certain principles or ideas into practice' (2016: 44). Datnow and Park (2009) agree and argue that a criticism of the top-down approach is its lack of sensitivity to the culture of schools or the daily lives of educators; reflecting the varying contexts that SENCos work in (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Factors such as 'power relations, conflicting interests, and value systems' are not given the necessary recognition (Barrett and Fudge 1981, cited in Trowler, 2003: 126). Essentially this policy approach fails to take into account how policies are interpreted on a local level. Ball et al., in agreement, suggest that taking this approach means that the 'other moments in processes of policy and policy enactments that go on in and around schools are marginalised or go unrecognised' (2012: 2), possibly implying that policy developers miss this. As a consequence, despite fidelity shown to the procedures and processes as set out within a policy, this does not ensure that intended outcomes will be

achieved. Ward et al. (2016) agree and suggest that while policy is designed to attempt to solve problems and tries to persuade policy participants to align themselves with such policy, the policy is also rarely enacted in a fully formed state as originally conceived. Trowler (2003) takes a stronger stance and suggests that the phenomenological approach highlights the importance of all actors. Furthermore, the lack of focus on the wider group of policy implementers often results in distorted and fragmented policy.

### **4.3 Policy implementation as an enactment**

The notion of enactment has increasingly become synonymous with policy implementation (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). This policy perspective suggests that the responses from the policy implementers are equally important to those from the policy makers. This moves away from the idea of a strictly linear model of implementation whereby the enactment faithfully reproduces the conceptions of the original policy makers. The hierarchy may provide the catalyst, or be a driver, for change, but essentially it is the interaction between various actors at the different stages of policy realisation, including the policy and the policy implementers, which determine how the policy is executed in practice (Saunders, 1986; cited in Trowler, 2003). Ball and colleagues suggest that policy enactment, 'involves processes of interpretation and re-contextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practice' (2012: 3). Through these processes, Ball and colleagues further argue that policy enactment does not take place in isolation. It takes place in a context and the 'material, situational and relational need to be incorporated into policy analysis' (Ball et al., 2012: 21). This suggests that the external factors, beyond those of the role of the policy actor/ subject, are intrinsic to the exploration of policy enactment (Heimans, 2012). Ball et al. (2012) through their empirical research, move towards developing a model of policy enactment (See Figure 4.1), discuss the elements which all impact on policy implementation. This includes, as they describe, the 'mundane' (2012:138). This relates to routines practices within schools, including meetings and events which bring policy 'immediate and intimate interactions of daily life at school' (2012:138). Additionally, Ball et al. cite the importance of artefacts, which including resources and materials, as a different representation of policy. Finally, there is the role of the teachers, who Ball et al. describe as being the 'meaning- makers' (2012:138) who enact policy.





drawn upon to highlight the breadth and impact of the aspect of enactment. It should also be noted that Ball and colleagues have not presented this theoretical model as a finished, complete article. They describe the model as a move towards ‘representing some of the material, interpretive and discourse dimensions of policy enactment and the complexity of their inter-relations’ (Ball et al., 2012: 143).

#### **4.4 The role of the policy actors when enacting policy in schools**

Coburn (2005, cited in Braun et al. 2011) suggests that teachers’ values, knowledge, and practice influence the way in which they enact policy. Certainly, regarding inclusive policy, Rosenthal (cited in Gibson, 2009) suggests that inclusion is shaped by the responses of all stakeholders, including the SENCo, and their responses to policy, their values and their attitudes. It is Braun and colleagues (2011) view that the role teachers take, as policy actors, is multi-faceted, not least because the teacher is also a policy subject.

The work of Ball and colleagues (2012) suggests that individuals take various policy positions during a period of interpreting and translating policy. Through their work on policy enactment, Ball and colleagues suggested that, whilst there are potential limitations regarding the production of a typology, there may be a specific aspects of policy work which are attributable to ‘eight types of policy actor or policy positions which are involved in the making meaning of and constructing response to policy through the processes of interpretation and translation’ (2012: 49). This led to the suggested policy actor typology outlined in table 4.1.

Policy actor	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection, and enforcement of meanings mainly done by head teachers and the SLT
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity, and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership, and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/ supporting, facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency.

**Table 4.1: Policy actor typology Ball et al. (2012:49)**

Ball and colleagues suggest that that the actor types assumed during policy enactment, as described in table 4.1, are ‘not necessarily attached to specific individuals, nor are they fixed, unified and mutually exclusive “types” of teacher in every case’ (2012: 49). In light of this specific study, this suggests that the role of the SENCo as a policy actor at a time of policy implementation may be changeable, static or hold various roles concurrently. Such positions may also be dependent on the nature and activity of the individual at the time, as well as with whom the SENCo may be working at the time. Through the typology, Ball et al. (2012) have developed a more detailed description of each role and given further explanation to the nature of the activities which may occur as part of the role. The adoption of a role may be in response to both internal and external factors, as well as personal and professional influences, in agreement with Glazzard et al. (2015) and their views regarding the individual nature of interpreting inclusion. Therefore the typology is an attempt to understand and categorise the complexity of enactment. As such, whilst this study focuses on the policy actor typology, the introductory model of policy enactment (Figure 4.1. See page 80) illustrates the additional influencing factors.

The role of the narrator is crucial regarding policy interpretation (Ball et al., 2011). Ball and colleagues describe this role as ‘explaining policy, deciding and then announcing what must be done, what can be done and what cannot’ (2011: 626). Through taking such a position related to making meaning, a vision for the emerging policy can be taken and

shared, with a view to leading change. Taking such a position does not necessarily ensure that other policy actors will adopt such a position, or indeed will be in line with other policy foci, which can potentially cause unintended outcomes and conflicts in policy implementation. Yet, the role of a narrator does seek to deliver some sense of policy coherence, or at least policy priority, due to the part they play in illustrating how the varying policies exist together in a coherent, meaningful narrative.

Ball and colleagues describe the role of the entrepreneur as one of 'joining up disparate policies' (2011: 626). Ball et al. further describe this role as one of an advocate, regarding advocating for particular policies and suggest that these policy actors are 'exceptional but significant' (2012: 53). The description of this position is particularly interesting, given the position and earlier description of the SENCo role. Entrepreneurs are 'charismatic people and "persuasive personalities" and forceful agents of change, who are personally invested in and identified with policy ideas and their enactment' (2011: 628). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on an internal position, i.e. the role of the SENCo. This position can also be held externally, for example, the role of the Local Authority (LA) (Ball et al., 2011). This has relevance for this study due to the role of the LA as set out within the SEND reforms, although it is not of central focus. Central to this idea is drawing together a group of people who are like minded to effect policy change, though not only through enthusiasm but also knowledge.

As mentioned above, the role of policy actors outside of the immediate role of SENCo cannot be discounted. Ball et al. (2012) refer to these as outsiders. Certainly, in the case of this study, a clear focus has been on the role of the LA with regards to the support given for policy implementation. However, this could equally refer to an internal position such as senior management. This illustrates the interactive process of policy implementation and the influence that external factors can have (see figure 4.1). Perhaps of current interest here is the movement towards the academy agenda and how the role of the 'outsider' may broaden to encapsulate more private enterprise, and the role of the LA may diminish.

Ball et al. (2012) describe the role of a transactor as someone who oversees what policy is done, and reports and accounts for this; this is in response to what Ball et al. describe as the low levels of trust in relation to policy implementation work. It could be argued that

the purpose of the transacting role is to make policy visible. To other policy actors, this position can appear to be one that has a negative impact on their work, primarily due to the accounting measures in place and the additional workload this can bring (Ball et al., 2012). Yet, transactors can also have a more positive influence. They can be 'supportive and facilitatory' (Ball et al., 2012: 57). Often such transactors are away from the frontline of teaching and may take a support staff role. Within this, they bring a breadth of experience and skills and often assume aspects of policy implementation which may have been carried out by a teacher previously.

Perhaps somewhat at odds with this position is the position of a policy enthusiast, also known as a translator. This is defined as someone who advocates for particular policies, in a similar way to an entrepreneur, yet enthusiasts do not simply advocate for a particular policy, they lead by example, ensuring the policy is embedded in their practice (Ball et al., 2012). The embodiment is not only necessarily through work practices, but also wider events and processes which enable the policy enthusiasts to share and translate for others, thus making it a practical, productive process (Ball et al., 2012).

The roles discussed thus far have centred on the positive and the practical implementation of policy. However, it is essential to consider that not all policies are welcomed or wanted. A critical position to policy may be taken, which Ball et al. refer to as the 'marginal and muted' (2011: 631). Ball et al. suggest that this tends to be the remit of the union representatives, although there may be room here to consider the role of the SENCo, given the discussion of their role in the literature review as well as the work of Ellis and Tod (2014) which concluded that SEN policy was regarded as having limited practical value by teachers. Yet, an additional point is that the marginal and muted also provide a counter discourse. The role of the critic is to move beyond general disquiet which may surround policy and to provide a considered critique. Ball et al. also suggest that often the historical view is presented as a critique. Within this research project, it will be interesting to consider whether the SENCo, as a lone voice, may also provide the counter-discourse and how this may be done, with a caveat that the study focuses on those SENCos who are relatively new to the post and therefore may not be able to provide that historical view.

Finally, the typology considers the role of the 'receivers' (2011: 632). Ball et al. (2011) suggest that newly qualified teachers and teaching assistants are typically dependent upon policy and as such tend to be compliant with policy requests and demands. In part, Ball et al. suggest this is because policy provides the structure and direction they are looking for. As a consequence, it is typical that at an early point in their careers, such teachers are considered 'receivers' of policy as they may not have the confidence or knowledge to narrate, enthuse or critique it. Again, it is interesting to consider where this fits with the research aims and questions, which consider the role that the SENCo takes during this period and where, because of the conflict and typically solitary nature associated with the role, whether SENCos may, at times, be considered to take this policy position.

Whilst not part of the typology, Ball et al. also refer to 'policy careers' (Ball et al. 2011: 635). Again, this potentially resonates with the role of the SENCo because the suggestion is that, for some, policy can provide opportunities regarding career, particularly when concerned with a specific area of policy. Ball et al. suggest that 'enthusiasm gets you noticed' (2012: 67) and therefore for some this may be a stepping stone to becoming a future leader.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the policy actor theory**

Datnow and Park (2009) would argue that intrinsic to the idea of implementation is not only the policy actor themselves but also the relationships between policy actors. Datnow and Park suggest that there is a co-constructing element between context and the intercommunications between the policy actors and it is noteworthy to consider the various power positions such actors may hold, both formally and informally. Perhaps one of the key limitations of the theoretical approach applied in this instance is the same as the criticism levied at the 'top-down/ managerial' approach (Trowler, 2003: 124). This relates to the idea that the policy implementer, in this case the SENCo, can show fidelity to all the aspects of a successful 'top-down' implementation approach, yet this may not be sufficient to ensure policy implementation is executed, in the way that the main policy actor intends. This may be due to the way in which other policy actors respond, the policy responses of others and of the wider school (See Figure 4.1).

In addition to this, a further complication is that the role of the SENCo is, by definition, one which encapsulates leadership and management; a power factor as highlighted by Datnow and Park (2009). Yet as the literature review has explored, part of the issue with the role of the SENCo is not only the lack of clarity regarding the role in policy and literature but also the varying seniority attributed to the role and the interpretation of the statutory guidance in relation to this matter (Oldham and Radford, 2010). Therefore such issues related to power may not be so prominent, or indeed the converse may be true. This does potentially lead to ambiguity regarding the actor role the SENCo assumes; as such assumptions regarding seniority cannot be made.

For the purposes of this study, the positions of other policy actors have not been explored. Yet, it could be argued that the SENCo is the principal actor and to situate their function, role and experience could provide a backdrop against which the roles of other actors could be explored in future studies, for example, the role of senior management. Equally, the focus of this study are the multiple roles which the SENCo may assume either concurrently or at various points throughout the first year of reform. If other roles, for example teachers or senior managers, were focused upon concurrently, this may dilute the impact of the study. This is imperative, particularly when this is an opportunity to add to the body of research which has tried to unpick the role of the SENCo. Yet, it is also important to note that the typology has been extracted from the work for Ball and colleagues' (2012) work and did not use the wider model they developed. As such this meant that some of the factors, which Ball and colleagues determine to be important as part of the process of policy implementation, have been excluded, including values within the school, intake, staffing, and resources. Whilst throughout the discussion these factors have been alluded to, and in some cases explored in relation to the role of the SENCo itself, these factors remain important areas for future research.

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has briefly explored the premise of policy implementation in schools, with a specific focus on the role/s an individual can assume. The work of Ball et al. (2011; 2012) has been centred upon, and in particular the typology they devised relating to the role of the policy actor. The idea of policy as an active process, and as a process of enactment, has been explored.

The literature review has provided an overview of the development of inclusion as a principle through both society and education. The translation of such principles into practice, through legislation, has been documented and the literature review discusses the most current changes specifically in relation to inclusive education for children with SEN. The SENCo, a role which could be considered central to the enactment of SEN policy in schools, has been discussed, with a view to exploring its advent, challenges and current position. Finally, the role has been considered as a policy actor, particularly with the introduction of significant policy reform. The Ball and colleagues policy actor typology has been discussed, with a view to adopting this as a theoretical model through which the varying policy actor roles the SENCo could be seen to assume during this period can be explored.

The next chapter explores the purpose and nature of this study, which seeks to explore not only the role of the SENCo as a policy implementer at a time of significant SEND policy reform, but also the perspective of the SENCo as a policy implementer.



## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Research activities in the social sciences are of paramount importance, in part due to our investment in social structures (Aronowitz and Grioux, 1991 cited in Cooper and White, 2012), but also due to the social questions and difficulties which the research seeks to answer (Cooper and White, 2012). While Cooper and White infer that the purpose of educational research is to seek answers, educational research can, and does, have a broader remit; to explore issues, to shape policy and to improve practice (Newby, 2014). It is argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between the research aims, the researcher's perspective and the methodological approach adopted for the purpose of the research. Therefore consideration of the interactions between these aspects is paramount.

The chapter will begin by outlining the aims and questions specific to the study. Following consideration of ontological and epistemological issues, the discussion will centre on the various potential methodological approaches, concluding with a discussion and justification of the methodological approach adopted. The research design, including a description of each phase, the data collection methods and the participants involved, will be explained. Quality issues regarding reliability and validity will be considered with a view to identifying whether these can be mitigated in addition to the potential impact on the study.

### **5.2 Research aims**

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at a time of significant policy reform; specifically the introduction of the 2014 Children and Families Act and the related statutory guidance, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015, hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code). The study aims to consider the role of the SENCo as a policy actor at a time of reform (Ball et al., 2012), with the SENCo sharing their experiences before and during the initial implementation period of the first year. The study is concerned with the nature of the SENCo role and the nature of the activities they carried out during this period. Equally, the SENCos' perceptions of the enablers and barriers which have supported or hindered implementation are explored. The aim is for

the SENCos to share the lived experience as a policy implementer; providing an expert eye witness account as policy is narrated in their settings.

However, policy enactment does not take place in isolation (Ball et al., 2012). Therefore the SENCo experiences are situated within wider data sets, specifically gathered from experienced SENCos at two points: half way through, and at the end of, the academic year.

The study aims to:

1. Explore the role of the SENCo as a policy implementer at a time of SEND reform, focusing on the introduction of the 2014 Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015) and activities in relation to this.
2. Provide the SENCos with an opportunity to narrate their experience regarding policy implementation, specifically preparing for, managing and implementing change over the course of the first year.
3. Consider and explore the views and experiences of the SENCo regarding their role and their perception of the implementation of the SEND reforms.
4. Examine the narrated experience of the SENCo as a policy implementer within the reforms, and whether it is a static, emerging and/ or changing role in relation to the Ball et al. Policy actor typology (2012).

### **5.3 Research questions**

1. How prepared do SENCos feel for the implementation of the reforms? What key areas have they identified to focus on and what are the challenges and/ or barriers that they predict?
2. What is the role of the SENCo at a time of policy reform and implementation?
3. How does the narrated experience of the SENCos reflect:
  - a. The aims of the reforms as stated with the 2014 Children and Families Bill and SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014)?
  - b. The *policy actor* typology (Ball et al., 2012)?
4. What does the SENCo perceive to be the impact of the SEND reforms on their professional role and their setting?

5. What impact does the narrated experience have on the role of the SENCo as *policy actor*? Is there a link between the policy acting role that the SENCo takes and the experience of policy implementation?
6. What factors impact on current and future policy implementation, with specific reference to the role of the SENCo?
7. What are the wider implications, specific to the role of SENCo, for example for schools, SEND organisations, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Local Authorities (LAs), and professional bodies?

## 5.4 Epistemological and ontological considerations

The central theme of the study intends to examine and explore the experiences of a policy implementer, in this context the SENCo during a period of policy reform using the policy actor framework as proposed by Ball et al. (2012). As such it was imperative to consider the various methodological approaches which would reflect the nature and purpose of the research.

Initially, I considered that I would be taking a critical theorist stance. This approach is ‘not so much a methodology but a commitment to the logic of critical reflection’ (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 39). Equally, Newby (2014) suggests that through critical reflection we are not simply seeking to explain, but we are also looking to change things which highlight the emancipatory perspective. This is further reflected by Horkheimer who suggests that the principle of critical theory is to, ‘liberate human beings from circumstances that enslave them’ (Horkheimer, 1982 cited in Newby, 2014: 43). It is not a suggestion that SENCos are enslaved in their roles. However, research suggests that the role remains ambiguous, and in some cases low status and operational (Rosen-Webb, 2011; Tissot, 2013). It is essential to be overt that while this supported my perception and my position regarding the voice of the SENCo, particularly from my experience of having been a SENCo in two schools, this could lead to a degree of bias in my role as a researcher. While I considered that the study could be transformative, I was acutely aware of the subjective response of my participants and the specific context (Cohen et al., 2011) which may lead to challenges regarding a generalisation of outcomes. This did lead me to consider the value of the research and the related meaning of transformation; an expert eyewitness account can be transformative, potentially for the individual, and as a consequence potentially for their setting. As Newby states, ‘the overarching purpose of

critical theory is to expose the need for change' (2014:43). In this instance, I was particularly interested in response to change.

Therefore it was through exploring my own ontological beliefs regarding individual representation, and recognition of my own bias towards the perceived unheard voice of the SENCo, that it transpired that I was seeking to give a voice to a group of individuals; the purpose of which was for me to try and make sense of their world, in particular regarding a specific phenomenon, within an interpretive tradition (Bryman, 2012). Throughout the study, the ontological position is one of constructivism which asserts that meaning is interpreted and created by 'social actors' (Bryman, 2012:33). This takes account of the individuality of the experience and the interpretation of such (Newby, 2014). To a degree, this draws a parallel with the work of Ball et al. (2012) which explores the idea of teachers as policy actors who equally apply their meaning to policy construction.

## **5.5 Considered methodological approaches**

As discussed above, the nature of this study is interpretative and therefore qualitative. My research questions were seeking to explore the social world (Bryman, 2012). This led me to consider the specific methodological approach I wished to take as this would inform not only the generation of the data but also the analysis.

Initially, narrative inquiry appeared to suit the nature of the study regarding the aims, the questions and also my interests as a researcher. Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry which aims to give space for participants to re-tell events while reflecting on human interest and making sense of situations (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Craig, 2007). When I considered the purpose of the research, the aims, myself as a researcher and my intended outcomes, the idea of narrative inquiry appeared to satisfy all perspectives. The purpose of the narrative is to allow a voice (Bold, 2012) which in part resonated with my perspective on the role of the SENCo. Yet, there is the tension between the notion of emancipation and the idea of narrative (Czarniawska, 2004), although it could be argued that the provision of a voice for those who are previously unheard is, in itself, emancipatory. Is it possible for individual narratives to create wider meaning (Rorty, 1992)? However, as outlined above, the study was not necessarily seeking to create a grand narrative and extract conceptual meaning from this.

There was also an inclusive nature about narrative inquiry which suited the nature of this research. The story is told both as a process and as a final result (Polkinghorne, 1988 *cited in* Bold, 2012) inclusive of all meaning, from which to make sense (Reissman, 2008). However, every story is different, even if recounting a shared experience of an event (Reissman, 1993 *cited in* Bold, 2012) and as such I considered the context to be equally important to situate the individual voices. I was also acutely aware that I was interested in particular instances of the phenomena and as such would not be re-telling whole stories, in the complete sense, but I was selecting elements of the stories which related to the research aims. I was seeking to analyse the results through themes in response to an event and specific research questions. I was also aware that I wanted to nest the narratives within wider data sets. Exploration of these issues suggested to me that a purely narrative inquiry approach would not be satisfactory.

## **5.6 Adopted methodological approach**

I subsequently considered a phenomenological approach. This approach is part of the interpretivist tradition and is concerned with how individuals made sense of the world around them (Bryman, 2012; Newby, 2014). This appeared to suit the purpose of the study as this approach supported the underlying purpose of the research due to the specific nature of the questions I wanted to explore, while also recognising my held view. Yet, the central premise was to develop a narration of events, with a critical eye linking this to policy intention and experience; the study was one of direct experience (Cohen et al., 2011). This approach would allow me to describe an event, linking back to the notion of an expert eye witness view, though a combination of data collection methods. Through the phenomenological approach it is 'participants' perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences that are paramount and that are the object of study' (Guest et al., 2012: 13). Crucially it is recognised through the phenomenological approach that 'telling stories' is not enough, and this means a bringing together of various methods to develop a data set (Guest et al., 2012). Smith et al., in their precis of phenomenological philosophical history, discuss how the concept of phenomenology developed from the importance of the individual experience and the individual's perception of this to an embedding of this experience within 'a world of objects and relationships' (2009: 21). Through the data sets, particularly the interviews, I would be able to build up a set of common themes and relate these to the policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012). It would enable me to consider

that whilst the notions of creating change from my research were not the necessary aim, implications for practice may emerge. The approach would also allow me to be selective as a researcher through reduction of data.

Further investigation initially suggested that a move towards an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) may support the aims of the research, with Smith et al. describing 'IPA as a broadly contextualist approach because of the persons in context' (2009: 181). Braun and Clark (2013) suggest that IPA is both a thematic approach, enabling the data in this instance to develop emerging themes, and concerned with the specifics of individual cases. It is concerned with the way we experience the world and the way in which we collectively experience the world (Newby, 2014).

It is notable that to show true fidelity to this methodological framework means that there would be potential disadvantages of this approach; the concurrent focus on individuals and themes was potentially one of them (Braun and Clark, 2013). The large amounts of data I intended to collect, in terms of the depth of data from each participant, would be problematic particularly regarding extraction and interpretation. I was aware that I intended to narrow the focus of the data, rather than interpret it in its entirety. Additionally, the focus is on the human experience (Guest et al., 2012) and this may limit the interpretation of the data regarding the meaning. Yet, with this in mind, and the enduring notion of 'the expert eye witness account' the issue related to extrapolating further meaning may be mitigated (Guest et al., 2012).

To this end, the methodological approach taken was a phenomenological approach, although a thematic analysis (TA) approach was applied during data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This approach retained many of positive features of IPA, yet allowed me as a researcher the freedom to interpret the data through boundaries as stated in the research aims and questions, through the use of complete coding (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This also allows me as a researcher to focus on the research aims without contorting my research to fit a specific methodology (Newby, 2014). Certainly, this approach informed my data collection as Guest et al. (2012) report; the TA approach is fluid and dynamic. Given the yearlong remit of my study, this was essential. From a pragmatic view, as an early career researcher working within a given timeframe, the TA approach was likely to be a supportive approach.

## **5.7 The research design**

The nature of the study was to consider the role of the SENCo and the implementation of the SEND reforms; as such the research needed to cover an adequate time frame to allow sufficient implementation to happen. Therefore I chose to focus on the first academic year of the SEND reforms, which were introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014.

The research design consisted of five phases. The purpose of the phases was to allow space and time for developing individual narratives in response to the implemented changes, while also seeking opportunities to contextualise this meaning; each phase was informed by the preceding phase. The core data was collected through ongoing interviews with a consistent group of participants. These interviews were nested within a series of contextual questionnaires to a wider group of individuals; developed as a response to the narratives emerging from the interviews. The data was later cross-referenced to policy analysis and the policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012). The term 'SENCo' is used throughout to refer to the participants.

## **5.8 Overview of methods within each phase**

- Phase One: a self-completing paper-based questionnaire which sought initial views from fifty-four participants regarding their understanding of the SEND reforms and their feelings related to preparedness for the reforms. The aim of the questionnaire was to set the subsequent research within context.
- Phase two: semi-structured interviews with a small group of nine participants who had taken part in phase one and were in the SENCo role. The interviews explored the questionnaire responses from phase one further.
- Phase three: termly semi-structured interviews with the nine SENCo participants from Phase two. Interviews focused on the SENCos narration of the SEND reforms for the first academic year of implementation.
- Phase four: a self-completing online questionnaire which focused on the participants' perceptions of the first six months of the reforms. The questionnaire was aimed at SENCos in the post, and this was to a wider audience than Phase one, two and three and drew upon the themes from the earlier phases. Seventy-four SENCos responded from varied locations, with varied experiences.

- Phase five: a self-completing online questionnaire. This was similar to phase four as it was directed to a wider group of participants regarding location and experience, who had not been part of the NA SENCo training. The purpose of the questionnaire was to reflect on the first year of reform. Forty SENCos responded.

## **5.9 Research procedures: Phase one**

The purpose of phase one was to begin by setting the wider context for the main body of the subsequent study. Phase one sought to explore the views of a group of SENCos regarding the impending SEND reforms, with a focus on the following areas:

- How aware are the SENCos of the SEND reforms? What is the SENCos' perception of 'others' awareness in their setting, for example, head teacher, governors?
- How well do the SENCos feel they understand the SEND reforms? Do the SENCos feel that others in their setting, for example, head teacher and governors, understand the SEND reforms?
- What support, and from whom, have the SENCos received to prepare and implement the SEND reforms?
- What priorities have the SENCos identified for their role in relation regarding the SEND reforms?
- What do the SENCos perceive may be the key enablers/ barriers with the efficient execution of their role and the implementation of the SEND reforms?
- Furthermore, this phase would explore the way in which the SENCos viewed themselves as policy implementers and their perception of how others viewed them.

It was essential that the instrument to gather data was efficient, due to the constraints of time for the researcher and the participants, as well as a large number of respondents; and questionnaires are often seen as an efficient tool (Newby, 2014). For this reason, a questionnaire was selected as the method by which to collect data at this stage. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through open and closed questions. There were notable benefits to the choice of a questionnaire for phase one: cheaper and quicker to administer, the absence of interviewer effects, no interview variability and convenience for respondents (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001; Bryman, 2012). This enabled me to analyse emerging themes in response to the questions above but also allowed there to be further consideration of the



data in depth (Creswell 2003). Such data set the later phases within a wider context, before narrowing the sample for phase two and three. Naturally, there were potential difficulties, including the lack of opportunity for the participant to clarify or probe further (Bryman, 2012). However, as Rose and Grosvenor (2001) suggest, this was partly negated by the fact that I was available to speak to participants if need be while they were completing the questionnaire; this allowed for qualification if the participant wished, but was not taken up during the phase. In addition to this, phase two was designed to enrich the data from phase one, thus allowing the exploration of particular issues as necessary.

The first stage of the process was to construct a questionnaire which examined the themes within the framework upon which I intended to base my research. This included themes relating to the role of the SENCo as policy actor and the work of Ball et al. (2012). The questionnaire focused on a number of questions, using a Likert scale for the SENCo to respond (five point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The questionnaire focused on the following aspects:

- The role of the SENCo, and how they and others perceived their role to be. This specifically considered the nature of a policy actor
- Priority areas for their role regarding the SEND reforms
- Potential barriers to executing their role, in general, and specifically regarding the SEND reforms.

Once the questionnaire was constructed, it was necessary to pilot it to increase the reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2011) (See Appendix 5.1 for the pilot questionnaire at phase one). The pilot questionnaire was sent to thirteen participants, with six responding. The respondents included a variety of educational professionals, both those in the area of SEN and the wider education field. I was aware that my research group while having a similar amount of SENCo experience would vary in their teaching experience. I did not want to work on an assumption of shared knowledge or language. Through presenting the questionnaire to a range of educational professionals I hoped that they were able to represent the broad experience of my sample. This was not a data pilot, but a pilot designed to look at format and coverage (Cohen et al., 2011). I did not draw on data from the pilot and following the responses of the pilot participants; changes were made to the layout and the framing of

some questions. Additional information was placed into some of the questions to clarify meaning, and this resulted in the final questionnaire (See Appendix 5.2 for final phase one questionnaire).

I administered the questionnaire to the group of participants at the same time, allowing the group the same amount of time to answer the questions. Before the completion of the questionnaire, I discussed with the group the purpose of the study, the approach as well as practical and ethical considerations. There was a time for questions.

### **Participants for Phase one**

Due to my current and previous roles, I had the benefit of working with a large number of SENCOs and I used these professional links to locate my research group. My first cohort of SENCOs had just completed the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo), with the majority having had one year of experience in the post. Paper copies of the questionnaire were provided to sixty SENCOs at the end of the final day of the NA SENCo. Fifty-four SENCOs completed the questionnaire.

Phase One: Fifty-four respondents	
In a SENCo post	53 (98%)
In an assistant SENCo post	1 (2%)
Worked in a primary school	41 (76%)
Worked in a secondary school	13 (24%)
Were non-teaching SENCos	Primary: 7 (13%) Secondary: 5 (9%)
Held additional teaching responsibilities	Primary: 28 (52%) Secondary: 5 (9%) Total: 33 (61%)
Held additional responsibilities in addition to SENCo/ teaching	Primary: 14 (26%) Secondary: 5 (9%) Total: 19 (33%)
Were part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	Primary: 11 (20%) Secondary: 3 (6%) Total: 14 (26%)
Were also head teachers	Primary: 2 (4%)
Worked within a Local Authority (LA) maintained school	Primary: 28 (52%) Secondary: 5 (9%) Total: 33 (61%)
Worked within an academy	Primary: 10 (19%) Secondary: 7 (13%) Total: 17 (31%)
Did not state type of school	Primary: 3 (6%) Secondary: 1 (2%) Total: 4 (7%)
Worked in a teaching school	Primary: 1 (2%)

**Table 5.1: Overview of participants at Phase one.**

The above table (Table 5.1) gives further detail regarding the participant group, including the contexts within which the SENCos worked and the additional roles they held in schools, at the point of administering the questionnaire. This provided a relatively good sample to draw upon in terms of number of respondents (n=54), with the majority, 98%

(n=53) in a SENCo role. However, the representative nature of the sample must be considered as there are a number of issues which may impact on the reliability and validity of the data.

Due to the way in which the data was accessed, this could be described as a convenience sample (Matthews and Ross, 2010); a sample which is 'simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility' (Bryman, 2012: 201). However, as Bryman (2012) states, convenience sampling can create issues regarding how representative the data is, and as a consequence, it can be difficult to generalise the findings. Whilst this sample was convenient to access, an approach which Newby (2014) suggests is useful in a preliminary investigation of an issue, it would not be accurate to state that this was a convenience sample. Specific decisions were made with the aim of obtaining a sample from a specialist group (Newby, 2014) whilst ensuring that this was also a representative sample in terms of the SENCo population (Bryman, 2012).

The research aimed to look at the response of a specific group of individuals in relation to a phenomenon; in this instance the response of a group of SENCos to newly introduced policy. This is also termed 'specialist group sampling' (Newby, 2014: 255) or 'purposive sampling' (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). Specialist sample groups are selected on the basis of various criterion, for example status or particular occupation (Newby, 2014), or as Cohen and colleagues state, 'in order to access 'knowledgeable people'' (2011:157). This was necessary for this particular project as the research questions were specifically aimed at individuals who would have knowledge or experience regarding the phenomena I wished to explore. For the purposes of this research, the criteria were that the respondent was a SENCo or assistant SENCo, working in a maintained primary or secondary school or academy.

However, it was also important to consider how representative the specialist sample group was. A representative sample is a sample which 'reflects the population accurately' (Bryman, 2012: 187); in this instance the 'population' refers to the SENCo population. The particular challenge for this sample regarding representation relates to the varying contexts within which SENCos work, with Hallett and Hallett (2012) suggesting that every context is different for every SENCo. Pearson and Ralph (2007) in agreement, state that the role of the SENCo is open to variance in practice and localised interpretation. Schools

can be of similar size, with a similar demographic and the SENCo may hold different/ additional roles and have contrasting amounts of seniority, time and support to conduct the role; there is no statutory guidance relating to the time required to execute the role (DfE and DoH, 2015).

In response to this issue, steps were taken to try and ensure that within the sample all potential contexts and roles were represented. It is typical practice for a SENCo to retain teaching responsibilities (Szwed, 2007a). SENCos also often hold additional responsibilities at a subject level (Qureshi, 2014). Therefore, as Table 5.1 illustrates, the sample at phase one includes both teaching and non-teaching SENCos. SENCos are often on the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), although as this is not a mandatory requirement (DfE and DoH, 2015). However, literature suggests that a lack of SLT membership can be a barrier to implementation of the role (Cole, 2005; Tissot, 2013; Qureshi, 2014) therefore the inclusion of participants who were and weren't on the SLT was imperative. Within this sample, 26% (n= 14) were part of the SLT. Research in this area is mixed with suggestions that SENCo membership could be between 50% (Tissot, 2013) and 19% (Pearson et al., 2015). Therefore this study is within this range. In addition to this two head teachers are represented within the sample.

The participants within the group also share a number of common characteristics which may give credence to the representative nature of the specialist group sample (Newby, 2014). All students had just completed the NA SENCo; they had all had the same taught experiences on the NA SENCo, particularly in relation to the SEND reforms. The participants were all in the role, yet due to their relative newness to the role, with the majority entering their second year, they may not have had significant experience of the previous policy to draw comparisons between the two. Lastly, the group had also just finished their tuition, so mitigating, to a degree, the potential compromise of working with current students. However, these aspects did present some limitations on the data, which have been explored further within the conclusion.

In addition to ensuring that the varying roles SENCos undertake were represented within the sample, it was also imperative to consider the nature of the schools within which the SENCos worked. National data illustrates that there are more primary schools than secondary schools in England. In 2014 58% of schools (n=4,416,710) in England were

primary state funded schools (DfE, 2016c). This indicates that the primary phase in this sample is slightly over-represented, with 76% (41) of SENCos working in a primary school. Participants from specialist, alternative and independent provision were not included. Whilst schools, including non-maintained special schools, independent schools and pupil referral units must have regard to the 2015 Code, (DfE and DoH, 2015), the role of the SENCo is only mandatory in maintained schools and academies. Therefore, maintained primary and secondary schools and academies were included within the sample to ensure that schools where the role was mandatory were represented.

Geographically, the participants were from the South West of England, which included several Local Authorities and councils. Schools from urban, semi-urban and rural settings are represented. It is noteworthy that one of the areas was part of the pathfinder programme. Again, this supports the purpose of seeking a sample which represents the varying contexts and roles within which SENCos work. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the sampling technique applied will also impose limitations; these limitations are explored in the conclusion chapter.

### **5.10 Research procedures: Phase two**

Phase two was planned to add the detail, the insight and to enrich the data from the questionnaires at phase one in readiness for the longer term phase three. It was not intended to be a broad-based data collection, but to provide detail to the questions previously asked at phase one.

Phase one explored the SENCos' feelings of preparedness in relation to implementing the SEND reforms. Phase two sought to add detail to the responses and asked SENCos to describe how prepared they felt and also asked what preparation they had already done. In addition to this, Phase two explored the idea of 'support' further. Whilst phase one had asked SENCos to consider their sources of support for implementing the SEND reforms and their satisfaction with this, phase two asked SENCos' to specifically describe the support and advice they had received from the LA. Phase one had also asked about the SENCos' levels of confidence, with the findings suggesting that SENCos did not feel confident in their LA. Therefore Phase two specifically focused on asking the SENCos about the meetings they had attended, support and advice they had received from the LA, and how they felt about this. Phase one suggested that, from the SENCos' perspective,

awareness and understanding regarding the SEND reforms amongst stakeholders was mixed. This was explored further in greater detail at phase two, with a specific focus on head teachers and colleagues. Questions regarding concerns, challenges and plans for September were asked again, to enable the further exploration of the themes emerging at phase one.

In summary, phase two sought to explore the following areas:

- The specific support the SENCos access from the LA
- The feelings of preparedness they felt as SENCos in school in readiness for the SEND reforms
- Whether they had carried out any specific preparation
- Awareness of the head teacher
- Hopes for the SEND reforms
- Potential concerns for the SEND reforms
- Plans for September.

‘Interviews have the potential to yield valuable insights into people’s life experience, attitudes, opinions and aspirations’ (Rose and Grosvenor, 2001: 112). As such, interviews were considered to be the most appropriate method to allow for the clarification and extension of some of the themes which emerged from phase one; although, as Newby was clear to state, ‘all interviews are not the same’ (2014: 341). A structured interview would not allow for the freedom to deviate from the script, for example, to probe further, as necessary, and in some sense can be considered a verbal questionnaire due to the non-deviation from the questions (Newby, 2014). Therefore a semi-structured questionnaire allowed for this. Data from phase one was analysed to provide topics for further exploration, which were then used to shape the interview schedule. A pilot interview schedule was produced (See Appendix 5.3 for pilot interview schedule at phase two). Thirteen individuals who were all educational professionals were asked to take part in a pilot to test the method of data collection (Matthews and Ross, 2010). Five people responded with suggested changes to the interview schedule, which resulted in the final interview schedule (See Appendix 5.4 for final interview schedule at phase two).

Due to the geography of the participants as well as the time they had available, it was not possible to carry out the interviews face to face. Therefore interviews were carried out

over the telephone. While face to face interviews may have been my preference, for many of the SENCos, we might assume that a telephone interview is less invasive and time-consuming than a face to face interview. This does mean, however, that there were compromises to be made, for example regarding rapport (Newby, 2014). This may have been mitigated because I had already established a relationship with all the SENCos on a professional basis. Equally, some subtle nuances may be omitted. Each phone call lasted between twenty minutes and one hour.

### **Participants for Phase two**

During phase one, SENCos were asked to indicate on their questionnaire whether they would like to be part of the ongoing research. Thirty-five SENCos indicated that they would be happy to be part of the next stage of the research. I subsequently contacted fifteen SENCos to explain the research further, regarding commitment and the purpose of the research. I was aiming to work with ten SENCos. However, I initially contacted fifteen SENCos as I assumed that not all of the SENCos would want, or would be able, to proceed with the research. The fifteen participants were purposefully selected from the thirty-five SENCos with the specific aim of creating a purposive, representative sample (Bryman, 2012).

As per phase one, the sampling method was specialist group sampling, with the aim of creating a representative sample of this specific group. Bryman (2012) describes how often researchers will aim to create a purposive sample in order to meet specific aims of the research, which is evident in this case. Equally, Bryman describes how participants within a purposive sample can also differ slightly to ensure variety, and in this case representation, within the sample. In terms of the purposive sampling approach, I was seeking to establish a specialist group of SENCos, in post, working within schools which were representative of both maintained primary and secondary schools and academies in England. All SENCos had completed the NA SENCo. This formed the criteria for the sample, which was based on the most basic mandatory criteria for the role of the SENCo in maintained primary and secondary schools and academies as stated by the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015).

Due to the methodological approach adopted, I was seeking to collect a large amount of in -depth interview data over a relatively long period of time. As such this would place a



limit on the number of participants, to ensure that data collection, and subsequent analysis was manageable. However, the consequence of working with a small group was that this would present challenges regarding the representative nature of the SENCo population within the group.

The thirty five SENCos, who were contacted initially, represented a mix of both primary and secondary schools including LA maintained schools, standalone academies and schools which were part of a Multi-Academy Trusts. This was particularly important given the recent growth of the academy agenda. Schools were of varying sizes, including a small village primary school with a population of seventy-three to a large secondary school with a population of 1789. The schools contacted were across seven local authorities, five of which were unitary authorities. The schools were a mix of rural, semi-urban and urban schools.

Eleven SENCos responded to say they would like to continue to be part of the research further. Following further contact, the final sample comprised of nine participants from nine different schools. The SENCos were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire survey which would enable the collection of general information regarding their school and their role within the school as well as their professional history (See Appendix 5.5 for pre-research questionnaire). SENCos were also sent information regarding ethics and their right to withdraw at any time (See Appendix 5.6 for ethics and consent form).

Phase two: Nine participants	
Worked in a primary school	5
Worked in a secondary school	4
Held additional teaching responsibilities	2 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Held additional responsibilities in addition to SENCo/ teaching	4 (Primary) 4 (Secondary)
Were non-teaching SENCos	3 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) team	1 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	1 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Were also deputy/ assistant head teachers	1 (Secondary – also SLT)
Were also head teachers	0
Worked within a Local Authority (LA) maintained school	3 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Worked within a standalone academy	1 (Primary)
Worked within a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)	1 (Primary) 3 (Secondary)
Worked in a teaching school	1 (Primary)

**Table 5.2: Overview of participants at Phase two**

As discussed above, all the participants for phase two were SENCos in post, had completed the NA SENCo and were working within a school which was either a LA maintained primary/ secondary school, or were working within an academy; therefore this group met the criteria for the purposive sample (Newby, 2014). However, it is also imperative to consider how representative the final sample is of the wider SENCo population.

The final sample of nine SENCos represented not only the varying contexts which Hallett and Hallett describe (2010), but also the varying roles SENCos can hold in addition to the SENCo role (Szwed, 2007a). Due to the sampling methods, as described earlier in the chapter, the participants were all were relatively new to the role of SENCo. All, bar one, had been in the post for one year at the start of the study. One participant had been an assistant SENCo and taken on the role of SENCo at the start of the study. Just under half of the participants held additional teaching responsibilities; in comparison to other studies in this field this is broadly in line with larger samples (Tissot, 2013; Pearson et al., 2015). Three SENCos from the sample were part of the SLT, either as a senior teacher or

as a deputy head teacher. This reflects the current statutory guidance which whilst recommending this as good practice, does not make SLT membership mandatory (DfE and DoH, 2015); previous research indicates that membership to the SLT is mixed (Oldham and Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013; Pearson et al., 2014). Non-contact time for the SENCOs within the sample was mixed, and variable. Of the SENCOs who held teaching responsibilities (n=4), non-contact time to execute the role varied from none, to half a day/ day per week. This therefore provides a range of experience in terms of additional responsibilities, time to execute the role and seniority (Pearson et al., 2014).

In terms of school representation, there was a relative balance between primary and secondary SENCOs within the sample, with five SENCOs working in primary setting and four in a secondary setting. This is broadly reflective of the national data at the time (DfE, 2016c). The schools were located within four unitary authorities and one borough council. At the time of data collection, the schools represented a mix of both Local Authority (LA) controlled and Academy schools, with two primary academies and 3 secondary academies. One school was a teaching school.

The school contexts were all varied. In terms of size, the smallest primary school was a small village primary school with a population of seventy-three and the largest had a population 510. The smallest secondary school had a population of 470 and the largest had a population of 1789. This again reflects the varying experiences of SENCOs working in a variety of contexts (Hallett and Hallett, 2010; Pearson et al., 2014).

Whilst steps have been taken to try and ensure that the varying roles and contexts within which SENCOs work have been represented within the sample, it is important to consider how representative this sample can claim to be with regards to the wider SENCO population; such claims will impact the generalisability of the data. It could be argued that the purpose of qualitative research is not usually 'concerned with being able to generalise to a population' (Matthews and Ross, 2010: 169). In addition to this, the sampling approach for phases four and five sought to address the concerns of the small sample at phase three. However, limitations regarding representation in relation to the small sample have been further discussed in the conclusion chapter.

### **5.11 Research procedures: Phase three**

Phase three was the central element of the research design. The purpose of this phase was to collect the long term data which illuminated and explored the experience of the SENCo regarding their role as a policy actor at a point of policy reform. As per phase two, the method of a semi-structured interview was selected. The aim was to work with a group of individuals from phase two and to interview them at the end of every new term (old half term) for the first academic year of the SEND reforms. Through this approach, I hoped to be able to look at sequences of events, which may or may not be linked, as well as individual events.

The themes which emerged at phases one and two provided the background detail for the development of the semi-structured interviews at phase three; specifically examining SENCos' feelings of support and preparedness in relation to the impending implementation of the SEND reform. The phases also considered the intended priorities and actions SENCos may take as a result of the SEND reforms, thus setting the context for an exploration of the introduction of the SEND reforms and the SENCo role within this.

Phase one and two had indicated that the SENCos had prioritised a range of actions, with the suggestion that the SENCo would lead on these activities. Therefore, phase three sought to explore the themes of identifying priorities and leadership over the course of the academic year. The interviews at phase three focused on the different activities the SENCos were engaged with, who was involved and who took the lead, thus exploring how SENCos implemented new policy and the actor role/s they assumed. Equally, the findings at phase one and two had suggested that some of the SENCos held strong leadership positions, and phase three sought to unpick the contested notion of the SENCo as a leader further. Whilst phases one and two had been forward looking, in terms of SEND reform, the phases did also suggest that there were barriers which impacted on the execution of the SENCo role. Phase three developed this theme further.

Therefore, the interviews at phase three explored the following areas:

- General SENCo activities
- Specific SEND reform activities and who was involved
- Reflection on the SENCo role

- Barriers and enablers to executing the role
- The SENCos' perception of the implementation of the SEND reforms to date.

An interview schedule was developed which related to the role and the activities of the SENCo. The semi-structured approach allowed flexibility for areas to be explored in greater depth if required. An interview schedule was piloted (See Appendix 5.7 for pilot interview schedule at phase three). I invited thirteen educational professionals, including head teachers, LA advisors and teachers to feedback on the pilot interview schedule. Five responded with written feedback, and one allowed me to conduct a pilot interview with her. This was useful as it enabled to clarify phrasing and sequence of questioning. This led to the final version of the interview schedule (See Appendix 5.8 for final interview schedule at phase three).

For phase three SENCos were given a choice of telephone, Skype or FaceTime. All participants chose to conduct the interviews via telephone. In an ideal situation, all interviews would have been face to face, but this was not a practical solution for either the researcher or the participant due to the location of the participants and the time needed for each interview. To mitigate this to an extent, I sent the interview schedule to all participants which detailed the times, transcript and intended areas for discussion and prompts before the interviews. The interviews lasted between eleven minutes – fifty-two minutes. The average length was twenty to thirty minutes. The interviews took place at the end of every new term (old half term). See table 5.1.

Interview one	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2014/ 27 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2014
Interview two	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2014/ 22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec 2014
Interview three	9 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2015/ 16 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2015
Interview four	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2015/ 30 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Interview five	18 <sup>th</sup> May 2015/ 25 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
Interview six	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2015/ 20 <sup>th</sup> July 2015

**Table 5.3: Interview dates: Phase three**

It is noteworthy that over time my rapport with the participants grew. Consequently, the interviews became far more conversational. I noticed that at times some areas were examined in greater depth than others. I was acutely aware of the time the participants

were giving me and therefore I was aware that there was a tension between keeping the interview 'on track' while also allowing a natural discussion to develop. This is further discussed with the section related to limitations.

### Participants for Phase three

The sample for phase three remained the same as per phase two.

Phase three: Nine participants	
Worked in a primary school	5
Worked in a secondary school	4
Held additional teaching responsibilities	2 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Held additional responsibilities in addition to SENCo/ teaching	4 (Primary) 4 (Secondary)
Were non-teaching SENCos	3 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) team	1 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	1 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Were also deputy/ assistant head teachers	1 (Secondary – also SLT)
Were also head teachers	0
Worked within a Local Authority (LA) maintained school	3 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Worked within a standalone academy	1 (Primary)
Worked within a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)	1 (Primary) 3 (Secondary)
Worked in a teaching school	1 (Primary)

**Table 5.4: Overview of participants at Phase three**

## 5.12 Research procedures: Phase four

Phase four was intended to explore the SENCos' views of the first six months of the SEND reforms. Phase three had provided a high level of detailed data, however, due to the small sample size, there were issues relating to the generalisability, validity and the localised nature of the data. Therefore Phase four provided an opportunity to explore and consider the experiences and contexts from a wider group of SENCos, in terms of location and experience, thus enabling the cross-referencing of emerging themes from the earlier phases and consideration as to whether these were individual narratives or reflective of a wider view as per the thematic analysis approach (Guest et al., 2012).

Phase four was developed at the mid-year point, by which time the participants at phase three had taken part in three interviews. Themes were developing from the earlier phases regarding the identification of priorities from the new statutory guidance, as well as sources of support and SENCos' view of this. Additionally themes were emerging regarding the barriers in relation to policy implementation and role enactment. Phase four examined these themes further, but also extended this by looking at the enablers as well.

Additional themes were beginning to emerge from the phase three data; this predominantly related to the impact which the SEND reforms could be perceived to have. This included an impact on the role of the SENCo, with the data at phase three suggesting that the role was expanding. Phase four asked SENCos to consider whether their role had been impacted, specifically in relation to the SEND reforms, and to add further details. In addition to this, phase three was beginning to suggest that the SEND reforms were having some early impact, particularly in relation to relationships with parents, but also in terms of the identification of children as SEN, and a possible reduction of children on the schools' SEN register. Therefore phase four sought to further examine this theme, through asking SENCos if their SEN register had changed, and if so why. SENCos were also asked to comment on whether the SEND reforms had impacted on various groups, again also asked to add details.

