

**POLICY INTO PRACTICE:
THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS COORDINATOR IN ENGLAND.**

**By
Jo Winwood**

**A thesis submitted to the
University of Birmingham
in part fulfilment for the degree of
EdD Educational Disadvantage and Special Educational Needs**

**School of Education
University of Birmingham
November 2012**

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of being a SENCO in mainstream schools in England. It examines how the role is operationalized and compares this to the guidance offered by national policy documents, such as the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). These issues were investigated through a questionnaire and in depth semi structured interviews with SENCOs working in primary and secondary school settings. The development of the SENCO role as a leader or manager is explored, including the potential benefits and limitations of such an approach. The relational aspect of SEN with pupils, staff and parents is also explored along with pressures and expectations placed on SENCOs by the current education system.

Findings suggest that a SENCO will find a particular way of interpreting and responding to the needs of the role, which cannot easily be defined as either a leader or manager. This is influenced by not only by national guidelines and school based pressures, but also by the values that SENCOs have. Many SENCOs valued the interactional nature of the SENCO role, whether that is with pupils, staff and colleagues. Most wanted to maintain this aspect of the role, but increase the opportunities they had to influence strategic responses to learning and teaching across the school, as well as increasing the involvement of colleagues in SEN related issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the SENCOs that participated in this study. Without their valuable insights and contributions this study would not have been possible. They are all very dedicated and skilled professionals and have done a great deal to improve the school experience for the children that they work with. I would also like to thank my family for their support and encouragement throughout the research process, especially Stu, for making me carry on.

However, two people have made this journey possible for me. They have offered support to me, both academically and personally and I have learned so much from both of them. Thank you, Mary, for being such a good friend and for never doubting that we could this. Thank you, John, (Visser, my supervisor) for all of the support and the encouragement to keep going when life got in the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter one: Introduction

pages 1 – 11

- 1 Introduction
- 1.1 Rationale
- 1.2 Context
- 1.3 Context of the study
- 1.4 Moving towards an inclusive education system
- 1.5 The role of the SENCO in the wider educational context: Inclusion
- 1.6 Every Child Matters
- 1.7 Conclusion

Chapter two: Literature review

pages 12 - 57

- 2.1 Search strategies
- 2.2 The SENCO role
 - 2.2.1 Historical perspectives
 - 2.2.2 Models of disability
 - 2.2.3 Disability
 - 2.2.4 Changing terminology
 - 2.2.5 The social model
 - 2.2.6 Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- 2.3 The role of the SENCO and inclusion
- 2.4 Roles, responsibilities and influences on the SENCO
 - 2.4.1 The SENCO role: policy definitions
 - 2.4.2 SENCO as leader or manager
 - 2.4.3 The role of the SENCO as a co-ordinator
 - 2.4.4 The development of a SENCO identity
 - 2.4.5 Theorising the role of the SENCO
- 2.5 The SENCO and the ethic of care
 - 2.5.1 What is the ethic of care?
 - 2.5.2 Weaknesses of the ethic of care
 - 2.5.3 Using the ethic of care to explore the SENCO role
- 2.6 Developing the SENCO role in the future: the SENCO as knowledgeable guide
- 2.7 Conclusion

Chapter three: Methodology

pages 58 - 85

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Research paradigms
- 3.3 Methodological foundation
- 3.4 Sample
- 3.5 Data collection strategies
 - 3.5.1 Questionnaire
 - 3.5.2 Piloting the questionnaire
 - 3.5.3 Analysing the questionnaire data
 - 3.5.4 Interviews
 - 3.5.5 Analysing the interview data
- 3.6 Validity, reliability and triangulation
- 3.7 Ethical issues
 - 3.7.1 Informed consent
 - 3.7.2 Confidentiality
 - 3.7.3 Access to the research field
- 3.8 The researcher's role
- 3.9 Conclusion

Chapter four: Findings from the Questionnaire

pages 86 - 108

- 4.1 The questionnaire
- 4.2 The school and staff population
 - 4.2.1 The school population
- 4.3 The SENCO
 - 4.3.1 The SENCO working week
 - 4.3.2 The SENCO: leader, manager or both?
- 4.4 Key themes raised by the questionnaire

Chapter five: Pen Portraits of the SENCO and their School

pages 109 – 117

- 5.1 School 1: context
 - 5.1.1 The context of the role of SENCO
- 5.2 School 2: context
 - 5.2.1 The context of the role of SENCO

- 5.3 School 3: context
 - 5.3.1 The context of the role of SENCO
- 5.4 School 4: context
 - 5.4.1 The context of the role of SENCO
- 5.5 School 5: Context
 - 5.5.1 The context of the role of SENCO
- 5.6 School 6: Context
 - 5.6.1 The context of the role of SENCO

Chapter six: Interview data

pages 118 - 141

- 6.1 Interview data
- 6.2 Comparing guidance to practice: the SENCO role
 - 6.2.1 The typical working week for the SENCO
- 6.3 Working with external agencies
- 6.4 Administration
- 6.5 Teaching children with SEN
- 6.6 Additional roles
- 6.7 The SENCO: leader or manager
 - 6.7.1 The SENCO as knowledgeable guide
- 6.8 The legal element to the role of the SENCO
- 6.9 Conclusion

Chapter seven: Analysis of findings

pages 143 - 160

- 7.1 Defining the role: SENCO as knowledgeable guide
 - 7.1.1 Leadership and the ethic of care: clarifying the SENCO role
- 7.2 The SENCO role compared to national guidance
- 7.3 The SENCO role: currently a leader or manager
- 7.4 The legal element to the SENCO role
- 7.5 Conclusion

Chapter eight: Conclusion

pages 161 - 169

- 8.1 What is the match between guidance and practice in the role of the SENCO in mainstream schools?
- 8.2 Limitations of the research

8.3 Future research

References

pages 170 - 194

Appendix One

An example of a completed questionnaire

Appendix Two

Interview schedule

Appendix Three

An example of an interview transcript

Appendix Four

A coded interview transcript

Appendix Five

Themes generated through coding data

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table

- 1** Type of school the SENCO works in

Figures

- 1** Explanatory framework demonstrating how each data collection strategy related to each other and informed the next
- 2** Number of pupils on roll
- 3** Percentage of pupils with SEN as a percentage of the total school population
- 4** Number of pupils with a Statement of SEN
- 5** Length of experience as a SENCO (in years)
- 6** Release time dedicated to SENCO tasks (per week)
- 7** Release time for secondary SENCOs
- 8** Release time for primary SENCOs
- 9** Release time (as a percentage) for SENCOs across three LAs
- 10** How often the SENCO contributes to the in-service training of staff
- 11** Perceptions of the role of SENCO

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfE	Department for Education
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECM	Every Child Matters
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IT	Information Technology
LA	Local Authority
LS	Learning Support
LST	Learning Support Teacher
NC	National Curriculum
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
TA	Teaching Assistant
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
TDA	Training and Development Agency

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This study explores the experiences of being a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in four Local Authorities in the Midlands region. Within this, issues relating to the role, SENCO identity and the status of the SENCO are also explored, looking in particular at the development of the role in relation to the recommendations in national policy guidance, comparing this to practice. The aim of the study was to gain a greater understanding of the SENCO role from the perspective of those who carry it out on a daily basis. The study aimed to understand the experiences of being a SENCO, using the experiences and perspectives of practicing SENCOs, how they enact the role and some of the challenges they face when doing this.

1.1 Rationale

A key motivation for this study was to seek a greater understanding of the SENCO role and how SENCOs in school work within the current education system that places a great deal of emphasis on achievement through national testing, whilst at the same time advocating inclusive practice. Much of the research within these two areas suggests that the most effective schools are also the most inclusive (Ainscow *et al*, 2006; Dyson *et al* 2002). However, other studies also suggest that many class teachers feel inadequately prepared to implement inclusion and are not confident that they could respond to a diverse range of learners' needs on a day to day basis (Pearson, 2008a; Connor and Ferri, 2007). By gaining a clearer understanding of the ways in which the SENCO role is currently executed within schools, alternative ways of responding to the role could be identified and provide opportunities to share good practice. This in turn might enable the SENCO to support the

development of inclusion for all children including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Various other research projects (Swzed, 2007; Cole, 2005b; Rosen-Webb, 2011) have explored the role of SENCO but many of these remained focused on SEN related to the needs of individual children with a particular impairment or need (NUT, 2004). Within this, the literature suggested the SENCO continues to spend a great deal of time responding to requests from individual teachers about a particular child, but that these teachers rarely take an active role with whole school issues relating to SEN and their views of SEN are often quite negative (Cole, 2005b). Academic research into issues of SEN and inclusion has developed rapidly since the Warnock Report (1978) and this study wanted to explore whether the reconceptualisation of SEN as an academic subject has had any impact on the status of SEN and the SENCO at school level.

1.2 Context

Influences on the SENCO role come from the institution where a SENCO works, the Local Authority (LA), from national policy documents and research into the field of SEN at national and international levels. At a policy level, the SENCO role has been influenced by changes in the philosophies that underpin SEN in schools, as well as the way education in the broadest sense has been seen to be at the heart of building a more just and equitable society for everyone. Recommendations made by the Warnock Report (1978) marked the move away from definitions based on the impairment a person had to that of being needs based, but much of the legislation that has followed has not offered support to teachers on how to implement this at classroom level. The introduction of national standards (TTA, 1998), the recent National Award for SENCOs (NASENCO) and further government guidance (DCSF,

2008) have gone some way to try and enhance the status of the SENCO, by increasing their knowledge and competence within the role, as well as trying to achieve consistency within the role both nationally and locally. This study was conducted before the NASENCO had been implemented and aimed to discover how the national guidance was interpreted and implemented in mainstream schools, before the introduction of national qualifications for new SENCOs.

SENCOs involved with the study work in four different LAs within the central region of the United Kingdom. All four LAs involved in the study have maintained special school provision for children attending primary and secondary schools, and one of them was identified by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) (2005) as having high levels of segregation. The SENCOs were accessed via LA SENCO forum meetings.

1.3 Context of the study

Having been a SENCO myself until recently, the various changes to the role were obvious to me, but how this fitted into other national initiatives around inclusion were less clear. For example, a variety of government policies and initiatives stress the importance of developing inclusive practice for the majority of children, whilst some staff and sometimes parents remained focused on a medicalized approach of diagnosis of needs. This often meant that as SENCO, much of the work I did focused on individual children, rather than developing and sharing good practice so that all children could achieve. With the introduction of the revised Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001b) a number of changes to the SENCO role were outlined, and Mackenzie (2007) noted a lack of consistency in the role in terms of workload, status and position.

Whilst the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) outlines broad principles for the SENCO role, informal discussions with other SENCOs in primary and secondary settings suggested that the role was open to very broad interpretations and expectations. Almost every other policy document within schools, other multi – agency guidelines and wider social issues continue to influence the role in various ways. It is therefore no surprise that as Garner (2001) points out, it is unlikely that any two SENCOs have identical experiences, workload or professional understandings. This can be seen as a benefit, enabling the SENCO to match the role to the needs of the settings, but Garner (2001) also highlights the need for some shared expectations so that the role can be manageable and beneficial for pupils and the school as a whole. Government documents, such as the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) set out broad guidelines for SENCOs, but expectations of colleagues, findings within academic research and parental requirements often demand contradictory and competing responses from the SENCO. Therefore, an exploration of how official guidelines compare with actual experiences of being a SENCO would enable a comparison between the recommendation and the practice, as well as providing an opportunity to consider the extent to which the aspirations outlined in the SENCO Regulations (DCSF, 2008) are being met. In order to explore these issues, the following research question formed the basis of the study:

1. What is the match between guidance and practice in the role of the SENCO in mainstream schools?

Within this, the role itself was explored, with comparisons made between guidance material and actual practice.

As the role remained entrenched within Special Educational Needs (SEN), notions of inclusion often appeared to be marginalised (Richards, 2012). Thus, the SENCO role is often centred on the administrative elements, such as writing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or reviewing paperwork, with little or no time left for a leadership role that could develop inclusive practice across a school (Oldham and Radford, 2011). These contradictions and challenges raised issues relating to the status and value placed on the role by other staff working in schools (Jordan *et al*, 2009). The authors suggest that some staff did not always value the children identified as having SEN, viewing them as a challenge to teach and offering little return in terms of results published in league tables. Additionally, the role of SENCO appeared to be devalued and marginalised through its association with the group of children that are judged to add little to the wider community of the school (Mackenzie, 2010). However, the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and TDA outcomes for the National Award for SEN Coordination (2009) both include a leadership element, related to staff development and support for other colleagues. The research also aimed to discover whether there was a leadership element as part of the SENCO role, the benefits (or limitations) of this for the SENCO and the school and the potential to move away from an administrative role towards a role that related to teaching and learning, rather than individuals with SEN.

1.4 Moving towards an inclusive education system

The notion of inclusion for all pupils, regardless of their diverse learning needs is a relatively recent development within the English education system. The Warnock Committee (1978) and subsequent 1981 Education Act supported the notion of integration for some children who, historically, would have attended an alternative educational provision, usually based on medical diagnosis of impairments rather than educational ability or need. Although this can now be seen as a significant development, integration expects the child or children to

conform to the system within which they are placed, rather than the system responding to their individual needs. As Corbett (1996: 22) states, integration is often understood to mean that the child needs to ‘become like the majority; conceal your difficulties; learn to fit in.’ With an increasing awareness of various inequalities within the education system for certain groups of students including pupils with SEN, the notion of inclusion instead of integration became a guiding principle within government documents, including the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). As Ainscow *et al* (2006) state this reflects an international drive towards inclusive practice within education, as many governments adopt the principles of the Salamanca statement (1994). However, although the term inclusion is used widely within the education system, understanding of the word and what it means in terms of practice is not always clear. Booth and Ainscow (2002: 12) reflect the views held by many that inclusion is a journey rather than a destination, stating that:

...inclusion is a never-ending process. It is relevant to any school however inclusive or exclusive its current cultures, policies and practices. It requires schools to engage in a critical examination of what can be done to increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students within the school and its locality.

Furthermore, the quote highlights the essential distinction between inclusion and integration made previously, stressing the need for the school to identify and respond to a range of different students, rather than the students being expected to change and adapt to the system they are in. This principle is stressed in Inclusive Schooling (DfES, 2001a), which highlights the need to identify and remove barriers to learning, linking it to principles of rights for all children and an appropriate educational experience. However, although the notion of inclusion is an element of many current educational policies and debates, including ‘Removing Barriers to Achievement’ (DfES, 2004b), which provides a strategy for schools to develop in relation to SEN, other drives mean that inclusive ideals can be marginalised.

Ainscow *et al* (2006) noted that the standards agenda often constrained the development of inclusive provision, with schools being forced to concentrate development on areas which they will be judged against. This marketization of education (Grace, 1998) can lead to some pupils, often with SEN, being seen as less attractive to schools, in that they will ultimately demand more resources but contribute less to the traditional measurements of success.

1.5 The role of the SENCO in the wider educational context: inclusion

The role of the SENCO in developing inclusive practice is not always clear. The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) stresses the need for SENCOs to work with other subject co-ordinators to enable all children to access the curriculum. Additionally, *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004b) emphasises the importance of high expectations for all learners, including children with SEN. However, Parsons (1999) suggests that for many teachers, inclusion is at odds with the drive for increasing attainment and they cannot see how it is possible to achieve both. Research by Pearson and Ralph (2007) suggests that various groups of professionals within schools have very different expectations of the SENCO, much of which revolves around dealing with individual or small groups of pupils, rather than developing and extending understandings of disability, SEN and inclusion within the classroom, still reflecting a traditional deficit approach to need. Ainscow *et al* (2006) and Dyson (2001) point out that achievement within the current system has been defined very narrowly in terms of reaching a particular standard by a certain age within a small number of subject areas, all of which are measured and used to judge the effectiveness of the school by various organisations, including Ofsted. These measurements might offer some insights into school effectiveness but, as Grace (1998) stresses, academic results are often only one element of what makes an effective school, and achievement can be measured in various other ways, such as social development and attendance.

If SENCOs are able to carry out the role as required by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), offering guidance and advice to staff and leading on issues of SEN, the dichotomy between inclusion and achievement could be lessened if not removed. Visser *et al* (2002) found that schools that were most effective in terms of inclusion had, among other attributes, high expectations of pupil achievement and did not presume that being identified with SEN should preclude pupils from wanting or being able to achieve academically. Carrington and Elkins (2002) highlight the need for the school ethos to value inclusion, which is then supported and nurtured in classrooms and actively put into practice, alongside achievement. However, research by Ainscow *et al* (2006) suggests many teachers are not sure how to implement inclusion on a practical level, within planning and lessons. Thus, responses tend to be located within existing practice, which according to Ainscow *et al* (2006) starts from government guidelines, such as the National Curriculum (QCA, 1999). Ainscow *et al* (2006) advocate the approach whereby schools reflect critically on the underlying aims of their teaching and the needs of their pupils and then respond, rather than being driven by requirements of policy documents such as the National Curriculum (QCA, 1999). Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) support this view, suggesting that teachers' pedagogical knowledge is perhaps limited which in turn hinders their approach to developing a curriculum that enables all pupils to participate effectively. However, the role advocated for the SENCO by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) is to be a knowledgeable guide, advising other teachers on how to develop effective inclusive practice.

Implementing the changes suggested above could lead to significant changes in the organisation of learning for pupils. Both Dyson (2001) and Ofsted (2006) suggest that traditional approaches to supporting children with SEN have, at best, had very limited impact

and at worst, negatively impacted on the educational experiences and achievements of pupils. Ofsted (2006) suggest that commitment from staff and sufficiently challenging work are among essential factors to ensure achievement, rather than additional resources, such as Teaching Assistants (TAs). Although these additional resources are often seen as necessary by school staff, they do not ensure good intervention or progress. Sharp and Thompson (1997) argue that school policies should reflect and communicate key values, such as valuing diversity and social justice, that can also be seen in practice in the classroom. Rose (2003) concurs, stressing the need of shared philosophies from all staff. According to Rizvi and Lingard (1996: 21) the view of education as a mechanism for social justice for all pupils, has to include ‘the engaged participation [of everyone]... it should not be merely symbolic but real.’ However, whether the SENCO can achieve this for children with SEN, whilst retaining so many other administrative roles and responsibilities is questionable without what Cole (2005b; 288) calls a ‘reprofessionalisation’ of the role of the SENCO that would enable the development of inclusive practices for all children to occur.

1.6 Every Child Matters

In recent years, government policy documents, including Excellence for All Children (DfEE, 1997) and Inclusive Schooling (DfES, 2001a) have stressed the important role schools have in promoting students’ achievement, self-esteem and emotional well-being. The introduction of Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004a) produced an overarching policy for education, health and social services, identifying five key areas that aimed to ensure ‘every child and young person is able to fulfil their full potential’ (DfES, 2004a: 2). These broad aims appear to match the principles and aims of inclusion. The documents stress the importance of achievement but also the purposes of school and education more generally, highlighting what Black-Hawkins *et al* (2007) term as a social inclusion agenda. Furthermore, this extends the

notion in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and the inclusion statements in the National Curriculum documents (QCA, 1999) that children with SEN are the responsibility of every teacher, and by implication, the SENCO role does not include responsibility for teaching pupils with SEN, but is a coordination post.

However, a number of writers have questioned how inclusive Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) actually is. Todd (2007) questions how inclusive education can benefit from a policy which, when put into practice, still reflects an individual deficit model where the child or family need to be fixed. Todd (2007) suggests that it is essential for professionals to critically reflect on the context and purpose of their responses to children, rather than trying to find a solution to what professionals deemed to be a problem. Marks *et al* (1995) support this view, suggesting that professionals, including SENCOs, are often expected to be able to reveal some sort of truth and thus answer any challenges other teachers are dealing with. Todd (2007) concludes that Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) is underpinned by sound principles of human rights for every child and that it could provide professionals with the opportunity to challenge practices that have become the norm. The SENCO role could be pivotal in enabling the principles that underpin ECM to be realised within schools, by acting as ‘catalysts, facilitators and managers and not..... remedial teachers [of children with SEN]’ (Mittler, 2000; 4) for various agencies to improve provision for all children. As Thomas and Loxley (2007) state, children encounter difficulties for a wide variety of reasons, situated both inside and outside of the classroom. Enabling the SENCO to be responsible for developing teaching and learning strategies across the school could enable all children to access learning in a variety of ways and develop inclusive provision for more and more children.

1.7 Conclusion

The role of the SENCO is defined within the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). However, as schools and parents become increasingly aware of SEN, expectations of the SENCO increase. Multi-agency working has contributed to this, as SENCOs, along with other school staff, are required to work with a wide range of specialists within the education profession, as well as those from social services and health organisations. Whilst these links are not new, very few roles within school have such a broad remit. Defining the role and keeping it manageable are two issues which are often raised by practicing SENCOs as areas for concern. Linked to this are issues about professional values and priorities within the role, such as the organisation of provision and support for children. Some of these issues will now be discussed, including academic debates that surround SEN within education and the development of the SENCO role within schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review is, according to Kumar (1999), to extend knowledge and understanding in a particular area of research and to enable the researcher to develop the focus for the research. By doing this, Denscombe (2002) claims that the research can then be justified as a worthwhile activity that will contribute to the field of study.

My own research focused on the role of the SENCO, with particular emphasis on how the role has been operationalized in comparison to guidance. It also explores this in the context of broader issues of inclusion, as well as the development of the SENCO role and identity as a leader or manager. The literature review presents an overview of policy guidelines relating to the role of SENCO. The themes of identity, leadership and management have been isolated and explored in the academic literature in order to illuminate understandings of the research question in this thesis.

2.1 Search strategies

Electronic databases and relevant academic journals, specifically those focusing on SEN and inclusion, were used to identify initial sources for the literature review, which in turn identified further sources, along with more general web based search engines. As special educational needs is such a broad topic that continues to be developed, explored and discussed within academic literature, texts were largely restricted to post 1994, not least because the original SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) was introduced in 1994, which formalised the SENCO role. It was essential to present a balanced view of current discussions and developments in the field so personal accounts of being a SENCO from e-

communities, such as the SENCO Forum, were consulted alongside academic sources and government policies.

2.2 The SENCO role

2.2.1 Historical perspectives

The original SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) formally required the role of the SENCO but the identification of a member of staff with specific responsibility for children with SEN was not new to education. Moss (1996) states that the role existed in the majority of schools before this time, in all but name. The introduction of the Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) was based on existing good practice seen in schools, with the Code formalising the role. Shuttleworth (2000) suggests that the SENCO role within the Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) enabled the role to move away from one focusing on teaching small groups of children, to include aspects of administration and management of provision. This development raised SEN to the level of a mainstream school issue that involved all teachers, instead of being the responsibility of special schools and specialist units. In order to understand this important change in provision, wider educational and social developments need to be considered.

Until the 18th century, no educational provision was made for children with any impairments or SEN. At this time, provision was introduced for children with specific impairments but this tended to consist of training rather than education. The dual system within the education system continued, almost unquestioned, until the Warnock Report in 1978. Warnock's Report and the subsequent 1981 Education Act were, according to Hall (1997), instrumental in that they reduced the focus on categories of impairment set out in the 1944 Education Act and instead focused on the generic concept of special educational needs, based on educational criteria, rather than medical diagnosis and definitions. Furthermore, the Warnock Report

(1978) introduced the notion that every teacher needed to have some knowledge about SEN and recognised that SEN can be caused by institutional arrangements as well as needs within the child.

Warnock (1978) and the following 1981 Education Act have, with the benefit of hindsight, been widely criticised but Warnock did raise awareness of SEN and it can now be seen as a mechanism that has moved the SEN and inclusion debate forward. Thomas and Vaughan (2004) highlight the support offered by the Warnock committee for a continuation of segregated provision for certain groups of children. The committee failed to note the negative impact of the limited educational and social opportunities pupils in special schools received, although at this time, many of those working within the education system did not recognise these limitations either and saw special education as a useful provision (Armstrong, 2003). Furthermore, the three caveats set out in the 1981 Act were, according to Thomas and Vaughan (2004), so prescriptive that they prevented many children accessing mainstream classes. However, it is important to note that whilst Warnock stated 20% of children might have SEN, 18% of them should be accessing education within mainstream provision, with only the remaining 2% requiring a place at special school. At this time, many of the children that would fall into the category of 18% were being identified as those pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and were placed in segregated provision. Furthermore, Armstrong (2003) claims that two important changes were implemented by the Act; it removed the assumption that any child with an impairment would necessarily also have educational needs and it defined SEN as a continuum of need that was not permanent, but one that could change over time and in different circumstances, suggesting an element of subjectivity in any definition of SEN. Armstrong (2003) claims that this went some way to

removing the labelling culture that once given, tended to remain with a child throughout their educational career and into adult life.

Numerous other education acts were introduced during the 1990s but Thomas and Vaughan (2004) refer to them as essentially lost opportunities that continued to limit opportunity for some children. In 1994, the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) was introduced following the 1993 Education Act and the SENCO role was formalised. However, Shuttleworth (2000) claims that the role quickly became an administrative task, rather than an opportunity to revolutionise practice for children, although Clough and Nutbrown (2003) state that the Code was simply meant to clarify the role as coordination rather than change practice. It is also important to remember that the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) expected all teachers to be teachers of children with SEN, not just the SENCO. From this perspective, the coordinator would not be based around teaching children with SEN, but supporting staff to work with pupils with SEN and the completion of administrative tasks relating to SEN provision. Recently, regulations for the SENCO role have been issued by the DCSF (2008), reflecting concerns about the status and role of the SENCO. The regulations specify that a SENCO must be a qualified teacher and be trained to carry out the role. Furthermore, they recommend that SENCOs be part of the school management team or be represented on this. Compared to previous recommendations made in both the 1994 and 2001 versions of the SEN Code of Practice, the current regulations highlight the need for training, knowledge and status as a leader for SENCOs. Further discussion about the regulations and the impact of these are explored later.

2.2.2 Models of disability

Having considered the historical developments that preceded the introduction of the role of SENCO, it is important to link this to other underpinning principles and debates surrounding SEN. The 1981 Education Act attempted to move away from the labels outlined in the 1944 Act, shifting the purpose of assessment from the diagnosis of impairment to the identification of SEN. However, according to Frederickson and Cline (2002) legislation, including the SEN and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) refers to both SEN and disability and this has helped to perpetuate the on-going segregation of disabled people from the non-disabled majority. Oliver (1996) notes that disabled people have tended to be the main recipients of special education but being disabled does not have to equate to having SEN. Therefore, definitions of the terms need to be reconsidered.

2.2.3 Disability

Whilst most people would no longer use the majority of terms outlined in the 1944 Education Act that, according to Wearmouth (2001) were linked to notions of handicap, the language surrounding disability continues to reveal some of the philosophies underpinning educational policy. Until recently disability was often used as a general term referring to a physical or sensory impairment that prevented an individual from participating in activities that were considered to be part of a typical life. Any distinction between disability and other related terms, such as impairment, handicap or SEN were not clearly articulated outside of academic debates (Mittler, 2000). Thus, disability was traditionally viewed from a medical perspective of diagnosis. This approach tended to focus on medical treatment and what Barton (1996: 61) describes as locating the 'source of disability in the individual's deficiency and her or his personal incapacities.' This is commonly referred to as the medical model approach (Clough and Corbett, 2000). From this perspective, any difficulties or barriers are a problem for that

individual, which has often meant that they are prevented from accessing all aspects of life and are forced to ‘negotiate different (less valued) social roles’ (Priestley, 2003: 12). Mittler (2000) suggests that this within- child approach reflects the drive towards integration, which followed the publication of the Warnock Report and 1981 Education Act. Armstrong (2003) and Mittler (2000) both highlight that whilst there was widespread rejection of the labels relating to different impairments, (although these were maintained in the 1981 Education Act, alongside a wider concept of need) certain groups, including parents and professionals within the education system, wanted their children to be given the label of SEN in order to either access additional resources or validate their role. Corbett (1996) suggests that this led to a change in terminology but retained the negative associations linked to special schools and disability.

2.2.4 Changing terminology

The traditional view of disability was initially challenged by disability activists, and can be compared to the challenges made by those representing other socially oppressed groups, such as women or those from minority ethnic groups. Thomas (2002: 39) quotes the now famous definition of disability from the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) that states:

Disability is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities.

This definition highlights the fact that society, both economically and socially, is designed by and for the non-disabled majority, and does not reflect the diverse needs of the population. Thus the definition of disability no longer refers to the impairment an individual has, but the social and attitudinal barriers they face living in today’s society. Thomas (2002: 38) states

the term could be rephrased as ‘disablism... as a type of social oppression.’ From this the social model of disability developed.

2.2.5 The social model

The social model approach highlighted society’s failure to respond effectively to the needs of disabled people, challenging the traditional approach of disability being based within the individual, with the emphasis on the individual changing and adapting to society. From this perspective, Rieser (2002) highlights the clear distinction between the impairment or medical condition they have been diagnosed with, and disability, being the physical and social barriers that prevent inclusion in day to day life. This move away from an integration model towards inclusion started, according to Clough and Corbett (2000), in the 1960s and became increasingly important in the education system. However, Gross and White (2003) highlight the complexities surrounding responses to disability within schools, including the paperwork generated when working in partnership with other agencies and possible legal challenges to any judgment made about children. This has led to many schools relying on the SENCO to retain responsibility for those children with any impairment regardless of the impact it has, or does not have, on their education (Liasidou and Svensson, 2012).

Another key element upon which the social model of disability is based links to an explanation of disability in practice. Having highlighted the social barriers that disabled people face, Johnstone (2001) claims that the social model demonstrates that exclusion is not necessary or essential, and it is quite possible to find examples of societies where people with impairments are not also disabled. Priestley (2003) states there are a range of social processes and forces that could be identified as a cause of disability but alternative solutions could address them. Furthermore this notion links to another key element of the social model

being that disabled people are an oppressed group rather than ‘victims of individual and tragic circumstances’ (Priestley, 2003:14). Oliver (1996) highlights that disability can no longer be a problem only for the individual with an impairment, excusing society from taking any steps to deal with the oppression faced, so that impairment is seen as a part of a diverse society and systems within that society are capable of responding to that diversity. According to Marks (1999) the social model emphasises a collective responsibility as a human rights issue, so that disabled people are able to participate in society, with the same rights, choices and opportunities that others have. Applying these principles to the role of SENCO, would see a move away from the notion of the SENCO as administrator to that of knowledgeable guide and advisor to other members of staff. However, whilst the revised version of the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) advocated this, the role of SENCO remained entrenched in administrative tasks (Cole, 2005b).

The social model has been hugely influential in the disability movement and is seen by many, such as Johnstone, (2001) Barnes and Mercer (2003) and Barton (1996) as the cornerstone upon which much political, academic and rights debates are based. However there are increasing numbers of critics, (Shakespeare, 2006, Oliver, 2004) of the social model approach. One of the most persistent criticisms is the clear distinction made between impairment and disability. French and Swain (2004) suggest that whilst the notion of disability being defined as a social construct is not problematic, it is impossible to define impairment purely on a biological, individual basis that is not influenced by social arrangements. Shakespeare (2006) uses the example of dyslexia only becoming an impairment when society demands a literate workforce to illustrate the obvious link between impairment and society. Research by Reeve (cited in Shakespeare, 2006) further highlights that whilst it is possible to make the two terms distinct theoretically, disabled people cannot

easily identify where impairment ends and disability starts in their experiences of day-to-day life. For SENCOs, the theoretical separation of the two issues is unlikely to be as clear cut in their working lives, leading to many retaining responsibility for children with an impairment even when they might not be judged to have SEN.

2.2.6 Special Educational Needs (SEN)

These on-going debates surrounding disability and impairment appear to have had only a limited impact in education. Rose (2003) suggests that notions of SEN and an individual deficit model still appear to dominate policy and practice, despite the various education acts appearing to support a move away from this. The author also highlights that teachers often raise issues concerned with addressing the needs of an individual, rather than considering the possible benefits for learning generally, reflecting a medical model approach to the situation. Furthermore, many government documents, including the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) refer to disability linked to impairment or learning difficulty and use SEN as a blanket term to encompass almost any needs a child may have.

Corbett (1996) highlights that the use of the term SEN helps to legitimise current responses which accepts certain groups of pupils being marginalised by educational policy and practice. Corbett (1996:3) suggests that SEN ‘implies dependency, inadequacy and unworthiness’ and needs to be removed from the education language if diversity and difference are to be valued. Corbett (1996) and Hall (1997) both highlight the negative impact that this type of language has had, not only on the individual, but also society’s perceptions of disability and those working with these children, including the SENCO. As Mittler (2000) states the use of this type of language helps to maintain segregation and discrimination as society tries to move

towards inclusion. He advocates using language that challenges the systems rather than language that labels individual.

In recent years different ‘categories’ of need have led to even greater debate around the dichotomy between SEN and disability. Mittler (2000) mentions Attention Deficit Hyper Activity (ADHD) and autism as examples of impairments that do not currently have precise medical aetiology but are often treated by doctors using drug therapies. Additionally, teachers, parents and other professionals often need these definitions, so that they can access additional support for the child within the classroom. These types of conditions draw on both medical and social model approaches. A medical approach is needed because diagnosis is often required to access treatment and resources that are additional to what is usually available to children in mainstream settings. In contrast, the social model approach would identify barriers that such conditions can cause but at the same time recognises barriers created by the current learning environment and modifies these to enable the child to participate. According to Ainscow (1999:218) in an inclusive education system, these responses would be possible as inclusion is ‘dependent on continuous pedagogical and organisational development.’ Within this the SENCO could act as a knowledgeable guide to school staff, as suggested by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). The role would then be about teaching and learning to support the development of inclusive practice, and not just administration.

2.3 The role of the SENCO and inclusion

The role of SENCO is linked to the development of inclusive practice in the same way that every teacher is expected to respond to the needs of the children in their class, identified in the National Curriculum Inclusion statement (QCA, 1999). Furthermore, the Code of

Practice (DfES, 2001b) outlines the importance of SENCOs developing provision for pupils with SEN, which would enable inclusion to occur, although it does not state that the provision itself should be inclusive. Carrington and Elkins (2002:54), suggest that to develop a successful model of inclusive practice, the SENCO should be

collaborating with a range of staff on professional development issues....From behaviour management through to in class support for teachers for showing them strategies.

Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) support this view, suggesting a move away from administration and support for certain children, to an advisor that enables learning and teaching to be flexible, with a focus on systems in education, rather than individual needs. However, whilst Brodin and Lindstrand's (2007) views reflect that of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), Mittler (2000) suggests that there is still an expectation within schools that SENCOs are teachers for those pupils that cannot access learning in mainstream classrooms.

In recent years, successive governments have taken increasing control of almost all aspects of the national education system, for example, through the introduction of the National Curriculum (QCA, 1999), as well as the use of performance tables and Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) as a mechanism that aimed to raise standards and enable various interested groups, such as parents, to compare the performance of schools. A number of authors, including Parsons (1999) and Slee (1998) have argued that the marketization of the education system has led to a situation where any students that challenge the system in some way, for example, by needing additional resources from staff or the budget, or judged to have a negative impact on the schools results, are likely to be seen as less attractive to schools, making inclusion harder to achieve. Slee (1998) suggests that the focus on narrow measurements such as performance tables requires students and teachers to aim for

assimilation, in terms of outcomes and results, regardless of individual needs, requirements or desires. This for Slee, (1998:178) reduces education to an 'agreed basic knowledge and skills'. The SENCO role is often specifically linked only to those children who fail to reach the expected targets; either set by the Local Authority or expected norms for children of a particular age. The introduction of Contextually Added Value information (CAV) (DES, 2007) has meant that school data now takes into account a number of factors that have been shown to have an impact on pupil achievement, including 'special educational needs, first language and income deprivation.' Whilst there is a greater emphasis on progression, it has been argued by Cole (2005b) that the role has become devalued because of the SENCOs association with groups of pupils that are sometimes perceived negatively, that do not easily fit into existing school policies and cultures, and show much lower levels of progress.

