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## Help! I'm a new SENCO and don't know where to start

If you're new to the profession, the role of the SENCO might initially seem complex and unsupported. It's important to know that you're never alone!

Over a typical week, I will receive about twenty e-mails and tweets from fellow SENCOs across the country and about ten or so from parents and carers.

I always try to spend some time each week answering each question in turn. This can be a real challenge, especially when I am travelling to events and school-to-school support work myself, in addition to doing my SENCO 'day job'!

This week I received a lovely email from a new SENCO colleague who had typed into Google 'I'm a new SENCO and need some help', only for my name to pop up! I have never courted praise or chased followers, but always tried to set myself up as someone who can make a difference by sharing resources, helping colleagues and offering advice.

As I'm often answering similar questions from new SENCO colleagues, I thought it would be useful to collate my thoughts for the support of new SENCOs.

### Don't live in isolation

I have been a member of the [SENCO Forum e-discussion group](#) since the beginning of my career as SENCO. I am currently vice chair of the Advisory Group that helps keep the service free to use.

Now in its twenty-first year of operation, the forum provides an opportunity for (new and experienced) SENCOs and other SEND professionals to discuss issues, share information and pass on practical advice. This is often based on the first-hand experience of SEND professionals, along with relevant research evidence and local/national policy guidance.

Knowing I can seek the advice and support of my colleagues almost immediately has proven invaluable throughout my career, and it's important that all SENCOs know that they aren't

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isolated within their roles. The forum is an excellent way to get the help you need simply by sending an email.

### **Consider key priorities**

SENCO colleagues often feel overwhelmed by the pressures and demands from lots of different areas. I wrote recently about [my three-stage plan for school improvement](#), which may be as useful for new SENCOs as for more experienced colleagues and headteachers.

However, the key is always to think about priorities and not to do too much at once. Being reflective will allow for a more strategic approach, which is crucial if SENCOs are to meet the challenges faced day after day.

### **Define your role**

The education system is currently under a lot of pressure, and schools are struggling with a [multitude of financial constraints](#) and [significant curriculum changes](#).

In this context, I think it is important to remain specific when defining the role of SENCO. Don't try to be 'something to everyone'; be as focused and strategic as possible.

The SENCO works strategically with the senior leadership team to review and refresh a school's provision for SEND, while also working with classroom/subject teachers to ensure that every child with SEND gets the most appropriate and personalised support possible.

Drawing clear distinctions between the responsibilities of staff is as important for new SENCOs as it is for everyone else.

The classroom teacher should:

- focus on outcomes for the child when reviewing SEND provision
- be responsible for meeting special educational needs, working in co-operation with the SENCO to develop a higher quality of teaching
- have high aspirations for every student, with clear progress targets for pupils
- be clear about how the school's full range of resources can be used to meet such targets
- involve parents/carers and pupils themselves when planning and reviewing progress.

The headteacher and SLT should:

- consider how SENCOs fit into the strategic management of the school, including how they feed into strategic decisions
- ensure that the SENCO has sufficient time and resources to carry out their responsibilities, with sufficient administrative support and time away from teaching to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities (Code of Practice section 6.91)
- foster a strong relationship between school and parents/carers, meeting parents/carers at least three times each year (Code of Practice section 6.65).

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It is always good to have a strong relationship between SENCO and SEND governor. Optimus members can [download our toolkit of resources](#) to help develop better collaborative working.

The SENCO should:

- oversee the day-to-day operation of school's SEND provision
- coordinate provision for children with SEND
- liaise with the designated teacher for a looked-after child with SEND
- advise on using the graduated approach to develop SEND provision
- advise on the use of delegated budgets and other resources
- liaise with parents and carers of children with SEND
- work with other education settings and external agencies
- liaise with the next providers of education to facilitate transition;
- work with the headteacher and governors on the Equality Act
- ensure that SEND records are kept up to date.

However new to the role of SENCO you might be, you'll never be alone! There is plenty of advice and support out there.

After all, if there is one thing I've learnt over the last 20 years, it's that SENCOs are a generous and supportive bunch!

### Resources and advice

- More [information about the SENCO Forum](#) and joining instructions
- ['Top tips for SENCOs'](#), compiled from a SENCO Forum discussion by Janice Rolnick
- ['Advice for SENCOs – the parents' perspective'](#) by Hayley Goleniowski (from Special Needs Jungle)
- ['So you are a new SENCO'](#) by Douglas Silas
- ['The 21st Century SENCO'](#) by Gareth D. Morewood (of 2008, but still useful today!)
- ['Top 10 tips for SENCOs at the start of the academic year'](#) by Lorraine Petersen
- [Gareth Morewood website](#)