As a consequence of the data at phases one, two and three, the questionnaire focused on the following areas:

- Support for implementation of the SEND reforms
- Primary sources of information and satisfaction regarding the support received
- Changes made in the setting post the introduction of the SEND reforms
- Training
- Enablers and barriers to effective implementation of the SEND reforms
- Changes to the SEN register
- Perceived impact on the SENCo role and groups within the school.

A self-completing online questionnaire was developed (See Appendix 5.9 for the pilot questionnaire and Appendix 5.10 for the final questionnaire at phase four). Due to the online nature of the questionnaire, this meant that there were associated benefits:

anonymity, ease of distribution, access to geographically distributed participants, and speed of completion for participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013). However, Braun and Clarke do state that this approach potentially is not inclusive; access to a computer and related skills are needed. A potential flaw with this questionnaire relates to the piloting process. I was mindful that I had already called upon the support and help of many of my fellow colleagues, past and present, with piloting the earlier phases. As such I piloted this with a couple of colleagues and my supervisors who advised me on phrasing and structure.

The questionnaire was administered in March 2015, six months into the SEND reforms. Due to the limitations of earlier phases, particularly regarding SENCo experience and location, Phase four was tailored to address this. Therefore a variety of channels were selected to try and promote as wide a reach as possible regarding experience and location of SENCos. The main channels used were: Twitter, the SENCo-Forum, Times Educational Supplement (TES) forums and LA contacts. I also contacted all the SENCos who had previously been involved in the research. The participants were able to opt in to the online questionnaire by clicking a link. Due to accessibility, students who had completed the NA SENCo in previous years were also contacted.

#### **Participants for Phase four**

As discussed above, the aim of phase four was to explore the themes which were emerging from phase three with a wider group of SENCos, in terms of role experience and geographical location. The aim was to provide a sample within which the rich data from phase three could be nested.

The target population (Newby, 2014) was defined by the research question; therefore the questionnaires were targeted at SENCos currently in post. This was the defining criteria, as opposed to the more specific criteria for phase one and two. The aim was to open up the field, seeking views from a broader group of SENCos, therefore I did not want to impose restrictions in the first instance, but equally I recognised the importance of acknowledging these within the study. Therefore whilst a homogenous sample was created (Matthews and Ross, 2010), due to all participants being in the SENCo role, this is where the similarity of participants ends. As Ruane (2016) states, homogenous populations in the social sciences are relatively rare.



The questionnaire was completed by seventy-four SENCoS. The approach taken was self-selecting (Newby, 2014); the SENCoS had to opt in to the questionnaire. The participants' common characteristics can be broken down into the following categories. It is important to note that not all SENCoS completed all questions, therefore some figures are somewhat underrepresented.

Phase four: Seventy- four respondents	
In a SENCo post	74 (100%)
In an assistant SENCo post	0
Worked in a primary school	48 (65.8%)
Worked in a secondary school	20 (27.4%)
Worked in a special school	1 (1.4%)
Other	4 (5.5%)
SEnCo experience:	
Less than 4 years	32 (44.4%)
4 – 8 years	24 (33.3%)
9 – 13 years	6 (8.3%)
More than 14 years	10 (13.9%)
Completed the National Award for SENCo	Yes: 53 (73.6%) No: 14 (19.4%) Currently completing: 5 (6.9%)

**Table 5.5: Overview of participants at Phase four**

In terms of the representative nature of the sample at phase four, the information given regarding the SENCo role (See Table 5.5), in comparison to the wider SENCo population, is limited; an issue with self-selecting, anonymous samples is that it is difficult to subsequently follow up with further questions (Newby, 2014). However, equally this may mean that that sample is a more random representation of the SENCo population; as such the probability of selecting a sample that is unrepresentative could be considered to be low, but should still be acknowledged (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

The sample does address, to a degree, the issue of participant experience with 56% (n=40) have four or more years of experience of the SENCo role, indicating that just over half had experience of the previous statutory guidance and therefore may be able to make comparisons with the new guidance. In addition to this, 74% had completed the NA SENCo (n= 53) with a further five near completion, this reflects the common characteristics of phases one, two and three. However, there is no national data

regarding the number of SENCoS who have completed the NA SENCo or how long SENCoS remain in post, therefore it was important to have these groups represented.

In terms of the context within which the SENCoS worked, approximately two-thirds were from primary settings; this is slightly more than the national average (DfE, 2016c) although the sample could be considered to represent both primary and secondary SENCoS. In terms of geographical representation, the questionnaire did have a wider reach than the earlier phases, with respondents citing locations nationally. However, there was still a large response from the South West, with 51% (n=38) of respondents citing this as their location. This is unsurprising given the channels which were selected; 53% (n=39) of the respondents were contacted directly via email or an LA contact. It is also noteworthy that one of the LAs in the South West acted as a pathfinder for the SEND reforms and this, alongside the large proportion of South West responses, may have impacted on the results. The second largest geographical group was from London and the South East (16% n=12). It is imperative to consider the limitations of the results. The respondents did not detail information such as additional responsibilities, or whether they were part of the SLT. It could be argued, that within a larger specialist group, there is likely to be more variation in role, which in turn would ensure that the various executions of the role are represented. However, this cannot be certain and is discussed further in the limitations section of the conclusion chapter.

### **5.13 Research procedures: Phase five**

In many ways phase five replicated phase four, albeit four months later at the end of the academic year (July 2015). The aims were slightly broader. In addition to building on questions emerging from the interviews at phase three and the questionnaires at phase four, the questionnaire also sought to gain some wider views in relation to the SEND reforms in general.

Phase five sought to replicate phase four to explore if the themes were more long term in nature, and therefore prevalent at the end of the academic year. Questions remained broadly the same, which allowed for comparison between the two phases. However, there were some questions added, based on data from the earlier phases. This included a question related to how well the SENCo considered other groups to understand the SEND reforms. There was also a more specific question regarding support, and whether the

SENCo would have liked more support, and where from. This was a recurring theme throughout the earlier phases. Finally, phase three indicated that there were a number of issues with the SENCo role, including aspects related to leadership, the solitary nature of the role, and the challenges of advocacy. Therefore phase five asked SENCos to consider what they, and others, considered to be the primary functions of the SENCo role.

The questionnaire examined:

- Sources of information regarding the SEND reforms
- How satisfied SENCos were with the information and support received
- Changes made since the introduction of the SEND reforms
- Training for the SEND reforms
- Primary enablers and barriers to the implementation of the SEND reforms
- Changes to the school SEN demographic
- Notions of cultural change
- SENCos' perception of the impact of the SEND reforms on their setting and their role.

The same method of a self-completing online questionnaire was used as per phase four as this had been a useful method. Due to the questionnaire building upon the phase four questionnaire, the same piloting approach was used to determine clarity and accessibility (See Appendix 5.11 for the pilot questionnaire and Appendix 5.12 for the final questionnaire at phase five). Equally, due to the relative success of phase four, the same channels were used as for phase four. The questionnaire was promoted in the last week of the summer term and remained open for four weeks. This was somewhat problematic. I had wanted the questionnaire to be administered as close to the end of the academic year as possible. However, I believe this is also why the completion rate is lower than Phase four. My professional experience has shown that this is a very busy time of year for teachers, especially SENCos.

## Participants for Phase five

Forty SENCos completed the online self-completing questionnaire.

Phase five: Forty respondents	
Taken part in previous questionnaire as part of this research project	Yes: July 2014: 11 (27.5%) Yes: February/ March 2015: 10 (25%) No: 19 (47.5%)
In a SENCo post	40 (100%)
In an assistant SENCo post	0
Worked in a primary school	22 (56.4%)
Worked in a secondary school	12 (30.8%)
Worked in a special school	1 (2.6%)
Other	4 (10.3%)
SEnCo experience:	
Less than 4 years	28 (70%)
4 – 8 years	4 (10%)
9 – 13 years	4 (10%)
More than 14 years	4 (10%)
Completed the National Award for SENCo	Yes: 13 (32.5%) No: 8 (20%) Currently completing: 19 (47.5%)

**Table 5.6: Overview of participants at Phase five**

The sample approach taken for phase five reflected the approach, and rationale, of phase four. Table 5.6 details the common characteristics of the specialist group (Newby, 2014). All of the respondents were SENCos. 30% (n=12) of SENCos had been in post for four or more years. This suggests that more experienced SENCos are somewhat underrepresented within this group. However, to a degree this question was flawed, as the banding regarding years of experience was too wide and did not allow identification of SENCos who whilst relative new, still had experience of both systems. It is notable, in comparison to phase four, that only 20% (n=8) of the respondents had not completed the NA SENCo, with 19 (47.5%) currently completing the award. This indicates that the majority of respondents had accessed (or were accessing) the mandatory training for SENCos. As stated in the earlier discussion, due to the lack of 'SEnCo register' which details who has the NA SENCo, it is not possible to know the proportion of SENCos in post who have achieved the NA SENCo.

In terms of the representative nature of the sample, of the forty respondents, 56.4% (n=22) were from a primary school setting. 30.8% (n=12) were from a secondary setting with the remaining 12.9% (n=5) from other settings, including special schools. This means data represents the various contexts where the role of the SENCo is mandatory and, to a degree, reflects national data regarding type of schools (DfE, 2016c). Regarding location, geographically this was more limited than phase four and therefore could be considered not to be as representative. Thirty-one of the forty participants (77.5%) listed the South West as their locality.

Nearly 50% had not been part of the research undertaken at the earlier phases, which was important in terms of validity of the data collected with 28% (n=11) completing the questionnaire at phase one and 25% (n=10) completing the questionnaire at phase four. Issues regarding the omission of additional information, including additional roles, remain the same as phase four and the potential limitations of this, and the earlier samples, are considered in the limitations discussion within the conclusion chapter.

## 5.14 Overview of data collection phases

Date	Phase	Data group
July 2014	Phase One  Questionnaire	SENCos (54)
July – Sept 2014	Phase Two  Pre-research interviews	SENCos (9)
September 2014 – July 2015	Phase Three  Interviews	SENCos (9)
March 2015	Phase Four  Questionnaires	SENCos (74)
July 2015	Phase Five  Questionnaires	SENCos (40)

**Table 5.7: Overview of data collection phases**

## 5.15 Quality assurance

Having described the methodological stance and association data collection instruments, it is imperative to consider the data in terms of credibility, transferability and dependability. This refers to issues related to reliability and validity which are noted as ‘cornerstones of any research’ (Newby, 2014: 130).

### Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the processes of the research and whether the results of the research could be repeated accurately (Bryman, 2012). Whilst notions of reliability may often be related to the positivist tradition, issues related to reliability and qualitative research need to be considered and addressed, albeit in a different way to quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). Klevén (1995 cited in Cohen et al., 2011) pose three

versions of reliability: stability, parallel forms and inter-rater. The phased approach to the study, to a degree, negates the issues related to stability, as the experience is narrated and explored over a prolonged period. However, it is interesting to note whether the contributions would have been different if conducted at a different time. This is problematic to answer but needs consideration. Finally, the notion of the inter-related version of reliability is pertinent to this study due to the relationship that I have with my participants for phases two and three. It could be argued that dependability, trustworthiness and candour (Cohen et al., 2011) may be enhanced as we had an established relationship. Equally, though it could be argued that the relationship may have acted as a hindrance as the participants may have felt they could not, or did not, want to be fully transparent with me. Alternatively, the participant's contributions may reflect a desire to please or, potentially, be contrary (Newby, 2014). This is referred to as the Hawthorne effect (Newby, 2014) and due to the previous relationship between the researcher and participant is particularly pertinent for this research. These considerations will be paramount during the analysis and extraction of the data.

## **Validity**

'Validity is, in many ways, a problematic concept because it is affected by the research procedure, the researcher's position and the work that receives the research results' (Newby, 2014: 17). Whilst it is impossible to mitigate all risk associated with validity (Cohen, 2011) it was important to consider the steps I could take to limit this.

Certainly, I was aware that due to the phenomenological approach I was taking there was a focus on the experience of the participant. Therefore this included a greater degree of subjectivity. Newby (2014) suggests that when reviewing the validity of a research project, the following areas must be considered: how representative is the data, how complete are the arguments and evidence and how transparent is our presentation of the results. Winter (2000 cited in Cohen et al., 2011) expands on the notion of how validity can be addressed and specifically cites scope, depth and richness of data, honesty, selection of participants and the understood stance of the researcher to be of paramount importance. This concern relates closely to the tradition within which I was working; an interpretivist, specifically phenomenological approach. Such approaches have been

criticised due to 'their narrowly micro-sociological perspectives' (Cohen et al., 2011: 21). Yet the very premise of the study was to provide an expert eye witness account.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006b cited in Cohen et al., 2011) cited a number of steps that researchers can address to ensure that the research project is valid. Issues which arose from discussions regarding the validity of the study led, in part, to the phased approach of the research. The phased approach of the study addresses the idea of representation to a degree, due to the approach of in-depth interviews situated within contextual questionnaires over a prolonged period. However, I am mindful that this does not necessarily create an absolute and enduring voice. This is the perspective of a group of people at a particular time. Yet, using a TA approach will help explore the occurrence of specific issues across all data sets. The research aims and questions have been designed to support the development of a complete, yet bounded, argument which I hope will enable the data to be reported with transparency. Although, with these considerations, it could be argued that the research project has addressed issues related to internal validity with greater success than external validity (Cohen et al., 2011). As Newby (2014) argues this relates closely to the acceptability of the research. Therefore the procedures for data collection and contextualisation are paramount which have been addressed through the sampling procedures (Bryman, 2012). It is clear, however, that through the discussion of data and related consideration of implications, parameters will need to be drawn relating to the generalisability of the data.

In summary issues related to quality assurances, specifically, reliability and validity have been addressed through a number of ways. Primarily this is through triangulation (Newby, 2014). Data collected through a variety of methods, specifically interviews and questionnaires, will help address both issues of reliability and validity through analysis of data. However, this is equally considered through the adoption of the style of research: phenomenology. Cohen et al. (2011) cite the work of Curtis (1978) when exploring the central agreement between phenomenologists. Curtis states that one of the centrally agreed points regarding phenomenology is the understanding of the importance of the subjective consciousness and the levels of interpretation which occur. Therefore it was essential to have a plan regarding data analysis and reporting; this is further discussed in the results chapter.



## **5.16 Summary of methodology**

This five-phase study has taken a phenomenological approach which sought to nest individual narratives within a wider context. The central phase, phase three, consisted of six interviews with nine participants over the course of an academic year, which sought to explore the SENCos' experience and perspective relating to the implementation of the SEND reforms. Given the high level of rich, individual data, it was imperative to situate the data within wider data sets. Phases one and two sought to explore initial conceptions regarding the SEND reforms, before implementation. Phases four and five enable emerging themes from phase three to be further explored, within a wider group of participants regarding experience and geography. While a number of issues regarding reliability and validity have been identified, the research design has mitigated these to a degree. Potential limitations of the study are explored later in this thesis.

## **5.17 Ethical considerations**

Burton and colleagues argue that that research within education is part of a wider drive to not only raise standards but also to further teachers' professional development and learning, as such research needs to be reliable and dependable and 'ethically sound' (2014: 70).

The study raised a number of ethical issues which needed addressing before beginning the data collection phase. Ethical issues are predominantly related to informed consent, anonymity and integrity with the reporting of results. However, issues related to the participant and researcher relationship and how this may affect the data collection process, as well as the interpretation of results, was a necessary consideration. Before beginning the study, all University ethical processes were followed (See Appendix 5.13 for ethics approval form), and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) guidelines were followed. This chapter explores the ethical issues in relation to these areas and the actions which were taken to either minimise or mitigate these issues.

## **5.18 Participants: access, informing and giving consent**

At each phase, SENCos were required to opt into the research. At phases one, four and five this meant that SENCos chose to complete the questionnaire if they wished to do so, without duress (BERA, 2011). For phases two and three, the interview phases, this meant

that SENCOs were asked to provide contact details if they wished to take part in the study. All information presented to the participants clearly indicated their right to withdraw for 'any or no reason, and at any time' (BERA, 2011; 6).

While each stage of the study required participants to opt in, it was equally important that the participants understood what they were opting to take part in, including the nature of participation, including the likely subjects of discussion, to ensure their consent was fully informed (BERA, 2011). Therefore, it was essential that the participants were aware of not only the purpose and value of the study but also the potential impact on them; this was particularly relevant as there was not a gatekeeper to the participants who might be able to mediate potential ethical issues (Burton et al., 2014). At each stage potential participants were given information about the study, to ensure that their consent to take part in the study was informed. At each stage, this was through written information (See Appendix 5.2, 5.6, 5.10 and 5.12 for details of written information at each stage); this was particularly important as the use of social networking sites presents specific difficulties ensuring informed consent (BERA, 2011). Participants at phases one, two and three also received the information verbally.

It could be argued that this was of particular importance at phase three due to the longer term, and more in-depth, nature of the interviews. At this stage, SENCOs were sent a letter (See Appendix 5.6 for ethics and consent form), and if they were satisfied with the information given, they were asked to consent to take part in the study. The information within the letter explained:

- The nature and purpose of the research
- Confidential storage and usage of data
- Anonymity throughout the research, including through all modes of dissemination, including the intended audience
- Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without notice or reason (Burton et al., 2014)

Interviews took place over the telephone to minimise disruption to the SENCOs, and therefore the majority of communication regarding informed consent was via email. I asked SENCOs to give their consent electronically, either by signing the letter and emailing it back to me or by giving their consent in an email. In addition to being a convenient

approach for the SENCos, this approach also allowed time and space for the SENCo to reflect upon nature and purpose, as well as the potential demands, of the study. The potential participants would have time to read over, at their leisure, the information (Hart and Bond, 1995 cited in Bell, 2005), which I hoped would again minimise the issue of a lack of a gatekeeper. It could be argued that individually customised communications, tailored to each setting, may have been appropriate, for example, if a school was part of a wider multi-academy trust (Burton et al., 2014). However, while this was not deemed necessary due to the homogenous nature of the group, it is an issue worthy of consideration for future research.

One element which was not explored explicitly as part of the consenting process was the potential consequence of involvement for the participants (Israel, 2015). It could be argued that this was not a primary consideration because the study was asking SENCos to reflect on past activities, rather than encouraging action. This assumption was made on the premise that the participants understood the nature of the study and were able to hypothesise the potential impact of the study. In addition to this, informed consent was not sought from the head teachers of the school, as the study related specifically to the role of the SENCo. It is notable, however, that all participants sought permission from their head teachers before taking part in the study. This raises an interesting question for future research regarding the breadth of who should be consulted regarding informed consent.

### **5.19 Protection from harm and minimising disruption**

Protecting the participants from harm should be central to any research conducted; ‘first, do not harm should drive every action and decision’ (Mears, 2012: 173). However, the term ‘harm’ is open to debate which can make the concept of protection problematic (Israel, 2015: 126). Initially, care was taken to ensure that the interviews and questions were appropriate and fit for purpose. This was achieved through liaison with my supervisors and the pilot study processes. However, there were additional protections that needed consideration.

In this instance, I included disruption to participants as a potential harm. The study asked for a commitment from the participants, initially through questionnaires and latterly through interviews over a sustained period. A time commitment was indicated to the

SENCOs. All interviews were over the telephone and times for the interviews were suggested by the participants. If a participant did not respond or was unable to take part in the arranged telephone call, I emailed once to ask for re-arrangement.

In addition to this, I was mindful that involvement with the study might also bring about potential opportunities and benefits for the participants, particular in relation to making sense of their role (Israel, 2015). This assumption was proved, in two known cases, to be correct. Two participants requested the transcripts, as they felt it provided evidence of the breadth of their role which they wanted to share with their senior managers. Participants frequently commented, at the end of the interviews, that they found the process of talking about their role useful.

However, despite the potential benefits of taking part in the study, it was also notable that there could be potential issues. Participants, particularly those within phase three, were taking part in the study at a potentially challenging point of their careers. The SENCOs were relatively new to a complex and challenging role at a time of wider educational change, particularly regarding policy. The participants were being asked to reflect on activities and experiences that they may not have been explored without my involvement. As such it was important that participants were aware that they should only share what they want to and cease the interview at any point. This also required sensitivity on the part of the interviewer, to be aware when the conversation was moving towards a potentially delicate area. As a precaution, all participants were offered the transcripts to enable them to check their input. This has not yet been requested, except using the transcripts for sharing content as discussed above. Participants were also offered a 'debriefing', although no one has taken up this opportunity yet.

However, an additional consideration was the potential of disruption to the school. The interviews at phase three had the potential to bring about issues which may impact on how the SENCO viewed their position within their setting. Equally, the process may have allowed the SENCOs time and space to reflect on their alignment to policy (Ball et al., 2012; Brundrett, 2011), which could cause potential disruption to the school. However, it could be argued that disruption was mitigated because the semi-structured interviews were reflective, and the interviews were not seeking to discuss any potential changes. This was not a piece of action research, and therefore the interviews were unlikely to

raise issues regarding fairness and inclusion (Burton et al., 2014). It is, however, impossible to ascertain whether there was a specific impact on the school through the SENCo taking part in this study, positive or otherwise.

## **5.20 The researcher and participant relationship**

In addition to informed consent and disruption for the participant, the potential impact of the researcher and participant relationship on the data needed to be considered. As Mears (2012) states, trust and rapport can create an environment for sharing. Certainly, at phase three as the interviews developed a more conversational tone also developed. At times this meant that the interviews moved off topic. As a researcher, I had to determine how to negotiate this. I had a duty of care to my participants (Burton et al., 2014) which, it could be argued, meant that I needed to allow SENCos time and space to reflect and share their ideas as determined by the nature of a semi-structured interview. At the same time, I was acutely aware that divergence from the interviews could mean that areas I had hoped to cover could be missed. Information that was shared as part of a conversation, and not relevant to the research aims and questions, has been discarded. Through the interviews, I allowed time and space, particularly if SENCos clearly wanted to speak about a particular topic. However, when appropriate, I endeavoured to draw the interview back to the specific focus.

Another consideration was the power relationship between the researcher and the participant. To a degree my position, as a previous SENCo, gave me 'insider status', yet my role as a previous tutor to the participants presented a potential power imbalance (Burton et al., 2014: 82). Therefore at the start of every interview, I re-iterated the ethical considerations, including confidentiality, the right to withdraw and reporting anonymously. I also explained the premise of the study, reminding participants that I was looking to report their experience of the SEND reforms rather than looking to evaluate their responses.

To further mitigate the issues of power and potential imbalance, I ensured that participants had access to transcriptions post interview. At each subsequent interview, the participants were reminded of this opportunity. To an extent, this infers to the participant that they had ownership over the research (Burton et al., 2014). For future research, this is an issue I would like to give greater consideration to, as I believe

developing ownership may help address issues related to power and accuracy when reporting results.

### **5.21 The role of the researcher**

While there were issues regarding the relationship between researcher and participant to consider, there were also ethical issues specifically relating to my role as a researcher which needed consideration. It could be argued that the beliefs, knowledge, and values I hold underpinned my behaviour as a researcher (BERA, 2011). Therefore my prior experience as a SENCo may have counted as an advantage. However, this equally means that the study will include my perceptions, as a researcher and therefore it is reasonable to suggest that this may impact on the interpretation of results. Supervision allowed me to explore key areas of concern, regarding any bias I may bring to study, particularly the interpretation of results. Careful consideration has been given to the impartial reporting of data.

The likelihood of a participant sharing concerns and requesting advice was also considered a potential concern for the researcher. Due to the nature of the study, as well as the relationship of tutor – student, it was possible that SENCos would share concerns or request advice. To support this process transparency was required throughout the process, particularly due to the limitations of my role.

### **5.22 Reporting of results: anonymity**

Ensuring anonymity was paramount for all SENCos, particularly given the sensitive information they were sharing. It could be argued that the sharing of such information might have adverse consequences for the participants (Israel, 2015); particularly if the participant was seen to be critical of their institution. Israel (2015) also asserts that it is the participant's right to have an assurance of anonymity. Therefore I have reported the results either as a group or using a pseudonym, to ensure that individual SENCos cannot be identified. In addition to this to preserve anonymity, I have restricted the amount of detail regarding the individual circumstances of each SENCo. I purposefully did not go into depth regarding the type of school, phase, stage, additional roles for each SENCo. Instead, I decided to report on these factors as a group. While it could be argued that this has compromised the depth of analysis about specific school circumstances, my overriding consideration was the need to protect and ensure the anonymity I had assured my

participants of, which was also their right (BERA, 2011). The geographical area of the study was known, and I made the judgement that some schools could potentially be identified if specific information was provided.

However, anonymity was not just a consideration for the reporting of results. This was also necessary for all sorting of data, including audio files. Transcripts of the audio files were made; all names and identifying characteristics were removed, except the participant's first name. These were stored securely in both soft and hard copy. Audio files will be destroyed post completion of the study. Transcripts will remain securely stored for future reference, by the participants or researcher.

It should be noted that confidentiality and anonymity specifically in relation to reporting were promised. Due to my relationship with the participants, at phases one, two and three, participation was not fully anonymous as I knew the participants. However, it could be argued that phases four and five did provide full and complete anonymity (Bell, 2005).

### **5.23 Reporting of results: integrity**

The integrity of the researcher is paramount during a period of research; and this is particularly true when reporting research (Israel, 2015). Throughout the reporting of results, it was essential to think about the nature of the information the SENCOs were sharing, Mears suggests that it is essential to be aware of one's assumptions, and not to 'take for granted that you understand everything you hear' (2012: 23). As a researcher, I was bound ethically to report stories honestly and accurately (Mears, 2012). In addition to this, it was important to appreciate that the SENCOs may be sharing information, at the moment, that did not truly reflect their overarching or enduring beliefs. For example, a particularly difficult conversation with a parent just before the interview may have impacted on their position during the interview. This not only highlighted the importance of the frequency of the interviews but enabled the emergence of reoccurring themes as well as providing opportunities for fact checking with participants. Equally, the later phases allowed the data to be nested within wider data sets, thus the cross-referencing of emerging themes. In addition to this, it was important to consider the individual narratives; a lack of endorsement from other sources does not make the information less valid for that individual.

## **5.24 Summary of ethical considerations**

This chapter has explored the ethical issues which were identified before embarking on the study and the steps which were taken to either minimise or mitigate these issues. This included ensuring that, prior to opting into the research, the potential participants were informed not only of the nature and purpose of the research but also the process which they were agreeing to participate in and the intended use of the data (BERA, 2011). The right to withdraw at any time was clearly stated throughout all phases. Issues related to confidentiality and anonymity, both throughout the data collection and reporting phases have been a primary consideration for this study. In addition to this issues related to the participant and researcher relationship, particularly during the data collection periods, were explored. These centred around a potential power imbalance, but also a deepening researcher- participant relationship which at times impacted on the data collection. It is hoped that, through identifying and addressing the issues above, the study 'reached an ethically sound position' (BERA, 2011: 4).



## **Chapter 6: Results**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the data analysis approach adopted for this study, thematic analysis (TA), and the rationale for this choice. The data from phase one is reported, predominantly within themes, with phase two data used to illustrate themes further. It is intended that data from phases one and two provide the wider context before the phase three interviews which focused on in-depth interviews regarding the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms. Phases one and two specifically focus on the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCo) feelings of preparedness, policy priorities and their role.

### **6.2 Analysis approach**

The aim of the study was to take an interpretivist, specifically phenomenological approach thus enabling the individual experience to be set within the wider context. Bryman (2012) argues that through taking an interpretivist approach to research, there are three levels of interpretation occurring. The three levels, Bryman suggests, relate to the researcher's interpretation in relation to concepts, theories and literature. Braun and Clarke (2013) agree, suggesting that during the reporting of results the researcher places their interpretation of the reported events, as interpreted by the participant.

Given such considerations, it was imperative to have an analysis plan (Guest et al., 2012). As discussed in the methodology chapter, the interpretative phenomenological approach to analysis had been discounted in favour of TA. TA has grown to become a widely used method and is now more generally accepted (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) do note, however, as discussed in the methodology chapter, that the approach provides a method for data analysis rather than a specific methodology. Braun and Clarke cite some positive attributes of the TA approach, particularly for the early career researcher, which are relevant to this study. It is flexible and adaptable. Themes can be identified through the data either in a top down or bottom up way, which supports the exploration of theoretical ideas.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that through using a TA approach it is possible to apply a method to allow either complete or selective coding to take place. For this study, I

decided to code the data completely. Complete coding focuses on identifying all the elements of data that are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). It allows the reporting of themes and subthemes. Codes are determined through re-reading of the raw data, which enables the researcher to remain close to the data. When considering the nature, purpose, breadth and depth of the study, the TA approach, and in particular undertaking the complete coding approach, allowed for the identification of codes which were relevant to the research questions, whilst also allowing selective reporting and a reduction of data during the analysis phase (Guest et al., 2012). As Newby (2014) states, with the presence of clear research aims and questions it is not a requirement, or indeed possible, to use all data.

### **6.3 Data analysis plan**

Both the questionnaire and interview data have been reviewed in depth following the protocol as set out by Braun and Clarke (2013). It is noteworthy that the plan adopted is similar in nature to procedures outlined by Hyncer (1985, cited in Cohen et al., 2011) regarding how to phenomenologically analyse an interview. The process initially involved developing familiarity with the data. For the questionnaire data, this took the form of repeated reading of the questionnaires followed by initial analysis. For phases two and three, the interview stages, this process began with complete transcription. Complete transcription included all pauses and speech fillers (Newby, 2014) (See Appendix 6.1 for an example of a transcribed interview). Subsequent repeated listening to, and reading of, the data ensured that I was aware of speech inflection. This not only allowed the emergence of points of interest which were then cross-referenced to the research aims and questions but also ensured that I was aware of the tone of voice with a direct aim to report 'authentic voice' (Bailey, 2008 cited in Newby, 2014: 465). This was important because the interviews were not carried out face to face and therefore elements of communication had already been lost, for example, gestures and mannerisms (Newby, 2014). The questionnaires and interviews were coded, completely, in light of the selected research questions and aims in relation to familiarity with the data and emerging ideas. The codes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke are both individual and inter-related (2013).

Initially, there were 105 codes in the whole data set; although it should be noted that there were fewer codes identified from within the questionnaires (See Appendix 6.2 for the list of codes used). Newby (2014) suggests that any more than fifty codes can be

difficult to deal with. However, through the second coding process, it was clear that there was some overlap between codes which led to a small reduction. For each phase the codes were then individually analysed by searching for themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013); 'the coding process lies at the heart of transforming data into information' (Newby, 2014; 471). Codes were later grouped as both implicit and explicit examples of the themes. Following a review of the codes and seeking of themes, the data was organised into themes, and for phase three, subthemes.

For this study, I have opted to carry out the coding myself, rather than use a computer software package. In part, I felt that this would be beneficial and would enable me to remain close to the data and to ensure, particularly when listening back to the interviews, that I was aware of any nuances. As an early career researcher, I believed this to be a useful process to go through (Newby, 2014).

While a complete approach to coding was taken, it was imperative to ensure that there was a reduction of data. This was not particularly problematic for the questionnaires. However, it did become an issue as the data collection progressed, particularly at phase three, interview stage. During this phase it was clear that I had underestimated two aspects: a) the high level and breadth of detail SENCos would give me through the semi-structured interviews and b) the influence of the developing relationship between the researcher and participant which resulted in longer than anticipated interviews, which also became more interactive and conversational in nature. Both of these elements led to a large amount of interview data. This was particularly evident as the year progressed.

The developing researcher-participant relationship resulted in an increase in the sharing of information by the participant, not all of which was relevant to the study's aims and questions. This is illustrated through the data transcriptions and has meant that ensuring impartiality and coverage of all areas within the semi-structured interview was a challenge. This further illuminated the importance of the additional, questionnaire phases to situate the rich data from the interviews. However, conversely the later interviews were also partly more successful as a pattern of conversation had been established; my input noticeably reduced. However, the issue of participants going 'off topic' remained and, as a consequence, has led to a natural reduction in data due to discounting leading

questions or elements which the SENCoS wanted to discuss but, ultimately, are not relevant when concerned with the focus of this study.

## **6.4 Reporting of results**

As reported above, the longer term interviews are nested within wider data sets. Therefore the data has been reported in a chronological manner, which reflects this methodological approach. Pseudonyms have been used throughout, as discussed in the ethics section, for the reporting of interview data.

### **Phase one and two:**

Results have been reported from the questionnaire. This consists of basic quantitative data along with the thematic analysis of themes emerging from the questionnaires which were coded. Phase two data has been woven within the reporting of phase one data to further illustrate specific instances of themes.

The themes explored and reported upon were:

- Awareness of the SEND reforms
- Understanding of the SEND reforms
- Sources of support
- Feelings of preparedness for the SEND reforms
- Themes related specifically to the role of the SENCo:
  - I am a leader
  - I am a supporter
  - I am a problem solver
  - Trying to shift a culture
  - There are practical barriers I cannot change

### **Phase three:**

Phase three results have been reported through a thematic analysis of interview data. Data has been reported through overarching, main themes and organised within two thematic maps: *Response to Policy* and *The role of the SENCo*. The interview data has

been used for illustrative purposes, which aims to ‘tell the story of the data’ (Braun and Clark, 2013:252; Newby, 2014).

- Response to policy
  - It’s a culture of change
  - Thinking about new legislation
  - I want more support
  - No impact, except for the impact
- The role of the SENCo
  - I am responsible
  - I am an advocate
  - It’s just me
  - There are school barriers to my role
  - I find solutions

#### **Phase four and five:**

Basic quantitative data has been reported from the questionnaires at phases four and five (See Appendices 9.1 and 9.2 for ample responses at phases four and five respectively). The data has been presented together to allow a comparison between the two phases. The areas reported upon include:

- Views regarding support received with implementing the SEND reforms
- Barriers and enablers to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms
- SENCo identified priorities as a result of the SEND reforms
- Perceived impact of the SEND reforms
- Perceived impact on the role of the SENCo as a result of the SEND reforms.

The results are reported in the following chapters:

Phase	Period of data collection	Number of participants	Results Chapter
Phase one: Questionnaires	July 2014	54 SENCos	Chapter 7
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	July – September 2014	9 SENCos	
Phase three: Semi-structured interviews	September 2014 – July 2015	9 SENCos	Chapter 8: Thematic map 1 Chapter 9: Thematic map 2
Phase four: Questionnaires	March 2015	74 SENCos	Chapter 10
Phase five: Questionnaires	July 2015	40 SENCos	

**Table 6.1: Overview of presentation of results**

## 6.5 Results: Phases one and two

Phase	Period of data collection	Number of participants	Results Chapter
Phase one: Questionnaires	July 2014	54 SENCos	Chapter 7
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	July – September 2014	9 SENCos	
Phase three: Semi-structured interviews	September 2014 – July 2015	9 SENCos	Chapter 8: Thematic map 1 Chapter 9: Thematic map 2
Phase four: Questionnaires	March 2015	74 SENCos	Chapter 10
Phase five: Questionnaires	July 2015	40 SENCos	

**Table 6.2: Overview of presentation of results**

As discussed within the methodology chapter, the reporting of results from phases one and two have been purposefully limited. This is due to considerations related to the validity of the data due to the nature of the sample (convenience) and the potential Hawthorne effect (Newby, 2014). However, this is not to disregard the data as it does allow the scene to be set before the implementation of the SEND reforms.

The questionnaire was designed to allow for the collection of basic quantitative, as well as qualitative, data to provide an overview of responses and the development of emerging themes. Therefore data has been directly reported, alongside the thematic analysis of the data in relation to the study's aims and questions. Phase two data has been used to provide further illustrative examples regarding emerging themes.

Fifty-four SENCos completed the questionnaire (See Appendix 5.2 for phase one final questionnaire). All respondents were SENCos, although one person was an assistant SENCo. Thirty-three of the SENCos held additional teaching responsibilities in addition to the role of SENCo. Six of the respondents were deputy head teachers. Three people were

head teachers, one of which also had teaching responsibilities. Twelve of the respondents had no other responsibilities other than the role of the SENCo. Of the fifty-four respondents, forty-one worked in a primary school, and thirteen worked in a secondary school.

Phase two, as described with the methodology, consisted of nine participants from nine different schools who had opted in to the research. The schools were located within four unitary authorities and one borough council. There were five primary schools and four secondary schools. At the time of data collection, the schools represented a mix of both Local Authority (LA) controlled and Academy schools, with two primary academies and three secondary academies. All participants themselves were relatively new to the role of SENCo. All, bar one, had been in the post for one year at the start of the research. One participant had been an assistant SENCo and taken on the role of SENCo at the start of the research. All participants had recently undertaken the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo).

The following section reports basic quantitative data which is derived from the SENCos' responses to questions related to their awareness of the SEND reforms, along with their (and others) understanding of the SEND reforms. The data also reports on the various sources of support SENCos drew upon regarding gaining information about the SEND reforms and, more specifically, how to implement the reforms in their schools. Finally, the results report the SENCos' feelings of preparedness about the implementation of the SEND reforms.

The themes which emerged from the open ended questions within the questionnaire related specifically to the role of the SENCo (See Appendix 5.2 for phase one final questionnaire). A dominant theme throughout was the leadership nature of the role; this led to the creation of the themes *I am a leader* and *Trying to shift a culture*. Both themes reflected how the SENCo felt not only about their role but also the purpose of their role during a period of policy implementation. However, the idea of leadership was multi-faceted and lead to the creation of subsequent themes *I am a supporter* and *I am a problem solver*. These themes reflected how the SENCos approached the role, but also their thoughts of where their role sat within the wide policy network within the school. Linked to the idea of being a problem solver was also the pragmatic acceptance that there



were barriers within the school which impacted on the execution of the SENCo role and were likely to impact on the implementation of the SEND reforms. This led to the creation of the final theme *Practical barriers I cannot change*.

## **6.6 Awareness of the SEND reforms**

The data from Phase one indicated that all the SENCos were aware of the SEND reforms. This is not only reflected in the Likert scale responses to the statement, 'I am aware of the SEND reforms' but also the comments SENCos made within the questionnaire regarding the tasks they were prioritising; comments made reflected new policy language and awareness of upcoming change. This is unsurprising given that all the respondents had just completed the NA SENCo; a key learning outcome within the NA SENCo is to understand and keep up to date with statutory policy (NCTL, 2014).

However, the data also suggested that wider awareness of the SEND reforms within the respondents' schools was limited. Only 11% of SENCos (n= 6) felt that parents in their schools whose children had SEN were aware of the reforms. None of the SENCos who completed the questionnaire felt that the pupils who had Special Educational Needs (SEN) in their school were aware of the SEND reforms. 67% of SENCos (n=36) felt that teachers were aware of the SEND reforms. Additionally, 96% of SENCos (n=52) felt head teachers were aware, and 69% of SENCos (n=37) felt governors were aware of the reforms. This was also reflected in the interviews at phase two. Lucy's remark was typical of the responses, 'I would say leadership here are very well informed, but the rest of the staff maybe not so much'.

However, this is the SENCos' perspective, and therefore we cannot assume that this accurately represents the actual awareness of the various stakeholders. This was not explored further and would be pertinent to follow up. Yet, from the perspective of the SENCo, awareness of the reforms among pupils and parents was low and this may have consequently influenced the actions which the SENCo planned to take subsequently; this is further discussed as part of the thematic analysis of the data at this stage, resulting in the theme *Trying to shift a culture*. Additionally as one SENCo, Amy, pointed out, little could be done until they [the SENCos] were sure of the exact nature and content of the reforms, 'I think most people [SENCos] just need to have a "right you need to do this, and this is how you do it"' which had resulted in a cautious approach to action. This again may

have resulted in a lower than expected level of awareness, particularly amongst teachers and parents.

## **6.7 Understanding of the SEND reforms**

It is important to draw a clear distinction between awareness and understanding, whilst also being mindful that one's perception is not necessarily reality or the perception of others. Therefore these results reflect not only the perception of the SENCo but also their interpretation, at the time, of the term 'understanding'. 76% (n=42) of SENCos either agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the SEND reforms, again perhaps influenced by the fact that they had just completed the NA SENCo. This was not represented within the other groups. In line with the earlier data, 0% of SENCos felt that pupils understood the reforms. 4% of SENCos (n=2) felt that parents understood the reforms. In comparison with the 67% of SENCos (n=36) who thought teachers were aware of the reforms, only 13% of SENCos (n=7) thought that their teachers understood the reforms. 69% of SENCos (n=37) felt that head teachers understood the reforms and 24% of SENCos (n=13) thought their Governing Body understood the reforms. It should be noted that this data gave an indication; the questionnaire did not explore the perceived extent of each groups' understanding or the SENCos' rationale for this judgement. It should also be noted, that the questionnaire was administered prior to the publication of the final Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) which may have influenced this result.

## **6.8 Sources of support**

The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) states that the role of the SENCo is central at both a strategic and operational level, yet the role is typically executed by one person. Therefore I wanted to consider the sources of support the SENCo could draw upon to execute the implementation of the SEND reforms. 61% of SENCos (n= 33) agreed or strongly agreed that they had received support from their head teacher with getting ready for the SEND reforms. 33% (n=18) received support from the Governing Body and 78% (n=42) had received support from other SENCos. All the SENCos who responded had accessed a SENCo/ mentor group in their locality over the past year due to the NA SENCo, which may have influenced this result. All of the SENCos at phase two were part of a network of colleagues from other schools; some formed through LAs, but increasingly formed independently as clusters of schools. One SENCo, from phase two, explained that their

cluster group had decided to look at all the various aspects of the SEND reforms together, in terms of planning for and implementing change. This was echoed by another two SENCOs through the phase two interviews. In a similar view to interpreting the term 'understanding' the term 'support' is open to interpretation, both in terms of level and nature, therefore this was a focus for exploration throughout phase three.

Lastly, 91% (n=49) of SENCOs agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted more support to prepare for the changes, with 94% (n=51) wanting more support with the implementation of the SEND reforms. Seven of the nine SENCOs reported through their interviews at phase two that they felt there had been a lack of support and information from the LA, although interestingly only two SENCOs explicitly stated that they wanted more support from the LA. Frustration was certainly evident with Clare stating, 'In fact the last one [SEND reform session] I went to I left early because what they tend to do is they tell us the same thing all over again'. Amy later similarly agreed, stating,

At the beginning of the term, they [the LA] then offered SENCOs twilight sessions to talk about the reform, but those people who have been from my cluster said they were a complete waste of time and it was very much a moaning session.

Other SENCOs reported that they had carried out their own research because they felt that there had been a lack of support. Katie stated, '...there doesn't seem to be anywhere you can go to for advice, you just end up fishing around for it unfortunately'. In terms of 'fishing around' the National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN) was repeatedly mentioned as the organisation SENCOs were going to for further advice.

## **6.9 Feelings of preparedness for SEND reform**

In terms of implementation, only 13% of SENCOs (n=7) agreed with the statement: *I feel confident that the LA is ready for the proposed changes*. This was further echoed at a school level through the interviews at phase two. Six of the nine SENCOs commented explicitly that they did not feel prepared to implement the reforms in the forthcoming academic year, which directly linked to the level of support they felt that they had received. When Anna was asked 'How prepared to you feel at this time?' her response was, 'Hardly at all to be honest'. Although she did later qualify this stating, 'I feel prepared in terms of what just happens in school'; this inferred that there were concerns

related to preparation at a wider level. Another SENCo, Amy, laughed when asked, 'How prepared do you feel at this time?'

Phase two interviews illustrated that the SENCos did not feel prepared for the introduction of the SEND reforms. Such feelings were related not only to the speed at which the SEND reforms came in, but also the subsequent view that there was a lack of direction on how to implement the SEND reforms. All SENCos referred to the LA throughout the interviews, suggesting that this is the avenue from which they expected support and guidance, echoing the views at phase one. This infers that the perceived challenges lay outside of school; this was echoed when they later cited concerns about how statutory duties related to SEN, which are the remit of the LA, will be executed. For one SENCo this linked to the practical execution of the SEND reforms, noting that despite agreeing with the theory of the SEND reforms, they had concerns relating to how the change in policy would work in a practical sense.

## **6.10 Thematic analysis of phase one**

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of open ended questions which allowed SENCos to freely comment on the following areas:

- How the SENCos felt their role was perceived in school
- Issues which SENCos felt impacted on the execution of their role
- Identified priorities for the SENCo emerging from the SEND reforms
- Issues which the SENCo predicted would impact on the implementation of the SEND reforms in their setting.

Complete coding in relation to the research aims and questions has led to the development of clear themes emerging from the responses. The themes have been reported in depth below.

### **Theme 1: I am a leader**

The theme *I am a leader* encapsulated the responses from the SENCos when they were asked how they, and others including parents and teachers, viewed the role of the SENCo. The theme was characterised by responses which made frequent references to not only the breadth and depth of the role, but also the leadership nature of the role. In part, the

theme highlighted the sometimes precarious balance SENCoS faced when negotiating the operational and strategic aspects of the role. SENCoS commented on how they were 'the co-ordinators of provision' yet also described how they were viewed as a 'leader' and suggested that at times other people, in particular parents and teachers, 'viewed them as an expert'. One SENCo commented that her head teacher viewed the role as, 'Essential. I am a policy implementer and role model' with another adding that her role was to, 'ensure SEN issues are seen as a priority'. This links closely to the later theme *Trying to shift a culture* which explores how SENCoS saw themselves as responsible for leading cultural change, while further illustrating the tensions between working both operationally and strategically.

Throughout the theme, the idea of leadership was intrinsically linked to the notion of responsibility. Many of the SENCoS made reference to the pressure of feeling solely accountable and responsible for SEN. These feelings extended beyond the remit of progress accountability measures, with the SENCoS describing how they were responsible for challenging teachers regarding provision for children with SEND and at times some of the comments resonated with the pressure of this, with one SENCo remarking, '[The teachers] expected me to be an instant expert'. For others, the roles were reversed with the SENCo applying pressure to the teachers to act regarding SEND. One SENCo stated, 'I am thought of as the demanding one' and another, possibly more tongue in cheek response, suggested that teachers viewed her as 'being annoying'. It is an interesting consideration, however, why SENCoS may hold this perception that they are asking for 'more' and 'are being demanding' of teachers and whether this is replicated in other areas of the curriculum, or whether this is something specific to SEND, or specific to post policy reform.

## **Theme 2: I am a supporter**

The theme *I am a supporter* drew together the responses from SENCoS that whilst they viewed themselves, and felt others viewed them, as leaders, the role was multi-faceted and for many, this included a strong pastoral element. The theme drew together the ideas from SENCoS that, in addition to operational and strategic elements of the role, there was a strong need to be an advocate for both the parent and the child. Specific terms such as 'advocate', 'advisor' and 'mediator' were frequently used when describing

the role throughout phase one. One SENCo commented in response to the question, 'How do parents/ carers view my primary role?' '[I am the] person to advocate for their child'. This was later echoed in the phase two interviews. Katie's view of herself as an advocate for the child was compelling, 'As far as I am concerned the children have always come first and that's what we need to be looking at'. SENCos did remark, during phase one, that part of their role was to challenge teachers which may also reflect the level of advocacy taking place for the child and parent whilst also reflecting the feelings discussed within the theme *I am a leader*, which explored the idea of responsibility to challenge teachers. However, the term 'advocate' did not extend to how SENCos thought teachers viewed the role. SENCos reported that teachers came to them for guidance and advice, the term 'advocate' was not referred to when discussing the view of the teachers in either phase one or phase two. SENCos did not report that they advocating for teachers, either to parents or senior managers.

### **Theme 3: I am a problem solver**

An extension of the theme related to *I am a supporter* was the notion of supporting and helping others to find solutions, or being the solution finder. This led to the creation of the theme *I am a problem solver*. This was predominantly a theme which was evident when commenting on the how SENCos felt their role was viewed by parents and teachers; the SENCos described themselves as being seen as problem solvers, on the behalf of others. One SENCo summarised their role with regards to teachers as, 'Guiding them on all aspects of SEND, helping them with paperwork, meeting with parents and advising on resources and approaches'. Others were more direct and when asked to complete the statement 'Teachers view my primary role as...' one SENCo replied, 'Sorting out the problems arising from SEN pupils' with another commenting, 'Fixing the problems so they can get on with teaching'. This certainly begs the question, what do the SENCos feel about this view and how do they approach it? This may, in turn, reflect in the themes *I am a leader and I am a supporter*, which encapsulated how SENCos felt the need to advocate for children.

#### **Theme 4: Trying to shift a culture**

The theme *Trying to shift a culture* explored and brought together the SENCos' responses to policy change, and encapsulated their views regarding the premise and purpose of the SEND reforms. A number of the SENCos felt that they were trying to effect cultural change, specifically within their setting. There was a clear feeling of consensus that action needed to happen and, consequently, things would change. It would have been useful to have explored this question further as to whether this is in response to taking on a new role in a setting, or specifically due to the SEND reforms. As Clare remarked at phase two, 'I don't know if it [the changes she has made] is to do with the changes in legislation or due to the fact that I can see a better way of doing it'. However, for some the distinction was clear; change would be taking place and for some this was an enforced change, whilst for others it provided opportunity with one SENCo stating at phase one, 'I would hope that a shift of culture could start as a consequence'.