Whilst the SENCO role might focus exclusively on SEN, Carrington and Elkins (2002) highlight the need for the school ethos to value inclusion, which is then supported and nurtured in classrooms and actively put into practice, alongside achievement. Research by Ainscow *et al* (2006) claims that many teachers are not sure what inclusion looks like at a practical level, when planning and delivering lessons. Responses then tend to be located within existing practice, for example, the use of TAs to support particular groups of pupils in lessons, rather than changing planned activities and learning opportunities. However, Ainscow *et al* (2006) advocate the approach outlined above, whereby schools reflect critically on the underlying aims of their teaching and pupils and then respond, rather than starting with the NC requirements before considering the needs of the children.

This notion of a move away from the traditional deficit model in SEN that places the child as the problem, links closely to the model of education advocated by Wedell (2005:3) that

recognises both the diversity of students and a curriculum that includes ‘elements of skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes,’ thus making educational achievement about much more than scores in national tests. This type of approach would allow schools to focus on the needs of the pupils in their classrooms, which can be very different from the needs of the NC, such as social and behavioural needs, as well as developing what could be termed academic skills and achievement that specifically relate to the needs of the children. As Wedell (2005) highlights, this type of approach has enabled schools to develop inclusive practice and has had positive effects on both learning and relationships within schools. Furthermore, greater involvement of the SENCO at the level of classroom practice could further enhance inclusive practice and, according to Kugelmass (2003) develop skills of all practitioners involved.

2.4 Roles, responsibilities and influences on the SENCO

2.4.1 The SENCO role: policy definitions

The original Code of Practice (DfE, 1994: 9) states that ‘in all mainstream schools a designated teacher should be responsible for:

The day to day operation of the school’s SEN policy
Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
Coordinating provision for children with special educational needs
Maintaining the school’s SEN register and overseeing the records of all pupils with special educational needs
Liaising with parents of children with special educational needs
Contributing to the in-service training of staff
Liaising with external agencies including the educational psychology service and other support agencies, medical and social services and voluntary bodies

The revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b:50) outlines the following areas as key responsibilities for SENCOs in a primary school:

Overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
Coordinating provision for children with special educational needs
Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
Managing learning support assistants
Overseeing the records of all children with special educational needs
Liaising with parents of children with special educational needs
Contributing to the in-service training of staff
Liaising with external agencies including the LEA's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies

Various authors, including Griffiths (2001) and Jones, Jones and Szwed (2001) have highlighted the essentially management nature of the role in that the majority of roles outlined above revolve around ensuring children receive the support required. Supporting and leading other members of staff on professional development are mentioned, but Garner (2001) suggests that under the original Code of Practice (DfE, 1994), the huge amount of administration required by the role effectively prevented SENCOs from taking on this leadership role.

Within the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b: 51) the leadership element of the role is stated as:

In terms of responsibility the SENCO role is at least equivalent to that of curriculum, literacy or numeracy coordinator. ... Many schools find it effective for the SENCO to be a member of the senior leadership team.

Very similar definitions of the role relating to Early Years and secondary settings are also outlined in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). However, as various authors (Szwed, 2007; Garner, 2001; Rose, 2003) have highlighted, the role may be defined quite clearly in the Code

of Practice (DfES, 2001b) but the interpretation within individual schools varies considerably, impacting on what is expected of a SENCO. Furthermore, although the Code of Practice, (DfES, 2001b) refers to the SENCO in a leadership role, it does not explain how this relates to practice or how this might be implemented in schools.

Recent government documentation (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) has emphasised the increasing gap between policy and practice for this role and that SENCOs had essentially lost any strategic leadership role, despite what the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) suggests. Furthermore, the SENCO Update (2008) suggests that the introduction of Teaching and Learning (TLR) payments has led to further downgrading of the role because as the above definitions demonstrate, the SENCO role does not include any reference to teaching and learning, only training of staff, coordinating provision and record keeping. Regulations issued by the DCSF (2008) stress the need for the SENCO to be a qualified teacher with additional training to carry out the role, and the National Award for all new SENCOs was introduced. Drafts of these regulations had required the SENCO to be a part of the school leadership team (SLT), but following consultation, this requirement was altered, so that if the SENCO was not part of SLT, a champion of SEN would represent them. This interpretation could mean that the role still retains a focus on coordination and not leadership or teaching and learning. Hallett and Hallett (2010) compare these requirements to other roles within school and note that the only other role that requires statutory qualification is that of head teacher. The authors claim that the changes support the view of SENCO as working with individual pupils but also as an agent for change across school, at a strategic level. This would mean that the SENCO would influence the learning opportunities of all pupils, whilst maintaining a focus of the specific needs of individuals.

2.4.2 SENCO as leader or manager

The above definitions of the SENCO role, from the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) make reference to the role having both management and leadership elements. Bush and Bell (2002: 3) claim that leadership is about ‘vision, mission and purpose coupled with a capacity to inspire others to work towards the achievement of these aims’ whereas management is concerned with the implementation of the vision at a much more practical level. Day *et al* (2000: 17) support this view claiming that leadership is ‘strategic’ whereas management is ‘operational.’ Whilst much of the research into the role of the SENCO (Cole, 2005b; Gross and White, 2003) suggests that a leadership approach would be beneficial to both staff and students, research by Szwed (2007) suggests that SENCOs continue to spend significant amounts of time fulfilling roles that are operational rather than strategic, including paperwork and completing forms. Szwed (2007) concludes that this then limits opportunities for SENCOs to work at a strategic level and that a SENCO is more likely to be part of middle management (Layton, 2005) This supports Shuttleworth’s (2000) view about the role being administrative rather than leadership, even after changes to the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and other pertinent guidance documents.

Busher and Harris (2000) described the role of SENCO as diffuse in that it is cross – curricular and needs to involve a number of staff, many of whom are likely to have additional roles and responsibilities in other subject areas. One of the challenges this presents is that the SENCO cannot be responsible for every aspect of SEN provision and that managing it needs to be distributed to a team of staff across the school. Blandford and Gibson (2000: 13) support this view stating that ‘SEN should have a figurehead, a visionary providing leadership, but he/she should not necessarily be the sole manager of all SEN issues within the school,’ an approach also advocated by Norwich (2010) who questioned whether it is realistic

for one person to be responsible for so many tasks. Blandford and Gibson (2000) use the term leadership to refer to the development and guidance of the subject area, making a clear distinction between that and management. Being part of the leadership team or having the support of senior leaders has been identified as a key component in raising the status of SEN and the SENCO within schools (Cole, 2005b). Layton (2005) takes this further, suggesting that systemic change is needed, with the SENCO being empowered to develop inclusive practice within schools and thus being seen as a key part of any school leadership team in the same way as core curriculum co-ordinators.

School structures have tended to follow a traditional model of leadership with the head teacher as a leader. Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004:133) define this as leadership due to 'behaviour rather than action, as having to do with persons rather than ideas; and the emphasis on bureaucratic.' This suggests that the position of head teacher has traditionally been the pinnacle of a hierarchical structure for staff staff, with the head teacher taking responsibility for much of the decision making processes within all areas of the school. However, as schools become increasingly complex in terms of organisation, structure, staffing and students, it is questionable whether this traditional approach to leadership is suitable for schools. Thus the notion of distributed leadership has become increasingly popular. Harris (2001: 11) defines distributed leadership as:

[distributed leadership] incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school who work at guiding and mobilising staff... and implies inter – dependency rather than dependency.

This approach mirrors Blandford and Gibson's (2000) approach to leadership with a figurehead working with others to develop the subject area, rather than a single person completing all tasks related to the area. The fundamental difference between the traditional

approach to leadership and distributed leadership is that the latter approach advocates a shared responsibility rather than responsibility being assumed through the position of head teacher or subject leader. In this way, SENCOs would maintain overall responsibility for the SEN department, but also actively involve others in issues relating to SEN. Moller and Eggen (2005) advocate collaboration and Davies and Davies (2004: 32) stress the ability to 'make a vision real' as two key elements of distributed leadership. Through this, other members of staff could participate with the SENCO, making clearer links between learning in their own subject area and SEN. This in turn could then support all staff to develop inclusive practice. Furthermore, by becoming actively involved in the decision making processes, staff can be seen as part of the community of a school rather than reacting to directions from a leader. This is particularly relevant to issues related to SEN as Jordan *et al* (2009) suggested that many teachers feel that they lack the necessary skills to work in inclusive classrooms and can see SEN as an additional responsibility that is outside their role, despite the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) stating that children with SEN are the responsibility of every teacher. Davies and Davies (2004) believe that through collaboration and support, staff can be motivated to do much more than they thought possible, as this raises their levels of understanding and they can see the potential benefits for all pupils, not just those with SEN. Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) suggest that this approach enables schools to use the expertise from all involved parties that will then enable continuous improvement in teaching and learning for all pupils.

The TTA (1998, p. 5) supported the notion of the SENCO as manager and leader and outlined 'leading and managing' as one of four key areas for a SENCO. However, Rayner *et al* (2002) highlight that although there are a wide range of training opportunities open to SENCOs, there are very few in terms of leadership and management even though national

guidelines are stressing this element of their role. Moss (1996) suggests that the SENCO needs to be able to positively influence the outcomes for children in the school, be an effective communicator with various groups and be able to identify and support staff training and development. This approach reflects some of the principles of a leadership role that are part of the SENCO Regulations (DCSF, 2008). The guidelines have also made training for all new SENCOs compulsory, so that SENCOs have the opportunity to develop the skills needed to at least coordinate the SEN department. Expertise within a subject area and the ability to share this and work with colleagues to develop it has been recognised as an effective way of increasing the status of a subject within school (Turner, 2006; Harris *et al*, 2001). Professional qualifications would be one way of establishing the contribution a SENCO could make to whole school development, but transferring this into classroom practice is not straightforward and there is a need for others to be active in this transfer (Harris *et al*, 2001).

Developing the SENCO role as a leader could also enable schools to support the development of inclusive practices. Dyson and Millward (2000) highlight the fact that schools have faced the dilemma of trying to value students' differences and diversity whilst still responding to the needs of individuals if they are to access all aspects of the curriculum. The authors highlight the dichotomy between inclusive education for all, regardless of need and the substantive differences between students within one classroom. This difference is fundamental to any discussion regarding SEN provision as it raises questions about how teachers address individual needs within a mainstream setting without disadvantaging others and using limited resources effectively. As Dyson and Millward (2000: 162) state 'student differences have not disappeared, they have simply been accommodated' and staff clearly need to receive training if they are to balance inclusive practices with ensuring all pupils can

and do access the curriculum. This also reflects differences previously highlighted between different models of SEN/ disability.

2.4.3 The role of SENCO as a coordinator

Whilst the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) outlines some key roles that the SENCO has to complete, how the role is implemented and executed within each school varies considerably (Mackenzie, 2007; Cowne, 2005). However, SENCOs are not the only co-ordinators in schools and comparisons with other subject co-ordinators can contribute to understandings of some of the challenges and complexities faced by SENCOs.

The revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) makes specific reference to the SENCO being part of a school's leadership team whilst at the same time maintaining many of the functional aspects of the role such as maintaining paperwork records. Bush (2008) categorises these two aspects of subject leadership as either strategic or operational and suggests that by including both elements of leadership, the role will become confusing and complicated. Furthermore, the tasks outlined within the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) do not make any specific mention of the need for a sound understanding of issues related to SEN, whereas there is an expectation, particularly in secondary schools but also increasingly in primary schools, in core subjects at least, for subject leaders to be an expert in the field who can offer support and guidance to other staff on subject related issues (Wise, 2000). By expert, it is likely that the individual will have studied the subject to at least undergraduate degree level, as well as completing training and professional development related to the co-ordination of the subject within school, and it is possible to do all of this within the field of SEN, including undergraduate study and professional training. By prioritising leadership and management rather than subject knowledge, the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) could

inadvertently be pushing the SENCO role towards what Wise (2000: 33) terms as 'administrative convenience' in that the role enables the department to function and the school to address the particular needs of some children, but without the benefit of an expert in SEN, who would be able to develop an SEN department identity and position within the school.

Although the role of SENCO can be difficult to define, the role of any subject co-ordinator within a school is made up of a variety of activities including teacher, consultant and manager. Even before the original SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) formalised the role of SENCO, Dyson (1990) raised concerns that the role was untenable because of the changes that the education system was undergoing at the time. Dyson (1990) suggested that SENCOs would be caught between a system of SEN that remained focused on an individual deficit model of SEN and policy developments that advocated inclusion. Dyson (1990) offered an alternative role to that of SENCO, an Effective Learning Co-ordinator (ELC) that focused on the development of effective learning and teaching strategies for all children and not just those judged to have SEN. This approach, according to Dyson (1990) would enable the SENCO to develop a role that was not based on SEN in a deficit way, but as a whole school development issue that enabled all pupils to access the learning opportunities presented in the classroom.

The debate presented by Dyson (1990) explored the two very different sides to the developing SENCO role; either as a manager of SEN provision or a coordinator with a teaching and learning focus. Even after two versions of the SEN Code of Practice, the SENCO role remains unclear, caught between these two very broad definitions (Cowne, 2005). SENCOs themselves report that the original Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) led to the

role revolving around administrative tasks and this, coupled with academic debates regarding the philosophical or ideological underpinnings of SEN within the education system did little to support the developing SENCO role (Wedell, 2004). Gross (2000), revisiting some of the principles put forward by Dyson, again suggested strengthening the teaching and learning element of the SENCO role. Wedell (2004) also noted that SENCOs were keen to remain linked to the teaching and learning element of their role, with a particular focus on pupils, rather than some of the managerial aspects of the SENCO post. Dwyfor Davies *et al* (1999) noted that SENCOs are often very passionate about their role and demonstrate a genuine personal commitment to the pupils they work with, often going above and beyond typical professional expectations of other subject coordinators, such as the amount of time spent on SENCO tasks and involvement with parents and other external agencies. These findings suggest that within the SENCO role a commitment to care for and about the pupils within the classroom is needed alongside a commitment to teaching (Dwyfor Davies *et al*, 1999).

Comparisons between the role of SENCO and other subject co-ordinators suggests that the SENCO role is diffuse in that even when it is headed by a subject specialist, it has to involve a range of other non-specialist staff and is implemented in a variety of different ways in different classrooms, making it much harder to develop a subject identity (Busher and Harris, 2000). Whilst other curriculum areas within school can draw on a wide range of academic material, research and subject matter on which to develop a shared vision for the subject, SEN as an academic subject is still a relatively new area to study and it has yet to establish itself as a valuable subject within its own right (Linton, 1998). This in itself is not problematic but it could inhibit the development of a subject identity to which colleagues want to belong (Busher and Harris 2000). Furthermore, as a co-ordinator for a particular subject, a teacher will focus on developing the subject area to enable pupil performance to

increase in that subject, whereas the SENCO remains entrenched in responding to the needs of individual pupils in many subject areas. Busher and Harris (2000) suggest that this lack of a shared identity and vision for SEN can make it harder to form a team around the subject that would support its on-going development.

Comparisons with other co-ordinator positions offers some insights into the challenges faced by the SENCO, and research into middle management can enhance understanding further. Middle managers are expected to carry out increasingly diverse and multiple tasks, and are often in the position of implementing change as directed from senior leadership or national policy changes (Bennett *et al* 2003). Blandford and Gibson (2000) suggest that with regards to SEN, the managerial element can quickly become overwhelming and the SENCO is put in the position of having a post that is made up of three facets; manager, administrator and teacher. Given enough time, the role would be manageable but the SENCO also has tasks that are beyond these categories and would usually fall to members of a school's senior leadership team (Layton, 2005). These include managing non-teaching staff, managing a budget and working with external agencies. Unlike other middle leaders, SENCOs have to work with, manage and try to influence almost all members of staff, including those above, below and at the same level as them in the traditional hierarchical structure of a school (Busher, 2000). Furthermore, Blandford and Gibson (2000) point out that many SENCOs do report a lack of time to fulfil the role as well as having a lack of status within school and adequate training to really guide and develop the SEN area. Inadequate training not only impedes the SENCO in completing tasks related to SEN but it also prevents the SENCO from developing the subject area in school so that it is seen by others as a valuable subject in its own right that can contribute to the overall development of effective teaching and learning for all pupils (Siskin, 1997).

2.4.4 The development of a SENCO identity

The role of SENCO is often acquired by the person applying for the role. For a lot of SENCOs, the post is held alongside that of teacher or another school based role (Mackenzie, 2007). Exploring the personal and professional identities that teachers construct and reconstruct when they become SENCO suggests that teacher identity is an on-going process of redefinition, through the interaction with culture, personal and professional ideologies and the influences of colleagues at work, particularly those perceived to have more power, who can and do exert pressure on other members of staff (Zembylas, 2004).

O'Connor (2008:118) defines identity as 'the type of person an individual is recognised as being in a given context' and encompasses a person's professional philosophy and their actions within that sphere. The concept of teacher can be defined with broadly accepted descriptions of what a teacher is and does but there is increasing recognition of what teachers themselves find important as being another element to the formation of a professional identity (Beijaard *et al*, 2004). Teaching is fundamentally a person based career, in that teachers are expected to interact, nurture and care for the students they work with, whilst balancing the desire to care with the need to maintain professional relationships with pupils or students (O'Connor, 2008). Care in this context can be seen as a sense of responsibility for the learners within a classroom and a reflection of the teacher's active involvement with the situation (Vogt, 2002). Thus, both professional philosophies and personal belief systems interact to inform the way in which a teacher works within the classroom setting and how they create their professional identity. Beijaard *et al* (2000) suggest that historically, a great deal of emphasis was placed on a teacher's knowledge of a particular subject area, but that in recent years, the notion of transmission of knowledge has been recognised as only one part of a teacher's repertoire of skills. Instead, subject knowledge is needed alongside

understandings about effective pedagogy, that would enable teachers to modify learning experiences within the classroom, so that all children can learn and progress. Beijaard *et al* (2000) conclude that strong subject knowledge and an ability to respond to students is what most teachers would aim to have, although responding to diverse needs remains a concern for many practitioners.

Responding to diverse needs can be seen in the list of typical SENCO responsibilities outlined in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), but this could be achieved through liaising with and advising fellow teachers rather than actually working with pupils with SEN. This could be one way to move the SENCO role towards a whole school, leadership position, which is relevant to all staff and pupils. An approach like this would also challenge the perception of the SENCO, defined by Crisp *et al* (2006: 600) as ‘a minority group of teachers working with an undervalued minority group of students.’ Crisp *et al* (2006) go on to point out that a person’s identity is influenced by the groups that they belong to whereas the groups that a person feels they do not belong to rarely have any impact on personal perceptions and sense of self- worth. They suggest that the SENCO can be a professionally isolated role which not only limits the influence a SENCO can have over whole school development issues but also leads to a lack of commitment from other members of staff in school as they do not have a shared sense of belonging or responsibility for SEN. Redefining SEN within school and placing the SENCO at the heart of teaching and learning could increase the sense of being part of an SEN team for the SENCO. It would also offer a chance to develop more inclusive practices through focusing on best practice within the classroom, rather than the traditional individual deficit model of SEN that pathologises pupils through identification of a particular need, rather than developing alternative approaches to learning (Skidmore, 2004). For SENCOs the current approach can create a tension in their identity as a teacher, between

what many consider to be an essential aim of education (inclusion) and the expectations of colleagues and policy expectations that focus on achievement in very limited ways (Jones, 2004).

One way to strengthen the identity of the SENCO and SEN department within a school would be to ensure that SENCOs are trained to carry out the role. Dyson and Millward (2000) noted that they are likely to receive brief courses related to the subject area, such as day long training days via the LA, but are much less likely to receive extended training in SEN issues and many SENCOs do not regard themselves as SEN specialists. Current government guidelines require all newly appointed SENCOs to complete post graduate training specifically related to the role, (DCSF, 2008) but the influence of this is yet to be seen in the role and many practising SENCOs will not complete this. Research by Pearson (2005) suggests that significant numbers of students on Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) training courses had very little knowledge of inclusion or SEN and their views often reflected medical model disablist thinking. The regulations for SENCOs (DCSF, 2008) valued the experience of being a SENCO, highlighting that training is a key factor if a new SENCO is to be successful in the role. Busher and Harris (2000) identify subject knowledge as one aspect of developing a subject area but developing SEN provision would be challenging if SENCOs continue to be appointed without any real understanding of SEN and inclusion as an academic discipline, which in turn could also impact on the development of a secure SENCO identity.

The isolation felt by many SENCOs has been recorded through various studies (Crisp *et al*, 2006; Lewis and Ogilvie, 2002). SENCOs have found support through networking with other SENCOs, either in person through LA cluster meetings or via electronic sources such as

the SENCO Forum. Both of these provide opportunities for SENCOs to discuss professional skills, challenges and development, as well as offering informal support to each other and can be seen to offer SENCOs the team needed to develop a sense of professional belonging and identity, outlined by Jones (2004). Moving the SENCO from a management role to a leadership role, which acts as a knowledgeable guide advising teachers on effective teaching and learning strategies for other members of staff could enable the development of a supportive network around the SENCO within their own school and create a SENCO identity that is part of a school wide team, rather than a marginalised individual that is often perceived differently by other teachers (Jones, 2004). Furthermore Avramidis *et al* (2000) and Ekins (2012b) noted that for many teachers, SEN is still seen as separate from their responsibilities, resulting in the SENCO being overly responsible for any issues. By sharing this responsibility, teachers would be forced into playing an active role within SEN and many of the managerial tasks that can overwhelm the SENCO would be completed by others in the team, with support from the SENCO when needed, whilst the SENCO retains responsibility for subject specific responsibilities, such as statementing (Norwich, 2010).

2.4.5 Theorising the role of the SENCO

Although the role of the SENCO has been studied since being formally identified in the Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) the changing role of the SENCO has not been theorised significantly until recently. Much of this research suggests that the role varies considerably between schools and local authorities. Szwed (2007) and Crowther *et al* (1997) stress the diversity of tasks that constitute the role with Szwed (2007) highlighting that this is often more challenging for primary based SENCOs, as they tend to maintain a full teaching timetable alongside the SENCO role. Pearson (2010) points out the consistent recognition of the problematic nature of the role linked to some of the conflicting demands placed on SENCOs.

Norwich (2010) notes that the role originated from practical requirements; schools needed to develop provision for pupils with SEN. Since then a number of studies have explored the role of the SENCO. A report by the NUT (2004) examined the impact of the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and highlighted the increase in workload for SENCOs and the somewhat limited opportunities SENCOs had to manage provision. Szwed (2007) and Pearson (2010) also noted that membership to the senior leadership teams was not automatic and wide variations in role definition existed between schools. The issues above can be seen to reflect some of the practical concerns from which the role arose. However, a number of authors (Norwich, 2010; Kearns 2005) have outlined theoretical approaches to enable greater understanding of what it means to be a SENCO and how this can impact on the role at a strategic level.

Szwed (2007) and Abbott (2007) found that for many SENCOs in primary schools, the role is too bureaucratic, leading to overload, as they attempt to maintain paperwork related to SEN. Kearns (2005: 138) describes SENCOs approaching the role this way as ‘arbiters’ as they focus on the administrative tasks. Hallett and Hallett (2010) suggest that this then limits their ability to focus on strategic elements of the role, as they complete the many procedural tasks outlined in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). The National Standards for SENCOs (TDA, 2009) outline a number of roles that SENCOs could be expected to perform, including the coordination of provision, leading, developing and supporting colleagues and collaboration with parents. These diverse tasks demand very diverse skills within a SENCO (Pearson, 2010), highlighting the complexities surrounding the role, leading Norwich (2010) to question whether it is realistic for all these responsibilities to be allocated to one role. He highlights what appear to be significant differences in expectations between the SENCO role and that of other middle leaders in relation to what is required for SEN. Rayner (2007)

argues that most coordinators develop their subject for all school staff, providing schemes of work and curriculum knowledge, which class teachers use and develop within their own lessons. This contrasts to what many SENCOs do, which Rayner (2007) describes as coordinating teaching and learning across all subject areas. The scope for the role is potentially vast and might explain why SENCOs revert to a paper based role in order to try and manage it. Furthermore, by adopting the arbiter role, SENCOs are, according to Hallett and Hallett (2010) simply carrying out a role that is often expected by other colleagues, in which they are absolved of responsibility for learners with SEN by passing this back to the SENCO, rather than working with the SENCO to identify possible solutions.

The issue of what the SENCO can do or should be doing links to the development of specialist skills and knowledge a SENCO needs in order to fulfil the role successfully (Pearson, 2010). Norwich (2010) divides this issue into two areas; whether there is a need for specialist coordination that is additional to the general coordination of school provision at middle management level and whether this should be confined to SEN. A specialist coordinator might be required if there is a need for specific skills or knowledge within the role that others could not be expected to have if they were not an expert. Norwich (2007) argues that subject coordinators could contribute to the development of colleagues' skills in relation to SEN issues within their own subject areas, removing one of the functions of the role from the SENCO. This links to the notion of SENCO as 'collaborator' (Kearns, 2005: 142) which 'focuses on staff development and curriculum developments for diverse pupils'. Using this type of approach would encourage staff to see SEN as a school wide issue and enable the distribution of some tasks from SENCOs, and enable the SENCO to focus on strategic developments within the SEN department. Additionally, it could contribute to a

move away from a focus on SEN with teachers looking at learning for all pupils (Lloyd, 2008).

However, Norwich (2010) points out that it might not be possible to completely delete the SENCO role due to the specific knowledge needed to complete certain SENCO tasks, for example, liaising with external agencies and completing paperwork for statements. Whilst other members of staff do work with external agencies, much of this knowledge cannot be classed as generic and specific skills are required to complete related tasks. Kearns (2005: 141) suggests that some SENCOs approach the role through procedure as an 'auditor'; they focus on identification and assessment, recognising the legal processes open to parents and the need for schools to make effective use of assessment and resources available to the child. Other SENCOs in the same study identified their role through the professional qualifications they had achieved. These 'expert' (Kearns, 2005:144) SENCOs expected to have a strategic role, which involved providing training for teachers and whole school development, whilst maintaining an interest and involvement with individual pupils. Working with individuals or small groups of children has been identified as a key component of the role by some SENCOs (Dwyfor Davis *et al*, 1999). Kearns (2005:139) describes this group as 'rescuers' and argues that many SENCOs identifying with this approach are being forced to take on more strategic roles, including staff development, even though they would prefer to remain in a role that focused on working with pupils. All of these approaches reflect the unique elements of the SENCO role, mentioned by Norwich (2010) and highlight how diverse the role can be, even when it has developed into a particular specialism. Norwich (2010) and Pearson (2010) also noted that many SENCOs are committed to issues of SEN and inclusion would not want to relinquish all roles, but instead make the role manageable, with a focus on strategic developments that directly impact on pupil experiences. By retaining the SENCO role, the

designated person could focus on specific issues of need. However, supporters of radical inclusion (Corbett, 1996; Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2009) reject all notion of need due to the negative association with medical model approaches.

Issues relating to labelling children (Marks, 1999) with SEN are not new. A common criticism of labelling is that it stigmatised those with the label, and the label becomes the focus of any intervention, rather than recognition of an individual's strengths or challenges. Ekins (2012a) suggests that pupils are complex regardless of whether or not they have SEN, a view reflected in the recent green paper, *Support and Aspiration* (DfE 2011). Rix (2008) and Norwich (2010) both support an approach that retains the concept of need, where individuals' strengths and difficulties are recognised. Within this, the SENCO role might focus upon the development of pedagogic needs of children, moving the role towards that outlined by Dyson (1990) and more recently Pearson (2008a). This would start to disassociate the SENCO from a specific sub-group of children and enable the SENCO to focus on promoting effective provision for any child.

2.5 The SENCO and the ethic of care

The role of the SENCO is entrenched in relationships with pupils rather than being based around subject knowledge or academic study (Busher and Harris, 2000). Furthermore, much of the research (Dwyfor Davies *et al*, 1999, Wedell, 2004, Kearns, 2005) suggests that SENCOs are keen to maintain and develop the working relationships they have with pupils and their families. This links to the ethic of care because as Cole (2005b) suggested, SENCOs were utilising the core principles of developing and sustaining personal and professional relationships, so that pupils, staff and parents could work more effectively together. The role of the SENCO is different from other subject co-ordinators in that it is not based upon a

curriculum subject. Whilst other coordinators within school, such as a literacy or numeracy coordinator, have an academic subject upon which to base their work, the SENCO role is based on pupils, and this has in turn produced academic research and study. SENCOs often have knowledge about SEN and various impairments their work is likely to start from the needs of an individual, rather than the requirements of curriculum knowledge. From this perspective, decisions about SEN have to highlight the person, rather than an abstract set of rules or judgements, such as those outlined in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and cannot only be related to subject issues such as covering the specified curriculum content.

2.5.1 What is the ethic of care?

Tronto (in Day, 2000) stipulates that the ethic of care is a model of moral development where notions of care are highly valued, rather than the traditional view of a low status, female dominated activity, rooted within the personal spheres of the family. For Tronto (in Day, 2000: 105) care comprises of ‘everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. Our world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment.’ Thus, an ethic of care goes beyond the personal relationships and settings into formal social and political institutions within society.

The ethic of care was initially developed by Gilligan (1993) in response to what she believed to be significant weaknesses in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg (1984) had developed a system to measure moral maturity, which produced results that suggested females were less morally mature than their male counterparts. Gilligan (1993:18) noted that within the research participants used by Kohlberg to develop his theory of moral reasoning ‘females simply do not exist’ as Kohlberg’s work was based on a study that used eighty four boys and no females. From this research, Kohlberg (1984) developed a six stage sequence of

moral development that he claimed to be universally applicable to all people. However, Gilligan (1993) highlighted the fact that members of the groups that were excluded from the initial sample, including women, rarely reached the higher levels of the sequence, often rising no higher than the stage that focuses on interpersonal relationships and working with others. Kohlberg (1984) justified this lack of progression by stating that it was due to women's lack of experience outside the home. In the home, it is acceptable to base moral decision making around building relationships, whereas outside the home, effective decision making, according to Kohlberg (in Gilligan 1993) should reflect society's rules and universal principles of justice. Gilligan (1993) suggested that this approach is contradictory in that the traits that are most associated with women; kindness and caring are then used to identify them as deficient when related to moral reasoning.

In response to the ethic of justice developed by Kohlberg, Gilligan (1993) developed the ethic of care. Within this she noted that men tend to approach moral decision making from a justice perspective that is based around principles of individual rights, fairness and autonomy whereas women tend to consider the various competing responsibilities they have, such as mother, wife or friend. The ethic of care aims to sustain and develop relationships, focusing on the needs of others and is context –bound, rather than aiming to base the decision making process on abstract notions of rights and rules. (Issues relating to gender, the ethic of care and the SENCO role are discussed later, chapter 2.5.3.) As Gilligan (1993: 19) states

problems arise from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract.

In this respect, identity is based on the relationships and attachments that they create and maintain, whereas male identity is based around individuation. For SENCOs, the role often encompasses issues of caring for pupils that other members of a school's teaching staff did

not consider to be a part of their role. This might include working with external agencies such as social workers, which start from principles of nurturing the whole child, and not just their educational achievement.

Within current western society, principles of independence, self-sufficiency, self-interest and rights are often stressed above interdependence and support from a wider community (Code, 1991). The ethic of justice reflects this, with the purpose of human life to be the realisation of individuality (Verkerk, 2005). The influence of this can be seen in the education system in the United Kingdom, with its clear focus on personal achievement, standards and competition between individual pupils and schools. The SENCO has to work within this system that advocates personal achievement in the form of exam results, often in competition with other pupils. At the same time, they are promoting inclusion which revolves around the recognition of diversity within the pupil population as a positive element of a school's society, in which all pupils should be able to learn and participate from a range of different starting points, towards equally diverse ends (Drudy, 2008). The ethic of care is underpinned by notions of connectivity and interdependence on others. Through this development of empathetic and mutually supporting relationships, both the individual and larger group of which they are a part, benefit as well as developing an autonomous self. Autonomy is thus developed through relationships with others, rather than separating ourselves from others (Held, 1993). In some ways, the SENCO role can already be seen to be putting some of these principles from the ethic of care into action. For example, the SENCO will regularly work with pupils, parents and external agencies in an interdependent relationship through which the pupils and those involved benefit on both personal and professional levels (McKenzie and Blenkinsop, 2006). Furthermore, the SENCO role can be seen to be well placed to challenge the current focus on standards, and to develop a school curriculum and teaching methods that

encourage pupils to achieve, but that also fosters compassion, honesty, responsibility and respect between pupils through inclusive practice (Carlsson-Paige and Lantieri, 2005).

With an increasing awareness of various inequalities within the education system for certain groups of students, even with the notion of inclusion being a key principle within government policy, the SENCO could have an important role to play in developing staff skills and understanding of what an inclusive classroom and school could look like (Tilstone, 2003). This not only offers an opportunity to challenge the traditional deficit model of SEN, that has permeated school policy, provision and practice, but it also encourages school staff to reconsider their own values and beliefs about children with impairments or SEN. Rather than viewing an impairment as a problem for the individual, the ethic of care would propose the view that each individual is different and there is a recognition and respect for this diversity, what Vogt (2002: 262) terms as ‘caring as commitment’; a professional responsibility to children’s learning and personal growth that Cole (2005a) suggests can be lacking in some teachers. This approach would stress the need for the school and staff to identify and respond to a range of different pupils, rather than the pupils being expected to change and adapt to the system they are in. This principle is stressed in a number of government documents, including Inclusive Schooling (DfES, 2001a), which highlights the need to identify and remove barriers to learning, linking it to principles of rights for all children and an appropriate educational experience for all. The document makes reference to inclusion both in terms of learning and more broadly as an ability to participate within the life of a school, highlighting the relational element within inclusion. This view of inclusion reflects the broad definition of the ethic of care outlined by Verkerk (2005: 136) as ‘living well in concrete relationships with others, responding to their needs and building up a joint life.’ Verkerk (2005) stresses the need to recognise and respect the particularity of individual

pupils and their family, within a wider society that is based on relationships from which everyone benefits, but current education practice means that the SENCO is often the only member of teaching staff that can implement such a holistic view (Jones, 2004).

Vitton and Wasonga (2009) and Nias (1999) both stress the importance of recognising the culture and values being advocated within schools and child care settings as these tend to shape the actions, beliefs and views of the staff and pupils. By focusing on individual achievement, education outcomes could be reduced to little more than exam results. In contrast to this, by adopting a ‘caring’ approach to education, teachers are enabled to promote achievement in the traditional sense of academic attainment and to develop the ‘whole pupil’ as a member of a wider society. Nias (1999) notes that the relational aspect of an ethic of care should be a fundamental characteristic of anyone working with children and young people because the importance of making all children feel happy, secure and valued within a classroom is essential if they are to learn, but this can only be achieved through the creation and maintenance of positive and supportive relationships, reflecting key principles of the ethic of care. This can then lead to opportunities for all pupils, and does not limit achievement to a narrow set of exam results (Vogt, 2002). In this way, they could offer a vision of inclusion that Dyson *et al* (2006) outline as a journey and never ending process, requiring school staff to constantly engage and reflect on the learning and social processes that are going on in their classrooms. From this, the role of SENCO in its current form would be almost obsolete. Many of the more managerial tasks would become part of everyday planning of lessons and this could enable them to focus on the development of teaching and learning, reflecting some of the broad principles outlined by Dyson (1990) when he predicted a change to the role of SENCO before the implementation of the original SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994).

