

Curran, H., Moloney, H., Heavey, A. and Boddison, A. (2018) It's about time: The impact of SENCO workload on the professional and the school. Report for the National Education Union. Bath: Bath Spa University

Rationale

This research was undertaken by Bath Spa University with The National Association of Special Educational Needs (nasen), and funded by The National Education Union (NEU). The research sought to understand the experiences of the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) as lead practitioner for special educational needs (SEN) provision in schools, a previously under-researched area. This was the first national SENCO survey post 2014 SEND reform focused on the impact of practitioner workload on strategic provision for children with SEN.

Methodology

The research adopted a mixed methods approach which was particularly relevant for the management of large data sets. The position taken was interpretivist.

Initial online semi-structured focus groups were undertaken, with fifteen SENCOs participating. The groups were moderated by the research team. Data from the focus groups were coded completely and thematically analysed, in relation to literature and policy. This analysis informed the content of the second phase, the national online survey, by providing the perspective of current SENCOs in post.

The survey was piloted twice prior to release to ensure it was suitable for purpose. Initially piloted with twenty-one SENCOs from various educational settings and latterly with three educational professionals. The survey was open for four weeks. The data was thematically analysed. Extracts are used illustratively.

Ethical approval was granted by the author's institution. Potential participants were provided with information and consent documents; with a summary provided within the survey.

1903 SENCOs practising SENCOs consented for their data to be reported as part of the survey.

Conclusions

The report found that SENCOs felt a lack of allocated time and isolated working mean that they did not have enough time to ensure pupils with SEN are able to access the provision they need. SENCOs were predominantly spending their time on administrative activities. They reported that the role was not manageable for one person and was not understood by wider staff or senior leaders.

Dissemination

The report was published in November 2018, and shared with the Department for Education, Ofsted and the National Award for SENCO provider group. The report was later shared through various conferences channels, as well as through the education media. The research has also been disseminated in the following academic publication: Curran, H and Boddison, A (2021) 'It's the best job in the world, but one of the hardest, loneliest, most misunderstood roles in a school'. Understanding the complexity of the SENCO role post-SEND reform.' *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21 (1). pp. 39-48