In a practical sense, the theme was also represented through the priorities which respondents had identified relating to the SEND reforms. Many of the planned activities related to the 'musts' in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) (See Appendix 6.3 for statutory requirements of the SEND Code DfE and DoH, 2015). However, Anna reported in phase two that she had gone through and highlighted exactly what she 'had to do', specifically the statutory activities, or the 'musts'. Activities mentioned by the SENCos included the requirement to publish statutory information on their website, including the school local offer and a reviewed SEND policy.

The most commonly cited activities at phase one were:

- Writing the School contribution to the Local Offer
- Review of how to engage parents
- Training for staff
- Review SEND policy
- Review move to SEN support

The idea of developing a clear overview and plan in terms of responding to statutory requirements was evident throughout all of the questionnaires and interviews at phases one and two. However for a number of SENCos, the activities and foci they commented

upon extended beyond the statutory requirements of the SEND reforms. A number of SENCOs commented throughout phase one about the increased focus and importance on engaging with parents, informing teachers and developing pupil voice as part of their role. These are elements which relate closely to the central principles of the SEND reforms. An increased commitment to pupil focused work was also central to a number of the interviews at phase two. Five SENCOs mentioned that they would be looking further at pupil centred work, with three citing that they would be introducing one page profiles for children to support this aim (See Appendix 6.4 for example One Page Profile). Lucy's view was typical of a number of the responses from SENCOs, 'I'm very aware of all the changes, of that need for increased participation of pupils and parents so it's a more joined up approach'.

However, the theme also reflected the concern that trying to effect cultural change was a complex process which involved a number of factors which extended beyond the development of new processes and systems. A concern which emerged from the theme *Trying to shift a culture* related to the SENCOs' perception of teacher resistance to change. One SENCO commented at phase one that difficulty lay with the teachers' perception of inclusion, and its importance, within the school. Another SENCO remarked that one of their main issues was 'teacher resistance to responsibility for SEND children'. Whilst this could be viewed in a negative light, Sam gave an interesting explanation for this at phase two,

There's a fear in the teaching staff to be honest where I am saying, "we need to engage with parents", "everyone is a teacher of pupils with special needs", "everyone is involved" and I think there is a feeling of "I'm not qualified. I can't do this"... So there is a fear and I think there is a fear of engaging with parents.

However, a more widely highlighted concern was the impact of competing policy priorities within the school, predominately this related to Ofsted as well as the introduction of the new curriculum. One SENCO commented that her role was, 'encouraging quality first teaching and the support to do this within a new curriculum'. Charlotte described the pressure she faced with other competing priorities,

I think it depends on the position your school is in [as to] what becomes a priority, so I think the priority at the moment here is exam results and sometimes I feel like SEN doesn't really come into that.



Charlotte's comment infers that the level of seniority attached to the SENCo role may impact on how priorities are determined within a school. Within phase one, the theme *I am a leader* did not highlight the seniority of the SENCo role, specifically whether the SENCo was part of the SLT, and therefore this was an important focus for phase three. The theme *Trying to shift a culture* also captured the SENCos feelings as to how they were going to practically proceed in terms of actions. It is noteworthy that one of the most commonly cited actions for the new academic year was training for staff. This took many guises, including presentations to SLT, governors as well as training for staff planned for In-service Training Day (INSET) days or through twilight sessions. Some SENCos noted that they had this planned, whilst others were waiting for further information but had plans to put this in place.

#### **Theme 5: There are practical barriers I cannot change**

The theme *There are practical barriers I cannot change* captured how the SENCos felt about their role and the theme specifically explored the barriers which the SENCos felt prevented them moving forward, not only with their role but also the implementation of the SEND reforms. Whilst the SENCos identified a number of barriers, reported below, it was also clear through the SENCos' comments both at phase one and phase two, such barriers were viewed as 'part and parcel' of the role. This could potentially demonstrate a level of acceptance and passivity to effecting change in this area, or could be the result of ongoing pressures which had become an accepted part of the role over time.

One issue which presented a barrier was the restricted access to resources. This included access to wider resources such as access to external agencies. One SENCo commented at phase one that she was concerned about 'engaging external services, including health, for joint working'. Additional reported concerns linked to communication with external agencies and their own understanding of the SEND reforms and related processes. However, concerns also related to school based resources, notably finance with a number of SENCos stating 'money' as a concern and a barrier. At a time of wider educational reform, some SENCos referred to changes to academy status and the impact this has on accessing finances or decision making regarding provision. Changes to the school system had, for some, brought in another layer of financial management which was impacting on their access to resources.

However, for the majority of participants lack of time was an overwhelming factor and this is central to the theme. Every SENCo who responded to the questionnaire cited this as a factor in both executing their role and implementing the SEND reforms. For some SENCos the issue of time impacted on the basic execution of the role, for others they identified the wider impact of a lack of time with one SENCo stating, 'Day to day demands get in the way of [the] strategic nature of the role'. This links closely to the previously discussed theme *I am a leader* and *Trying to shift a culture* and suggests that there may be a number of elements which impact on this particular facet of the role. This provided a further area to explore in phase three.

### **6.11 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the rationale for the data analysis approach taken with regards to the five phases of data. Broadly speaking a thematic approach was adopted across the five phases, through complete coding and development of themes in relation to the research questions and aims. Additionally, the chapter reported the initial findings from phases one and two in order to situate the longer term interviews at phase three and questionnaire findings at phases four and five.

Data from phase one indicated that the majority of SENCos were, prior to the formal introduction of the SEND reforms, aware of the nature of the reforms and they felt they had an understanding of the reforms. Awareness and understanding, from the perspective of the SENCo, was more limited in other groups; head teachers and governing bodies represented the groups with which SENCos felt had the highest level of awareness and understanding of the SEND reforms.

The thematic analysis of the data illustrated that the SENCos felt their role was broad and multi-faceted; however central to this was the notion of being a leader and problem solver. In addition to this SENCos identified with being a supporter; in particular an advocate for parents and children. Part of this role meant challenging teachers regarding issues related to an inclusive ethos, although SENCos reported that they were acutely aware of the additional, competing demands placed on teachers from other areas of the school and wider organisations.

Themes emerging from the data illustrated that SENCOs felt that as a result of the SEND reforms, or indeed as a consequence of the role itself, cultural change was likely to take place. For some this was an opportunity, for others it was a burden. The enactment of the priorities identified from the SEND reforms illustrated how the SENCOs felt they could, in part, lead cultural change in their setting. However, SENCOs recognised that there were practical and cultural issues which would impact on the development of such change. Practically this included a lack of time and resources, as well as a lack of guidance and clarity from the LAs. Culturally SENCOs perceived there to be some resistance to change by teachers, in part due to the importance they placed on the issue but also because of the competing policies the teachers were negotiating concurrently. However, partly in response to this, SENCOs viewed themselves as problem solvers. This was evidenced through the SENCOs response to 'teacher resistance' through the proposed development of systems and training but also how they and others viewed them; creative problem solvers who do as much as they can within the confines of internal and external pressures.

## Chapter 7: Phase three: Thematic Map One

### 7.1 Introduction

Phase	Period of data collection	Number of participants	Results Chapter
Phase one: Questionnaires	July 2014	54 SENCos	Chapter 7
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	July – September 2014	9 SENCos	
Phase three: Semi-structured interviews	September 2014 – July 2015	9 SENCos	Chapter 8: Thematic map 1 Chapter 9: Thematic map 2
Phase four: Questionnaires	March 2015	74 SENCos	Chapter 10
Phase five: Questionnaires	July 2015	40 SENCos	

**Table 7.1: Overview of presentation of results**

This chapter provides an overview of the participants who took part in phase three. The chapter details the nature and timing of the interviews and explores potential issues in relation to this. The chapter presents the findings from phase three through the first thematic map: *response to policy*. Each overarching theme is described and the subthemes which emerged from the research are presented with quotes from participants for illustration.

### 7.2 Phase three overview

Phase three marked the start of the regular, termly interviews with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo) over the course of the academic year 2014/ 2015. With regards to the phenomenological methodological approach adopted, this phase reflects on ‘how individuals make sense of the world around them’ (Bryman, 2012:31). The purpose of the phase is to provide a long term view of the experience of the SENCo and to build upon and explore the themes which emerged from phases one and two. Nine

participants agreed to be part of the study and therefore agreed to take part in six interviews over the course of the year. Table 7.2 below gives a basic overview of the participants. I have not provided an individual overview for each SENCo, as this could lead to identification; ethically anonymity is paramount for participants. However, additional context is provided within the reporting of the results, if relevant.

Of the 9 SENCos who participated in the interviews, how many...	
Worked in a primary school?	5
Worked in a secondary school?	4
Held additional teaching responsibilities?	2 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Held additional responsibilities in addition to SENCo/ teaching?	4 (Primary) 4 (Secondary)
Were non-teaching SENCos?	3 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) team?	1 (Primary) 2 (Secondary)
Were part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)?	1 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Were also deputy/ assistant head teachers?	1 (Secondary – also SLT)
Were also head teachers?	0
Worked within a Local Authority (LA) maintained school?	3 (Primary) 1 (Secondary)
Worked within a standalone academy?	1 (Primary)
Worked within a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?	1 (Primary) 3 (Secondary)
Worked in a teaching school?	1 (Primary)

**Table 7.2: Overview of participants**

Of the possible fifty-four interviews which were planned over the year, forty-two were carried out. Seven participants remained part of the project until the final interview. Two participants were unable to take part in the final interview but had been a regular part of the process up until this point. The interviews typically took place at the end of each new term, which was approximately every six to eight weeks. The interviews were planned to allow time and space for the individual to reflect back on the previous term. This happened for the majority of the time, however, in some instances, the interviews took place after the holiday (either ‘half- term’ break or seasonal holiday) and therefore this may have slightly distorted the data due to the way in which SENCos remembered the topics for discussion. Interviews ranged in length. The shortest interview was eleven

minutes, with the longest being fifty-two minutes. Typically interviews lasted between twenty – thirty minutes. Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone app and then manually transcribed into a word document.

The interviews have been reported within themes, following the complete coding of the interviews (See Appendix 6.1 for an example of a transcribed and coded interview). This was in line with the complete coding approach as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013) and as discussed in the data analysis plan. As described previously, the codes were identified in relation to the study's aims and questions. The themes emerged through grouping the coded responses within the interviews in response to the research aims and questions. While the themes were coded at each stage, the themes have been reported as a whole, across the year. The exception to this rule is if specific moments were identified as particular to a specific point in time. The rationale for this decision is two-fold. The codes which emerged did not appear to illustrate a specific pattern over the course of the year; a point which I will explore more in the discussion chapter. Additionally, where there did appear to be small anomalies related to the specific stage of the data collection, I have drawn attention to this within the description of the theme.

The themes have been organised into two thematic maps, which reflect the original study's aims and questions. The two thematic maps are based on a) *responses to policy* and b) *the role of the SENCo*. While these are presented as separate results, there is overlap between themes which has been explored in the subsequent discussion of results. As far as possible the titles for the themes and subthemes have been created using direct quotes from the participants. Pseudonyms have been used throughout, to ensure a more personalised reporting of results while preserving anonymity. Where direct quotes have been used for illustrative purposes, the term during which the interview took place has been given in brackets. For example, Term One (T1).

### 7.3 Thematic map 1: Response to policy

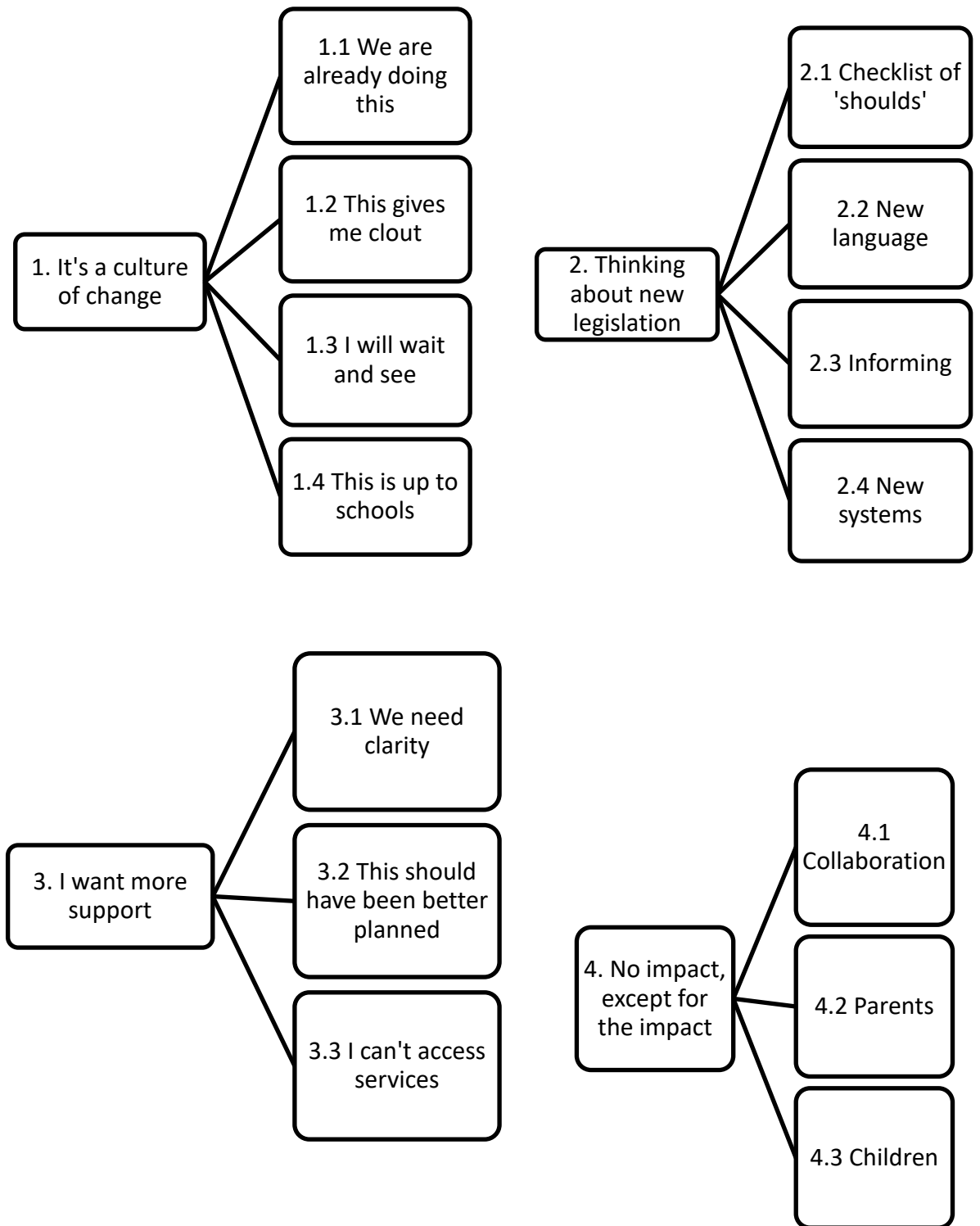


Figure 7.1: Thematic map 1: Response to policy

## 7.4 Discussion of themes

### Thematic Map 1: Response to policy

Before exploring the themes which emerged and have been grouped as responses to policy, it is important to clarify the specific policy changes to which the research, and the SENCos, were referring.

The 2015 Code states the underpinning principles which relate to the statutory requirements to have regard to the 'views, wishes and feelings of the child or young persons, and the child's parents (DfE and DoH, 2015: 19). Additionally, the 2015 Code places an increased emphasis on the role of the child (or young person) and the family; specifically their participation in decision making and the requirement that they should be supported within this process. The third principle relates to the nature of the support the child or young person receives. The principles are clear that the provision in place must support the development of the individual to 'help them achieve the best possible education and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 19) (See Appendix 2.1 for the principles of the SEND Code of Practice).

### Theme 1: It's a culture of change

The theme *It's a culture of change* grouped together SENCos' thoughts and feelings about the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, specifically about the concept of a change in policy and the perceived need for change in SEN practice within schools. The theme does not consider the types of change or the drivers behind the changes, and this is a point for further research. The theme was characterised by the participants' views regarding the principles of the reforms, and specifically, the degree to which they felt, both as an individual and within their schools, that they needed to respond and react and therefore change. The theme captured the SENCos' acknowledgement, and acceptance, that change was inevitable, to a degree. However while the principles of the SEND reforms were typically agreed with, specifically the increased involvement and collaboration with pupils and parents and an outcome focused system, frequent references were made regarding the relevance of the reforms and whether such principles needed to be stated so explicitly. Some SENCos suggested that their setting already had such principles in place.



While a number of SENCOs already felt their setting reflected the new principles of the SEND reforms, all SENCOs felt that there was likely to be an impact on children and schools in the medium (three years) and long-term (five+ years). Some SENCOs predicted the likely changes, while others suggested a more cautious ‘watch and wait’ approach. SENCOs also expressed the view that there would be immediate and longer term consequences for *their* role as a result of policy reform. The theme reflected acceptance from the SENCOs that change is inevitable. A number of SENCOs embraced change and six of the nine SENCOs specifically noted that policy reform could give the policy implementer an additional authority to implement change.

### **Subtheme 1.1: We are doing this already**

The subtheme *We were doing this already* developed from the theme *It’s a culture of change* with a specific focus on the view of the SENCO and their feelings towards the SEND reforms. Specifically, the sub-theme explored the idea that some SENCOs felt that the changes were not as momentous as they were expecting, or as had been advertised at a government level. Some participants remarked that the final guidance felt in line with their current practices, with some SENCOs expressing surprise that such basic principles needed to be made explicit. For example, Anna remarked,

It’s all very well and good saying, “well it is there in the Code of Practice”, and it just says “you must have regard to listening to parents”. Well, that’s our job anyway. I think from my point of view I find it staggering that there are probably schools out there not doing that. Someone down the line must have felt the need to put it in black and white (T1).

Amy agreed, albeit in a less direct way, by querying the changes. She commented, ‘I don’t feel there is a massive difference to what we were doing before’ (T2). Although it is noteworthy that both Anna and Amy remarked upon this in Term Two, which may have been too early for them to make an informed comparison. The Term Four interview with Emma explored this point further and gave an indication as to why the SENCOs may have felt this way. She stated,

Having done eight years as a Deputy SENCO, I have developed a really clear vision as to what I wanted to do and that vision hasn’t altered massively with the new Code of Practice to how I felt it was going (T4).

She subsequently reiterated, ‘I don’t think it is massively different to before if I am honest’. The idea of developing a ‘clear vision’ is interesting, as Emma implies her vision

aligns with that of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), which may not be the case for all SENCos as earlier inferred by Anna.

The responses of the SENCos suggest that they were concerned they had 'missed something'. Clare summed it up during the Term Six interview by remarking, 'I just wonder if I've missed something because it all seemed to be such a huge change and such a huge thing that was coming in... It's actually has been much more straightforward' (T6).

### **Subtheme 1.2: This gives me clout**

While the subtheme *We are doing this already* explored the idea that the SEND reforms did not necessarily represent an initial difference to SENCo practice, there was underlying agreement from the participants that there were benefits to legitimising the principles as outlined by the SEND reforms. This resulted in the subtheme, *This gives me clout*. Emma had remarked in Term Three that the SEND reforms, specifically the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), had given her 'credibility... legality' (T3). Later, in Term Four she stated that her day to day practice had not changed yet added, 'I guess the Code has facilitated me putting it [the key worker system] in place with some backing... So it has given me some clout which is great' (T4).

The idea of 'clout' resonated with a number of the other SENCos, indicating that a benefit occurring from the introduction of the SEND reforms was that the impetus for effecting change was now coming from legislation rather than from the SENCo. A number of the SENCos described this as 'clout', or as Sam described it, '[It] gives me a little bit of elbow' (T1). Alongside the notion of clout, SENCos also suggested that the SEND reforms also acted as a prompt. Lucy, in Term Two, agreed with both points. She felt that while some elements related to SEN provision, such as parental engagement, were on the school's long-term agenda, it was the introduction of the SEND reforms which brought this forward.

While the subtheme refers to 'clout', which is perhaps suggestive of power and influence, this was not recognised by all. Katie suggested that the SEND reforms, 'just raised awareness generally' (T6) which is somewhat a lower key than the response from others. Katie did not elaborate on the exact nature of whose awareness, although the conversation, up until this point, had centred on parents. In a sense, this may illustrate

the degree to which the SENCos felt they needed to engage with the SEND reforms or the degree to which they felt they wanted/ needed to effect change in their setting.

### **Subtheme 1.3: I will wait and see**

Throughout the overarching theme *A culture of change*, feelings related to uncertainty were common. These feelings were echoed in later themes, for example, *I want more support*. However, a subtheme which emerged from the idea of uncertainty was *I will wait and see*. This was one of the themes, remarked upon earlier in this chapter, which only occurred during the Terms One and Two. Some SENCos suggested that there was a lack of urgency to respond to policy and the most sensible way forward immediately was to watch and wait. Clare has previously described her frustration at the varying and repeated changes to statutory paperwork, so she had made the decision to 'watch and wait' (T1) for the final versions. Her reasoning for this approach was what she perceived to be the central premise of her role, 'It's all kind of bureaucracy, which is irritating, but at the end of the day you just do the best you can for the children you are working with and you hope that the paperwork might catch up with you eventually' (T2). However, in addition to this view, two of the SENCos had voiced a more strategic view; they were going to wait before they made any changes, to enable them to see what was necessary and to see what worked. As Amy stated at the start of Term One, 'You don't want to rush in and then find out you have to do something slightly different'.

### **Subtheme 1.4: This is up to schools**

Within the main theme of *It's a culture of change*, there was the perception that schools were not only responsible for delivering change but would also be potentially leading in this area. *This is up to schools* was a multifaceted subtheme which reflected the concerns voiced by SENCos that their schools will be central to the delivery of the new policy. The inference is that this additional work will then impact on resources, not only the role of SENCo but school-wide resources. This theme is partly contradictory; due to the earlier discussed subtheme of *We are doing this already*. Four of the nine SENCos commented that they felt they already demonstrated the principles of the SEND reforms, yet also remarked through the early interviews that the notion of change and reform would be up to the schools. However, the subtle difference is that while SENCos felt they already, to a degree, exemplified the principles of the SEND reforms, it is the execution of these

principles through statutory guidance which may impact on their role and their school. The suggestion from the SENCos was while agreeing with the principles, in theory, execution would impact negatively regarding their workload; not in an accounting or punitive sense, but generally.

The subtheme, *This is up to schools*, encapsulates two specific concerns shared by the participants. Firstly the concern is that if schools are expected to take the lead on the delivery of policy, this will lead to greater disparity of practice between schools. This subtheme links closely with the later discussed theme *I want more support* which considers the perceived lack of clarity and standardised guidance with the SEND reforms. When discussing the idea of which pupils should be recorded as SEN, Emma remarked, 'My concern is... everybody does their own thing, and we are back to the same old situation where every single school is doing it their own way' (T1). The idea of individual schools differently interpreting the guidance was also raised by other SENCos. However, the counter view was suggested by Amy and Sam who considered that it might be an opportunity for more schools to work together and who were, from Term One, drawing upon their support networks to find out how other SENCos were responding to the SEND reforms.

Secondly, the subtheme *This is up to schools* encapsulated the concern that in addition to interpretation, delivery will also be the responsibility of the schools. Charlotte's view of this issue related to the general lack of clarity, but also resources, regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms. She commented, 'Those people [The LA] don't know the answers; it is just pushed back to the school' (T4). Early on in Term Two Katie had also suggested that schools will be responsible for the delivery and implementation of the SEND reforms, stating, 'You kind of get the feeling that the school will be the ones that pick up the organisation of it all'. This indicates a level of frustration from SENCos at having to not only implement, but also lead on policy which, for some, they already believed they were doing, albeit it in a different way.

## Summary

The theme *It's a culture of change* explored the SENCos' initial responses to new policy, which were echoed across the academic year. Central to this theme is the idea that policy can bring 'clout', and as such can give SENCos authority to effect change; with the

inference that this can be a useful tool. The term cultural change was first stated by the DfE (DfE and DoH, 2015). In response to this a number of SENCOs felt that they were already embodying the principles of the SEND reforms. However, whilst many SENCOs were responding to new policy immediately, a number of SENCOs were waiting to see the responses of others and to see what information would emerge before they made any changes.

## **Theme 2: Thinking about new legislation**

The theme *Thinking about new legislation* captured the SENCOs thoughts regarding the new legislation and their explicit and implicit ideas and actions about the implementation of the SEND reforms. Specifically, this theme looked at the nature of the statutory activities which the SENCOs were engaged in. Additionally, the theme considered the processes and systems which the SENCOs were developing in response to the new policy. The theme particularly captured the new policy language associated with the SEND reforms, which participants seemingly quickly adopted. The theme highlighted the role and related to new activities, of the SENCO as an informer, executioner and advocate of new policy. While the theme is titled *Thinking about new legislation*, participants typically engaged with new policy activities very quickly, despite some saying they were going to watch and wait.

### **Subtheme 2.1: Checklist of shoulds**

A subtheme which emerged from the idea of *Thinking about new legislation* was the subtheme, *A checklist of shoulds*. This theme first emerged when Anna stated in Term One that she had been through the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) and had picked out everything that she 'should' be doing; specifically this related to statutory duties. It is notable that there appeared to be a discrepancy between the understanding of 'musts' and 'shoulds'. Throughout scrutiny of the codes, it was clear that this notion of a checklist, of a tangible list of what to do, was something that a number of the participants would have welcomed, with the suggestion that the list should either be within the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) or should have come from the LAs. Lucy, in Term One, talked about her wish for a 'set of strict guidelines'. While for some there was a feeling of a lack of guidance, later themes explored how this was not necessarily a barrier for the participants, echoing the findings in phases one and two. The later theme, *I find solutions*,

addresses how the SENCOs responded to their feelings related to a lack of specific, set guidance.

## **Subtheme 2.2: New language**

An extension of the subtheme *A checklist of shoulds* led to the emergence of a new subtheme, *New language*. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the SENCOs had all been involved, at different points throughout the year, in statutory SEND reform related activities. For example, the statutory assessment of SEN needs; the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment process. For some this formed the backbone of their SENCO related activities. However, there was a myriad of other activities which related to the introduction of the reforms, which Anna earlier referred to as 'shoulds'. However, it is notable that whilst Anna referred to this as 'shoulds' she further explained she wanted to know what she 'had to do'. This included the reviewing of the school SEN policy, the creation of the school SEN information report and contributing to the LA Local Offer (See Appendix 6.3 for statutory requirements of the SEND Code DfE and DoH, 2015).

From this data, the theme of *New Language* emerged. From the first interview, all the SENCOs were immediately using policy language associated with the SEND reforms. Predominantly this focused on three areas: One-page profiles, outcome focused targets and person centred planning. The importance of this subtheme should not be underestimated. These subthemes, alongside the subtheme of *A checklist of shoulds* demonstrates how quickly SENCOs began to engage in new policy activities and new policy language, despite their personal and professional feelings related to the validity of the SEND reforms.

Lucy talked enthusiastically from Term One about the processes within her school during the adoption of one-page profiles. She discussed how the school had developed a team to approach this new system, and in Term One had completed a pilot. Later, in Term Five, she reflected on the approaches she and her SEN team had taken to introducing this new process. She remarked, 'It is really [about] trying to embed that [new] language from the Code into our systems and procedures' (T5). Other participants talked at length about the various activities they had been involved with, many of which were new as a result of the SEND reforms. Such discussions appeared part and parcel of normal SENCO life, almost in an unquestioning sense.

### **Subtheme 2.3: Informing**

Within the theme *Thinking about new legislation*, it was evident that participants were mindful that the understanding of new information should extend beyond themselves and that they had a central role to play in the dissemination of such information. The subtheme *Informing* captured the awareness SENCos' demonstrated with the need to work with, liaise and inform colleagues and parents regarding the SEND reforms. It could be argued that this subtheme captured the SENCos' actions of moving beyond their specific role and felt that it was part of their role to ensure that others were aware of the changes; certainly, all participants mentioned the need to share information with other staff and parents across the year.

Lucy talked about the importance of strategically planning for staff training, noting that 'It's no good having the odd staff meeting here and there, you [the SENCo/ the staff] have really got to buy into it and believe it and see the evidence that it [One page profiles] really works' (T4). A strategy others agreed with, or indeed wished for, but recognised that in practice to timetable meetings focused on SEN was problematic due to competing priorities, as explored in the later theme *There are school barriers to my role*.

Sam talked about the idea of informing parents; he instigated in Term Three a new parent forum. This closely links to the later theme related to advocacy for parents, pupils and staff. Sam felt that through such events he could 'begin to break down barriers' (T3). However, the approaches to involving and informing parents were broad. Anna developed a working party of parents to focus on the SEND policy, while Emma focused on developing a key worker system to meet with parents three times a year. There was a difference in interpretation regarding informing parents of the changes which came from the SEND reforms and increasing the parental involvement. The latter is explored in the theme *I am an advocate*.

### **Subtheme 2.4: New systems**

Alongside the idea of taking on board new language and engaging with new processes, it was clear through the interviews that some of the SENCos had taken the opportunity to review and subsequently develop new systems. This links closely to the subtheme, *This gives me clout* which encapsulated the idea that the SEND reforms also gave the SENCos

impetus to act or to change systems. There were a variety of different systems and processes which emerged from the interviews, including changes to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) system, introducing provision mapping and one-page profiles. As discussed in the subtheme *Informing*, Emma in Term One developed a key worker system for parents. Sam had decided to develop the idea of the 'Teacher as a teacher of [children with] SEN' and developed a handbook for teachers which provided an overview of areas of SEN, as well as Quality First Teaching (QFT) strategies. Sam also talked about how he introduced another layer of SEN management to support the role of SENCo,

One [idea] that is gradually moving through is that each major department area, as it were, has a SEN representative. So a member of staff I can co-ordinate with and then they can actually disseminate to the department, as it were (T1).

It is hard to determine whether the new systems were as a result of the introduction of the SEND reforms, or whether this process would have happened anyway as a natural part of the SENCo role and whether it is possible to tell the difference between the two; a fact acknowledged by the participants.

## **Summary**

*Thinking about new legislation* illustrated that despite any misgivings raised in the early theme *It's a culture of change*, SENCos very quickly absorbed and used new policy language and processes. Not all of the activities related to statutory requirements. A number of the activities related to the SENCo belief regarding what they felt they 'should' be doing.

## **Theme 3: I want more support**

The overarching theme *I want more support* links closely to the idea of responding to new policy. The themes emerging from previous themes had demonstrated that the SENCos were quick to respond to the SEND reforms, regardless of their view of the principles. However, all SENCos were emphatic throughout that they wanted to have greater clarity and more guidance regarding the execution of the SEND reforms. This is partially reflected in the earlier subtheme *A checklist of shoulds*. The overarching theme *I want more support* extends beyond the idea of a wish for specific, clear guidance. It



encapsulated a spoken need for greater support with the implementation of the SEND reforms over a longer term and a wish to access more services earlier on.

### **Subtheme 3.1: We need clarity**

The subtheme *We need clarity* drew together the ideas of wanting more, specific guidance. Anna was emphatic about this, 'It would be quite handy to have a list of what to do' (T1). Amy agreed and felt that a more pragmatic approach would have been beneficial, 'I think it would be so much easier if we were all doing the same thing, with very strict guidelines' (T1). She later added, 'The thing you then feel is that each LA or each cluster or school is reinventing the wheel on their own' (T1).

However, the subtheme *We need clarity* moves beyond the earlier theme of *A checklist of shoulds* and encapsulated the frustrations that some of the SENCOs felt due to the lack of information and guidance. Charlotte in Term One, praised how reassuring her LA Case officer had been, yet still felt frustrated at the lack of information. In response to a question regarding whether she had received information from the LA, she responded,

Yes, loads of information, but none of it very specific. I think I probably went to about five or six training events last year, all of which told me exactly the same thing in really highly generalised terms. So I found myself sitting there and thinking, "but I want specifics". I want to see what it is going to look like. I want to know what I've got to do and of course they never gave us that because they hadn't come up with that yet (T1).

Lucy agreed and felt that at times, particularly earlier on in Term One, that there were still questions, with few answers. Amy also agreed, and as a result, she felt that the way in which she spent her time, and how effective this was, was impacted on.

It is notable that the issues regarding a lack of clarity continued beyond Term One, with some of the SENCOs continuing to refer to this issue across the year. Certainly, lack of clarity also remained an issue for Emma during Term Four. She shared her frustrations that she was not 'getting any responses from people, emails and things. I am asking questions and they [the LA] would have been really good in the past' (T4). Katie summed this up in Term Six and felt that the first year was a year of exploration, 'I think I've definitely had the feeling all the way through the year that they [the LA] are finding their feet and nobody's sure... nobody seems to know' (T6).

### **Subtheme 3.2: This should have been better planned**

The subtheme of *This should have been better planned* arose from the subtheme *We need clarity*. SENCos reported that there remained a number of unresolved questions at the end of the first year. Some voiced the idea that perhaps the reforms were rushed through and a more cautious approach would have been preferable. Lucy suggested that part of the issue related to the timing of the publication of the statutory guidance, 'Things aren't ironed out at all. The fact it all kind of became solid and was no longer a draft was only in the summer holidays – July – you think that's nuts. It should have been planned better really shouldn't it?' (T1).

However, it was also recognised by some of the participants that the LA was in a difficult position, tasked with trying to effect change on such a wide scale. Sam talked about how he was working alongside his LA officer and described how they were 'really doing this together' (T6). Clare took an equally philosophical approach. She described a specific situation regarding the placement of a child with high level, complex SEN. Throughout the interview, her frustrations regarding the new processes and the rush at how things were being carried out were impacting on the individual child or young person concerned. Despite this, she added, 'I think to be honest we are all human, aren't we? No one has messed it [the situation] up on purpose. They [the LA] panicked about the reforms; they panicked about what they needed to do' (T6).

### **Subtheme 3.3: I can't access services**

*I can't access services* was a particular theme for the secondary SENCos; accessing services was particularly difficult. For Emma, this was a theme which permeated all of her interviews. Certainly, towards the latter half of the academic year, her frustration was evident, 'I can't get anybody... It's like with mental health, with the best will in the world I can't get any support unless I have got someone saying "yes"' (T4). In this particular instance, she was referring to the difficulty of accessing a diagnosis for some children, and how a lack of confirmation of difficulties from an external agency can then lead to a barrier when trying to access specific services.

Despite this subtheme forming a strong part of Emma's narrative, this is not to suggest that it was not a frustration shared by other SENCos. In Term Five Anna shared her

frustrations when trying to arrange additional Educational Psychology visits, specifically for advice. She described feelings relating to being out of her depth in terms of deciding what to do for the child. However, when requesting support, she was faced with the issue that the school had used up their allocation of Educational Psychology time. Lucy voiced similar concerns and shared her school's response.

Did I tell you we have a new Educational Psychologist? She has been employed by the collaborative of schools and I have got a list of children that I need to work with her because I know our county Educational Psychologist is only really able to do statutory work and we are really having to push for that as well (T5).

## **Summary**

The theme *I want more support* was related, initially, to the support received for the implementation of the SEND reforms, however, this was a consistently echoed theme across the year. The idea that SENCos needed more clarity and support was a striking theme across all respondents with a number wishing that they had a number of specific requirements to adhere to, or to implement. In addition to this, a number of SENCos reported that they felt the introduction of the SEND reforms should have been better planned. It is notable that within this theme, the idea of support extended beyond a need for additional guidance in relation to the SEND reforms, but extended to typical SENCo operational practice.

## **Theme 4: No impact, except for the impact**

The final overarching theme within the thematic map relating to policy response was *No impact, except for the impact*. While the focus of the interviews was to examine the experience of the SENCo during a period of policy reform, inevitably the interviews drew upon the SENCos' perceptions related to the impact of the SEND reforms. The theme encapsulated the views of a number of the SENCos that when directly asked, they felt that that had not observed any impact of the SEND reforms on parents or children. Yet, woven within the interviews, there was evidence of changes taking place, which occurred as a result of new policy initiatives. This theme links closely to the theme *Thinking about new legislation*, which demonstrated the new policy language, processes and systems that SENCos quickly engaged with. Therefore the theme *There is no impact except for the impact* highlights how SENCos may be reporting on their perceptions of impact, without necessarily attributing this to a change in policy.

#### **Subtheme 4.1: Collaboration**

The first subtheme which forms part of the overarching theme *There's no impact except for the impact* emerged when participants increasingly referred to the increased amount of involvement they had observed over the course of the year between parents, schools and the LAs. This was particularly evident when the SENCos were discussing statutory processes. In Term Three Anna, when reflecting on this process, was enthusiastic about the increased involvement of other parties. She felt that this could lead to a better experience for the parents. Katie echoed this experience in Terms Two and Term Four, although she particularly referred to the involvement of the health services. She speculated as to the reason behind the increased involvement, 'So that NHS link, I don't know whether it's because they are being told they have to or whether they are starting to realise... do you know what I mean? They seem to be more forthcoming' (T4).

This was not reflected by all SENCos, however. Emma shared her frustrations that when completing the EHC statutory process, it was primarily the school, in particular, the SENCo, who was contributing to the process. She did not feel that health or care was particularly involved, although this may reflect a localised experience.

The idea of collaboration extended beyond statutory involvement from the LA. A strong theme which emerged was collaboration between schools. SENCos were working with each other not only to find out information but, for example, to provide an enhanced transition for pupils between phases. This is explored further in the theme *I find solutions* but does also emphasise how increased collaboration was beginning to take place across schools; although this appeared more prevalent in the medium to larger LA maintained schools.

#### **Subtheme 4.2: Parents are engaged, and this brings responsibility**

A strong subtheme which emerged from the overarching theme *There is no impact, except for the impact* was the changing nature of parent involvement. Increased parental engagement is a central principle of the SEND reforms, and a number of SENCos felt they needed to address this area. The theme reflects the changes they made and the related impact they observed over the course of the year.

For Anna, she felt straight away that the SEND reforms were clear stating, 'obviously, there is the expectation that parents are involved' (T1). Charlotte agreed and stated,

I think in terms of meeting with parents and students because it is so much more overt. I have always liked to think of myself as being very pupil-centred and parent-centred actually, but I think the reforms have meant that I have been much more overt about it (T2).

Amy agreed with the idea of being more overt with this interaction. She described how parents and children were 'more in her mind now', as a result of the SEND reforms. This links closely to the responses grouped earlier under the subthemes *We are doing this already* and *This gives me clout* as well as the theme *Informing* which explored the SENCos' feelings of responsibility when informing parents. The SENCos felt that the principle of parental involvement was far more overt and therefore all parties were more mindful of the importance of explicitly encouraging this. Katie felt that the processes parents were going through, in particular, the statutory processes, were more family friendly. She felt, by Term Six, that families were more aware and had a greater input with regards to their child's education.

There were other benefits and reasons for increasing contact and engagement with parents, which did not relate to the SEND reforms. Anna reported in Term Three that she felt that she had a responsibility to engage more with parents, to ensure that she had established a relationship with them in case she needed to have a challenging or difficult conversation with them at some point. Sam also agreed with this benefit. Again, this links closely to the sense of responsibility which SENCos reported, and discussed within the theme *I am responsible*.

This is not to say that all SENCos exclusively reported an increase in parent involvement. Louise felt that there had not been such an impact on parents, but she did wonder if this was because of the nature of her small school and therefore she felt that she was not addressing such high-level needs as other, larger, primary schools may be or perhaps as often.

#### **Subtheme 4.3: Positive impact for children?**

Throughout the interviews, a clear subtheme emerged relating to the perceived impact of the SEND reforms on children. This is perhaps unsurprising when the central premise of

the role of SENCo is considered, with some of the SENCos clearly stating that the backbone of their role is to support children as examined under the later theme *I am advocate*. However, this subtheme encapsulated the recurring references made to the outcomes for children, which appeared to be happening with relative speed. This subtheme links closely to the idea that the new processes and systems were enabling the positive outcomes for children as well as facilitating greater collaboration.

One page profiles (See Appendix 6.4 for example One Page Profile) were mentioned by some SENCos as the vehicle through which pupils' voice was being enhanced. Lucy had focused a significant part of her year on introducing a newly graduated approach for children identified with SEN, and this included the use of One Page Profiles. She described, in Term One, the positive impact this was beginning to have on individual children regarding understanding their concerns and needs. Lucy described the One Page Profile as 'The one document that promotes pupil and parent voice' (T1). Early in Term Two Louise identified that the biggest impact of the SEND reforms would be the development of pupils' voice. She added, 'That benefits the children with SEN but it will also benefit everybody at the end of the day' (T:2).

However, some additional themes arose as part of the notion of impact, which could be perceived as not positive. This led to the re-naming of the subtheme to incorporate a query over whether the impact for children was wholly positive. Regarding impact, some SENCos felt that the introduction of the SEND reforms had prompted wider questions regarding the category of SEN and who this is concerned with. Anna summed this up, 'we keep having conversations about who do we think are SEN support and who we think are just inclusion?' (T5). Amy echoed this view and explained how, early in Term One, she had been having conversations with staff regarding the importance of understanding 'who is SEN' (T1). Lucy felt understanding this was intrinsic and something she and her inclusion manager had been trying to clarify in their minds over the course of the year. Ultimately it related to whom the SENCo felt they should be concerned with.

However, the question mark over this subtheme extended beyond such confusion. Emma, in the early stages of the SEND reforms in Term One, commented that one impact of the SEND reforms would be that 'the numbers who get that degree of provision will reduce' (T1). She predicted that numbers of children identified as having a SEN would reduce.

Katie in Term Four talked about the changes which occurred over the year to the SEND register, 'I feel like the children that are on the SEND register have cut down quite a bit'(T4). She attributed this to a greater understanding of the nature of SEN, ensuring that the teacher is considering the underlying reason for concerns. Later, in Term Six, Katie clarified that she had looked with teachers at the 're-categorisation' of children (T6). Specifically, she had considered the impact of the change from Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development (BESD) to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties and whether children previously identified with BSED should be on the SEN register. Katie added that she had a 'concern' register. Her expectations were that teachers would come to her with clear evidence of need before thinking about whether or not they were SEN.

Emma felt that the reduction of SEN numbers was also a reaction to budget issues, both nationally but also within her school. She noted that while schools would have difficulty reducing teaching staff, they could target less money to SEN as it was not ring-fenced. This links closely to the subtheme *I can't access services*, which, while illustrating the frustrations of some SENCOs when accessing services, may also highlight some of the impact on children.

## **Summary**

The theme *No impact, except for the impact*, explored the idea of the initial impact of the first year of SEND reform. It is notable that the SENCOs, almost immediately, began to discuss areas which they felt were directly attributable to the SEND reform, yet did not necessarily feel that, when directly asked, that the SEND reforms were having an impact. The SENCOs particularly reported an observed impact on parents, specifically an increased collaboration. However, whilst SENCOs reported a greater focus on pupil voice, they also reported that numbers of children with SEN were reducing.

## **7.5 Summary**

This chapter has explored the themes related to policy response which emerged through the long term interviews carried out with the SENCOs over the course of the first year of SEND reform. The themes reflect mixed feelings towards policy reform, with SENCOs reporting that their setting already embodied the principles of the reforms, while concurrently embracing new policy language and activities. Such juxtaposition was also

evident regarding the notion of impact, with some SENCos reporting that the impact of the SEND reforms was limited, while the interviews clearly illustrated positive, and potentially negative, aspects of the SEND reforms. SENCos reported that parental engagement was not only a priority, but also had begun to improve. A similar view was reported regarding the increase of pupil's voice. The themes also highlighted a challenge to the previously held notion and nature of SEN, with some SENCos querying who they really should be concerned with. It is noteworthy that all SENCos were engaged, to varying degrees, with the SEND reforms and saw it as part of their role to move the reforms forward in their individual settings; this is in spite of concerns raised regarding the lack of centralised support and specific guidance. In part, the responses relate closely to the way in which the SENCo views his or her role and how it is executed in schools. This is explored in the second thematic map provided in chapter 9.



## Chapter 8: Phase three: Thematic Map Two

### 8.1 Introduction

Phase	Period of data collection	Number of participants	Results Chapter
Phase one: Questionnaires	July 2014	54 SENCos	Chapter 7
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	July – September 2014	9 SENCos	
Phase three: Semi-structured interviews	September 2014 – July 2015	9 SENCos	Chapter 8: Thematic map 1 Chapter 9: Thematic map 2
Phase four: Questionnaires	March 2015	74 SENCos	Chapter 10
Phase five: Questionnaires	July 2015	40 SENCos	

**Table 8.1: Overview of presentation of results**

The themes which emerged from the data at the phase three, interview stage, were organised into two distinct categories;

- the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo) narrated responses to policy
- the role of the SENCo

The preceding chapter explored the themes which related to the SENCos' responses to policy. This chapter explores the role of the SENCo at a time of policy implementation and specifically draws upon and explores the themes which emerged at phase three and are directly connected to the role of the SENCo. This is not to suggest that the two categories are separate from each other; the two are inextricably linked. Certainly, it could be argued that the way in which the SENCos respond to policy is linked to the way in which they view their role and the way in which their role is executed within the school. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the themes which emerged from the data specifically in relation to the way in which the SENCo executed and viewed their role during a period

of policy implementation. Themes which emerged from the data related to ideas of responsibility, in relation to leadership, as well as the importance of advocacy for various groups; specifically children, parents and teachers. Issues related to the solitary nature of the role, and the potential impact of this, were also explored. Further themes related to barriers which the SENCos identified as part of their role, but also the solution they found in response to these.

## 8.2 Thematic Map 2: Role of the SENCo

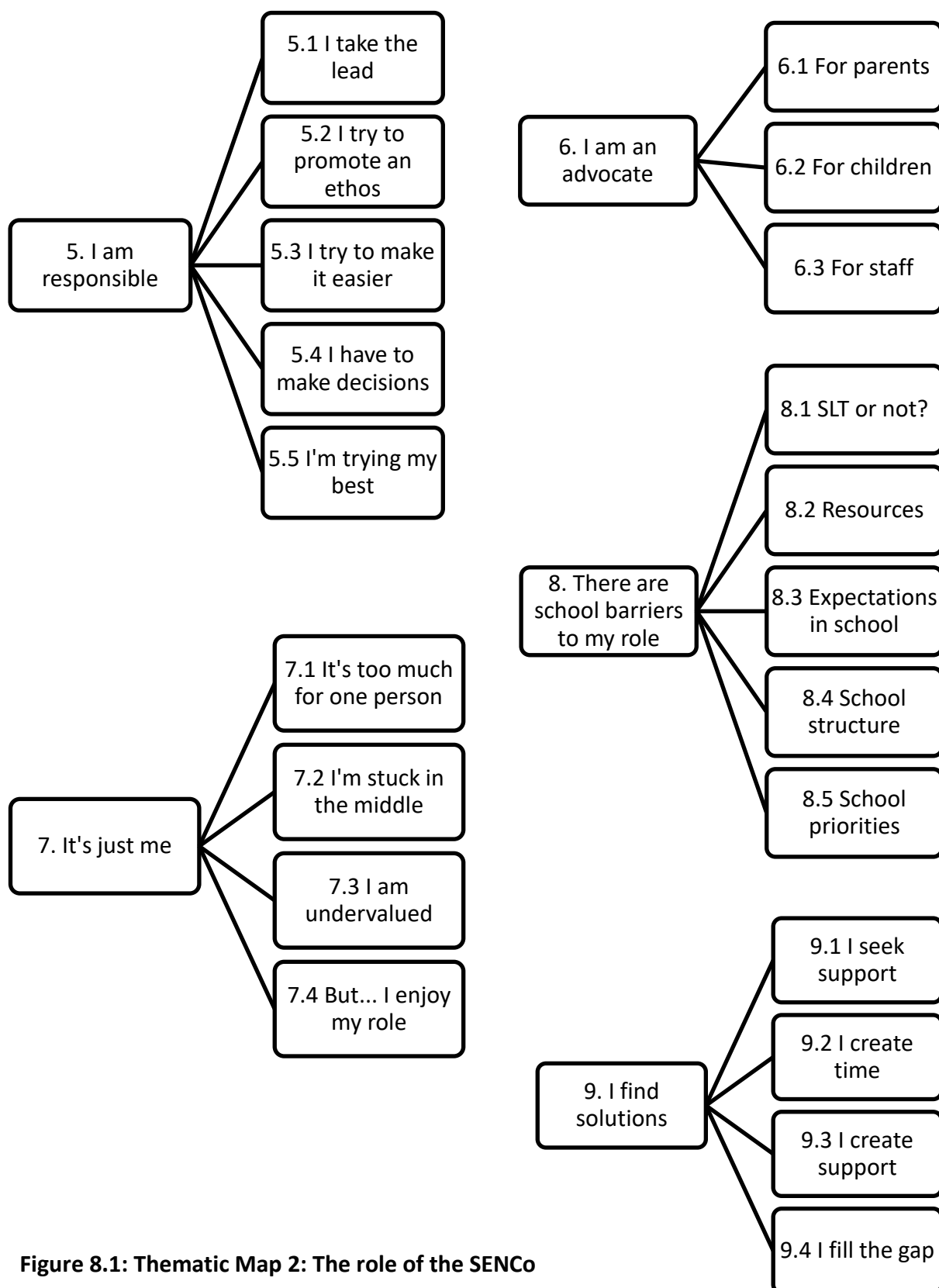


Figure 8.1: Thematic Map 2: The role of the SENCo

## 8.3 Discussion of themes

### Theme 5: I am responsible

The overarching theme *I am responsible* captured the SENCos' feelings of responsibility in relation to their role. In particular they described feelings of needing to take the lead with regards to Special Educational Needs (SEN) as well as feelings of accountability, particularly with promoting an inclusive ethos within their setting. When discussing this aspect of the role, SENCos suggested this incorporated a balance of challenging colleagues while also being understanding and supportive of the additional pressures colleagues may be experiencing. Yet, SENCos also described how these feelings of responsibility could also be overwhelming. This was particularly evident when SENCos were describing their role in making decisions and prioritising resources. The idea that SENCos were trying to do the best they could, in what they felt were difficult circumstances, permeated the interviews. This theme, while a theme in its own right, closely linked to the theme of *It's just me* which further explored the SENCos' feelings and tensions within the often solitary role.