The move away from the traditional deficit model in SEN could transform the role of SENCO and links closely to the model of education advocated by Wedell (2005: 4) that recognises both the diversity of students and a curriculum that includes ‘elements of skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes,’ that reflect the interests and strengths of an individual, making educational achievement about much more than scores in national tests. This type of approach would allow schools to focus on the needs of the children in their classrooms, which can be very different from the needs of a national curriculum, such as social and behavioural needs, as well as developing what could be termed academic skills and achievement that specifically relate to the needs of the children. Wedell (2005) highlights that this type of approach has enabled schools to develop inclusive practice and has had positive effects on learning, achievement and relationships within schools. Noddings (2005) supports this view by stating that caring has an element of responding to an expressed need, rather than just presuming that the person caring knows best. Furthermore, continual reflection on the overall aims of the education system could, according to Noddings (2005), create a much more equitable education system that is concerned about all of its members. Jones (2004) notes that SENCOs are often criticised for their over –involvement or caring approach and that this has a negative impact on their professional identity with other staff members. However, Noddings’ (2005) view of caring as action is about being professional rather than seeing the role as a ‘vocation’.

2.5.2 Weaknesses of the ethic of care

The term care within the context of education can lack clarity of meaning. Vogt (2002) identifies a range of ways that ‘caring’ within the education setting could be interpreted, including physical care, commitment and building relationships. Nonetheless, care cannot be

used as an excuse for doing something that is morally questionable; caring *per se* is not enough. Armstrong (2003) noted that for many children within special schools, caring was used as an excuse by staff. From this perspective, the children received 'care' from the school setting, but were often denied any educational opportunities because they were deemed to be unnecessary for that particular group of children. In this respect caring has to be more than having the right attitude and the ability to empathise with others; action is also required. (Dyson, 1997). Caring might start from an ideal notion of what should be done in a particular situation but this needs to be translated in to concrete acts, where a person takes responsibility and is responsive to the needs of others. (Sevenhuijsen, 2003). This highlights another opportunity to develop the SENCO role and identity. As stated previously, many teachers do not know what inclusion should look like at classroom level, and risk falling into the situation discussed that prevents children with SEN from participating in classroom activities. By enacting the role of SENCO as a knowledgeable guide, teachers could see care in action that can lead to greater levels of inclusion and achievement for all children.

The ethic of care stresses the importance of relationships, with obvious links to the emotional aspect of life. This relational aspect contrasts with the rule based approach of the ethic of justice, that is criticised for being too rigid and objective, ignoring the complex nature of society. However, caring for someone does not automatically equip that person with the skills or knowledge needed to make a moral decision, and basing decisions only on our emotions could be as dangerous as always following a rule or principle (Botes, 2000). When trying to make decisions about children and young people with SEN, the SENCO is regularly confronted with the dilemma of what they want to do to enable the child to succeed, but within the confines of a restricted budget, as well as other social or physical barriers and issues relating to the education of other pupils with school. This dilemma would not be

unique to the SENCO, but through on-going reflection and collaboration with other members of staff, effective provision could still be implemented, even if it was not perfect provision (Florian, 2008).

2.5.3 Using the ethic of care to explore the SENCO role

As stated previously, Gilligan (1993) developed the ethic of care in order to demonstrate how women approach decision making from their experiences of relationships and responsibilities, rather than from abstract notions of rights and rules. Feminist writers have since used the approach to explore a range of issues surrounding gender including disability and gender. However, this study did not attempt to use the ethic of care to explore gender issues in relation to the SENCO role. The study involved SENCOs that were both male and female, although the vast majority were female. This reflects national statistics (National Archives, 2008) that reveal only 12% of primary teachers and 38% of secondary teachers are male. Rather than use the ethic of care to explore gender issues, the purpose was to use the ethic of care to explore the SENCO role through its relationships with pupils, parents, staff and external partners. Macbeath *et al* (2006) highlighted a lack of involvement in curriculum issues for many SENCOs as the SENCO role was seen to be administrative. Additionally, many SENCOs lacked relevant qualifications related to SEN. However, a number of writers (Kearns, 2005; Cole, 2005b; Cowne, 2005) have highlighted how much SENCOs identify their role through relationships with others, instead of through other mechanisms such as the subject taught (Wise, 2000) or qualifications, reflecting the principles of the ethic of care. By exploring the relationships the SENCO builds with others, there is the potential to identify new ways of responding to SEN through the development of reciprocal relationships with colleagues (Shakespeare, 2006).

2.6 Developing the SENCO role in the future: SENCO as knowledgeable guide

The literature review has explored a variety of issues surrounding the development of the SENCO role. Informal discussions with SENCOs often refer to the overwhelming amounts of administration the SENCO role creates, and the somewhat isolated existence the SENCO can experience when trying to manage these alongside their teaching responsibilities. Various writers (Szwed, 2007; Cole, 2005b; Ellins and Porter, 2005) have explored the role of the SENCO and how this continues to develop, in conjunction with the changing demands placed on it by policy initiatives, expectations from staff, pupils, parents and other external agencies. Debate about the SENCO role often explores the different dimensions which create the whole (Norwich, 2010; Pearson, 2010). Another approach has been to explore the way SENCOs have responded to the role and the elements they have chosen to focus on (Kearns, 2005; Rosen-Webb, 2011). Both of these approaches have offered insights into how the SENCO role has developed, areas for future development and what matters to SENCOs in terms of their professional values and priorities. They reveal that conflicting demands on SENCO time need to be managed in some way, perhaps with a reconceptualization of how the SENCO role can be operationalized in relation to other subject areas and the professional skills that many SENCOs have. Having reviewed literature related to role and the professional values and identities of SENCOs, one option would be to develop the SENCO post around two key areas, in order to start to define it further and position it within the context of other subject areas and responsibilities within schools. The development of SENCO as leader and the relational aspect of the SENCO role could be integrated to form the SENCO as 'knowledgeable guide'. This would ensure that staff have support from an expert when it is required and the SENCO maintains responsibility for specialist areas within the field of SEN, but at the same time the role moves away from SEN exclusively and instead is linked to pedagogy for all pupils, developing inclusion across the whole school.

Cole (2005b) and the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) advocate the development of SENCO as a leader, as this would enable them to focus on strategic developments within the SEN department, delegating administrative duties to other members of staff, such as class or subject teachers. The SENCO would still be available to staff to support their professional development in relation to SEN and inclusion issues, but not be directly responsible for the planning of day to day support for children with SEN. Norwich (2010) debated some of the key tensions that surround different elements of the SENCO role and how these impact on provision within school. He concluded that whilst SENCOs do have skills and knowledge that are unique and valuable to their role, many of the tasks they complete are somewhat generic. These could be taken away from the SENCO and incorporated into subject coordinator roles and responsibilities, encouraging the ownership of issues related to SEN in all teachers, not just the SENCO. Layton (2005) and Szwed (2007) note how the SENCO is more likely to be a part of middle management, because the role requires a variety of operational tasks to be completed, before the SENCO can move onto more strategic roles and responsibilities. However, if some tasks which have traditionally been completed by the SENCO are distributed to other subject coordinators, this has the potential to enable the SENCO to concentrate on strategic development of inclusion across the school. Busher and Harris (2000) suggest that due to the diffuse nature of the SENCO role, it must involve other staff because it is cross- curricular. The authors advocate a separation between two aspects of the SENCO role; the administrative managerial element and the more strategic leadership element, enabling the SENCO to support colleagues with administrative tasks but not being solely responsible for them. This type of approach, reflecting principles of distributed leadership, would force the SENCO role to move away from administrative tasks. Although the initial change might mean that SENCOs continue to be actively involved with administration, such as IEP writing, it would be in collaboration with other staff, so that they

develop the skills and knowledge to take responsibility for these areas in the longer term. This reflects the concept of 'connective specialisation' coined by Norwich (1996) as a way to describe the integration of generic skills into the workloads of other subject coordinators, ensuring that SEN and inclusion are seen as an essential element of them. Adopting this type of approach would also go some way to strengthen the notion that teachers have a responsibility to support the needs of all children, including those with SEN, rather than the SENCO assuming sole responsibility.

Developing the role of SENCO as a knowledgeable guide would allow the SENCO to act as what Busher (2005: 137) termed a 'middle leader' being both part of the leadership team of the school but also working closely with teachers, enabling them to promote the cultural values of the school through practice in classrooms. Busher (2005) suggests that a central role for middle leaders is to improve the department by attending training and development programmes, and by sharing the leadership of the department, reflecting a distributed leadership approach. In this role, the SENCO can be seen as the representative for matters relating to SEN, and as someone who enables the staff team to share good practice and offers support and professional guidance. Additionally, the SENCO could act as a part of a transformational team that has opportunities to reflect on practice and work in consultation with other members. Kugelmass (2003) noted that by adopting this style of leadership, the SENCO would be able to maintain an overview of the daily issues within classrooms, as well as the strategic role advocated by Gross and White (2003) which enables whole school progression and development, developing effective pedagogy for all children.

The commitment of the SENCO to pupils with SEN reflects principles of the ethic of care in that for many SENCOS, the inherent value of the role relates to the relationships that the SENCO develops with pupils, parents, other members of staff and external agencies. Extending the leadership element of the SENCO role could also enable the development of the relational aspects of the SENCO role as it would redefine the role, relating it to teaching and learning opportunities for all pupils and not just those with SEN (Frankl, 2005). Various authors (Kearns, 2005; Liasidou and Svensson, 2012) have noted that SENCOs are often very committed to the pupils identified with SEN which results in them spending a great deal of time and effort working with the pupils, families and external agencies. The ethic of care stresses the need to sustain relationships, seeing care as a commitment to the child and the experiences they have within school (Vogt, 2002). Cole (2005a) argues that for some teachers, their commitment relates to the subject area for which they are responsible, rather than individual pupils. This does not have to be problematic, but it can limit the way that learning and teaching is organised, as there is less recognition of diversity within the classroom and an expectation that pupils will change to fit into the system presented to them. Redefining the SENCO role so that it focuses on the development of effective learning opportunities, as well as the broader social aspect of school for all pupils, would provide teaching staff with a critical friend to support them as they continue to develop inclusive provision. Jordan *et al* (2009), recognise the need for staff to receive training and guidance when trying to develop inclusion. Using the SENCO in this way would encourage all staff to reflect on their own practice and move towards the model of inclusion, outlined by Wedell (2005), in that it could support the development of more flexibility in classrooms, as teachers become more competent and confident in using a variety of teaching and learning strategies. Within this, staff devise lessons in response to the individual needs of children and the broader social context of the school. The SENCO role would then be about how to develop

effective provision, reflecting Dyson's (1990) original vision of the SENCO as a pedagogy expert. Maintaining links with pupils, parents and external agencies would be a part of the 'expert' leadership element of the SENCO role, and further builds the reciprocal relationship between the SENCO, other staff members and the pupil.

The approach outlined above would encourage staff to develop individual strengths, but this does not remove the need for on-going staff development and training in the area of SEN provision. Rose (2003) highlights a number of areas that are essential for staff development to be successful in terms of impacting on practice and enhancing performance. These include training that involves all staff, which encourages individuals to actively participate. Staff also need opportunities to reflect and analyse current practice and to develop alternative approaches. Gallagher (2001) suggests that these are similar to the key themes associated with distributed leadership, such as encouraging staff to actively take part in decision making, considering what the implications mean for themselves and the pupils in their class and the ethos that they are trying to develop within school. These also reflect the relational aspects of the ethic of care, encouraging teachers to work together to improve provision, rather than taking sole responsibility of a specific area. Rayner and Gunter (2004) claim that this would enable staff to change practice, in line with changing values and priorities. By adopting this type of process, SENCOs would be able to involve staff in the development of an inclusive system within school, move away from a traditional deficit model which focuses on diagnosis, and adopt a leadership approach that uses what York-Barr *et al* (2005: 211) term as 'leadership through horizontal channels.... Keeping a vision or goal in clear focus while observing the details.' By distributing leadership and having opportunities to debate the issues, reflect on practice and receive professional training and development, as advocated by Gibson and Blandford (2005) staff should no longer feel isolated and ill prepared to support

children with a variety of needs within a mainstream classroom. They would also be aware that colleagues, including the SENCO, are available to guide and support, maintaining and extending professional relationships between staff and pupils as advocated through the ethic of care (Verkerk, 2005).

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review has explored government guidelines relating to the role of SENCO, perceptions and influences on the role and ways to develop the role in future. Whilst policy guidelines and research have enabled some exploration of the role, further research into the experiences of SENCOs would contribute to a greater understanding of how far the role is moving to that which is advocated by documents such as the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b).

The next chapter will debate issues related to methodology. Methodology refers to an exploration of why the approaches adopted in the study were suitable for the piece of research. It can be defined as an examination of how to research in a logical and meaningful way, justifying these decisions within the context of the research problem (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). Methodology explores the logic of adopting an overall approach when researching the identified topic, but also the values and assumptions which underpin them and why the approach would be relevant for this area of study and others would not be. By doing this, the researcher aims to identify the most suitable framework from which to develop their research design. Then specific methods can be identified, which will enable the researcher to gather relevant data and answer the research questions (Silverman, 2010). The role of the SENCO is at the heart of this research and enabling them to have a voice about their experiences, successes and challenges was a guiding principle which influenced

decisions about how to research and suitable data collection strategies. These are explored in chapter 3. From this perspective, the SENCOs were seen as research participants so that their concerns can be heard and ultimately used to influence developments in the role, and why qualitative approaches, utilising a questionnaire and semi structured interviews were deemed appropriate (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the approach when engaged in the research process. Methodology can be defined as the justification of why a researcher approached the research in a particular way (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). Decisions about how to collect data can reveal some of the values and assumptions which influenced the study and the researcher, and therefore need to be explored. Furthermore, Bailey (2007) states that methodology also explores issues relating to ethics, gaining entry into the field and developing research relationships. The chapter will discuss the issues raised above.

3.1 Introduction

This small scale study focused on the role of the SENCO, considering how the role is translated from the guidelines contained within the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) into the day to day work in schools. The objective of the research was to capture the experiences of being a SENCO in schools today and the ways current SENCOs work to develop their own professional role, within the drive for inclusion. The study adopted a qualitative approach, using a questionnaire followed by in-depth interviews to explore what it is like to be a SENCO in the current education system. The approach enabled a wide variety of experiences to be gathered from a variety of educational settings and from staff with very varying amounts of knowledge and experiences of the role of SENCO.

The study drew on ethnographic methodology for its structure, with in depth interviews being used to explore and triangulate the data gathered through the initial questionnaire of SENCOs working across a number of different LAs and schools within the central region. In depth interviews were held with six SENCOs, all of whom were working in schools as full time SENCOs. Before the interviews were conducted, informal meetings and discussions were

held with each SENCO to ensure that they had a clear understanding of the expectations of the interview. These meetings also provided an opportunity to build a relationship between the SENCO and interviewer because although they had a professional relationship, these were not established. The research focused on the experiences of being a SENCO and it was essential for the SENCOs to feel confident that their opinions and insights into their work would be treated with respect, within the ethical code that the research was adhering to.

The methods used for the research were:

- A questionnaire which provided a very broad overview of how the role of SENCO was currently being interpreted within schools, as well as providing a glimpse into the personal experiences of being a SENCO when working with other colleagues. These accounts provided the basis on which the interview schedule was built.
- Analysis of the findings from the questionnaire was used to generate themes for the interviews. Interviews were used to gather a rich data set and to explore the issues raised in much greater depth and detail.
- A second meeting with SENCOs provided an opportunity for them to reflect on the research and to add any further comments or clarifications.

The following sections outline the qualitative approach adopted and the reasons for its selection. Furthermore, the philosophical foundations of the research, within the interpretivist paradigm are outlined along with the research design and methods. Finally, ethical considerations and the role of the researcher are discussed.

3.2 Research Paradigm.

As stated previously, this research centres on the experiences of the role of the SENCO. Having defined the focus of the research, it was important to consider which methodological approaches were suitable and realistic in order to answer the research question. Opie (2004) emphasizes the importance of the researcher's epistemology in determining the methodology and methods adopted for the research. Research paradigms are often separated into two broad areas; positivism and interpretivism, each having a particular theoretical approach to research. Whilst the methodology adopted clearly reflects principles of interpretivism, Opie (2004) stresses the importance of adopting methodology that is pertinent to the research, rather than adhering rigidly to any approach without questioning and considering the alternatives, so alternative approaches will be discussed.

According to Bassey (1995) positivist research relies on the use of observation, with the ultimate aim to be able to describe and understand the phenomena researched. The researcher can then explain how such events transpire and explore the links between these events and wider social structures and actions. However, a key issue for this piece of research is the differing and perhaps contrasting experiences of the role of SENCO and how these impact on that role. Walliman (2001:167) highlights a fundamental principle of positivist approaches as being the collective nature of society, what the author terms the 'internal laws' of society. In order to answer the research questions I will need to gather data that reflects individual interpretations of the role, rather than universal laws that aim to reflect the experiences of all SENCOs in all schools. Thus, whilst the research may conclude that there are shared understandings of the role, it aims to focus on individual interpretations within the wider social and educational drivers, such as inclusion, reflecting an interpretivist approach rather than the positivist approach.

Opie (2004) and Bassey (1995) suggest that a fundamental difference between positivist and interpretivist approaches is the concept of reality and knowledge. Walliman (2001: 167) states that positivist approaches suggest knowledge about society is available as definitive facts, gathered through observation, concentrating on 'the repetitive, predictable and invariant aspect of society'. In contrast, researchers adopting an interpretivist paradigm are interested in the varied, personal or subjective elements of society, as Robson (2002) suggests that knowledge reflects differing cultural and conceptual systems that cannot be objective. Rather, Robson (2002) highlights the importance of reality being understood by people who are part of a wider society. They then attach meaning to the situations and events of which they are a part, but these can vary from person to person. This type of approach reflects the underlying interests of the researcher; from my own experiences of working as a SENCO, the interpretation of the role within classrooms or schools is not necessarily commonly shared or understood across the education system or even individual schools, and perhaps reflects and reveals wider societal values about inclusion, achievement, disability and diversity.

As stated previously, the initial starting point of this research was the result of my own experiences of working as a SENCO, and then as a lecturer in special educational needs and inclusion. This highlights the fact that I am not starting from the positivist assumption, as outlined by Cohen *et al* (2000), that researchers are objective observers who do not have any impact the research process. As both Robson (2002) and Cohen *et al* (2000) state, interpretivist research aims to gain a greater understanding of the situation from the perspective of those directly involved and is thus subjective, generating what Robson (2002:25) terms as a 'working hypothesis' rather than universal laws or fact. This might be subject to constant change, reinterpretation and redefinition as society changes and develops.

However, my background and experiences have undoubtedly impacted on my research 'agenda' and rather than claim to be objective and detached, it is important to 'come clean' about this (Denscombe, 2003:269).

The emphasis on the interpretations individuals attach to social interactions means that researchers following an interpretivist paradigm will tend to gather data in the form of verbal records, which might include fieldwork notes, interview transcripts and observation diaries, all of which are termed as qualitative techniques. This is in contrast to positivist approaches that rely on statistical data to act as evidence for an objective fact. However, Bassey (1995) points out that qualitative research techniques often make use of numerical data, but it would only be a small element of the data gathered and would be supported by other richer accounts from those involved. These differences, are what Denscombe (2003) believes are the fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Rather than being a simple dichotomy between different data collection techniques. Qualitative approaches use data that already exists in the social experiences of the research participants, as part of their everyday interactions. The data only becomes research data when it is analysed, interpreted and employed by a researcher. Conversely, quantitative data is often generated because of the research process, and has to be revealed. With reference to this piece of research, the data clearly already exists, as every SENCO is working and practising within schools and colleges across England, and lives through the experiences the research explore on a daily basis. However, although the title of SENCO might be shared with all of those participating, their individual experiences, backgrounds, perceptions and understandings of the role will vary, as well as sharing some similarities. Whilst the data could be argued to already exist and just need measuring, reflecting a positivist epistemology, this approach would not enable the study to explore the subjective meanings attached to the role of SENCO. By focusing on

people within the research, the alternative epistemology of interpretivism, which recognises that social reality has meaning for people, has enabled the researcher to interpret these meanings seemed most suitable (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, the focus on perceptions of the role of SENCO from an interpretivist perspective was underpinned by the notion that a person taking on a SENCO role becomes an ‘actor’ within their setting in that they interact and react to the situation and this is constantly being revised (Bryman, 2008). From this ontological position, the use of in depth interviews enabled the exploration of these interactions, which would not have been possible through the use of quantitative methods and methodology.

3.3 Methodological foundation

This research flows from the question of what it was like to be a SENCO and wanted to investigate how the role could be developed in the future. Exploring the lived experience, using SENCO voices to make sense of the role and the practices they adopt, offered a deeper insight into post. Walford (2001) described ethnography as trying to understand the behaviour and values of individuals and groups, whilst Cohen *et al* (2000) describe it as trying to make sense of the everyday world. The research sought to understand the working reality of the participants from an ethnographic perspective, considering their own experiences and understandings of the role. The study was grounded in the accounts of practicing SENCOs and was concerned with their development of SEN within school, both in terms of SEN as part of school provision, reflecting the ‘how’ element of ethnography outlined by Silverman (2010: 106), but also SEN as a relationship between pupil and SENCO, reflecting the caring, personal accountability elements often seen in feminist research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The iterative process of using a questionnaire to inform the in depth interviews (methods are discussed in detail later) was employed to strengthen

findings and to help illuminate the different ways the SENCO role could be interpreted and operationalized. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) do not identify questionnaires as a common data collection tool within ethnography, as depth and description are essential. However, Cohen *et al* (2000) and Burton and Bartlett (2009) suggest that almost any tool can be used, as they can all contribute to a greater understanding of the situation, and enabled rich, personal data to be gathered, in line with the interpretivist approach adopted by the study.

Ethnographies, according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), are a description and analysis of social situations and interactions which can lead to a deeper understanding of these activities, from the perspective of members of the group. The aim of the research was to gain an insight into what is really happening with SENCOs currently practicing. Both Bassey (1999) and Rose and Grosvenor (2001) state that this type of approach can go beyond description, providing opportunities to inform or change practice. As this research compared policy to practice, a story telling approach enabled current SENCOs to reveal their own experiences, going beyond the obvious key roles that are outlined in current policy documents, such as the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b).

3.4 Sample

With a focus on the role of the SENCO, issues surrounding the identification of a sample, together with access and time constraints need to be considered. Through my work at a school of education at a university, it was possible to contact a relatively large number of schools and SENCOs through the professional links that already exist. However, in terms of time and cost, this seemed unrealistic and potentially could still lead to very few returns of offers to participate. For these reasons it was decided that sampling needed to be more focused, and the termly SENCO forums, held by many Local Authorities (LA) provided an

opportunity for me to access the specific group of people needed to answer the research question, without adding to their workload in terms of replying to my requests, whilst maintaining their right not to participate in the questionnaire. By approaching groups of SENCOs in this way, the sample chosen reflect the characteristics of a ‘purposive sample’, defined by Walliman (2001) as a sample that has been identified by the researcher as a typical sample. May (2001) adds that the sample in purposive sampling share a known characteristic, which in this case is that they are all SENCOs. Purposive sampling is suitable because it would be impossible to answer the research question without speaking to SENCOs and the sampling approach needed to be strategic to ensure that those participating were members of this group. Bryman (2008) advocates trying to ensure that there are some differences between members of the sample group, in terms of key characteristics so that a broad range of perspectives and experiences can be gathered within the framework of purposive sampling. This was achieved by involving SENCOs from a range of different LAs, including urban and rural authorities; SENCOs with varying numbers of years’ experience and across different school ages and types of setting.

Walliman (2001) highlights the difficulty of forming any generalisations from using purposive sampling. However, the participants work in a range of different settings across at least five different local authorities, adding to the richness of the data gathered and increasing the likelihood of findings being representative. Furthermore, Bryman (2008: 47) notes that whilst qualitative research may not be able to make generalisations out of the data collected, it can ‘generalise to theory’. From this perspective, judgements about generalisability should be made with reference to the theoretical inferences drawn from the data and not the data itself. Thus, although the SENCO role is diverse, it is likely that some of the major themes

that are highlighted would be relevant and applicable to SENCOs working in schools across the country.

3.5 Data collection strategies

The research developed two data collection tools in order to provide a rich, descriptive account of the experience of being a SENCO. These were a questionnaire and semi structured interviews.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

The research question aimed to explore whether there was a match between official guidance for the SENCO and actual practice. In order to create a rich picture about this role, a questionnaire was developed (appendix one). This enabled data to be gathered from a relatively large number of SENCOs working in five different local authorities (LA). All of the schools were LA maintained. Four were metropolitan boroughs and the fifth a shire county. The sample included SENCOs from primary and secondary schools. Seventy questionnaires were distributed at the LA SENCO forums, and in total forty-nine SENCOs completed questionnaires, representing a 70% return rate. The researcher attended each forum to distribute the questionnaires, which positively impacted on the return rate. Denscombe (2003) notes that meeting with respondents usually leads to a higher response rate, as it enables the participants to discuss the purpose of the study, clarify any ambiguities and the questionnaires can be completed immediately. Bryman (2004) and May (2001) highlight this as a benefit which outweighs any negative impact the presence of the researcher might have on the findings.

Various authors, including Clough and Nutbrown (2007) and Burton and Bartlett (2009) advocate the use of questionnaires to gather a broad picture of experiences within a particular situation which can then be explored further using alternative approaches with a much smaller sample of the population. Clough and Nutbrown (2007) note that questionnaires often examine a variety of concepts from the research and act as a ‘mapping exercise’ to identify key issues that need further exploration in greater depth. By adopting this approach, themes relating to the SENCO role that were revealed through the literature review could be investigated to enable some exploration of practice in relation to theoretical interpretations of the role, reflecting the principles of ethnography outlined by Bassey (1999) and Rose and Grosvenor (2001).

The content of the questionnaire was developed using a variety of different sources. The literature review identified a number of themes that are relevant to the SENCO role, including the status of the SENCO role, leadership issues and time demands. De Vaus (1996) advocates using questionnaires from previous studies as a basis for future studies in to similar topics. Crowther *et al* (1997) developed a questionnaire to explore the SENCO role, which was subsequently used by Szwed (2007). These ‘tried and tested’ models provided a basis from which to develop the questionnaire, in terms of layout and style, rather than content and questions (appendix one). In order to gain an overview of the school setting, questions were included about school type, size and LA and about the size and scope of the SEN department. Information about the SENCO, including length of service, qualifications and their day to day role were also included. These easy to answer questions are often used to set the scene for the research and offer a systematic way of structuring the questionnaire, so that respondents are supported when moving from concrete to abstract questions (De Vaus, 1996). Open and closed questions relating to leadership and management were included in order to gain an

overview of how far the recommendations from the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) have been implemented in this area. Wellington (2000) notes that respondents can be more willing to reveal rich data via a paper based questionnaire, than in a face to face interview.

Robson (2002: 232) suggests that through the use of a questionnaire it is possible to obtain what he terms as 'usable knowledge'. This is knowledge that is generated by a questionnaire, and is accessible and relevant to anyone with some understanding of the topic being researched. Usable knowledge is of particular relevance to this study because the findings might be useful to SENCOs, as it could act as a mechanism through which their working lives can be developed and improved, as well as improving the experiences of pupils with SEN within the education system. Furthermore, whilst the role of SENCO as a topic may not appear to be particularly sensitive, specific details and perhaps challenges that individuals face as part of their working life are often sensitive in nature and might only be revealed through a confidential medium, such as a self-completion questionnaire.

3.5.2 Piloting the questionnaire

Payne and Payne (2004) highlight that it is essential for all participants to be able to understand all of the questions, particularly because the researcher will not be there to explain every question in detail. The questionnaire was piloted with a small number of teachers (four), two of whom have been SENCOs in the past, but none of whom were currently working as a SENCO, although all have jobs within the education field. This made it possible to judge if the questionnaire functioned effectively as a data collection instrument (Bryman, 2008). Small changes were made to the order of questions and the format of a particular question, so that respondents could illustrate their response rather than write it as prose. Another advantage of a questionnaire is that it is both economical and efficient (Cohen *et al*,

2000). Whilst this might not appear to be a very valid argument in terms of gathering the most useful data, it is important to remember that SENCOs are very busy people, making it more unlikely that they would be able to participate in other forms of data collection that are very time intensive. The questionnaire had twenty five questions in total, including sixteen closed or very brief questions which required only a tick or one word response, two tables were completed with a tick and seven sections asked for a more detailed response. Piloting suggested that the questionnaire took less than 15 minutes to complete, even when detailed feedback was provided by the participant.

The pilot questionnaire was discussed with participants and feedback was asked for regarding the interpretation of each question (Brown and Dowling, 1998). Although the questions were generally clearly and consistently understood, further explanation was added to some questions to clarify what was being asked. Bickman and Rog (1998) stress that alongside understanding the questions and having the relevant knowledge to be able to answer them, the questionnaires must be consistently understood by the participants so that responses are comparable and can be analysed in order to answer the broader research objectives. The questionnaire focused on SENCOs own experiences of the role, so whilst they needed to understand the questions, personal insights and reflections were valued, which enabled some shared understandings as well as diverse experiences to be shared. Bryman (2008) suggests that very little interesting or useful data can be gathered from any question that is answered in exactly the same way by every respondent. From this perspective, the way each question is understood by the research participants needs to be consistent but the answers can be very diverse.

3.5.3 Analysing the questionnaire data

The data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed through comparison of responses to each question. For many of the closed questions, analysis was achieved through the use of relatively straightforward computer software that generated charts and graphs to represent responses to questions such as the size and type of school in which the SENCO worked.

The responses to the open ended questions tended to be longer and varied so an alternative approach to analysis was needed. Moore (2006) and Hopkins (2002) advocate breaking data into meaningful fragments through the identification of core issues that arise within the research, including the unexpected elements of findings, as well as those that support initial interpretations. Gall *et al* (1996) support this approach to coding as they believe that it is an effective way for qualitative research to describe, explore and explain the particular phenomena being studied. This then achieves what Moore (2006) terms a higher level synthesis which enables the data to be drawn together so that the situation can be seen in a different way or the issues can be understood differently. Coding of this data revealed four broad themes; the number of children with a statement or SEN at a school, time pressures, release time and the SENCO as a leadership role. These themes were used as a guide for the subsequent interviews, so that they could be explored in greater depth and related to the experiences of being a SENCO (this is explored further in the next section).

3.5.4 Interviews

Interviews, according to Cohen *et al* (2000) enable all participants to discuss their experiences and interpretations of a particular situation. Additionally, the authors point out that they are an effective method to validate and explore issues raised by other data collection

techniques in greater depth, an essential element of ethnographic studies. This particular study focuses on a very specific group of professionals and various authors, including Robson (2002) and Rose and Grosvenor (2001) support the use of interviews when research focuses on particular phenomena, as in depth information is needed from a small number of participants. Another advantage of interviews is that most people do have some experience of being interviewed as well as interviewing, through situations such as getting a job or as part of an appraisal. Whilst a range of issues still need to be taken into account before the interview process begins, such as building a rapport with the interviewee and a clear understanding of the organisation and purpose of the interview, Bryman (2008) believes that interviews offer a very accessible method of data collection to researchers, as well as being a familiar method of data collection to interviewees.

Whilst most people are familiar with interviews, the process of interviewing can change the relationship between the participants, often placing the interviewer in a position of power over the interviewee (Denscombe, 2002). The purpose of the research, along with issues to be debated, was shared with each participant before the interview in order to highlight the value of their knowledge and insights. Furthermore, all participants were aware of the researcher's background and commitment to the SENCO role. Although these approaches do not completely remove issues surrounding power Simons (2009) argues that the use of an interview can act as a mechanism to support interviewees and to help them feel more at ease with the process of participating in research. This point is of particular importance here because those participating are part of a relatively small group of people (SENCOs) on which the research focuses and without their participation, it would be very difficult to answer the research question. Furthermore, their personal experiences and reflections enabled a much

richer data set to be gathered, but these views and opinions would only be revealed if they were comfortable with the researcher and the research process.

Whilst there are a variety of interview styles, this research utilised a semi structured technique, defined by Gall *et al* (1996: 310) as ‘asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply using open-form questions to obtain additional information.’ The role of the SENCO is common to almost every mainstream primary and secondary school, but this research aimed to discover what, if any, shared experiences SENCOs have. Furthermore, an exploration of the experiences of being a SENCO would reveal how far the aspirations of recent government guidelines are actually being realised. By using semi structured interviews, core issues that are related to the research question and questionnaire data were introduced to the interviewees and they were able to add any additional thoughts, information or ideas that they had in response to the questions. This enabled the SENCOs to discuss, debate and explore the themes raised through the literature and questionnaire, providing greater insights into the challenges they face (Denscombe, 2002).

This type of approach enabled the SENCOs to discuss their own experiences and perceptions of their role as SENCO, as well as providing opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to identify and analyse issues together. Simons (2009) proposes that the two advantages of this are that the participants are actively engaged in dialogue about the chosen topic that enables the exploration of emergent points and that this discussion can be one way that could uncover events, feelings or responses that have not been observed or recognised in other situations. This raises a number of ethical issues, in that participants could

inadvertently reveal more than they intended, but the opportunities provided to review and amend the data gathered gave control of the data back to participants.

As stated previously, the content of the interview schedule (appendix two) was generated from a combination of the research question and literature, as well as the findings of the questionnaire. The framework overleaf outlines how each stage of the research process informed the next, starting with the research question:

What is the match between guidance and practice in the role of SENCO in mainstream schools?



Pilot Questionnaire.

Changes to the order of some questions created a logical structure to the questionnaire. The format of another question was changed to enable SENCOs to illustrate rather than record responses.

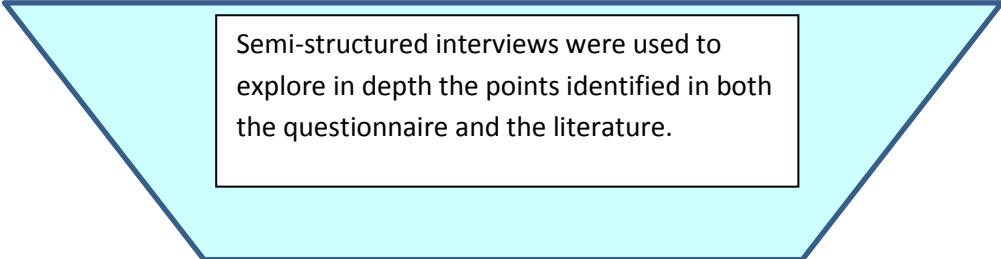
The aim of the questionnaire was to gain information from a representative sample of the population. The emphasis was on finding if the themes from the literature review reflected the experiences of SENCOs in classrooms.

Questionnaire.

Key themes derived from the questionnaire:

- Number of children with a statement or SEN.
- Time pressures.
- Amount of release time.
- The SENCO as a leadership role.

Matching themes from the literature review and those arising from analysis of the questionnaires were used to arrive at a set of points to be raised in the interviews.



Semi-structured interviews were used to explore in depth the points identified in both the questionnaire and the literature.



Interviews.

In total, six SENCOs participated in semi structured interviews. This was designed to explore in depth the experiences of being a SENCO. It aimed to generate in-depth knowledge about specific experiences and issues related to the SENCO role. An overview of each case, including descriptive detail about their setting can be found in chapter five.

Figure 1: Explanatory framework outlining the stages of data collection.

The interview schedule was not a rigid set of questions to be asked in order, but rather a set of headings, based on issues, themes and topics to be explored in the interview. The aim was to use these headings as points around which the interviews were organised. A semi-structured interview provides the researcher with opportunities to probe and explore responses further. Two pilot interviews were carried out with a teacher and an experienced teaching assistant. Gall *et al* (1996) support this approach as there are opportunities to revise and revisit questions if interviewees' interpretation of a question is different to the interviewer.

