

SENCO and governor relationship toolkit

Anita Devi

This toolkit focuses on one key relationship dynamic: that between the SENCO and the SEN governor.

The aim is to provide SENCOS and governors with talking points and tools to enhance their working relationship to collaboratively secure better outcomes for pupils.



Contents

Part 1: Working in collaboration	3
Part 2: How to make the most of meetings	10
Part 3: Termly reporting	13
Part 4: Formal compliance	15



Part 1: Working in collaboration

Effective from 2009, the [Education \(Special Educational Needs Coordinators\) Regulations](#) introduced prescribed qualifications and experience for SENCOs. The post of SENCO now requires:

- qualified teacher status
- satisfactory completion of the induction period
- working as a teacher in the school
- and, in the case of new appointees, completing the National SENCO Award within the first three years of appointment.

The regulations also covered the headteacher or acting headteacher of the school when undertaking the role of SENCO.

The [SEND Code of Practice 2015](#) further makes clear the expectations upon teachers regarding their responsibilities towards all pupils; including those with SEND.

Thus, the role of the SENCO has changed from specialist expert to strategic lead.

This has provided SENCOs with an opportunity to explore their leadership styles and approaches to management.

A top-level view of leadership involves four core elements:

1. Sharing a vision
2. Inspiring people
3. Leading change
4. Empowering people

None of these are easy. Each warrants further thought and research. Each develops through the experience of time.

Over the years, several authors have defined different models of leadership and leadership styles. The underpinning premise of each model or theory being to encourage self-reflection in the leader and greater clarity on the identity question: who am I?

Leadership does not happen in isolation. Each model in effect moves from who am I to how does that make me behave and what impact does that have on my team.



Activity

Make a list of the people on your team.

- What are their defined roles?
- What strengths do they bring to the team?
- Where do they need support?

Undertaking a reflective dialogue like this can help a SENCO firstly appreciate the size and diversity of their team, but also clarify expectations.

The following grid may help to record and consolidate ideas:

Who's on my team?			
Name	Role	Core strengths	Areas for support

The greater diversity on a team, the more effective that team will be (assuming difference and conflict are managed constructively).

Specified responsibilities

Focusing specifically on the interaction between the SENCO and the SEN governor, it is helpful to examine the [SEND Regulations 2014](#) in more depth.

The table below summaries the responsibilities of the governing body and the SENCO as specified in the regulations.



Governing Body	SENCO
<p>Timescales for EHC plans (p. 7)</p> <p>13. (1) When a local authority sends a draft plan to a child’s parent or young person it must— ...</p> <p>(2) A local authority must send the finalised EHC plan to—</p> <p>(a) the child’s parent or to the young person;</p> <p>(b) the governing body, proprietor or principal of any school, other institution or provider of relevant early years education named in the EHC plan; and</p> <p>(c) to the responsible commissioning body,</p>	<p>The SENCO, in relation to a relevant school, is the person who has been designated to be the special educational needs co-ordinator for the school by the appropriate authority in accordance with section 67 of the Act</p>
<p>Amending an EHC plan following review (p. 13)</p> <p>(3) Where the local authority decides to amend the EHC plan following representations from the child’s parent or the young person, it must send the finalised EHC plan to—</p> <p>(a) the child’s parent or to the young person;</p> <p>(b) the governing body, proprietor or principal of any school or other institution named in the EHC plan; and</p> <p>(c) to the responsible commissioning body</p>	<p>PART 3 (p23)</p> <p>Duties on schools</p> <p><i>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators</i></p> <p>Prescribed qualifications and experience of SENCOs</p> <p>49. (1) The appropriate authority of a relevant school must ensure that the SENCO appointed under section 67(2) of the Act meets all of the requirements in either paragraph (2) or (3).</p>
<p>Prescribed information that must be included in a SEN Information Report</p> <p>51. For the purpose of section 69(3)(a) of the Act the SEN information which the governing body or proprietor of every maintained school, maintained nursery school and Academy school (other than a special school that is established in a hospital) must include in a report containing SEN information is set out in Schedule 1.</p> <p>Manner of publication of report</p>	<p>(2) The requirements in this paragraph are that the SENCO—</p> <p>(a) is a qualified teacher;</p> <p>(b) if required to complete an induction period under regulations made under section 135A of the Education Act 2002(a), has satisfactorily completed such an induction period; and</p> <p>(c) is working as a teacher at the school.</p> <p>(3) The requirement in this paragraph is that the SENCO is the head teacher or acting head</p>