#### Subtheme 5.1: I take the lead

The subtheme *I take the lead* extended the notions of responsibility and specifically considered the idea of being a leader; a theme which emerged at phases one and two. Within the theme feelings of needing to be a proactive leadership emerged. In taking the lead, SENCos talked about feeling responsible for actively accessing and distributing provision. Additionally, they felt that they should be the embodiment of an inclusive ethos, and as such, they should be responsible for promoting such an ethos throughout the school. This was particularly evident for those SENCos who also had teaching responsibilities. Anna summed this up early on during the academic year stating, 'I take my job very seriously' (T:2). This was in relation to a discussion about changes which she had brought into effect, and whether she would have actioned these if there had been no reforms. She felt she would because that was her role.

Yet, the idea of leadership was also conflicted. Lucy shared her reflections that being part of a wider SEN team helped share the feelings of responsibility. It is notable that in Lucy's case she was not only part of a SEN team in her school, but also her school was part of a

Multi-academy Trust (MAT) which had a lead SENCo. She felt that, regarding taking the lead in her school, she has the support of her local and wider team to make and execute decisions. This linked closely to the later theme *There are school barriers to my role*, which specifically considered the requirement or not to be part of SLT and the theme *It's just me*, which explored the solitary nature of the role.

### **Subtheme 5.2: I try to make it easier**

This theme encapsulated the feelings the SENCos voiced with regards to supporting their colleagues. The theme relates closely to the later theme *I am an advocate*, which in part explored the feelings of responsibility SENCos had towards others, including their colleagues. SENCos voiced their concerns about the other pressures placed on teachers, and many of the SENCos reported that they did not like being the person who had to ask teachers to do extra work; echoing feelings reported at phases one and two. Katie had concerns about what teachers were being asked to do; she felt that she 'didn't want to throw too much at them, just try to drip-feed things in' (T 4). She did add, that the issue was that everyone was 'drip feeding' in new things, and this brought different difficulties. For Sam, however, he felt that part of his role was 'translation' (T3). He inferred that he took this approach to try and make things easier, and more palatable, for colleagues.

### **Subtheme 5.3: I have to make decisions**

Within the subtheme, *I have to make decisions* participants made frequent references to the responsibility of having to make decisions regarding a child's support. Along with the idea of deciding the nature of the support, the key area of responsibility lay with the need to prioritise support, thus prioritising children. This linked closely with the idea of needing more support and the theme *I can't access services*. Some SENCos reported the challenge of accessing specific limited external agencies, and as a consequence, the responsibility to make the 'right' decision was increased. For some SENCos, frustration was evident. Despite feelings of responsibility, these could not always be acted upon as other school priorities often took precedence.

Equally, the changing nature of the landscape impacted on decision making, with many SENCos suggesting that the process of accessing support was reactive rather than proactive. Clare talked about how she was, 'constantly just re-prioritising' (T3). She

elaborated further and explained how important it was to her that she made the 'right' decision. Through this theme stress and pressure were evident.

However, the theme explored how decision making went beyond prioritising the organisational nature of allocating support. For Emma the idea of making decisions also related to how she executed her role. She felt that daily decisions were made in relation to how she allocated her time, from working with individuals to carrying out activities which were more strategic. When reflecting on this, she wondered if this complexity was unique to the role of the SENCo?

#### **Subtheme 5.4: I am trying my best**

This subtheme relates closely to the previous subtheme of *I have to make decisions*. While the two subthemes are related, the idea of wanting to do well and to get it right lead to the creation of a new subtheme *I am trying my best*. The SENCos made frequent references to the fact they felt they were trying their best; they wanted to do well. Yet the theme also drew together the frustrations voiced regarding the lack of recognition from others regarding their role and what it entailed. Charlotte, in Term One, was worried about the time she had to complete her role, and as a consequence, she was concerned that the quality of her work might be compromised. Similarly, Anne commented in Term Three, with regards to specific provision for a child, that she was 'doing her best' but was evidently frustrated by the constraints in doing this. Sam talked about the fact that at the end of his first academic year as a SENCo, he felt like he's 'just started' (T6). He explained that he wanted to do the role well, but he continually felt like he was on an upward trajectory of learning.

#### **Summary**

The overarching theme *I am responsible* illustrated elements of the SENCo role related to leadership, notably feelings of responsibility and the importance of 'doing the job well'. The themes illustrate how the notion of responsibility was partly conflicted, with SENCos feeling responsible for taking the lead, wanting to do the job well, but also having to make challenging decisions due to resourcing as well as being mindful of the additional pressures colleagues may be facing. It is notable that membership to the Senior

Leadership Team (SLT) was not specifically referred to, however leadership issues resonated throughout.

### **Theme 6: I am an advocate**

The theme *I am an advocate* was a strong theme throughout the interviews when discussing both the SEND reforms and the role of the SENCo. The idea of an advocate, in this instance, related to advocating for people, rather than for policies, specifically parents, children and staff. This theme was evident through phases one and two. Sam summed it up as, 'I am an advocate in the sense that I am seen as the focal point, logically. So, yeah, I am explaining as we find out as well. So I am an advocate, I am [an] explainer, but I am also [a] reassurer. I kind of filter it I suppose' (T1). The theme encapsulates the central premise of the role for many of the SENCos and links closely to the theme *I am responsible*. Many of the SENCos reported feelings of wanting to and needing to advocate for individuals.

#### **Subtheme 6.1: I advocate for parents**

It is interesting to consider the reasons for advocating for parents. Emma discussed the benefit of working with parents, 'Parents are our best weapons' (T2). Emma further explained that working closely with parents enabled the support to move forward for the child adding, 'They [the parents] feel valued, they feel included, and they feel that they are part of their child's education' (T2). Lucy described the view of parents as 'experts' (T1). She discussed the varying roles, specifically the teachers as experts on education but parents experts on their children and how 'it's not until you marry those two levels of expertise together that you are really going to impact on the child's learning' (T1). Although, as Anna stated, this was not an easy part of the role, particularly due to the lack of training on how to work with parents.

There was, however, also very real empathy for parents. A number of SENCos discussed their frustrations with accessing support as well as some of the challenges that parents were dealing with on a daily basis. Lucy discussed how she had offered to accompany a parent to a paediatric appointment, as she recognised the immense pressure this was putting the parent under. Anna talked about how she once cried with a parent regarding the placement of their child. She said, 'I sat with her and I cried in the end and said I was

sorry that we had been unable to fulfil the needs of her child' (T2). Despite being an advocate for the parent, Anna felt she could not deliver what was needed, closely reflecting the sense of responsibility discussed in the themes *I am responsible* and *It's just me*. This also demonstrates the potential impact of a lack of resources as discussed in the theme *There are school barriers to my role*. For Katie the idea of being an advocate for the parents was important as it helped bridge a potential gap between the teachers and the parents. She explained in Term Six how she was aiming to have an open door policy with parents; she wanted parents to feel that they could approach her at any time. A by-product of this was that she felt she was taking some of the pressure off of teachers, particularly if it was a parent who was requiring a lot of support. This is something that Katie strongly feels is a result of the SEND reforms, but is also reflected in the theme *I try to make it easier*.

### **Subtheme 6.2: I advocate for children**

The subtheme of advocating for children encapsulated a key element of the overarching theme *I am an advocate*. The idea of advocating specifically for children was distinct, and throughout the thematic analysis, it was clear that this should be a subtheme in its own right. Emma summed this up as 'working from the child's perspective a lot of the time' (T2).

This theme also relates to the idea of embracing new processes, systems and policy language. Some SENCos felt that the introduction of the One-page profile, as discussed within the theme *New language*, had bolstered the ability to advocate for children. When reflecting on this in Term Six, Katie felt that the SEND reforms had enhanced the voice of the child and this was a specific, positive outcome.

One element of this subtheme relates closely to the theme of *I am responsible*. Responsibility for advocating for children was a strong theme throughout the interviews. As such a number of the SENCos repeatedly discussed the need to challenge teachers regarding the provision in place for children with SEN. For some this was implicitly carried out, Sam noted how on every training session he carried out he inserted the tagline 'Every teacher is a teacher of SEN' on his PowerPoints. Emma had considered her role and had trained her TAs to 'challenge teachers' (T2). There was an awareness, as discussed in *I try to make it easier*, those teachers were balancing many other policy requirements. It was



evident from the responses that that majority of SENCos were happy to challenge teachers on behalf of a child.

Emma discussed the potential tension of dual advocacy for the child and parent, as such views may not always be complementary. Emma shared her concern that whilst parent voice is important in principle, she felt that in some cases this could be potentially detrimental to the child if the parent did not have the best interests of the child at heart, or perhaps the parent did not have a clear view of the best way to support the child. She gave the example of parents not wishing to accept if a child has a SEN, and their subsequent decision to refuse all additional support.

### **Subtheme 6.3: I advocate for staff**

While discussing their role in advocating for children SENCos would often refer to the level of challenge they would present to teachers. It was also evident that SENCos felt that their sense of responsibility extended to also advocating for colleagues. This subtheme, *I advocate for staff*, extended beyond providing support and help to staff, but refers to the repeated references that SENCos made about their concerns for staff, their sense of responsibility to support them and protect them while also ensuring that they had a voice. Katie, in Term Four, was concerned about the balance for teachers, she stated, 'The main barrier I find at the moment is teachers are just overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork they are doing. You are very wary that you don't want to throw too much at them' (T3). For Amy, part of her role as an advocate was based on her memories of being class based herself, 'Having been a class teacher, I know exactly where they are at and why it is so difficult' (T1). Supported and advocating for many of the SENCos meant offering training, but also being realistic about what is asked of teachers. For some SENCos this meant taking on some of the teachers' role, but also mediating for teachers with parents and/or SLT.

### **Summary**

The theme *I am an advocate* explored the emerging subthemes related to the ways in which the SENCos viewed themselves as an advocate. Predominantly this was within three areas: for parents, for children and staff. SENCos shared their motivations for advocacy, particularly regarding parents; this included an acknowledgement that this

secured best outcomes for children, but also because collaboration was, in principle, the right way forward. Throughout the theme, SENCoS acknowledge that advocating for groups was not without its issues, although it was evident throughout that this was a key driver for the SENCo role.

### **Theme 7: It's just me**

Traditionally many schools have employed one person to cover the role of SENCo. The overarching theme *It's just me* explored the many references SENCoS made to the solitary nature of the role and the subtheme considers how the SENCoS felt about this. Feelings were both positive and negative regarding this approach, yet a central premise of this subtheme was the solitary and sometimes lonely nature, of the role.

#### **Subtheme 7.1: It is too much for one person**

The subtheme *It is too much for one person* was a reoccurring theme for all SENCoS throughout the year. It forms part of the overarching theme *It's just me*, but specifically looks at the volume of work for each individual and the manageability of this. The subtheme, however, is not necessarily negative. At times this was voiced with frustration, exasperation and even joy. Anna repeatedly referred to how busy her role was in Term One; she stated early on 'I am running around like a headless chicken' later qualifying, 'I have been amazed at how busy I am' (T1).

It is noteworthy that for many participants that while they reflected on the significant workload, and the issues this brought, they also recognised the value of the role. Lucy summed this up, 'It's mad, and it's crazy, never enough hours in the day, but I do like the fact that you can make a positive change' (T1). However, despite her positivity, Lucy did later mention, 'So consequently you then spend all of your evenings and most of your days off actually doing the [SENCo] work and doing the paperwork side of it' (T1). This was echoed by Charlotte who described feelings of being overwhelmed with the level of work. When considering the breadth and depth of the role, Emma expressed surprise that 'How anybody ever concedes that a SENCo can be done by one person is completely beyond me' (T4). Emma's role in a secondary school, as the sole SENCo with limited teaching assistant support possibly led to her feeling disillusioned with the role and, by Term Five, stated, 'I just feel like every single day that the expectation and the quantity of

work becomes unbearable' (T5). This was the exception, however, rather than the rule with the majority of SENCos recognising that the volume of work was high, but they still enjoyed the role.

### **Subtheme 7.2: I'm stuck in the middle**

The subtheme *I'm stuck in the middle* strongly emerged early on in the interviews. Participants frequently reported that not only was the role a lonely one but having additional school responsibilities made the issue worse. While many of the SENCos reported the idea of being in the middle as difficult and negative, this was not exclusively the case. Emma stated, 'If I am honest, I'm an advocate for the teachers, and I'm an advocate for the child. That, by definition, makes me a mediator – I am in the middle' (T1). She later added that a key part of the role, which could cause issues, was also mediating between the school and the LA. Charlotte, however, saw this more of a pressure. She felt that a key difficulty of the SENCo role was the importance to 'respond to everybody' (T3). In particular she cited the example of 'the school' stating that there was little money for additional support, while having to communicate this decision to the child and parents; 'It's the SENCo that's stuck in the middle of all of that' (T3). It is noteworthy that SENCos themselves used this term 'stuck in the middle' frequently, particularly the secondary SENCos.

### **Subtheme 7.3: I am undervalued**

The subtheme *I am undervalued* developed from the overarching theme *It's just me*. In some cases, it is a conflicting subtheme as the idea of feeling undervalued jars with the reported enjoyment of the role. SENCos did report that they often felt undervalued and this was not necessarily in relation to the school environment or their colleagues, but often more to do with how the role is perceived outside of the school regarding the professionalism of the role. Anna experienced feelings of frustration in this area during a period when she was trying to secure an alternative placement for a child. She talked about her feelings of protectiveness towards the child when trying to access support for him. She felt that the 'decision makers', regarding the statutory assessment process, were 'playing God' (T2). However, intrinsic to this theme, she also stated that 'They [the LA] listen to that professional [the EP] and I was thinking, "What the hell am I then?" "What the hell are the teachers?"' Anna later discussed her frustration that her opinion did not

seem to count. Charlotte echoed similar concerns. When discussing the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan process, she talked about her feelings of frustration, not only about the lack of clarity regarding the process but also because, 'Everything has to be justified' (T3). This was also an issue raised by Lucy, who expressed surprise, during the same statutory processes, that there was no space on the needs assessment proforma for the school's view. She felt that this missed a key opportunity for the school to share their concerns and observations. Emma's view on this was that despite the level of qualification, specifically the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo), she did not think that the role was valued amongst other professions.

Clare's response to the lack of professionalism recognised within her role was to withdraw. She felt that it was pointless engaging in battles where she was not listened to or respected. As such she decided just to focus on 'working with the kids' (T5).

While the idea of being undervalued focused on the role of the SENCo outside of the school, SENCos frequently referred to how their role was understood, or not, within the school. A number of SENCos commented that senior managers did not understand their role. Frustration, but also acceptance, about this concern, was evident. Emma summed this up by stating, 'What I do think is that the role of the SENCo is not recognised and understood – the complexities of that role' (T3). It is noteworthy that Emma added that she did feel supported, just not understood. Anna developed this idea, suggesting that the role of the SENCo had developed to such a point that she was not clear over its intrinsic function, questioning whether it was educational or social. She explained, 'I need a job description. It's not going to work unless my role is clearly defined' (T1). This is an interesting consideration if the SENCos are not clear themselves regarding the nature of the role, how can it be expected that senior managers will be? Or conversely, should the senior managers be setting clear expectations, and job descriptions, for the SENCos? It is interesting to consider how the role, as set out by the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), reflects the role as described by the SENCos. It was Anna's view that the role has developed so rapidly, and arguably against a backdrop of educational change, that the role continued to lack clarity.

#### **Subtheme 7.4: But... I enjoy my role**

The subtheme *But... I enjoy my role* is essential to not only provide balance in light of the earlier discussed themes but also because it illustrates the sometimes contradictory and confusing nature of the SENCo role. Alongside feelings of being undervalued, loneliness and concerns regarding the position, all the SENCos talked about how much they enjoyed the role. It is noteworthy that while all SENCos reported these feelings and frequently remarked upon their enjoyment, and even love, for the role it was not consistent throughout the year. Woven within their enjoyment for the role were frequent discussions regarding stress and frustration. However, crucially, when directly asked if they enjoyed the role, the SENCos would respond as Lucy did, 'I love it. I love the job' (T3). She did qualify this statement by stating that her enjoyment of the role was tempered by a lack of fulfilment as it never felt finished, but equally, she described this as 'constantly changing and evolving, it's an exciting job to be in' (T3). Sam was possibly one of the most positive of the SENCos, and he consistently remained upbeat about his role throughout all of the interviews, describing himself as 'giddily excited about it [the role]' (T3).

#### **Summary**

The theme *It's just me* explored the, often contrasting, aspects of a solitary role. Throughout the themes, it was evident that the solitary nature of the role impacted on the individuals. In part this related to workload, with SENCos stating that it was too much for one person, but also because the role tended to be held by one person and, as a consequence, the role was not widely understood. These issues led to feelings of being undervalued. Additionally, this linked to the earlier described feelings of uncertainty regarding the role and issues of leadership and status; this is particularly pertinent for not only how colleagues within the schools viewed the role, but also the wider views of those working in the area of SEN, for example, the LA. Despite this, the majority of SENCos stated that they enjoyed the role.

#### **Theme 8: There are school barriers to my role**

The overarching theme *There are school barriers to my role* considered the issues which SENCos reported upon during the interviews which they perceived to be barriers to the execution of their role in the school. Barriers were reported by participants in a factual

way, and not necessarily in a negative way. The majority of participants reported upon areas which were unsurprising, including time and money. However, within the theme, other barriers emerged, predominantly school-based. These are described below within the subthemes.

### **Subtheme 8.1: SLT or not?**

*SLT or not?* reflects many of the views voiced by the SENCos as to whether their role is supported or hindered by their membership, or not, on the SLT. This subtheme presented a difficulty in that there was no consensus as to whether to be part of SLT would be useful or not, but throughout the interviews participants frequently mentioned that they felt this was an important factor in their role.

One of the important factors reported upon was the link between SLT membership and the strategic development of SEN within schools. Emma reported that she felt frustrated that 'her role is still so fundamentally at the micro level' (T1) and cited not being part of SLT as a key reason for this. As a consequence, Emma felt that she lacked clout with teachers, which may explain why she considered her role to be lacking strategic effectiveness.

For others, their position, or not, on SLT was not the issue. The central issue was whether SEN concerns were not only acknowledged and understood at this senior level but also whether the area was a priority. For Emma she felt this was not the case, commenting that because she was not part of SLT 'SEN have (sic) got very forgotten' (T1). However, this was not a consensus of view. Sam felt confident that he had the 'ear' of his line manager who was on SLT. As a consequence he felt that he had 'free access' (T1) to SLT and therefore he did not see it as a benefit to be part of management at this level, noting that to be part of SLT would in all probability widen his role further; a view shared by a number of the other SENCos.

### **Subtheme 8.2: Resources**

The subtheme *Resources* summarises a key barrier which all SENCos identified as part of the difficulty when enacting their role. All SENCos frequently referred to the issues of accessing and deploying resources. For some, the idea of resources encapsulated their limited resource of time and support. For others, limited resources formed part of a

vicious cycle which meant access to future resources was prevented. Emma summed up her concern as,

I am in a catch 22 as well, and this is the ludicrous situation that you are in. In order to get an EHC plan you have to be able to prove what you have done to meet that child's needs and therefore, despite all of that, there is still no progress taking place and therefore you need something above and beyond what you can provide. But, because I have no staff, I can't put anything in place so therefore, by default; I can never show what I have done so, therefore, I can never get an EHCP to get the funding to put the support in place (T5).

Charlotte had a similar concern. She felt that the requirement to illustrate the exact level of support an individual received was inaccurate and unquantifiable; she felt stuck.

Perhaps unsurprisingly time to execute the role was also evident as an issue through the subtheme of *Resources*. This links closely to the theme *It's just me* which explored, as a subtheme, the idea that the role was too big for one person. Louise, who had full-time teaching responsibilities in addition to the SENCo role, stated, 'Our biggest barrier to anything we have tried to do is capacity' (T1). This was also echoed earlier on by Charlotte. She felt that time was the biggest issue; she was concerned that she could not get through the work that she felt she should be doing. For her, the biggest concern was the impact that this was having on the quality of the work she was doing and links closely to the theme *I'm trying my best*.

### **Subtheme 8.3: School Structure**

This subtheme related to how the role of the SENCo was delegated and structured within schools. While for some the subtheme explored the idea that working within a small team was intrinsic to the success of the role; this was in the minority. For the majority, the solitary nature of the role, the lack of team support was a significant and repeatedly reported barrier. However, SENCos also reported upon other barriers within the school, which often related to the structure of the organisation.

An overwhelming barrier, as reported by the SENCos, were the additional roles which each held in addition to the role of the SENCo. For example, those who held additional teaching responsibilities frequently commented on the issue of a lack of time. There were also concerns raised by SENCos about the protection of allocated time to carry out the role. It was reported, by two of the SENCos, that the time they had for the role of SENCo

was not protected, and as such, they could be called upon to carry out other activities, such as emergency class cover. It was a concern of some that time for their role would reduce.

Katie had previous experience of working as a SENCo and a class teacher, before focusing solely on the role of SENCo. She felt that this had significantly changed the way in which she worked. She described the issue of having 'a class in her head' (T4) which to a degree illustrated that challenges of holding multiple roles and having to change focus. She later discussed how she felt that now she was out of class she had moved beyond 'fire-fighting' (T 4).

However, there were additional elements related to the structure of the school which came through in this theme. It was not just the pressure of the role of the SENCo, but it was also the time staff had to liaise with the SENCo. Due to teaching, and other, commitments it was often very hard for teachers and the SENCo to liaise. Amy felt that part of the problem was the time that it took to carry out various SENCo activities and the standard to which it was done. She gave the example of completing a provision map. Whilst she felt it would be more efficient if she completed the provision map, she was mindful that this was not her role. When referring to the role of the class teacher, she stated 'That child in that class is yours' (T4).

#### **Subtheme 8.4: School priorities**

This subtheme explored the idea that the SEND reforms were not taking place in isolation, and as such it sat within a wider group of school priorities. Participants reported that while they were acutely aware of the need to focus on SEN, they also felt that there were other priorities which would often take precedence; echoing findings at phases one and two. Louise felt this had impacted on the progression of SEN in her school, 'Well, with all the other stuff that is going on, the SEN stuff is really taking less of a place for all of us at the moment I feel' (T3). For Louise, the 'other stuff' was a reference to a new head teacher. However, others felt that the timing of the SEND reforms, which came in at the same point as the New Curriculum provided challenges not only for whole school priorities but also for individual priorities of colleagues.



Katie was acutely aware that the school had a wide and varied nature of priorities, and that SEN was just one of those. She noted that she had previously tried to make things easier for staff through 'drip feeding' (T4) as reported through the theme *I try to make it easier*, although it is interesting to consider how effective such a method might be with regards to strategic development. Anna was acutely aware that she was adding to the pressure that teachers were already under,

With the New Curriculum, I think they [the teachers] have been overwhelmed with the expectation of what they have to do. Not teaching, but the expectation of all the other stuff... There has been discontent all year... The other day, when I handed out this piece of paper saying this isn't very good I was thinking the whole time, 'Jeez, I wish I wasn't doing this. For some people, I am literally just adding on another layer of misery (T5).

## **Summary**

The theme *There are school barriers* to my role explored the varying issues which SENCos felt impacted on the successful execution of their role. Such issues included membership to SLT; concerns from SENCos related to whether they had adequate 'clout' to effect cultural change. However, wider school issues related to access to resources and whole school priorities also impacted on the SENCos' ability to carry out the functions of their role.

## **Theme 9: I find solutions**

Despite the concerns raised by the SENCos throughout the interviews regarding their role and potential barriers to their role, it was strongly evident that the SENCos were not passive, but were active in seeking solutions. Their approach to barriers could be described as pragmatic and accepting, before quietly moving onto finding solutions. The theme *I find solutions* encapsulates the idea that the SENCo did not passively look for support or answers, or spend time rallying against the lack of resources, support or time. Instead, SENCos creatively explored different and varied avenues of support. However, this theme draws together the creative and innovative ways in which SENCos not only sought support but also created solutions.

### **Subtheme 9.1: I seek support**

Throughout the interviews, a strong subtheme was the active nature with which SENCOs would seek support. Emma suggested, 'If you want it [support] you need to seek it' (T3). The subtheme illustrated that there were many, varied avenues of support including line managers, the head teacher and the LA; echoing phases one and two. The majority, although not all, of SENCOs also worked closely with their SEN governor, many of which had a background in SEN education. Louise described her governor as, 'Supportive of us; she wants us to move forward' (T2). Louise later described her governor as a 'critical friend' (T2). While this might provide a critical friend, this route could also bring additional pressures if the governors required support themselves to understand the SENCO and governing role. As such, SENCOs were also active at seeking different avenues of support.

SENCO clusters were also a key component of this varied support. Many of the SENCOs referred to this support when they were seeking clarity regarding what they 'should' be doing about the SEND reforms. Lucy said such meetings helped her clarify what she should be doing. Amy agreed and repeatedly mentioned her SENCO cluster throughout all of the interviews, describing it as 'her support network... it's active and supportive' (T4).

Some of the SENCOs worked within a wider school SEN team, although this was more the exception rather than the rule. Others had administrative support. All SENCOs who had access to this additional support agreed that this was intrinsic to the success of their role. This was particularly evident through the interviews with the SENCO who was part of a MAT.

While the earlier theme *I want more support* discussed the prevalent themes related to SENCOs wanting more clarity as well as the challenge they often experienced accessing services, all the SENCOs throughout the year frequently referred to their links with the LA, and in particular how they would often ring the LA to seek clarity and support.

### **Subtheme 9.2: I create time**

In addition to seeking varied avenues of support, SENCOs also sought ways in which to address the previously reported barrier of a lack of time. SENCOs frequently described the different ways in which they managed their workload, many of which described as

overwhelming in subtheme *It's too much for one person*. This led to the emergence of the subtheme *I create time*. The most frequently reported strategy of managing a large workload, which was explicitly mentioned by five out of the nine SENCOs, was the idea of working additional hours, outside of their contracted hours. Clare talked about the challenges of fitting in her role. In part this related to the breadth of her role. She discussed how she was trying to set up interventions, complete statutory paperwork and meet parents. Attending frequent meetings was another time pressure. She stated, 'I never get to do any paperwork except at weekends' (T3). She did admit that in part this was because of her love for the role and her sense of responsibility, but she did also add that working at this level and pace was 'exhausting' (T3).

This idea of working outside of typical working hours was a common thread throughout the interviews. Charlotte talked about how she was at work until '6.30pm or 7.00pm and then doing it [paperwork] on Sunday' (T3). Lucy described how she was 'working crazily' (T3) later adding in Term Four that while she worked part time, she was carrying out SENCO activities on her remaining days off.

There were other ways in which SENCOs tried to create time. Sam talked about how he was trying to work out 'pinch points' throughout the year (T5) so he could actively seek support from his line manager before then.

### **Subtheme 9.3: I fill the gap**

This theme considered the ways in which the SENCOs actively responded to the issues identified in theme *There are school barriers to my role* by trying to create solutions. In particular, this theme considers the way in which SENCOs creatively fill the gap, either by their use of existing resources or by widening their role. Emma had particular concerns related to accessing services for children with mental health difficulties, which closely related to the themes *of I want more support* and *I can't access services*. When discussing her approach to these issues, she stated, 'It's about trying to be as creative as we can with very minimal resources'. She later added that she had also started a lunchtime club twice a week to support children with mental health issues to try and fill the gap. It is notable that Emma was acutely aware that this was potentially a risky strategy, partly because she had not been trained in this area but also because this strategy might suggest she has greater capacity than she has.

Sam too found that he was taking on a broader role. He viewed this in a positive light and suspected that his role was increasing due to successes his team were having. Yet, he did concede that this had increased his role which was problematic.

## **Summary**

The theme *I find solutions* illustrated how, despite identified barriers, SENCos sought various ways in which they could effectively carry out the role within the identified parameters. The SENCos reported ways in which they addressed the barriers, such as seeking support from a variety of sources or working during their time away from work. However, of particular note was the way in which SENCos sought to fill the gap by external agencies, through the development of their interventions.

## **8.4 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter explored the second part of the thematic analysis of the phase three interviews, which were carried out with SENCos over the course of the first year of the SEND reform implementation. This chapter focused on the second thematic map, which explored the role of the SENCo. While this did look specifically at the SEND reforms, in part, because this was the period within which the interviews were carried out, the chapter also looked more broadly at the role of the SENCo and the emerging themes in relation to this which came through from the interviews.

Feelings of leadership and responsibility were evident throughout all of the interviews. All respondents discussed how they felt responsible, not only for individuals but also for the wider strategic direction of SEN in their schools. However, with this came feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed, in respect of the manageability of the role. Certainly, while SENCos acknowledged that there were barriers to their role, which were school based, SENCos also illustrated through the interviews that they were creative in their problem-solving approaches, although one could argue in possibly self-defeating ways. Advocacy for children, parents and staff was a uniting factor for all the SENCos and features strongly throughout all of the interviews. This related closely to the idea of responsibility and 'doing their best'; SENCos felt strongly that a central part of their role was to advocate for inclusive, effective practices for children with SEN.

## Chapter 9: Results: Phases four and five

### 9.1 Introduction

Phase	Period of data collection	Number of participants	Results Chapter
Phase one: Questionnaires	July 2014	54 SENCos	Chapter 7
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	July – September 2014	9 SENCos	
Phase three: Semi-structured interviews	September 2014 – July 2015	9 SENCos	Chapter 8: Thematic map 1 Chapter 9: Thematic map 2
Phase four: Questionnaires	March 2015	74 SENCos	Chapter 10
Phase five: Questionnaires	July 2015	40 SENCos	

**Table 9.1: Overview of presentation of results**

This chapter reports the results from phases four (March 2015) and five (July/ August 2015). Each phase consisted of a questionnaire, delivered to participants online. Both phases focused on the nature of the support the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo) had received, changes they had made within their setting and enablers/ barriers to the process of policy implementation. Results from the phases are presented together, to enable a comparison of findings.

The purpose of administering the questionnaires at two points through the year (half way through and at the end of the academic year) was to enable the further exploration and testing of the themes emerging from the in-depth interviews at phase three with a wider audience.

The participants at both phases four and five consisted of a larger group of SENCos who had varying degrees of experience and were from a wider geographical area than Phase

three. The demographic of the participants has been reported in the methodology chapter and briefly summarised in Table 9.2 below:

Phase four	March 2015  (6 months post introduction of SEND reforms)	74 SENCos responded	66% (n=48) Primary  28% (n=20) Secondary  6% (n= 5) Other  56% (n=40) 4+years SENCO experience  74% (n=53) completed the NA SENCo
Phase five	July 2015  (9 months post introduction of SEND)	40 SENCos responded	56% (n=22) Primary  31% (n=12) Secondary  13% (n= 5) Other  30% (n=12) 4+years SENCo experience  33% (n=13) completed the NA SENCo

**Table 9.2: Overview of participants for Phases four and five**

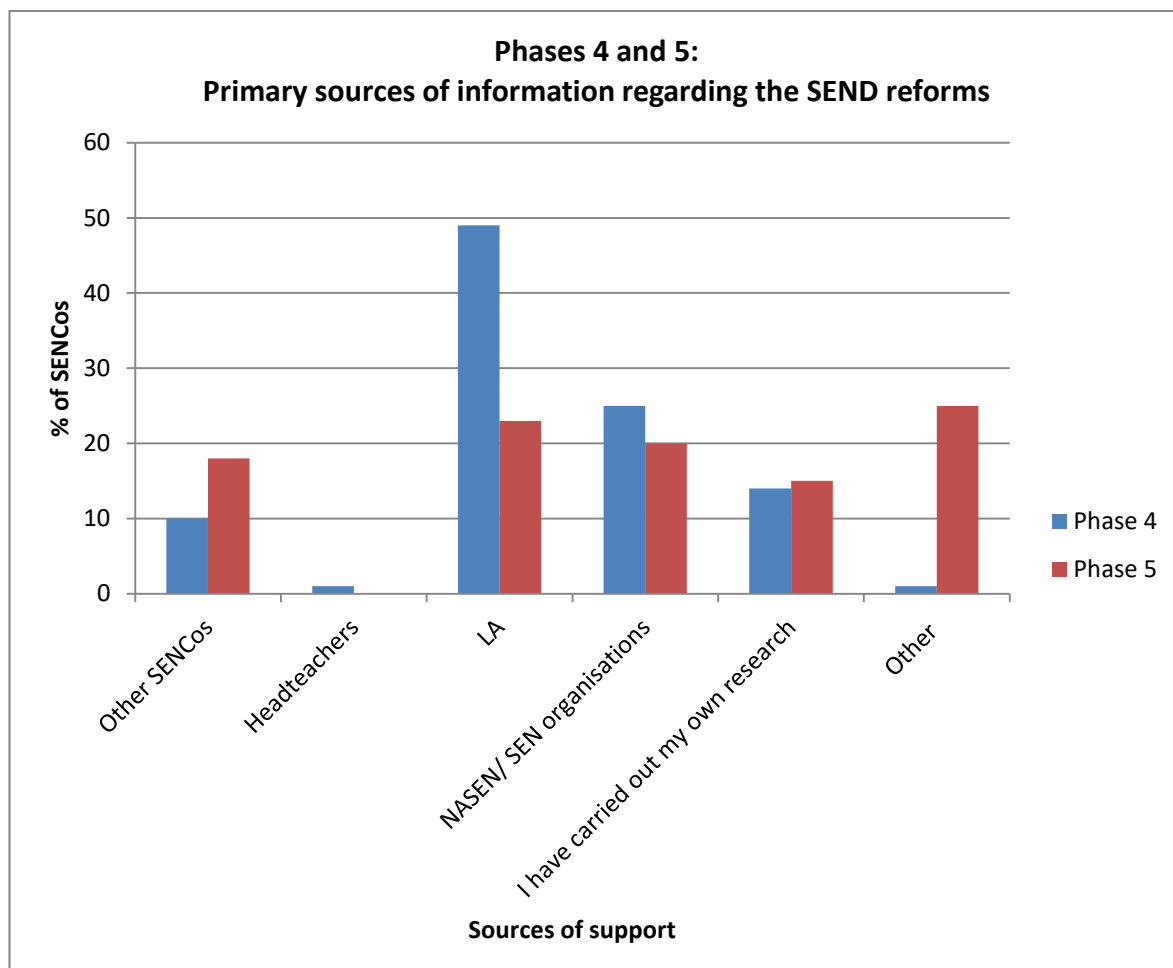
Data has been selected in light of the study's aim and questions. Additional data, which has consent, has been reserved for future use. See Appendices 9.1 and 9.2 for a sample response to the phase four and phase five questionnaires.

The chapter reports on the following areas:

- Views regarding the support received with implementing the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms
- Barriers and enablers to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms
- Respondents' views regarding the principles of the SEND reforms
- Priorities as a result of the SEND reforms
- Perceived impact six/ nine months into the reforms

## 9.2 Views regarding the support received with implementing the SEND reforms

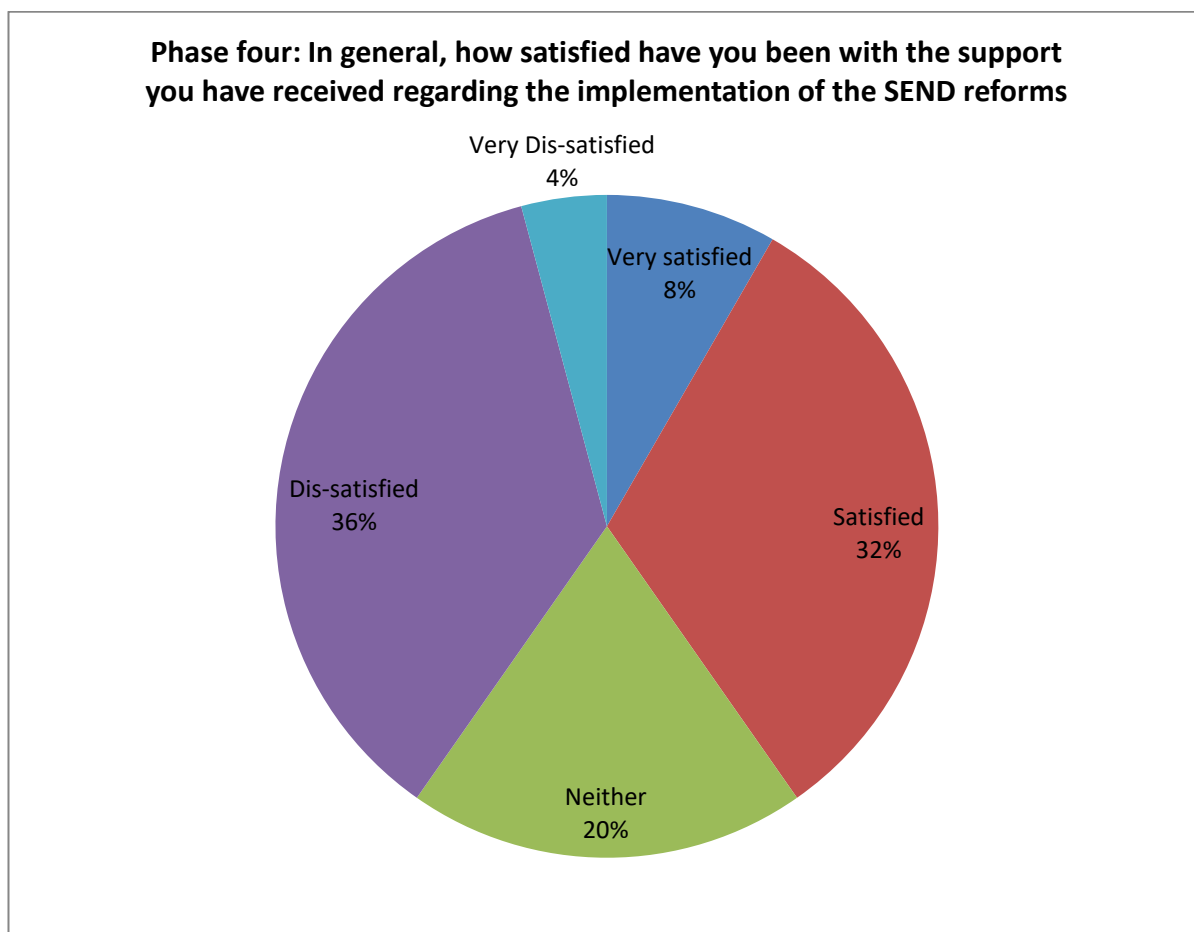
In line with the previous phases, SENCoS reported that their primary sources of information regarding the SEND reforms were varied. See Figure 9.1 below:



**Figure 9.1: Phases four and five: Primary sources of information regarding the SEND reforms**

Figure 9.1 illustrates that at phase four the Local Authority (LA) was the primary source of information, while at phase five this had shifted to 'other'. Other avenues for information cited by respondents included the governing body, senior leadership team (SLT), Special Educational Needs (SEN) charities, The Key (a national, subscription information service for school leaders), SENCo Forum and undertaking the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo); echoing the varied ways in which SENCoS sought support at Phase three. Only 39% (n=28) of SENCoS at phase four had taken part in specific SEND reform training.

The questionnaires also explored the SENCo's feelings of satisfaction towards the support they had received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms. Figure 9.2 shows the levels of satisfaction with support received.



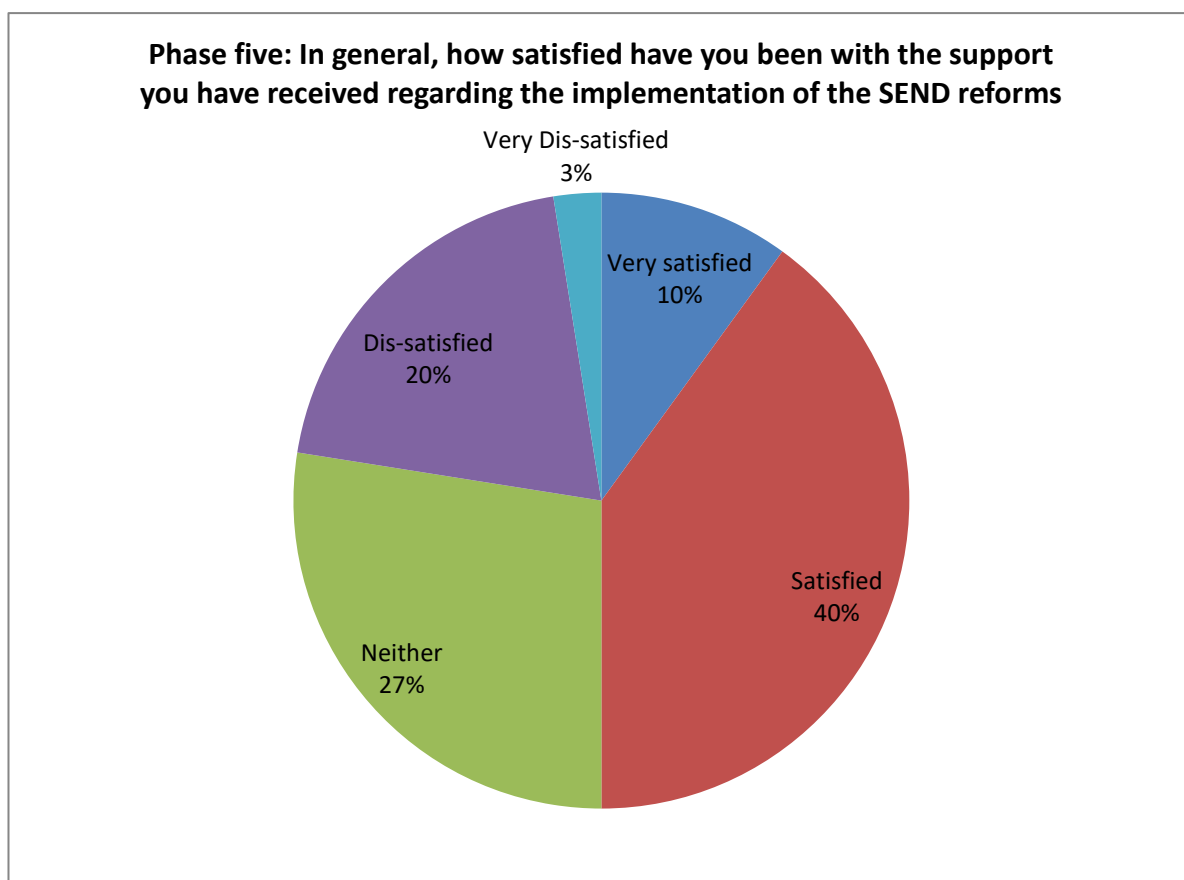
**Figure 9.2: Phase four: Pie chart indicating how satisfied SENCo's were with the support they received to implement the SEND reforms**

Additional comments made by respondents at phase four reflected that they felt there was a lack of clarity around the requirements of the SEND reforms and they had concerns that the SEND reforms may lead to a potential reduction of statements for vulnerable children. Some respondents acknowledged that some LAs had done 'the best they could' given the time frame, although a more gradual introduction would have been preferred. While some SENCo's commented favourably regarding the LA support they had received, this was with the caveat that support was often rushed and content of the information was often confused.

Certainly the lack of prescription regarding what the SENCo's 'should be doing' was a source of frustration, as stated by one SENCo, 'considering that SENCo's across the



country all need to do the same thing it still feels like I am reinventing the wheel alone'. This echoed the findings from earlier phases.



**Figure 9.3: Phase Five: Pie chart indicating how satisfied SENCOs were with the support they received to implement the SEND reforms**

The results from phase five, illustrated in Figure 9.3, are broadly in line with those from phase four; although it is notable that the percentage of SENCOs stating that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support at phase five was less. Comments at phase five reflected those at phase four, detailing feelings of frustration at the timing of the SEND reforms and the overall lack of communication and clarity from LAs. Additionally, during this phase, SENCOs commented on the difficulty of the reforms being introduced at the same time as other initiatives and a lack of consistent approach with newly introduced central systems.

Phase five expanded on the issue of support and explored whether, on reflection, SENCOs would have liked more support. 60% (n=24) agreed with the statement, 'I have had adequate resources to implement the reforms'. However, 45% (n=18) would have liked more support from their school, and 62.5% (n=25) would have like more support from

their LA. 40% (n=15) of SENCos at this phase had taken part in specific SEND reform training, similar to phase four.

### **9.3 Barriers and enablers to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms**

Key barriers cited across both phases reflected the themes from phase three, and these included a lack of time, money and clarity from central services. Additional barriers reported included a lack of support from head teachers, SLT and 'teachers who oppose change'. Respondents at phase four also cited that engaging with other services, including health and social care, was problematic. However, comments at phase five cited competing school priorities as an additional barrier.

Enablers of effective implementation mirrored that of the cited barriers: time, support and clarity; again reflecting the findings from the earlier phases. In addition to this, SENCos cited the importance of a whole school collaborative approach and the need for individuals to invest in the idea of change, with respondents stating that enablers included, 'teachers who embrace change' and 'staff on board' with the principles within the SEND reforms

### **9.4 Respondents' views regarding the principles of the SEND reforms**

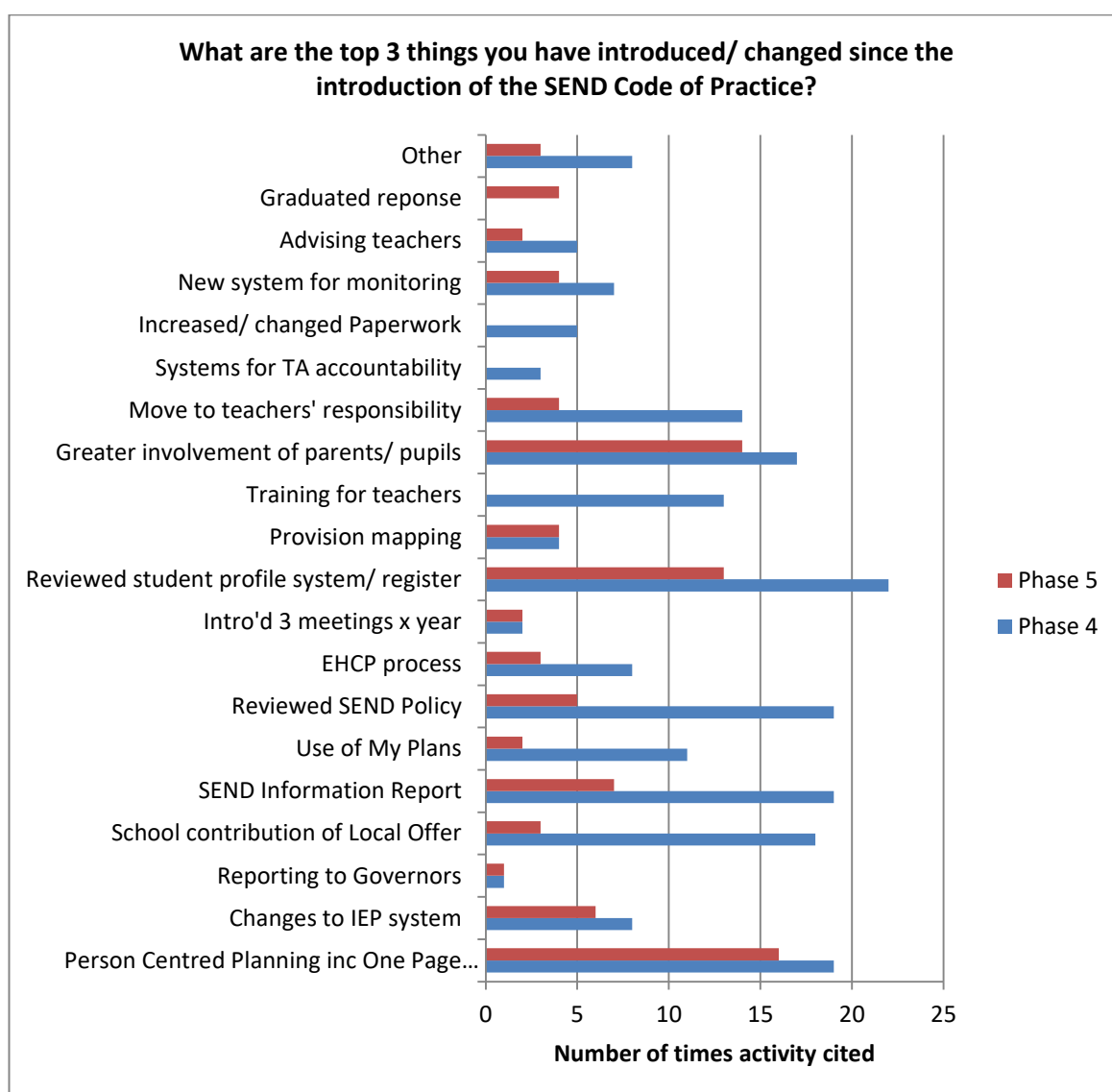
Both phases were asked whether they agreed with the following statement: 'The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?' 69.5% (n=50) of respondents at phase four agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. However, comments made by respondents stated that they felt they were already reflecting the new reform principles and had 'been doing that for years', although some did add that the new policy gave them leverage to act. Comments overwhelmingly positively reflected the principle of increased parent involvement, with the majority agreeing this was a necessary shift in SEN policy. However, additional comments did query how this principle might look in practice.