Whilst semi-structured interviews offer an opportunity to gather rich data, they are extremely time-consuming, not only for the interviewer but also for interviewees. As Robson (2002) highlights, researchers have to balance their desire to gather good quality, useful data with the other demands that are on interviewees. This is clearly very relevant to SENCOs, as time pressures was one of the points which both the literature review and questionnaire identified. Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewees were informed of the points for discussion which would be raised. Of the six SENCOs that participated in the interviews, four invited the researcher into school for preliminary visits before the interview took place. Bryman, (2008) and Simons (2009) stress the need for rapport if in-depth information is to be gathered and these preliminary visits enabled the professional relationships that already existed between researcher and SENCOs to be consolidated. These visits also provided an insight into the day to day work that they complete within their own school and enabled the researcher to extend their relationship with the SENCO. This also enabled the SENCO to provide an insight into their day to day role and develop a shared understanding of the pressures and expectations of the role in that setting with the interviewer. Two SENCOs were willing to participate in the interviews but did not want their participation to be known to colleagues at their schools.

3.5.5 Analysing the interview data

The data gathered via interviews were initially coded into broad areas, using the themes which arose from the open questions in the questionnaire. The themes were the number of children with SEN or a statement; amount of release time and additional roles; time pressures and expectations, and leadership related to SEN exclusively or as a whole school issue. The number of children with SEN or statement and release time/additional roles could all be interpreted as facts, rather than themes. However, the findings from the questionnaire suggest that these areas are open to very broad interpretations in different settings, which impact on the SENCO role. For example, the variety and diversity of additional roles, linked to the SENCO post varied dramatically between schools and warranted further exploration beyond what these were and how much time they demanded.

The themes became the four codes used to analyse the data for the first time. Miles and Huberman (1994: 56) describe this process as assigning ‘units of meaning’ to particular words, phrases or paragraphs of data, which enables the researcher to combine the data gathered and to start reflecting on what is revealed. This initial analysis used open coding, defined by Neuman (2006) as the mechanism to identify critical terms, events or themes which facilitates the reduction of the data into first set of codes. He advocates initially using codes with quite broad parameters, whilst encouraging researchers to continuously reflect on the process and add memos to these broad areas, recording thoughts and ideas about possible further analytical codes, as well as links to other topics within the research.

The codes used at this stage of the analysis are descriptive in that they entail little or no interpretation of the data; instead a theme has been assigned to a chunk of data, so that data

are linked together around themes, rather than as field notes. Having completed this initial analysis of the data, the coded data was analysed again, and the data was subdivided again into more specific dimensions within the overall code, and these were then related to major themes from the literature review. Neuman (2006) and Basit (2010) highlights the value of using coding in that it enables the researcher to start to think about the links between concepts and themes and it begins to reveal the more significant findings so that these can form the basis of the 'interpretive analysis' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57). By completing the coding process, the researcher becomes even more familiar with the research topic and data. Although this can create challenges in terms of the amount of potential new areas for exploration, this stage of coding starts to link the raw data to the theoretical concepts and research questions. This second stage of coding led to the further themes being generated, related to the four broad areas identified through the questionnaire (see appendix five). These included issues relating to the type of role a SENCO creates and the types of task they focus on when being a SENCO, career progression and development linked to leadership or management roles, and the legal element of the role, as responses and provision provided for children can be questioned and challenged by parents.

3.6 Validity, reliability and triangulation

In traditional positivist approaches to research, validity and reliability refer to the notion that the experiment has followed accepted guidelines in terms of controllability and replication in order to produce generalisable facts and statements. However, Gall *et al* (1996) state that interpretivist researchers reject such notions when applied to the social sciences, and instead stress principles of relevance and context bound data to achieve validity. Cohen *et al* (2000) outline various approaches to validity, including an ecological approach. This approach reflects interpretivism in that rather than seeking to manipulate certain variables in order to

reveal facts, the research situation is of interest in its naturally occurring state. This relates specifically to this research as it focused on the implementation of policy surrounding the SENCO role as it is put into operation in school and the experiences each SENCO has of operationalizing the role.

Gall *et al* (1996) also highlight the importance of context and the researcher's role within the context, when trying to achieve validity in social research. They stress the importance of creating a rich description of the context, as well as a clear explanation of the researcher's position within that. May (2001) states that neutrality is often emphasised in naturalistic research, and any bias can impact on the findings. However, Cohen *et al* (2000: 113) refute this claim, advocating 'notions of authenticity,' and associates validity with interpretations of data, rather than the methods used. The authors suggest that interpretivist researchers are a part of the world that they research, making it impossible to be totally objective.

Nevertheless, researchers still need to ensure that they avoid bias in their research by selecting only data that corresponds with their views of the situation. In this sense reliability can be seen as a match between what researchers' record as data and what actually occurred in the situation being researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This does not mean that the findings would be identical if another researcher used them, rather the notion of 'dependability' involving a number of checks, utilising tools such as triangulation (Cohen *et al*, 2000: 120), enable the researcher respond to criticisms of bias and confirm findings. Careful piloting of the questionnaire and interview schedule also enhanced reliability, although this was harder to achieve due to the fluid nature of the semi – structured interviews. However, Silverman (2010) sees this as a benefit, as respondents can discuss their unique

views of the situation which provides opportunities to discuss unanticipated but relevant issues to be debated.

Triangulation, defined by Cohen *et al* (2000: 112) as ‘the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint’, can be one way to achieve reliable data. Denscombe (2003) believes that triangulation enables the researcher to avoid bias by judging findings from a range of different perspectives. By using two data collection tools to understand the role of the SENCO, shared experiences would be revealed. Furthermore, inconsistencies and contradictions within the role may also be revealed through triangulation and these are valuable because there is a lack of a consensus view. Gall *et al* (1996) claim that controversial or stressful situations often produce this type of result but this is useful in terms of understanding why this is happening. For example, any contradictions could suggest that the SENCO role is currently too vague, making the role challenging to define and implement, with a wide variety of conflicting expectations arising from different interest groups, such as school management, parents and pupils.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Fundamentally, this research starts from the perspective of valuing the views of those on the ground, currently working as SENCOs in a range of educational settings. This, according to May (2001: 39) reflects an interest in ‘value judgements’ rather than absolute statements as truth. Thus, the research agenda moves away from a positivist search for facts of truth, searching instead for the underlying beliefs and experiences from everyday life that have shaped the value judgements. May (2001) goes on to suggest that rather than claiming or even trying to remove the values people have, researchers should recognise values being

revealed by research participants and their origins in terms of the wider social context and relationships that are influencing the situation being researched. This would also include the values of the researcher; I was a SENCO and continue to have an interest in the role due to my work on the SENCO national qualification, as well as within the wider drive for inclusion within education. However, as Pinker (quoted in May, 2001) states, this recognition of values is not problematic within itself, as long as these do not in some way distort the final piece of research.

Having identified the role of values within this piece of research, some underpinning principles of ethics will be applied to the research. Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 66) state that ‘ethics is the ‘should’ question: how should we think and act?’ Researchers have an obligation to consider the possible impact participation with the research could have on participants. Exploring the role of the SENCO might highlight various challenges and inequalities faced by a SENCO, due to the way that the role is implemented in their setting. However, this might also be seen as beneficial, as this can then be a catalyst for recognition of the challenges and faced and the creation of solutions or alternative ways of working and responding to SEN (Cohen *et al*, 2000). As Ensign (2003:43) points out, researchers have to remember that ‘research is neither a basic right nor necessity’ and they have to balance their quest for useful and informative data with the rights of the research participants. These tensions are closely linked to issues of informed consent, confidentiality and access to the research domain.

3.7.1 Informed consent

The principle of informed consent revolves around the notion that people have the right to know what they are participating in when they agree to be a part of the research process.

Cohen *et al* (2000: 51) outline four key elements of informed consent: ‘competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension.’ Whilst certain populations, such as children, can be considered to lack the ability to give informed consent (although this is questionable) the target audience of SENCOs are professional teaching staff, who are capable of judging whether or not they are able to, and want to, participate in a research process and all have volunteered to participate with the research, with varying levels of involvement ranging from the completion of a questionnaire to a longer in-depth interview. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage and their right to not answer any question asked.

The remaining two categories present a somewhat broader challenge. Whilst every participant has been informed of the aims and objectives of the research, as well as the expectations and outcomes, both in terms of dissemination of information and any possible benefits to participation, this has to be an on-going process, that is revisited throughout the life of the project. Ensign (2003) highlights the importance of this being a process rather than a paper exercise at the start of a project, in order to ensure that informed consent is maintained. Furthermore, comprehension of the requirements of the research process can be an aim but it is reliant on the research subjects highlighting any confusion, which can be harder once the researcher and *researchee* have entered into a relationship. However, as all participants have studied to undergraduate level at least, it can be presumed that they have at least some understanding of the nature of research and would ask for clarification if needed.

Some of the participants are former students that I have worked with as a lecturer. This raises issues of power within the research, as the researcher’s position as lecturer may have meant that they were in a more powerful position than the student (SENCO). However, none of the

participants are currently working with the researcher and the aim is to develop the type of relationship outlined by Christians (2005) as being reciprocal rather than controlling and competitive. The researcher has some knowledge of the role, having been a SENCO previously, but the research participants are working in the field now and can therefore provide relevant and up to date insights. Whilst the research is not claiming to take an emancipatory approach, it aimed for a partnership approach that values the contribution made by the SENCOs, with a goal to highlight the positive contribution they make to education as well as challenging some of the negative associations with the role.

3.7.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is about protecting the privacy and identity of those involved in research. Researchers have to remember that they are often given access to very privileged information and thus have an obligation not only to the participants but also the wider research community to ensure that their research will not reveal the identities of any key participants, including their linked organisations, such as a school or LA. However, Ensign (2003) and Bell (2005) suggests that certain studies make this much harder to achieve, particularly those focusing on specific groups, such as a SENCO. Whilst research into a particular school might involve speaking to a relatively large number of staff, schools usually only have one member of staff titled as SENCO so any identification of a school would automatically reveal the member of staff as well. Thus confidentiality needs to go beyond the use of pseudonyms for participants and consider whether any details included in a report, could lead to identification of participants, including for example, type and setting of school.

Furthermore, whilst a number of authors (including Cohen *et al*, 2000, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) suggest promising confidentiality, Ensign (2003) recognises that this total

assurance is impossible, but should be seen as a guiding principle that researchers strenuously aim for. Information relating to the identity of the SENCO is not needed for this study and only details that enrich the data, such as the type of school they work at and a broad geographical location have been included in order to try to maintain confidentiality for participants.

3.7.3 Access to the research field

Schools are not public spaces, meaning that any access to them needs to be negotiated through a variety of gatekeepers. Furthermore, Bailey (2007) highlights that initial access can be granted with certain restrictions in place, preventing the researcher from completing the proposed data collection. As part of my role within a school of education at a university, I have access to a range of schools. However, this would not only be a significant change in relationship between myself and the setting, there is also the possibility that staff could see my role as some sort of inspection of their work. Cohen *et al* (2000) stress the importance of providing enough information regarding the purpose and focus of the research to prevent participants from feeling threatened or marginalised. I aimed to achieve this by providing information regarding the scope and focus of the study, design and methods to be used, confidentiality arrangements, time requirements, opportunities to reflect and alter comments and any possible outcomes for the research.

Having gained access to the research field, it is important to consider how I would respond to any revelations made to me about practice within school or tensions that arise due to the role. In line with British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2004) the interests of the pupils must be the primary concern. This, along with the need to share any challenging information that I might gather would be made clear to all participants. The challenge

presented by tensions is not easily addressed. As the research is focusing on the changing role of the SENCO, compared with national policy documents, there is a strong possibility that a wide range of tensions will arise through the research process. Whilst these are likely to add depth and richness to my findings, neither my position as a researcher nor the participation in the research project are likely to change or remove these tensions from an individual.

3.8 The researcher's role

My own interest in the role of the SENCO has arisen from personal experience as I worked as a SENCO within a junior school for five years. Before taking on the role, I had worked at a school for children and young people with a range of behavioural and emotional needs and I applied for the post of SENCO, rather than it being an additional 'add on' to a straightforward class teacher job. The school was in an area of significant social deprivation, with high levels of free school meals and the number of children identified with SEN was consistently above the national average. Various national strategies were used throughout the school to raise levels of attainment and the previous SENCO had worked extremely hard to support staff with issues relating to SEN, as well as the children with SEN, and clearly commanded a great deal of respect from the staff team in school. Within this context, I had expected a positive view of SEN and inclusion, with the SENCO working as a knowledgeable guide with colleagues who already realised the value of inclusion. However, it quickly became clear that whilst the staff did work effectively with certain groups of pupils, very often their work reflected principles of integration rather than inclusion with many of the support strategies that they relied upon revolving around additional support from a TA. Furthermore, although staff were keen to engage in dialogue with me as SENCO, it tended to focus on individual children and what they could not do, often in the hope that additional TA

support could be found for a particular child. They rarely recognised the successes of children with SEN in other areas of school life. I very quickly found myself overwhelmed with what can be described as the day to day paperwork tasks that are linked to the SENCO role, but rarely had the opportunity to contribute to whole school planning. Whilst this was not in itself problematic, I felt that I was not utilising the skills and knowledge I had to offer, but the other teachers were happy with this arrangement as it meant that their involvement with issues of SEN were quite limited. It was from this experience that initial ideas for research into the role of the SENCO developed, with a particular interest in exploring perceptions of the role.

3.9 Conclusion

To conclude, the research is a case study of the role of the SENCO. The role exists in most schools and whilst national guidelines exist, significant variation in expectations and implementation of this persist. The research gathered views and opinions from SENCOs working in primary and secondary mainstream. Findings are related to national policy documents and the development of inclusive education.

Mortimore (1991) and Hammersley and Scarth (1993) highlight the importance of careful planning, methodical data collection and careful interpretation using valid and reliable findings guided by sound ethical principles. However, Ball (1993) also points out that research is often limited in terms of time, funding and people and places whilst still achieving useful research outputs. All of these issues were relevant to this piece of research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As stated previously, questionnaires and interviews have been used to gather data from SENCOs working in five different local authorities. Questionnaires (appendix one) were followed by in depth interviews with six practising SENCOs. The findings from both data collection methods will be presented separately.

4.1 The questionnaire

The advantages of utilising a questionnaire in the initial stages of gathering data was that it enabled the research question to be explored, although not in any great depth. Answers provided meant that some key themes or shared experiences were highlighted that could then be explored in greater depth through interviews with SENCOs.

The questionnaire was designed so that the information gathered during the literature review could be explored and related to SENCOs currently working in school. Areas such as qualifications held, workload and a typical working week were easily addressed through a questionnaire and would be relatively easy for SENCOs to answer. Other questions about implementing the role and leadership and management responsibilities were used to provide a basis on which to explore some key issues raised in the literature and to see the extent to which the actual role is moving towards the aspirations of government documents and other national policies.

The questionnaires were distributed to SENCOs in five different LAs. The authorities involved were in the West Midlands and covered metropolitan and rural shire counties. Two SENCOs did not reveal their LA on their returned questionnaire. The local authorities are

quite diverse in terms of their populations, the types of geographical locations they cover and their approaches to SEN. Furthermore, one LA is now managed and administered by a private company. Every LA involved with the study has received positive reports from Ofsted in relation to their SEN provision. All are committed to promoting inclusive practices within their schools, according to their websites.

The Local Authorities were selected because I already have links to the authorities through my role as an education lecturer in a Higher Education Institute. Additionally, the diversity between the five LAs involved was considered to add a richness and depth to the data gathered, as any findings would not be limited to one local authority. By speaking to SENCOs working in different schools and Local Authorities, exploration around how broadly (or otherwise) the role of SENCO is interpreted and implemented, could be explored because the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) is not statutory, so LAs and schools need to have regard for it, but are free to interpret the guidance with some autonomy.

Questionnaires were distributed to SENCOs through a number of different channels. These included professional development days for cluster schools, SENCO forums and individual visits into schools. Out of a total of 70 questionnaires, (70 SENCOs attended the events or were contacted), 49 were completed and returned, representing a 70 per cent return. This is a very high return rate for a questionnaire, and can be explained through the distribution strategy employed. The majority of questionnaires were distributed to groups of SENCOs attending various training or development sessions. Each time, a brief overview of the research being conducting was presented, which provided opportunities to discuss this and the questionnaire with the SENCOs. As stated in the methodology section, the sample was selected using purposeful sampling; every participant had to be a SENCO. Every SENCO

had the opportunity to participate or not and so the sample can only be said to be representative of itself (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Although this meant that the number of returned questionnaires was relatively high, the limitations of this type of approach are that it is difficult to draw any generalisations from this group to the wider population. However, the sample does include representatives from a number of different LAs and different types of schools including primary and secondary settings. Their experiences of being a SENCO highlighted major themes and key issues that could be relevant to SENCOs working elsewhere.

4.2 The school and staff population

The first four questions in the questionnaire aimed to establish the background and type of school the SENCOs are working in.

The research focuses on the role of the SENCO in all types of school, regardless of size. The majority of SENCOs that completed the questionnaire were based in primary schools (25). Sixteen SENCOs were secondary based, with six in special settings. Two SENCOs recorded their setting as other. One described her setting as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and the other did not specify.

Type of school	Number of completed questionnaires
Primary	25
Secondary	16
Special	6
Other	2

Table 1: Type of Schools the SENCOs work at.

What the figures in Table 1 do not reveal is that school size varied considerably. The sample ranges from a very small primary school with six teaching staff and 5 non- teaching support staff, to a large secondary school with 70 teachers and 52 support staff.

4.2.1 The school population

Table 1 (above) clearly shows that the majority of SENCOs that participated in the research are currently working in primary schools. Figure 2 (below) demonstrates that the actual number of pupils on roll at individual schools is broadly consistent when comparing primary or secondary schools. However, of the 19 schools with more than 450 pupils on roll, three were primary schools and this could impact on how the role is operationalised at school level.

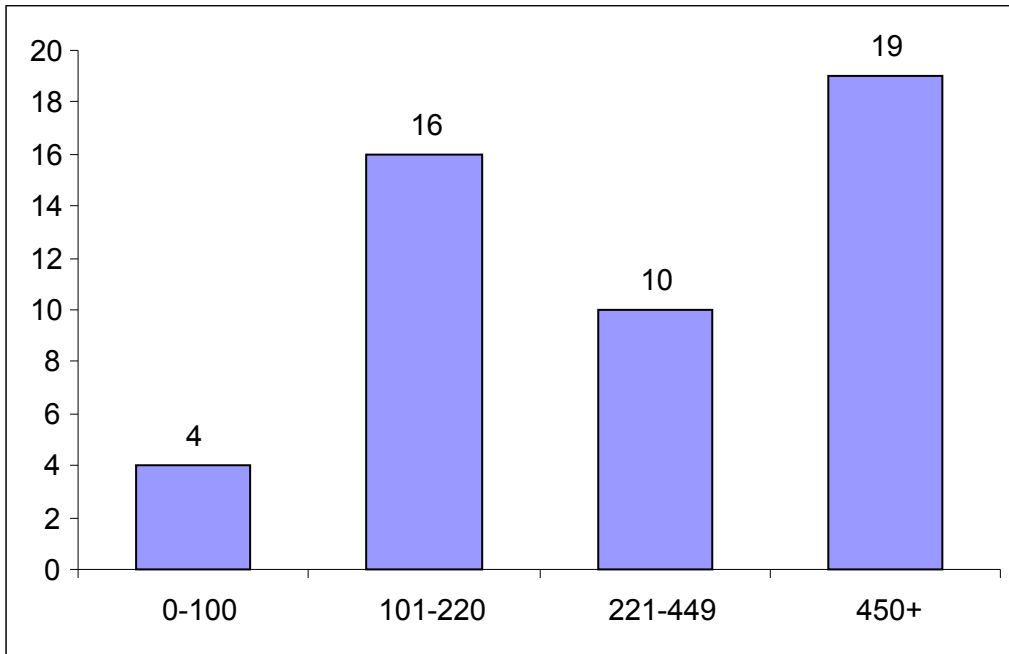


Figure 2: Numbers of pupils on roll.

Categories of size were calculated on approximate sizes of average classes, based on the average class being made up of thirty pupils. The smallest category (0-100) represents the smallest schools and specialist provision, such as special schools or PRUs. The next category (101-220) equates to a one form primary, with the following category (221-449) representing a two form primary and a two or three form secondary. The final category is for the largest schools, with three form entry or more at primary and secondary.

By looking into individual examples, school size varies considerably within the sample ranging from a nursery with 60 places in total, with pupils attending for either a morning or afternoon session, and a primary school with 90 pupils on roll to a secondary school with 1624 pupils on roll and a primary school with 720 pupils. Specialist provision within the sample, such as the special school and the Pupil Referral Unit both had 100 pupils on roll. The Warnock Report (1978) proposed that 20% of children would have SEN during their school careers. By 2010, Ofsted (2010) identified that 20.9% of the national school

population had SEN. This included children with a statement of SEN (2.7%). Although 20.9% of any school population might not seem like a particularly large number, translating the figure from a percentage into actual numbers of pupils within a particular school and between different schools would highlight potentially significant differences. For example, the smallest primary school in the sample (excluding special schools) has a total pupil population of 90. If Ofsted's figure of 20.9% of the school population will have SEN, 18 pupils would have SEN. At the opposite end of the scale, the largest primary school in the sample had 720 pupils, leading to an expectation that there would be 144 pupils with SEN. These examples are extreme but do highlight the potential variety that could exist between two SENCOs in terms of their workload and demands placed upon them by the role. The statistics also do not reveal whether the SENCO is working full time or part time, or whether they have other roles and responsibilities in addition to being SENCO.

Figure 3 (below) shows the breakdown of pupils identified as having SEN, as a percentage of the entire population of each school in the sample. (Special Schools and PRUs were excluded from the data as it is presumed that all of the pupils attending have special educational needs.)

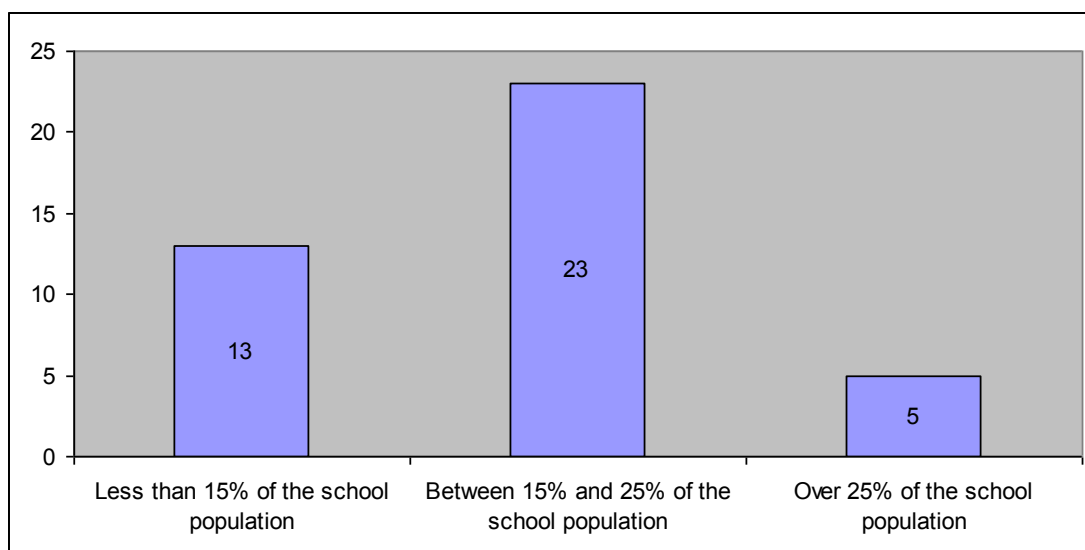


Figure 3: The percentage of pupils with SEN as a percentage of the school population.

The graph above suggests that the vast majority of schools within the sample are broadly in line with the figures outlined by Ofsted (2010) or that the number of pupils identified with SEN is below this figure, and this is across five different LAs. A common theme that SENCOs raised at every meeting, as well as being a regular talking point on SENCO forums and within the literature, was the huge amount of work and particularly administrative tasks, the SENCO role requires. This was not unexpected; the forums provide SENCOs with an opportunity to meet with other SENCOs and discuss the role formally with staff from the LA, and informally with colleagues from other schools. The forum provides a 'safe place' for SENCOs to debate challenges, as well as potential solutions. The data above suggest that it is not the number of children that the SENCO has to deal with which creates extra work, but requirements from other sources, including the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). It is important to note that whilst figures may reflect official guidelines, this does not reveal the amount of release time given to SENCOs to complete the role, and it does not take into account the challenges of working in a large school, where 20% of the population could be hundreds of pupils. However, although the SENCOs raised issues about the time needed to

complete the tasks, comments suggested that their concerns related to administrative elements of the role and the somewhat limited involvement of colleagues within these processes. This suggests that for many SENCOs in the sample, the role continues to focus on a limited number of requirements set out in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), such as maintaining pupil records and ensuring legal entitlements are accessed, with fewer opportunities to develop the area of SEN strategically.

The actual number of pupils identified with SEN within individual schools varied considerably in the sample, particularly the number of children with a Statement of SEN. Furthermore, some schools identified very few pupils with SEN. For example, one primary school in a metropolitan borough recorded only 27 of pupils on SEN records out of a school population of 352, or less than 8% of the school population. This included two children with a statement of SEN. In direct contrast to this, a secondary school in a small unitary authority recorded 261 pupils as being identified with SEN out of a total of 627 on roll, including 29 with a statement of SEN, or nearly 42% of the school population. The school does have a support base for children with SEN. This expertise might go some way to explaining the large numbers, but other issues such as the socio economic setting of the school or the criteria used to identify SEN might also impact on these figures.

Pupils with a statement of SEN also varied quite significantly between schools, although there does appear to be a broad pattern as outlined in figure 4, below:

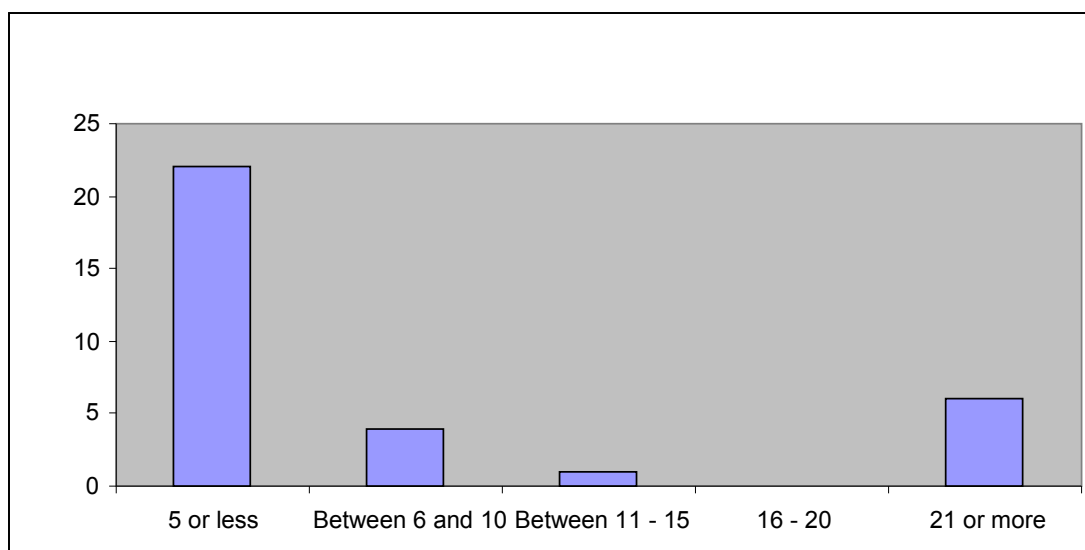


Figure 4: Number of pupils with a Statement of SEN.

The data suggests that most mainstream schools are likely to have very few pupils with a statement of SEN, reflecting the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) which recommends only a very small number of pupils will be statemented. This is broadly in line with Ofsted's (2010) findings that 2.7% of school populations are statemented. However, within the sample there are six schools with 21 or more pupils with a statement of SEN, suggesting that numbers tend to be either very high or very low. Comparing numbers of statemented pupils with overall school size revealed that these figures are still in line with the 2.7% figure identified by Ofsted (2010). Two of these schools also had a specialist resource base for children with SEN, which could explain the increased numbers of statemented children. The SENCO at these schools managed the resource base as part of the role and neither had a full time class teacher role. Even so, having to liaise with a variety of external agencies and maintain the paperwork for 21 or more statements of SEN would have a significant impact upon the workload of the SENCO, when compared with the same role in schools of a similar size without any specialist provision.

4.3 The SENCO

The majority of SENCOs that participated in this research are full time teachers. Of the 49 SENCOs that completed the questionnaire, 41 were full time teachers and eight were teachers employed on a part time contract. Of the eight that were employed for part time, six worked in primary schools, two in secondary and all worked at least three days per week in school.

All of the participants identified themselves as SENCOs, 76% of the sample had additional roles within school. Some of these ranged from roles that could be linked to that of SENCO, such as Inclusion Manager or Speech and Language Link Co-ordinator. However, others were more diverse, such as History co-ordinator and Newly Qualified Teacher mentor. Additionally, sixteen SENCOs also held other school wide management and leadership posts, such as deputy, assistant head or head teacher. Holding a school wide management post was not exclusive to either primary or secondary settings. The majority of SENCOs that participated in this piece of research carry out at least one other role, regardless of the number of pupils identified with SEN.

The range of experience of being SENCO within the sample is quite broad (see figure 5).

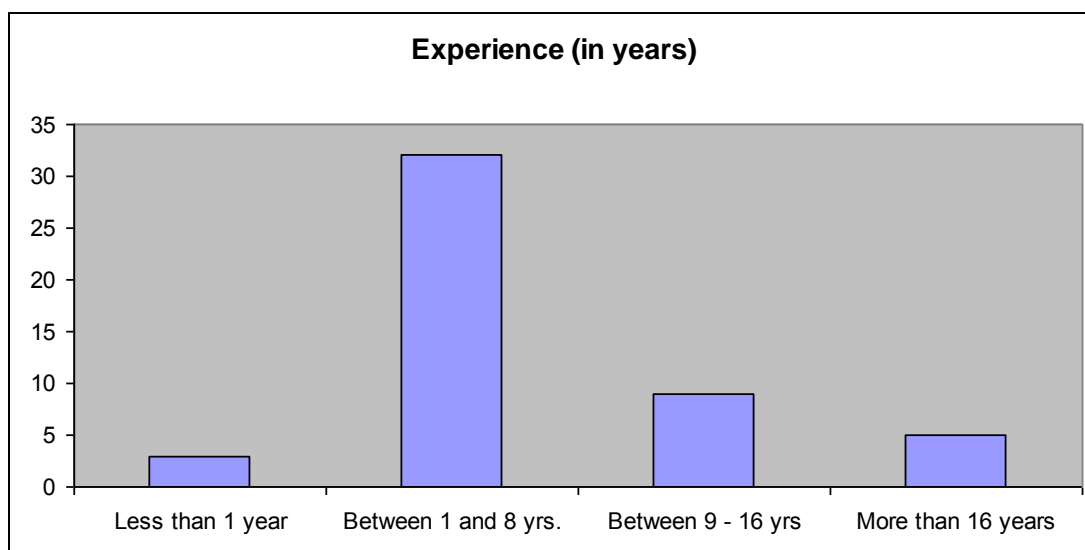


Figure 5: Length of experience as a SENCO (in years)

The categories were separated to reflect national changes. The first category was for new SENCOs with less than a year of experience in the role, the second represents those SENCOs that have been in a SENCO post since the introduction of the revised Code of Practice for SEN (DfES, 2001b). The next category is for SENCOs that have worked with both Codes of Practice with the final category being for those SENCOs that have been in the role before the introduction of the original Code of Practice (DfE, 1994). Whilst the majority of SENCOs in the sample are experienced in the role, the numbers that stay in post beyond nine years does diminish. The questionnaire did not ask teachers to identify their total number of years in teaching, but as so many of the SENCOs had other significant responsibilities within school, it would appear that although the role of SENCO might not be considered to be very prestigious, most are experienced practitioners.

The qualifications held by SENCOs within the sample also varied significantly. The majority of SENCOs hold an undergraduate degree (43) or Certificate of Education (6) and all are qualified teachers, reflecting the latest government guidelines for the role of SENCO.

Additionally, of the 49 SENCOs that completed the questionnaire, twenty held post graduate qualifications ranging from the TTA national qualification for SENCOs (TTA, 1998), diplomas in various aspects of SEN, such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) and national leadership qualifications. All of the SENCOs had completed training related to their SENCO post, provided by the LA.

SENCOs were also asked to identify why they wanted to be SENCO. Responses fell into two broad categories. There were those SENCOs that had an interest in the area and those that took on the role either because no one else would or as part of another role for which they had applied. For those in the first category, responses often related to previous experience within the SEN field and linked to elements of their undergraduate degree, such as psychology. Nine SENCOs also identified the post as a mechanism for career development, enabling them to take responsibility for an area within school and become part of the leadership team. The second category, taking the SENCO role because others did not want it, could be seen as a very negative response. However, only five participants said this and all added additional comments about positive elements to the role and how they have developed it. This is perhaps due to broader issues, such as the need for some posts to be shared between colleagues in small schools, and could be seen to be beneficial for the SENCO role, as this could encourage a number of staff to actively contribute to SEN issues. Seven SENCOs were appointed to the role as part of another post for which they had applied, for example, assistant head or deputy. Of this group, only one SENCO maintained a class responsibility, again reflecting the need for staff to have more than one area of responsibility.

4.3.1 The SENCO working week

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) suggests that schools need to consider the amount of time required to co-ordinate SEN provision within schools, but does not give any specific guidelines on how much time is needed or how it is operationalised. SENCOs were asked to identify how much time they had dedicated to the SENCO role rather than teaching classes or other responsibilities. Figure 6 highlights the differences in practice between schools within the five local authorities that participated in the research.

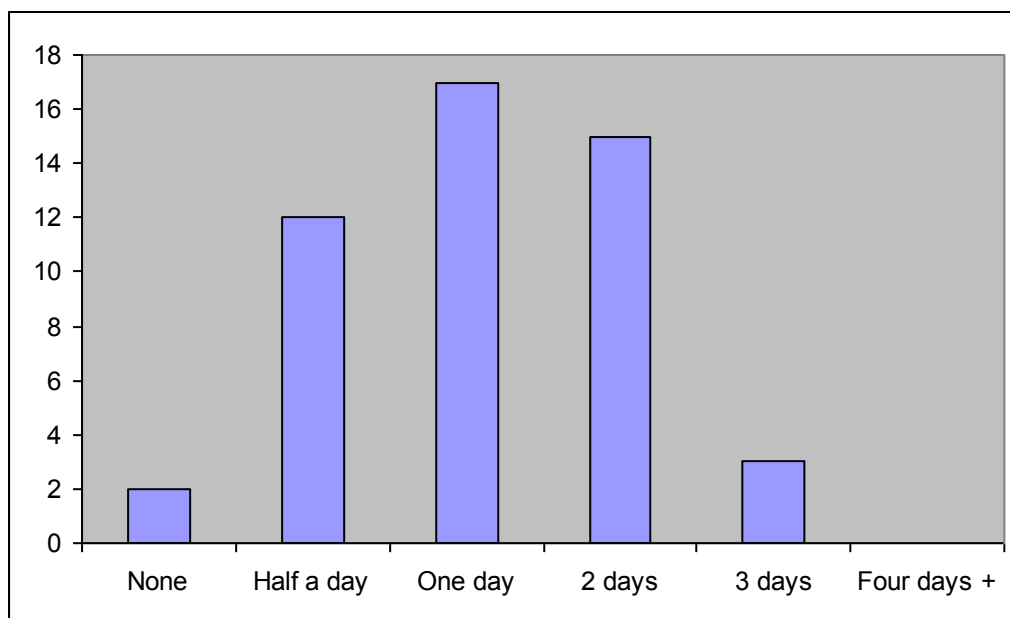


Figure 6: Release time dedicated to SENCO tasks (per week)

Whilst it appears that twenty of the SENCOs in the sample receive two or more days release time for the role, the majority of SENCOs with this amount of release time had to complete other roles alongside SENCO tasks. Another reason for this amount of release time was that there were four non - class based primary SENCOs, often working part time and completing a number of roles alongside that of SENCO, making it harder to specifically identify time that is exclusively for SEN related tasks.