<p>52. The governing body or proprietor of the school must publish on the school’s website its report containing SEN information.</p>	<p>teacher (or equivalent in the case of an Academy school) of the school.</p> <p>(4) Where a person becomes the SENCO at a relevant school after 1st September 2009, and has not previously been the SENCO at that or any other relevant school for a total period of more than twelve months, the appropriate authority of the school must ensure that, if the person is the SENCO at the school at any time after the third anniversary of the date on which that person becomes a SENCO, that person holds the qualification, mentioned in paragraph</p> <p>(5) The qualification referred to in paragraph (4) is a postgraduate qualification in special educational needs co-ordination, for the time being known as “The National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordination”, awarded by a recognised body.</p> <p>(6) For the purposes of paragraph (5), a recognised body is a body designated by the Secretary of State by order made under section 216(1) of the Education Reform Act 1988(b);</p>
<p>Consultation (pp. 24-25)</p> <p>54. (1) When preparing and reviewing its local offer, a local authority must consult the following persons in its area—</p> <p>(a) children and young people with special educational needs and the parents of children with special educational needs;</p> <p>(b) children and young people with a disability, and the parents of children with a disability;</p> <p>(c) the governing bodies of maintained schools and maintained nursery schools;</p> <p>(d) the proprietors of Academies(a);</p> <p>(e) the governing bodies, proprietors or principals of post-16 institutions;</p>	<p>Appropriate authority functions and duties relating to the SENCO (pp. 23-24)</p> <p>50. (1) The appropriate authority of a relevant school must determine the role of the SENCO in relation to the leadership and management of the school.</p> <p>(2) The appropriate authority of a relevant school must determine the functions of the SENCO in addition to those under section 67(2) of the Act and monitor the effectiveness of the SENCO in undertaking those responsibilities.</p> <p>(3) The functions referred to in paragraph (1) may include the carrying out, or arranging for the carrying out, of the following tasks—</p> <p>(a) in relation to each of the registered pupils who the SENCO considers may have special educational needs, informing a parent of the</p>



<p>(f) the governing bodies of non-maintained special schools;</p>	<p>pupil that this may be the case as soon as is reasonably practicable;</p> <p>(b) in relation to each of the registered pupils who have special educational needs—</p> <p>(i) identifying the pupil’s special educational needs, and co-ordinating the making of special educational provision which meets those needs,</p> <p>(ii) monitoring the effectiveness of any special educational provision made,</p> <p>(iii) securing relevant services for the pupil where necessary,</p> <p>(iv) ensuring that records of the pupil’s special educational needs and the special educational provision made are maintained and kept up to date,</p> <p>(v) liaising with and providing information to a parent of the pupil on a regular basis about that pupil’s special educational needs and the special educational provision being made,</p> <p>(vi) ensuring that, where the pupil transfers to another school or educational institution, all relevant information about the pupil’s special educational needs and the special educational provision made is conveyed to the appropriate authority or (as the case may be) the proprietor of that school or institution, and</p> <p>(vii) promoting the pupil’s inclusion in the school community and access to the school’s curriculum, facilities and extra-curricular activities;</p> <p>(c) selecting, supervising and training learning support assistants who work with pupils with special educational needs;</p> <p>(d) advising teachers at the school about differentiated teaching methods appropriate for individual pupils with special educational needs;</p>
--	---



	<p>(e) contributing to in-service training for teachers at the school to assist them to carry out the tasks referred to in paragraph (b); and</p> <p>(f) preparing and reviewing the information required to be published by the appropriate authority pursuant to regulation 51, the objectives of the appropriate authority in making provision for special educational needs, and the special educational needs policy referred to in paragraph 3 of Schedule 1 to these Regulations.</p> <p>(4) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(b)(iii) “relevant services” means—</p> <p>(a) special educational provision, or advice or assistance in relation to such provision or its management; and</p> <p>(b) the assessment of special educational needs, or advice or assistance in relation to such needs or in relation to the management of pupils with such needs.</p>
--	---

Table 1: Responsibilities of Governing Body and SENCO as specified in the SEND Regulations 2014