Similarly, 74% (n=29) either agreed or strongly agreed that cultural change was necessary in phase five. Again comments reflected that the central focus was on working with

families, and engaging parents, with comments suggesting that a benefit of the SEND reforms was the way in which the importance of parental engagement was overly stated.

## 9.5 Priorities as a result of the SEND reforms

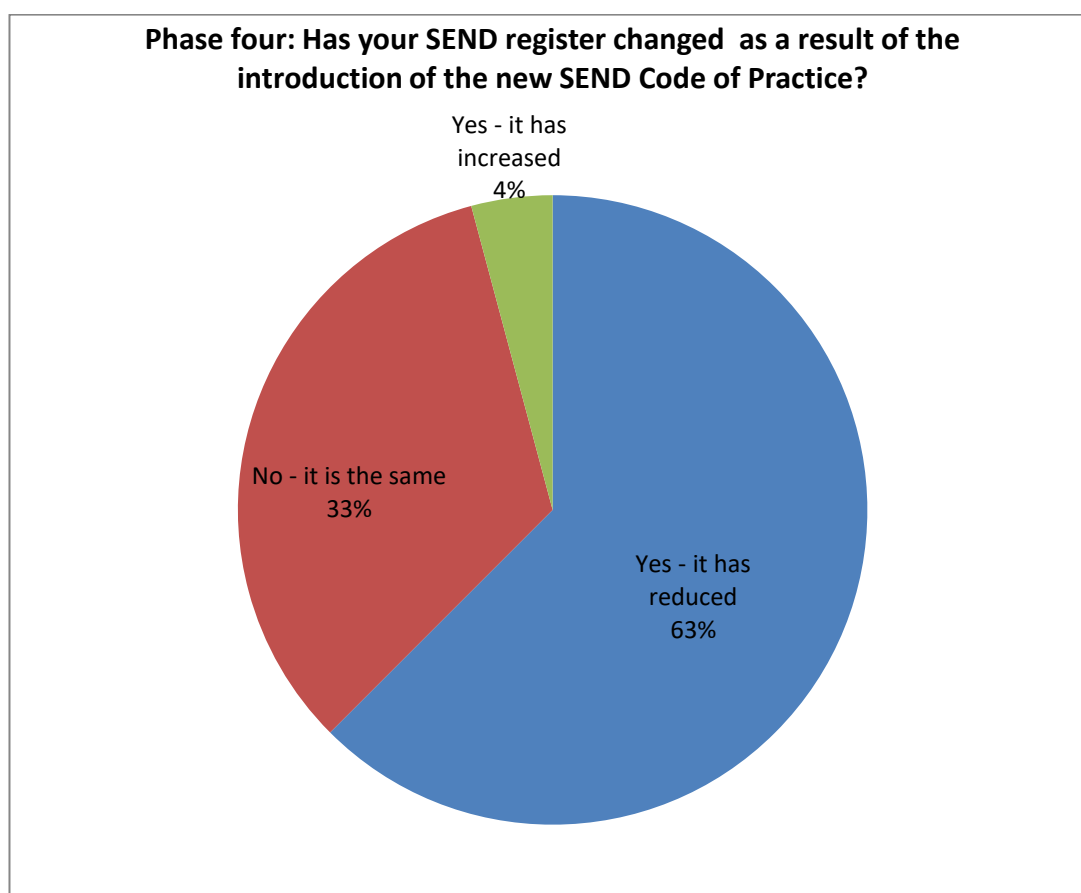
SENcos were asked to comment on the 'top three things' that they had introduced or had changed since the introduction of the SEND reforms. Figure 9.4 illustrates the number of times each respondent endorsed each 'activity'.



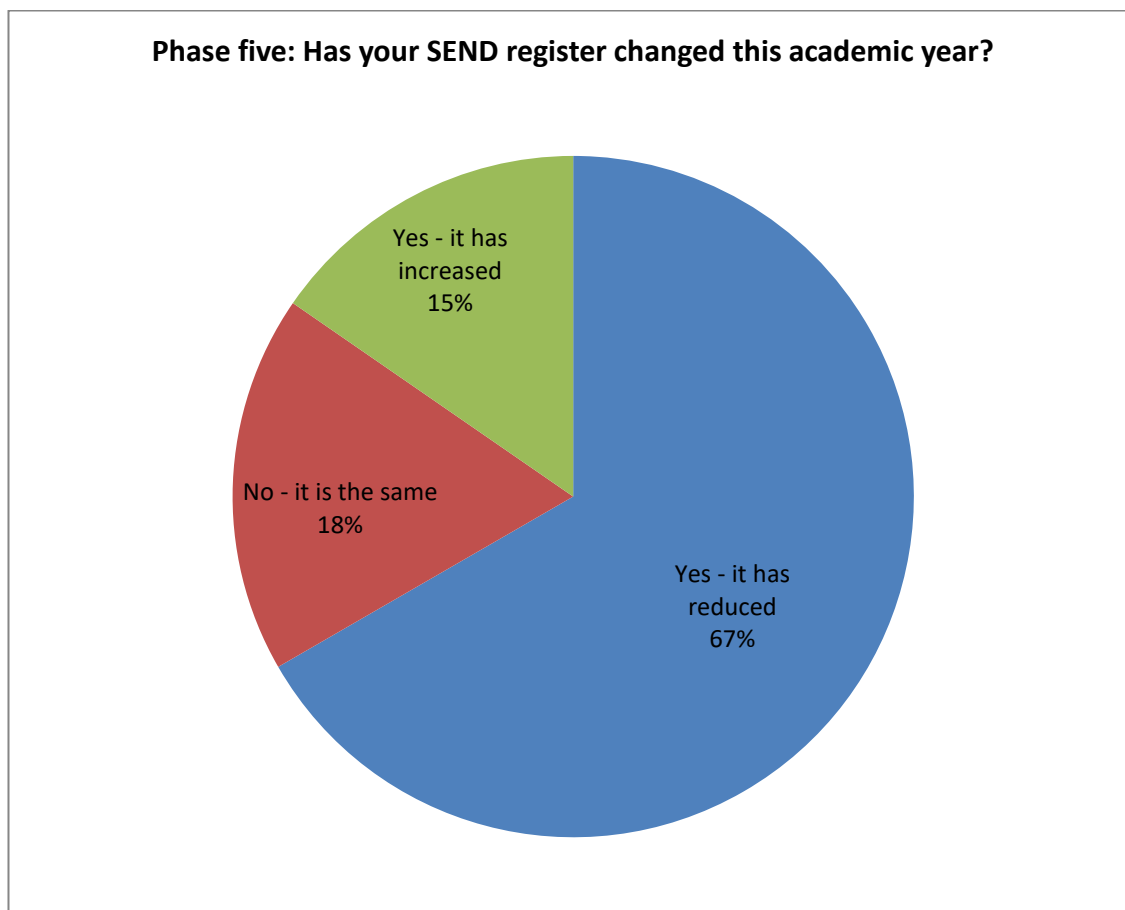
**Figure 9.4: Most commonly cited activities changed or introduced since the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015).**

Three key areas cited as priorities during phases one - four, reviewing the SEND policy, creating the SEND information report and contributing to the Local Offer, were not cited as a priority in phase five. It should be noted that these are typically annual activities. The most cited activities at phases four and five include reviewing the student profile system/ register and person centred planning/ one-page profiles, reflecting earlier phases. A greater focus on the involvement of parents/ pupils was also a frequently cited priority.

The idea of reviewing the student profile system/ register as a priority was also strongly evident in phase three, which warranted a question within phases four and five to specifically explore this phenomenon. SENCos were asked if they had changed their SEN register as a result of the SEND reforms, specifically the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) (see Figure 9.5 and 9.6 below).



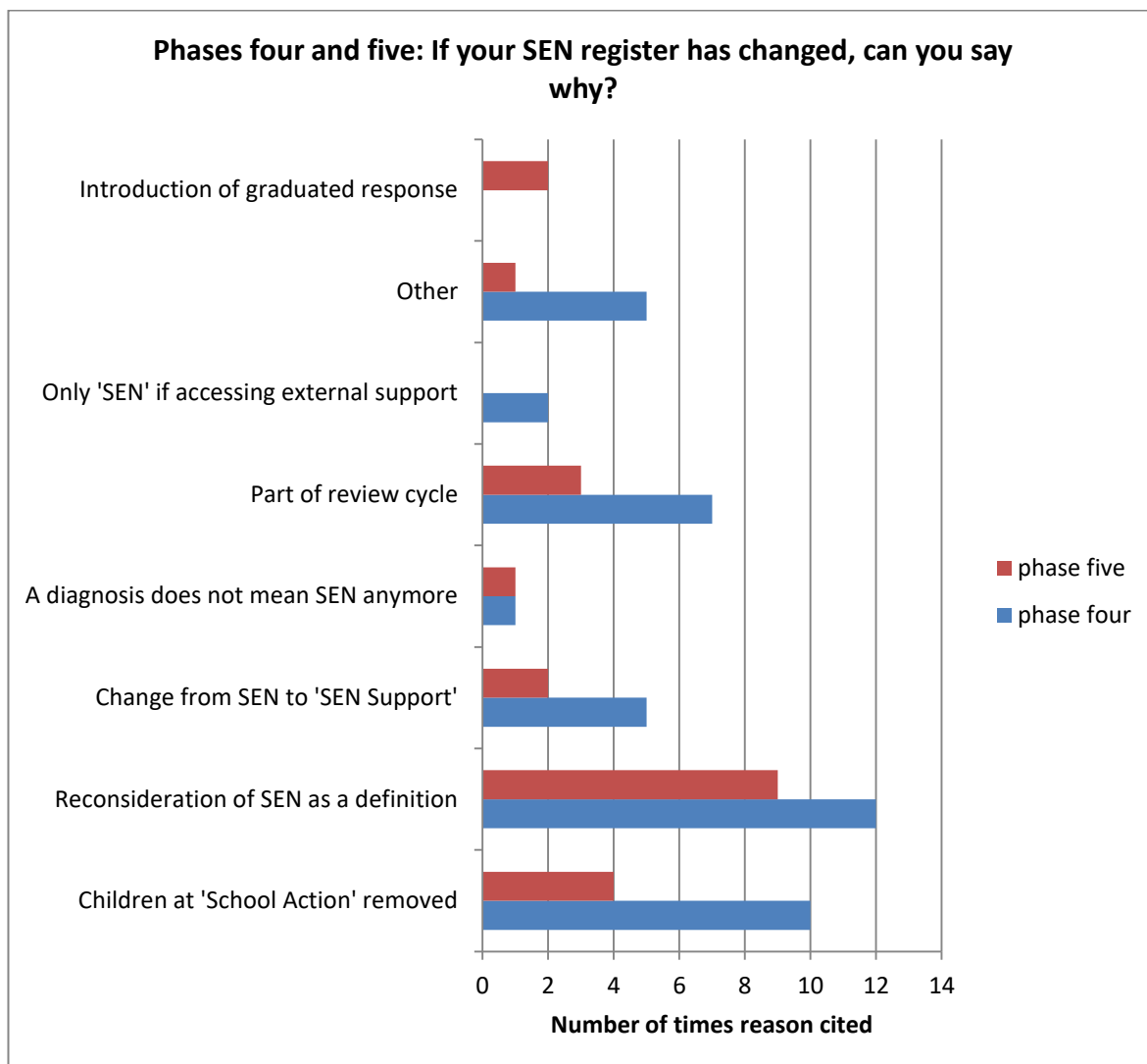
**Figure 9.5: Phase four: Has your SEN register changed this academic year?**



**Figure 9.6: Phase Five: Has your SEN register changed this academic year?**

The question at phase five was phrased differently to the question at phase four to ensure clarity between changes occurring during the academic year, and changes occurring as a result of the introduction of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). SENCOs were asked if changes to the SEN register were a direct result of the SEND reforms: 82% (n=42) at phase four and 67% (n=20) at phase five responded 'yes'.

The reasons cited by respondents for this change were varied. A tally of the most commonly cited reasons are detailed in Figure 9.7:

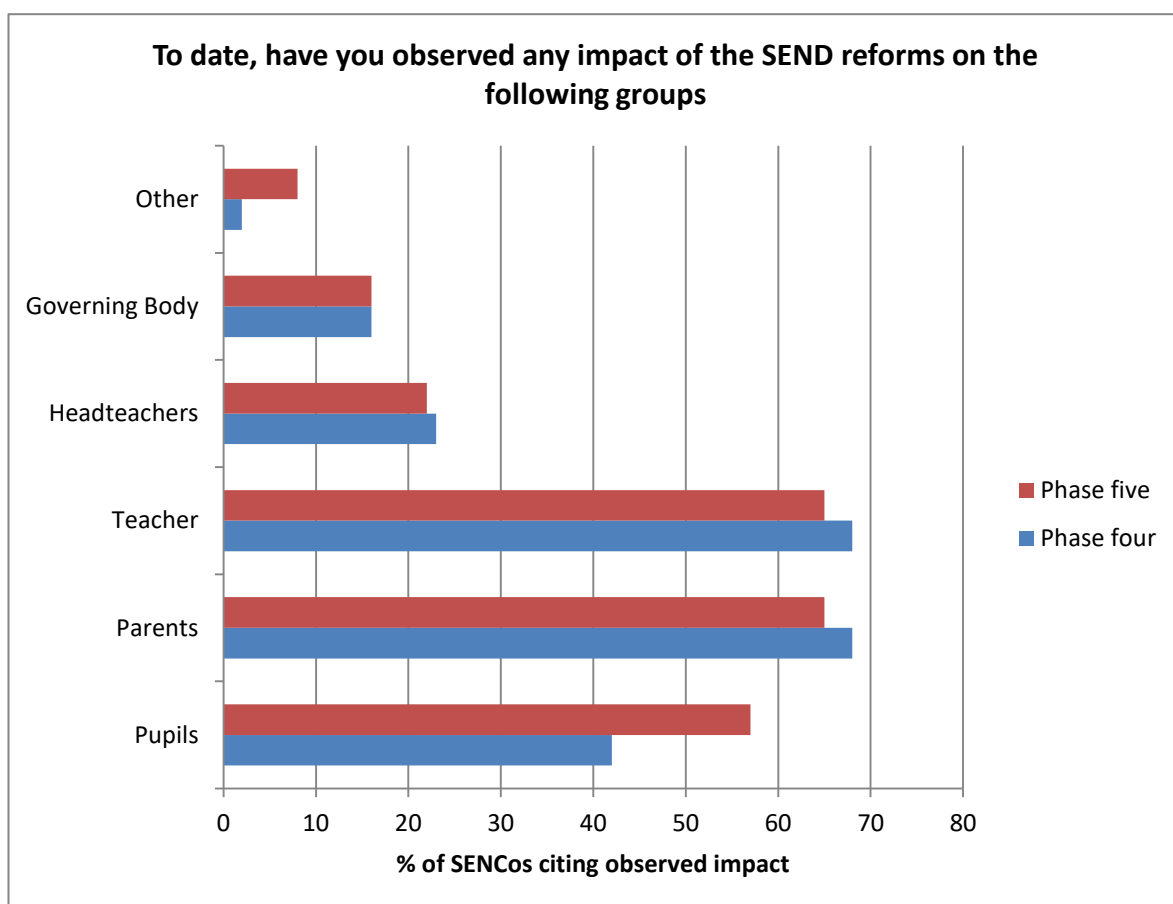


**Figure 9.7: Phases Four and Five: Reasons why the SEN register has changed.**

For both phases the reconsideration of the legal definition of SEN and the removal of children previously registered as School Action figured highly as cited reasons for reducing the SEN register; repeating earlier results in earlier phases which illustrated that some SENCOs were querying who 'should' be 'SEN'. One comment was reflective of many of the respondents, citing 'The large chunk at School Action has disappeared...' Further comments at phase four endorsed this, with some SENCOs reporting that they were only recording/ monitoring children who received 'SEN Support' or some instances had access to external agencies. From the responses given, it appeared that there was some confusion regarding which children should be recorded as having SEN. Some SENCOs stated that the legal definition of the term had changed, hence the changes. Others noted that they were reconsidering the application of the legal definition of SEN in their schools. Additional reasons cited included the view that reducing the SEN register was part of the

purpose of the SEN reforms, hence why SENCos over time had been ‘working to reduce our registers’.

## 9.6 Perceived impacts: six and nine months in

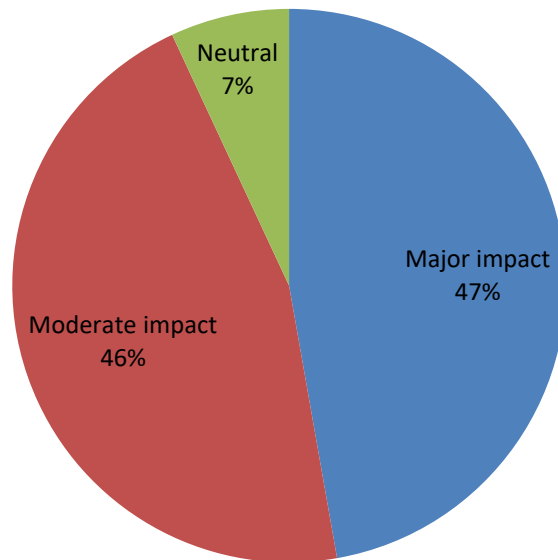


**Figure 9.8: Phases four and five: SENCos observed impact of the SEND reforms on groups**

Comments by respondents in relation to the observed impact of the SEND reforms echoed the findings above (See Figure 9.8), with SENCos stating that they felt that parents were better informed and that pupils were more involved; many SENCos felt that the new statutory assessment processes were an intrinsic process to this change. SENCos also felt that teachers were increasingly acknowledging their personal accountability for the progress of all children, including those identified as having SEN.

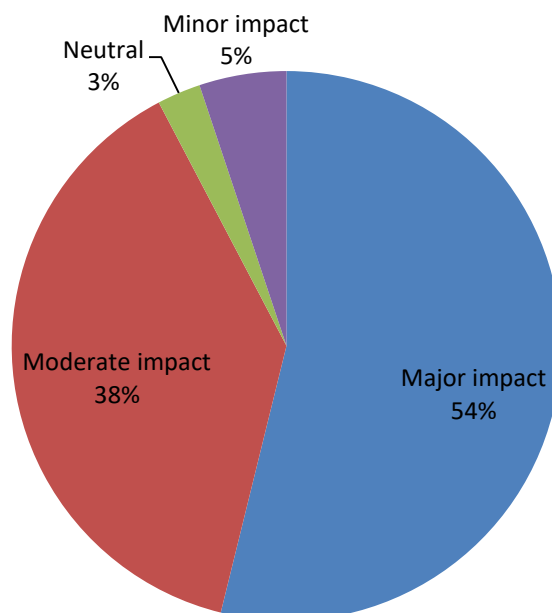
The question of impact was also asked in relation to the role of the SENCo.

**Phase four: Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?**



**Figure 9.9: Phase four: Percentage of SENCos who believe the SEND reforms have impacted on their role**

**Phase five: Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?**



**Figure 9.10: Phase five Percentage of SENCos who believe the SEND reforms have impacted on their role**



Comments from the SENCos at both phases suggested that becoming acquainted with new processes and paperwork had impacted on their role; for some being a new SENCo has exacerbated this. Additionally, SENCos reported that researching and managing the changes brought in by the SEND reforms requirements, while continuing with their everyday role, was challenging. Some respondents at Phase four felt that their role had been strategically enhanced through the introduction of the SEND reforms. Phase five respondents additionally cited the 'outcome focused' way of working and increased SENCo accountability as key factors impacting on their role.

## 9.7 Summary

This chapter has explored the responses from the online questionnaires which were given to a broader group of practising SENCos at the six (n=74) and nine months (n=40) mark respectively. The responses from both of the questionnaires predominantly echoed the views shared at phase three, although response, particularly at phase five, provided some additional perspectives.

The data presented within this chapter has illustrated that the perceived support SENCos have received with regards to the implementation of the SEND reforms has been varied, regarding the source. SENCo networks and individual research were both cited as key ways in which SENCos gathered information about the SEND reforms. However, the LA was the predominant source of information, which reflects the responses throughout all data collection phases. Satisfaction with the support on offer again was broadly similar at phases four and five, with SENCos responding satisfied or very satisfied with 40% (n=29) and 50% (n=20) respectively. Concerns regarding the nature of the support related to not only the timing of the SEND reforms but also the mixed messages which SENCos perceived they were receiving. Lack of clarity was frequently commented on and reflected the overarching theme in phase three of *I want more support*.

Phases four and five indicated similar barriers which the SENCo experienced regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms. This included a lack of time and a lack of support from head teachers and SLT. Regarding enablers, SENCos stated that adequate time and support from senior leaders was essential for policy implementation. However, this question also suggested that the engagement from the whole staff was also an important enabler.

Key statutory activities which were detailed as part of phase three were also echoed through phases four and five. This included the writing of the SEN policy, the SEND information report and schools engaging with the local offer. Equally, an increased focus on pupil and parent engagement was paramount in the response from SENCos at phases four and five, again reflecting earlier phases. Additionally, priorities identified at phases four and five included a re-evaluation of the SEN register. For the majority of respondents at both phases this resulted in the reduction in the SEN register, which was largely attributed to the introduction of the SEND reforms. Reasons for this trend were varied but did include a reconsideration of the definition of SEN, and queries regarding alternative reasons for underachievement. For some this was more formulaic, citing that the 'band of children' at School Action had been removed.

The responses at phases four and five indicated that the SENCos felt that they had observed some impact on teachers and parents, as a direct result of the SEND reforms. SENCos felt that parents were more involved and engaged with processes, while responsibility and accountability were also cited as a key impact on teachers. The impact was not limited to these two groups, with SENCos reporting that their workload had increased. However, SENCos also acknowledged that the SEND reforms had brought about a new way of thinking, which had in turn developed a more strategic view of the role.

## **Chapter 10: Discussion of results**

### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers how the findings from this study contribute to the current debate relating to the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). Specifically, the chapter explores the varying policy actor roles the SENCo could be seen to have assumed during the first year of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms (Ball et al., 2012). The chapter also considers the initial impact the SEND reforms have had in relation to children, parents and the role of the SENCo as reported from the perspective of the SENCo.

The key findings from this study illustrate that during this period of reform, SENCos naturally assumed a lead role in relation to implementing policy, either through direct or indirect means. SENCos began to narrate policy, described by Ball and colleagues (2012) as filtering, selecting and enforcing policy meaning, by identifying and determining how the policy was interpreted in their settings. SENCos immediately assumed new policy language and engaged with new policy procedures, almost without criticism.

Yet the findings also indicate that implementation of the policy was linked to the SENCos' feelings of responsibility and vested interest; such feelings of responsibility extended beyond the operational and strategic elements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and encompassed feelings of accountability, both for children and parents, and for developing an inclusive ethos. Additionally, the findings illustrate that there were tensions when trying to effect policy change. SENCos stated that other factors included the status of the role, as perceived by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the wider school, as well as issues related to competing for policy priorities at both a school level and nationally. Linked to this, SENCos reported feelings of being undervalued and isolated, and stated that the role was misunderstood by SLT.

With regard to the introduction of the SEND reforms, SENCos reported that they had observed the emerging impact on parents, particularly in relation to their increased engagement. They also reported that there was a greater focus on pupils' voice. Additionally, the findings indicated that the SENCos felt that the role of the SENCo has expanded due to the additional requirements for SENCos in terms of activities which the SEND reforms had brought in. It was also due to SENCos 'filling the gap' left by a lack of

access to external agencies, although it could be argued that the latter occurred for wider economic reasons. However, a further impact reported by the SENCos concerned the numbers of children identified as having SEN; numbers had reduced during the first year, and SENCos cited a multitude of reasons for this phenomenon.

However, to fully understand the relevance of this study, the findings need to be situated within the context of previous research. Therefore this chapter will seek to discuss this study's findings by using the policy actor typology (See chapter 5) as a structure through which the role of the SENCo is explored and explained (Ball et al., 2012). Ball et al. suggest that the actor types assumed during policy enactment are 'not necessarily attached to specific individuals, nor are they fixed, unified and mutually exclusive "types" of teacher in every case' (2012: 49). Certainly, the findings from this study bear this out. Following on from an exploration of the SENCo role within the policy actor typology, the chapter discusses the findings in relation to the impact of the SEND reforms, specifically focusing on the role of the SENCo, children and parents as perceived by the SENCo. The chapter is structured as follows:

- Policy actor typology and the SENCo (Ball et al., 2012)

The role of the SENCos as a:

- Narrator
  - Entrepreneur
  - Enthusiast and translator
  - Transactor
  - Critic
  - Receiver
  - Outsider
- The SEND reforms and the beginnings of impact
    - Impact on children
    - Impact on parents
    - Impact on the SENCo role

## 10.2 The Policy Actor Typology

### The role of narrator

The findings from this study illustrate that the SENCos immediately responded to the introduction of new policy guidance by selecting and narrating aspects of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). A number of SENCos began by identifying and selecting both the statutory and non-statutory elements of the 2015 Code which they felt needed to be addressed within their setting; this selection began before the official guidance was finalised, with SENCos using the draft advice before September 2014 to determine priorities. This suggests that the SENCos quickly assumed the role of narrator as soon as the new policy was introduced (Ball et al., 2012); a role echoed throughout all the phases of the study. There were elements of the guidance which restricted the way in which SENCos could select and narrate policy in their settings. For example, the requirement to have a SEND information report, detailing how each school identifies and supports children with SEN, was statutory. Schools were also required to contribute to the LAs' Local Offer (DfE and DoH, 2015). While Ball and colleagues suggest that 'policies rarely tell you exactly what to do', they also suggest that some can 'narrow the range of creative responses' (2012: 3).

Despite an element of restriction regarding policy response, the findings from this study evidence that SENCos were 'explaining to colleagues, deciding and then announcing what must be done, what can be done and what cannot' (Ball et al., 2012: 50). This extended beyond a narrating role, and the findings illustrate that SENCos were taking a lead role in determining school policy by selecting and interpreting it. This extends upon the work of Kearns which suggested that the SENCo sought to inform others of 'knowledge' (2005: 145). It has been argued that the 2015 Code lacks specific guidance and clarity and is less prescriptive than previous versions (Norwich, 2014), perhaps reflecting not only the view of an increasingly school-led system, but also Ball and colleagues' (2012) suggestion that sometimes the onus is on the school to develop and interpret policy when it has not yet been developed by the policy makers. Certainly, this view is reflected within the findings from this study, with a number of SENCos suggesting that they were implementing their interpretation of the guidance as well as taking part in unofficial LA 'trial processes'. Some SENCos suggested that the rules and expectations changed every time they spoke to the LA. The findings suggest that SENCos viewed this as both a concern and an opportunity.

SENCoS believed that this approach could lead to a varied interpretation of national policy within schools, something they reported on as a negative outcome, but which also allowed them the freedom to take charge of processes.

However, despite the SENCoS within this study assuming a lead role in 'deciding' policy, only two of the nine SENCoS at phase three were members of the senior leadership team (SLT). The primary SENCo was a member due to the position of SENCo, and the secondary SENCo was a member due to her role as an assistant head teacher. Therefore the majority of SENCoS within this study were taking a lead role regarding policy implementation, without the formal status of being a member of the SLT (Szwed, 2007c; Pearson, 2010; Oldham and Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013). Policy interpretation and narration tend to be primarily assumed by head teachers and senior leaders (Ball et al., 2012). This presents an interesting juxtaposition; the SENCoS were assuming a lead role in the narration and interpretation of new statutory policy, yet lacked the formal status that SLT membership can bring, which, it could be argued, is essential to effect change (Tissot, 2013).

The findings also indicate that decisions often made when isolated and without apparent support, were problematic for SENCoS, particularly those who were not part of SLT. The lack of support was often made worse by the low priority given to SEN policy by SLT. The research suggests that the issue of narrating new policy within a set of wider school policy priorities was challenging for the SENCoS. Certainly, the findings suggested that the introduction of the SEND reforms at the same time as the New Curriculum (DfE, 2014c) was problematic for SENCoS, due to the primary focus on the latter in schools. Glazzard highlights the tension between 'advancing inclusion as a policy agenda' while at the same time suggesting that 'neo-liberal forms of governance have continued to emphasise the value of function skills and the importance of enterprise and self-reliance' (2014: 40). The SENCoS within this study echoed this tension of competing policies and how to negotiate these, while also having to consider their alignment to new and existing policies, many of which they may find 'controversial and challenging' (Brundrett, 2011: 339). Such feelings may be exacerbated by a lack of experience of the SENCo or their understanding of the wider school picture; not being an SLT member could make it difficult to have a holistic picture of school policy as a whole (Oldham and Radford, 2011).

The findings from this study suggest that the SENCoS did not necessarily want to be part of the SLT, despite the argument that this is the most effective way of managing the strategic aspect of the role (Tissot, 2013). Kearns (2005) highlights a key issue with this approach; 'the higher the level at which the responsibility is delegated, the more likely it appears that other staff will make a contribution to its fulfilment' (2005: 146). Certainly, Mackenzie (2007) is in agreement, stating that the role of SENCo is an agent of change, particularly with regards to inclusion, and that the status attributed to the role is imperative in facilitating this. SENCoS cited the potential increase in workload, as well as a detraction from the SENCo role, as a reason not to seek SLT membership. The findings did, however, suggest that SENCoS were concerned about issues regarding the seniority and status of the role; issues that they did not believe were necessarily related to, or solvable by, SLT status. Feelings of loneliness, being 'stuck in the middle' and a lack of clout regarding the practical execution were also reported, as well as feelings of wider accountability for developing an inclusive ethos. The SENCoS also reported that they wanted a greater understanding of their role; a consequence of these feelings was that SENCoS felt undervalued. Such findings add to previous research (Rosen-Webb, 2011), and suggest that SENCoS continually felt that the role remained misunderstood by those they worked with, specifically with regard to the breadth of the role. This extended beyond the school settings, with SENCoS suggesting that some external agencies underestimated the professionalism of the role. It may be argued that such issues could be alleviated through SLT membership for example, as this would provide opportunities for clarifying the role and for sharing the breadth of responsibility. However, the findings suggest that the SENCoS wanted access to SLT, not membership. This echoes Szwed's (2007a) recommendation regarding the need for strong communication between SENCoS and SLT. This does present a tension regarding the best way to execute the SENCo role if the SENCo does not want to be part of the SLT, or indeed if they are not invited to be.

It is not just the position of the SENCo which needs to be considered. The findings from this study suggest that the response of other policy actors in schools, including head teachers, teachers and teaching assistants, also impacted on the implementation of policy. This is intrinsic when considering the construction of inclusive policy is co-dependent on various stakeholders (Simplican et al., 2015). In addition to this, it could be argued that competing subjects and policy areas in addition to a 'history of prior discourses' are also influencing factors (Ball et al., 2012: 138). Thomson suggests that

selecting, narrating and interpreting policy is a 'risky business' for head teachers due to the external pressures of policy (2009, cited in Ball et al., 2012: 53). Certainly, the findings from this study suggest that SENCOs are experiencing similar feelings and it could be argued that this is particularly pertinent when considering the feelings of investment and accountability as reported by the SENCOs.

### **The role of entrepreneur**

Despite such reported concerns, the findings from this study illustrate that the SENCOs were thinking about how to bring colleagues on board and 'make it easier' for them; SENCOs were seeking to 'mak[e] policy palatable and mak[e] it happen' (Ball et al., 2012: 50). This suggests that the SENCOs were acting as 'policy entrepreneurs... they seek to recruit others to their cause' (Ball et al., 2012:53).

The findings suggest that the SENCOs carried this role through a myriad of ways; there did not appear to be a relationship between the nature of the policy activities and the seniority of the role. The findings also suggest that such advocacy for policy was not always through overt means. For example, the SENCOs described the various ways in which they engaged staff within new policy initiatives, including the immediate adoption of new language, for example, the phrases 'outcome focused' and 'with the child's family at the centre' figured prominently in the interviews when the SENCOs were describing interactions with staff. SENCOs put up information boards and held 'drop in surgeries' for teachers. SENCOs also described how they modelled the process of identifying and supporting children with SEN and leading through the introduction of new processes, for example new person-centred practices, which were reflective of the NA SENCo Learning Outcomes (NCTL, 2014). In addition to this, there were more overt methods of implementing change, such as specific SEND reform training for staff and the introduction of new processes, derived from the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). It could be argued that this illustrates 'the importance of practices, the routine and the mundane ways in which policies are enacted' (Ball et al., 2012: 138) as well demonstrating how the SENCo is a 'vital resource' (Soan, 2005: 43).

A central finding from the study was the way in which SENCOs used the introduction of new policy guidance as a vehicle to effect change, potentially reflecting personal investment in policy principles as well as highlighting how the lack of status can impact



when trying to effect change, which means that alternative drivers need to be adopted. While SENCos reported that they felt they were already embodying the principles of the SEND reforms, they did suggest that the introduction of statutory guidance highlighted the importance of SEN provision and gave them a licence to act. During a period of policy implementation, the specific policy is selected out (Ball et al., 2012) and then used to promote change or, it could be argued, forward specific agendas. This demonstrates how the SENCos were acting as entrepreneurs, as described by Ball and colleagues, through advocating particular principles of policy. The inference from the SENCos across all the study's phases was that legislation could bring personal distance, and therefore legislative clout, to the introduction of new ideas and processes, suggesting to staff that the reason for change is policy, not the person. SENCos may hence be acting as covert entrepreneurs when leading policy change and using policy as a means through which to effect change. This is particularly pertinent when the issues above with status and SLT membership are considered.

Regardless of the methods utilised to implement policy, it is notable that throughout the study, the SENCos began narrating and were advocating new SEN policy immediately, despite their concerns about the lack of clarity. The findings from this study indicated that the SENCos felt invested in the new policy and certainly agreed with the central principles of the SEND reforms, even if they critiqued certain aspects. This reflects the reported notions of individual responsibility and concurs with Coburn's view (2005, cited in Braun et al., 2011) that the individuals' values, knowledge and practice will influence the way in which they enact policy. In terms of advocacy for policy within schools, reflecting the work of an entrepreneur (Ball et al., 2012), SENCos reported that they felt responsible for provision social and emotional as well as academic. In addition to this, SENCos reported feelings of responsibility in relation to securing good outcomes for children and facilitating family leadership. These areas reflect the central principles of the SEND reforms (DfE and DoH, 2015) and perhaps indicate the areas in which SENCos feel that they are professionally invested in as well as potentially illustrating the longer term government policy drive towards inclusion (Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007).

The reported feelings of investment, which may explain the entrepreneurial role, also confirm Pearson and colleagues' proposal that 'SENCos anticipate taking a lead role in making schools more inclusive for all, not just pupils with SEN' (2015:53). However, the

current study specifically illustrates that SENCoS were predominantly concerned with inclusion in relation to SEN, rather than wider groups (Ball et al., 2012). There are a number of potential reasons for this: lack of time to execute the role, breadth (or not) of the job description, even interest from the individual SENCo. However, the potential risk of such an approach is that the very notion of having one person responsible for SEN could be anti-inclusion because ‘the ethos of inclusion rejects the view the responsibility for specified groups of learners should be invested in one professional’ (Layton, 2005: 59).

Both Pearson (2008) and Morewood (2012) draw attention to the conflict of having an individual responsible for a group of learners, which by definition is separatist. It should also be considered that the immediate take-up of new policy reflects the view of Ball and colleagues that staff rarely have the time and space to reflect on new policy (Ball et al., 2012). Additionally this could indicate a lack of confidence in new policy initiatives, particularly for those SENCoS who were new to the role, who perhaps are less likely to critique policy or risk delaying implementing policy and are more likely to follow specific guidance, a role potentially reflective of a policy ‘receiver’ and discussed later in the chapter (Ball et al., 2012: 63).

### **The role of enthusiast and translator**

The findings suggest that while SENCoS were acting as policy narrators and entrepreneurs, through the activities and processes they were introducing, they were also acting as policy enthusiasts. The findings clearly illustrate that SENCoS felt that *modelling* inclusive practice was essential; this was particularly evident from the interviews with the SENCoS who retained teaching responsibilities. Such an approach allowed SENCoS to demonstrate the implementation of new policy, for example, the new Assess, Plan, Do, Review procedure (DfE and DoH, 2015), thus ‘recruit[ing] others to the possibilities of policy’ (Ball et al., 2012: 60). Certainly, within this study, the SENCoS reported how they wished to demonstrate that policy was ‘do-able’ to colleagues, echoing the idea of the SENCo as a collaborator who wants to share the new approaches and link with other professionals, to ‘be realistic and positive’ (Kearns, 2005: 138). This potentially reflects Alisauskas and colleagues (2011) who suggest that a focus on inclusion in a school is capacity building. It could also be argued that the enthusiasts’ approach is more in line with Qureshi’s (2014) view of effecting cultural change and reflects the view

of Ball and colleagues that policy ‘does not unfold through large-scale events but, rather, through a complex ‘micro-physics’’ (Ball et al., 2012: 138).

However, it is interesting to consider how the role of the SENCo as a policy enthusiast may change if the role of the SENCo changes over time. If the role of the SENCo becomes one increasingly without teaching responsibilities, how will the SENCo recruit colleagues to the positives of policy if they are unable to demonstrate it themselves? It could be, as Ball and colleagues (2012) suggest, through the development and production of texts and events. Or it could be argued that the role of extending the team of entrepreneurs is even more important. Certainly, the findings from this study indicate that SENCos were seeking to recruit others to their cause to champion policy. This was particularly evident in the findings which reported on the development of mini informal SEN teams, for example, the adoption of departmental SEN champions.

### **The role of transactor**

The findings from the study illustrate that the SENCos clearly felt accountable, although this was not related to typical accountability measures such as monitoring children’s progress. Feelings of accountability related to wider notions of the SENCo role, in relation to advocacy for children and parents and the development of inclusive policy. The role of the transactor is typically someone who is seen by colleagues and management to act on policy, to report and account for new policy (Ball et al., 2012). It is notable that the SENCos within this study did not appear to be concerned with ‘making policy visible by evidencing policy activity’ (Ball et al., 2012: 57). Rather, the findings suggest that SENCos felt accountable to individuals. The findings illustrate that SENCos felt accountable when trying to access provision for individuals, with SENCos arguing that this was necessary when reviewing provision or trying to access additional services from an LA level. It could be argued that measures of accountability for children have gained prominence through SEN legislation (Children and Families Act, 2014; DfE and DoH, 2015), but this does not necessarily explain the reported feelings of accountability towards developing an inclusive ethos, which Morewood describes as the SENCos’ ‘ethical responsibility’ (2012: 75). In a sense, this does illustrate that SENCos were trying to make policy visible, not for the sake of the policy, but due to the need to secure the best outcomes for the individual.

Certainly, the findings from this study indicate that linked to the role of transactor was that of mediator. SENCos reported feelings of being 'in the middle', particularly because they often had to convey messages between parties. The findings illustrate how when SENCos had to account for and evidence policy, specifically for individuals, this could cause tensions between parties, for example parents, teachers, SLT and governors due to the outcomes which followed as a result, ratifying one of the hypothesised outcomes of the SEND reforms regarding the role of the SENCo (Pearson et al., 2015). SENCos from the study who were part of Multi Academy Trusts commented on this issue, citing the additional layer of management/ bureaucracy which brought about mediation issues. Such feelings relate back to the earlier reported issues of feeling isolated.

It is interesting to consider whether SENCos may assume a greater role of transactor in the future, particularly in relation to wider whole school SEN policy. The NA SENCo Learning Outcomes (NCTL, 2014) draw attention to the need to account for and monitor provision, typically through provision management. Certainly Pearson et al. (2015) argue that SENCos do not regard the increase of pupil monitoring as linked with better outcomes, rather they view this as increased bureaucracy. Therefore, with the increased focus on value for money, and potentially accountability, we could hypothesise that the transacting role may increase in the future.

### **The role of the receivers**

The findings throughout illustrate that the SENCos quickly took on board new policy initiatives, advocating these in a variety of ways, including narrating and translating. The findings suggest that this is due to a host of factors, including the personal investment of the SENCo in the policy principles. However, it is important to note that whilst the idea of personal investment is a dominant theme for the majority of SENCos, for others their seemingly strict adherence to policy guidance may be more reflective of their lack of confidence in their role and their lack of understanding of the new policy or indeed their lack of experience. This was a particularly strong theme at phases one and two, which perhaps illustrates this theory. However, it could be argued that some of the SENCos remained policy dependent due to concerns regarding the lack of clarity from the guidance (Norwich, 2014), potentially due to concerns regarding accountability, which Ball and colleagues refer to as 'receivers' (2012: 63).

### **The role of the critic**

The findings from this study did not highlight a specific role for the SENCo as a critic, which reflects the view that this does tend to be a 'marginal and muted' role (Ball et al., 2012: 61). While the SENCos were critical of policy, particular regarding the support they received to implement the SEND reforms from LAs, SENCos still quickly took on the role of policy narrator, entrepreneur and enthusiast. The findings did not suggest that the SENCos took their concerns regarding policy implementation any further, for example to their head teacher or the LA. The only evidence which illustrated the role of critic was the way in which a number of SENCos described how they were not engaging with LA support, due to their perception of its lack of usefulness. In addition to this, the findings illustrate how SENCos 'protected' staff from some of the wider, more substantial changes which may indicate a critique of the policy itself or the assumption that to add to their colleagues' workload felt unfair.

It could be hypothesised that there are a number of reasons why the SENCo has not assumed this role. The lack of this role may reflect the idea that perhaps there was no time or space for reflection on the new policy (Ball et al., 2012), which may mean that SENCos have not had the time to reflect on their view of the policy. Yet this counters the idea that SENCos felt invested in the policy, hence the reported strong feelings of advocacy. Potentially others within the school could be providing a counter voice, which consequently means the SENCo does not need to provide this. This is potentially echoed in the findings from this study which reported on how teacher resistance was a factor for SENCos when trying to effect change. However, this may relate to a variety of factors, and may not necessarily reflect the teachers' perspective. Feelings may relate to reform fatigue or the historical experience that criticising new policy and initiatives does not achieve much; perhaps reflecting feelings related to the practical value of SEN policy (Ellis and Tod, 2014).

### **The role of the outsiders**

It is notable that one aspect this research has not addressed in any depth was the notion of the outsider policy actor (Ball et al., 2012). This reflects the idea that not all policy development is school based, and takes into account the wider voices of the other stakeholders who are invested, or at the very least involved, in the implementation of

policy. The LA is cited by Ball and colleagues (2012) as a typical example of an outsider; this would be a pertinent area for future SEND reform research. Heimans (2012) would agree that it is essential to consider the impact of external factors during a period of policy implementation. Certainly, throughout this study, the findings demonstrated that while the SENCos reported feelings of isolation, they were constantly working with, dealing with and being affected by 'outsiders' (Ball et al., 2012: 55). In this instance, this role was predominantly assumed by the LA. It has previously been argued that some policy can only be executed with the support of outsiders (Ball et al., 2012). However, perhaps this study is an example of where policy outsiders are omitted from the internal processes in school.

### **10.3 Summary**

In summary, the findings from this study illustrate that the SENCos, at a time of policy implementation, could be seen to assume a number of policy actor roles concurrently. Through using the policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012), the findings from this study indicate that the SENCos immediately took the lead narrating role, when selecting, determining and interpreting new policy. However, in addition to this, the SENCo could be seen to be adopting the role of an entrepreneur and an enthusiast for policy, through direct and indirect activities, with a view to recruiting others to their cause (Ball et al., 2012: 53). The findings indicate that the role of the transactor was more marginal, although feelings of accountability towards children and parents were reported. The SENCos at times assumed the role of policy receivers by demonstrating their strict adherence to policy, potentially indicating a lack of experience or confidence in the SEND reforms or the role. Other marginal roles include those of the critic and the outsider, which may reflect engagement with outside services as well as time and space to reflect on policy.

### **10.4 The SEND reforms: the beginnings of impact**

The purpose of the study was twofold: to explore the nature of the SENCo role during a period of policy implementation, and to consider the impact of the SEND reforms as observed by the SENCo. This section will focus on the latter.

## Impact on children

A central finding throughout the study illustrates that the SENCos particularly felt that the role of the SENCo should be one of an advocate, specifically in relation to advocating for parents and for children and, it could be argued, this demonstrated the SENCos' investment in inclusive policy. With regard to advocating for children, the SENCos reported a strong sense of accountability about needing to secure best outcomes for children; the SENCos did not relate this to a narrow attainment focus but reported that they were concerned with all areas: personal, social and academic outcomes. The notions of advocacy and outcomes link closely with the central principles of the SEND reforms (DfE and DoH, 2015). The findings illustrate that there were tensions when trying to advocate for children while trying to secure the best, outcome focused provision. The issues related to having to make decisions based on finance and priority need. However, this does also illustrate the previously discussed tensions of trying to narrate and advocate a new policy when there is a lack of clarity, and potentially status, over the key policy implementers' role. This suggests a move away from the role of 'SENCo as rescue' as suggested by Kearns (2005: 139) and reflects a more strategic view of support.

However, the findings from this study also indicate that there were further impacts on children, which present a potential tension regarding the role of advocate. The findings suggest that the number of children on the SEN register has reduced. This was a theme which occurred across all phases of this study. Pearson and colleagues, in response to the Green Paper (DfE, 2012 cited in Pearson et al., 2015), had predicted that the SEND reforms would bring an increased uncertainty regarding the term SEN and, as a consequence, which children the SENCo would be focused upon, stating 'the dominant view, however, is that there will be a steady reduction in the number of children on the SEN register' (2015: 52).

Certainly, the findings from this study confirm this hypothesis. SENCos, at all phases, clearly indicated that they were reducing their SEN registers, either consciously or as a by-product of the introduction of the SEND reforms. A range of reasons were given for this phenomenon.

One of the reasons given relates to the aforementioned issue of the over-identification of children as having an SEN (Ofsted, 2010). SENCos stated that they were reconsidering the

underlying reasons why children had been identified as having an SEN, for example a lack of access to quality teaching or low expectations (Ofsted, 2010). The findings suggest that the way in which SENCos addressed this concern was through revisiting the legal definition of SEN. Whilst the legal definition of SEN did not change with the introduction of the SEND reforms, despite a small number of SENCos believing it had, SENCos used the introduction of the new SEN support category (DfE and DoH, 2015) to re-affirm the principle that all teachers should take responsibility for all of the children in their class, including those with SEN (DfE and DoH, 2015). SENCos clearly were stating their expectation of teachers and the difference between in-class support and SEN. For some, this led to a decrease in SEN numbers because children who had previously been considered as having SEN were no longer considered as such. This indicates that SENCos were using new policy as a tool to challenge previously held decisions regarding the identification of children and to reassert the legal definition of SEN. This does, however, suggest that there are training implications for staff if a cultural shift towards teacher responsibility is being promoted. Additionally, the change in SEN registers was rapid, and it is interesting to think about how this message of teacher responsibility and effectively a change of status was conveyed to parents. Both of these elements are explored further in the next chapter.

However, the findings also indicate that there were additional reasons for the reduction of the SEN registers, which were not related to the definition of SEN. This included queries regarding the differences between SEN and the newly introduced SEN Support status (DfE and DoH, 2015), with the inference that the term 'support' meant the child should be accessing something outside of the classroom; some SENCos stated this should be external support. This relates closely to another cited reason, which was that the children who were at the School Action stage of the register had been removed, which echoes the recommendations made by Ofsted (2010, cited in Norwich, 2014) that children identified at this stage should have their needs met through typical classroom practice. The latest annual Ofsted report suggests that as a result of the SEND reforms 'individual schools had adjusted their criteria for including a pupil on their register of SEN' (2016: 89); findings reflected in the most recent SEN data (DfE, 2016b). However, the findings from this study, however, suggest that the decision to remove children is more arbitrary. This does raise questions regarding the interpretation of the 'special educational provision', which is determined as 'additional to or different from that made



generally for other children... of the same age by mainstream schools' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 16) and again carries significant training implications for mainstream teachers if expectations related to their expertise teaching children with a broader range of needs are increased. In addition to this, the most recent Local Area SEND inspections, led by Ofsted in conjunction with the Care Quality Commission, have criticised some local areas for not identifying children who should receive SEN support quickly enough, while other reports state that some figures of children at SEN support are too low in some areas (2016). This suggests that provision may not be accessed at an early point, or children's difficulties were not being identified.

