MILLIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND RISK MISSING OUT ON VITAL SUPPORT IF SENCO RESOURCE ISN’T PROTECTED BY LAW
Government urged to act now to tackle lack of progress in the face of growing SEND needs in UK schools

New research published today (24.06.21) has found that millions of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) will be left vulnerable for decades to come if the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) workforce isn’t given more time, resources and support to meet the needs of all children with SEND.

The new report, The National SENCO Workforce Survey: time to review 2018-2020, from nasen (National Association for Special Educational Needs) and Bath Spa University, estimates that 55% of primary SENCOs and 70% of secondary SENCOs are not allocated enough time to complete their role effectively - with 75% and 79% of primary and secondary SENCO’s highlighting that they were routinely pulled away from their role to perform other duties.

The survey also highlights that between 2018 and 2020, SENCOs time allocation has seen only slight increases at just 18 minutes per week and 54 minutes per week for primary and secondary phase respectively. Based on this trajectory, it would take almost 150 years (primary) and more than 40 years (secondary) for all SENCOs to become full time - a recommendation outlined in previous SENCO Workforce reports to fully support the needs of children and young people with SEND.

This was echoed in a 2019 House of Commons Education Committee report on SEND, which advised that the Department for Education (DfE) should appoint an independent reviewer to examine the cost implications of requiring all schools to have a full-time dedicated SENCO.

Professor Adam Boddison, Lead Author and CEO at nasen - a leading charity that exists to support and champion those working with, and for, children and young people with SEND and learning differences, said: “Meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND must be a national priority. We cannot risk them falling through the cracks, particularly following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In England alone, we are talking about over 1.3 million children or 15.5% of all pupils.

“SENCOs are highly specialised in their ability to support children and young people with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) and those requiring SEN support. Yet our report with Bath Spa University clearly shows three key areas where SENCOs’ progress has been hampered.

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“This includes providing SENCOs with more time, resources and support; supporting senior school leaders and the wider workforce to better understand the vital role of the SENCO and ensuring that SENCOs routinely have the opportunity to influence strategic decision making in schools and settings. It is critical that changes in policy and statutory guidance are urgently accelerated. The forthcoming SEND Review presents an important chance to make much needed progress and we are calling on the DfE and wider policy makers to make this opportunity count for our learners with SEND.”

The report, which examined responses to two SENCO surveys in 2018 and 2020 to create a clear picture of the national SENCO workforce, revealed other concerning statistics, including:

- **Two thirds** of SENCOs (66%) report not being part of their schools Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- A SENCO in a primary school is **twice as likely** to be part of SLT than a SENCO in a secondary school, but they are **less likely** to receive any additional pay for undertaking the role
- **Only two in five** primary SENCOs and one in five secondary SENCOs felt their role was manageable for one person
- The proportion of SENCOs who feel their **role is understood by the wider education workforce** stands at 30% for primary SENCOs in 2020 and only 17% for secondary SENCOs
- Over a quarter of SENCOs in primary and secondary phases **cite workload as a reason for leaving the role**, however those citing workload as the main reason for leaving reduced significantly between 2018 and 2020 at both primary (52% to 27%) and secondary (54% to 35%)
- **Significant churn within the SENCO workforce** should be anticipated with an estimated 12% of SENCOs at primary and 14% of SENCOs at secondary leaving the role every year.

Hannah Moloney, Co-author, SENCO and SEND researcher, said: “Capturing data over the last three years on the SENCO role has led to a very clear picture about the challenges they face. These challenges are profound, often preventing the Code of Practice from being effectively put into practice in schools nationwide. As a research team, we are desperate to see SENCO time protected in law so that children and young people with SEND can have the support they need and deserve.

“If we continue to ignore the issue of time needed to execute the SENCO role, we will see high levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions and children and young people leaving education with poor mental health and with reduced chances of securing meaningful employment. Given the fact that children and young people with SEND represent over 15% of children in schools, it is an ongoing tragedy that we are not doing more. The number of children and young people with SEND is increasing annually - and they are just the ones who are formally recognised with SEND needs, many are not. Protecting SENCO time is a very cost-effective and powerful way to immediately impact a positive change **overnight in every single school** and setting nationwide.”
Dr Helen Curran, Co-author and Senior Lecturer in Special Educational Needs at Bath Spa University, added: “Over the last three years, the SENCO Workforce surveys have consistently demonstrated the challenges that schools and, in particular SENCOs, are facing. Despite their hard work and commitment to supporting children with SEND, particularly during such challenging times, it is clear that unless action is taken to support the effective facilitation of the SENCO role at a national level, there will be a very real and lasting impact on children with SEND.”