The charts below compare release time for SENCOs in either primary or secondary settings.

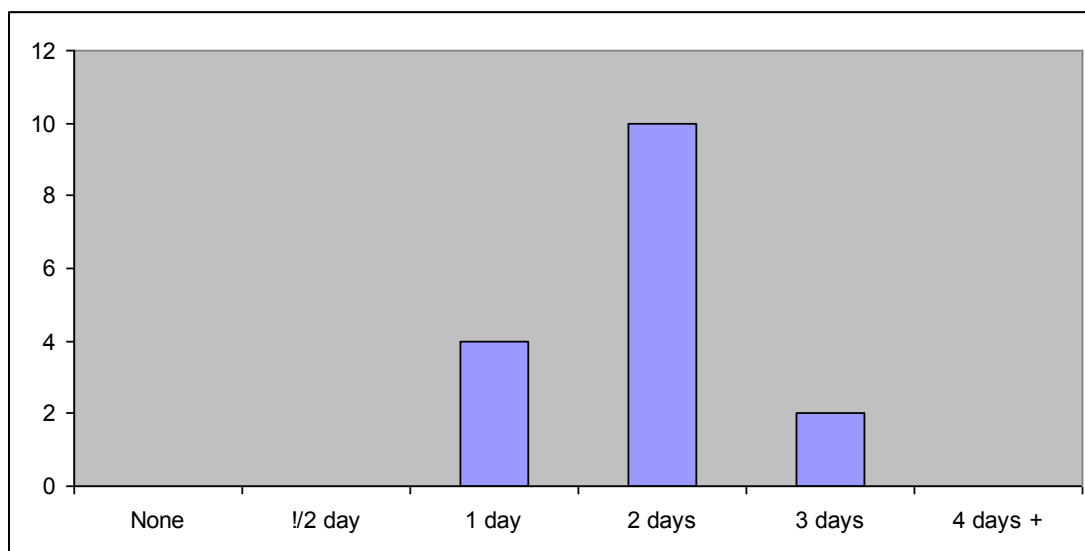


Figure 7: Release time for Secondary SENCOs

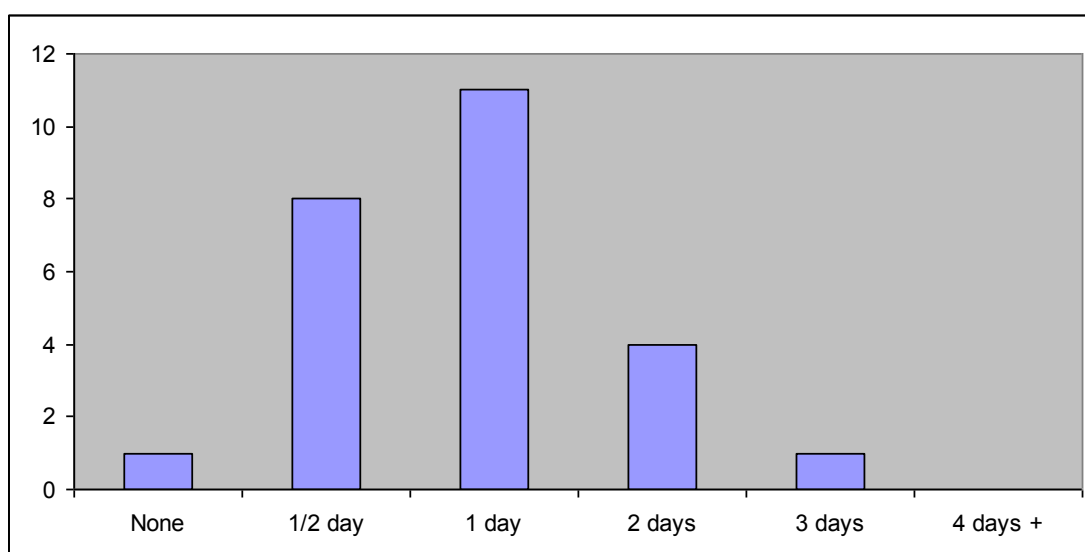


Figure 8: Release time for primary SENCOs

The charts reveal that secondary SENCOs tend to receive greater release time from teaching commitments to complete the SENCO role. This could be explained in terms of school size, as primary schools have tended to be smaller than secondary, but the sample does include

large primary schools. The figures highlight a disparity between primary and secondary SENCO release time, although there are broad similarities for those working in a secondary school. Secondary SENCOs are likely to get two days release from timetable to complete SENCO tasks, although other roles are often carried out in the this time as well. Primary SENCOs' release time varies from half a day to two days, but this includes four non- class based SENCOs, completing other management roles, and eleven that are members of the school senior leadership team, as either head or deputy, completing tasks relating to these roles at the same time as SENCO work.

Comparing release time across different local authorities (figure 9, below) again demonstrates the very different ways in which the recommendations made by the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) are interpreted. (Only data from three LAs that returned the most questionnaires were included here. SENCOs from the other LAs involved represented a very small number in total.)

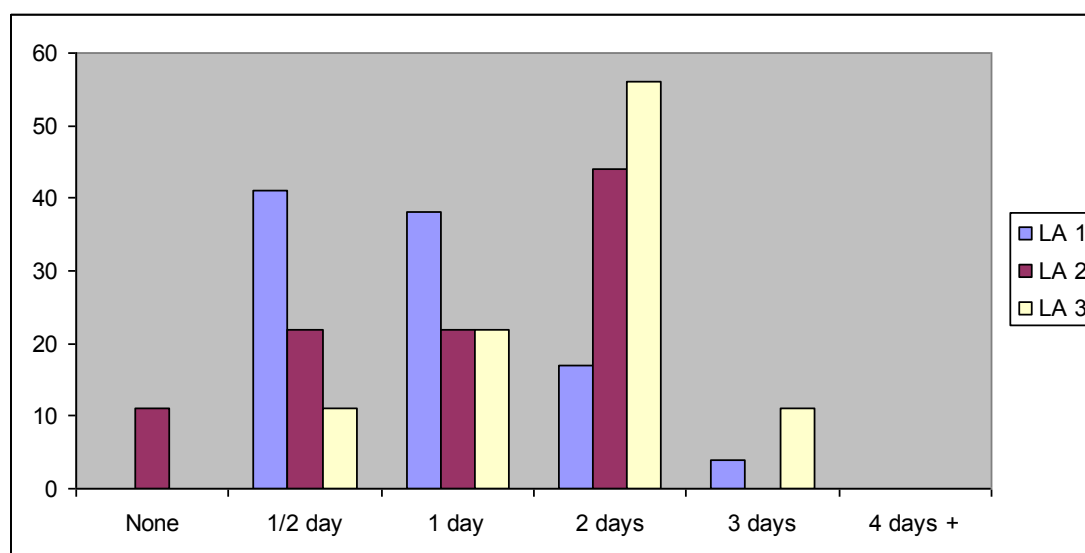


Figure 9: Release time (as percentages) for SENCOs across three local authorities.

LA 3 appears to offer most release time for SENCOs, but this again does not reveal other roles completed alongside SENCO tasks. This issue could be linked to the status of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), in that schools are not obliged to implement any of the guidance or recommendations contained within in, including allowing sufficient time to co-ordinate SEN across the school. Additionally, LAs can offer suggestions on release time for SENCOs, but ultimately this decision will rest with the head and is likely to be influenced by a number of secondary issues, including those not directly linked to SEN, such as financial limitations.

Furthermore, there seemed to be no correlation between the amount of release time to complete SENCO tasks and the number of children identified with SEN or a statement, with individual schools making their own arrangements. For example, one SENCO with two days release to complete SENCO tasks, had 50 pupils identified with SEN and four with a statement, whereas a colleague in another primary school with 68 pupils identified with SEN and 6 statements had only one half a day release time, and this had to be shared between her other co-ordination role. A secondary SENCO also noted that although she does have a reduced teaching timetable (two days teaching), she offers before and after school sessions to the pupils, so her official timetable does not reveal all of her commitments and her release time has to be used to balance these. These examples highlight the inconsistencies between how each school interprets the role and the potential impact this can have on SENCO workload.

Having identified the amount of time dedicated to the SENCO role during the working week, SENCOs were asked to identify what types of tasks and activities they completed during release time. The recommendations from the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) were

outlined, although this, according to the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) is not a definitive list. Out of the eight sections the six below were identified by all SENCOs in the questionnaire as an activity they complete regularly throughout a term if not every week:

Overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
Coordinating provision for children with special educational needs
Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
Overseeing the records of all children with special educational needs
Liaising with parents of children with special educational needs
Liaising with external agencies including the LA's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies.

Only two of the 49 SENCOs that completed the questionnaire were not responsible for the management of Teaching Assistants, due to other management roles, but management of TAs was often at a somewhat superficial level, in that it revolved around timetabling TAs and ensuring that they were informed about school issues from staff meetings. The widest disparity in responses came for 'contributing to the in-service training of staff'. The results are recorded in figure 10 (below):

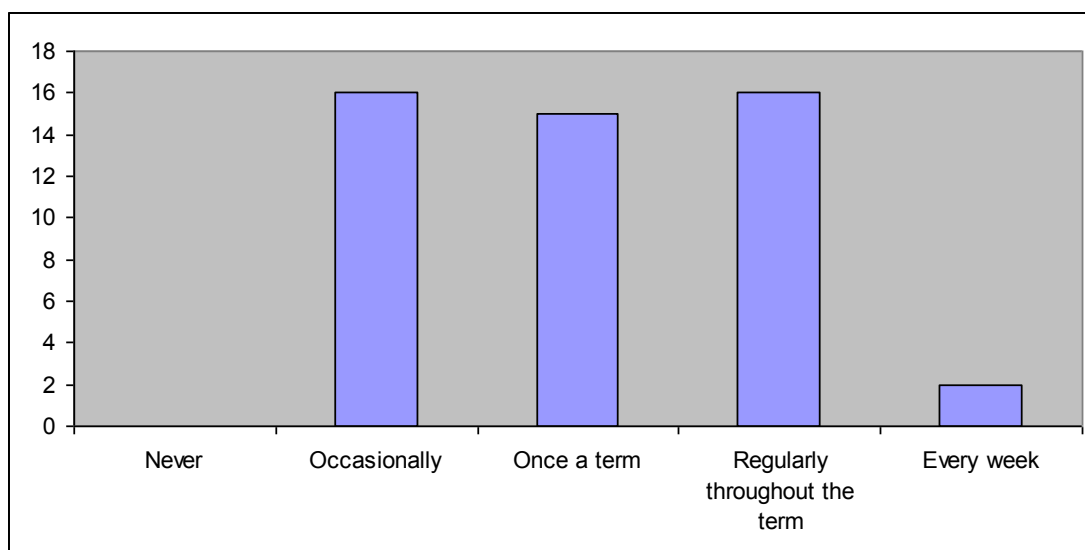


Figure 10: How often the SENCO contributes to the in-service training of staff.

All SENCOs stated that they contributed to staff training, but the number of times that they did this varied considerably. Of the 31 SENCOs that identified opportunities to contribute to in-service training of staff as either regularly throughout the term or every week, nineteen were part of the Senior Management Team of their school, with other roles alongside that of SENCO, including a head teacher and five assistant heads or area leaders. The types of support, guidance and training can be described as either Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff or advice to colleagues with regard to the specific needs for individual children or small groups, including various intervention programmes. CPD included developing SEN related areas, such as IEPs or provision mapping. No SENCO mentioned opportunities for strategic planning or improving SEN provision at a whole school level, to enable to respond to a diverse range of pupils, in line with the inclusion agenda. Of the SENCOs that had very few opportunities to contribute to in service training, seven made specific reference to SEN not being a priority area within the school, and with so many other initiatives and agendas, SEN was often marginalised to informal discussions between the SENCO and staff, meaning that support tended to be ad hoc as the needs arise.

4.3.2 The SENCO: leader, manager or both?

Even though the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) recommends that SENCOs are members of the school leadership team, practice in individual schools varied. (NB the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) uses the term “leadership” rather than management. The differences and challenges of this have been discussed previously in the review of literature and will be explored in greater depth in the analysis of data.)

Of the forty-nine SENCOs questioned, just under two thirds were part of the leadership team in school. However, only three SENCOs were on the leadership team because they were SENCO, with no other co-ordinator responsibilities. Ten respondents were also deputy or assistant heads and fourteen co-ordinated other subject areas and stated that they were part of the school leadership for these roles, rather than the SENCO role. Even without the recommendations of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) suggesting that the SENCO should be a leadership role, SEN is a school wide issue which permeates all subject areas. In the same way that core subjects such as Literacy and Numeracy are relevant in a wide range of other curriculum areas, so are issues about SEN but opportunities for SENCOs to contribute to school wide development can be limited if the SENCO is not a part of the school leadership team.

Having established that the SENCO role does not automatically equate to being part of the school leadership team, its status, compared with other coordinator roles was considered. Again, nearly two thirds (28) of SENCOs felt that the role carried the same status as other co-ordinator roles within school. Reasons identified for this included SEN being a key part of the School Development Plan (SDP) and the SENCO being a respected and valued member of the team. However, a small number of SENCOs (seven) felt that the role did not have the

same status as other co-ordinator roles. Three stated that they were only ever actively involved in SEN related issues, rather than whole school planning and development. Another SENCO suggested that the role in her school revolves around problem solving for staff with issues linked to SEN, rather than management or leadership issues.

The majority of SENCOs reported that colleagues appreciated the work they did as SENCO. This appears to be a very positive response, but many SENCOs believed that colleagues were very positive and supportive about their role as they recognised that they do a good job because they limit the impact that many SEN-related tasks have on the class teachers' working life. As one SENCO stated "SEN is seen as just an additional workload – IEPs, catering for needs etc.". Additionally, a number of SENCOs (eight) felt that staff realised the scale of the administration involved and were not keen to do this, but appreciated someone else doing it for them. Eleven SENCOs highlighted the importance of inclusion in their school and this helped to give SEN issues a priority. However, four other SENCOs noted that in their schools SEN was still seen as an issue for the SENCO alone, whereas other areas of the curriculum, particularly core subjects, tended to involve all staff. Being part of the school leadership team was identified as a mechanism to impact on these perceptions and to raise the profile of SEN to a school wide issue. However, SENCOs comments suggest that staff want and appreciate a SENCO that manages the SEN department effectively with only limited involvement from the rest of the teaching team, rather than a distributed approach that involves all school staff in SEN issues.

Whilst school staff might want the role of SENCO to be managerial, the vast majority of SENCOs recognise that it should involve elements of both leadership, in terms of developing

and leading staff and the whole school on SEN issues, and management, in terms of still playing an active role in the day to day organisation of the SEN department.

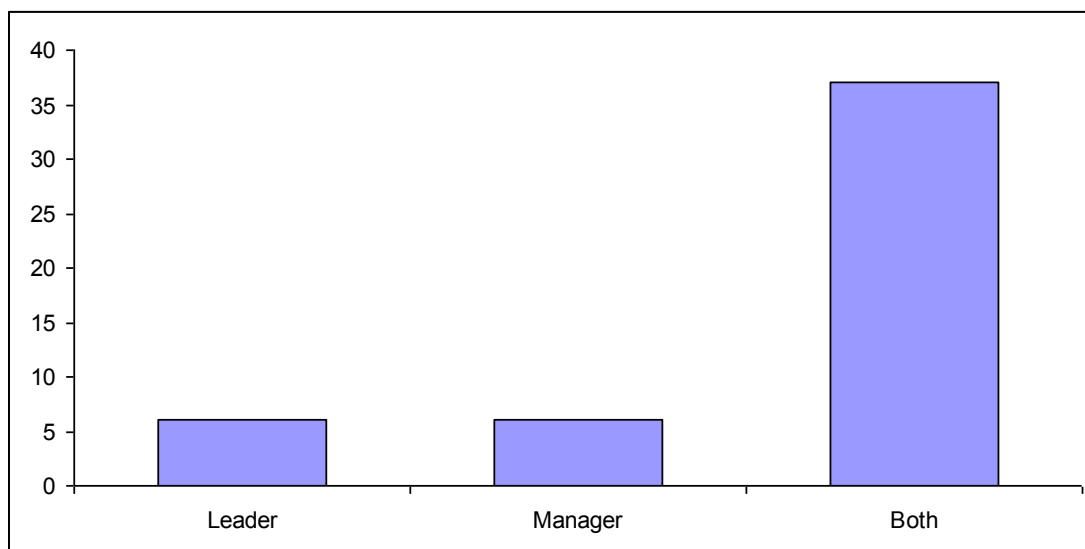


Figure 11: Perceptions of the role of SENCO.

The majority of SENCOs felt that they had to maintain some involvement in SEN records, paperwork and related tasks due to the nature of their work, which can lead to legal documents such as statutory assessment. Comments suggest that there was a concern that the paper trail would not be maintained if the SENCO passed all of the responsibility to class teachers. However, sixteen SENCOs identified opportunities to lead school wide development of SEN as something they would like to do in the future, suggesting that a leadership role is something that many SENCOs are aiming for. Three SENCOs specifically referred to developing staff skills and confidence in response to diverse student needs, thus encouraging staff to be actively involved in SEN issues, rather than it being the sole responsibility of the SENCO. Three SENCOs that identified themselves as new to the role felt that they needed to be involved with management issues at this stage of their SENCO career in order to develop clear understandings of SEN protocols.

4.4 Key themes raised by the questionnaire

The questionnaires highlighted the fact that having the same job title does not equate to a shared experience in terms of role expectations or demands. Across different local authorities, as well as in different schools, disparity exists between SENCOs, but the data also highlighted a number of common themes and shared experiences. The number of pupils identified with Special Educational Needs varied considerably between schools, as did the number of children with a Statement of SEN. The number of pupils with SEN on school records also appeared to have little impact on the amount of release time to fulfil the expectations set in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) or for other responsibilities held by the SENCO. Additionally, time pressures and the wide variety of additional expectations and roles held by the SENCO were identified.

SENCOs reported that other colleagues did value the work that they did for children with SEN, noting that teaching and support staff often came to ask their advice and opinion, usually about the needs of a specific child. Respondents also reported that other colleagues were aware of how onerous the SENCO role can be, in terms of workload, and there was appreciation of what the SENCO did to support them. Even though national guidelines, such as the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and the SENCO Regulations, (DCFS, 2008) suggest a leadership role for the SENCO, this was not a universally shared experience. School context appears to impact on the role significantly, with the position not automatically being part of schools' senior leadership or management teams, preventing some SENCOs from actively participating in leadership issues. Those SENCOs that were part of the leadership team often commented that their views and opinions were frequently only sought when issues relating specifically to SEN were being debated, preventing them from developing a whole school approach to SEN, and thus maintaining SEN as the responsibility

of the SENCO rather than sharing this with all staff, as suggested by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b).

The questionnaire was used as a mechanism in order to start to set out the parameters of actual practice, so that this could be compared with official guidance. This revealed that although certain aspects of official guidance are being met, others remain aspirational for many SENCOs, including their ability to support strategic developments and the role other teachers and support staff have in relation to issues of SEN. These issues were explored in greater depth through semi structured interviews with six SENCOs. In the next chapter, a pen portrait of each SENCO is provided and the following chapter (chapter 6) provides an exploration of these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: PEN PORTRAITS OF THE SENCO AND THEIR SCHOOL

This chapter will give a brief descriptive outline of the six participants and schools who partook in the interviews. The six participants were from four Local Authorities in the central region; three from primary settings and three from secondary schools. Two other SENCOs initially agreed to participate but both had to withdraw due to a change in role. The selection of schools was not limited to any particular age range. Although this increased potential variables in the data generated, my own experiences as a SENCO, along with anecdotal evidence from school staff suggested that the SENCO role was interpreted widely, with both primary and secondary SENCOs working in a variety of different ways.

Research identified in the literature review (Szwed, 2007; NUT, 2004; MacBeath *et al*, 2006) suggested that the role continued to be administrative rather than strategic, even after the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) was introduced. The literature review also highlighted a number of debates relating to the role and the way in which it was interpreted, such as the leadership element and opportunities to work with colleagues at a strategic level. These issues relate to both primary and secondary settings (Cole, 2005b), and the sample was selected to reflect this.

5.1 School 1: Context

School K is a mid-sized, four form entry boys' secondary school in an affluent area of a large city. However, the catchment area for the school also includes an area of significant deprivation and the number of children receiving free school meals is higher than the national average. Pupils total 620, with another 132 students, including girls, attending the sixth form. The school is a popular choice for parents and there is a waiting list for prospective pupils

wishing to attend. The number of pupils identified with special educational needs is slightly above the national average. 36 pupils with a statement of SEN currently attend the school, with another 6 receiving a provision plan rather than a statement from the Local Authority. In total, 136 pupils are currently on the school database for SEN, in addition to the pupils with a statement, representing 24% of the school population.

5.1.1 The context of the role of SENCO

J, the current SENCO, has been in post for over nine years. Although she is primary school trained, her background is in health and social care and she always intended to become a SENCO so that she could use these qualifications alongside her teaching degree. The Learning Support (LS) department at the school consists of the SENCO, a full time member of teaching staff, a part time teacher working exclusively in the LS department with children in Key Stage three, and a secretarial assistant supporting the administrative element of the role. Additionally, there are eleven Teaching Assistants (TAs) attached to the department. Although some are assigned to specific pupils, the majority are attached to specific subject areas or departments in school.

The last Ofsted (2008c) report for the school concluded that provision made was satisfactory, noting that whilst standards in some subjects had improved, along with students' personal development, achievements in science and across Key Stage Three were weak. However, the report made a particular point of highlighting how well inclusion has been fostered and developed in the school and the effective leadership offered by the special educational needs co-ordinator, which ensures that pupils with SEN make good progress.

5.2 School 2: Context

School P is a split site school, comprising two former secondary schools within a large urban Local Authority. Both schools were closed down and reopened under one name in 2001 in order to increase standards of achievement for all pupils on both sites. The larger site provides education for 800 pupils aged between 11 and 16, with the smaller site catering for 208 pupils, aged between eleven and sixteen. Both sites are situated within areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage and according to the latest Ofsted report (2008d), levels of free school meals and SEN are well above the national average. Each site essentially operates as a separate school; both have a complete cohort of staff, including a head teacher and SENCO, and staff rarely work on both sites. In 2000, Ofsted gave the school 'Notice to Improve' but the latest report (2008d) notes significant improvements in the provision made by the school. In in near future, both schools will close and open as an academy on a new site.

The SENCO interviewed is based at the smaller site that covers both Key Stage Three and Four. Ofsted (2008d: 4) noted that the site 'has a legacy of poor behaviour, underachievement and low attendance' all of which have been successfully challenged in recent years. Of the 208 pupils that attend this site, sixty six are recorded at School Action on the SEN database, thirty-eight at School Action plus and eleven have statements of SEN, representing 55% of the school population. Whilst the school as a whole has large numbers of pupils from various minority ethnic backgrounds, pupils at the smaller site are predominantly from white British backgrounds.

5.2.1 Context of the role of SENCO

L became SENCO when the previous SENCO left the post over five years ago. Her experiences are unique compared to all of the other SENCOs that were interviewed for this research because she does not hold a teaching qualification, which is now a legal requirement for the post. She is currently studying for a BA in Special Needs and Inclusion Studies and her background is in community based roles, working with children and young people. Her previous post was as the English as an Additional Language (EAL) Co-ordinator at her current school. She was actively encouraged to apply for the role of SENCO, as the EAL post had been expanded to include children with SEN, due to her success with the pupils with both EAL and SEN.

Despite the relatively small number of pupils on the site, the inclusion department plays a significant role across the school, due to the high numbers of pupils with SEN. The school has a small team of TAs that are used in a variety of ways to support individual learners and small groups of pupils. Additionally, on this site there is an educational psychologist, clinical psychologist, targeted mental health team members and a multi-agency support team, including youth workers, nurses, area SENCO (a SENCO employed by the LA who works with SENCOs from a variety of schools), school based police officers and social inclusion support workers. Whilst these staff members work at other schools as well as school P, the Local Authority recognised that the needs of the pupils went beyond academic learning, into social and emotional skills, and particularly language development and comprehension. For example, SENCO L highlights that there is a significant language barrier between staff and pupils and parents. This is not because the parents and pupils have English as an Additional Language, as Ofsted (2008d) noted that numbers were well below the national average, but

because comprehension and language skills are weak, which is one of the main reasons for so many pupils being recorded on the SEN database.

As SENCO and Head of the Inclusion department, L is part of the school's leadership team, and the positive developments that she has made to the school were recognised by Ofsted (2008d) in their latest report. However, despite the high numbers of pupils with SEN and only limited numbers of teaching and support staff in the Inclusion unit, L suggests that staff are sometimes too keen to make a referral to her without trying to implement support strategies within the classroom, many of which would be of benefit to other pupils in the group. There is still an expectation from some teaching staff that children with SEN will be removed from the mainstream class.

5.3 School 3: Context

School B is a relatively large secondary school, specialising in mathematics and Information Technology (IT). The school is situated in an affluent area of a city and has been recognised by Ofsted (2008a) as a 'good school.' The school caters for a diverse pupil population, both in terms of ethnicity and pupils with a range of SEN, as the school has been modified to enable access for disabled pupils. A total of 1047 pupils attend the school. In terms of SEN, numbers are broadly in line with the national average. 218 pupils are recorded on the school's register as having SEN, and 22 pupils are in receipt of a statement of SEN, totalling just under 23% of the school population. According to the SENCO, the school is a popular choice for parents due to the changes made to the infrastructure of the building and other support services available for pupils with SEN.

5.3.1 The context of the role of SENCO.

The current SENCO, M, has been in post for two years. Prior to her appointment, the school experienced some difficulties in appointing a SENCO and the role was filled by senior leaders, supported by TAs. The SEN department includes the SENCO, fourteen TAs and a school counsellor. Pupils are streamed for almost every lesson, with the SENCO teaching some sessions with the lower ability groups each week. TAs have a variety of different roles, depending on their level of responsibility (which is linked to pay scales). Whilst all TAs work across departments, supporting a range of different children within lessons, the more senior TAs are also involved in the planning, delivery and administrative elements of SEN, such as IEP writing and implementation. This is often linked to specific needs such as Speech and Language Therapy work or reading development. Additionally, the school has a resource to support children and young people with a variety of social, emotional, behavioural needs as well as SEN. This provision is delivered by the SENCO on a rolling programme to different year groups throughout the year. Ofsted (2008a) noted that the provision for pupils with SEN is ‘outstanding’, with very carefully planned support provided to children from all staff.

5.4 School 4: Context

School L is a small nursery and infant school in an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage within the West Midlands. The school currently has approximately ninety pupils, including 25 pupils in the nursery. Twenty five pupils are recorded at Early Years (EY) Action and twenty one are at EY Action Plus. The school does not have any pupils with a Statement of SEN. In total, over 50% of pupils are recorded as having SEN but early identification and response is a key principle of the work that the staff are engaged in. Additionally, a recently opened children’s centre is now part of the school and this is working with approximately forty additional families, again utilising principles of early identification

and response. The school caters for children from the immediate area surrounding the school and is, according to the latest Ofsted report (2007b), a popular choice with both children and parents. Ofsted (2007b) graded the school as good in overall effectiveness, recognising the significant development the children make in areas such as literacy. However, they also suggested that other curriculum areas, such as maths, required further development.

5.4.1 The Context of the role of SENCO

P has been head teacher and SENCO at the school for nine years. This is her second post as SENCO and she was willing to take on the additional role when she was appointed as head teacher. Children can enter the nursery from the age of two and a half, so the majority of pupils do not have any identified SEN when they arrive at school, although around ten pupils arrive each term with initial concerns raised by external agencies, such as a health visitor. Due to the very impoverished upbringing that many of the pupils have experienced, the knowledge and experiences which might be considered typical for most children is often missing, with their language, mathematical and social skills also being well below the expected levels for children of a similar age. The school has only three teachers, but higher numbers of support staff, including nursery nurses and TAs. All support staff act as key workers for a small group of pupils. This role often includes implementing SEN targets for individuals and small groups. The latest Ofsted report (2007b) noted how effective staff were at monitoring and responding to children's progress and needs, and how the staff work effectively as a team to address SEN issues.

5.5 School 5: Context

School A is a nursery and primary school, based in a small rural town. The catchment area encompasses areas of affluence as well as families living in social housing. Children aged

between three and four attend the nursery for either morning or afternoon sessions, before transferring to the primary school. In total, 82 pupils attend the school, which includes sixteen children identified as having special educational needs. None of the children currently have a statement of SEN. The school is a popular choice for parents, with Ofsted (2007a) judging it to be an outstanding school, where all pupils achieve and make progress.

5.5.1 The context of the role of SENCO

H has been at the school for three years, and became SENCO a year ago. She has previous experience of working in special schools and was keen to go back into this field when the opportunity arose. The school has two teachers and eight support staff, all of whom are involved with SEN work. Every member of staff acts as a key worker for a small group of children and will then take on a shared role with H when identifying any SEN and working on IEP targets.

The last Ofsted report (2007a) made particular note of the ‘rapid progress’ made by pupils with SEN because all staff are able to respond to individual needs and offer activities that are exciting and capture the children’s interests.

5.6 School 6: Context

School C is a primary school situated in an area of significant social deprivation in a large industrial town. In total there are 404 pupils on roll. Over a third of pupils (133) are on the SEN database and there are fourteen pupils with a statement of SEN and three more currently being assessed. Pupils attending the school often do not have the skills and knowledge expected of children of a similar age, and the school has developed a number of strategies, including parent support sessions and a nurture group to try to overcome this. Additionally,

the number of pupils receiving free school meals is twice the national average (Ofsted, 2008b).

5.6.1 The context of the role of SENCO

W has been a SENCO at the school for four years. Having trained to teach in primary settings, her background is with looked after children in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and special schools. Her current role has recently changed following the amalgamation of a junior and infant school into one primary school. Previously she had no class responsibility, teaching children in the bottom set for English and Maths each morning and then supporting children for additional sessions, linked to IEP targets, each afternoon. Since the amalgamation, she teaches for three days each week, and spends a day working with the other SENCO on SEN issues. Her actual job title is Assistant SENCO, as she now shares the role with the deputy head. She does not teach children with SEN on a daily basis, but works with individuals and small groups, as needs are identified. W suggested that her new role was fluid at this time, as the two roles [SENCO and Assistant SENCO] have yet to be defined and clarified. Alongside the two SENCOs are seventeen TAs. They are either assigned to a particular class, or take responsibility for specific areas, such as supporting children with behaviour management needs.

The last Ofsted report (2008b) for the junior school noted that the teaching and learning for pupils with SEN is very good overall. However, W stressed that this referred to the provision made previously by the junior school and not the new primary school, as children are no longer in ability sets and are instead being supported in class by TAs. Ofsted (2008b) noted that all teachers are skilled at identifying the needs of pupils and providing various mechanisms to support learning as well as their social and emotional needs

CHAPTER SIX: INTERVIEW DATA

6.1 Interview data

This chapter presents the findings from the data gathered from the interviews conducted with six SENCOs. It will be organised around the research question as well as key themes which emerged from the questionnaires. Through coding (see appendix five) these themes were explored and linked to each other and the notion of SENCO as knowledgeable guide. The coding process revealed that the two elements of a knowledgeable guide (leadership and relational aspects of the role) were influencing and impacting on SENCOs working lives in a variety of ways. For example, by making themselves available to staff, pupils and parents, SENCOs have found that they can develop good working relationships with these groups, which is very useful for them but it also creates additional pressures and workloads that go beyond the typical expectations of most teachers. Interview data enabled further exploration of this and provided a deeper understanding of how the initial broad, descriptive themes identified through the questionnaires encompassed a variety of secondary issues. These linked the practice of being a SENCO to theoretical concepts which attempted to define the role, in order to produce a SENCO typology and develop the post in future.

Whilst this chapter draws primarily on data from the in depth interviews with six SENCOs, findings from all aspects of the research, including examples from the questionnaire will also be used. (The interview schedule is presented in appendix two and an example of an interview transcript is presented in appendix three.) The first part of the discussion chapter will focus on the experiences of being a SENCO currently, including the challenges, expectations and implementation of the role, moving it from policy guidance into practice.

6.2 Comparing guidance to practice: the SENCO role

All of the participants in the questionnaires and interviews were happy to discuss their role of SENCO. What quickly became clear was that whilst there are many shared experiences and expectations within the role, the diversity between roles across different schools and local authorities was quite wide.

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b: 29) identifies eight areas that are described as ‘key responsibilities for the SENCO.’ Of the eight areas, six were identified by SENCOs, completing either the questionnaire or through the interviews, as areas for which they take responsibility within their own school, and which form a regular part of their working lives. These areas included day to day operation of SEN policy, co-ordinating provision and liaising with various members of staff, external agencies and parents. All of the SENCOs that completed the questionnaire identified these areas as tasks that they complete regularly throughout the term, if not every week. Through interviews, a number added that the first two areas, relating to day to day administration of the department and co-ordinating provision were the least enjoyable elements of the role, because they were not working directly with the children and often these elements were paper based. For example, a primary based SENCO stated that during a typical week she will “monitor pupil progress, review IEPs, arrange and lead Annual Reviews and subsequent paperwork, make referrals. I rarely interact with the pupils that are not in my class.” These opinions reflect the views of Shuttleworth (2000) that when the SENCO role was formalised, it quickly became an administrative task, rather than an opportunity to develop teaching and learning for all children.

6.2.1 The typical working week for a SENCO

The questionnaire revealed that SENCOs not only have very diverse working lives in terms of how they managed the department, but also in terms of the amount of time they were given to complete the wide variety of tasks that form the SENCO role. Responses to the questionnaire varied from no release time from general teaching duties to over four days, although these two respondents did not have a class teaching responsibility. Furthermore, there appeared to be no relationship between the amount of time individual SENCOs received to carry out the role and the number of children identified as having SEN within each particular school. A large number of SENCOs also had other responsibilities within school, including co-ordinating other subjects and whole school management roles, such as head or deputy. The best way to describe a typical working week for a SENCO is that there does not appear to be one. Findings from the interviews reinforce the findings from the questionnaire in that the role is very diverse across schools and local authorities.

However, there are some shared experiences for those SENCOs working in similar sized secondary schools. J, L and M all reported very similar workloads in terms of teaching. J stated that she taught eight sessions per week, compared to six sessions for L and ten sessions for M. All three SENCOs spoke positively and enthusiastically about this part of the role. M commented that this part of the job was the most rewarding element, and it “keeps me sane”, reflecting the views of J and L. Leadership responsibility will often lead to a reduction in class teaching, as the post holder takes on additional responsibilities. Although this could be beneficial in that the SENCO might have more time to dedicate to other tasks, there is also potential for the SENCO to move away from the tasks that J, L and M value most; pupil interaction in the classroom. Strategic roles are outlined in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES,

2001b) but balancing this with operational roles, such as administrative tasks as well as teaching commitments have the potential to create an unmanageable workload for SENCOs.

Reflecting on their working week, J, L, and M all noted that to some extent, their success and skill at working with the children that access the SEN department had been highly rewarding but had also increased their workload. M and L point out that having developed a very welcoming environment within the Learning Support department, children often choose to spend time there at less structured times of the day, such as break and lunch time, as well as for lessons. M has made a particular point of offering an open door policy to pupils, having seen how well some pupils responded to this, but was then faced with the challenge of a small number of pupils arriving in school at around 7.30 in the morning, because they had nowhere else to go and because they felt “at home” within the learning support department. J and L have similar arrangements in their own schools, although this is often supervised by support staff rather than just the SENCO.