The findings also illustrate that SENCOs were reducing SEN registers to make them more manageable; a reduction in numbers would enable the more effective management of their role as well as concentrating resources on a smaller group. Such findings may reflect the individual needs of each setting, as well as the different pressures they face, potentially as a result of the schools' pupil demographic which indicates that this may vary between schools. However, this does echo the suggestion that post-reform, schools were likely to focus on a smaller group of pupils identified with SEN, with more complex needs (Norwich, 2014). In addition to this, Norwich, prior to the implementation of the SEND reforms, queried whether the change of category from Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties to Social, Emotional and Mental health would lead to a reduction in the numbers of children identified with SEN. The findings from this study suggest that this hypothesis was correct.

Yet whilst the findings report that SENCOs were reducing numbers of children identified as having SEN as a response to their interpretation of policy and manageability of the role, the findings also suggest that a number of SENCOs believed that part of the wider purpose of the SEND reforms was to reduce the number of children with SEN. Edward Timpson (DfE, 2014a), the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, stated that no child should lose their support as a result of the SEND reforms. Therefore, it is interesting to consider the most recent data. Since the publication of the Ofsted report (2010) in relation to SEN and identification, the numbers of children reported by schools as having SEN have been declining. In 2010 a reported 18.3% of children had SEN (DfE, 2015). However, there was a marked drop from 2014 to 2015 from 17.9% to 15.4% (DfE, 2015), based on the January 2015 census data. The latest figures,

published in July 2016, stated that the current number of pupils with SEN has fallen to 14.4% (DfE, 2016d). The findings from this study, in conjunction with the figures reported above, raise questions regarding the impact of this phenomenon on vulnerable groups of children. The findings suggest that children who were previously School Action are no longer considered as having SEN. Yet there remains a wider issue regarding the support that these children previously had accessed, and how they are now supported and monitored, despite the promise that no child would lose their support as a consequence of the SEND reforms (DfE, 2014a).

Taking into account the varied drivers for this phenomenon reported through this study, it is clear that questions remain regarding the definition of SEN, how this is applied to schools, and the potential impact of this on the individual, despite Ofsted's (2016) claims that the new system provides clarity regarding the process of identifying and supporting children with SEN. Within the wider educational context, there is a changing assessment system, which Norwich (2014) argues will impact on our understanding of the term SEN. 'The assessment and identification of pupils with special educational needs depends on the quality of the general assessment system for monitoring progress and for decision-making about when a pupil is not making adequate progress' (2014: 409). However, perhaps the discussion regarding the reduction of SEN numbers masks wider questions regarding the usefulness and inclusiveness of retaining the SEN category. It has been suggested that the use of such labelling approaches is restrictive, stigmatising and potentially unhelpful (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Given the reduction of SEN registers alongside reported feelings of advocacy and investment in inclusive policy, this does raise questions regarding the role of the SENCo and the purpose of keeping such registers.

### **Impact on parents**

The findings also suggest that, from the perspective of the SENCo, the SEND reforms have brought about increased collaboration among all parties, in particular parents. These findings endorse Pearson and colleagues' (2015) prediction that parents whose children are identified as having SEN would increasingly become partners in their child's education as a result of the SEND reforms. This reflects the SEND reform principles focused on creating a family centred, outcome-driven system (DfE and DoH, 2015). A recent report by Les Scott (2016) for the Secretary of State for Education endorses this and has

highlighted the importance, and positive impact, of close collaboration with families. Within this study, the majority of SENCos referred to the statutory assessment processes when citing this positive impact. They felt that all services were involved during this period of assessment, which determines whether a child should have an Education, Health, and Care Plan. It should be noted that SENCos did not view this process as without criticism; they cited issues with engaging with other external agencies, where the schools were viewed as equal partners, as well as a lack of clarity about the process. This suggests a mixed picture which is echoed by the National Autistic Society, whose research suggested that only 23% of parents who had been through the new statutory assessment process were satisfied with it (NAS, 2015), although the main concerns raised by the report are linked to the failure of statutory LA responsibility, rather than liaison with the school SENCo. Subsequent research by the NAS (2016) suggested that difficulties accessing support for children persisted, with 69% of parents waiting for longer than a year to access support for their child once concerns had been raised. The issue here relates to perspective; SENCos are reporting increased collaboration, and so do parents feel the same, and at what points specifically are they experiencing frustration?

While the SEND reforms may have brought about increased collaboration with parents, the findings from this study illustrate that SENCos felt that advocacy for parents was a central part of their role. The reasons for this approach were varied. SENCos reported that outcomes for children could be more effectively achieved if parents were 'onside'. For others, they recognised the interdependence of the partnership between schools and families, with the suggestion that unless there was an effective relationship, then it was not possible to achieve the best possible outcomes, which reflects a consensus with the Scott report (2016). However, while SENCos felt that a good relationship with parents led to better outcomes for the child, this was not without issue. The findings from the study demonstrate that SENCos had concerns regarding how to effectively engage with parents, citing a lack of guidance and training in this area as problematic. The key issues were related to how to ensure that parents were truly part of the decision-making process (DfE and DoH, 2015) as well as how to manage such a system effectively when there was typically only one SENCo in each school. Digman and Soan (2008) have highlighted the benefits, but also the time-consuming nature, of engaging parents and suggested that support from a key worker might be appropriate, thus further adding weight to the notion of a wider SEN team. Given concerns about timing and training, it may be prudent

to draw upon the Achievement for All initiative, which seeks to develop specifically structured conversations with parents in school (Humphrey et al., 2013) and in particular consider how this had facilitated greater, more active involvement with parents. Could this approach be adopted for not only the assess, plan, do, review cycle but also the requirement to meet with parents three times a year (DfE and DoH, 2015) thus enabling greater collaboration with parents, while also developing the wider role of advocacy?

### **Impact on the SENCo role**

The findings from the study indicate the varying roles which the SENCo assumed during a period of policy implementations and the feelings associated with this. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the findings also illustrate that there was a practical impact on the role of the SENCo during this period.

### **Prioritising resources**

The findings from this study illustrate that a lack of resources, including time and money, negatively impacted on the role of the SENCo. This echoes previous research (Derrington, 1997; Bowers et al., 1998; Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007c), which unsurprisingly suggests that this is an ongoing issue and not directly attributable to the SEND reforms. Certainly the work of Kearns described one of the roles of the SENCo as an 'arbiter' with a focus upon 'negotiating, rationalising and monitoring the use of SEN resources in their schools' (2005: 138).

However, the lack of resources did mean that, during a period of critical policy implementation, SENCos were finding themselves in a position of having to make difficult choices regarding the level and frequency of provision in their schools against a backdrop of increased parent collaboration and outcome focused practice; this echoes the prediction made by Pearson and colleagues (2015) which suggested that resources would decrease as a result of the SEND reforms. It could be argued that this further endorses the earlier reported finding that SENCos were reducing SEN registers due to difficulties managing larger numbers, to not only help manage their role but also due to the allocation of resources in schools. Given the reported issues with schools' finances, specifically the current challenging economic circumstances of schools, with schools facing budget cuts of 8% (National Audit Office, 2016), it is likely that these reported

difficulties may increase, particularly because SEN funding is not ring-fenced (Education Funding Agency, 2016). The combination of these factors, we could hypothesise, may exacerbate the 'fragility' of the school and the notion of making the school 'a stable organisation' (Ball et al., 2012: 139). Therefore it is possible SENCos, who describe how they are trying to 'do their best', may experience an even greater number of challenges particularly when selecting, narrating and advocating policy, due to the barriers occurring in relation to the reduction of resources (Ball et al., 2012).

### **Extending the role**

However, the findings from this study illustrate that, despite the identified difficulties with time, money, resources and status, SENCos were adept at thinking creatively to address such issues, although it could be argued that the approaches they adopted were potentially detrimental to them personally. The findings illustrate that SENCos were working in the evenings and on weekends to stay on top of the role. SENCos reported that the SEND reforms had brought about additional requirements for their role. This meant they were responding to the new requirements, while still maintaining SENCo responsibilities, and had not been allocated additional time for such activities. As such, they had to work additional hours to keep up. Robertson might argue that the SENCos' ability to establish and execute the role despite these issues illustrates their 'resilience and capacity' (2012: 82). This presents tensions regarding the execution of the SENCo role and whether it should be carried out around other duties. It is a point of discussion as to how this aids SLT to develop a clear overview of the breadth and requirements of the role. It could be argued that such a system is only as sustainable by the person who is sustaining it.

In addition to working additional hours, a central finding of this study suggests that SENCos are extending their roles beyond the responsibilities as described in policy (DfE and DoH, 2015). Research over time has highlighted how the role has moved away from one of a specialist teacher towards a more strategic role (Cowne, 2005; Pearson, 2008; Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012). While Mackenzie (2007) highlights that the role of the SENCo is extending to include more vulnerable groups, the findings from this study suggest that SENCos were making conscious judgements to try and fill the gap left by a lack of access to external services, through providing specialist support themselves. In particular, this

related to providing additional support for children experiencing Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties. The findings illustrate that SENCoS are increasingly finding it challenging to access universal services, endorsing the predictions made by Pearson et al. (2015), who suggested that with the introduction of the SEND reforms it was likely that access to universal services would become more problematic. Certainly, this demonstrates the tensions of trying to secure best outcomes for children, while working within restricted resources, a tension highlighted by Soan (2006). This model of 'filling the gap' potentially has a range of repercussions for the child, SENCo and school, which are explored in the implications section.

## **10.5 Summary**

The findings from this study indicate that the SENCoS assumed a variety of policy implementer roles during the period of SEND reform introduction. Specifically, the SENCoS assumed the roles of narrator, advocate and enthusiast concurrently. To a degree, it could be argued that the SENCoS also acted as receivers of policy, which could be attributed to a lack of experience, confidence, support or time to reflect on policy or their position. However, Ball and colleagues suggest that SENCoS are policy actors who 'embody specific policies' (2012: 145); certainly the findings from this research endorse this view and indicate that the SENCoS felt invested in the new policy guidance and felt an accountability towards this; specifically inclusive policy. Accountability for implementing policy also extended to reported feelings of advocacy. The findings from the study illustrate that SENCoS not only advocated for the new policy but also felt that the role of an advocate for parents and children was a central part of their role.

However, while the findings indicated that SENCoS were advocating for increased collaboration with parents, to secure better outcomes for children, there was a tension between trying to execute the role of an advocate within a landscape of competing policy and limited resources. Such tensions may explain why the findings from this study also suggest that the SENCo role has been impacted by the introduction of the SEND reforms, specifically an increase in workload. While barriers to the effective execution of the role, including time and status, have long been commented upon (Szwed, 2007c; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012), the findings do illustrate that the requirements of the SEND reforms have had a detrimental impact, although it is as yet unclear as to whether this impact will continue into the longer term. The National Audit Office suggests that the

Department for Education 'has not assessed the financial impact of policy changes' (2016:8). Certainly, the findings from this study suggest that the SEND reforms impacted on the SENCo role, which already lacks clarity, status, adequate time and resources, due to the increase of requirements on the SENCo. It is notable that SENCos attempted to problem solve this issue, through working additional hours and through extending their role to try and 'fill the gap' left by external agencies themselves; this could be regarded as a proactive, yet a potentially risky solution, depending on the SENCos' training and expertise.

Finally, the findings reported that while the SENCos observed a positive impact of the SEND reforms on parents, specifically increased collaboration, the impact on children was more mixed. Despite the findings reporting that SENCos sought to advocate for children identified with SEN, numbers on the SEN registers were falling. SENCos were actively reducing SEN registers in response to the introduction of the SEND reforms.

The discussion chapter has highlighted a number of salient findings from the study, which have inferred potential implications for the role of the SENCo, as well as the school, the LA and additional organisations, such as HEIs. These, alongside potential areas for future research, are explored in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 11: Conclusions**

### **11.1 Introduction**

The aim of the study was to explore the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at a time of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) policy reform in England. The purpose of the study was twofold: to specifically examine the policy actor roles which the SENCos could be seen to assume during this period of policy implementation and to consider the emerging impact of the SEND reforms, from the perspective of the SENCo.

A further intention of the study was to consider whether, based on the findings, there may be any potential implications for the SENCo, the school and the wider parties involved in the execution of the SENCo role, including the Local Authority (LA) and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). This chapter explores the potential implications which have arisen from this study, including areas for future research. Equally this chapter will consider potential limitations of the study and the contribution to original knowledge which the study makes.

### **11.2 Implications for the role of the SENCo**

#### **The SENCo as a strategic leader**

The findings suggest that during this period of policy implementation the SENCos immediately assumed a lead role. This, to an extent, confirms the SEND reform predictions of Pearson and colleagues (2015) regarding the potential increase in the SENCo leadership role post reform. It is noteworthy that the SENCos were seen to assume this lead role immediately, before the statutory guidance was finalised, by beginning to identify statutory policy requirements as well as identifying further priorities for their school, through policy selection (Ball et al., 2012). This lead role, it could be argued, reflects the narrator policy actor role, which Ball and colleagues suggests involves, 'explaining policy, deciding and then announcing what must be done, what can be done and what cannot' (2011: 626).

A number of the priorities identified by the SENCos related to the principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), for example the development of parental involvement and pupil voice. It could be argued that such actions demonstrated that the SENCos were



working in a strategic manner as they were seeking to influence whole school practices (Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012). The opportunity to act in a strategic manner, Griffith and Dubsky (2012) argue, has previously been a frustration voiced by SENCos. However, the findings from this study imply that the introduction of new statutory guidance can provide the required weight to bring about change, particularly if a role is viewed as marginalised or lacking in status (Rosen-Webb, 2011). This also implies that the SEND reforms may have provided an opportunity for the SENCos to act in a strategic manner, which potentially may not have presented itself in such a way before.

It is therefore noteworthy that a criticism levelled at the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) has been that the guidance is not specific enough (Norwich, 2014; Allan and Youdell, 2015). This concern was echoed in the findings of this study which suggest that some SENCos were acting as policy receivers, potentially due to a lack of experience or confidence (Ball et al., 2012). In addition to this, the findings also suggest that the SENCos were determining priorities, and therefore acting strategically, alone. This implies that through policy narration actions (Ball et al., 2012) SENCos were seeking to determine and potentially influence wider SEND priorities and the schools' inclusive approach for children with SEN, regardless of their level of experience, seniority, support or with the specific guidance they desired. Inclusive policy is shaped by the responses of stakeholders, including the SENCo, based on how they respond to and interpret policy, as well as their values and attitudes (Rosenthal, 2009, cited in Gibson, 2009; Glazzard et al., 2015) The implication, therefore, is that the development of SEND and inclusive policy could be an even riskier 'business' (Thomson, 2009 cited in Ball et al., 2012: 53) for SENCos due to the perceived lack of specific guidance, varying levels of experience and the typically solitary nature of the role. This also indicates that the previously discussed issue regarding the SENCo and their relationship to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in terms of strategic efficacy continues to remain relevant today.

### **The SENCo role, seniority and SLT status**

The findings from this study suggest that the SENCos assumed various policy actor roles (Ball et al., 2012), regardless as to whether they were part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). This implies that the SENCos did not perceive a lack of SLT membership as an impenetrable barrier to try to affect change and influence wider school policy (Griffiths

and Dubsky, 2012). However, literature which has previously explored the status of the SENCo role is generally in agreement that SENCos are most effective, and in particular strategic, if they are part of the SLT (Szwed, 2007c; Pearson, 2010; Oldham and Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013). This is echoed in the most current statutory guidance (DfE and DoH, 2015).

This therefore raises questions regarding the efficacy of the SENCos' strategic endeavours if they are not part of the SLT. This is perhaps due to the link between status to affect change, and how such status is achieved (Kearns, 2005). The 2008 SENCo regulations state that the SENCo is a mandatory role in school, which must be held by a qualified teacher. The purpose of introducing the National Award for SENCo (NA SENCo) in 2009 was to strengthen the status of the SENCo through ensuring that he or she has the necessary authority to execute the role (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006). Griffiths and Dubsky (2012) suggest that the NA SENCo allows the development of a theoretical understanding of practice, and therefore potentially more influence to affect change. However, the implication from this study is that the NA SENCo may not be addressing issues related to SLT membership, or status, as the Select Committee report intended it would. It is also notable that Ball and colleagues (2012) suggest that policy narration is often a task assigned to SLT and head teachers. Therefore, despite the intentions of the 2008 SENCo regulations, it is questionable as to how individuals can influence strategic direction, without SLT membership, despite the introduction of the NA SENCo. This also raises questions regarding the efficacy of working towards and implementing the principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) if the SENCo role remains outside of SLT.

The 2015 Code is based on inclusive principles, with the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014c) and the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) stating that provision for vulnerable learners, including those with SEN, is a priority for all teachers. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) is also underpinned by principles related to the importance of parent and child choice, participation and decision making. These are arguably principles which would need whole school recognition and development to be fully implemented. Simplican et al. (2015) echo this and state that the development of inclusive policy is dependent on various stakeholders.

This, therefore, implies that the wider implementation and strategic development of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) principles, particularly in relation to inclusion, may be compromised if the SENCo works in a solitary manner, and in particular without being part of the SLT; as Ball and colleagues (2012) suggest, the adoption of an individual policy position does not mean that others will either agree or align with the proposals.

The Select Committee, in agreement, states that ‘the role and position of a SENCo must reflect the central priority that SEN should hold within schools’ (Select Committee, 2006: 74). However, if the SENCo is not part of SLT, opportunities to ensure that SEN policy priorities are embedded within wider school priorities and initiatives may be limited. Glazzard (2014) suggests that the advancement of inclusive policy is already problematic; in part due to the tension between the inclusion agenda and the standards agenda (Ellis and Tod, 2014; Norwich, 2014). This suggests that it would be prudent to seek opportunities to embed SEN within wider school policy rather than look at it in a separatist manner. While other school leaders, for example, the governing body and the head teacher have a central role to play regarding developing inclusive policy in their schools, without an advocate for SEN and inclusive policy from within the school, there is a ‘potential loss of a strong voice for inclusive strategic school-wide practice’ (Tissot, 2013: 34). This also implies that the historically reported SENCo issues related to status of the role, seniority, SLT membership and working strategically (Tissot, 2013) continue to be present despite the 2001 Code (DfES, 2001b) and the subsequent 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) both emphasising the strategic importance of the role.

Conversely, this also implies that there may be limited opportunities for the SENCo to be aware of wider priorities within the school if they are not routinely part of SLT meetings, this may also impact on their decision making (Szwed, 2007b). This, it could be argued, is particularly important at a time of policy reform as the central policy actor, in this instance the SENCo, is seeking to influence whole school direction. This issue could be exacerbated during a period where there is potential conflict between educational policies (Ellis and Tod, 2014); the findings suggest that the introduction of the New Curriculum (DfE, 2014c) during the same period as the SEND reforms was problematic.

This infers that there may be a range of implications for the strategic development of new SEN and inclusive policy in schools if there is not an individual on the SLT who is

responsible for leading on the strategic direction of SEN policy and SEN provision. This is critical when considering the central premise of inclusion and the inclusive principles the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). As Thomas and Loxley state, 'the ethos of a school must be clearly articulated to ensure inclusion' (2007: 54). If the school infrastructure does not support a strategic role with adequate time and resources, this implies that the implementation of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), as intended, may be problematic.

Yet, the findings from this study also indicate that the SENCoS did not necessarily want to be part of the SLT. They felt that this membership could negatively impact on their role as their duties could extend and as a consequence there would be an increased demand on their time and a diversion from their SENCo responsibilities, echoing the findings of Pearson (2008). SENCoS within the study held the view that, rather than SLT membership, an elevated status within the school would be the answer to affecting change in their setting, although questions remain as to how this would be possible unless seniority is attached via SLT. It is perhaps, therefore, more important to consider why SENCoS do not want to be part of SLT. The findings from this study imply that time, competing priorities and an expanding role are all reasons why SLT membership is not desirable; indicating that the historical barriers associated with executing the role, including a lack of time and resources, remain (Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007b).

In addition to the strategic nature of the role continuing to be unrealised, a consequence of the SENCo role remaining outside of the SLT may be that the role, and therefore inclusive policy, continues to be the remit of one person. This could indicate a move towards a more specialised role, as due to a lack of time and seniority, the SENCo may be only able to focus on the operational aspects of the role; a situation potentially exacerbated by a lack of resources (Sellgren, 2016).

### **The SENCo as an advocate**

However, despite the reported issues related to status, SLT membership, time and an expanding role, the findings from this study suggest that the SENCoS not only had strong feelings of responsibility and accountability in relation to their role, they also felt a strong need to advocate for parents and children, which Morewood describes as a SENCoS' 'ethical responsibility' (2012: 75).

The feelings of advocacy specifically related to the principles of the SEND reforms, with parental engagement and coproduction cited as priorities. It was evident that SENCos felt that the increased role of the parent was central to the SEND reforms; SENCos specifically reported that they had observed an increase in the collaboration between parents and schools. Yet, SENCos also voiced concerns that the focus was not solely on increasing parental engagement but ensuring that the family should be at the centre of a joint decision-making process (DfE and DoH, 2015).

The findings from this study highlight that for many SENCos this represented a different way of working with parents; historically they communicated with parents, and now they were seeking to collaborate and proactively engage with parents in decision making. SENCos felt that this provided a challenge regarding not only as to how they engaged with parents and how to foster these *new style* relationships but also through the time required to execute this principle as it is intended. This therefore presents an implication for SENCo training concerned with developing effective working relationships which move beyond engagement and towards collaboration. This also implies that additional time will need to be allocated to the SENCo role to facilitate such relationships.

The notion of advocacy also related to children. The findings indicate that SENCos felt a responsibility to account for provision, to enable them to secure appropriate support for children, assuming the transacting policy actor role (Ball et al., 2012). In addition to this SENCos were focusing on the development of pupil voice, in particular through the use of One Page Profiles. This implies that advocacy, for both children and parents, was a priority for the SENCos in this study. The importance of providing this support should not be underestimated. The new SEN system has been described as fragmented (LkMCo, 2015), with Lehane (2016) commenting that the new system was yet to bring about positive improvement for children and young people. The findings from this study indicate a particular area of vulnerability is the SEN Support category, endorsing the predictions of George et al. (2011). Set within the wider educational context, it could be argued that the role of the SENCo as an advocate is more important than ever.

Yet, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the impact of such advocacy may be limited if the SENCo remains in an operational role, without adequate time, status or seniority;

potentially limiting such actions to individual cases, rather than advocacy at a school wide level.

### **The SENCo role in relation to a changing educational landscape**

The findings from the study indicate that acting strategically, SLT membership and advocacy are all intrinsic elements to the SENCo role. However, in addition to this, one over-arching theme is how the SENCo role is centred within a wider, changing educational landscape. As Ball and colleagues (2012) state, policy enactment does not take place in isolation. There are a number of factors which can influence the implementation of policy, this includes wider policy discourses. As Norwich states, the SEN system is 'interdependent' of the wider education system (2014: 404).

Nationally, the educational landscape is changing. It could be argued that one of the most significant changes is the increased focus and development of the academies agenda, specifically the development of groups of academies typically known as Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). It was the introduction of the 2010 Academies Act that promoted growth in this area, with the Government stating that it 'hopes and expects' that all schools will convert to academy status (DfE, 2017e: 8). Keddie (2016) argues that the policy goals of academisation include increasing parental choice, reflective of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). However, it could be reasoned that a change in school structures is likely to impact on the execution of the SENCo role.

Whilst the findings from this study suggest that the Local Authority (LA) continues to provide information, SENCos are also actively seeking information and dialogues elsewhere. SENCos are looking at nationally provided networks, for example, NASEN. SENCos are also increasingly turning to their wider networks, including those which are formal SENCo networks and those which have organically grown between local schools, as well as within MATs. It could be suggested that, as time goes on, these networks may become increasingly important, particularly if LA services continue to reduce. Such networks may also change in response to not only the increase of academisation, but also the 'school-led, self-improving system' (Riddell, 2016: 75). SENCos may be able to access school- to school support as well as share good practices and resources via a MAT (DfE, 2016e). This may alleviate some of the issues related to isolation as reported by SENCos.

However, this is likely to be dependent on availability and expertise within the MAT, and in particular capacity (Riddell, 2016).

However, the findings from this study indicate that accessing external agency support was also increasingly problematic for SENCos, confirming the hypothesis regarding a reduction in resources post SEND reform made by Pearson and colleagues (2015). A primary purpose of the academies movement was to give schools autonomy (Keddie, 2016) which also meant that schools could commission services from the wider market, rather than just the LA. However, SEN funding is not ring fenced in schools (Education Funding Agency, 2016). Schools are not accountable for their SEN spending, akin to the pupil premium processes. In addition to this, 'there are anecdotal reports of some academy schools being reluctant to accept students with statements' (Norwich and Black, 2015: 131; Trafford, 2016), which may be due to the link between the outputs of the school, for example exam results, and the inputs, the children who are on roll (Rayner, 2017) or due to concern related to the lack of funding required to meet a pupil's need (Cassidy and Garner, 2016; Goddard, 2016). Hodgkinson (2010) states that both of these issues are fundamental barriers to the furthering of the inclusion agenda. This further highlights the need for an advocacy role at SLT level for inclusive principles and provision for children with SEN; with the implication that such a role is likely to be increasingly important where outcome focused, pupil-parent centred principles (DfE and DoH, 2015) are set against a backdrop of wider education budget cuts (National Audit Office, 2016) and a changing educational landscape.

### **The future SENCo role?**

As the educational landscape changes, it could be assumed that so does the role of the future SENCo. The findings from this study indicate that the SENCo role is expanding. SENCos reported that the introduction of the SEND reforms had contributed to an expansion of the role due to an increased number of policy requirements; time to complete the role was the primary concern for all participants. The findings also suggest that SENCos were seeking to individually replicate or replace services which they were no longer able to access, possibly due to the changes in LA structures and related SEN services. This presents a different reason for role expansion than Pearson and colleagues (2015), who hypothesised that the role would expand to incorporate more vulnerable

groups. Whilst it is not yet clear as to whether the impact of the SEND reforms will continue to impact on the SENCo role, this study infers that the expanding role is due to the SENCo responding reactively, trying to meet all operational needs, which is likely to impact on the strategic nature of the role (Hallett and Hallett, 2010).

The implication for the future role of the SENCo, if such developments continue, is that execution of the role while maintaining teaching (or other) responsibilities may become increasingly difficult. This could suggest that the SENCo will need to determine and prioritise their duties. It could be argued that SENCos would be likely to prioritise operational and statutory responsibilities, over strategic development, as such responsibilities are difficult to delay. Increased pressures on time, as a result of an expanding role or due to budget cuts, may mean that the demographic of children with whom the SENCo works may need to be increasingly focused on children with the most complex of educational needs. This could make fulfilling the principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015), specifically in relation to early identification, problematic.

In addition to this, legislation in relation to the role of the SENCo does not yet take into account the MAT agenda. The 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) refers to the mandatory nature of the role in standalone academies and does not mention how the role could be executed under a Multi-Academy Trust model. Yet, DfE guidance (2017e) suggests that one SENCo could work across a number of schools in a MAT, which appears contradictory with the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). NASWUT (2016) suggest that where MATs exist over several Local Authorities, this could be a future area of conflict for SENCos when trying to negotiate local policies as well as MAT policies. However, the move to towards MATs provides a change to the school leadership structure, which may impact on the strategic nature of the future SENCo role, which is already unclear in policy and context (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Equally, the MAT agenda may provide an opportunity for the introduction of new leadership models (Hill, 2016) which could provide an opportunity for a reconceptualisation of the SENCo position in relation to SLT.

### **11.3 Implications in relation to policy implementation**

It could be argued that the concerns regarding the strategic development of SEN policy in schools manifested itself in one particular phenomenon, illustrated by the findings from this study. They suggest that the introduction of the SEND reforms led SENCos to



reconsider the definition of the term *SEN* and its application in their settings. The reasons for this reconsideration included confusion regarding the term as well as a response to concerns that children with SEN had been over-identified (Ofsted, 2010). SENCos also refocused their work on those children they considered to have more complex SEN. The findings also illustrated that, for some, the perception that a key driver of the SEND reforms was to reduce the numbers of children identified as having SEN; SENCos viewed this as a governmental aim. As a consequence, some SENCos reported that they were reducing their SEN registers; a phenomenon reflected in the most recent statistical release from the Department for Education (2016b). It seems that the legal definition of SEN and its application remains confused. The term has been in use for over thirty-five years; the findings from this study support and extend the argument by Norwich who suggested the term had outlived its usefulness (2010: 18), particularly when considering the inclusive principles of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). However the implication from this study is that arguably an opportunity to reconceptualise, change, clarify or even remove the definition, has been missed and as such potentially leading to continued inconsistency in the categorisation of learners.

In the shorter term, this raises questions as to how the reduction of registers and the removal of children has been communicated and justified to parents and teachers. Such a change also has implications for class and subject teachers, whose classes may contain an increasingly diverse range of learners whose needs have not changed or disappeared. Whilst Szwed (2007b) has previously suggested that teachers will need to be increasingly concerned with the needs of all learners, in response to inclusion, the findings from this study imply that this is likely to increase as children who may have been considered School Action under the previous system (DfES, 2001b) would now be considered part of typical classroom provision.

This must have implications for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in terms of the input which student, and experienced, teachers receive regarding SEN and inclusive practice, to ensure that class and subject teachers are meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum and the 2015 Code (2014c; DfE and DoH, 2015) to respond to the needs of all learners. As stated by Gibson and Haynes (2009), to develop inclusive environments teachers need a clear understanding of their pupils and methods to support them. Carter (2015) and Nicky Morgan, the then Secretary

of State for Education (May, 2016) have highlighted the urgent need to improve on the minimum requirement for teachers' SEN training within ITT (DfE, 2011); echoing earlier calls made by Golder et al. (2005). Additionally Lord Addington has introduced the Teacher Training Special Education Needs Bill (2016) to parliament to introduce a change in ITT to enable all teachers to fulfil their legal duty towards all children, including those with SEN (specifically specific learning difficulties) and the Rochford Review (2016) proposed that ITT should have a greater focus on those working below expected levels. However, these are all future possibilities, which will take time to come into effect and will not address the training needs in the short term, which suggests a potential implication for the current training available for teachers. SENCos may find that they are required to provide more training and advice to colleagues regarding the provision of high quality teaching to meet the needs of all learners. Whilst this is currently part of the SENCo role, there may be an increased need in response to this phenomenon. Potentially this may mean that the SENCo role widens further, or at least there may be a need to shift a priority to CPD. However, as Hodgkinson (2016) states, the teachers' view is imperative, as a more medical model suggests that teachers will continue to look externally for support regarding SEN, rather considering their own practice. This therefore suggests that SENCos may need to consider the model of disability in action in their schools.

#### **11.4 Implications from the study as an example of educational policy implementation**

The discussion thus far has predominantly focused on the implications for the SENCo role, and SEN policy in general, which have emerged from the study. However, it could be argued that the application of the policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012) within this study has presented an opportunity to consider whether there were any potential broader implications in relation to the implementation of educational policy.

The findings reflect the research of Ball and colleagues (2012) who suggest that policy actors can assume varying policy actor roles, at varying times. Therefore it could be argued that this study, to a degree, illustrates the policy actor typology as suggested by Ball and colleagues from the perspective of a specific, statutory role in schools. However, the policy actor typology (Ball et al., 2012) describes the narrator policy actor role, one which the SENCos were seen to assume, as often within the remit of senior leaders and

the head teacher. Yet, the findings from this study also infer that policy narration can occur at varying levels of leadership and not all policy enactments are overt. This study therefore implies that there may be roles within a school, which are not part of the SLT, which can narrate and advocate for specific policy. Whilst Ball and colleagues suggest that an entrepreneurial role is uncommon, the findings imply that perhaps this is a key role for policy leaders and advocates who lack status as it enables them to persuade others to their cause; entrepreneurs can be 'forceful agents of change' (Ball et al., 2012: 53). The findings also suggest that policy actors can use a variety of policy tools, in this instance statutory guidance, as means to implement change; suggesting that policy actors can act as *covert entrepreneurs* when implementing policy particularly if they have the power of statutory guidance. This may infer that those without status or seniority can seek to affect change, and endeavour to act strategically, through alternative means. Although as Trowler warns, such an approach to change may lead to 'the dangers of enclaving' (2003:136).

The findings also echo previous research which suggests that policy narration activities are, to a degree, dependent on individual interpretation (Trowler, 2003). Whilst the findings indicate that meeting statutory requirements was a priority, SENCOs were also selecting out additional priorities based on their view of school priorities; indicating that their views may have influenced the determining of priorities. This suggests that policy can bring about change, depending on the individuals' alignment to such policy; for example the SENCOs cited parental involvement as a priority which was a key principle of the SEND reforms.

However, this study also implies that the implementation of educational policy is determined, to a degree, by the other, competing policy priorities at that time and the importance placed on these. In the instance of this study, the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) was introduced on the same day as the New Curriculum (DfE, 2014c). This presented a particular challenge for the policy actor role of narrator (Ball et al., 2012) in part due to the tensions between the inclusion and standards agenda (Ellis and Tod, 2014) and whether either one should take priority. Yet whilst it is arguable the role of senior leaders to join together 'disparity policies' (Ball, 2012:51) this also infers that the interpretation and narration of policies in school, including statutory policies, remain likely to be influenced by the 'schools' position in relation to policy...the degree and type

of imperative attached to any policy and the contextual limitations of budget, staff etc.’ (Ball et al., 2012: 45); these influences may have a greater impact when set within the context of a standards agenda in economically challenging times.

### **11.5 Limitations of the study**

The findings from this study suggest that there are a range of potential implications emerging in relation to the role of the SENCo and the implementation of educational policy. However, it is equally important to consider the limitations of the study. While the methodology chapter justified the methods chosen for the study, such choices may have imposed some limitations on the study.

#### **Participants at Phases one, two and three**

Despite the steps detailed within the methodology chapter which sought to gain a purposive sample of SENCos in post at phases one, two and three, there are a number of potential limitations with the approach taken which may impact on the representative nature of the sample, and therefore may pose a limitation on the findings in terms of transferability (Matthews and Ross, 2010). A number of the issues are common across the three initial data sets, although it should be noted that there were additional issues at phases two and three which have been reported upon separately.

Matthews and Ross state that, ‘as social researchers we need to find ways of collecting data that ensure that the data closely reflects the reality it represents’ (2010: 53). This presented a key challenge for this specific study, as national data related to SENCos, in terms of experience, varying roles, seniority and completing the NA SENCo, does not currently exist. In addition to this, as Hallett and Hallett (2010) state, the role of the SENCo can vary significantly in relation to the varying contexts SENCos work in. This lack of information presented a key difficulty in trying to ensure that the groups at each phase were representative of the wider SENCo population. Whilst the sampling approach across phases one, two and three sought to represent the varying roles and contexts within which SENCos execute their role, and comparisons were made to previously conducted research (Szwed, 2007a; Tissot, 2012; Pearson et al., 2014), there was additional information which was omitted which would have been useful to explore. At phase one, SENCos were not asked if they had non-contact time, a factor which is likely to impact on

the execution of the role and it would have been useful to have ensured that there was acknowledgment of representation in this area.

It could be argued that the participants at phases one, two and three lacked experience; specifically in relation to the nature and execution of the SENCo role. The majority had been in post for one year. In addition to this SENCos were not asked whether they had undertaken any leadership training (Oldham and Radford, 2011). This lack of experience may have impacted on their understanding of the role, as well as potentially their confidence and experience regarding leadership to execute the role and implement policy. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to argue that the participants definitely represented the wider SENCo population. In response to this issue, additional data was gathered, via questionnaires at phases four and five, to test out some of the emerging themes from the data and to consider whether the issues were specific to the group of SENCos at phases one, two and three or echoed by a wider group of SENCos. Equally, care has been taken to ensure that the data collection methods, particularly the representativeness of the group, are transparent.

The study primarily focused specifically on LA maintained primary and secondary schools and academies; schools where the SENCo role is mandatory. Therefore these schools were represented in the samples from phases one, two and three. It should be noted however, that the national picture is changing rapidly, particularly regarding academisation and therefore this may impact on the representative nature of the group, as well as schools' access to services and LA support particularly in the short to medium term. In addition to this, specific school information regarding the number of children on the SEN register, Ofsted rating and school demographic have not been taken into account. Whilst varying schools are likely to be represented, the findings are unable to report this. The limited sample regarding geographical representation should also be taken into consideration, namely the South West of England. There may have been a localised interpretation of the national guidance, with varying support and information offered by LAs in contrast to other areas within England. In addition to this, the role of one of the LAs as a pathfinder may also have impacted on the results.

Finally, it is reasonable to suggest that the impact of taking part in a research project where there is a previous relationship to the researcher, in this case, student- lecturer,

may have skewed the data. This could be viewed as a 'power-relationship' (Matthews and Ross, 2010: 76); the participants may have felt concerned disclosing information to someone they might consider knowledgeable of their field. In relation to this, the process of opting into the study may present a limitation in the representative nature of the study as participants who opt in to a study may have a specific interest in the issue and therefore may not be representative of the wider group (Newby, 2014).

### **Specific issues related to phases two and three**

The key limitation with the data at phase three is the number of participants: nine. Whilst the sampling approach endeavoured to ensure that LA maintained primary and secondary schools and academies were represented, representation is limited due to the small numbers. This is equally true regarding the SENCos who had additional teaching responsibilities, who were part of SLT or who were part of a SEN team. Whilst it could be argued that the varying roles were represented, it is reasonable to suggest that the size of the group impacts on the validity of this. To a degree phases four and five sought to address this, yet it is imperative to appreciate the limitation this provides.

### **Phases four and five**

Despite the aims of phases four and five, specifically to negate some of the potential limitations regarding representation of the earlier phases, it should be noted that there were also potential limitations associated with these final two phases.

Whilst phases four and five did access a wider group of more experienced SENCos, the information regarding the varying roles and contexts within which SENCos work is not reported; this impacts on the claims which can be made regarding how representative of the SENCo population the sample is. It would have been useful to have inquired whether the SENCos held additional responsibilities; for example teaching or SLT responsibilities, and how much non-contact time they had to execute their SENCo responsibilities. It also would have been useful to have information regarding the specific characteristics of the school, for example whether the school is a maintained school, an academy or part of Multi-Academy Trust. Whilst we could hypothesise that these schools have been represented within the sample, it could be argued that to account and report on these

factors would have provided more information regarding the representative nature of the sample and to allow comparisons with the earlier phases.

Whilst phases four and five did access a wider geographical area, there did remain a significant bias towards the South West; therefore this may provide a limitation in wider validity as broader geographical groups are not represented. This may particularly influence the research questions which focused on the wider support and information which SENCOs sought to gather.

Both questionnaires were designed with online accessibility in mind which meant that individuals had to have access to the specific channel, e.g. Twitter. This may have skewed the demographic. A related issue is that for both phases the participants were required to opt-in to the questionnaire, 'the respondents choose to take part' (Newby, 2014: 258). This is particularly relevant given the sensitive nature of the phenomena under exploration; SEND reform and policy change. Newby argues that respondents for self-selecting samples tend to be individuals who are interested in the issues, and therefore represent, 'a sub-set of those who have views' (2014: 258). Therefore the findings need to be reported, and understood with this caveat, whilst also further highlighting the importance of the five phases of the research.

## **Methods**

It could be claimed that a limitation of the study was the number of interviews which took place over the course of the academic year. The frequency of these interviews may have limited the time and space for both the participants and the researcher to reflect on a) the research questions and b) the emerging data. The frequency of the interviews may also have limited the number of participants, due to the demands placed upon participants, particular in terms of time. However, adopting an approach of fewer interviews may have resulted in the loss specific detail as participants may have found it harder to recall specific instances.

There were some limitations regarding the content of the interviews. Specifically, a limitation of the research is that SENCOs at phase three were not directly asked whether they felt the cultural change in their setting was necessary; thus allowing the participants time and space to reflect on their alignment to the policy they were seeking to implement

(Ball et al., 2012). However, it is worth considering the potential impact of the researcher in relation to this question. It is questionable whether SENCos during the interviews would have been either able or comfortable to disclose their personal alignment to the policies they were implementing, either due to inexperience or their personal opinions.

The methods chosen for this study presented some potential limitations, although steps have been taken to mitigate or limit the impact of these issues. The limitations of this study could be addressed through future research, which would also extend research in this area.

## **11.6 Implications for research**

The findings from this study have suggested potential implications for the role of the SENCo and the implementation of SEN policy. However, the findings, and the limitations, of the study suggest a number of areas for further research. These include:

- Longer term research into the impact of the SEND reforms and how the perceived impact relates to the principles as set out the by 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) specifically concerning inclusive policy and its coherence with wider educational policy.
- The continued interpretation and application of the legal definition of SEN.
- The reduction of numbers of children identified as having SEN with a specific focus on how this has been managed within schools and communicated to parents. Further research could focus on the impact, socially and academically, on children who were previously identified as ‘having SEN’ and no longer are under the remit of the SENCo.
- An exploration of the various routes in Initial Teacher Training, specifically exploring how SEND training is reflected within each of the routes and, as a consequence, how prepared Newly Qualified Teachers feel in terms of readiness to teach potentially more diverse groups of children.
- The breadth and nature of the support offered to and accessed by SENCos, with a specific focus on the differences between primary and secondary schools.
- Further specific research into the various strategic leadership models adopted by SENCos, with the intention of evaluating the effectiveness of each.



The above is not intended to be presented as an exhaustive list but does illustrate that the implementation, and related impact, of education policy, is a long term process which, regarding efficacy will require extended research.

### **11.7 The contribution of knowledge from the central findings of the study**

The introduction of the SEND reforms has provided a new opportunity to review and explore the role of the SENCo as a strategic policy implementer. Current literature, which specifically explores the complexities and effectiveness of the role, is based upon the previous SEND system (Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007b; Tissot, 2013). We are therefore entering a period of SEN, and wider educational, policy reform which could potentially impact and influence the operational and strategic efficacy of the role.

Research regarding the impact of the SEND reforms is beginning to emerge (LkMCo, 2015; NAS, 2015; NCDS, 2015). However, to date, this has predominantly focused on the perspective of the parents, particularly regarding their experiences of statutory processes. The facilitation and implementation of SEN policy, specifically inclusion, in schools is impacted by a number of policy actors (Rosenthal, 2007, cited in Gibson, 2009; Ball et al., 2012). However, it could be argued that the role of the SENCo is central to this process (Ball et al., 2012), both operationally and strategically and therefore their perception of impact in this area is likely to impact on the way they implement policy.

This study makes a number of claims which build and extend upon existing research in this area which seeks to explain the complexity of the SENCo role. In particular this study adds to the body of research which seeks to explain the role in practice, particularly at a time of policy implementation, building on the work of Kearns (2005) through drawing upon the work of Ball and colleagues (2012), specifically the policy actor typology. In addition to this the study makes claims to the contribution of knowledge regarding the implementation and the impact of the SEND reforms from the perspective of the SENCo.

The findings from this study illustrate that SENCos immediately established themselves as leaders of policy implementation, as soon as the SEND reforms were introduced. They quickly began to identify and select policy priorities, while also determining new processes and how identified priorities should be executed; indicating that they were assuming a narrating and interpreting policy actor role (Ball et al., 2012). These activities

took place despite concerns regarding support and preparedness for the implementation of the SEND reforms. Additionally, SENCos were engaging with the strategic nature of the role, regardless of their perceived status in their setting. SENCos advocated for the SEND reforms through their actions. This is suggestive of the entrepreneur and enthusiast policy actor roles (Ball et al., 2012); or as the findings suggest, a *covert entrepreneur*.

However, despite the findings from this study indicating that the SENCos were taking a lead role regarding the implementation of policy, the findings also suggest that the strategic nature of the role will continue to be minimised due to a continued lack of status, time and resources. However, this also relates to the view of SLT membership reported through these findings. While SENCos reported feelings of needing more support and concerns regarding a lack of status, the SENCos did not see joining the SLT as a desirable option; despite the research which advocates this as the most effective approach (Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007b; Pearson, 2008; Oldham and Radford, 2011). As a result, SENCos were often taking a lead role when determining policy priorities, without the support or input from a wider team. Oldham and Radford (2011) have previously suggested that a lack of SLT membership can make it difficult for the SENCo to have a holistic picture of whole school policy. Equally, Tissot (2013) argues that the SENCo can provide a strong voice for inclusion at a wider school level, which is particularly important given the potentially conflicting aims and priorities within wider educational policy (Slee, 2011, cited in Glazzard, 2014). This, therefore, raises questions regarding the position and prominence of inclusive policy at a time of significant reform, if the SENCo role remains a solitary one which lacks status.

In addition to this, a lack of time to execute the role continues to be a central barrier to the effective execution of the role. Whilst the findings from this study indicate that this issue has been exacerbated by the SEND reforms, it is debatable as to whether this is a short term impact due to the period under review focusing on the introductory period of new policy. The findings illustrate that the role of the SENCo, in some cases, was broadening and, in some cases, becoming more specialised. SENCos were responding to a lack of time through extending their working hours, as well as trying to provide services themselves which they could no longer access due to a reduction of central services. In addition to this the SEND reforms placed an additional requirement on SENCos to respond to new policy requirements whilst maintaining their operational SENCo duties;

this also led to increased time pressures. This implies that, in conjunction with issues related to seniority, the opportunities for the SENCo to act strategically may be limited due to a further increase in time constraints and a broadening of the role.

A consequence of the continued lack of strategic role the SENCo plays centrally within schools may be that SEN and inclusive policy becomes increasingly marginalised. This, combined with a lack of time and a role which lacks clarity, suggests potential implications for the development of whole school strategic SEN policy if it is unclear who is taking responsibility for leading in this area particularly during a period of wider educational reform. This is despite the range of policy actor roles, including the roles of narrator, entrepreneur and enthusiast (Ball et al., 2012), the SENCo could be seen to have adopted during this period to address such issues.

While the findings from this study have further highlighted the complexity of the SENCo role, including the challenges faced when implementing new policy, the SENCos did report that they had observed some positive impact related to the SEND reforms over the course of the first year. Specifically, SENCos observed that parents were more engaged with schools; reflecting one of the aims of the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Certainly, the findings suggest that SENCos were focused on the development of parental engagement, citing this as a priority area for development. SENCos reported that the development of this relationship was important in order to secure positive outcomes for children. SENCos also reported that pupil voice was gaining prominence in their schools, due to the changes they made to processes as a result of the new policy.

However, the findings also suggest that there are potential implications for children which relate to the execution of SEN policy within schools, in particular following the introduction of the SEND reforms. The findings from the study indicate that numbers of children identified as having an SEN are falling, particularly since the introduction of the SEND reforms. The SENCos within this study identified a range of reasons for this phenomenon, all of which have implications for how the legal definition of SEN is understood and applied. It is notable that the reduction of numbers has occurred as a result of new policy, rather than a new definition of SEN or a reduction of children's needs. The findings suggest that the SENCo role is increasingly concerned with more

complex levels of need, with children who may be perceived as having a lower level of SEN, historically referred to as *School Action*, assimilated into typical classroom practice.

With the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) stating that every teacher is responsible for all children including those with SEN, this phenomena suggests implications for ITT to ensure that newly qualified teachers are equipped to plan and provide for all children, including those with SEN, particularly if the definition of the term is narrowing, and the children within typical classroom provision are diversifying. As such the findings suggest that the SENCo may need to prioritise CPD for staff to ensure that they are supported in their professional development regarding their ability to provide high quality provision to meet the needs of all the learners in their class, particularly for those children who, pre-SEND reforms, may have come under the remit of the SENCo. This may mean that the SENCo is called upon to deliver such CPD.

The SENCo has a critical role to play within schools, for children, parents and colleagues regarding provision and advocacy for children with additional needs, as well as determining and influencing wider policy priorities. This study has demonstrated the varied roles and approaches the SENCo undertakes to fulfil their role both operationally and strategically, not only during a period of policy implementation but also during a period of wider educational policy reform; all of which are enacted within the confines of the barriers as stated above. Given the findings from this study in relation to the emerging impact of the SEND reforms, and the potential implications which may arise from this, it could be argued that the need to clarify the role and the position of the SENCo, with a specific focus on how the role contributes to the strategic development and enactment of inclusive policy in schools, has never been more important.