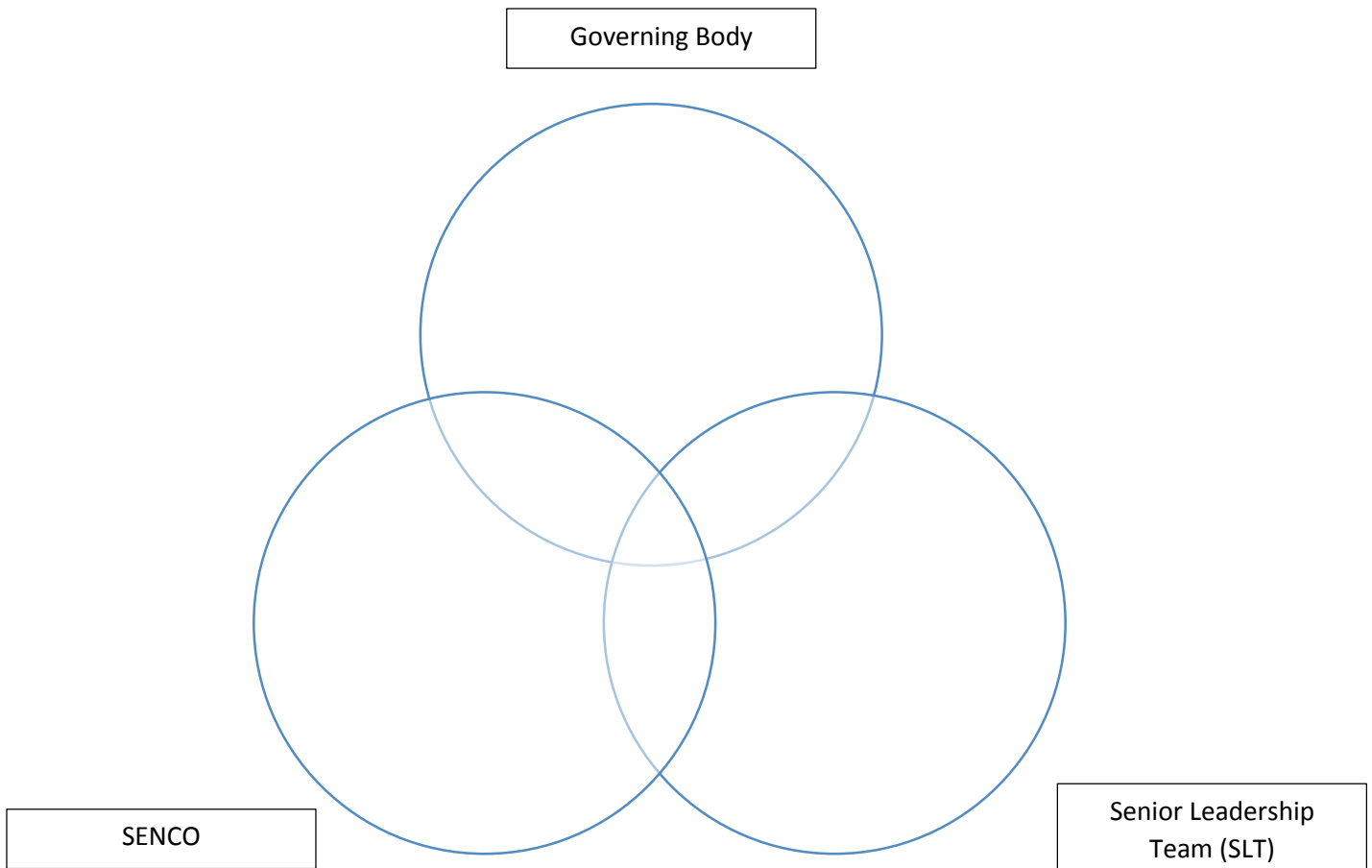
SENCOs can use the information in this table as a useful starting point to explore key responsibilities and define collaborative practices in school.



Activity

Through open dialogue with the SEN governor and SLT, use the Venn diagram below and the information in Table 1 to map out the core responsibilities of the governing body, SENCO and SLT.

Consider the overlaps, as well as areas that are mutually exclusive.



Reflective questions

- Has this process helped you identify any areas for further development or training?
- Can you use the same approach with other partners on the SEND team?
- What would be the advantages and drawbacks?



Part 2: How to make the most of meetings

The SENCO and SEN governor will meet many times, and each meeting should be approached with standards reflecting the SEND Code of Practice. Both participants should feel valued and informed, and the meeting should move things forward smoothly.