Two primary based SENCOs had very different experiences of the role, because of the organisation of learning within their own schools. As SENCO, W does not take an active role in teaching the children with SEN, although she previously spent every morning teaching literacy and numeracy to children from Years 3- 6 either with a statement of SEN or those who had achieved the lowest scores in end of year tests. Her original SENCO role was very similar to the experiences of the secondary based SENCOs, in terms of her working days. In her new role of completing SEN related work, W reported that this mainly revolved around administrative tasks relating to annual reviews, liaising with external agencies and parents, or supporting teaching assistants and very occasionally teachers, in order to develop provision for pupils with SEN within classrooms. She rarely spent time working with children in this

release time, and when she did it was often doing what she described as “pointless testing with archaic tests, such as Bangor dyslexia.” W stated that her counterpart, with whom she shared the role of SENCO, had a very different approach to SEN and was very keen on identifying specific needs within individual children, whereas W wanted to improve teaching and learning for pupils, whilst being aware of individual needs, although she currently did very little of this.

H was the only SENCO involved with the interviews that did not appear to define herself primarily as SENCO. Whilst she holds the role in a primary school, she stated that she considers her teaching role to take precedence over that of SENCO. Her teaching role is essentially full time, with release time for planning, preparation and assessment, but not her SENCO role, on which she spends one evening each week completing SENCO related tasks. H qualified this approach by highlighting the fact that the size of the school and the number of staff meant that whilst H held the title of SENCO, everyone including support staff, take an active role in all SEN issues. H did not see herself as a leader in the context of SEN, but as a manager, stating that it was the approach that was already in place at the school when she took over the role of SENCO. A small staff team and a wide range of co-ordinator roles meant that this type of shared ownership was adopted for a number of key areas within the school and H believed it was a positive way to raise staff awareness and knowledge of key areas, such as SEN. In this example, leadership could be seen as superfluous in that the staff team are already actively involved with SEN issues, meaning that the role is manageable and staff are actively engaged in professional discussions and developments on a regular basis. The other primary based SENCO, P, was also head teacher and so her typical working week was very different. The dual role meant that she devolved many of the day to day tasks related to SEN to other members of staff, in much the same way that J did. However, the

diverse needs of the school population also meant that she was regularly involved in SENCO related tasks, such as multi-agency meetings and offered support to staff on SEN related issues when this was needed.

Another key role for the majority of SENCOs was working with TAs. What this involved again varied considerably, both between individual SENCOs and across different types of setting. The majority of SENCOs involved in the interviews managed TAs in some way. Only H stated that this was not a specific aspect of her role. Both J and P managed TAs in terms of overseeing timetables for them, acting as their line manager and ensuring they receive professional development. The organisation of TA support for learning was an area that J and P changed when they were appointed in the SENCO role. J reported that the TAs were assigned to particular students for a certain number of hours, often reflecting the suggestions made on a Statement of SEN or through an Annual Review. J expressed concern that this type of system did little to respond to the needs of children and deskilled staff, so that they became what she termed as “shadows” to the pupils. She removed one to one support for the majority of pupils and assigned the majority of TAs to a subject department. She stated that this enabled TAs to develop an expertise in a particular area, they worked with a range of pupils, including children without SEN, and pupils did not become reliant on one member of staff in lessons. P organised TAs differently, in that they each became responsible for a small group of children, working as a “key worker” for them, regardless of any SEN. Should a child have SEN, the key worker, together with the class teacher and SENCO then formulated a response to this. L and M both adopted a similar approach to P with TAs being attached to individual pupils or small groups for certain lessons. However, all three SENCOs working within secondary settings felt that they were seen by both TAs and teaching staff as their line manager, and this often meant that the SENCO would become

involved in issues that the SENCO felt the teachers should be responsible for, such as differentiation in lessons.

W reported that most TAs in her setting were attached to a specific class, with very few moving around for different lessons or groups of children. However, two TAs had a specific role of working with children with a Statement of SEN or other children that staff were concerned about for a variety of reasons, and she worked closely with both of them to devise learning activities and IEP targets, as class teachers rarely provided any learning materials. She also acted as a link between teaching staff and support staff, keeping them informed of developments at staff meetings or development days. W really enjoyed this aspect of the role and had encouraged a number of support staff to consider their future career development, as she stated that they are so skilled when working with diverse groups of pupils and could develop this into a number of career opportunities. She also reported a strong camaraderie between herself as SENCO and the TAs, which she explained in terms of them both being “marginalised by other staff members.” When asked to explain, she suggested that some of her teaching colleagues openly dismissed issues of SEN, as unimportant compared with other aspects of school. Additionally, she stated that even supportive colleagues could not understand why she wanted to be a SENCO. She believed that many teachers treated their TAs in a similar way, and they supported each other because of this negative response they often received. However, W was also quick to add that she genuinely believed that it was not a personal attack on her or the TAs, and staff appreciated the work they all did, but some teaching staff “did not enjoy working with children with SEN, and preferred it when I [the SENCO] took full responsibility for that group of children, including teaching them.”

6.3 Working with external agencies

Reflecting on their typical working week, participants all mentioned the role that external agencies and working with parents played in their SENCO life. For example, L noted that because her school is in an area of significant social deprivation, and because of the high number of pupils recorded on the SEN records at School Action plus or with a Statement of SEN, she spent a significant amount of time each week with a range of external agencies. These included support mechanisms provided to all schools by the LA, such as educational psychologists, but also social workers, the mental health team and the police that are specifically linked to her school. L remarked that she dedicated a lot of time each week to requesting updates from various agencies, as well as attending meetings and completing the necessary paperwork for these.

Whilst the experience of L is somewhat extreme when compared with SENCO experiences in other schools, all of the other SENCOs also spent time with representatives from external agencies, on a regular basis. P, as both SENCO and head teacher reported weekly meetings with a variety of multi-agency workers, such as behaviour support workers and speech and language therapists. H and W worked with a range of external agencies, but noted that their involvement tended to fluctuate throughout each term, depending on things such as Annual Reviews or new concerns about pupils being raised by staff. However, W also commented that she completed her Masters in SEN with the support of the head teacher. Having done this, the school operated a policy that involved her assessing pupils at the nearby primary school, rather than buying in assessment hours through the LA because the head now judged her to be as qualified as an LA advisory teacher. W has enjoyed this change in role, seeing it as an opportunity for professional development. She did raise concerns about testing in this way and felt that external agencies can often be a “very supportive ally when you’re trying to

change or develop new practices in school” and her suggestions may not be so readily acted upon or carry the same influence as those contained within official LA documents.

All of the SENCOS could identify positive aspects of working with external agencies, but they also all stated that this was another role which put additional demands on their already full workload. Whilst organising meeting with external agencies was not easy for the SENCOs that did not have a class responsibility, for H and W, even meeting informally with external representatives within school could be very challenging, when they are on timetable with a class of pupils. For example, M, W and H all reported using breaks and lunchtimes to discuss children. W also reported class teachers being upset by some representatives who thought it would be acceptable to walk into their classroom during lesson time and expect them to be able to discuss a child or strategy with them, something that W then has to try and mediate. Furthermore, all of the SENCOs involved with the interviews could see this element of the role increasing, in terms of the number and scope of meetings, but usually without any additional time to do these.

Working with external professionals often involved parents. Although this could be a challenging aspect to the SENCO role, the SENCOs also reported that it was often very rewarding. All of the secondary based SENCOs suggested that initially trying to involve parents could be difficult. J pointed out that parents are rarely contacted by schools until there is some sort of concern. To address this, she invited all parents into the learning support department when the pupils transfer in year 7 and held regular open sessions throughout the year for parents to see what they do. She has also made use of the TAs linked to the learning support department to work as link tutors between parents and school, as parents reported feeling much more comfortable chatting to them, rather than teaching staff.

H stated that she had never struggled to contact parents because young children have to be accompanied to school, often by parents, so she can access them in this way. Parental responses were not always positive and as a staff team they were trying to develop strategies that increased parental understanding of SEN and the strategies being used in school to support pupils.

W, L, P and M supported J's view that gaining initial contact with parents can be difficult and their responses can be unpredictable. Nevertheless, they also spoke of how they can think of a number of parents that they have worked with directly, developing very close and open relationships. W cited examples where parents would attend meetings with other teaching staff or external agencies, but then return to her to clarify what had happened or to get reassurance about outcomes and expectations of the parent. L shared this experience, using the example of a parent asking L to explain her divorce papers because she "did not know who else to ask" and trusted her. The SENCOs were very proud of these relationships, but they also recognise that this adds another pressure to their already demanding role.

6.4 Administration

A common theme raised in literature, questionnaires and interviews was the amount of administration that the SENCO role generates. A number of SENCOs commented that even with additional release time to complete SEN related tasks, administration regularly had to be completed outside of the typical working week, at the weekend or in holiday time. As a SENCO in a secondary school commented on the questionnaire, "there is not enough time to do anything but administration in SENCO release time." The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) defines key areas for the role quite clearly, but as Garner (2001) and Rose (2003) highlight, the document is only guidance, and although schools are expected to have regard

for the guidance, they are free to implement this in ways that they consider to be most suitable for their setting. Thus, whilst schools are keen for SENCOs to develop all aspects of the role, including the non-administrative elements, this will not in itself reduce the amount of paperwork needed for certain elements of SEN provision, such as Annual Reviews and referrals to external agencies. As a secondary SENCO stated “the necessary paperwork has to be completed.”

The amount of administration related to the role of SENCO is not a surprising finding as it is often debated on SENCO forums and at LA SENCO meetings. However, some SENCOs have managed to address this issue to some extent. Two SENCOs, J and P, both of whom participated in the interviews, made direct reference to approaching the role of SENCO in such a way as to encourage all members of staff, both teaching and support, to be actively involved with the administrative elements as well as the working with the pupils in their lessons. Others, both primary and secondary based, repeatedly mentioned this as an on-going issue.

Secondary based SENCOs approached this element of the role in different ways. J noted that whilst she hears a lot of SENCOs discussing the problems of the amount of administration related to the role, she had addressed this and no longer saw the administrative element as one of the challenges of the role, although J acknowledged that there was too much of it. Due to the size of the school, J stated that she deliberately tried to move away from being actively involved in the everyday detail of the SEN department as soon as she took the role of SENCO. However, she did retain a small number of management roles which she considered essential for the SENCO to complete, such as liaising with external agencies and periodically reviewing pupil progress with other staff members. J stated that initially this was not very

popular with staff, as they felt that many of the tasks they were being asked to do were the responsibility of the SENCO. She suggests that this was often due to “staff believing that they lacked the skills needed to complete tasks such as setting IEP targets.” By developing support systems in school, such as a SEN database, staff were enabled to take responsibility for children with SEN in their classes, rather than J, as SENCO, doing these. Furthermore, J stressed the importance of retaining an “open door” approach to SEN management issues, in that she explicitly encouraged staff to see her as a supportive colleague, who was willing to support them with any difficulties or challenges they encountered. This approach reflects the principles of a knowledgeable guide, in that it encourages the SENCO role to focus on strategic, leadership issues within SEN, but also maintains the relational aspects of it, between the SENCO, the pupils and staff.

The two other secondary based SENCOs mentioned paperwork as a time consuming element of the post. L noted that although she does spend a great deal of time on paperwork at the moment, this is more manageable because she does not have qualified teacher status (QTS), so her teaching role is limited to six sessions per week and the administrative element of the role can be given more time. L pointed out that if she follows the latest government requirements and gains a teaching qualification, her role as SENCO is likely to become much more demanding because her teaching commitment would have to increase but the amount of administration related to the role would remain.

Experiences of primary based SENCOs varied in relation to administration. P openly acknowledged that she had to develop the role so that she could oversee the paperwork but without doing all elements of it, because as head teacher as well as SENCO, it would have been almost impossible to take on sole responsibility for all of administration within that area

of the school. P stated that the administration was not onerous *because* she handed over the vast majority of administration tasks to various members of teaching and support staff. P outlined a similar approach to SEN as J, in that she also deliberately involved every member of staff in SEN management and this meant that “the role was not unmanageable because I handed the detail over to others....but was still available to support staff when they needed it.” Like J, the support element for staff remained but the SENCO did not complete every SEN related task, again reflecting principles of a knowledgeable guide.

H commented on the amount of paperwork, but she linked this to her lack of experience in the post. Furthermore, the staff team work collaboratively on SEN issues so she did not feel responsible for every aspect. H stated that this meant that everyday paperwork, such as IEP writing and reviews was shared between staff, usually being completed by a child’s key worker and only involving H if there was a problem or if provision was going to be changed. These factors meant that H identified one evening per week as SENCO time which was enough, although this was fluid. This type of approach reflects one of the underlying principles of the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), which states that every teacher is a teacher of children with special educational needs. The revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) was meant to clarify the SENCO role as exactly that; one of co-ordination across a school, and not as the person with sole responsibility for all aspects of SEN within a school.

6.5 Teaching children with SEN

Every SENCO mentioned without prompting, the teaching element within their role. Although there was a clear difference in teaching commitments between the primary and secondary SENCOs, this was a highly valued part of the SENCO role, even though the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) does not outline teaching children with SEN as something that

should be part of the co-ordinator's role and could be seen as an additional responsibility. Two of the three primary based SENCOs had teaching commitments that were not related to the role of SENCO, but both W and L noted how much they enjoyed the opportunities they had to work with children with SEN, even if these were quite rare. All three SENCOs based in secondary schools had a reduced teaching commitment, but all three spoke enthusiastically about this. J stated that although it was the one task that she often puts the least amount of time into, in terms of planning or preparation, this was a particularly enjoyable element to the role and helped her to maintain relationships with the pupils within the LS department. L and M both had reduced teaching workloads, which included elements of small group work with children with SEN. Additionally, both operated 'open door' sessions for pupils to access support through the school day, as well as before and after school. Both SENCOs had received positive feedback from pupils about these opportunities and they believed that it helped to build relationships with the pupils in a less formal setting than a typical classroom lesson.

6.6 Additional Roles

The nature of the SENCO role, which includes a variety of elements, such as pupil need, parental involvement and the legal requirements of things such as statements, mean that it can be very time consuming and professionally demanding. However, the questionnaire highlighted a growing number of SENCOs with other responsibilities alongside the SENCO role.

Two of the three primary based SENCOs did not have any additional roles within school. H was a class teacher and SENCO, but held no other role within school. W was class based for three days each week and released for one day to be SENCO, and she did not have any other

official role within school. However, she reported that she was often called upon to cover classes for absent colleagues during her SENCO release time even though the deputy head teacher no longer had a class and is meant to be responsible for this. W noted that she was regularly expected to do this and her work with children with SEN was cancelled. P also held the post of head teacher within her school and this was the post for which she applied. Due to the relatively small number of staff within school, it was essential for all staff members to take on a number of responsibilities. P stated that she identified herself as head first, due to the nature of the role and expectations of others, but she admitted that the SENCO role demanded a great deal from her and it was not easy to separate them, especially because of the high level of needs in her setting.

The three SENCOs based in secondary schools all held additional roles alongside that of SENCO. All three had responsibility for line managing TAs, regardless of whether or not their role linked to SEN. J and L were also the designated child protection officer, which for L added quite a significant amount of work to her role. J was also the lead member of staff for social and emotional learning in school and, as part of SMT, had performance management responsibilities for a group of teachers. L was also co-ordinator for Gifted and Talented provision and M was responsible for developing differentiation across the school. All three were aware of the additional demands that the roles added to their working week, but they were also keen to be seen as capable of contributing to school wide development, as this was another way to develop SEN as a whole school issue. M noted that as SENCO, she was not a member of a particular department within school and often felt marginalised during staff meetings or development days. However, with her differentiation role, she felt that staff could see the relevance and use of her contribution. She stated that she aimed to develop this

element of her work further as a mechanism to develop responses to learning that are useful for a number of children, and not just those with SEN.

6.7 The SENCO: leader or manager?

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b: 30) states that the SENCO role is ‘at least equivalent to that of curriculum, literacy or numeracy coordinator...Many schools find it effective for the SENCO to be a member of the senior leadership team.’ Whilst there is some ambiguity in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) because it does not specifically label the role of SENCO as a leadership one, it does align it with core subject areas for which coordinators are usually leaders, in that they take on a strategic development role for the subject area, with an expectation that all other teachers and other staff members will contribute to the day to day delivery of the detail. More recent government guidelines relating to the SENCO role (SENCO Regulations, DCSF, 2008) did little to strengthen the SENCO role in terms of being a leader, stating that where a SENCO is not a member of the schools’ leadership team, a member should be designated as a representative to the group.

Within individual schools, SENCOs interviewed had very diverse experiences of the role in terms of being a leader or manager. P clearly had a leadership role, being head teacher of the setting. It was very clear that P was also a leader when acting as SENCO, and that this was a strategic and deliberate development. She commented that whilst she was keen to take on the role of SENCO, it quickly became obvious that she could not complete many of the day to day management tasks that are typical for a SENCO, alongside the demands of being a head teacher. Thus, it became essential to develop the SENCO role as a leader, across the entire school, so that P could manage her workload. Although this took some time to develop because staff required training and systems had to be developed within school, P noted the

positive impact this had on the SENCO role as she never felt it became unmanageable in terms of paperwork and administration, because every member of staff, including TAs and nursery nurses are actively involved in planning, delivering and reviewing provision for children with SEN. This enabled her as SENCO to focus on school wide issues and to develop provision for SEN that was beneficial to all pupils, stating that “I had to develop a school wide leadership approach.... But this has improved practice for all children.”

P stated that this type of approach had two specific benefits in that it empowered staff, increasing their knowledge and skills in issues related to SEN and facilitated her to act as a knowledgeable guide, offering advice to staff, which in turn enabled P to maintain an overview of individual children, without being directly involved with every detail of their school experience. This has since meant that staff have developed specialist areas, such as speech and language development that they plan and deliver to small groups of children during lessons. This reduced the need for so many IEPs and improved practice across the school, as staff recognised and responded to needs as they arose, without needing to wait for advice from external agencies. These points are reflected in what P defined as her “vision” for SEN when she took on the role of SENCO, as she had wanted to move away from teaching staff approaching SEN by highlighting any problems they were having with an individual child and then deferring responsibility for that child to the SENCO. She felt it was essential for staff to think what they, as part of a team that included the SENCO, could do to support every child in the class, reflecting a distributed leadership approach to SEN. Implementing these changes could be easier as head teacher, particularly if staff have respect for the vision and ethos for which the school is striving. Comments from other SENCOs suggest that they lack this status which in turn could limit the type of changes that could be made.

From the initial comments made by J, it was clear that her approach to SEN had been very similar to Ps in that she tried to develop skills, systems and strategies that were not reliant on her. She stated that her approach to the role of SENCO as a leader had been deliberate, partly as a mechanism to raise the profile of SEN across the school. She acknowledged that this took a significant amount of time to develop and implement, and some staff were either unwilling or felt unable to take on greater responsibility for children with SEN in their classroom. However, it has ultimately enabled her to move away from solely working with small groups of children, to develop whole school systems and plan strategically for the longer term.

J openly acknowledged that she no longer knows every detail with regard to each child with SEN. J argues that “leaders can’t, but importantly I do know where to get that information when it is needed,” suggesting a strategic focus in line with that of a leader, rather than an operational focus of a manager. Having set up effective systems within school and built up a supportive and knowledgeable team within the LS department, J feels confident enough to delegate tasks such as IEP writing and planning small group support to others, whilst still being available when staff need further guidance and support. According to J, this enabled her to empower staff, and increased their confidence in dealing with pupils with SEN and other pupils, as well as supporting her role as SENCO and demonstrating the potential contribution to school wide development that the SENCO can make.

Both M and L stated that they are actively trying to develop the leadership aspect of the SENCO role. L is part of the school leadership team and she reflected on the significant changes she has been able to implement, although she has had to look for the support of the

head teacher to implement some of the changes she wanted to make. The school implemented various strategies, devised by L, to reduce the number of exclusions at the school, and to develop the SEN provision at this site, because of the high levels of need within the pupil cohort. The development of the SENCO post as a leader, rather than a manager is something that L deliberately set out to achieve, not only as a mechanism to develop good practice within the school, but at a very personal level, to demonstrate her skills within the field of SEN and inclusion, despite her lack of a teaching qualification, as she felt that some teaching staff do not see her as a colleague, but as part of the support staff team. L emphasised the positive impact she has had on SEN, and she was adamant that her passion for the area, alongside her knowledge and ability to work with diverse and often challenging young people, meant that teaching and support staff soon recognised the contribution she could make to the school which addressed some of the negative responses initially received from teachers regarding her lack of a teaching qualification.

Whilst her non-teaching status was no longer such an issue for teaching staff, L had to maintain a management role in conjunction with the leadership element, because of her limited teaching hours. The new guidelines from the government, requiring the SENCO to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), could impact negatively on the role L had. She stated that her background in community work had been very beneficial to her current role and the needs of the pupils she works with and she does not want to be a teacher. When comparing her own working week with other SENCOs in the local authority, the majority of whom, according to L, complain about the lack of time to complete all of the administration linked to the post of SENCO, L realised her lack of a teaching qualification had enabled her to work in different ways with the pupils and staff. L worked very hard at the role, regularly completing a ten hour day but without the added pressures of a large number of teaching hours to

complete on top of SENCO responsibilities. Thus, by adhering to the government requirements and obtaining QTS, the SENCO role for L could well become more burdensome and would limit her opportunities to continue to develop SEN provision within school because she would be required to teach for more hours each week. She believed that she would have to revert back to being a manager, just to stay in control of the administrative elements and teach for a significant part of each day. The learning outcomes outlined by the TDA (2009) for the National Award for SEN Coordination include reference to staff development and support including leading colleagues, but this could be potentially very challenging for a SENCO without QTS. Furthermore, the lack of QTS could impact negatively on the status given to the role, with an implication that support staff could fulfil the role. However, using support staff could limit opportunities to develop the post, as one option could be to extend the pedagogic aspect, but this would be difficult to achieve if the post holder was not a qualified teacher. The SENCO Regulations (Explanatory Memorandum, 2008) stipulate that all SENCOs must hold QTS or be working towards this, so that every SENCO holds the qualification by 2011. Although the lack of QTS was seen by L as beneficial, using staff with different qualifications and experiences would not be possible or legal any longer.

M was not a member of the senior leadership team, but was keen to develop this aspect of the SENCO role, although she had similar concerns to L in terms of workload. M suggested that the positive aspects of such a promotion, such as the ability to implement school wide changes, would have to be balanced against other expectations that increased responsibility would bring. M felt very aware of the SENCO still being ultimately responsible for children with SEN, particularly as Statements of SEN are a legal document, without additional leadership roles to perform. Even with a devolved approach to the day to day management of

SEN within school, M commented that the expectations of a leadership strand alongside that of SENCO might make the role even less attractive and manageable. This could be interpreted as a rejection of a leadership role; M valued pupil interaction and the relationship element of the SENCO role, whereas a leadership role could focus on strategic developments at school level, reducing the engagement with pupils inside and outside of the classroom.

W and H were adamant that their role as SENCO was purely one of management, in that they maintained records, ensuring necessary paperwork was completed and up to date and liaised with external agencies, but they did not have opportunities to contribute to the development of SEN throughout the school in any way. Both said that they worked with other teachers, but they did not see this as them acting as an expert or knowledgeable guide, interpreting this as a professional discussion between colleagues. H said that the staff team she worked with included some very experienced teachers, whereas she was still very young and relatively new to the role. As a team, they tended to collaborate on most aspects of school life due to the size of the school, and thus leadership was distributed throughout the team. However, W commented that despite working with very experienced colleagues, she was keen to develop SEN provision within school but felt she was prevented from doing this by the head and deputy, whose views on SEN she described as “dated, more like integration than inclusion”. Furthermore, she felt that some teachers agreed with this view, because whilst she completed most of the SEN related work with support from TAs, classroom teachers did not get involved beyond basic classroom responses, such as simple differentiation or using a TA to support learning. If she adopted a leadership approach, W felt that some staff would not respond to her because of the possible impact it would have on their workload. She noted “I still feel outside of their [the teaching] group. When I did not have a class, some teachers would complain if I suggested my children should be included in activities, such as the

Christmas production. They don't want me to be or see me as a leader, just a manager of SEN, so they don't have to do it." W stated that by managing SEN she maintained the status quo within the school and between herself and some of the other members of teaching staff, but this approach prevented her from developing the SEN department in ways that she would like.

6.7.1 The SENCO as knowledgeable guide

Opportunities for SENCOs to act as a knowledgeable guide, that is a supportive expert who works with colleagues on issues related to SEN, appear to be closely linked to that of being either a leader or manager. Participants with a leadership element could clearly identify opportunities to use their knowledge and skills to develop provision within their school, whereas those that only managed SEN spoke in depth about various administrative tasks, but appeared to lack time and opportunities to do any development work.

H was very enthusiastic about her SENCO, role, recounting at length her experiences of working with children with a range of different needs, and her own professional development through training provided by the LA. However, she suggested that her perceived "lack of experience" compared with other staff members in the setting meant that she did not feel confident about acting as a knowledgeable guide because she felt that other staff would know more than she did. W also felt that she had few opportunities to be a knowledgeable guide, despite her qualifications and previous experience related to SEN. She did feel that the TAs often approached her for advice which she saw being implemented in classrooms regularly. W said that she had started to change some of the current systems within the school, for example, she now supported staff with IEP writing rather than completing them herself and then sharing them with staff, and hoped to extend this further. Even though external

agencies, such as the Learning Support Teacher (LST), had actively encouraged her to develop a leadership role and had approached the head teacher to advocate changes, she was uncertain how successful this was likely to be, as he appears to want to retain what she termed as a “traditional administrative role” for the SENCO.

The other SENCOs interviewed clearly identified with the notion of a knowledgeable guide. They had opportunities to provide professional development to colleagues, usually during twilight sessions after school. For J, this has been so successful that she initially extended it to the school’s partner girls’ school, and provided sessions across the LA. Each SENCO provided examples of how they have been involved in helping staff, either as a group or when individuals have asked for guidance, then seeing their suggestions in action, which they found very rewarding. As M stated “it made me feel valued and my views are respected.” Additionally, L, J and M specifically stated that they used this as a mechanism to empower staff to feel more confident when dealing with issues related to SEN, which they hoped would enable them to relinquish some of the roles a SENCO might complete, such as developing IEP targets into lesson plans. Although this appears to be very positive, both L and M noted that this was still very much an area that required further development, with twilight sessions only happening occasionally.

From the experiences of this group of SENCOs, it would appear that some are utilising some principles of a knowledgeable guide, particularly P, who is also the Head Teacher, and J, a member of the leadership team in school. However, none of the other SENCOs are using all elements consistently, suggesting that the principles could be implemented to offer a logical and developmental step forward when trying to clarify the role of the SENCO. This could help to define the role within the context of teaching and learning, rather than SEN or needs,

and utilise SENCO skills to support staff pedagogically. SENCOs would still retain the specific SEN elements of the role, as these would still be essential, but many of the more generic elements would become the responsibility of class teachers.

6.8 The legal element to the role of SENCO

An issue raised by four of the SENCOs was what they termed the “legal element” of the role. J, L, M and W all specifically mentioned this, without being asked about it during interviews. All four felt increasingly aware of pupil rights and entitlements, linked to having a Statement of SEN, for which they are ultimately responsible. W referred to an example when the parents of a child with a Statement of SEN challenged the provision provided by school. Both the school and LA supported her throughout this, but she felt that they were questioning her professional skills and practice. J was also very aware of the legal implications of the role of SENCO, with reference to issues such as Annual Reviews. The status of the role within school may be equal to other subject areas, but this is an added pressure that she believes other staff do not always appreciate. J, L and M stated that the role can be quite isolating as other staff will help, but they as SENCO are ultimately responsible for the documentation and support provided to children and young people attending their school, and they will have to defend this provision if it is ever questioned or challenged.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the six semi structured interviews conducted with practicing SENCOs. Findings indicate that SENCOs are committed practitioners, with a clear interest in children and learning, as well as the subject of SEN. Although administrative elements of the role have been highlighted here, the findings also offer some insights into possible future developments that might go some way to reduce this element and encourage

all staff to be actively involved in SEN related issues. The next chapter will explore these issues further, analysing and interpreting the findings from the questionnaires and interviews, and considering where the SENCO role might change and develop in future.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews are analysed, discussed and linked to key points raised in the literature review. Findings about the experiences of being a SENCO, their role, status and professional development are explored. It is clear that the participants in this study enjoyed being a SENCO and were highly committed to the children and young people that they work with. However, the role also continues to be very time consuming, and although developing the leadership element of the role might relieve the SENCO of some tasks, there is still a need for SENCOs to be involved in other bureaucratic elements of the role. Furthermore, SENCOs valued the relationships that they formed and fostered with pupils, parents, staff and other professionals and a leadership role might limit the opportunities to be part of this in any meaningful way.

7.1 Defining the role: SENCO as knowledgeable guide

The literature discussed earlier analysed the SENCO role and identified key dimensions, ongoing tensions and the status of SEN within schools currently. Kearns (2005: 137) outlined five different approaches a SENCO can adopt when developing their own responses to the role, each of which related to what SENCOs identified as 'priority demands' in their setting. Rosen-Webb (2011) extends this, identifying skills related to coordination, management and personal qualities in order to develop commitment and enthusiasm for special educational needs and inclusion in other members of staff. Both writers identify shared experiences and tasks that a SENCO does, offering some insights into what it is like to be a SENCO, forming the basis of a SENCO typology. Literature about the SENCO role highlighted the conflicting demands placed on the SENCO, as it straddled leadership and managerial roles (Pearson, 2008a; Cole, 2005b). Furthermore, the relational aspect of the role, based around the needs

of pupils was also highlighted (Oldham and Radford, 2011). These two aspects, created the foundation for a further SENCO typology which emerged from this research, which is the notion of SENCO as knowledgeable guide. The two elements of this; the SENCO as leader whilst still maintaining and developing professional relationships with staff and pupils so that inclusive provision can be developed and extended, would provide the basis from which to begin to clarify the role, responsibilities and status of the SENCO within the context of the school and other co-ordinator positions.

7.1.1 Leadership and the ethic of care: clarifying the SENCO role

Various studies (NUT, 2004; Pearson, 2008b; Szwed, 2007) draw attention to the ever increasing workload SENCOs face, as pupils' diversity of needs becomes increasingly recognised and labelled. Kearns (2005) noted that it is difficult to explore the impact school structures, organisation and relationships have on the SENCO role, but what was evident is that none of the SENCOs were doing every aspect of the role outlined by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), and most defined themselves as either a leader or manager. For example, J and P had both actively initiated systems and strategies so that their role was strategic, acting as what Kearns (2005:144) described as an 'expert'. In contrast to W and H who saw their role as purely administrative and managerial, approaching the role as 'auditors' (Kearns, 2005: 141). The differing approaches had benefits and limitations, in that SENCOs had to prioritise some tasks over others, which often led to a reduction in the tasks that they enjoyed, including hands on work with children with SEN. This illustrates the challenge faced by SENCOs, when trying to balance generic and specialist roles (Norwich, 2010). The SENCOs who identified themselves as leaders were not actively involved in many administrative tasks, although they were willing to provide support for colleagues and maintained an overview of these elements. Conversely, SENCOs who saw their role as a

manager had very few opportunities to influence school wide initiatives, but they had more opportunities to work with pupils, parents and some colleagues, such as TAs. However, this generic role, related to the day- to- day tasks, creates some of the limitations SENCOs face, in that they never have time to move past these and by completing them, other members of school staff do not develop skills which are potentially valuable for other pupils within their lessons, as well as those with SEN. One of the characteristics of SENCO as knowledgeable guide would be the implementation of distributed leadership for some aspects of the SENCO role, including the development of provision for children within lessons and different subject areas. Utilising this approach would mean that the SENCO would still be available to contribute the specialist knowledge when required to ensure that the needs of children are met, but teaching staff would take responsibility for those aspects of SEN which were part of daily lessons. This approach would enable the SENCO to take charge of strategic dimensions of the role, such as the development of policy into good practice, and has the potential to reduce their workload, as other members of staff assume responsibility for day-to-day management of SEN in their classes or subject areas.

All the SENCOs interviewed mentioned the workload demands placed on them by the role. Although colleagues acknowledged this additional pressure, there was very little collaboration in SEN related issues, making the SEN role unsustainable in the longer term. Distributing roles and creating some shared responsibilities for SEN would encourage each SENCO to focus on priority areas for their setting, building capacity into the post, so that they could use the specialist SEN skills to create a vision and then enable the school to work collectively towards this. This approach would also utilise relational aspects of the ethic of care, which stress the importance of interaction and support with others in order to develop effective practice (Vogt, 2002).

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and recent guidance related to the SENCO role (DCSF, 2008) make reference to both leadership and managerial aspects of it. However, debates about role definition need to be contextualised within the career plans and aspirations of the SENCO and their school. M noted that a leadership element could make her role very difficult, trying to balance administrative tasks with leadership expectations that would be part of any leadership role. H did not see any benefit in becoming a leader, due to the existing organisation within her school, where most tasks were shared due to the relatively small number of staff. Kearns (2005) points out that whilst a small number of SENCOs adopt a broad interpretation of the role, the majority tended to identify with one specific type of SENCO role, limiting opportunities to work in other ways. This implies that the breadth of the role is too broad, as Norwich (2010) suggested, and might be more effectively organised by involving more than one person. This might include other teaching staff, but another option would be to utilise staff with other skills.

One SENCO, L, did not have QTS, and highlighted how useful her skills and experience from a social work background were to her as SENCO. Additionally, she saw potential limitations if an increasing teaching load became a part of her SENCO role, as this would limit her ability to focus on and develop pastoral support in the same way. Principles of distributed leadership stress the importance of building capacity by developing professional relationships, so that each member of a team can contribute and learn from other members (Rayner and Gunter, 2004), an approach that would be enhanced if members had a variety of skills and experiences to offer. Furthermore, redefining the role as a knowledgeable guide might address the concerns outlined by M (above), as her role would be different, so the challenges which she identified would no longer be relevant to her SENCO role. H is already

utilising some of the principles of a knowledgeable guide, as a small staff team depends on everyone contributing. She interpreted her own contribution within her perceived lack of experience, but this highlights the benefits of exploiting skills from different members of staff, as this encourages the development of supportive professional relationships, reflecting principles of the ethic of care, where staff respect and support each other to develop a curriculum which ensures all pupils can learn and achieve (Nias, 1999).

Another benefit of this approach would be to encourage the development of an SEN network, where the SENCO could contribute a SEN dimension to other areas of school development. Approaching SEN from this perspective would remove much of the breadth from the role whilst ensuring that each of the aspects identified by Kearns (2005) was covered by a member of staff, working in collaboration with the SENCO. This would strengthen the relational aspect of the role and begin to create a SEN team, developing mutually supporting relationships in line with principles of the ethic of care (Day, 2000) and removing some of the isolation SENCOs can feel.

7.2 The SENCO role compared to national guidance.

Participants' comments about their experiences of being a SENCO contributed to a growing understanding of an ever changing and diverse role that also has some shared characteristics, both in terms of what a SENCO does, but also in terms of what matters to SENCOs. The questionnaire provided an insight into the variety of roles that can be part of the blanket term 'SENCO', as outlined in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). The questionnaire also highlighted the significant number of SENCOs with additional roles in school, including leadership duties and responsibility for other curriculum areas (Pearson, 2008b). Although it is unlikely that this situation is unique to SENCOs, the roles and responsibilities that a

SENCO tasks have been categorised by Blandford and Gibson (2000) as teacher, manager and administrator. Combining these with other tasks within school could be one reason why the post can be so difficult to fill and as a questionnaire respondent noted “Staff in the school recognise what a difficult role it is and probably feel grateful it’s one they don’t have”.