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## **2.1: Principles of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years**

### **Principles underpinning this Code of Practice**

1.1 Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 makes clear that local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood

1.2 These principles are designed to support:

- the participation of children, their parents and young people in decision making
- the early identification of children and young people's needs and early intervention to support them
- greater choice and control for young people and parents over support
- collaboration between education, health and social care services to provide support
- high quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN
- a focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning
- successful preparation for adulthood, including independent living and employment (DfE and DoH, 2015: 18 – 19)

## 5.1: Pilot questionnaire Phase one

### SEN reforms, 2014: A SENCOs perspective

**NOTE: The questionnaire was presented to SENCOs as landscape – presented here in portrait for readability**

Dear SENCO,

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of SENCOs in relation to the implementation of the SEN reforms and proposed SEN Code of Practice, 2014. Your responses will form part of a PhD research project narrating the SENCO's experience of the implementation of the SEN reforms. In addition to these questionnaires, I will be looking to work with 4 SENCOs over the course of the year. The aim is for the SENCO to share their reflections on the SEN reforms, over the course of the year. I intend to look at the implementation of policy in relation to the practical experience of the SENCO. I aim to conduct an interview with each SENCO, either face to face or via telephone, for approximately 15 minutes at 4 points across the academic year. If you would be interested in taking part, and would like to discuss this further with me, please highlight your interest and fill out your contact details below.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires and subsequent analysis of results will be anonymised. All results will be available to participants.

Thank you,

Helen Curran

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Position in school: (please include all current positions): \_\_\_\_\_

Primary/ Secondary/ Special school/ other: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as a SENCO: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you completed the National Award for SENCO? \_\_\_\_\_

When did you complete the award? \_\_\_\_\_

I would be happy to discuss the possibility of taking part in telephone interviews over the academic year (please delete as appropriate)

YES/ NO

Contact details

(optional): \_\_\_\_\_

In the next set of questions, you are presented with a statement. You are being asked to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by indicating whether you:

**Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), are Undecided (UD), Agree (A) or Strongly Agree (SA)**

(Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the appropriate response)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Un-Decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Preparedness for the SEN reforms 2014</b>					
I am aware of the SEN reforms					
The majority of:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils in my school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents in school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers in my school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
My Head Teacher is aware of the SEN reforms					
The Governing body is aware of the SEN reforms					
<b>Understanding the SEN reforms</b>					
I understand the SEN reforms.					
I feel confident that I understand the SEN reforms					
The majority of:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils in my school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents in school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers in my school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
My Head Teacher understands the SEN reforms					
The Governing understands the SEN reforms					
<b>Policy into practice</b>					
I feel prepared to make the changes necessary.					
I feel confident to carry out necessary changes.					
I understand how the SEN reforms will impact on my school.					
I understand the key changes in relation to the SEN reforms.					
I have adequate knowledge and understanding to implement the reforms.					
<b>Support for change</b>					
In terms of getting ready for the SEN reforms. I have received <b>support</b> from:					

• My head teacher					
• The Governing Body					
• SENCos from other school					
• The Local Authority					
• Health groups or trusts					
• Social Care					
• Parent partnership					
In terms of getting ready for the SEN reforms. I have received <b>guidance</b> from:					
• My head teacher					
• The Governing Body					
• SENCos from other school					
• The Local Authority					
• Health groups or trusts					
• Social Care					
• Parent partnership					
I feel confident that the Local Authority is ready for the proposed changes.					
I have adequate resources to support the changes.					
I would like more support to prepare for the changes.					

What are your top three priority areas to focus on in relation to the SEN reforms from September 2014?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Changes I have planned to put in place from Sept 2014

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My concerns for the reforms are:

## 5.2 Final questionnaire Phase one

### SEN reforms, 2014: A SENCO's perspective

**NOTE: The questionnaire was presented to SENCOs as landscape – presented here in portrait for readability**

Dear SENCO,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of the SENCO in relation to the implementation of the SEN reforms and the new SEN Code of Practice, 2014 which is effective from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. The questionnaire will also consider the nature of your role. Your responses will form part of a PhD research project narrating the SENCO's experience of SEN policy implementation.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Helen Curran

**Name (optional):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Position/s in school (please include all current position/s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary/ Secondary/Special school/other (please specify):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of years as a SENCO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you completed/ are completing the National Award for SENCO (inc year)?** \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to these questionnaires, **I am looking to work with 10 SENCOs over the course of the year.** The aim is for the SENCO to share their reflections through diaries and interviews, over the course of the year. I intend to look at the SENCO's experience of policy implementation. For the SENCOs who take part I would like to offer free SEN training to your school, as thanks for your time and help. If you would be interested in taking part, and would like to discuss this further with me, please highlight your interest and fill out your contact details below

.

**I would be happy to discuss the possibility of taking part in the SEN reforms research over the academic year 2014/15 (please delete as appropriate):**

**YES/ NO**



**Contact details (telephone/ e mail):**

In the next set of questions, you are presented with a statement. You are being asked to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by indicating whether you: **Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (UD), Agree (A) or Strongly Agree (SA)**

(Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the appropriate response)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Un-Decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Preparedness for the SEN reforms 2014</b>					
I am aware of the SEN reforms					
The majority of:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils in my school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents/ carers in school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers in my school are aware of the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
My Head Teacher is aware of the SEN reforms					
The Governing Body is aware of the SEN reforms					
<b>Understanding the SEN reforms 2014</b>					
I understand the SEN reforms.					
The majority of:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils in my school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents/ carers in school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers in my school understand the SEN reforms</li> </ul>					
My Head Teacher understands the SEN reforms					
The Governing Body understands the SEN reforms					
<b>Support for change</b>					
In terms of getting ready for the SEN reforms. I have received <b>support</b> from:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My Head Teacher</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Governing Body</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SENcos from other school</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Local Authority</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health groups or Trusts</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Care</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent partnership</li> </ul>					
Other Please state here:					
I have adequate resources (for example: time,					

money) to support the changes.					
I would like more support to prepare for the changes.					
I would like more support implementing the changes.					
I feel confident that the Local Authority is ready for the proposed changes.					

**What are your three priority areas to focus on in relation to the SEN reforms from September 2014? (in order of priority)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

<b>The role of the SENCo</b>					
<p>When reflecting on your SENCo role over the last year, to what extent do you feel you have played the following roles?</p> <p>'Policy' refers to the SEN policies you work to and develop within your role as SENCo; this includes government and school policy.</p> <p>You can tick as many, or as few, as you believe to be relevant.</p>					
(Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the appropriate response)	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I select, interpret and explain policy to colleagues.					
I champion and advocate for particular policies or principles.					
I work closely with external agencies, e.g Local Authority advisors, to help develop and interpret particular policies and principles.					
I spent time accounting for and reporting on policy.					
I embed policy in my practice, to be an example to others.					
I plan and produce materials, for others, to support the understanding of policy.					
I voice my opinion regarding policy, particularly when it may impact on the well-being of teachers and/or I like to provide the counter opinion.					
I listen to and act upon presented policy from my Head teacher and/or SLT.					
Other role (please state):					

**The main issues which can impact on my ability to execute my role, as a SENCo, are (in order of priority):**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**What do others perceive your role, as SENCo, to be?**

Considering the roles described above, and the responsibilities you have, what do you think others perceive your primary role as a SENCo to be?

Parents/carers view my primary role as: \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers view my primary role as: \_\_\_\_\_

SLT/ Head Teacher view my primary role as: \_\_\_\_\_

The Governing Body view my primary role as: \_\_\_\_\_

The Local Authority view my primary role as: \_\_\_\_\_

**From September part of your role, as a SENCo, will be to implement the new SEN reforms in your setting.**

What do you perceive to be the main issues which may impact on your ability, as a SENCo, to implement the new reforms? (in order of priority)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire and for supporting my research.**

**Helen Curran**

### 5.3 Pilot interview schedule Phase two

Phase two interview schedule

11 SENCos

End of July/ Beginning of September 2014

#### Introduction to the interviews

Thank you for being willing to take part in an interview in this project. Just to reiterate from our previous conversations and the information I have sent you, your responses will remain completely anonymous and, all records of this interview will be anonymised and password protected. I would also like to ask your permission to record this interview. The reason for this is to ensure that I can accurately record your responses and opinions. This will then aid the subsequent analysis of data.

Purpose of this interview is to focus on the introduction of the SEND reforms and the support you have received in readiness to implement the reforms.

Do you have any questions? Ok, we'll begin.

#### SENCo questions/ topics for discussion

What support have you had from the LA with the reforms?	
Have you attended meetings or had further guidance? If so, what?	
How prepared do you feel?	
What preparation have you already done?	
What do you feel the awareness is of your head teacher and teachers regarding the reforms?	
What do you hope for the reforms?	
What are your concerns for the reforms?	
What do you view as the main challenges for you?	
What are your plans for Sept?	

## 5.4 Final interview schedule Phase two

Phase two interview schedule

9 SENCos

End of July/ Beginning of September 2014

### Introduction to the interviews

Thank you for being willing to take part in an interview in this project. Just to reiterate from our previous conversations and the information I have sent you, your responses will remain completely anonymous and, all records of this interview will be anonymised and password protected. I would also like to ask your permission to record this interview. The reason for this is to ensure that I can accurately record your responses and opinions. This will then aid the subsequent analysis of data.

Purpose of this interview is to focus on the introduction of the SEND reforms and the support you have received in readiness to implement the reforms.

Do you have any questions? Ok, we'll begin.

### SENCo questions/ topics for discussion

Can you describe the support and advice you have had from the Local Authority regarding implementing the SEND reforms?	
Have you attended any LA meetings or had any specific further guidance from the LA regarding the SEND reforms?	
Have you carried out any specific preparation?	
How do you feel regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms and the new Code of Practice, do you feel prepared?	
How aware do you feel you head teacher is regarding the SEND reforms? How aware do you feel your colleagues are?	
What do you hope to come from the introduction of the SEND reforms?	
Do you have any concerns regarding the introduction of the SEND reforms?	
What do you think might be the main challenges for you as a SENCo with introducing the SEND reforms?	
Do you have any plans for September, specifically in relation to the introduction of the new Code of Practice?	

Thank you very much for taking part in this interview. Is there anything you would like to add? Please contact me if you would like a copy of the transcribed interview.

Thank you

## 5.5 Pre-research questionnaire Phase three

### Pre-interview questionnaire

Thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this research. The purpose of the research is to narrate the experience of the SENCo in relation to the first year of the SEND reforms. Your responses will form part of a PhD research project.

As part of my data collection, I am looking to collect some initial information about your role and your school, to enable me to set the research within the context of your setting. I would be very grateful if you could complete the following and send it back to me.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised and later destroyed. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you,

Helen Curran

Name:	
School:	
Local Authority:	
Are you the SENCo in school?	
Do you hold any additional roles in school? If yes, please state	
Length of time as a teacher?	
Length of time as a SENCo?	
Previous roles held?	
Are you full time or part time?	
Do you have non-contact time to facilitate your role as a	

SENCo?	
If so, on average, how much time do you have per week?	
Size of your school? (pupil numbers)	
Number of pupils who are identified as having SEN (SEN Support – as was School Action/ School Action plus)	
Number of children with a statement of SEN	

Please could you email your responses to [REDACTED]

Thank you very much for you time.

Helen Curran

## 5.6 Ethics and consent form

### Research overview and ethics statement

Dear SENCo,

Thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this research project. Before you continue, it is important that there is clarity regarding the purpose and nature of the research. The following information aims to give you a brief overview of the research project, the research aims and the processes involved. It also aims to outline the ethical considerations for the project.

#### **Overview of the project**

The research project aims to narrate the experience of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) over the course of the academic year, following the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. The project will form part of a PhD thesis. You have been selected because you are currently a SENCo in a school and you have recently completed the National Award for SENCo.

#### **The research aims:**

- To narrate the experiences of the SENCo at a time of significant SEND reform
- To explore the role of the SENCo during the first year of policy reform
- To consider the enablers and barriers to policy reform, as well as the specific role the SENCo plays within this.

#### **The process of the research**

##### Phase 1 (complete)

- Questionnaires to 60 SENCos regarding the SEND reforms.

##### Phase 2 (with selected participants)

- Initial questionnaire to ascertain key school and SENCo information.
- Initial interviews to elaborate on the initial questionnaires.

##### Phase 3 (with selected participants)

- Termly (new term) interviews with the SENCo to explore the changes they have observed and the role of the SENCo within the implementation of the SEND reforms

#### **The planned dates for the 15 minute interviews (telephone, SKYPE, FaceTime) are:**

- 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014/ 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014/ 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2014



- 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014/ 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2014/ 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2015
- 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015/ 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015/ 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2015
- 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015/ 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015/ 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015
- 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015/ 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015/ 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015
- 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015/ 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015/ 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Please let me know your preference.

## **Ethics**

Confidentiality will be maintained in this study and will not be shared with any other colleagues. Data will not be linked to participants; all data will be anonymised on all transcripts and questionnaires. Data will be protected by keeping questionnaires, transcripts and interview recordings in a secure facility. All data will be password protected. Interviews which are recorded will be transcribed and subsequently destroyed. Once the study has been completed, all data will be destroyed. Any quotes used in the research will use a pseudonym rather than the participant's name. Schools and locations will not be named.

The interviews will take place via telephone, FaceTime or skype, depending upon your preference. The interviews will take place at a time which is convenient to you and will take approximately 15 minutes. Transcriptions of the interviews will be made available, should you wish to see them.

The data will be used to form part of a PhD research project, the data will not be used for any other purpose. The project will be available for all participants during and at the end of the project. Findings will be disseminated to all those involved.

Please sign below (or send a confirmation e mail) to indicate that you:

- Have read and understand the nature of the research
- Agree to take part in the research
- Understand your participation is voluntary and you are aware of your right to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason
- Agree to the interviews being recorded for data collection purposes
- Understand that the data may be used as part of a publication, for example in an academic journal, and you give consent for the data to be used. All articles will be shared with you prior to publication.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for your time and for your participation in this project.

Helen Curran

## 5.7 Pilot interview schedule Phase three

### SEND reform implementation: the SENCo's story

#### Interview schedule: Phase 3

- 11 SENCos (6 Primary and 5 Secondary)
- 15 – 20 minute interview.
- Over a three week period:

The last week of each new term/ first week of holiday:

- 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014/ 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014
- 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014/ 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2014
- 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015/ 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015
- 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015/ 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015
- 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015/ 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015
- 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015/ 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015

#### Introduction to the interviews

Thank you for being willing to take part in an interview in this project. Just to reiterate from our previous conversations and the information I have sent you, your responses will remain completely anonymous and, all records of this interview will be anonymised and password protected. I would also like to ask your permission to record this interview. The reason for this is to ensure that I can accurately record your responses and opinions. This will then aid the subsequent analysis of data.

Do you have any questions? Ok, we'll begin.

As you know the SEND reforms were introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2014. Our conversation today will explore topics related to the introduction of the reforms and your role as SENCo within the implementation of these reforms.

#### Topics for discussion

Area for discussion	Topic/ question	Prompt
Types of activity: e.g. Instructional, narration...	What activities have you observed in your setting in relation to the SEND reforms over this last term?	Policy changes Groups Changes to paper work
Policy enactment – specific roles	Who has been involved in these activities?	
	Who has taken a specific lead?	Could be one or more people

	Considering the activities you have mentioned above, how have you been involved?	
	How would you describe that role that you took in these activities?	
Policy enactment – specific roles	How would you describe the role of others?	
Response	Considering the different activities you have mentioned, what has been the response from those involved?	Consider engagement of others (or not)
Policy enactment – specific role	What was your response? How did you feel about the aspects you were involved in?	E.g. SEN policy rewrite – what did the SENCo think of the process?
Support	What has helped facilitate the activities you have described?	
Impact	Would you say you have observed any impact of the SEND reforms in your setting? What specifically?	Qualify that this relates to vision
	Considering your role as a SENCo, can you think of any factors which may have presented as a barrier to you moving forward with the SEND reforms in your school?	Qualify: For example putting in place changes?
Future plans	Do you have any activities planned over the next half term which relate to the SEND reforms?	

We seem to have covered a great deal of information, thank you. Can you think of anything we have left out? Are there any further comments you would like to make in relation to this, or the research as a whole?

The interview will be transcribed, would you like a copy? I will look forward to speaking to you again at the end of the next term. Thank you

## 5.8 Final interview schedule Phase three

### SEND reform implementation: the SENCo's story

#### Interview schedule: Phase 3

- 11 SENCos (6 Primary and 5 Secondary)
- 15 – 20 minute interview.
- Three week period at the end/ beginning of term

The last week of each new term/ first week of holiday/ first week of the new term:

- 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014/ 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014
- 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014/ 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2014
- 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015/ 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015
- 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015/ 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015
- 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015/ 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015
- 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015/ 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015
- The first week of the new term is a possibility if required.

#### Introduction to the interviews

Thank you for speaking to me about this research project. Just to reiterate from our previous conversations and the information I have sent you, your responses will remain completely anonymous and, all records of this interview will be anonymised and password protected. I would also like to ask your permission to record this interview. The reason for this is to ensure that I can accurately record your responses and opinions. This will then aid the subsequent analysis of data.

Do you have any questions? Ok, we'll begin.

As you know the SEND reforms were introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2014. Our conversation today will explore topics related to the introduction of the reforms and your role as SENCo with the implementation of these reforms.

#### Topics for discussion

Area for discussion	Topic/ question	Prompt (for interviewer)	
Types of activity: e.g. Instructional, narration...	General question re SENCo role – what has been happening?  Anything specific re SEND reform which stands out?	Policy changed? Groups – parent? Changes to paper work Discuss the nature of the activities. Once 'activities' defined then these can be referred to specifically	
Policy enactment – specific roles	Who has been involved in these activities?	SEnCo? Governor? Head? Parents? Other?	
	Has anyone taken a lead on	Could be one or more people	

	this?	Did this involve the SENCo? Ask if anyone has not been involved or who has been resistant Keep open ended	
	How did you fit into these activities?	Explore what the SENCos specific role was	
	How did you feel about your involvement?	Focus on the SENCo role... how did they feel about their involvement in the activities?	
Policy enactment – specific roles	Link to question re who was involved above... How did other people respond to the activities?	Passive? Involved?	
Response	How did you feel about this?	Once I know the activities I can refer to these specifically.  Consider engagement of others (or not) How did this make the SENCo feel?	
Support	When you consider the different activities, what has helped? What didn't help?	Supportive elements?	
	Considering your SENCo role, have there been any specific barriers to regarding carrying out your role?	Qualify: For example putting in place changes?	
Impact	It is interesting to think about the impact of the SEND reforms, so far.  Have you see any impact on pupils? On parents? Generally in school? Outside of school?  How do you think about this?	Qualify that this relates to vision  Relate to provision Pupils views Parental engagement  Relates to what is really changing – is it a fundamental shift, or administration?	
Future plans	Do you have any activities	Specifically the SENCo and things	

	planned over the next half term which relate to the SEND reforms?	they are going to do	
--	---	----------------------	--

We seem to have covered a great deal of information, thank you. Can you think of anything we have left out? Are there any further comments you would like to make in relation to this, or the research as a whole? The interview will be transcribed, would you like a copy?

I will look forward to speaking to you again at the end of the next term.

Thank you

## 5.9 Pilot questionnaire Phase four

URL for online pilot questionnaire Phase 4 [URL removed from this digitised version]

Questions copied directly from the online questionnaire

Dear SENCo,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of the SENCo in relation to the implementation of the SEND reforms and the new SEND Code of Practice, 2014. Your responses to the questions below will form part of a PhD research project narrating the experience of the SENCo and the implementation of SEND policy.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you very much for your time.

Helen Curran

1. What type of school do you currently work in?  
Primary  
Secondary  
Special School  
Other
2. Please give rough location, E.g. South West, Midlands etc.
3. How long have you been a SENCo? Please tick for the total number of years, for example if you have been a SENCo in two schools, tick the total number of years in both schools.  
Less than 4 years  
4 – 8 years  
9 – 13 years  
More than 14 years
4. Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification?  
Yes  
No  
I am currently completing it
5. Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice?  
Please check all you have received support from.

- Head teacher
  - Governing Body/ SEND Governor
  - Local Authority
  - NASEN
  - Other SENCos
6. What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?
    - Other SENCos
    - Head teachers
    - Local Authority
    - NASEN/ SEND organisations
    - I have carried out my own research
  7. In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?
    - Very satisfied
    - Satisfied
    - Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
    - Dissatisfied
    - Very dissatisfied
  8. Can you add further details?
  9. Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
  10. With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?
  11. Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?
    - Yes – I have
    - Yes – our department has
    - Yes – the whole school has
    - Not yet – this is planned for
    - No
    - Other
  12. In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
  13. In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
  14. Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?
    - Yes – it has reduced
    - Yeas – it has increased
    - No – it is the same
  15. Can you add further details?
  16. If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?



Yes

Undecided

No

17. Can you add further details?

18. The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

19. Can you add further details?

20. To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?

Pupils

Parents

Teachers

Head Teachers

Governing Body

21. Can you add further details?

22. Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?

Major impact

Moderate impact

Neutral

Minor impact

No impact

23. Can you add further details?

## 5.10 Final questionnaire Phase four

URL for online pilot questionnaire Phase 4 [URL removed from this digitised version]

Questions copied directly from the online questionnaire. Highlight illustrates changes made from the pilot questionnaire.

Dear SENCo,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of the SENCo in relation to the implementation of the SEND reforms and the new SEND Code of Practice, 2014. Your responses to the questions below will form part of a PhD research project narrating the experience of the SENCo and the implementation of SEND policy.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you very much for your time.

Helen Curran

1. What type of school do you currently work in?  
Primary  
Secondary  
Special School  
Other
2. Please give rough location, E.g. South West, Midlands etc.
3. How long have you been a SENCo? Please tick for the total number of years, for example if you have been a SENCo in two schools, tick the total number of years in both schools.  
Less than 4 years  
4 – 8 years  
9 – 13 years  
More than 14 years
4. Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification?  
Yes  
No  
I am currently completing it
5. Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice?  
Please check all you have received support from.

Head teacher  
Governing Body/ SEND Governor  
Local Authority  
NASEN/ SEND organisations  
I have carried out my own research  
Other SENCos  
Other

6. What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?  
Other SENCos  
Head teachers  
Local Authority  
NASEN/ SEND organisations  
I have carried out my own research  
Other
7. In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?  
Very stratified  
Satisfied  
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied  
Dissatisfied  
Very dissatisfied
8. Can you add further details?
9. Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
10. With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?
11. Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?  
Yes – I have  
Yes – our department has  
Yes – the whole school had  
Not yet – this is planned for  
No  
Other
12. In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
13. In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
14. Has your SEND register changed this academic year?  
Yes – it has reduced  
Yeas – it has increased  
No – it is the same
15. Can you add further details?

16. If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
- Yes
  - Undecided
  - No
17. Can you add further details?
18. The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Undecided
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
19. Can you add further details?
20. To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?
- Pupils
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - Head Teachers
  - Governing Body
  - Other
21. Can you add further details?
22. Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?
- Major impact
  - Moderate impact
  - Neutral
  - Minor impact
  - No impact
23. Can you add further details?
24. I heard of this questionnaire from:
- LA contact
  - SENCo forum
  - Twitter
  - Email
  - TES
  - UKedChat
  - Other

## 5.11 Pilot questionnaire Phase five

URL for online pilot questionnaire Phase 5 [URL removed from this digitised version]

Questions copied from the online questionnaire

Dear SENCo,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of the SENCo in relation to the SEND reforms and the new SEND Code of Practice, 2014 now that the academic year is coming to an end. Your responses to the questions below will form part of a PhD research project narrating the experience of the SENCo and the implementation of SEND policy.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you very much for your time.

Helen Curran

1. What type of school do you currently work in?  
Primary  
Secondary  
Special School  
Other
2. Please give rough location, E.g. South West, Midlands etc.
3. How long have you been a SENCo? Please tick for the total number of years, for example if you have been a SENCo in two schools, tick the total number of years in both schools.  
Less than 4 years  
4 – 8 years  
9 – 13 years  
More than 14 years
4. Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification?  
Yes  
No  
I am currently completing it
5. How well do you think the following groups understand the SEND reforms?  
Strongly agree/ agree/ undecided/ disagree/ strongly disagree:  
Pupils  
Parents

Teachers  
Headteacher  
Governing Body  
SENCo (me)

6. Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice?  
Please check all you have received support from.  
Head teacher  
Governing Body/ SEND Governor  
Local Authority  
NASEN  
Other SENCos  
Other
7. What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?  
Other SENCos  
Head teachers  
Local Authority  
NASEN/ SEND organisations  
I have carried out my own research  
Other
8. In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?  
Very satisfied  
Satisfied  
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied  
Dissatisfied  
Very dissatisfied
9. Can you add further details?
10. Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
11. With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?
12. Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?  
Yes – I have  
Yes – our department has  
Yes – the whole school had  
Not yet – this is planned for  
No  
Other
13. In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?

14. In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
15. Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?
- Yes – it has reduced
  - Yes – it has increased
  - No – it is the same
16. Can you add further details?
17. If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
- Yes
  - Undecided
  - No
18. Can you add further details?
19. The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Undecided
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
20. Can you add further details?
21. To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?
- Pupils
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - Head Teachers
  - Governing Body
  - Other
22. Can you add further details?
23. Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?
- Major impact
  - Moderate impact
  - Neutral
  - Minor impact
  - No impact
24. Can you add further details?
25. I heard of this questionnaire from:
- LA contact
  - SENCo forum
  - Twitter

Email  
TES  
UKedChat  
Other



## 5.12 Final questionnaire Phase five

URL for online questionnaire Phase 5 [URL removed from this digitised version]

Questions copied directly from the online questionnaire. Highlighted text illustrates changes made from the pilot questionnaire.

Dear SENCo,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey the views of the SENCo in relation to the SEND reforms and the new SEND Code of Practice, 2014 now that the academic year is coming to an end. Your responses to the questions below will form part of a PhD research project narrating the experience of the SENCo and the implementation of SEND policy.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. All reporting of the questionnaires, and subsequent analysis and reporting of results, will be anonymised. Data analysis, related discussions and conclusions will be available to participants.

Thank you very much for your time.

Helen Curran

1. Have you completed a questionnaire for this research project before?

Yes – in July 2014 as part of the National Award for SENCo at BSU

Yes in February/ March 2015

No

2. What type of school do you currently work in?

Primary

Secondary

Special School

Other

3. Please give rough location, E.g. South West, Midlands etc.

4. How long have you been a SENCo? Please tick for the total number of years, for example if you have been a SENCo in two schools, tick the total number of years in both schools.

Less than 4 years

4 – 8 years

9 – 13 years

More than 14 years

5. Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification?

Yes

No

- I am currently completing it
6. How well do you think the following groups understand the SEND reforms?  
Strongly agree/ agree/ undecided/ disagree/ strongly disagree:  
Pupils  
Parents  
Teachers  
Headteacher  
Governing Body  
SENCo (me)
  7. Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice?  
Please check all you have received support from.  
Head teacher  
Governing Body/ SEND Governor  
Local Authority  
NASEN  
Other SENCos  
Other
  8. What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?  
Other SENCos  
Head teachers  
Local Authority  
NASEN/ SEND organisations  
I have carried out my own research  
Other
  9. In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?  
Very satisfied  
Satisfied  
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied  
Dissatisfied  
Very dissatisfied
  10. Can you add further details?
  11. Would you have liked more support?  
Strongly agree/ agree/ undecided/ disagree/ strongly disagree  
I have had adequate resources to implement the reforms  
I would have liked more support from my school  
I would have liked more support from my LA
  12. Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
  13. With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?

14. Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?
  - Yes – I have
  - Yes – our department has
  - Yes – the whole school had
  - Not yet – this is planned for
  - No
  - Other
15. In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
16. In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?
17. Has your SEND register **changed this academic year?**
  - Yes – it has reduced
  - Yes – it has increased
  - No – it is the same
18. Can you add further details?
19. If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?
  - Yes
  - Undecided
  - No
20. Can you add further details?
21. The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Undecided
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
22. Can you add further details?
23. To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?
  - Pupils
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - Head Teachers
  - Governing Body
  - Other
24. Can you add further details?
25. Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?
  - Major impact
  - Moderate impact

Neutral

Minor impact

No impact

26. Can you add further details?

27. What do you view as the top three primary functions of your role?

28. What do you think others view the top three primary functions of your role to be?

29. I heard of this questionnaire from:

LA contact

SENCo forum

Twitter

Email

TES

UKedChat

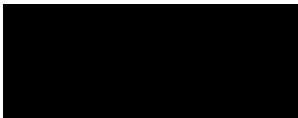
Other

### 5.13: Bath Spa Research Ethics Approval Form

Student/BST name	Helen Curran
Programme and/or module	Research Degree
Title of the proposed research project:	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Reforms 2014 - from policy to practice:  SENCo's perspectives of the first year post implementation
Number and type of proposed participants (e.g. 30 children aged 6-7)	Long term interviews: approximately 10 participants.  Questionnaires approximately 50 participants at each stage.  All participants will be SENCo's working in schools.
How is permission being sought from the participants and/or their parents/carers?	Participants will have a written reference relating to the nature of the research, to refer to. They will also give their written consent. This will take place after the research has been explained both in verbal and written form.
How is participants' anonymity to be preserved?	All records, notes and observations will be kept securely and confidentiality. All reports and the subsequent thesis will be anonymised.
Describe the research methods proposed (e.g. interviews, classroom observations)	To facilitate the collection of data I intend to take a mixed methods approach. Initially this will begin with a broad based questionnaire, which will seek to establish the broader ideas surrounding the introduction of the SEND reforms. This will also enable me to set the research within context. From the questionnaires I hope to link with ten SENCo's in schools to examine in depth, through interviews, the deeper experience of their role during this period.
List the ethical issues and potential risks associated with the research	Informed consent  It is essential that the participants are fully aware of the purpose and value of the research. Participants must be

<p>methods outlined above (e.g. confidentiality) and how you propose to deal with each of these.</p>	<p>fully informed of the nature of participation, including the likely subjects of discussion, to ensure their consent is fully informed. The potential audience will be discussed with the participants. The commitment to the research will be clear; however participants can withdraw from the research, at any time without notice or reason. The research whilst concerning children will not involve direct contact with children; the focus will be on the SENCo's perceptions. Any material shared which does not relate to the study will be discarded.</p> <p>Protection from harm</p> <p>Due to the nature of the research I will be working with SENCo's at a potentially busy, stressful period. Due to the nature of the research, participants will be asked to reflect on issues and experiences that may not have been explored without my involvement. As such it is important that participants are aware that they should only share what they want to, and go no further. Participants will be able to check their input, through reading transcripts, and will have access to the completed research through a 'debrief'. All responses will be treated confidentially and measures will be taken to protect identity of the participants and schools. However, the potential benefit is the development of 'voice' for the SENCo and the chance to share some of their ideas and thoughts regarding their role.</p> <p>Participants will be invited through discussion at the final NA SENCo session. Later participants will be invited to participate through email/ online questionnaires. All of which will be piloted and shared with my supervisor and trialled to ensure clarity as well as any potentially suggestive terms.</p> <p>The likelihood of a participant sharing concerns and requesting advice needs to be considered. The purpose of the research is to consider the experience of the SENCo. Myself in the role as a participant</p>
--	--

	<p>researcher/observer must be considered. To support this process transparency is required at the beginning of the process. The role of the researcher will be made clear to the SENCos, although time and space needs to be given to the participant. A coaching/ mentoring approach will be taken. Further, specific and escalating concerns will be dealt with on a case by case basis, with a duty of care paramount throughout.</p> <p>Disruption for the participant</p> <p>The research asks for a commitment from the participants, initially through questionnaires and latterly through face to face interviews over a sustained period of time. To minimise disruption times must be establish that are convenient to the participant. These will be agreed in writing with the participants. Interviews will also be time stamped, to ensure that they participants are aware of the commitment they are agreeing to.</p> <p>The issue of disruption to the school must also be considered. The additional demands of the interviews will naturally cause some disruption to the school and will be sought to be minimised by agreeing appropriate methods of communication, as determined by the SENCo. Furthermore the possible disruption to the school must be considered in light of the potential issues that may arise as a result of the interviews.</p> <p>The role of the researcher</p> <p>There are potential issues surrounding my role as a researcher. Whilst I have suitable experience in this area I must consider the impact of the research on myself in relation to the values I hold regarding the role of the SENCo and inclusive policy. Supervision will allow me to explore key areas of concern.</p>
--	--

Describe how your findings will be reported or disseminated	<p>The findings will be reported through the thesis.</p> <p>Dissemination will be offered to the participants.</p> <p>Any further likely dissemination will be discussed with the participants.</p>
I have read the School of Education Research Ethics Policy (please sign and date)	<p>Yes</p> 

**Supervising tutor use only:**

Comments on the ethical issues raised by the proposed research:	
<p>Please tick one of the boxes below:</p> <p>Either:</p> <p>1. I am satisfied that the ethical issues raised by the proposed research project have been addressed and give approval for the project to go ahead <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Or:</p> <p>2. The ethical issues raised by the proposed research project require referral to the School of Education Ethics Committee. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p>	

A copy of this form should be sent to the Head of Research in the School of Education



## 6.1 Example of transcribed interview

File name: Pseudonym: Lucy

Date of interview: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Date of transcription: 14 November 2014

Interviewer:	Have you observed in school any activities related to the SEND reforms over the last half term?	
Respondent:	Yes we have had a staff meeting on the SEND reforms, talking to everybody about the implications of that and we've looked really clearly at the graduated approach and have tried to fit in our current systems in that "assess, plan, do" cycle and told people explicitly where the current documents that we use are placed within that cycle, so it's really explicit for them, that they understand. We have asked them to consider that move to SEN support and some of our school actions are being met just by the ordinary differentiation rather than anything specialised or any specific intervention, maybe they could be dropped off. Other things - we've talked about the one page profile and the way it links into "my support plans" and EHC plans and just tried to raise people's awareness of it all. It's a very gradual process I think, getting it all off the ground. That's what we are trying to do. We are going to have other staff meetings. We are trying to move away from IEPs and our replacement is my next step, which isn't as formal really.	Staff training New process - language New process - language Staff training/ Challenge staff Challenge staff One page profiles EHCs Supporting staff Priorities Changing processes
Interviewer:	How has that been received?	
Respondent:	People really like it, I think. We talked about "smart and scruffy targets". Have you heard that?	Impact – staff
Interviewer:	No I haven't heard about "scruffy" ones.	
Respondent:	So people have really liked that approach and I think my next step is to look for child friendly – the way X has designed it, it's actually got a staircase on it and it's a bit of a flow chart and it's a document you could actually show children, rather than IEPs are just horrid aren't they? This hopefully will be more accessible to parents and children.	Pupil voice New processes – language Engaging parents Informing parents
Interviewer:	I think a lot of SENCos are feeling quite excited about the idea of moving away from IEPs and	

	doing something different and more child-centred as well.	
Respondent:	Yes, absolutely. They've got to understand. We have talked a lot about meta-cognition and children understand how they learn how that can have an impact on them. I think by making documents like that more child friendly, they have got a chance of understanding more where they are heading and what we want for them and why they are learning these things in their own particular learning styles.	Challenging staff?  Child friendly  Wider school picture
Interviewer:	So who was specifically involved in those sorts of activities? Was it all teaching staff?	
Respondent:	Our learning set have developed the one page profile and read into that and that's teachers and TAs and then X and I and X (the other SENCo) have chatted about it ourselves and the next way to develop it. So it's really been X and us two as SENCos who have been involved. We shared it just after you left actually on Monday. It's a trial period at the moment. We've got a parent consultation next week. They are going to talk to parents and give them a bit of an information slip about the changes to SEN reforms and refer them to the Local Offer on our website, but also some people (if they are feeling brave enough almost) will move from the IEP format to "my next step". We are using this year really as a transition period to see what works, so that we will have definitive for next academic year. People have got to feel confident haven't they? We can't suddenly say "right this is a new format, this is what you are going to do", I think people have to feel ready and understand it before we can launch into a whole school approach.	Team approach (MAT)  Support - SENCo Involving parents  Informing parents New process/ language LO  Supporting staff  Wider school picture
Interviewer:	It will be interesting to see how the parents respond to taking away from IEPs and moving into "my next steps".	
Respondent:	Yes, we've had a couple of parents ask actually where their child is placed, because they are aware of the changes to the SEN Code of Practice. I had a lady yesterday who has paid privately for a diagnosis of dyslexia and she said how will this affect him because I know it's all different. Will he be provided with SEN support?	Involving parents SEN?  SEN?
Interviewer:	Well, exactly, I think for children with dyslexia it's going to be the trickiest one. Particularly for those who are attaining quite well – they won't meet those criteria for SEN necessarily.	<leading/ going off topic>

Respondent:	No and she is very keen that he is labelled because he's Year 6 and she is worried about the transition to secondary and she thinks that will flag it up a bit more.	Involving parents <Going off topic>
Interviewer:	It opens up some really big issues doesn't it about parents perceptions of how children are monitored and things. Quite interesting. So, as a SENCo, how did you feel you fitted into all of these activities? Did you take quite a lead role and how did you feel about it?	
Respondent:	I mean I'm lucky that I'm part of that inclusion team – it isn't just me in isolation – and I think that makes a big difference. Obviously, X's massively experienced and is very current in all of her thinking, so it's been lovely actually to thrash it through and be able to talk about it in a group and think what are our next steps are and how we are going to develop it. I suppose it's a way that the collaborative SENCo network should work, but those meetings don't happen that frequently. I'm really fortunate to be in a setting where I have got lots of people who are as aware of the changes and really willing to talk about it and move it on.	Team approach  Team approach – supervision  Support – SENCo networks?  Team approach Positive/ proactive about the role
Interviewer:	So do you feel quite positive about your role and how it fits into .....?	
Respondent:	Yes I do actually. I am really enjoying the job. It's mad and it's crazy, never enough hours in the day, but I like the fact that you can make a positive change and I think that's what the SEND reforms are. I think it's pretty positive. Pupil and parent voice is so key and I'm lucky to be in a school environment where everybody else believes it as well. We've got a chance of really shaping things and moving it forward.	Positive about the role  Time – lack of  Involving parents Pupil voice – importance of  Wider school picture - importance of
Interviewer:	It certainly sounds like people are quite involved in the fact that you've had that day about parent participation on Monday as well.	
Respondent:	Yeah and I think people's perceptions have really changed by listening to you and X. You know, it really made these people think that parents actually are the experts on their child. We might be experts on how children think and learn and we know all about development and all that kind of stuff, but parents actually are the experts on their child and it's not unless you marry those two levels of expertise together that you are really going to impact the child's learning.	Involving parents Advocating for parents Challenging teachers perceptions Parents experts Collaboration - Importance of schools and parents working together <query>

		SENCo role in this?>
Interviewer:	That's so true. One cannot exist without the other really. So what do you think has really helped you in all these things you have been doing? Has it been the fact that you have been part of the team? Has that been the key thing do you think?	
Respondent:	It has and also NASEN's "Everybody Included". That's a brilliant publication and it's really small, precise and easy to read, but it has got so many useful ideas in there – that's been really good.	Support – NASEN
Interviewer:	Yes it's really good. I'm using that at the moment actually. On the other hand then, what things have hindered you would you say?	
Respondent:	I think lack of clarity at county level still about certain things. We went on a "how to write a my support plan" training, which was great, but when you scratch away at the surface of the trainer's knowledge of how does this work in comparison to a CAF, they don't really have the answers for it. The paperwork itself we all felt was incomplete, because it had a section on the parent's views and a section on the child's views (what's working and what's not working), but it didn't have a section on the professional view. We weren't sure if that was just an omission when it went to the printers (somebody accidentally missed that page off) or that it's a general stance that those two views mattered the most. So its little things like that when you go to training and you ask questions and nobody is really sure. We submitted a statement request at the end of last year on the advice of "don't worry, if it goes through it will be an EHC straightaway" and I've since been told it probably won't – it will probably be a statement and that will be converted in 2 or 3 years time. That just seems absolutely nuts to me. There seem to be lots of little things that people are still confused about and nobody can really answer.	<p>Lack of LA clarity</p> <p>New process - Use of new policy language – my support plan</p> <p>Bureaucracy</p> <p>Issues with paperwork – critical of paperwork</p> <p>Pupil voice</p> <p>Training - SENCo</p> <p>Lack of clarity - LA</p>
Interviewer:	They seem like they are intrinsic procedural things as well – paperwork that should be in place.	
Respondent:	I really like the "my support plan" thing – I think that's fantastic, but when you ask about the review process (reviewed 3 times a year), nobody has really thought that through. Do you actually do it on that document, does that document just grow or is another one created?	<p>Impact – likes new procedures for My Support plan / New Language</p> <p>Wider policy picture</p>

	They've got the systems in place but I don't think they've thought about the bigger picture and how it's all going to work and feed in.	
Interviewer:	I've had a couple of SENCos say to me that they feel that this year should have been a pilot year.	<Query leading question?>
Respondent:	Yeah, absolutely. Things aren't ironed out at all. The fact it all kind of became solid and was no longer a draft was only in the summer holidays – July – you think that's nuts. It should have been better planned really shouldn't it?	Issues of timing of the draft <note leading?>  Implementation - Should have been better planned – SEND reforms
Interviewer:	Yes, absolutely. Thinking broader than the SEND reforms, what are the bigger barriers to your role at the moment? You mentioned time.	
Respondent:	I find that when I'm in school (because I'm only part time – 2 days a week) I feel I should really be there for the people and the children so I have lots of people come to me and ask questions or present problems and things and I have to be there, I have to answer those and be there for them as a physical presence. So I don't actually work on my work days – I am kind of problem solving, fighting fires that kind of thing. So consequently you then spend all of your evenings and most of your days off actually doing the work and doing the paperwork side of it. You know that is what everybody at our school feels at the moment because we are in a state of flux with the Academy and everything, but I think that's also a general SENCo thing isn't it? You want to be very hands on when you are there and help people as much as you can, but actually all the things that you have to do get pushed to the side.	Time: lack of  Creative with time SEnCo – impact Feeling responsible for others whilst not there  Worried Creative with time  Wider educational policy issues impacting  Time – lack of
Interviewer:	They just have to wait don't they? I am not sure if people appreciate the level of all those extras that you have to do as a SENCo. I think there's still a little bit of a perception that the SENCo is still sometimes still taking out intervention groups and it's far removed from that now really isn't it?	
Respondent:	It is and again I am lucky that I am working with X because her view is that it should be a much more strategic role, which is great, but also people expect you to be the expert and expect you to have the magic wand solution, so they are almost queuing up at my door on my days in and saying "oh my goodness, so and so is doing x, y and z, what can we do about this?". It's really	Team support  Operational v strategic role  Supporting staff

	important that they get to speak to somebody about that and they feel that they've been listened to and that you can give them that support. Like I say, that impacts on your actual job.	Time: lack of
Interviewer:	Particularly at a time of reform as well, when you can't just look at the systems you have in place and develop those, but you actually have to incorporate new systems, it's really challenging. It may be far too early to ask this question, but have you seen any impact (given when we think about what the purpose of the reforms is) so far on parents or pupils?	
Respondent:	<p>We have had a couple of quite powerful moments actually through the use of the one page profile. There's a particular lad – X talked to him about it at the beginning of our day and that kind of set the scene – who we have always considered him to be a happy, confident chap. We knew he struggled a bit with his literacy, but he was having interventions and it came to the point where we thought we will refer to SEN support because he wasn't making a great deal of progress in literacy and so when the meeting for that happened with the advisory teacher (it was right at the end of the year so his teachers from Year 3 and his new ones for Year 4 were present at the meeting to get the feedback) and it was talking to mum and saying "how is he at home?" "How did he find writing the profile?" and she just burst into tears because he hadn't been able to write anything in the "what do people like and admire about you?" section and she just said he won't have birthday parties because he feels nobody likes him enough. He will never invite children home. Our perception of him was that he was a leader, really engaged in everything, really popular boy and that was a real moment for everybody to think that "oh my goodness". It wasn't until we'd asked both his opinion (and obviously he couldn't express it) but also asking mum's take on it that we actually learnt what his actual learning needs were. I mean it's been brilliant because we've seen real progress since that and he's writing at home and bringing it in. He feels like he's a writer now, whereas before he obviously didn't. I think that because of that one document that really promotes pupil and parent voice (which is obviously the essence of these SEND reforms)</p>	<p>Impact on the individual (pupil) OPP Staff training in relation to new processes</p> <p>Impact on the individual and the family as a result of new processes</p> <p>Advocating for the child</p> <p>Involving parents Pupil voice</p>

	that was great. It showed us the possibilities that kind of approach can bring. It's something we've always tried to do, but it has formalised it a bit more.	
Interviewer:	Sometimes it's just having those vehicles to structure the conversation isn't it? That's incredible. I am imagining that was probably quite powerful for the other teachers as well, to get them on board?	
Respondent:	Yes, absolutely. X, when she was talking about him she delivered it in a really powerful way and she said showed pictures of him from Year 3 when he's on a climbing wall and he's dressed as a Hindu Raj and he's looking amazing and happy and he's got his arms around his friends and everything and then she said well this is actually what his perception of himself is. It was really powerful and particularly because we all knew him and people had never considered him in that way at all.	Staff training  Advocating for new processes for individual OPP  Impact: pupil
Interviewer:	It really kind of brings the focus back on outcomes for children and what they think is important as well doesn't it? Gosh, wow. So I guess you are already seeing impact from pupils and families.	
Respondent:	Yeah and you know generally the children that we have had coming into our reception years who already had "my support plans", teachers have commented that they have been really good documents to read. With a statement it's just a comment bank isn't it, whereas a "my support plan" (we haven't had anyone come in with an EHC plan) the way they are written you really get a clear picture of that child through reading it.	New processes – My support plans Changing processes
Interviewer:	Again, that's what it's all about isn't it? Being able to have that effective assessment and moving forward. Brilliant. So thinking about up until Christmas, for this next half of the term, what are your plans in terms of moving forward with SENCo and the reforms and things?	
Respondent:	We've got another staff meeting in a couple of weeks, because with our first one when we were talking about reforms, we just kind of looked at the assess and planning bits of the graduated approach, so our second staff meeting is going to focus on the "do and review" section. That's where we are going to talk a bit more about the "my next step" document rather than IEPs, so there's just not enough time.	Staff training – focus reforms  Language - Graduated approach  Changing processes

Interviewer:	Also, you need to do it in adequate depth don't you as well, to get people on board? Brilliant, thank you. There's been loads going on.	
Respondent:	It's a really good time to be involved in SEN isn't it? Exciting time. It's just those frustrations as well that not everything is completely in place and you do feel a bit in the dark sometimes.	Positive about role Frustration - processes Lack of clarity – LA/ processes
Interviewer:	It will be interesting to see how that develops over the course of the year. Whether things become clearer or whether schools actually develop that clarity themselves – their own interpretation – which could be interesting.	
Respondent:	The responses you get on these training sessions is “you trial it and see how you get on” and they said “you can add an extra box on the my support plan if you feel that's important” and I think that people will develop their own systems.	Changing processes
Interviewer:	Would it be okay to talk to you again towards the end of this term?	
Respondent:	Absolutely. I am in school on a Wednesday and Thursday normally, that's why you missed me yesterday.	
Interviewer:	Right, Wednesday and Thursday. Is it better to call you at school?	
Respondent:	No, actually it's better to call when I'm at home.	
Interviewer:	I'll email you a few weeks before and you can let me know when is good for you.	



## 6.2 List of codes used

Additional roles	New process- language
Advising staff	No impact
Advocate	Numbers reducing - SEN
Children	One Page Profile
Parents	Operational/ strategic
Staff	Outcome focused
Policy/ process	Parents' expectations
Already doing it	Parents are the expert
Bureaucracy	Parents more involved
Challenge staff	Positive about the role
Challenges with role: time	Priorities
Changing processes	Promote inclusion
Child friendly	Pupil voice
Collaboration	Reacting to issues
Creative with time	Role lacks clarity
Creative with support	Schools' own way
Education, Health and Care plans	SEN?
Engaging Teaching assistants	SEN policy
Engaging parents	SEND information report
Feeling responsible	Senior Leadership team issues
Frustration	Services - access
Graduated support	Should have been better planned
Impact	Staff informed
Pupil	Staff training
Parents	Social, Emotional, Mental Health
Teachers	Support
SENCo	Cluster
Informing parents	External agencies
Lack of clarity: Local Authority	Governor
Leader	Headteacher
Licence to change	Local Authority
Local offer	NA SENCo
Managing staff requirements	Team
Managing expectations	Supporting children
Parents	Supporting staff
Staff	Team approach
Mediator	Time – lack of
Meeting parents	Training – SENCo
Money – lack of	Undervalued
More people involved	Wider policy/ school picture
My Support plan	Working outside of hours
Nervous/ worried/ negative	Working with children
	Working on my own
	Working with parents

### 6.3 Statutory requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years

Note: the following refers to the ‘**musts**’ as documented within the 2015 Code which are relevant for mainstream primary and secondary schools; ‘**must**’ refers to a statutory requirement (DfE and DoH, 2015).

#### Who must have regard to the 2015 Code?

- the governing bodies of schools, including non-maintained special schools
- the governing bodies of further education colleges and sixth form colleges
- the proprietors of academies (including free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools)

This means that whenever they are taking decisions they **must** give consideration to what the Code says. They cannot ignore it. They **must** fulfil their statutory duties towards children and young people with SEN or disabilities in the light of the guidance set out in it. They **must** be able to demonstrate in their arrangements for children and young people with SEN or disabilities that they are fulfilling their statutory duty to have regard to the Code (DfE and DoH, 2015: 12).

