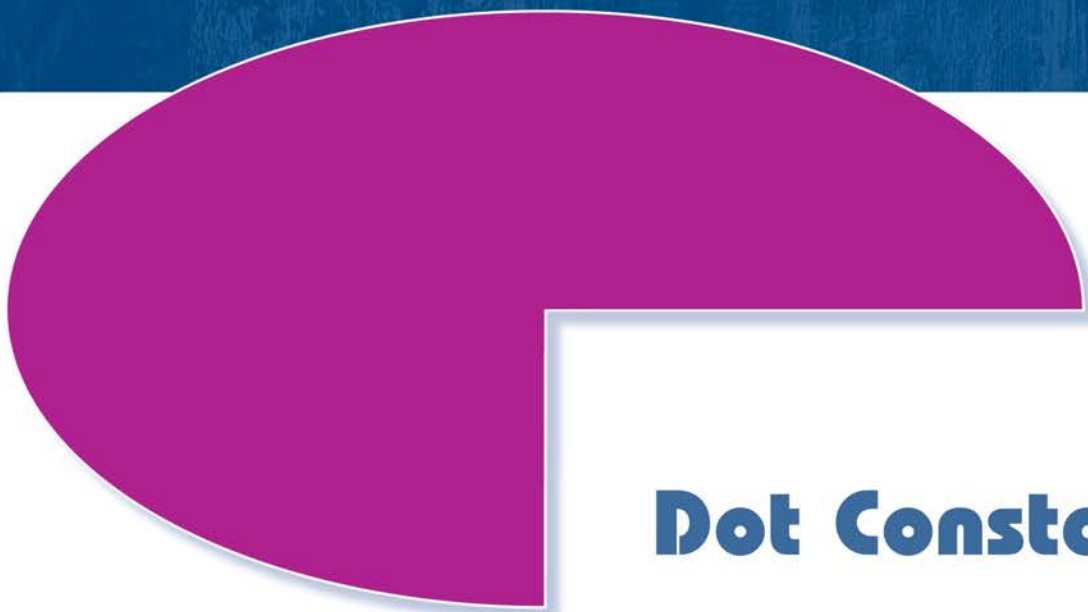


Planning and Organising the SENCO Year

Time-saving strategies for
effective practice



Dot Constable

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Dedication</i>	viii
<i>Introduction: the need for planning and organisation</i>	ix
1 A yearly planner	1
2 Special educational needs – the Code of Practice	6
3 Proactive policies	11
4 Effective individual education plans	30
5 Reviewing progress	45
6 Support for learning – school – teacher – pupil	59
7 Collaborative working	69
8 The role and responsibilities of the SENCO as a manager	78
9 Conclusion	94
<i>References and further reading</i>	97
<i>Index</i>	99

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Lynda Wood

During the course of the book you will become aware of the importance I place on the SENCO having an administrative assistant. I can say it is most definitely worthwhile. My administrative assistant, Lynda Wood, was brilliant. She was efficient, effective, gave support to both staff and children and most importantly, she made me laugh! Thank you, Lynda.

Margaret Roberts

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to the staff and children of Churchfields High School, West Bromwich, for whom I shall always keep a special place in my heart. Sadly the school closed its doors forever on 31 August 2001 and we all went our separate ways. To all of you I would like to say – thank you for ‘the way we were’.

Introduction: the need for planning and organisation

What does the job entail?

The role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is clearly defined in the Code of Practice (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 1994a; Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2001). The Code suggests that under the auspices of the head teacher and governing body, the designated person in charge of SEN may have responsibility for:

- The school's SEN policy documentation and its implementation.
- Liaising, advising and supporting colleagues.
- Managing the school's SEN team.
- Organisation and provision for pupils who are designated as having SEN.
- Appropriate record-keeping.
- Liaising and working with parents.
- In-service training of staff.
- Multi-agency liaison.

What the Code does not give, however, is appropriate advice and guidance on how to manage the workload. This surely poses the question: is it humanly possible for one person to carry out this role?

The answer to this question is implicit in the title of the job – special educational needs coordinator. By definition, a coordinator is someone who organises people or things to work properly together. The SENCO's role is one of managing the coordination in respect of the educational provision for pupils with SEN. This I truly believe is possible, but it is dependent on good systems and effective strategies and resourcing.

The need for planning and organisation

Forward planning and good organisational skills are crucial if SENCOs are to be able to carry out the numerous duties and tasks required of them. They are often expected to provide quick solutions to a number of problems while at the same time delivering the curriculum, writing individual education plans (IEPs), completing paperwork, running reviews, attending meetings, liaising

with outside agencies ... need I go on? The solution to the problem lies in whole-school involvement. Systems need to be designed, ideas shared, colleagues educated and responsibilities delegated if the provision for SEN in mainstream schools is to be a manageable task for the SENCO.

With this in mind, and in light of the statutory duties on local education authorities (LEAs) and schools as laid out in the Revised Code of Practice (DfES 2001) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (HMSO 2001), this publication was put together to share ideas, strategies and mechanisms to provide equality of opportunity for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The main objective is to support colleagues in a practical way towards achieving SEN provision that is cost effective, workable but, most importantly to the SENCO, manageable. The starting point is a yearly planner which came about from my own desire to be able to 'spread the workload' across the academic year. Following on from this it is hoped that the information and ideas contained in the remaining chapters will support the reader in a variety of ways, irrespective of their background.

This publication will be of interest to:

- Newly appointed SENCOs.
- SENCOs in post.
- Senior management teams (SMTs).
- SEN link governors/governing bodies.
- Teachers undergoing SENCO training.
- Those involved in the training of SENCOs.
- LEA (SEN advisor/support services).

The book has been designed for ease of reference in the hope that it will be used, as intended, as a working document for all those who are involved in the provision for pupils who have SEN.

1 A yearly planner

Where it all started

Being a SENCO is one of the most difficult positions of responsibility assigned to any one person in a school. The job requires endless energy with continuing demands from managers, teachers, governors, LEAs, parents – not forgetting the children! The list of tasks (which seems to duplicate in size overnight) is truly never-ending.

I usually wonder what madness possesses colleagues to take on such a role, but I guarantee that anyone who talks to a SENCO will quickly realise that they are very devoted to the children in their care and often passionate in their defence when fighting for equality of opportunity. They will probably be the first to admit that they do not like the administration, the bureaucracy, the endless sheets of paper to be completed; but what they do like is the look on the children's faces when they transcend through the learning block, develop a new skill, begin to enjoy school once again and achieve the impossible. The point is that SENCOs feel they are truly able to make a difference and have an impact.

I am sure that what most SENCOs would appreciate would be a reduction of the administrative and managerial pressures of the role, which could in turn alleviate some of the stresses that most of them encounter and enable them to devote more time to the children in their care. It is from a personal point of view that I take up the case. At a poignant time in my career when I was not only a SENCO but also a senior teacher (with added whole-school responsibilities), I decided the time had come to consider my effectiveness. I was at that time, for want of a better term, 'treading water'. On many occasions I felt that my head was most definitely below rather than above the water line, and my contact time with the children was being eroded. Time to evaluate!

I decided that the two areas in need of the greatest consideration were time management and delegation of duties. It soon became evident that in respect of the SENCO's role, there was a need for a system that could be organised in a logical order, planned well ahead and ultimately designed to avoid pressure points during the year. This was the key. There were too many occasions during the year where task overload was common. I hit on the idea of producing a yearly planner whereby the tasks could, I hoped, be spread out, giving me at least a fighting chance of survival. Once developed, the second area – the delegation of roles/jobs – could then be considered.

With the two goals in mind I set about developing the ideas.