The report reiterates critical recommendations for the Department for Education, initially made in 2018, that include: creating legal protections on SENCOs’ time; ascertaining and standardising minimum time requirements for the role; and developing guidance for governing bodies and school leaders to facilitate the vital impact of SENCOs on the outcomes of children and young people.


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Notes to editors

Further report findings - primary / secondary phases
SENCOs in the secondary phase have significantly enhanced support in comparison to their primary counterparts across three distinct areas:

1. Two fifths of secondary SENCOs in 2020 have access to a Deputy SENCO or Assistant SENCO compared to just 9% in primary
2. Almost half all SENCOs (49%) in the secondary phase have access to dedicated administrative support compared to 15% for SENCOs in the primary phase
3. The proportion of SENCOs with regular deployable support in the form of teaching assistants and/or specialist teachers has increased significantly by 13% between 2018 to 2020 but, in contrast to SENCOs in the primary phase (69%), almost all SENCOs in the secondary phase (99%) have access to such support.

Background to the SENCO role
Amongst the list of responsibilities, SENCOs are expected to oversee the day to day operation of the school SEN policy, coordinate provision for SEN, advise teachers, liaise with parents / carers, providers and multi-agencies as well as ensuring all records are kept up to date.

In addition, the SENCO should work with senior leaders and the governing body in determining the strategic development of SEND provision in the school. If a SENCO is unable to move beyond ‘fire-fighting’, due to a lack of time and support, not only will there be an impact on individual children,
particularly those at SEN Support, but there will be a longer term impact on the development and progress of SEN provision within the school.

Further background on the role of the SENCO can be found here.


The National SENCO Workforce Survey: time to review 2018 – 2020, published by nasen and Bath Spa University, is authored by Professor Adam Boddison (nasen), Dr Helen Curran (Bath Spa University) and Hannah Moloney (SENCO). The report focuses on the current issues and priorities that primary and secondary-based SENCOs, and their equivalents (e.g. Inclusion Coordinators), have identified in relation to the development of special educational needs in their settings. The report examined responses to two SENCO Workforce surveys in 2018 and 2020, comparing findings on workloads and the experience of the SENCO role in general, to create a clear picture of the national SENCO workforce. 933 individuals contributed to the study in autumn 2020. Their responses were compared with those of more than 1,900 SENCOs surveyed in 2018, in order to track the latest rates of progress.


About nasen

- nasen is the National Association for Special Educational Needs – a charitable organisation that exists to support and champion those working with, and for, children and young people with SEND and learning differences
- For 30 years nasen has worked in partnership with over 30,000 members across 7,500 schools and settings and are committed to ensuring that their expertise in SEND is available to every school and setting in the UK through free nasen membership for all individuals
- nasen’s work spans the delivery of international programmes of support through to direct, ‘on the ground’ engagement with schools and settings in the UK through the DfE-funded, Whole School SEND consortium (hosted by nasen) and wider project and programmes
- For further information, visit www.nasen.org.uk
- To join nasen’s free membership community, visit: www.nasen.org.uk/membership
- Follow nasen on Twitter @nasen_org, Facebook @nasen.org or LinkedIn @the-national-association-for-special-educational-needs-nasen

About Bath Spa University

- Bath Spa University is where creativity and enterprise meet
- Offering a wide range of modern courses across the arts, science, education, social science and business to 7,000 students, the University employs outstanding academic and technical staff to deliver innovative learning opportunities
Based in stunning countryside just a few minutes from a World Heritage City, Bath Spa University students graduate as engaged global citizens who are ready for the world of work. 96.1 per cent of graduates find themselves in work or further study within six months.

The Network of Learning is based in the Institute for Education at Bath Spa University where they’ve been running training courses for teachers for more than 7 years. The network promotes excellence in teaching and learning from school, through university and into the workplace.

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