



Department  
for Education

# **The role of the Early Years Special Educational Needs Coordinator**

**January 2022**

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## Purpose

This document is intended as guidance for early years providers and practitioners to help clarify the role of the Early Years SENCO in non-maintained early years settings. It should be read alongside the [Special educational needs and disability code of practice](#).

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## 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.

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.

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)

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

The Early Years SENCO role involves:

- ensuring all 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 are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting, and
- liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting

# The Early Years SENCO Job Role

The Early Years SENCO has a key role in supporting colleagues and coordinating the response of the setting to children with SEN. The Early Years SENCO role will vary depending on the size, structure and employers requirements in the setting. The following is an overview of the typical role. Further details can be obtained from the [Special educational needs and disability code of practice](#):

## 1. Ensuring all practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities to children with SEN and the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN

The Early Years SENCO will:

- work with the manager of the setting to regularly review the SEN and disability policy and practice within the setting and agree how it will be implemented.
- be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the setting's SEN policy, and for coordinating provision across the setting.
- implement SEN support and the graduated approach of: assess, plan, do, review to meet the outcomes identified for the child
- support individual practitioners in implementing the approach for individual children.
- meet the requirements for record-keeping in a way that supports a participative decision-making process.
- draw on a range of sources, including the views of the child, supported by reliable evidence of effectiveness, to inform their advice and support to colleagues on different approaches to improving children's progress.

## 2. Advising and supporting colleagues

The Early Years SENCO will:

- support practitioners to assess their skills and competencies, identify any gaps and implement next steps in professional development.
- ensure all practitioners in the setting understand:
  - their responsibilities to children with SEN

- how to work actively and effectively within the Assess Plan Do Review SEN support in Early Years cycle.
- the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN
- how the setting: responds to any cause for concern and identifies and responds to special educational needs.
- how the setting works in partnership with parents to identify a child as having SEN.
- how the practitioner and the SENCO agree, in consultation with the parent and the child, the outcomes they are seeking for the child.
- identify and use training and other sources of support available to help explain the duties to colleagues.
- link with others who have a role in supporting the development and delivery of training both for individual settings and on a wider basis.

### **3. Ensuring parents are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting.**

The Early Years SENCO will:

- make sure parents receive the information, advice and support that they need in order to participate in the SEN decision-making process.
- ensure parents are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting.
- involve parents in the discussion of any early concerns, in identifying any SEN, and agreeing:
  - the outcomes being sought for the child
  - the interventions and support to be put in place
  - the expected impact on progress, development, behaviour
  - date for review

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

The Early Years SENCO will:

- understand the local offer, including the provision that the Local Authority expects to be available from providers of all relevant early years education.
- 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 and children with information, advice and support on SEN and disability
  - support groups who can support parent carers of disabled children.
- 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 supports settings in meeting children's SEN and disability.
- liaise with professionals or agencies beyond the setting, including, but not limited to:
  - 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 to aid their child's development at home, including such services as Portage<sup>5</sup>
  - Independent Advice and Support Services (IASS)

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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.

<sup>5</sup> 5 An early intervention service that seeks to work closely with parents to meet their child's needs at home and in range of informal and formal education setting.



- Local voluntary agencies that provide support to children and their families.
- Social Care Services
- Area SENCO, inclusion officer, or equivalent where available.

## 5. Continually develop own practice

Effective practitioners reflect on their own practice and undertake continuous professional development. The Early Years SENCO will:

- understand:
  - own responsibilities to children with SEN, their carers/parents
  - the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN
  - how to determine reliability of evidence of the effectiveness of provision
- assess own skills and competencies, identify any gaps and next steps in professional development.
- identify and use training and other sources of support to address own development needs.
- keep up-to-date with meeting the setting's needs.

## Relevant skills and knowledge

There is a range of resources and advice, information and training available, for example:

- The [Local Offer](#) in your area – see Local Authority website.
- [The Communication Trust](#) - supports everyone who works with children and young people in England to support their speech, language and communication.
- [The Autism Education Trust](#) for children on the autism spectrum.
- [National Sensory Impairment Partnership](#), Natsip, for children with vision impairment, hearing impairment and multi-sensory impairment.
- The [Early Years Foundation Stage Inclusion Development Programme](#) provides learning resources to support the development of practice in relation to young children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; autism; and speech, language and communication needs.

- Nasen hosts an online portal, of [Early Years SEND Resources](#) which provides access to information, resources and training to meet the needs of children with SEN and disabilities to support early years practitioners

## Acknowledgements

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