The questionnaire and interviews revealed that whilst the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) identifies core areas of responsibility for a SENCO, the interpretation and implementation of these varies considerably between schools (Szwed, 2007; Rose, 2003). All of the participants were dedicated to developing the SEN department for the benefit of pupils, other staff and their own professional development and this often led to them taking on responsibilities that could be considered above and beyond the expectations of any other subject co-ordinator. As one SENCO stated when discussing her colleagues, comparing her role with other subject areas, “They are supportive but I don’t think they fully appreciate the amount of time that goes into the paperwork – probably because it is done for them!” This still reflects a managerial role that is based in operational issues (Kearns, 2005), rather than school wide strategic planning (Day *et al*, 2000). From these experiences, it would seem that the outline provided by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) is just an outline that inevitably gets added to, modified and developed, depending on the context in which each SENCO works. This can be seen as beneficial in that it would provide opportunities for the SENCO to respond to the needs of the setting and the children. However, this lack of consistency can also be interpreted as having a negative impact on SENCO workload, in that the broad interpretation means that almost any task relating to SEN could become the responsibility of the SENCO. Garner (2001) suggests that there is a lack of shared responsibility for issues relating to SEN within the current Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), in that a broad range of tasks remain with the SENCO because policy guidance does not outline expectations of other

middle managers in relation to SEN. Norwich (2010) also highlights that many SENCO tasks are generic, some of which could easily be completed by other members of staff. Whilst a rigid framework of expectations outlining the SENCO role might be equally unwanted, further guidance exploring the role other teachers and support staff have in relation to the SENCO would highlight how SEN relates to other curriculum areas (Pearson, 2010). It could also link the SENCO role to teaching and learning and might go some way to redressing the imbalance between the SENCO role and other subject coordinators (Garner, 2001).

All of the participants had some teaching responsibility within their own school, either with one class or with groups of children identified as having SEN. Only one of the participants was not a qualified teacher, so a teaching responsibility could be expected, but it is important to note that the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) does not make any reference to teaching children with SEN when it outlines the key responsibilities for SENCOs (Mittler, 2000). It also did not require the SENCO to have QTS, although the assumption by most schools was that it would be a teacher who held the role, in line with coordinator posts for other subject areas. Later guidance (SENCO Regulations, DCSF, 2008) recommends this and requires the post holder to have QTS. In this respect the role is based around notions of coordination, in much the same way that any subject area within school would have a designated member of staff that leads on that area (Wise, 2000). Thus, the SEN coordinator role is about providing guidance and offering support to all other members of staff within school about issues relating to SEN, reflecting the views of Carrington and Elkins (2002) on coordinating any subject. For the majority of participants, their experiences within school did match this expectation to some extent, but it was only part of a much broader range of expectations they

took on with the role and any clear definition or parameters within which the role should function remained unclear (Cowne, 2005).

Mittler (2000) suggests that even with on-going developments within the role of SENCO, there is an expectation that they will be responsible for teaching children with SEN. SENCOs based in secondary schools did spend at least part of their working life teaching children with SEN, whereas those based in primary schools often had class responsibilities alongside their co-ordinator role. Participants from both primary and secondary noted the confusion around what role a SENCO should play in teaching children with SEN and how it often created tension between the SENCO and other colleagues when expectations were different. An example of this is given by P as she observed staff coming to her with concerns about a particular child, with the expectation that she would then take ownership of the issue, decide what responses to make and then implement these. P emphasised her willingness to work with colleagues and offer support so that they developed a better understanding of SEN and retained responsibility for the children in their class. The approach adopted by P moved some of the managerial elements of the SENCO role away from her and gave them to other members of staff. She implemented strategic developments within the area of SEN, but delegated much of the day to day management to other members of staff. However, P was also Head Teacher, so she was more able to influence staff, because of this position and could challenge staff perceptions of what their roles should be with regard to children with SEN. In some ways, traditional hierarchical structures of leadership can be seen in this example, but P also utilised principles of distributed leadership, in that responsibility for SEN was shared between the staff team, rather than being the sole responsibility of the SENCO (Harris, 2001), although this might have been essential in order to complete both SENCO and headship tasks, rather than simply being a mechanism to encourage staff ownership and responsibility.

The development of distributed approaches to SEN was utilised in some way by nearly all of the SENCOs that participated in interviews. Only H did not feel that she had developed the department in this way, although she mentioned how staff in the setting work very closely on a range of subject areas, including SEN. When W took on the role of the SENCO, she inherited a tradition of SENCO, writing every IEP. She reflected that being new to the school offered her the opportunity to change practice because she did not feel capable of writing targets for children she did not know and would not teach, but staff were initially unwilling to complete a task that they considered to be a part of the SENCO's role. In this way, W was successful in moving the SENCO role away from an administrative task, that focused on individual children and she implemented a distributed approach to SEN (Brodin and Lindstrand, 2007). Although W, J, P, L and M all reported some resistance to the distribution of tasks relating to SEN, they all identified the positive impact this had on the ability of staff to respond to the children in their classrooms and how staff could see the type of support the SENCO might be able to offer to them. Research suggests that the development of inclusive practices within schools often means that all children benefit, and not just those with SEN, as teachers become increasingly skilled at responding to diversity (Wedell, 2005). Through the development of distributed leadership within the SEN departments, SENCOs in this study have contributed, somewhat indirectly, to staff professional development as well as raising their own professional status. Through this, the SENCO moves away from managerial aspects of SEN, towards a role that potentially impacts on all pupils and is related to the development of effective teaching and learning; a leadership role that reflects the guidance set out in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). Furthermore, some of the approaches outlined here utilise the SENCO as a knowledgeable guide; examples illustrate how they continue to try and build supportive relationships with colleagues in order to develop learning and

teaching for children with SEN. Additionally, although some of the SENCOs interviewed did not see themselves in a leadership role, they were finding ways to reduce the focus on administrative tasks, including the generic roles identified by Norwich (2010).

7.3 The SENCO role: currently a leader or manager?

Results from the questionnaire suggested that most of the SENCOs can identify both leadership and managerial elements to the role. Of the forty nine SENCOs questioned, five identified as only a leader and the same number as only a manager. Of the SENCOs that defined themselves as a manager, one was very new to the post, with less than six months experience of the role. Two others, both working in secondary schools, had two years' experience and their comments suggest that they still feel relatively inexperienced in the role beyond the managerial elements. All three SENCOs commented that they did not as yet feel that they were 'experts' although they would try to support and work with colleagues in any way they could. Subject leaders, particularly within secondary schools, are usually expected to have a sound understanding of the subject area that they co-ordinate (Wise, 2000). However, this is not straightforward in terms of SEN. Subject knowledge could range from understanding various impairments and the potential barriers that these can create to LA systems to access support, as well as supporting colleagues to develop responses within lessons. Mittler (1990) advocated the development of the SENCO role as a teaching and learning coordinator, which had the potential to challenge traditional responses to SEN, moving away from a deficit, needs based approach, which could at the same time, potentially raise the status of the SENCO, making it relevant to all children. However, the SENCO role is directly related to children and young people in a slightly different way than other coordinator roles in that they are the subject of the role, rather than an academic topic (Oldham and Radford, 2011). This might seem like a pedantic interpretation of the post but it

was this element that the SENCOs reported as being the most important and enjoyable part of the work they did; they wanted to interact with children and young people and enable them to make progress in their learning, reflecting principles of the ethic of care, which highlights the relational aspect of care in teaching and care based professions. Unlike other subject areas this association means that the needs and challenges faced by school staff are ever changing, in response to the changing needs of pupils. The SENCO can be an expert in SEN, but the diversity seen in pupil populations in relation to curriculum and learning needs means that responses have to be continually refined and changed. Some of this will build on previous good practice, but Jordan *et al* (2009) note that teachers often lack confidence in dealing with issues of SEN, perhaps because of this continuous need to change and develop. This could explain why SENCOs become entrenched in certain aspects of the role, outlined by Kearns (2005) or maintain the role as either a leader or manager, as this is one way to keep it manageable.

A number of respondents noted that the SENCO role was given to them when they applied for another job, for example P, when she applied for the role of head teacher. H reported getting the role because other members of staff already had coordinator roles and she did not. The remaining four SENCOs that were interviewed all applied for their role because it was a position that they wanted, but only L was working towards a qualification that was specific to her role, whereas the others had relevant experience and some training, but no formal qualifications. Busher and Harris (2000) noted various benefits of having a clear subject specific knowledge. These include the support offered in terms of topic content, developments and research, which in turn helps to form and create a subject identity. Whilst all of the SENCOs were keen and enthusiastic to work with colleagues and support them with SEN, they also felt that they had to show colleagues how their knowledge about SEN could

be relevant to them, their class or their subject area, and not just when the teacher was working with specific children with SEN. M and J both spoke of having to prove their subject knowledge and skills to other colleagues before being seen as knowledgeable, and this knowledge often seemed to be gained 'on the ground' as SENCOs become more experienced, rather than through formal qualifications. This perhaps impacts negatively on staff perceptions of the SENCO, although national qualifications for SENCOs might address this issue in future. It also suggests that SENCOs have to demonstrate their potential for leadership, rather than automatically gaining that status (Jones, 2004) unless, like P, it is gained through other roles such as headship. In contrast, various SENCOs discussed the feeling of isolation they had at work, for example, M noted that as SENCO she often did not feel that she was a part of any staff team, as in subject or phase teams, reflecting traditional views of leadership, in which responsibility for a specific aspect of school falls to one person. Through the distribution of some SEN responsibilities, a network of support and a shared vision could be developed, that utilises academic research in the field, which in turn could reduce the isolation experienced by many SENCOs (Crisp *et al*, 2006; Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003). This network approach, utilising the SENCO as a knowledgeable guide related to learning, rather than being just an expert in SEN, would enable the SENCO to distribute tasks to other members of staff, by enabling them to participate in the elements of SEN that relate to their teaching responsibilities. It would also offer opportunities for the SENCO to build mutually supportive relationships with other members of staff, reflecting principles of the ethic of care (Held, 1993). Staff with different skills would be working together to develop effective provision for a range of children, as well as developing their own professional knowledge in a range of subject areas and the SENCO role would be less isolated from other areas of school provision. This could encourage a move towards leadership for the SENCO, but even if this did not happen, the role could become manageable as more staff would be

involved with the day to day administrative tasks, which the NUT (2004) identified as an issue that had not decreased with the introduction of the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b). Furthermore, it could enable the SENCO role to start the process advocated by Cole (2005b: 304) of 'bringing inclusion into the mainstream' with the SENCO leading the drive towards inclusion for all pupils.

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) suggests that the SENCO should be part of the school leadership team, suggesting the role should go beyond managerial responsibilities. Participants highlighted that it is almost impossible to avoid spending some time completing managerial roles, as they had to ensure the department had complete records and children received the support they needed. What became clear from both the questionnaires and interviews was that for most SENCOs the role straddled both concepts, with the SENCO acting as either leader or manager depending on the task in hand. As M stated, she would like to do more leading, but a big part of the role is managing the department and the related administration. Despite this, many of the questionnaires and interviews suggested that the SENCO had a vision for the department and the children that they worked with, an essential element of leadership. These were underpinned by clear values of equity, equality and achievement for the pupils at their school. Achievement was valued in the traditional understanding of the term, related to end of year exam results, but also in different ways, such as staying in school and attending lessons or developing friendships with other pupils (Wedell, 2005). This again highlights the relational aspect of the SENCO role, aligning it with the principles of the ethic of care, by fostering empathy, respect and responsibility. In this way, being a leader is beneficial, not because of the reduction in administrative tasks, but because it would provide more opportunities to expand this inclusive ethos across the school (Cole, 2005b).

Participants suggested that their colleagues were appreciative of what they did and recognised the level of commitment and hard work needed to be a successful SENCO. They identified various ways in which their colleagues appreciated their hard work, although these tended to focus on the managerial tasks that they completed, such as completing IEPs, so that other members of teaching staff did not have to be involved. Furthermore, participants expressed concern that by maintaining the management responsibilities for a SENCO, the workload is quite considerable. For example, a questionnaire respondent noted ‘I am expected to take responsibility for all areas of SEN whereas with other subject areas, teachers expect to deliver, plan and assess for all children.’ Whilst government policies might advocate a leadership role, it would seem that this does not reflect the experiences of SENCOs currently in post and this appears to create additional workload for them. Particularly for SENCOs working in primary schools, trying to balance class responsibilities with paperwork for the SEN department does increase the professional demands on their time, and the addition of leadership responsibilities without a redistribution of management tasks could make the role impossible to maintain. Norwich (2010) questioned whether there is a need for specialist coordination for SEN. He argued that in an inclusive school, many of the more administrative tasks currently assigned to the SENCO could be distributed between other subject coordinators. However, Norwich (2010) recognised that some residual specialist elements are likely to remain even when many generic tasks have been designated to other colleagues. All of the SENCOs involved in the interviews spoke passionately about their commitment to SEN and inclusion, suggesting that they would want to retain some sort of role within SEN. Norwich (2010) claimed that by distributing generic tasks, SENCOs would have a reduced coordination responsibility, whilst maintaining more specific SEN focused

tasks, creating a more manageable workload, and enabling the SENCOs to target their work into areas for development, such as teaching and learning (Oldham and Radford, 2011).

However, this highlights another challenge for any SENCO in that having attained the post, there are relatively few career opportunities open to them if their passion is specifically related to SEN and inclusion issues. This lack of career development was highlighted by three SENCOs as they felt that they would have to choose between a leadership role within school that would mean losing at least some of their work within SEN or moving away from a school based teaching post completely. One option would be to take an advisory role within the LA, as this would maintain the SEN element, but could limit their interaction with children, which was particularly important to them. New SENCOs are expected to complete the national SENCO post graduate certificate and many SENCOs in this study held a variety of additional SEN related qualifications, both of which can be seen as beneficial for the role, as it enables SENCOs to be experts in the field and can increase the professional status of those in the post. Professional development can also be used as a mechanism for teachers to demonstrate their potential for leadership positions within school, meaning that the SENCO role could be used as a stepping stone into senior leadership. This is reflected in the aims of the national SENCO qualification, which identifies the need to develop strategic leadership skills related to policy and practice for SEN and inclusion (TDA, 2009). The outcomes of this could have very positive implications for the development of provision for SEN and inclusion across the school, as well as for the SENCO post, in that it would be seen as part of senior leadership and relevant to all aspects of school provision, developing inclusive practice rather than SEN. However, the SENCO role is demanding and so many SENCOs spoke of the passion they had for the area, which sustained them throughout the busy and stressful times (Jones, 2004). If this enthusiasm is lacking in those who are coerced into the

role or if the role is used only as a means to develop their own career, the successes might be somewhat limited and the experience of being SENCO could be quite negative. The SENCOs in this research were committed to the ideals of inclusion, but also the children and families that they worked with, and this was demonstrated in the many and varied additional activities they did with them. It was often these aspects that were most rewarding to the SENCO, but also these tended to be more demanding in terms of time and emotional involvement, and it might be these tasks that those using the role for career development could avoid, which would limit the impact of the role for the children and families they are working with.

7.4 The legal element to the SENCO role

There appears to be a number of opportunities to develop the SENCO role so that it is no longer associated with teaching groups of children with SEN or administrative tasks, and instead relates to teaching and learning, but many SENCOs continue to work to support individual children identified as having some sort of need that is different from others in their class. Participants reported that they enjoyed this element of the role, even though this did not make up a significant part of their working week (Pearson, 2008b). SENCOs reported spending increasing amounts of time working with TAs to devise various interventions for individuals or small groups of children, often related to targets on the child's IEP. This does present a very particular challenge to them, in terms of how the support given is judged by others, such as parents. M, J, W and L all mentioned what could be termed as the 'legal' element of their job, linked to notions of entitlement and the expectations others can have of a SENCO in terms of 'fixing' a particular need within a child. As stated, the role is being further professionalised through the introduction of specific qualifications but these will only provide the SENCO with a range of tools about how to develop learning experiences for

children with SEN, but not the answer as to how to solve the vast range of challenges that children and young people are dealing with when they are in full time compulsory education. Whilst changing perceptions of school staff about what the role of SENCO could be seen as one way to develop the post, there is also a need for others, such as parents and external agencies, to have realistic expectations, not only of what they think a SENCO should do in order to support a particular child, but also about the possible outcomes from the support offered. This would need everyone involved to take on some responsibility for implementing support, not just the SENCO (Pearson, 2010).

This aspect of the SENCO role is unlike other curriculum roles as expectations for other subject co-ordinators usually start from a curriculum subject, rather than a pupil. M stated that this legal element left her feeling quite isolated as it would ultimately be her responsibility, as SENCO, if the support provided was questioned or challenged in the future (Crisp *et al*, 2006). The head teacher and governors share responsibility with the SENCO, but SENCOs still felt that SEN issues would ultimately be their responsibility, even though they recognised the support given to them by senior leaders and governors. The development of the SENCO as a knowledgeable guide that works with a network of class or subject teachers could go some way towards removing this additional responsibility from the SENCO alone, as well as encouraging all staff to be active in issues related to SEN, which might reduce the possibility of parents, or other agencies, questioning what was provided. From this perspective it would be very difficult for anyone, including parents, to make claims against any one member of staff as no one would have the sole responsibility of ‘fixing’ any child, but all staff would have a responsibility to ensure that pupils received suitable learning experiences and opportunities to be part of the school community, with the SENCO supporting this. Utilising this approach might mean that the SENCO spends time with

colleagues, including teachers and TAs, rather than pupils, to ensure that lessons are inclusive and relevant.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis of findings from the two data collection strategies. This led to the identification of a SENCO typology, which has been used to examine how the role is functioning currently and how it could be developed in the future, so that the role maintains its relevance, whilst at the same time addressing some of the common challenges SENCOs face. The next chapter will debate how far the research question was answered, future research and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

I started out on this research journey with the aim of trying to discover the experiences of being a SENCO in schools at the start of the twenty first century. My own professional career has included a period of being a SENCO at a very small special school, catering for Looked After Children and at a mainstream primary school, with a unit for children with Moderate Learning Difficulties. Although I have since moved to a different role, my interest in SEN issues and particularly the role of the SENCO has remained strong. Having been actively involved in the development of the National Award for SENCOs, exploration of how the role has changed and could be strengthened was the motivation behind the thesis. The research question will now be reviewed before the limitations of the research are explored.

8.1 What is the match between guidance and practice in the role of SENCO in mainstream schools?

Although expectations for the SENCO role are outlined in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) and the more recent regulations (DCSF, 2008), the role remains at best loosely defined and ambiguous. This leaves individual schools with a great deal of flexibility on how to implement the role, leading to a wide variety of SENCO role experiences under current guidelines. Many of the SEN tasks could be termed as administrative or managerial in nature, such as maintaining records, ensuring IEPs are completed and liaising with staff and outside agencies in order to meet the needs of individual children. The amount of administration generated by SEN takes up a lot of time, usually more than the designated release time provided for the majority of SENCOs. However, some SENCOs have distributed tasks to other teachers and have also devised support systems which made the

administrative element manageable, meaning that they were able to focus on more strategic tasks, such as developing provision. Although the amount of teaching each SENCO did was dependant on a variety of factors, including other roles they had and how the SENCO role was implemented, all SENCOs demonstrated a passion for SEN and enabling children to progress and learn. Teaching children with SEN is not outlined as part of the SENCO role in the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) but many SENCOs wanted to do this, sometimes more than strategic leadership level tasks.

Working with external experts, parents and support groups was seen by many SENCOs as a core element of the role but working with teaching colleagues in school was often informal and reactionary, due to the changing needs of a specific pupil or group, rather than a regular planned event. Furthermore, a number of SENCOs mentioned the lonely aspect of their role in that they never feel part of any particular school team, such as a subject area or year grouping. This perception of a gap between SEN and other traditional, subject based elements of the school curriculum, as well as the apparent lack of shared ownership of SEN issues by some school staff, further alienated some of the SENCOs. This isolation was also referred to in terms of potential challenges to the support and advice provided by the SENCO, if parents or a child ever questioned their education through legal processes.

Comparing these experiences to official guidelines highlighted some of the tensions. SENCOs seem to inhabit a unique role in that government guidance, including the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b), suggests the role is a leadership position, but in practice the role cannot be so clearly defined. The complex nature of the role leads to situations where some of the tasks outlined by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) are completed by the SENCO as a leader within school, such as strategic development of SEN. At other times, the SENCO is

no more than a colleague and subordinate to others who are always recognised as leaders, such as the head or deputy. The recent guidelines (DCSF, 2008) which specified the need for SENCOs to be qualified teachers (or working towards this) might have been an attempt to clarify this and to add status to the role, but this will have little impact if SENCOs in school have to continue to be caught in a unique space between leadership and other colleagues. Norwich (2010) highlighted that many SENCO tasks are somewhat generic in nature, and do not need to be the responsibility of the SENCO alone. Instead, the SENCO would be responsible for tasks that do need specific subject knowledge, with the rest being devolved to other middle leaders in school. Developing the SENCO role so that it focuses on pedagogical issues, with SENCO acting as a knowledgeable guide to support staff on teaching and learning issues could do a great deal to increase the status of SEN as a whole school issue and move the role towards the approach outlined by Norwich (2010).. The Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) states that liaising with colleagues should be a key role for the SENCO, and thus the need for a sound understanding of teaching and learning would be essential, but those involved with this study reported having very few opportunities to do this. Developing the role as a knowledgeable guide would help to maintain links between the SENCO and children, as well as other colleagues, reflecting the relational aspect of the role, in line with principles of the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993). It would encourage the development of an inclusion team or department, moving away from deficit notions of SEN. The SENCO role would be relevant to all areas, but at the same time, preserve the relationships the SENCO builds with children with needs and their parents, which most SENCOs identified as a key element to their role and one that they valued.

At the start of this study, developing the leadership element of the SENCO role seemed to be a solution to the on-going and ever increasing workload SENCOs have to deal with (NUT,

2004). Government guidelines related to the role further supported this assumption, and research about different approaches to leadership, and in particular, distributed leadership, appeared to offer a way forward. Furthermore, the green paper, *Support and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011), advocated using SENCOs to share good practice and knowledge, acknowledging that this might not be happening. Some SENCOs in this study have successfully defined their role as a leader and have opportunities to work at a strategic level. However, for other SENCOs, this element was not a part of their role and they did not want it to be. All SENCOs showed a commitment to working with children and young people with SEN and for some, this was where they wanted to focus, although they could see the potential benefits from sharing strategies with colleagues. Kearns (2005) outlined five different approaches to the SENCO role, some with a strategic, leadership element, others more managerial. In his study and my own, SENCOs are approaching the role as an either or option; either a leader or manager but not both, perhaps as this is one way to control the workload and suggesting that it is not possible (or desirable) to do both. Layton (2005) and York-Barr *et al* (2005) advocated a leadership role for SENCOs, but also recognised the need for system change in schools so that learning opportunities could be extended to respond to diverse needs and this is perhaps what is needed in the longer term. In itself a move towards leadership might reveal some of the pressures on the SENCO role and reduce the loneliness reported by SENCOs. More importantly, redefining what a SENCO is and does, within a broader context of developing inclusive provision for all children, as suggested by Cole (2005), could have the potential to challenge traditional deficit views of SEN and positively improve teachers skills at responding to the learning needs of children in their classroom.

8.2 Limitations of the research

The research has provided some very interesting and unexpected insights into the working life of a SENCO in schools today. These include the additional roles SENCOs hold, the value placed to teaching children with SEN and the legal element. However, there were a number of limitations to the research which need to be recognised and discussed.

The single biggest limitation of this research was its scale, involving a very small number of participants and only one researcher. The number of SENCOs involved through the questionnaire and the interviews was less than one hundred. As every mainstream primary and secondary school in England should have a SENCO, this sample represents a very small number of the SENCOs currently in post. Furthermore, all of the SENCOs involved with the research work in one of five Local Authorities within the central region. Although the LAs involved range from a large urban authority to a relatively small unitary authority and include two LAs that are shire counties, with schools ranging from large city based secondary schools to small, rural primaries, any sample cannot be considered to be representative of all SENCOs across the country as a whole. Many of the SENCOs that completed the questionnaires were accessed via LA forums arranged for practising SENCOs, meaning that they are likely to have some very similar experiences in terms of training and support provided at LA level, although the interpretation within their own schools could still vary considerably.

The sample used by the study was small, making it impossible to draw any generalisations from the data. Being able to generate any specific generalisations was not a key aim of the research process, but as Bryman (2008) noted, this type of approach can still offer useful insights via the major themes that are highlighted through the data. In this way the findings,

that include a number of key issues that were raised by numerous SENCOs within the sample, provide an insight into the working life of a SENCO and contribute to the growing understanding of what it is like to be a SENCO in the current education system which could lead to further research into the SENCO role.

The identification of major themes needed to be supported by relevant and valid data. The use of both questionnaires and in depth interviews as data collection methods was one way to triangulate data and to validate findings. Furthermore, every participant in the interviews had opportunities to review the comments which they had made and alter, amend or remove any comment from the records. These discussions not only provided an opportunity for the research participants to authenticate the findings and themes that had been drawn from the data, but also reinforces the overall reliability and validity of the findings. This approach also goes some way to address the issue of bias in the collection of data or presentation of the findings. Interpretivist researchers are likely to be a part of the world that they choose to research and because of this cannot claim to be free of bias (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Having already highlighted my interest in the role of SENCO and my commitment to developing this in future, the ‘checking procedures’ outlined above go some way to ensuring that the key themes that were identified resonate with SENCOs and are reflective of their own experiences, rather than the researcher’s own ‘agenda’.

Florian and Rouse (2001) note that respondent bias is another issue that researchers need to be aware of. Although any or all of the SENCOs could have been influenced by the presence of the researcher, my genuine interest in their opinions and the use of two different data collection methods should have gone some way to limiting the impact of this. Furthermore, truth in qualitative research can change on a day to day basis, and therefore the snapshot

taken of the experiences of SENCOs might only be representative of that particular moment of their SENCO career, but it can still offer interesting and relevant insights into the role (Walford, 2003).

Another significant constraint on the research process was that of time. This impacted in a number of different ways, including the amount of time that I was able to spend with SENCOs and how the research data was gathered. The questionnaire was designed and used to enable data to be gathered from quite large groups of people in relatively short periods of time. The use of LA SENCO forums meant that some informal discussions around the role of SENCO were instigated, but because the groups usually only met once a term and attendance was only possible if the SENCO could be released from duties in school, it was impossible to build on these relationships or to make use of them to gather further data because of the somewhat ad hoc nature of the groups.

The SENCOs that were part of the in depth interviews were extremely generous with their time and provided access to their schools. Of the six, four allowed the researcher to spend some time in school shadowing the SENCO at work. This not only enabled me to gain some first-hand experience of a typical school day, but it also supported the development of the relationship I had with each SENCO. My relationships with all of the SENCOs have been professional, built either through my own role as a SENCO or through my work as a university lecturer, but I was keen to do as much as possible to challenge the traditional researcher/researchee relationship, so that the participants knew that they had an active role to play in shaping the research and their contributions would be valued. By spending time with SENCOs, I hoped to build relationships that remained professional and still encouraged the SENCO to be open, honest and frank about their role as SENCO, whilst maintaining the

ethical principles I was being guided by. To some extent this was achieved as SENCOs spoke very candidly to me about their work and they acknowledged the need for confidentiality about certain points, but at other times they appeared unable or unwilling to reveal some experiences and chose to speak more generally about certain issues, for example, their lack of influence on the senior leadership team (SENCO M).

Overall, the findings produced correlated internally, in that many of the issues were raised and discussed by more than one SENCO during interviews or via the questionnaire. There is also correlation between this study and others in the same field, suggesting that the data collection instruments were effective and findings are representative of SENCO experiences currently.

8.3 Future research

This research has highlighted a number of other areas which need to be explored in greater depth. For example, the introduction of national training for all SENCOs might be one way to move the role towards leadership, but what impact this training might have would need to be explored further. Impact could be explored from the perspective of the SENCO and their confidence and ability to fulfil the requirements of the role, and from a broader exploration of the impact on the actual role itself and its status within school.

What became apparent after the completion of the questionnaires was the sheer amount of time every SENCO spends doing the role, as well as the tensions that they find themselves trying to balance on a daily basis. These include the need to reach attainment targets whilst encouraging inclusion for all children, despite their levels of need. SENCOs wanted to support other members of staff with issues relating to SEN and at the same time encourage

their active involvement with this so that the children with SEN receive the best support possible, which would enable them to succeed within the education system, challenging traditional views of SEN. Future research into these areas could expand understandings of SEN in schools and support the development of the SENCO role.

Since the start of this study the SENCO role has been the subject of a number of government initiatives, such as the green paper, *Support and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011) and continues to be difficult to accurately define. National, local and within school pressures will continue to influence to the way in which SENCOs work and the expectations schools have of them. Understanding and interpretations of SEN and inclusion continue to contribute to these debates. Training for SENCOs would offer those new to post an opportunity to develop and support good practice in their setting, enabling them to ensure the needs of individuals are met. SENCOs in this study stressed their commitment to SEN, and to some extent they will need to remain involved with managerial aspects of SEN. However, *Support and Aspiration* (DfE, 2011:4) also stresses the need for ‘effective support’ for all children to fulfil their potential which might be one way for the SENCO role to develop strategic elements, and support staff development in issues relating to SEN.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, L. (2007) Northern Ireland Special Educational Needs Coordinators creating inclusive environments: an epic struggle. **European Journal of Special Needs Education**. **22** (4), pp. 391-407.
- Ainscow, M. (1999) **Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools**. London: Falmer.
- Ainscow, M., Booth, T. and Dyson, A. (2006) Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England. **International Journal of inclusive Education**. **10** (4-5), pp. 295 – 308.
- Armstrong, D. (2003) **Experiences of Special Education**. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Avramadis, E. Bayliss, P. and Burden, R. (2000) Student teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school. **Teaching and Teacher Education**. **16** (3), pp. 277 – 293.
- Bailey, C. (2007) **A Guide to Qualitative Field Research**. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ball, S. (1993) Self-doubt and soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic research. In Hammersley, M. (ed) **Educational Research: Current Issues**. London: Paul Chapman.
- Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (2003) **Disability**. Cambridge: Polity.

Barton, L. (1996) **Disability and Society**. Harlow: Longman.

Basit, T. (2010) **Conducting Research in Educational Contexts**. London: Continuum.

Bassey, M. (1995) **Creating Education Through Research**. Newark: BERA.

Bassey, M. (1999) **Case Study Research in Educational Settings**. London: Taylor and Francis.

Beijaard, J., Meijer, P. and Verloop, N. (2004) Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. **Teaching and Teacher Education**. **20** (3), pp. 107 – 128.

Beijaard, J., Verloop, N. and Vermunt, J. (2000) Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: an exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. **Teacher and Teacher Education**. **16** (2), pp. 749 – 764.

Bell, J. (2005) **Doing Your Research Project**. Maidenhead: Open University.

Bennett, N., Newton, W., Wise, C., Woods, P. and Economou, A. (2003) **The Role and Purpose of Middle Leaders in Schools**. London: National College for School Leadership.

Bickman, L. and Rog, D. (1998) **Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods**. London: Sage.

Black – Hawkins, K., Florian, L. and Rouse, M. (2007) **Achievement and Inclusion in Schools**. London: Routledge.

Blandford, S. and Gibson, S. (2000) **Middle Management in Schools: A Special Educational Needs Perspective**. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001621.htm>
[Accessed: 17th November 2009].

Booth, T. and Ainscow, M. (2002) **Index for Inclusion**. Bristol: CSIE.

Botes, A. (2002) A comparison between the ethics of justice and the ethics of care. **Journal of Advanced Nursing**. **32** (5), pp. 1071 – 1075.

British Educational Research Association (2004) **Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research**. Southwell: BERA.

Brodin, J. and Lindstrand, P. (2007) Perspectives on a school for all. **International Journal of Inclusive Education**. **11** (2), pp.133 – 145.

Brown, A. and Dowling, P. (1998) **Doing Research, Reading Research: A Mode of Interrogation for Education**. London: Falmer.

Bryman, A. (2008) **Social Research Methods**. 3rd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burton, D. and Bartlett, S. (2009) **Key Issues for Education Researchers**. London: Sage.

Bush, T. (2008) **Leadership and Management Development in Education**. London: Sage.

Bush, T. and Bell, L. (2002) **The Principles and Practice of Educational Management**. London: Paul Chapman.

Busher, H. (2005) Being a middle leader: exploring professional identities. **School Leadership and Management**. **25** (2), pp.137-153.

Busher, H. (2000) Schools, effectiveness and improvement: a political analysis. In: Bennett, N. and Harris, A. (eds) **School Effectiveness and School Improvement: Search for the Elusive Partnership**. London: Cassell.

Busher, H. and Harris, A. (2000) **Subject Leadership and School Improvement**. London: Paul Chapman.

Carlsson-Paige, N. and Lantieri, L. (2005) A changing vision of education. In Noddings, N. (ed) **Educating Citizens for Global Awareness**. New York: Teachers College Press.

Carrington, S. and Elkins, J. (2002) Bridging the gap between inclusive policy and inclusive culture in secondary schools. **Support for Learning**. **17** (2), pp. 51- 57.

Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) (2005) **Are LEAs in England Abandoning Inclusive Education?** <http://www.csie.org.uk/publications/segregations-trends.shtml>

[accessed 14th April 2008]

Christians, C. (2005) Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) **The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research**. 3rd Edition Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Clough, P. and Corbett, J. (2000) **Theories of Inclusive Education: A Student's Guide**. London: Paul Chapman.

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2003) The Index for Inclusion: personal perspectives from early years educators. In Nind, M., Sheehy, K. and Simmons, K. (eds) **Inclusive Education: Learners and Learning Contexts**. London: David Fulton.

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2007) **A Student's Guide to Methodology**. (2nd Edition) London: Sage.

Code, L. (1991) **What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000) **Research Methods in Education**. 5th Edition. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cole, B. (2005a) 'Good faith and effort?' Perspectives on educational inclusion. **Disability and Society**. **20** (3), pp. 331-344.

Cole, B. (2005b) Mission Impossible? Special Educational Needs, inclusion and the re-conceptualisation of the role of the SENCO in England and Wales. **European Journal of Special Needs Education**. **20** (3), pp. 287-307.

Connor, D. and Ferri, B. (2007) The conflict within: resistance to inclusion and other paradoxes in special education. **Disability and Society**. **22** (1), pp. 63 – 77.

Corbett, J. (1996) **Badmouthing: The Language of Special Needs**. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cowne, E. (2005) What do special educational needs co-ordinators think they do? **Support for Learning**. **20** (2), pp. 61-68.

Crisp, R., Lewis, A. and Robertson, C. (2006) Email forum usage as an identity maintenance strategy for educators working with pupils with special educational needs. **Educational Psychology**. **26** (5), pp. 599-613.

Crotty, M. (1998) **The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process**. London: Sage.

Crowther, D., Dyson, A., Lin, M. and Millward, A. (1997) **The Role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator in Schools: An Analytical Report**. Newcastle: University of Newcastle.

Crowther, D., Dyson, A., Millward, A. and Skidmore, D. (1997) **New Directions in Special Needs: Innovations in Mainstream Schools**. London: Cassell.

Dahlberg, G. and Moss, P. (2005) **Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education**. Abingdon: Routledge Falmer.

Davies, B. and Davies, B. (2004) Strategic leadership. **School Leadership and Management. 24** (1), pp. 29-38.

Day, K. (2000) The ethic of care and women's experiences of public space. **Journal of Environmental Psychology. 20** (2), pp. 103-124.

Day, C., Harris, A., Hadfield, M., Tolley, H. and Beresford, J. (2000) **Leading Schools in Times of Change**. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denscombe, M. (2002) **Ground Rules for Good Research**. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Denscombe, M. (2003) **The Good Research Guide**. Maidenhead: Open University.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, J. (2005) **The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. 3rd Edition**. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008) **SENCO Regulations – Explanatory Memorandum**. London: DCSF.

Department for Education (DfE) (1994) **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice**. Nottingham: DfE.

