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Information Sheet: 7

The Role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2001 describes the importance of the role of the SENCO in all school settings, from pre-school to secondary.

The role of the SENCO in early education settings:

All early education providers, except specialist SEN provision, will need to have an identified member of staff to act as SENCO. This responsibility extends to accredited child-minders who belong to approved networks where the role can be shared between individual childminders and the network co-ordinator. The Early Years SENCO should have responsibility for:

- ensuring liaison with parents and other professionals in respect of children with SEN
- advising and supporting other practitioners in the setting
- ensuring that appropriate Individual Education Plans are in place
- ensuring that relevant background information about individual children with SEN is collected, recorded and updated

The role of the SENCO in mainstream primary schools:

The Code says that in mainstream primary schools the SENCO's responsibilities 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 Surrey's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies

The role of the SENCO in mainstream secondary schools:

The Code says that in mainstream secondary schools the key responsibilities of the SENCO may include:

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

The Code does not go so far as to say how much time needs to be given over to the SENCO's duties. However, it does recognise that all of the above will be time-consuming. The costs of the SENCO should come from the school's core budgets rather than from additional money allocated to meet the needs of individual pupils.

At primary level, many SENCOs will have other responsibilities in the school (perhaps a class teacher) or may only work part-time. The Code suggests that in small schools the headteacher or deputy headteacher should only take on the role of SENCO after carefully considering the implications.

In secondary schools the Code suggests that the SENCO role will be the specific responsibility of one member of staff who probably should not have any other school-wide duties.