



Department  
for Education

# Early Years Level 3 SENCO Qualification Specification

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## Summary

This publication provides a recommended specification for accredited Level 3 qualifications for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) working in early years private, voluntary and independent settings.

The specification was first published 26 March 2018.

## Purpose of the qualification specification

The qualifications developed from this specification are intended to support early years practitioners to gain accreditation for the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to perform the Early Years SENCO role effectively. The qualifications are not mandatory.

This recommended specification has been designed by early years experts and stakeholders supported by the Department for Education (DfE). This group comprised:

- DfE
- Eastern Partnership UK (SEND)
- Nasen
- The Communication Trust
- Action for Children
- Julie Revels - Specialist SEND Consultant
- Christopher Robertson - Chair, National SENCO Forum Advisory Group.

It will be used by awarding organisations to develop qualifications.

## Introduction

All children are entitled to an education that enables them to:

- achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, and
- become confident young children with a growing ability to communicate their own views and ready to make the transition into compulsory education

All early years providers are required to have arrangements in place to identify and support children with SEN (Special Educational Needs) or disabilities and to promote equality of opportunity for children in their care. These requirements are set out in the [EYFS framework](#).

A child who is under compulsory school age has a special educational need if they are likely to have a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational provision when they reach compulsory school age or they would do, if special educational provision were not made for them.<sup>1</sup>

All early years providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors that are funded by the local authority must have regard to the [Special educational needs and disability code of practice](#) which provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014<sup>2</sup> and associated regulations and applies to England. It relates to children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabled children and young people.

Maintained nursery schools must identify a member of staff ([with QTS](#)) to act as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). From September 2009 every new SENCO in a maintained school is required to gain the [Master's-level National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator](#) within 3 years of taking up the post.

Other providers (in the private, voluntary and independent sector) are expected to identify a SENCO (QTS is not required however). (DfE (2014) [Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage](#), para 3.67)

Childminders are encouraged to identify a person to act as SENCO<sup>3</sup>. Childminders who are registered with a childminder agency or who are part of a network may wish to share that role between them.

The legal responsibilities for disabled children and children with SEN lie with the responsible body (Equality Act duties) or the appropriate authority (Children and Families Act duties). In both cases this is the governing body for a maintained school, including a maintained nursery school, and the proprietor, that is the owner or the management

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<sup>1</sup> Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted>

<sup>3</sup> Special educational needs and disability code of practice, paragraphs 5.12, 5.53 and 5.58

committee, of a private, voluntary or independent nursery. (Para 5.10 of the [Special educational needs and disability code of practice refers](#)).

The early years SENCO qualification is for a Level 3 practitioner in a private, voluntary or independent setting. It is also appropriate for childminders. This is an important role to ensure the best possible educational outcomes are achieved for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

# Recommendations for what a Level 3 Early Years SENCO qualification should include

## 1. SEN identification and early action

- Explain what Special Educational Needs (SEN) are.
- Describe the four areas of need and give examples of the difficulties associated with each:
  - Communication and interaction
  - Cognition and learning
  - Social, emotional and mental health difficulties
  - Sensory and/or physical needs
- Describe the characteristics of the different types of high and low incidence special needs you are likely to see in your setting and how these are identified.
- Be able to explain how any differences in a child's rate of progress are related solely to learning English as an additional language (EAL) and not SEN.
- Be able to explain how to identify when SEN is occurring in children with EAL.
- Explain the legal obligations that early years providers have towards disabled children.
- Explain what the Graduated Approach is and how each aspect helps to provide suitable SEN support, within the cycle:
  - Assess
  - Plan
  - Do
  - Review
- Explain how to actively engage the child and the child's parents/carers in the assess, plan, do, review process.
- Explain the importance of the child and the child's parents/carers, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- Explain the role of the early years practitioner/key worker and that of the SENCO within the cycle.

- Explain how and why reviews of progress, including formal progress checks, should be used to inform the Graduated Approach, including who will do what/why/where/when.
- Explain what an effective support plan should include and why clear outcomes are important.
- Give examples of adjustment strategies and interventions for supporting the learning of children with different types of SEN to ensure positive learning outcomes.
- Explain what information can and/or should be shared with others within the setting and beyond to support the achievement of the agreed outcomes and effective transition.

## 2. The role of the Early Years SENCO

- Understand the principles, statutory guidance and legislation underpinning the 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice'.
- Explain the role of the SENCO in private, voluntary and independent early years settings, including for:
  - ensuring all early years practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities to children with SEN and the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN advising and supporting colleagues
  - ensuring parents/carers are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting, and liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting.
  - Gaining the views of the child.
- Assess own skills and competencies, identify any gaps and next steps in professional development.
- Reflect on own practice.
- Identify and use professional development opportunities, including training and other sources of support, to address own development needs.
- Understand the principles underpinning Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans.
- Explain what and how records should be maintained and used to track progress and achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes for children.

## 3. Supporting colleagues in their work with children with SEN

- Explain own responsibility to support colleagues in their work with children with SEN



- Understand how you would identify and support practitioners to develop their expertise in relation to SEN to ensure practitioners have the relevant skills and knowledge, including:
  - induction of new staff
  - their responsibilities to children with SEN
  - the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN
  - how the setting works in partnership with parents/carers to identify a child as having SEN,
  - how the practitioner and the SENCO agree, in consultation with the child and the child's parents/carers, the outcomes they are seeking for the child
  - assessing their skills, competencies, and next steps in professional development in relation to particular impairments.
  - identifying and using training and other sources of support available locally help them in explaining the duties to colleagues.

#### **4. Liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting**

- Understand the local offer, including the provision that the Local Authority expects to be available from providers of all relevant early years education.
- Liaise with professionals, agencies and services beyond the setting, for example:
  - SEN support or learning support services including 'local offer'<sup>4</sup>
  - sensory support services or specialist teachers
  - therapies such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy
  - support available to parents/carers to aid their child's development at home, including such services as Portage
  - Independent Advice and Support Services (IASS)
  - Local voluntary agencies who provide support to children and their families

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<sup>4</sup> Local authorities must publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.

- Childminder Agencies/Networks
- Social Care Services
- Area SENCO, inclusion officer, or equivalent where available.
- Understand the support available including:
  - Education
  - Health and social care services for disabled children and children with SEN
  - Services assisting providers to support young children with medical conditions
  - Childcare for disabled children and children with SEN
  - Services providing parents/carers and children with information, advice and support on SEN and disability
  - Groups who can support disabled children and their parents/carers.
- Explain how to signpost families for advice and services beyond the setting and encourage use of them.
- Link with the local authority to liaise over individual children and links on wider strategic issues such as securing sufficient expertise and experience on SEN and disability locally.
- Understand how funding can contribute to whole setting support to improve children's SEN and disability outcomes.
- Explain why SEN support should include planning and preparing for transition, before a child moves into another setting or school.
- Explain how to share information with the receiving setting or school and how to involve children and their parents/carers in this.

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