

The Role of the SENCo in Community Pre-Schools

Understanding the Role of the SENCo

At its core, the SENCo's role is to coordinate provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In community pre-schools, this means acting as an advocate for inclusion, a leader for staff, a point of contact for families, and a liaison with external agencies. The SENCo's responsibilities are multifaceted, encompassing identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and review of SEN provision.

Key Responsibilities

- **Identification of SEN:** The SENCo works collaboratively with staff to observe children's development, identify early signs of additional needs, and coordinate appropriate assessments. Early identification is crucial for effective intervention and positive outcomes.
- **Liaison with Families:** Building trust with families is central to the SENCo's success. They provide guidance, share insights, and ensure that parents and carers are involved in all stages of the support process.
- **Developing and Overseeing Support Plans:** The SENCo leads on planning tailored support, which may include Individual Education Plans (IEPs), care plans, or behaviour support strategies. They ensure these are regularly reviewed and adapted as the child grows and develops.
- **Staff Training and Support:** SENCos provide ongoing professional development for staff, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to support a diverse range of needs. This may involve delivering training sessions, modelling best practices, or sourcing external expertise.
- **Coordination with External Agencies:** The SENCo acts as the primary link between the pre-school and external professionals, such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, health visitors, and local authority SEN services.
- **Record Keeping and Compliance:** They maintain accurate and confidential records of all interventions and outcomes, ensuring that statutory duties and local authority requirements are met.

The SENCo and Inclusive Practice

Inclusive practice lies at the heart of effective early years education. The SENCo champions a culture where all children feel valued, included, and able to participate fully in pre-school life. This is achieved through a combination of strategic planning and daily interactions.

Creating an Inclusive Environment

Inclusivity starts with the environment. The SENCo advises on adaptations to the physical space and resources, making sure that classrooms, play areas, and sensory zones are accessible to everyone. This might mean providing alternative seating, visual supports, or quiet zones for children who need them.

Promoting Awareness and Understanding

The SENCo leads on raising awareness among both staff and peers about different types of SEN. Through training, discussions, and modelling inclusive attitudes, they foster a culture of empathy and understanding. This ensures all children learn in an environment that celebrates diversity and encourages acceptance.

Embedding Differentiated Teaching

Recognising that every child learns differently, the SENCo supports staff in differentiating activities and routines. They help develop strategies so that all children—whether they need extra support or more challenge—can participate meaningfully and make progress according to their individual needs.

Working with Families and the Community

An essential aspect of the SENCo's role is working in partnership with families and the wider community. Open, honest, and respectful communication is key to building relationships **that support the child's well-being.**

Listening and Responding

Parents and carers are often the first to notice differences in their child's development. The SENCo listens attentively to their concerns, values their insights, and responds promptly with guidance or action. This partnership is built on mutual respect and the shared goal of supporting the child.

Empowering Parents and Carers

SENcos provide families with information about available support, both within the pre-school setting and from external sources. They may signpost to local support groups, workshops, or statutory services, and help families navigate complex processes such as Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments.

Liaising with External Agencies

Often, meeting a child's needs requires input from professionals outside the pre-school. The SENCo is the linchpin, coordinating referrals, sharing information (with parental consent), and ensuring a joined-up approach to support.

Examples of External Support

- **Speech and Language Therapy:** For children with communication difficulties, the SENCo can facilitate referrals and implement recommended strategies within the setting.
- **Occupational Therapy:** Support may be needed for children with sensory processing or physical development concerns.
- **Educational Psychologists:** These specialists can assess complex needs and advise on targeted interventions.

- **Health Professionals:** The SENCo ensures that medical needs are understood and managed appropriately, possibly requiring care plans or medication protocols.

Supporting Staff Development

The SENCo plays a crucial role in staff training, ensuring that all team members are confident and competent in supporting children with SEN. This includes formal training, mentoring, and informal day-to-day support.

Training Topics May Include:

- Understanding specific learning difficulties (e.g., autism, ADHD, Down syndrome)
- Effective use of resources and adaptive equipment
- Behaviour management strategies
- Communication techniques, including Makaton or PECS
- Implementing sensory supports
- Recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns

Ensuring Compliance and Quality Assurance

Community pre-schools are required to meet statutory requirements for SEN provision. The SENCo is responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant legislation, such as the SEND Code of Practice. They also support the setting to prepare for Ofsted inspections and quality audits.

Keeping Accurate Records

Maintaining thorough records allows for effective tracking of progress, planning of interventions, and demonstration of impact. The SENCo ensures that records are kept up-to-date and stored securely, respecting confidentiality at all times.

Reviewing Policies and Practice

The managers and SENCo regularly reviews SEND policies to ensure they reflect current best practices and legislation.

Personal Qualities of an Effective SENCo

While qualifications and experience are important, the personal qualities of a SENCo are equally vital. These include:

- **Empathy and Compassion:** Understanding the perspectives of children and families.
- **Strong Communication Skills:** Articulating ideas clearly to various audiences.
- **Organisational Ability:** Managing multiple priorities efficiently.
- **Problem-Solving:** Finding creative solutions to complex challenges.
- **Collaborative Spirit:** Working effectively with others, both within and beyond the pre-school.
- **Resilience:** Coping with the emotional demands of the role and persisting in the face of setbacks.

The Impact of a SENCo in Community Pre-Schools

The SENCo's influence extends far beyond individual children with SEN. By fostering a culture of inclusion, they benefit all children—helping build empathy, respect, and understanding throughout the pre-school community. Their leadership ensures that no child is left behind, and that every family feels welcomed and supported.