#### Disabled children and young people

The Equality Act 2010 sets out the legal obligations that schools, early years providers, post-16 institutions, local authorities and others have towards disabled children and young people:

- They **must** not directly or indirectly discriminate against, harass or victimise disabled children and young people
- They **must** not discriminate for a reason arising in consequence of a child or young person’s disability

They **must** make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that disabled children and young people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers. This duty is anticipatory – it requires thought to be given in advance to what disabled children and young people might require and what adjustments might need to be made to prevent that disadvantage

Public bodies, including further education institutions, local authorities, maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies and free schools are covered by the public sector equality duty and, when carrying out their functions, **must** have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and nondisabled children and young people.

All providers **must** make reasonable adjustments to procedures, criteria and practices and by the provision of auxiliary aids and services. Most providers **must** also make reasonable adjustments by making physical alterations. Schools and local authority education functions are not covered by this last duty, but they **must** publish accessibility plans (and local authorities, accessibility strategies) setting out how they plan to increase access for disabled pupils to the curriculum, the physical environment and to information.

School governing bodies and proprietors **must** also publish information about the arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps taken to prevent disabled children being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to assist access of disabled children, and their accessibility plans. (DfE and DoH, 2015: 16- 17).

### **Identifying children and young people's needs**

Local authorities **must** keep their educational and training provision and social care provision for children and young people with SEN or disabilities under review (Section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014). In carrying out this duty, the local authority will gather information from early years providers, schools and post-16 institutions. In most cases, those institutions **must**, in turn, co-operate with the local authority. The local authority **must** publish and keep under review its Local Offer of provision in consultation with children, their parents and young people. (DfE and DoH, 2015: 24).

### **High quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN**

High quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised will meet the individual needs of the majority of children and young people. Some children and young people need educational provision that is additional to or different from this. This is special educational provision under Section 21 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Schools and colleges **must** use their best endeavours to ensure that such provision is made for those who need it. Special educational provision is underpinned by high quality teaching and is compromised by anything less. (DfE and DoH, 2015: 25).

### **A focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning**

Where a child or young person has SEN but does not have an EHC plan they **must** be educated in a mainstream setting except in specific circumstances (DfE and DoH, 2015: 25).

### **The legal framework**

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010), public bodies (including CCGs, local authorities, maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies and free schools) **must** have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of

opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled children and young people when carrying out their functions. They **must** publish information to demonstrate their compliance with this general duty and **must** prepare and publish objectives to achieve the core aims of the general duty. Objectives **must** be specific and measurable (DfE and DoH, 2015: 39).

### **Schools and post-16 settings as commissioners**

Schools, including early years providers, and post-16 settings can also be commissioners in their own right. Schools have a notional SEN budget and many schools will commission services (such as speech and language therapy, pastoral care and counselling services) to support pupils. Schools **must** work with the local authority in developing the Local Offer, which could include school-commissioned services. The school **must** set out its SEN policy and information on its approach to supporting children and young people with SEN. The school's governing body **must** ensure that arrangements are in place in schools to support pupils at school with medical conditions and should ensure that school leaders consult health and social care professionals, pupils and parents to make sure that the needs of children with medical conditions are effectively supported (DfE and DoH, 2015: 55).

### **Local accountability**

Mainstream schools have duties to use best endeavours to make the provision required to meet the SEN of children and young people. All schools **must** publish details of what SEN provision is available through the information report and co-operate with the local authority in drawing up and reviewing the Local Offer (DfE and DoH, 2015: 58).

### **Schools**

Schools have additional duties under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014. Schools **must** publish more detailed information about their arrangements for identifying, assessing and making provision for pupils with SEN.

The information **must** also include information about the arrangements for the admission of disabled pupils, the steps taken to prevent disabled pupils from being treated less favourably than other pupils, the facilities provided to assist access for disabled pupils and the schools' accessibility plans (DfE and DoH, 2015: 69).

### **Improving outcomes: high aspirations and expectations for children and young people with SEN**

Mainstream schools, which in this chapter includes maintained schools and academies that are not special schools, maintained nursery schools, 16 to 19 academies, alternative provision academies and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), **must**:

- use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people’s SEN
- ensure that children and young people with SEN engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEN
- designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision – the SEN co-ordinator, or SENCo (this does not apply to 16 to 19 academies)
- inform parents when they are making special educational provision for a child
- prepare an SEN information report (see ‘Publishing information: SEN information report’, paragraph 6.78 onwards) and their arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps being taken to prevent disabled children from being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to enable access to the school for disabled children and their accessibility plan showing how they plan to improve access progressively over time (DfE and DoH, 2015: 92).

### **Equality and inclusion**

Schools support pupils with a wide range of SEN. They should regularly review and evaluate the breadth and impact of the support they offer or can access. Schools **must** co-operate with the local authority in reviewing the provision that is available locally.

They **must** have due regard to general duties to promote disability equality.

All schools have duties under the Equality Act 2010 towards individual disabled children and young people. They **must** make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services for disabled children, to prevent them being put at a substantial disadvantage (DfE and DoH, 2015: 93).

### **Careers guidance for children and young people**

Maintained schools and PRUs **must** ensure that pupils from Year 8 until Year 13 are provided with independent careers guidance. Academies are subject to this duty through their funding agreements (DfE and DoH, 2015: 94).

### **Special Educational Provision in schools**

Where it is decided that a pupil does have SEN, the decision should be recorded in the school records and the pupil’s parents **must** be formally informed that special educational provision is being made.

Where it is decided to provide a pupil with SEN support, the parents **must** be formally notified, although parents should have already been involved in forming the assessment of needs as outlined above.

Where a pupil has an EHC plan, the local authority **must** review that plan as a minimum every twelve months. Schools **must** co-operate with the local authority in the review process and, as part of the review, the local authority can require schools to convene and hold annual review meetings on its behalf.

(Those teaching classes of children with sensory impairment **must** hold an appropriate qualification approved by the Secretary of State. Teachers working in an advisory role to support such pupils should also hold the appropriate qualification (DfE and DoH, 2015: 100 – 103).

### **Involving parents and pupils in planning and reviewing progress**

Schools **must** provide an annual report for parents on their child's progress. Most schools will want to go beyond this and provide regular reports for parents on how their child is progressing (DfE and DoH, 2015: 104).

### **Publishing information: SEN information report**

The governing bodies of maintained schools and maintained nursery schools and the proprietors of academy schools **must** publish information on their websites about the implementation of the governing body's or the proprietor's policy for pupils with SEN.

The information required is set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and **must** include information about:

- the kinds of SEN that are provided for
- policies for identifying children and young people with SEN and assessing their needs, including the name and contact details of the SENCo (mainstream schools)
- arrangements for consulting parents of children with SEN and involving them in their child's education
- arrangements for consulting young people with SEN and involving them in their education
- arrangements for assessing and reviewing children and young people's progress towards outcomes. This should include the opportunities available to work with parents and young people as part of this assessment and review
- arrangements for supporting children and young people in moving between phases of education and in preparing for adulthood. As young people prepare for adulthood outcomes should reflect their ambitions, which could include higher education, employment, independent living and participation in society
- the approach to teaching children and young people with SEN
- how adaptations are made to the curriculum and the learning environment of children and young people with SEN

- the expertise and training of staff to support children and young people with SEN, including how specialist expertise will be secured
- evaluating the effectiveness of the provision made for children and young people with SEN
- how children and young people with SEN are enabled to engage in activities available with children and young people in the school who do not have SEN
- support for improving emotional and social development. This should include extra pastoral support arrangements for listening to the views of children and young people with SEN and measures to prevent bullying
- how the school involves other bodies, including health and social care bodies, local authority support services and voluntary sector organisations, in meeting children and young people's SEN and supporting their families
- arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the provision made at the school
- It should also give details of the school's contribution to the Local Offer and **must** include information on where the local authority's Local Offer is published (DfE and DoH, 2015: 106- 107).

### **The role of the SENCo in schools**

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.

The SENCo **must** be a qualified teacher working at the school. A newly appointed SENCo **must** be a qualified teacher and, where they have not previously been the SENCo at that or any other relevant 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. 6.86 A National Award **must** be a postgraduate course accredited by a recognised higher education provider. The National College for Teaching and Leadership has worked with providers to develop a set of learning outcomes (see the References section under Chapter 6 for a link). When appointing staff or arranging for them to study for a National Award schools should satisfy themselves that the chosen course will meet these outcomes and equip the SENCo to fulfil the duties outlined in this Code. Any selected course should be at least equivalent to 60 credits at postgraduate study (DfE and DoH, 108).

### **Reviews where a child or young person attends a school or other institution**

The child's parents or young person, a representative of the school or other institution attended, a local authority SEN officer, a health service representative and a local

authority social care representative **must** be invited and given at least two weeks' notice of the date of the meeting.

The school (or, for children and young people attending another institution, the local authority) **must** seek advice and information about the child or young person prior to the meeting from all parties invited, and send any advice and information gathered to all those invited at least two weeks before the meeting

The school (or, for children and young people attending another institution, the local authority) **must** prepare and send a report of the meeting to everyone invited within two weeks of the meeting. The report **must** set out recommendations on any amendments required to the EHC plan, and should refer to any difference between the school or other institution's recommendations and those of others attending the meeting (DfE and DoH, 2015: 196-197).

### **Action to take in respect of Service children with SEN**

Maintained schools **must** transfer information, including SEN information, about pupils to other schools in the UK (maintained or independent) in accordance with the Education (Pupil Information) Regulations 2005 (DfE and DoH, 2015: 220).

### **Complaints procedures**

The proprietors of academies, free schools and independent schools **must**, under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2010, ensure that a complaints procedure is drawn up which is in writing and is made available to parents. The procedure **must** allow for a complaint to be considered informally in the first instance and then, if the parent remains dissatisfied, there should be a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing. If the parent is still dissatisfied the complaint can then be heard in front of a panel of at least three people one of whom **must** be independent of the management and running of the school (DfE and DoH, 2015: 265).



## 6.4 Example of a One Page Profile

My One-Page Profile

Your Name Here

Age and Occupation

What people appreciate about me

What is important to

How to support

### 9.1 Sample response: Phase four

What type of school do you currently work in?	Primary
Please give rough location	South
How long have you been a SENCo	Less than 4 years
Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification	Yes
Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice	Local Authority, NASEN, Other SENCos
What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?	Local Authority
In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?	Satisfied
Can you add further details?	Information came out during the school year we were trying to implement it, it should have been made available 2013/14 for Sept 2014 start date. It coincided with new curriculum and new assessment systems and these all impact on the effectiveness of both information and implementation of all the reforms - not very well planned!
Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?	Provision Map not IEPs for 'SA' children Passports for all SA+ and St chn Whole school parents meeting to inform of change of school systems
With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?	Due to new leadership in school PPMs are very closely linked to SEND provision and tracked accordingly - SENCo now central role with Head dealing with PPMs.

Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?	Yes - I have
In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?	Good and clear information and templates, flowcharts
In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?	Lack of information and support
Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?	Yes- it has reduced
Can you add further details?	SA children no longer included - as a school we have devised a separate register and closely monitor these children as we feel they will 'come off radar' without having an IEP. We also think parents involvement in personal targets has lessened with provision map set up and no IEP and are changing or target setting system as a school so SA chn have targets set from provision map not from curricular targets which all other non-sen chn will have
If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?	Yes
Can you add further details?	n/a
The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?	Undecided
Can you add further details?	Families at the centre of discussion also needs to be families at the centre of seeking outcomes, not just schools seeking outcomes. For many of our SA chn

	<p>there is already very little input from families and we are not convinced this will address high aspirations for outcomes.</p> <p>We were very happy with our existing SEN provision, we felt Health care was the external agency that needed to be reformed so that joined up thinking and talking from Health made provision more effective in schools.</p>
To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?	Teachers
Can you add further details?	Teachers are fully involved in implementing provision maps and passport, we have yet to measure the impact of the interventions and strategies both systems implement
Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?	Moderate impact
Can you add further details?	Great deal of interaction with teachers as is always a part of setting up new systems in school. Lots of support from new headteacher
I heard of this questionnaire from:	Email

## 9.2 Sample response: Phase five

Have you completed a questionnaire for this research project before?	No
What type of school do you currently work in?	Primary
Please give rough location	South-West
How long have you been a SENCo	More than 14 years
Have you completed the National Award for SENCo qualification	No
How well do you think the following groups understand the SEND reforms?	Pupils: strongly disagree Parents: disagree Teachers: undecided Headteacher: undecided Governing Body: disagree SENCo (me): agree
Have you received support from any of the following regarding the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice	Local Authority Other SENCos
What has been your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?	Local Authority
In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?	Very dissatisfied
Can you add further details?	Limited information & few examples of paperwork
Would you have liked more support?	I have had adequate resources to implement the reforms: disagree I would have liked more support from my school: agree I would have liked more support from my LA: strongly agree
Since September 2014, what are the top three things you have changed or introduced following the introduction of the SEND	IEPs changed to support plans Children on register who are making progress documents on website

Code of Practice?	
With the exception of the SEND policy, Information report and contribution to the Local Offer, have you made any significant changes in your setting as a result of the SEND reforms?	Support plans introduced & produced with parents rather than by teachers.
Has your setting taken part in any training on the SEND reforms?	Yes - I have
In your view, what is the primary enabler to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?	My commitment to the reforms
In your view, what is the primary barrier to the effective implementation of the SEND reforms?	Time & lack of examples so having to start everything from scratch
Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?	Yes- it has reduced
Can you add further details?	Children who are making progress removed
If you answered yes to the above, has this change been a direct result of the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?	Yes
Can you add further details?	Children who are making progress have been removed even if they have a disability/SEN eg ADHD
The SEND reforms are seeking 'cultural change' focused on an outcome based system with families at the centre. In your setting, would you agree that it is necessary to implement such change?	Undecided
Can you add further details?	n/a

To date, have you observed any impact of the SEND reforms on the following groups?	Teachers
Can you add further details?	Teachers feel that the support plans written with parents are more relevant & less time consuming
Have the SEND reforms impacted on your role as a SENCo?	Major impact
Can you add further details?	Time to write new policy etc. Getting my head around new systems & paperwork. Annual reviews more time consuming.
What do you view as the top three primary functions of your role?	To help ensure that teachers are able to help children to make academic, social & emotional progress. To provide knowledge on strategies that work with children with SEN To coordinate provision & paperwork related to SEN.
What do you think others view the top three functions of your role to be?	To wave a magic wand & come up with a solution to any problem involving children. To get funding available to support children more. To manage problems with TAs
I heard of this questionnaire from:	Email

**10. Publication: Curran, H., Mortimore, T. and Riddell, R. (2016) 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six months.' British Journal of Special Education. 44 (1), pp. 46 – 64.**

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six months

## **Introduction**

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms have been reported as the most significant reforms of their kind for over 30 years (DfE, 2014a). Through the Children and Families Act 2014 the Government are seeking to effect cultural and systemic change within the area of SEND and education; specifically the development of an aspirational and outcome based system for individuals with SEND, with the family at the centre (DfE and DoH, 2015). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. The SEND Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as the Code) provides statutory guidance relating to the Children and Families Act 2014 for organisations, including schools, which work with children and young people with SEND. After publication a small number of amendments followed, with an updated version published in January 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015).

The Code states that the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) has an 'important role to play' regarding the strategic direction of SEND in schools (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). Additionally the SENCo is typically responsible for the operational management of the SEND policy. Therefore the SENCo may be regarded as a key implementer of the SEND reforms.

However, despite such prominence in policy for 20 years since the introduction of the first Code of Practice (DfE, 1994), the role of the SENCo has been considered unclear in policy and literature (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013). Hallett and Hallett noted that the role is 'as varied as the schools and settings in which the post-holders are employed and the role is delivered' (2010:1). In



addition to the variation within context, a further complexity is that the role has been 'perceived as low status and operational rather than at a senior, strategic management level' (Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013:34). This therefore suggests that there may be a tension with the SENCo as a key policy implementer due to the barriers historically identified regarding the status and execution of the role.

This paper forms part of a PhD which is developing research within the area of SEND policy reform, through exploring and analysing the in-depth experience of the SENCo as a policy implementer during the first academic year post-reform. Through a semi-naturalist narrative inquiry approach, a group of SENCos have participated in individual half-termly semi-structured interviews for the first academic year of reform. The aim is for the SENCos to share their lived experience as policy implementers, providing an expert eye witness account as policy is narrated in their settings. However, policy enactment does not take place in isolation (Ball et al., 2012). Therefore interviews are situated within wider data sets, gathered from experienced SENCos, Local Authorities (LAs) and the Department for Education (DfE) through interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis.

This paper discusses the emerging themes from one of the wider data sets which sought to gather the views of SENCos six months after the introduction of SEND reforms and the Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). The data was gathered through an online questionnaire and the SENCos were asked to reflect on the support they had received to implement the Code. They were also asked about the changes they had made in their setting as a response and whether they had perceived any impact in their setting, as a direct result of the new Code. This paper seeks to explore the question 'What is the SENCos' perspective of the SEND reforms, six months after implementation?'

Whilst the study is limited to a relatively small, partially localised sample, early findings indicate that SENCos have sought support from a variety of sources, predominantly the Local Authority and other SENCos. During the early stages of the reforms, the data suggests that the more bureaucratic elements have been focused upon, for example the school SEND policy and the SEND information report. A number of SENCos also reported

that since the introduction of the SEND reforms the number of children recorded on their Special Educational Needs (SEN) registers has reduced. Responses suggested that understanding of the term SEN, the introduction of the new 'SEN Support' category and a perceived drive to reduce SEN numbers were all factors which contributed to this occurrence.

### **Policy enactment and the role of the SENCo**

The role of SENCo is statutory within schools; legislation states that the SENCo must be a qualified teacher and, since 2009, teachers working as a SENCo must achieve the National Award for SENCo within three years of taking up the post (The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations, 2014). Statutory guidance cites that the post holder should be responsible for the strategic and operational coordination of provision for children who have been identified as having SEN (Hallett and Hallett, 2010; DfE and DoH, 2015). The role has been described in government guidance as 'pivotal' (DfES, 2004: 116). A view echoed by Hallett and Hallett stating that 'it is clear that best practice has the role of the SENCo at the heart of the education processes occurring within a setting' (2010: 1).

However, research has suggested that the role of SENCo remains ambiguous, and in some cases low status and operational (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013). The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report (2006) acknowledged that the role of the SENCo did not have the status which was required to have strategic influence. Tissot (2013) suggested that this may be attributed in part to the discrepancy between the legal requirement for the position and the lack of guidance to all stakeholders, including the SENCo, regarding the execution of the role. Additionally the varying settings within which the role is executed may also explain this variation (Robertson argued that despite such uncertainty, the SENCos' ability to establish and execute the role despite these issues illustrates their 'resilience and capacity' (2012: 82). Hallett and Hallett, 2010).

In response to the House of Commons Education and Skills report (2006), a number of recommendations were made through the Select Committee, including the requirement

for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Masters Level training; these recommendations were later reflected in legislation (The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations, 2014; DfE and DoH, 2015). It could be argued that such policies have begun to create impact. Recent research by Qureshi (2014) suggested that the strategic nature of the role is emerging within schools, despite membership to the Senior Leadership Team remaining a non-statutory requirement (DfE and DoH, 2015). The introduction of the SEND reforms may provide an opportunity to raise the status and profile of the SENCo; the leadership aspect of the role is likely to increase, therefore promoting the strategic nature of the role (Pearson et al., 2015). Robertson (2012) argued that this issue needs directly addressing, alongside addressing the issue of adequate time to carry out the functions of the role. Yet despite such tensions, the role remains central to policy enactment within schools (Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013).

The idea of policy enactment, with the SENCo as a policy 'actor' in this instance, stems from the work of Ball et al. (2012) who suggested that policy implementation is not a transaction from the top down, but it is an act carried out by an actor (of which there may be more than one). Ball et al. suggested that the work of policy enactment is a process of interpretation, involving key figures, who will attribute a sense of priority and interpretation to the practical translation of policy. The management level at which the policy is being enacted and the context for the enactment are also relevant features. This suggests that policy translation is not as simple as implementation, but it is more complicated due to a number of internal and external influencing factors and therefore becomes an enactment.

Norwich suggested that the SEND system is 'interdependent' on the general educational system which encompasses 'the National Curriculum and assessment, school inspection, the governance of schools and equality legislation' (2014: 404). This suggests that there are a number of external influencing factors during SEND policy enactment. Therefore the SENCo may need to negotiate not only competing educational policies, but also their alignment to the policies, many of which they may find 'controversial and challenging' (Brundrett, 2011: 339).

These issues present a question relating to the enactment of the SEND policy reforms which have been described by the DfE as the most significant for thirty years (DfE, 2014a). If the role of the SENCo remains ambiguous, predominately operational and lacks status (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013), what is the experience of the SENCo when trying to implement policy driven change in their setting?

### **The research design**

The central theme of the research intends to examine and explore the experiences of the SENCo as a policy actor, post policy reform and during policy implementation. As such it was imperative to consider the various methodological approaches which would reflect the nature and purpose of the research.

The research design consisted of five phases.

- Phase One: a questionnaire which sought initial views regarding the SENCos' understanding of the reforms and their views of preparedness. The aim of the questionnaire was to set the research within context.
- Phase two: semi-structured interviews with a group of nine SENCos, which explored the questionnaire responses further.
- Phase three: termly semi-structured interviews with the SENCos from Phase two. Interviews focused on the SENCos narration of the SEND reforms for the first academic year of implementation.
- Phase four: a second questionnaire, focused on the SENCos' perceptions of the first six months of the reforms. Crucially this was to a broader group of SENCos, both in terms of experience and location than Phases 1, 2 and 3.
- Phase five: a final questionnaire to a broad group of SENCos reflecting on the first year of reform.

This paper will report on Phase four.

### **Phase Four**

Phase four intended to explore the SENCos' views of the first six months of the SEND reforms. Phase three had provided a high level of detailed data, however due to the small sample size there were issues relating to the generalisability, validity and localised nature of the data. Therefore Phase four provided an opportunity to explore and consider the experiences and contexts from a wider group of SENCos, thus enabling the cross referencing of emerging themes from Phase three and consideration as to whether these were individual narratives or reflective of a wider view.

The questionnaire focused on the nature of the support the SENCos had received, changes they had made within their settings and enablers/ barriers to the process of policy implementation. The questionnaire was a mix of open ended and closed questions, with space for the respondents to add additional detail. The period under review was from September 2014 to March 2015.

Due to the breadth of the questionnaire it is not possible to report the findings from this phase in full. Therefore this paper focuses on the following aspects from the questionnaire:

1. Who has provided support to SENCos for the implementation of the SEND reforms and what is the SENCos' view of this?
2. What changes were made in the SENCos' settings following the introduction of the SEND reforms?
3. Were any changes made to the schools' SEN register following the introduction of the SEND reforms? If so, why?
4. Had the SENCos observed any impact of the SEND reforms in their setting to date?

## **Participants**

Due to the limitations of earlier phases, particularly in terms of SENCo experience and location, Phase four was tailored to address this. Therefore a variety of channels were selected to try and promote as wide a reach as possible in terms of experience and location of SENCos. The main channels used were: Twitter, the SENCo-forum, Times

Educational Supplement (TES) forums and Local Authority contacts. The participants were able to opt in to the online questionnaire by clicking a link. Due to accessibility, students who had completed the National Award for SENCo in previous years were also contacted. The questionnaire was completed by 74 SENCos, with two thirds from primary settings.

Due to the small size and reach of the sample it is imperative to consider the limitations of the results in terms of validity. In terms of geographical representation, the questionnaire did have a wider reach than earlier phases, with respondents citing locations throughout the UK. There was still a large response from the South West, with 51% (n=38) of respondents citing this as their location. This is unsurprising given the channels which were selected; 53% (n=39) of the respondents were contacted directly via email or via a Local Authority contact. It is also noteworthy that one of the LAs in the South West acted as a pathfinder for the SEND reforms and this, alongside the large proportion of South West responses, may have impacted on the results. The second largest geographical group was from London and the South East ( 16% n=12).

With regards to experience, 56% (n=42) of SENCos stated that they been in the role for more than four years, indicating that just over half had experience of the previous statutory guidance and therefore may be able to make draw comparisons with the new guidance. 74% had completed the National Award for SENCo (n= 53) with a further 5 currently near completion.

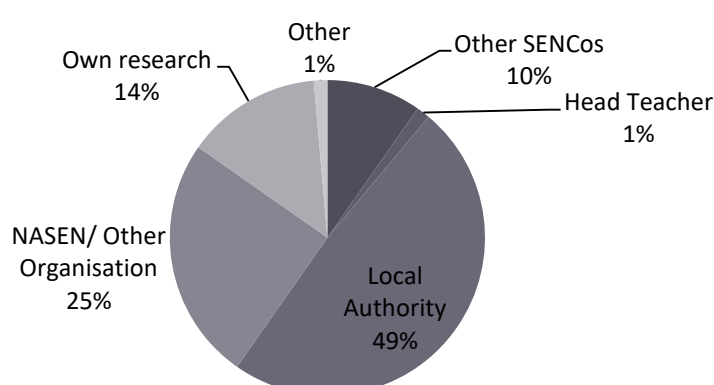
## **Findings: Phase four**

### **Support for implementing the SEND reforms**

76% of SENCos (n=55) reported that they had received support from their LA relating to the implementation of the SEND reforms. 72% of SENCos (n=52) stated that they had received support from other SENCos. Other avenues of support reported included accessing support from NASEN and SENCos carrying out their own research. 49% (n= 35) stated their main source of information was their LA (See Figure 1.) This suggests that LAs have played a key role supporting SENCos, alongside other organisations such as NASEN.

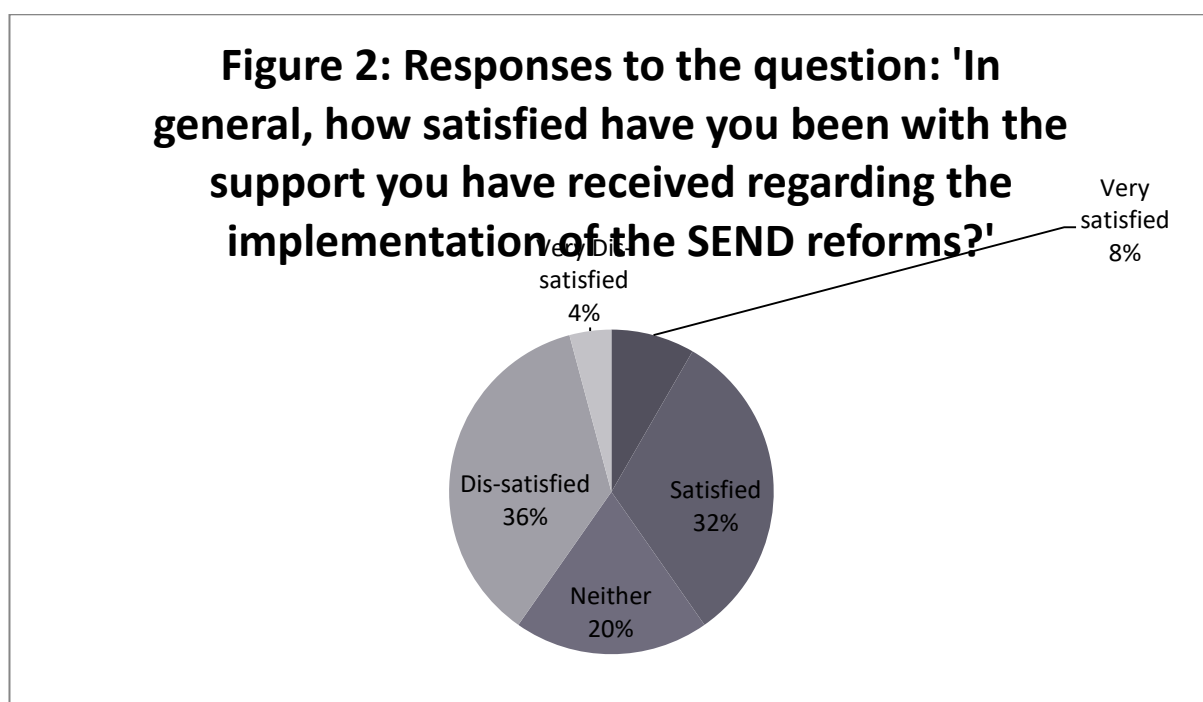
With the reported reduction of LA services, in addition to the introduction of the Education Excellence Everywhere White Paper 2016 and the focus on all maintained schools to convert to academies, typically as part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), it does pose the question: 'What level and type of support will SENCoS be able to access in the future and how dependent will this be on budgets and school priorities?'

**Figure 1: Responses to the question: 'What was your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?'**



Pearson et al. (2015) have suggested that schools will need to become more self-reliant with an increased focus on networks between schools. With potential future educational policy directing all schools to become part of a MAT, could this mean that the support for SENCoS may be provided from within a MAT? Prompting the question, what opportunities will there be for SENCoS for wider sharing and dissemination of good practice? The responses from the questionnaire suggested that SENCoS were already relying on each other for support; illustrating the general increase of inter-school support. It could be that the National Award for SENCo has the potential to develop such opportunities at a local level, which national systems may not be able fulfil. In addition to the type of support that the SENCoS have received, SENCoS were also asked to consider how satisfied they were with the support (See Figure 2). Responses here indicated a balance between respondents feelings of satisfaction (40% n=29) and dissatisfaction (40% n=29), potentially

reflecting localised experiences. Whilst the additional information provided by the SENCos reflected this mixed picture, the responses provided some further insights:



'Initially there was so much confusion about the practicalities of the reform'

'LAs have been less than clear about the requirements'

'LAs have not been very helpful and seem to be using the new system to cut costs and take statements away from vulnerable children'

Good practice was also reported, although such reports were rarer: 'I have attended some very well planned and resourced sessions by our LA Inclusion Service'. However the question posed requires further exploration. As Rumsfeld is quoted, there are the 'unknown unknowns' (1932 cited in Danchev, 2014: 1186). In this context this suggests that some SENCos do not know what they do not know and therefore whilst 40% may be satisfied, this does not necessarily mean that the support was effective and/ or provided them with the support they needed. This is could be problematic due to the common theme throughout the data regarding the importance of finding out information for



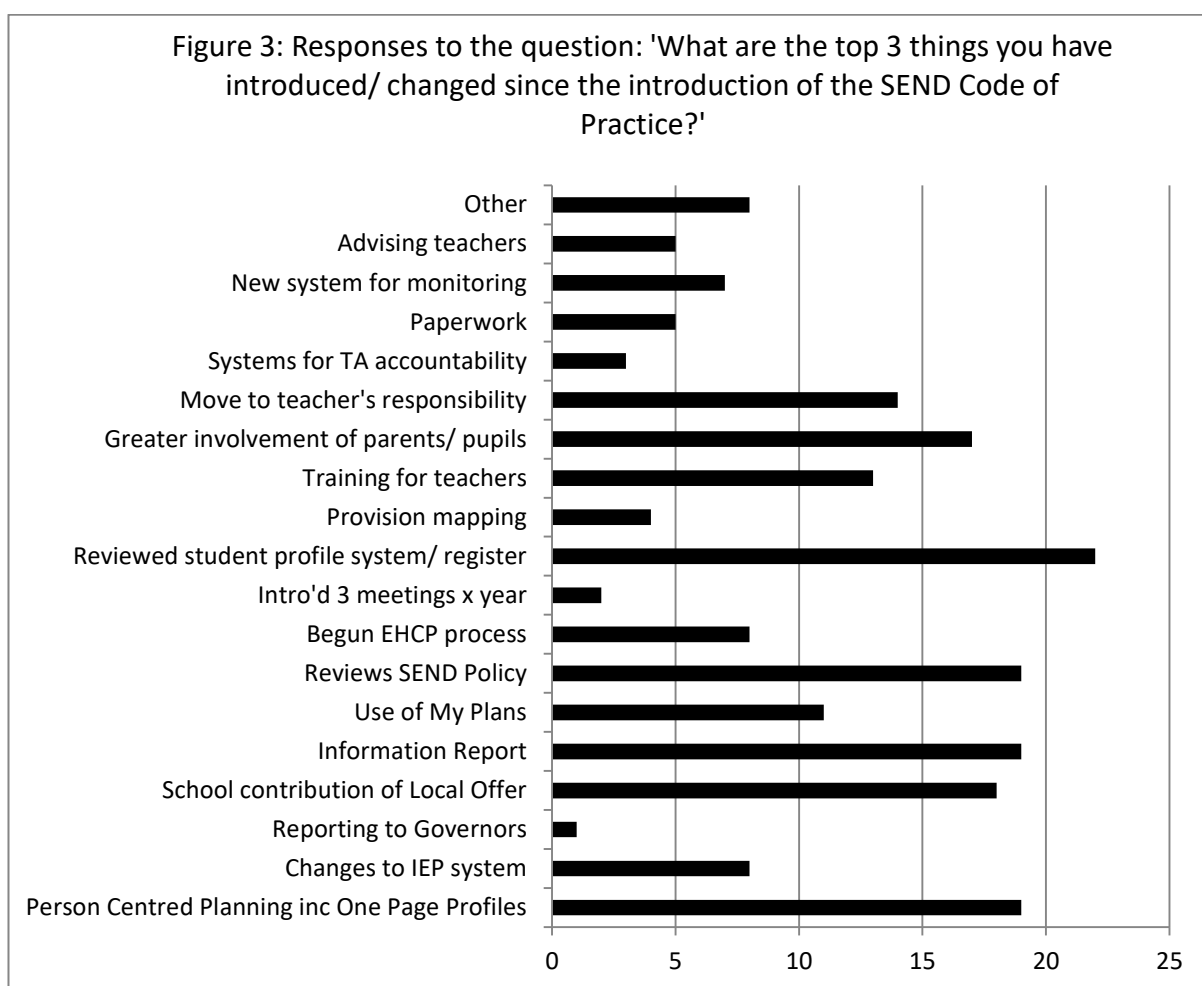
themselves, or utilising self-started networks of local SENCOs or larger organisations such as NASEN.

‘The Local Support Group was set up as a direct result of us not feeling supported by the LA through the SEND reforms’

A number of respondents acknowledged that some LAs had done ‘the best they could’ given the time frame, although a more gradual introduction would have been preferred. Even the positive responses regarding the support from the LA noted that there was confusion and many elements felt rushed. Certainly the lack of prescription in terms of what to do was a source of frustration with one SENCO stating, ‘considering that SENCOs across the country all need to do the same thing it still feels like I am reinventing the wheel alone.’ SENCOs also reported that competing policy issues within schools made the reforms less of a priority. The reforms were introduced on the same day as the new National Curriculum, exemplifying the interdependence of the SEND system within the general system (Norwich, 2014)

### **Policy in practice: changes made**

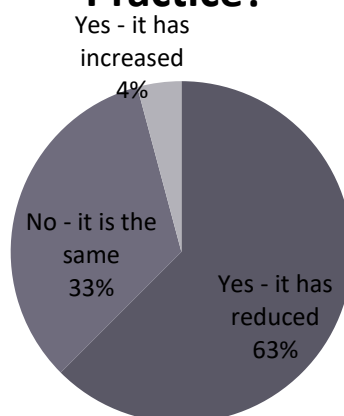
The questionnaire asked the SENCOs the ‘top three things’ that they had changed or introduced since September 2014 (See Figure 3). Reviewing the SEND register was a priority for 22 of the respondents (30%). Other activities included reviewing the SEND policy, creating the SEND Information Report and focusing on Person Centred Planning/ One Page Profiles. It is perhaps unsurprising that the more bureaucratic elements have been focused upon. The requirements to have an up-to-date SEND policy, an SEND information report and to contribute to the LA Local Offer are all statutory, and could be considered the more perceivable elements of the SEND reforms. For future research it would be interesting to look at the execution of the activities and the SENCOs’ perception of how these activities have impacted on both their role and the school.



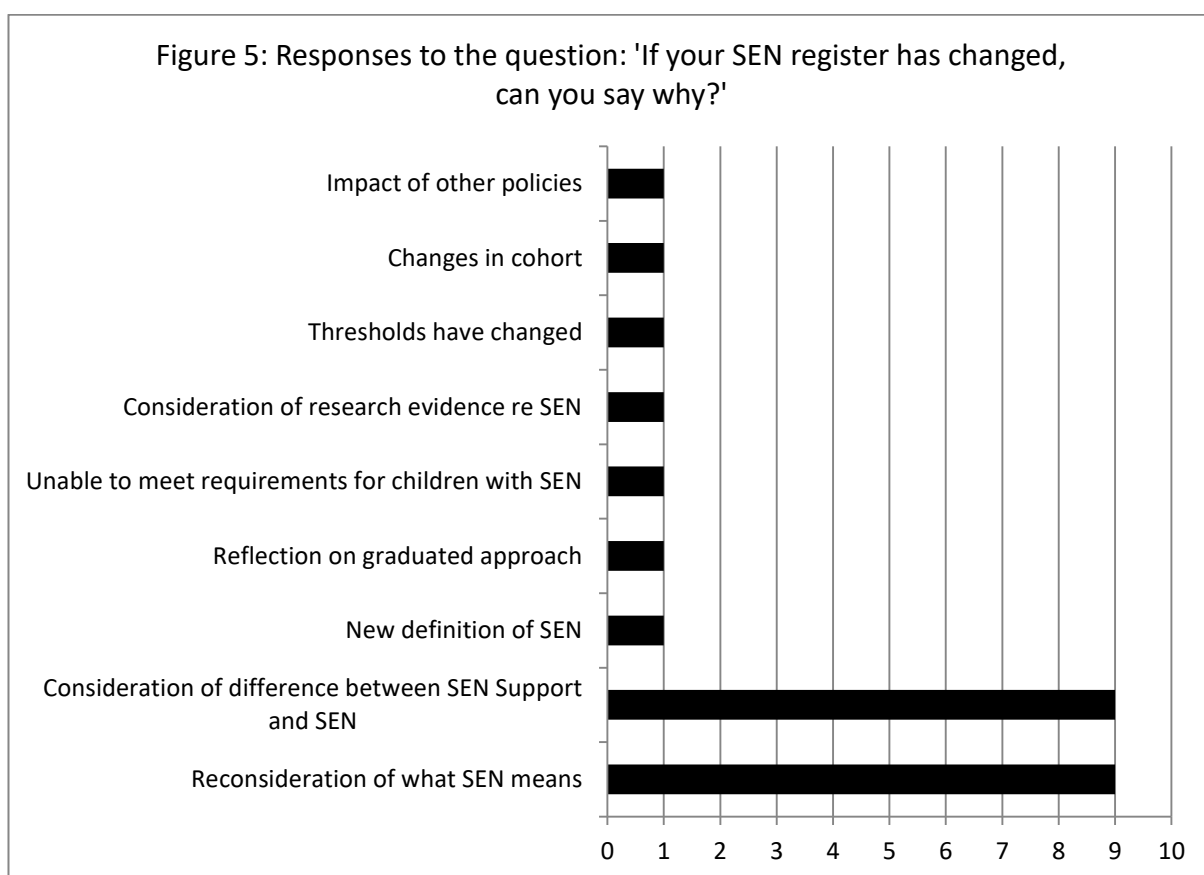
### Changes to the SEN register

During the in-depth interviews with the SENCOs at Phase three, a recurring theme was the reduction of children recorded on the SEN register. Therefore this was included as a focus within the questionnaire to query the validity of this phenomenon. In response to the question, 'Has your SEN register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND reforms?' 63% of SENCOs (n=45) reported that they had reduced their SEN register since September 2014 with 82% (n=60) stating that this was a direct result of the Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Responses to the question: 'Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?'**



When asked specifically why the SEN register had changed, the responses were varied (See Figure 5). The most commonly cited reasons for changing the SEN register related to the definition of 'SEN' and the new 'SEN Support' category. A number of SENCOs reported that the SEND reforms provided an opportunity to reconsider whether the children on their register actually met the definition of SEN or whether there may be a different reason for the concern, for example a lack of effective teaching. This reflected the Ofsted report (2010) which suggested that children were being over-identified with SEN.



The report suggested a number of reasons for this trend, including concerns that the definition of SEN was being inconsistently applied and children who were summer born were over-represented. Stobbs (2014) suggested that part of the issue was a lack of understanding of what constituted a schools' core offer and therefore skewing a schools' definition of SEN, in part reflecting the importance of context as remarked upon by Hallett and Hallett (2010). Equally this issue could impact on the role of the SENCo. How does a SENCo respond to, and manage, expectations regarding the definition of SEN, particularly for parents? However, comments by the SENCos did not suggest that changes to the register were solely a result of revisiting the definition of SEN. Some SENCos reported that they considered there to be a clear distinction between a child receiving SEN Support and a child with SEN. A number of SENCos reported that they were only recording children who were in receipt of 'SEN Support'. In some instances SENCos reported that only children who had access to external agencies were recorded as in receipt of SEN Support. As a consequence numbers on school registers had reduced. Responses included:

‘Streamlined the SEND register in line with the new SEN criteria’

‘Changed school SEND register in line with new single SEN support category’

‘Only including children who have involvement from outside agencies’

This presents an issue relating to what comes first, the external agency involvement or the identification of an SEN? The challenge here is that the terms ‘support’, ‘provision’ and ‘intervention’ are open to interpretation. The Code states a child has SEN if they require ‘provision [that is] different from or additional to that normally available to pupils of the same age’ (DfE and DoH, 2015:94). The Assess, Plan, Do, Review process set out with the Code discusses SEN Support in terms of ‘removing barriers’ and providing ‘effective provision’ (DfE and DoH, 2015: 100). When the process of identification is considered, it is an involved process and is not determined by participation in an intervention. Yet, some responses indicate that SEN support may have been interpreted as such:

‘Those students who do not have more support are monitored’

‘The definition of SEN Support – no support means not identified as such’

In some instances SENCos suggested that children who were previously identified at School Action no longer met the ‘criteria’ for SEN Support:

‘School Action children no longer listed’

‘The large chunk at School Action have disappeared...’

However, changes to the register also related to concerns regarding the management of the SEN register. One SENCo reported that it would be impossible to manage an SEN register with all the identified literacy needs. Therefore a ‘literacy register’ had been created. Further respondents concurred, stating that they had developed alternative systems, such as a ‘concern’ or ‘monitoring’ list to try and address issues related to the manageability of the SEN register. This implies that whilst pupils are still being monitored,

the processes may not necessarily reflect the requirements for monitoring as stated in the Code (DfE & DoH, 2015).

The responses above raise some questions regarding the nature of identifying and recording SEN. The term 'SEN register' could be considered misleading. Whilst it is not a requirement to have an 'SEN register', the Code does stipulate a number of recording requirements (DfE and DoH, 2015). This tends to be typically referred to as the SEN register. This therefore suggests that there may be some confusion regarding this area.

Certainly for some SENCos the communicated aim was that SEN registers should be reducing:

'I anticipate it [the SEN register] will reduce'

'I was involved with the changes from 2 years earlier and we phased in the reduction in the SEND register over 18 months'

'I was involved with the consultation through the DfE regarding SEN changes back in 2012. I had therefore a head start and reduced my register a long time ago'

The respondents did not elaborate on why they felt it was necessary to reduce the number of children as requiring SEN support. This can possibly be tracked back to the start of the reforms with the introduction of the Green Paper, 'Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability' (DfE, 2011) which, in part, responded to the idea that children were being over identified as having an SEN (Ofsted, 2010). This supports the earlier comments made by other respondents regarding re-evaluating children and their needs.

However, the responses given raise questions regarding how the definition of SEN is understood, how SEN support is understood as a category, and how this process has been managed with the introduction of the new Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Whilst the data from this phase is limited, it does suggest that there is ambiguity regarding all of these areas. At a policy level there has been a lack of specific guidance regarding the

assessment and identification of SEN (Norwich, 2014). It could be argued that this has happened at a time when SENCos would have benefitted from such guidance. The argument that the Government is reluctant to regulate practice (Norwich, 2014) may lead to a greater disparity in practice with interpretation based on experience, knowledge, school priorities and budget amongst other external and internal influencing factors. It is also noteworthy that the reforms have been set within not only a period of wider educational reform, but also a period of economic austerity. Edward Timpson stated the former system for supporting SEN cost £5 billion and did not deliver good outcomes, financially or otherwise (Timpson, 2013). **Perceived impact: 6 months in**

67% of SENCos (n=42) stated that they had observed the greatest impact of the SEND reforms on teachers and parents. SENCos stated that parents were better informed and engaged. SENCos noted that parents welcomed the formality of process, for example the requirement of three meetings per year. Expectations for parents were clear.

‘[Parents are] more engaged and [they are] appreciating the increased involvement’

‘Families feel much more part of the process now’

However, this is not a pattern which is echoed nationally. The National Deaf Children’s Society reported that only 6% of parents reported improvements to the support their child/ren received over the last year (NDCS, 2015). This is echoed by the National Autistic Society, whose recent research suggested that only 23% of those who had been through the new statutory assessment process were satisfied with it (NAS, 2015). Other SENCos reported that they did not think the reforms gave enough clarity to parents, stating that ‘some are demanding 1:1 support’, which suggests that there may be some confusion relating to what is known good practice and what parents expect. Some concerns related to parents and the application of personal budgets, although this has yet to be reported upon fully.

The term ‘accountability’ was used frequently by SENCos; stating that teachers were now ‘more understanding of their accountability’ and were ‘taking on more responsibility for

the SEN children... not passing the responsibility onto me which had previously happened on occasions'. As a consequence SENCos reported that the teachers were taking ownership for the learning of all pupils and consequently developing better relationships with both parents and pupils. Some SENCos reported that as a consequence teachers were becoming more proactive, with the child and the parents.

### **Concluding comments**

The SEND reforms 2014 have been publicised as the most significant SEND reforms for 30 years (DfE, 2014a). It could be argued that central to the execution of the reforms is the statutory role of the SENCo; a role which previously has been suggested to be low status and ambiguous (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012). Whilst the reforms themselves have the potential to influence the strategic role and status of the SENCo (Pearson et al., 2015), the question remains as to how effective can the role be at a time of such change particularly when the status and understanding of the role is so mixed?

This paper sought to explore the question, 'What is the SENCos' perspective of the SEND reforms, six months after introduction?' The paper focused on three key elements: the support SENCos had received to implement the reforms, key changes they had made in their settings within the first six months and whether SEN registers had changed as a result of the SEND reforms.

Responses from SENCos indicated that the early changes related more to the bureaucratic, statutory elements of the reforms, for example writing of the school SEND policy and SEND information report; activities which were unsurprising given their statutory nature. SENCos reported that they had accessed support for implementation, with the three quarters of SENCos accessing support from their LA. It does not necessarily correlate that the support was effective, accurate or useful as this was not reported upon. SENCos, however, did remark that information was often mixed with some SENCos suggesting that they felt the information provided lacked clarity.



Significantly, 63% of SENCOs reported that they had reduced their SEN registers since September 2014, with 82% stating that this was a direct result of the introduction of the SEND reforms. SENCOs cited mixed reasons for this; including revising their understanding of the term SEN and their understanding of the SEN Support category. However, themes related to the definition of SEN, the newly introduced SEN category and the need for the SEN register to reduce were persistent in this small sample. Whilst Ofsted (2010) reported a concern of the over identification of SEN, the opposite may also be true. Certainly figures for SEN have been steadily declining since the publication of the Ofsted report. In 2010 a reported 18.3% of children had SEN; however there was a marked drop from 2014 to 2015 from 17.9% to 15.4% (DfE, 2015). A DfE response to the reduction in numbers suggested that this was the result of a clearer understanding of the legal definition of SEN and a clear distinction of the SEN Support category (Tirraoro, 2015). However, responses from this small sample suggested the opposite, indicating that SENCOs remain confused in relation to the consistent application of the term SEN and the practical application of the new SEN category.

Wider issues relating to the perceived government driver for a reduction in numbers of children recorded as having SEN and the manageability of the role may also be a factor. If present, a drive to under-identify children due to a host of internal and external influencing factors may create significant problems for children, parents and teachers in terms of accessing appropriate support and certainly would be the antithesis of the SEND reform aims which are to create an aspirational and outcome focused system (DfE and DoH, 2015). In addition to the potential issue of under identification, there is also a question regarding how the process of 'removing' children has been managed and communicated to parents during this period.

It is noteworthy that, despite the short period explored, SENCOs have reported on the positive impacts that they have observed with parents at a school level, citing better communication and co-production. It should be noted, however, that this is not a national trend. Greater exploration as to the reasons behind this is required. It is also important to

consider whether the positive impact reported has been achieved because of the SEND reforms, or in spite of them.

This paper represents a small sample of SENCo responses, and therefore has limitations in its validity. However, a number of themes raised through this paper have been echoed by the Driver Youth Trust report which considered the early impact of the SEND reforms (LKMco, 2015). Themes included the inconsistency with identification, the importance of developing wider networks and the importance of SEN as a whole school priority. Certainly much remains to be seen regarding the impact of the SEND reforms, much of which will not be evident until the longer term, with the timeframe for transferring statements to Education Health Care Plans stated as April 2018 (DfE, 2014b). However, it is already clear that there is an emerging, mixed picture relating to the SENCo experience and the potential, related impact on the children, families, the school and the SENCo (LKMco, 2015; NAS, 2015; NDCS, 2015).

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