Of course, these principles could equally be applied to meetings with other partners. However, good meeting habits will allow the SENCO and SEN governor to collaborate much more effectively and coordinate the best possible provision.

Here are seven tips to consider:

1. Schedule in advance

It is a good idea to set key dates at the beginning of the year. As a SENCO, I would time my meetings with my SEN governor just before the main governing body meeting.

2. Be clear on the agenda and share it beforehand

It is helpful to provide information in advance to give everyone thinking and research time. Avoid having too many items on the agenda and prioritise the essentials.

3. Stick to the agreed meeting times

If the meeting agenda has been thought through, it will be easy to stick to agreed meeting times. Honouring these boundaries conveys the message that you value the other person's time.

Nothing can frustrate a working relationship more than when boundaries become blurred and an agreed one-hour meeting turns into two hours.

4. Stay focused, but followed additional items tabled at another time

It is possible during discussions that additional items come up. If not directly relevant, record these and park them for next time. Staying on track helps to ensure the meeting finishes on time. Often these additional items can be addressed informally, outside the meeting.

5. When decisions need to be made, prepare with accurate information

Providing attendees in advance with a list of possible options, and advantages and disadvantages for each option, will help prepare them to make the decision in the final stages of the meeting.

6. Multi-dimensional note taking approaches

Recording the discussions at a meeting is vital, and can be done in a number of ways. If possible, invite someone along with the specific remit to simply record the minutes of the meeting. Be clear on expectations and what you would like noted.



If a note-taker is unavailable, seek permission to audio record the meeting as a memory aid for later. You may also wish to record not just what was said at the meeting, but any related thoughts you had during the discussions. These could be represented in mind maps or doodles.

7. Follow up on decisions

One of the most annoying habits in a workplace is when decisions are agreed in a meeting and between that meeting and the next nothing is followed up.

It is important everyone holds each other to account. If not, it raises the question – what is the point of the meeting?

Meeting and activity planner

	Sept 2016	Oct 2016	Nov 2016	Dec 2016	Jan 2017	Feb 2017
Joint activities: SESCO & SEN governor						
	March 2017	Apr 2017	May 2017	June 2017	July 2017	Sept 2017
Joint activities: SESCO & SEN governor						

Meeting record template

Use the template below to develop a combined agenda and meeting record with your governor. It can be referred back to, and a copy can be shared at main governing body meetings as an appendix to the minutes.

Aim to keep the minutes form to a page in length, and use an agreed paper colour (this will help you find it in future).



School name/letterhead:

Date:

Time:

Attendees:

Agenda item 1:	
Key points discussed:	Agreed actions, by whom and by when
Agenda item 2:	
Key points discussed:	Agreed actions, by whom and by when
Agenda item 3:	
Key points discussed:	Agreed actions, by whom and by when
Agenda item 4:	
Key points discussed:	Agreed actions, by whom and by when

AOB:

Date of the next meeting:



Part 3: Termly reporting

The purpose of a termly report is as much to help the writer as the intended reader. It creates a track record, making term-on-term and year-on-year comparisons easier. It also ensures that meetings focus on the issues that require a decision, not the day-to-day stuff.

It is suggested SENCOs meet their SEN governors at the beginning of the term (face-to-face) and submit a report at the end (prior to governors' meetings).

Termly report template

The template below has been created to support SENCOs and their SEN governors engage in a meaningful dialogue each term. Schools are free to adapt and personalise the document to suit local needs:

- If you are new to the role of SENCO, you may choose initially not to include any finance information.
- For more experienced SENCOs, completing a report like this enables you to set up conversations with your business managers to look at value for money spending in SEND.



Date:

Academic Year:

SENCO:

Email:

Tel:

Best time to call:

Allocated non-contact time:

SEN Policy date:

Date of whole school Provision Review to map wave 1:

- Copy of outcome:**
- Costed provision maps for wave 2**
- Costed provision maps for wave 3**

Finance:

SEN Budget allocated for current financial year: Total:

E1: E2: E3: Additional:

Expenditure to date:

Amount remaining:

Number of children with SEND:

Number of children on SEN Support (K):

(Could include global figures or breakdown by year/need)

EHCP/high needs block funding applications in process:

Challenges addressed this term (plus solutions used to address them/success milestones):

Ongoing issues/concerns:

Training undertaken or delivered this term:

Ongoing issues/concerns:

Training undertaken or delivered this term:



Part 4: Formal compliance

Having previously explored collaborative leadership, making meetings work and termly reporting, this last section looks at some of the more formal aspects of SEND leadership.

Cultural competence

This is a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that coalesce in a system or among professionals, and enable that system or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

‘Compliance starts with understanding, and understanding starts with cultural competence’

One of the biggest challenges for any leader is bridging the gap between policy and practice. This is developed through cultural competence.

A true story with a moral

I was invited to a school recently to work with the new SENCO. Prior to the visit, I looked at the school’s SEN Information Report. It stated the school was involved in a partnership with a national organisation.

Upon arrival at the school, I checked with the new headteacher as to whether this was accurate. She informed me it was not.

The previous SENCO had (in the early days of the SEND Reforms) acquired a SEN Information Report from another school, cut and paste into their school letterhead.

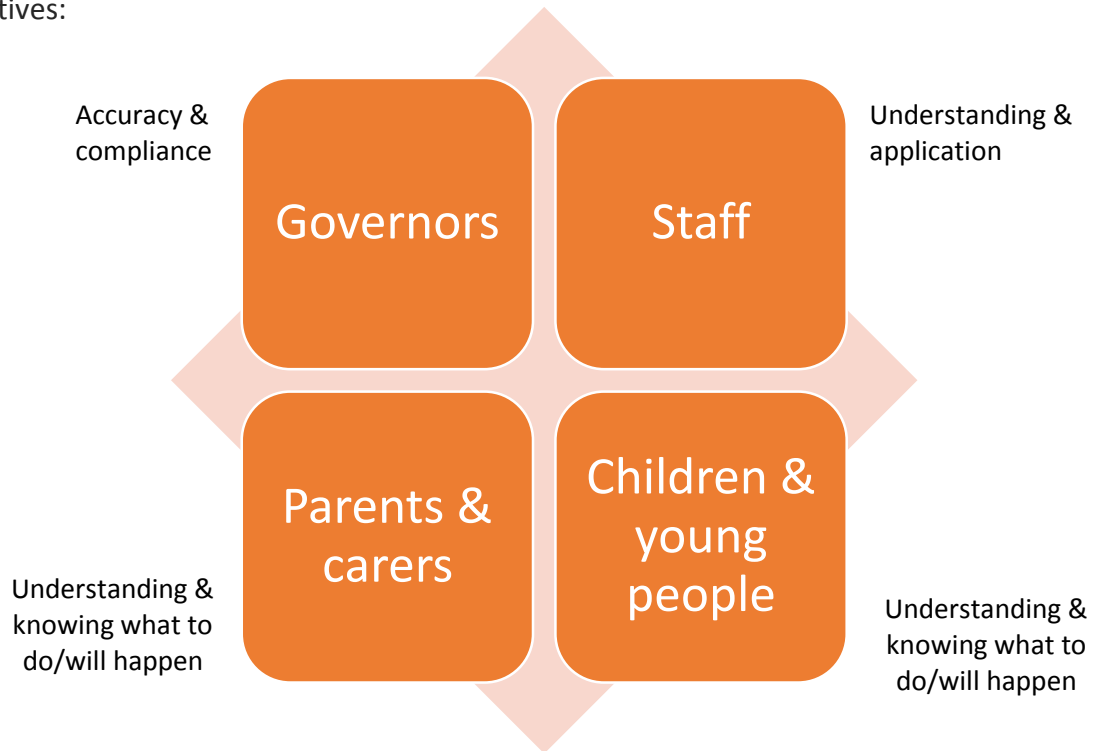
Ironically, the governing body had signed off the SEN Information Report as being accurate.

The moral of the story: it is acceptable to magpie ideas from other schools, but do check whether they are applicable.

More importantly, the governing body has the legal responsibility for compliance.



When undertaking a consultation, I tend to encourage schools to engage partners from different perspectives:



Given the recommendation above, it is helpful if the governing body to ascribe a compliance statement to documents when signing them off. For example:

'We the undersigned, representing the governing body for X school, declare this document and the contents therein to be accurate and compliant in line with all current legislation and the current school status. [Date]'

Statements of compliance ensure checking is thorough; it can serve as good evidence for an Ofsted visit.

For more information on creating the SEND Information Report, I've [written a guide](#) to explain what you need to publish and how you can communicate it clearly.