Department for Education (DfE) (2011) **Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Education Needs and Disability**. London: DfE.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001a) **Inclusive Schooling**. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001b) **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice**. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004a) **Every Child Matters: Change for Children**. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004b) **Removing Barriers to Achievement**. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2007) **Contextually Added Value (CAV) Information**. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Drudy, S. (2008) Gender balance/gender bias: the teaching profession and the impact of feminism. **Gender and Education**. **20** (4), pp. 309-323.

Dwyfor Davies, J., Garner, P. and Lee, J. (1999) Special educational needs coordinators and the Code: No longer practising? **Support for Learning**. **14** (1), pp. 37–40.

Dyson, A. (1990) Effective learning consultant: a future role for special needs co-ordinators. **Support for Learning**. **5** (3), pp. 116-127.

Dyson, A. (2001) Special needs education as the way to equity: an alternative approach? **Support for Learning**. **16** (3), pp. 99–104.

Dyson, A., Gallannaugh, F. and Millward, A. (2002) **Making Space in the Standards Agenda: Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools**. Leeds: University of Leeds.

Dyson, A. and Millward, A. (2000) **Schools and Special Needs; Issues of Innovation and Inclusion**. London: Paul Chapman.

Dyson, L. (1997) An ethic of caring: conceptual and practical issues. **Nursing Enquiry**. **4** (3), pp. 196 – 201.

Education Law Update (2008) **How to Approach ‘Failure to Educate’ Claims**. [www.teachingexpertise.co./articles] Accessed 7 January 2009.

Ekins, A. (2012a) **The Changing Face of Special Educational Needs**. London: Routledge.

Ekins, A. (2012b) The importance of a whole school culture of inclusion. In Cornwall, J. and Graham-Matheson, L. (eds) **Leading on Inclusion**. London: Routledge.

Ensign, J. (2003) Ethical issues in qualitative research with homeless youths. **Journal of Advanced Nursing**. **43** (1), pp. 43-50.

Florian, L. (2008) Special or inclusive education: future trends. **British Journal of Special Education. 35** (4), pp. 202 – 208.

Florian, L. and Rouse, M. (2001) Inclusive practices in English secondary schools. In Rose, R. and Grosvenor, I. (eds) **Doing Research in Special Education: Ideas into Practice**. London: David Fulton.

Frankl, C. (2005) Managing individual education plans: reducing the workload of the SEN coordinator. **Support for Learning. 20** (2), pp. 77-82.

Frederickson, N. and Cline, T. (2002) **Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Diversity**. Maidenhead: Open University.

French, S. and Swain, J. (2004) Whose tragedy? Towards a personal non-tragedy view of disability. In Swain, J., French, S., Barnes, C. and Thomas, C. (eds) **Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments**. London: Sage.

Gall, M., Borg, W. and Gall, J. (1996) **Educational Research: An Introduction**. 6th Edition. London: Longman.

Gallagher, E. (2001) Leadership: a paradigm shift. **Management in Education. 16** (3), pp. 24-28.

Garner, P. (2001) What's the weight of a badger? Teachers' experiences of working with children with learning difficulties. In Wearmouth, J. (ed) **Special Educational Provision in the Context of Inclusion**. London: David Fulton.

Gibson, S. and Blandford, S. (2005) **Managing Special Educational Needs**. London: Paul Chapman.

Gilligan, C. (1993) **In a Different Voice**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Grace, G. (1998) Realising the mission: Catholic approaches to school effectiveness. In Slee, R., Weiner, G. and Tomlinson, S. (eds) **School Effectiveness for Whom?** London: Falmer.

Griffiths, K. (2001) The special needs co-ordinator in the secondary school. In Wearmouth, J. (ed) **Special Educational Provision in the Context of Inclusion**. London: David Fulton.

Gross, J. (2000) Paper promises? Making the code work for you. **Support for Learning**. 15 (3), pp. 126-133.

Gross, J. and White, A. (2003) **Special Educational Needs and School Improvement**. London: David Fulton.

Hall, J. (1997) **Social Devaluation and Special Education**. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Hallett, F. and Hallett, G. (2010) Leading learning: the role of the SENCO. In Hallett, F. and Hallett, G. (eds) **Transforming the Role of the SENCO: Achieving the National Award of SEN Coordination**. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Hammersley, M. and Scarth, J. (1993) Beware of wise men bearing gifts: a case study in the misuse of educational research. In Gomm, R. and Woods, P. (eds) **Educational Research in Action**. London: Paul Chapman.

Harris, A. (2001) Reflections on distributed leadership. **Management in Education**. **19** (2), pp. 10-12.

Harris, A., Busher, H. and Wise, C. (2001) Effective training for subject leaders. **Journal of In-Service Training**. **27** (1), pp. 83 – 94.

Held, V. (1993) **Feminist Morality**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D. (1995) **Research and the Teacher**. London: Routledge.

Hopkins, D. (2002) **A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research**. 3rd Edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.

House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2006) **Special Educational Needs, Third Report of Session 2006. Volume 1: HC478-1**. London: Stationery Office.

Johnstone, D. (2001) **An Introduction to Disability Studies**. London: David Fulton.

Jones, P. (2004) 'They are not like us and neither should they be': issues of teacher identity for teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. **Disability and Society. 19** (2), pp. 160 – 170.

Jones, F., Jones, K. and Szwed, C. (2001) **The SENCO as Teacher and Manager**. London: David Fulton.

Jordan, A., Schwartz, E. and McGhie-Richmond, D. (2009) Preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms. **Teaching and Teacher Education. 25** (4), pp. 535 – 549.

Kearns, H. (2005) Exploring the experiential learning of Special Educational Needs Coordinators. **Journal of In-service Education. 31** (1), pp.131-149.

Kohlberg, L. (1984) **The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages**. London: Harper and Row.

Kugelmass, J. (2003) **Inclusive Leadership; Leadership for Inclusion**. London: National College for School Leadership.

Kugelmass, J. and Ainscow, M. (2004) Leadership for inclusion: a comparison of international perspectives. **Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs. 4** (3), pp. 133 – 141.

Kumar, R. (1999) **Research Methodology**. London: Sage.

Layton, L. (2005) Special educational needs coordinators and leadership: a role too far? **Support for Learning**. **20** (2), pp. 53 – 60.

Leader, The. (2009) SENCO ruling should be put on hold. **The Leader**. **37**, pp. 8.

Lewis, A. and Ogilvie, M. (2002) Support, knowledge and identity: reported gains from involvement in a special email group – the SENCO Forum. **British Journal of Special Education**. **30** (1), pp.44 – 50.

Liasidou, A. and Svensson, C. (2012) Theorizing educational change within the context of inclusion. In Cornwall, J. and Graham-Matheson, L. (eds) **Leading on Inclusion**. London: Routledge.

Linton, S. (1998) Disability studies/Not disability studies. **Disability and Society**. **13** (4), pp. 525 – 540.

Lloyd, L. (2006) A caring profession? The ethics of care and social work with older people. **British Journal of Social Work**. **36** (1), pp. 1171 – 1185.

Lloyd, C. (2008) Removing barriers to achievement: a strategy for inclusion or exclusion? **International Journal of Inclusive Education**. **12** (2), pp. 221-236.

MacBeath, J., Galton, M., Steward, S., MacBeath, A. and Page, C. (2006) **The Costs of Inclusion: Inclusion Policy and Practice in English Primary, Secondary and Special Schools**. Cambridge: Victoire Press.

Mackenzie, S. (2007) A review of recent developments in the role of the SENCO in the UK. **British Journal of Special Education**. **34** (4), pp. 212- 218.

Mackenzie, S. (2010) “If you could wave a magic wand ...” Special educational needs in London: Diversity, complexity and context. In Ang, L., Trushell, J. and Walker, P. (eds) **Learning and Teaching in a Metropolis**. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Marks, D. (1999) **Disability: Controversial Debates and Psychological Perspectives**. London: Routledge.

Marks, D., Burman, E., Burman, L. and Parker, I. (1995) Collaborative research into Education Case Conferences. **Educational Psychology in Practice**. **11** (1), pp. 41 – 48.

May, T. (2001) (3rd Ed) **Social Research. Issues, Methods and Process**. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

McKenzie, M. and Blenkinsop, S. (2006) An ethic of care and educational practice. **Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership**. **6** (2), pp.91-105.

Miles, M. and Huberman, A. (1994) **Qualitative Data Analysis**. 2nd Edition. London: Sage.

Mittler, P. (2000) **Working Towards Inclusive Education**. London: David Fulton.

Moller, J. and Eggen, A. (2005) Team leadership in upper secondary education. **School Leadership and Management**. **25** (4), pp. 331-347.

Moore, N. (2006) **How To Do Research**. 3rd Edition. London: Facet.

Mortimore, P. (1991) The front page or yesterday's news: the reception of educational research. In Walford, G. (ed) **Doing Educational Research**. London: Routledge.

Moss, G. (1996) **Effective Management of Special Needs**. Birmingham: Questions.

National Archives (2008) **GTCE Statistics Analysis**.

[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/search/search_results.aspx?Page=1&QueryText=GTCE+2008&SelectedDatabases=A2A%7cARCHON%7cBOOKSHOP%7cCABPAPERS%7cDOCUMENTSONLINE%7cEROL%7cMOVINGHERE%7cNRA%7cNRALISTS%7cPREM19%7cRESEARCHGUIDES%7cE179%7cCATALOGUE%7cWEBSITE%7cTRAFALGAR] Accessed on 17th November 2011.

Neuman, W. (2006) **Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches**. 6th Edition. London: Pearson.

Nias, J. (1999) Primary teaching as a culture of care. In Prosser, J. (ed) **School Culture**. London: Paul Chapman.

Noddings, N. (2005) Identifying and responding to needs in education. **Cambridge Journal of Education**. **35** (2), pp.147 – 159.

Norwich, B. (1996) Special needs education or education for all? Connective specialization and ideological impurity. **British Journal of Special Education**. **23** (2), pp. 100 - 104.

Norwich, B. (2007) **Dilemmas of Difference, Inclusion and Disability: International Perspectives and Future Directions**. London: Routledge.

Norwich, B. (2010) What implications do changing practices and concepts have for the role of SEN coordinator? In Hallett, F. and Hallett, G. (eds) **Transforming the Role of the SENCO: Achieving the National Award of SEN Coordination**. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

NUT (National Union of Teachers) (2004) **Special Educational Needs Coordinators and the Revised Code of Practice: an NUT Survey**. London: NUT.

O'Connor, K. (2008) "You choose to care": Teachers, emotions and professional identity. **Teaching and Teacher Education**. **24** (1), pp. 117 -126.

Ofsted (2006) **Extended Services in Schools and Children's Centres**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2007a) **Inspection Report (School A)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2007b) **Inspection Report (School L)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2008a) **Inspection Report (School B)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2008b) **Inspection Report (School C)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2008c) **Inspection Report (School K)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2008d) **Inspection Report (School P)**. London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2010) **The Special Educational Needs and Disability Review**. Manchester: Ofsted.

Oliver, M. (1996) **Understanding Disability**. London: Macmillan.

Oliver, M. (2004) If I had a hammer: the social model in action. In Swain, J., French, S., Barnes, C. and Thomas, C. (eds) **Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments**. London: Sage.

Oldham, J. and Radford, J. (2011) Secondary SENCO Leadership: A universal or specialist role? **British Journal of Special Education**. **38** (3), pp. 126-134.

Opie, C. (2004) **Social Research**. London: Sage.

Parsons, C. (1999) Social inclusion and school improvement. **Support for Learning**. **14** (4), pp.179 – 183.

Payne, G. and Payne, J. (2004) **Key Concepts in Social Research**. London: Sage.

Pearson, S. (2005) SEN – a politically correct phrase to replace terms such as disabled? A study of the views of students entering a secondary PGCE course. **Support for Learning**. **20** (1), pp. 17-21.

Pearson, S. (2008a) Deafened by silence or by the sound of footsteps? An investigation of the recruitment, induction and retention of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in England. **Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs**. **8** (2), pp.96-110.

Pearson, S. (2008b) **The Working Lives of SENCOs**. Tamworth: NASEN.

Pearson, S. (2010) The role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator: ‘To be or not to be’ The **Psychology of Education Review**. **34** (2), pp. 30-38.

Pearson, S. and Ralph, S. (2007) The identity of SENCOs: insights through images. **Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs**. **7** (1), pp. 36- 45.

Priestley, M. (2003) **Disability**. Cambridge: Polity.

QCA (1999) **National Curriculum**. [online] www.curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-1-and-2 [accessed 23rd January 2009].

Rayner, S. (2007) **Managing Special and Inclusive Education**. London: Sage.

Rayner, S. and Gunter, H. (2004) **Remodelling Distributed Leadership**. BERA Conference Paper.

Rayner, S., Gunter, H. and Powers, S. (2002) Professional development needs for leaders in special education. **Journal of In – Service Education**. **28** (1), pp.79 – 93.

Richards, G. (2012) Perspectives on special educational needs and inclusive practice: whose views count? In Cornwall, J. and Graham-Matheson, L. (eds) **Leading on Inclusion**. London: Routledge.

Rieser, R. (2002) **Inclusion in Early Years**. Nottingham: Disability Equality in Education

Rix, J. (2008) Inclusion and the early years setting: what's your attitude? In: Paige-Smith, A. and Craft, A. (eds.) **Developing Reflective Practice in the Early Years**. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rizvi, F. and Lingard, B. (1996) Disability, education and the discourses of justice. In Christensen, C. and Rizvi, F. (eds) **Disability and the Dilemmas of Education and Social Justice**. Buckingham: Open University.

Robson, C. (2002) **Real World Research**. London: Blackwell.

Rose, R. (2003) Ideology, reality and pragmatics. In Tilstone, C. and Rose, R. (eds) **Strategies to Promote Inclusive Education**. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Rose, R. and Grosvenor, I. (2001) **Doing Research in Special Education**. London: David Fulton.

Rosen-Webb, S. (2011) Nobody tells you how to be a SENCO. **British Journal of Special Education**. **38** (4), pp. 159 – 168.

Runswick-Cole, K. and Hodge, N. (2009) Needs or rights? A challenge to the discourse of special education. **British Journal of Special Education**. **36** (4), pp. 189-203.

SENCO Update (2008) Children's Plan aims to strengthen SENCO's role. **SENCO Update** **92** pp. 1-2.

Sevenhuijsen, S. (2003) The place of care. **Feminist Theory**. **4** (2), pp.179 – 197.

Shakespeare, T. (2006) **Disability Rights and Wrongs**. London: Routledge.

Sharp, S. and Thompson, D. (1997) The establishment of whole school policies. In Lindsay, G. and Thomas, D. (eds) **Values Into Practice In Special Education**. London: David Fulton.

Shuttleworth, V. (2000) **The Special Educational Needs Coordinator**. London: Pearson.

Silverman, D. (2010) **Doing Qualitative Research**. 3rd Edition. London: Sage.

Simons, H. (2009) **Case Study Research in Practice**. London: Sage.

Siskin, L. (1997) The challenge of leadership in comprehensive high schools: school vision and departmental divisions. **Education Administration Quarterly**. **33** (2), pp. 604 – 623.

Skidmore, D. (2004) **Inclusion: The Dynamic of School Development**. Basingstoke: OU Press.

Slee, R. (1998) High reliability organisations and liability students – the politics of recognition. In Slee, R., Weiner, G. and Tomlinson, S. (eds) **School Effectiveness for Whom?** London: Falmer.

Szwed, C. (2007) Remodelling policy and practice: the challenge for staff working with children with special educational needs. **Educational Review**. **59** (2), pp. 147-160.

Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (1998) **National Standards for Special Educational Needs Coordinators**. London: Teacher Training Agency.

Thomas, C. (2002) Disability theory: key ideas, issues and thinkers. In Barners, C., Oliver, M. and Barton, L. (eds) **Disability Studies Today**. Cambridge: Polity.

Thomas, G. and Loxley, A. (2007) **Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion**. Maidenhead: Open University.

Thomas, G. and Vaughan, M. (2004) **Inclusive Education**. Maidenhead: Open University.

Tilstone, C. (2003) Professional development of staff: steps towards developing policies. In Tilstone, C. and Rose, R. (eds) **Strategies to Promote Inclusive Practice**. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Training and Development Agency For Schools (TDA) (2009) **Specification for nationally approved training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) new to the role, leading to the award of the National Award for SEN Coordination**. London: TDA.

Todd, L. (2007) **Partnerships for Inclusive Education**. London: Routledge.

Turner, C. (2006) Subject leaders in secondary schools and informal learning: towards a conceptual framework. **School Leadership and Management**. 26 (5), pp. 419 – 435.

de Vaus, D. (1996) **Surveys in Social Research**. London: UCL Press.

Verkerk, M. (2005) A feminist care-ethics approach to genetics. In Ashcroft, R., Lucasson, A., Verkerk, M. and Widdersharen, G. (eds) **Case Analysis in Clinical Ethics**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Visser, J., Cole, T. and Daniels, H. (2002) Inclusion for the difficult to include. **Support for Learning**. 17 (1), pp.23- 26.

Vitton, C. and Wasonga, T. (2009) Between Kohlberg and Gilligan: levels of moral judgement among elementary school principals. **Leadership and Policy in Schools**. 8 (2), pp. 92-116.

Vogt, F. (2002) A caring teacher: explorations into primary school teachers' professional identity and ethic of care. **Gender and Education**. **14** (3), pp.251 – 264.

Wlaford, G. (2001) **Doing Qualitative Educational Research: A Personal Guide to the Research Process**. London: Continuum.

Walford, G. (2003) **Doing Educational Research**. London: Routledge.

Walliman, N. (2001) **Your Research Project**. London: Sage.

Warnock, M. (1978) **Meeting Special Educational Needs**. London: HMSO.

Wearmouth, J. (2001) **Special Educational Provision in the Context of Inclusion**. London: David Fulton.

Wedell, K. (2004) Points from the SENCO Forum: Life as a SENCO. **British Journal of Special Education**. **31** (2), pp. 105.

Wedell, K. (2005) Dilemmas in the quest for Inclusion. **British Journal of Special Education**. **32**, (1), pp. 3- 10.

Wellington, J. (2000) **Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches**. London: Continuum.

Wise, C. (2000) Being a curriculum leader: helping colleagues to improve learning. In: Busher, H. and Harris, A. (eds). **Subject Leadership and School Improvement**. London: Paul Chapman.

York-Barr, J., Sommerness, J., Duke, K. and Ghere, G. (2005) Special educators in inclusive education programmes: reframing their work as teacher leadership. **International Journal of Inclusive Education**. **9** (2), pp. 193 – 215.

Zembylas, M. (2004) Discursive practices, genealogies and emotional rules: a poststructuralist view on emotion and identity. **Teacher and Teacher Education**. **21** (8), pp. 935 – 948.

APPENDIX ONE:

An example of a completed questionnaire.

School Information

1. Type of school

Primary ☐
Secondary ☒
Special ☐
Other (Please specify)

2. Local Authority.....

3. Number on roll.....946

4. Number of staff:

Teaching.....60 approx
Non- teaching support staff.....30 approx

SEN department

5. Number of pupils on record as having SEN179

6. Number of pupils with a statement of SEN15

7. Number of teaching staff who's full time work is in the SEN department0

8. Number of teaching staff in the SEN department on a part time basis.....0

9. Number of non- teaching staff in the department on a full time basis57

10. Number of non- teaching staff in the department on a part time basis6

11. Does the school have an additional resource for SEN or area of expertise (for example, Speech and Language)?

Yes - specify.....
(No)

The SENCO

12. How long have you been a SENCO for?4 yrs

13. Are you:

A full time member of teaching staff ☒
A part time member of teaching staff ☐
A full time member of non- teaching staff ☐
A part time member of non- teaching staff ☐
Other.....

14. Do you fulfil any other senior roles within school, for example, deputy or subject co-ordinator?

My title is Inclusion Coordinator. ∴ SENCO, DT LAC, Health co-ordinator, child protection etc.

15. Outline any qualifications you have:

Degree ☒
 Qualified Teacher Status ☐
 Certificate of Education ☒
 MA or MEd ☐
 Postgraduate certificate or diploma – state area:

Do you have any other qualifications that are relevant to your role as SENCO, including length and level: (For example, 6 wk I.A training course, 1 yr PT diploma Post Graduate level, SENCO qualification)

16. For a typical week, how much time is dedicated to your SENCO role?
 (T=teaching; S= SENCO work; O= other)

	9-10	10-11	11-12		1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5
M	T	T/S	S	L	S	S		
T	S	T	T	U	T	T		
W	T	T	T	N	T	T		
Th	S	S	T	C	S	S		
F	S	S	S	H	S	S		

Any comments on your working week as SENCO:

I often find that P.P.T. time gets absorbed into SENCO duties. If I did not have a full time administration assistant it would be impossible to cope with the demands of the role. I am working during the evening to keep on top of the work and only stopping to prepare the Friday mail.

Time during holidays is also spent catching up with SENCO jobs as well as preparation for the lessons I teach.

17. The SEN Code of Practice outlines the following duties for a SENCO. In the column, please indicate the length of time spent on each item over the course of a term. (1 = never; 2 = occasionally; 3 = once a term; 4 = regularly throughout a term; 5 = every week)

Overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy	1	2	3	4	(5)
Coordinating provision for children with special educational needs	1	2	3	4	(5)
Liaising with and advising fellow teachers	1	2	3	(4)	5
Managing learning support assistants	1	2	3	4	(5)
Overseeing the records of all children with special educational needs	1	2	3	4	(5)
Liaising with parents of children with special educational needs	1	2	3	4	(5)
Contributing to the in-service training of staff	1	2	(3)	4	5
Liaising with external agencies including the LPA's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies	1	2	3	4	(5)

18. If you have opportunities to provide professional support, guidance and training for colleagues, please briefly outline what these are.

Acting as a mentor for a member of staff best practice working towards Q.T.S.
 Mentoring LSA team - 3 staff on HLTA course
 Lead whole school training sessions on SEN Issues
 Recently presented training session to Walsall - SENCO forum training day on Transition & Involvement of parents linked to the work we do on Personal Education Transition Reviews

19. Why did you become a SENCO?

I reached a stage in my career after being a HOD or HLT. That I needed new challenges & the opportunity arose to become SENCO.

20. In your opinion, how do your colleagues perceive the role of the SENCO, compared to other coordinator or leadership roles?

Very Positively

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Please explain briefly why you feel this way?

I feel that often staff have time to develop their own knowledge & skills on the job. Specialising in one area as an instructor. They do not appreciate the amount of work that is undertaken to support their student. I do find the way they fail to interact with support staff very annoying.

21. What do you think impacts on these perceptions?

Demand of the day to day role of the teacher, excessive paper work, new roles to jump through do not allow colleagues time to become fully acquainted with the roles & responsibilities of the SENCO or his team.

22. Are you as SENCO a member of the Senior Management Team?

Yes

No

— only since March 09 — as my line manager (deputy head) is leaving.

23. If so, do you think that the role carries the same status as other roles within this group?

Yes

No

Please explain why.

This is to be seen as a habitually regular on the S.M.T. I hope it will be as 18-50 of [] pupils on the SEN register.

24. Do you see your role of SENCO as a leader – (an expert in the area of SEN, able to guide, advise and develop school policy and practice) or a manager (maintaining SEN records and paperwork, implementing the day to day SEN policy and managing support staff), or both? Please state why.

Both.
As I have a budget of 250K, the leadership role must run alongside the more managerial side of running of the SEN team / provision.

25. How would you like to develop your role as SENCO in the future?

We are currently developing a behavior unit to meet the needs of our students struggling with the challenges of mainstream education. So this will require significant input. I also want to develop mentoring provision for youngsters.

After work on disabilities / mental health programme this year inclusion issues & how to develop & improve the service we offer will be a focus for me.

26. Any other comments.

Sometimes time to reflect would be good!

I hope this will be useful.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX TWO:

Interview schedule.

Interview schedule.

- Details of the school – general information, not just SEN
- SEN department: Staff, pupils, support, organisation.
Number of children with statement/SEN
- SENCO – FT/PT, class responsibility, other roles, SMT, qualifications
Teaching children with SEN
- Why you took the role of SENCO, previous experiences, interests, future career options
- Typical working week for the SENCO
External agencies, parents – your role?
- Challenges of the role. Support with this, from others? Links to leadership
Time pressures
Release time
- Code of Practice (2001) table – roles and responsibilities.
Opportunities to support colleagues
Opportunities to develop the SEN department strategically, links to inclusion.
- Status of the SENCO, links to leadership. Leader or manager – your experiences.
- Future developments for the role – professionally in school and yourself
- Any other comments?

APPENDIX THREE:
Interview transcript

Interview transcript.

Five of the six interviews were recorded and all interviews were then analysed. These were then compared with findings from the other interviews so that key themes emerged and were explored. Each SENCO also had the opportunity to review and amend comments made.

Transcript Code

... = indicates a pause or switch of thought mid-sentence

Participants

INT = Interviewer

J = Interviewee

Recording starts

<interview from 4:05 onwards>

INT: The questions are very much, I'm not looking for a right or wrong answer or anything like that, it is purely about experience. I'm coming from the idea that I was a SENCO, and there's the new outlined suggested code and expectations and how people have experienced the job, because I look at the code and think <laughter> I never did any of that, but I did lots of that and that doesn't seem to be valid, and that's all I'm looking at.

J: Yes.

INT: And it will all be anonymised, and I can send you the recording, because it'll go onto the computer if you want to have a review of that. But if you could just tell me a bit about the school? Obviously I know a little bit having been around it.

J: So yes, we're a mainstream secondary, 11 to 19, so we do have a sixth form and it's a joint sixth form with the local girls' school. So at sixth form, there are girls onsite as well so the boys are going back and forth from the sixth form. And then historically, it was quite an academic sort of old type school, and although our area looks like a leafy suburb, we actually take from some quite deprived areas. So in terms of percentage of free school meals, we're quite high. So we've got quite a catchment of, as I say, socially deprived families.

INT: That's quite surprising.

J: And that obviously impacts on the school. I find that impacting on my end of the school in terms of SEN. So there are those young men who've got some behaviour issues. So we're small, we're four form entry so we're medium sized, we're not huge, we're small enough to be quite close. The staff get to know the children, so 120 in each year group, plus about another 120 in the sixth form.

INT: That's still quite a lot of children.

J: It is quite a lot, so we're 620 plus 120, so it's 700 plus. But it means that you don't have so much scope for setting and banding because subjects have to be on together, so it means that the timetable's perhaps more rigid. We've found being more flexible at key stage four has been a difficult journey I think. So we're getting there, we're looking more at some non-academic – we're beginning to introduce some BTECs, we have some vocational stuff going on, we do ASDAN. I do entry level certificates as and when, just working with boys who switched off and are not going to lessons and things like that. So we've basically have an upper band and a lower band, and this little discrete SEN group at key stage three. So that's the context of the school, and achieving... in terms of boys' schools, like for like with boys' schools, we're quite high up in terms of the league tables, in terms of As to Cs, including English and Maths, we're quite high, just behind the grammar schools, on that sort of level. So we've got some very bright pupils.

INT: So parents would choose to come here.

J: Yes, we've certainly got waiting lists within the area, but there are other schools who are beginning to play catch-up, so you can't just sit back and rest on your laurels.

INT: Is the SEN part... because I think one of the other schools I've been to, they said actually the SEN department is good and parents choose to come for that reason...

J: Definitely.

INT: ...as well as the A-level pass rate, so actually that adds more pressure to yours.

J: Yes, and it is an odd one, isn't it, because as I've been more successful and created, and I can sit here and say that, I've got a very good learning support department. The more people would want to come here, and then that creates some pressures within school, because as I say, certainly I've got people, I've got SENAS phoning me and saying, would you consider this young man who everybody else has said no to? And that brings with it pressures.

INT: It adds pressure for you then.

J: Yes, and adds pressure for staff. We sometimes forget that sense that<laughter> And we were Ofsteded in October, and that was really good because I got recognition in Ofsted. The Ofsted report actually said that I had quite good leadership.

INT: Brilliant, yes, you need that though, don't you?

J: But what hurts a bit is that it hasn't been 'bigged up' by the Head.

INT: But it doesn't look good in the newspaper, does it?

J: That's the best way to put it.

INT: That's tragic.

J: And it is, yes. So we'll pick on other kids, but not actually the SENCO has been named in the report.

INT: That she's achieved so much, and those children recognise it.

J: Absolutely.

INT: And their parents.

J: Yes, and it should be. So yes, we definitely get parents choosing to come here. So my statement, in terms of statements I've now got 36 statements.

INT: That's a huge proportion to the other children.

J: Which is a huge proportion. So yes, that's 36 out of the 620, so it's...

INT: It's a huge...

J: Plus provision plans which effectively are statements, you're talking about six additional statements, and then you've got School Action Plus.

INT: And to get a statement now.

J: These days, yes, you have to go through...

INT: Absolutely.

J: Yes.

INT: That's a huge...

J: Yes, it is a lot.

INT: Presumably the more successful you are, the less likely they give a statement that say you can support in a school, we know you can, so there's...

J: Yes, that pressure as well.

INT: So all those statements, what about School Action, School Action Plus?

J: Yes, I've got 130, 130 plus on the SEN database in total.

INT: Wow.

J: And I've got boys with statements in the sixth form as well. So last September I had two boys come from different schools into our sixth form.

INT: But still requiring...

- J: But still requiring... One young man had been at Lindsworth, which is a local special school, all his secondary career, probably shouldn't have been but had been. The autistic spectrum...
- J: Yes, so we had to manage that transition very carefully, and his learning, he's a borderline A-level student, so he's being nurtured. And the other young man, much more high functioning Asperger's, but with additional significant mental health problems.
- INT: So a very different challenge.
- J: A very different challenge and was not supported effectively at his secondary, so I didn't get told and he just appeared, and oh, he's got a statement. So I didn't help him in his transition because...
- INT: But then how could you?
- J: How could I?
- INT: Yes, absolutely. The kind of child just to be transferred without that is... you think that doesn't happen anymore? Very naively I know.
- J: You would've hoped so, but no. So we've got that whole range, as I say, from non-readers right through.
- INT: So that's essentially almost like an entire year cohort.
- J: Yes. The school actually is...
- INT: Yes, but you still need to have an overview of it, that you've got to keep a... even if you don't actively get involved.
- J: Yes.
- INT: And so lots of children, how many staff are linked to special needs?
- J: I've got a team of 11 Teaching Assistants, most of whom are inter-generic and some linked to named students. One of the things I did fairly early on here was to change the way the Tas worked, because they used to be attached to boys, and then I've moved so that they're attached to departments, so that they build up subject knowledge and expertise in the subject area which I think is important. So they stay, they don't follow boys, and it also increases independence; I didn't want Tas following groups of boys, it's not good. But then I have some Tas who are named workers for... my two profoundly hearing impaired boys have got a named TA. I've got somebody who's attached to a high functioning autistic young man who'd had a very troubled primary career and had been excluded from mainstream. And in year six, nobody thought he'd function in a mainstream secondary.
- INT: So actually that was needed.

J: He's now in year eight and he's accessing lessons, and he's here five days a week.

INT: So she's done huge...

J: She's done a huge job, and I've got another young man who is a looked after child who's got long term support, because he'd been permanently excluded from another school. And I've got a couple of boys with significant behavioural problems who've got some one-to-one support.

INT: But presumably though that will be reviewed and...

J: Yes, that funding might tail off.

INT: But those people would still stay linked to the SEN department?

J: Yes, I've just got a couple of people, I'm using an agency staff for one, because that'll end.

INT: Of course, yes, and then that will...

J: Yes. But I mean there's likely to be funding for the bulk of them, there'll be somebody else coming through. And then, as I say, I've got my person in charge of learning support, and she runs learning support and everything that goes on in here.

INT: And then there's you?

J: Yes.

INT: And admin?

J: Some admin support, but that's a new thing, the first four years I had no admin support.

INT: And so you did all of it?

J: I was running... well, yes, I had no assistant SENCO.

INT: That's all of my questions for that.

J: No assistant SENCO, so I'm running 36 statements without an assistant.

INT: How do you even get them all done? That's a silly question I know, but eight I think at most. But just getting eight was... to organise the meetings and things to... it's a huge...

J: Yes, it's a huge role. We also then have a teacher who works primarily with our small SEN groups, and she teaches across subjects. So she teaches the English, History, Geography and RE at year seven and year eight as a sort of a bridge from primary to secondary to them to help that. So they've got that certain sense of security and support.

INT: And she's part time?

J: And she works four days a week. So that's how we're structured as a department.

INT: It's a big department.

J: It is quite a big department, and growing.

INT: Yes, compared to others.

J: Yes, oh absolutely, in terms of the size of my department, yes.

INT: So that's managing a lot of people, a lot of students, but a lot of people with those students.

J: Yes.

INT: So you're a full time SENCO.

J: Yes.

INT: You don't have any other role surely?

J: Well, yes, I do. I sit on the senior leadership team, which is very important.

INT: Is that because you're a SENCO or for other reasons?

J: It's because I'm a SENCO, although it will be interesting to see what happens as and when I leave, to make sure that that is secure. I think it's also because I bring things to the table. I do some whole school stuff, I lead on SEAL in the school for example, we brought SEAL into year seven, and so I've led on that and yes, I've got some other...

INT: So you do have other...

J: Yes.

INT: I don't know how you do it! Most SENCOs I've spoken to are only part of SMT when it's SEN. They only get invited to the meetings, they aren't part of it, but you couldn't really not be with such a big department.

J: No, and my line manager is Deputy Head for pastoral, and he very much sees the importance of my role. So I do that, and I'm then part of the curriculum team leaders and part of the achievement team, so I actually straddle both sides of the school in terms of achievement and the pastoral side.

INT: It's so diverse and all of those could be areas in themselves.

J: Yes, I don't do a lot around behaviour, and I don't do Able and Talented.

INT: But at least SMT did recognise the need for SENCO to have that leadership.

J: Yes, absolutely, yes.

INT: So part of SMT, other roles, so qualified teacher?

J: Yes.

INT: And you're working towards a Masters I know.

J: Yes.

INT: Anything else? <laughter>

J: Well, I had pre-school experience, so I didn't go straight into teacher training, so I think that's important. So I've got a background, I worked in the health and social care sector, and I worked around learning difficulties and advocacy, so I bring that.

INT: So SEN in other areas.

J: Yes, I bring that experience into school and in terms of other, I've got a SPLD qualification.

INT: So a diverse range of things you've done.

J: Yes, and I'm primary trained, as I think a lot of SENCOs are...

INT: <laughter> So how did you end up... is that a silly question?

J: Well, I'm primary trained and I trained in Wales and when I qualified, there were no jobs, no teaching jobs, you come out of the training in primary in Swansea, and you suddenly realise there's no jobs. So I had a dispiriting couple of years, I did some NVQ work, I was working in NVQ, I did the assessors award and stuff, I did that and then I went back into supply. And I always thought when I was doing my primary PGCE, I thought I'll veer towards special needs. A job came up in a mainstream secondary as a SEN teacher, temporary, took it and I followed on the path; so assistant SENCO.

INT: Always in secondary?

J: Always in secondary.

INT: So you trained but never went into primary?

J: Only in supply, I only ever did short term stuff in primary and I would never ever go back to primary, it's much happier... and mainstream, I wouldn't ever be a special... maybe behaviour.

INT: But that's actually different.

J: Yes, it's very different. I wouldn't ever want to work in special provision either. That's my path, as it were.

INT: So you wanted to be a SENCO really?

J: I wanted to be a SENCO and I think that's so important, because I can be boring because I'm prepared to bore people about it and bang on about it. I'm really passionate about it because it's always what I wanted to do, and so I feel passionate about it. And I think that's an issue because I think there are many SENCOs who didn't quite duck quick enough when somebody said, would you like to take on some of this?

INT: Yes, that's why I asked the question.

J: And I think that's a reflection and I think that's not going to get better.

INT: And that's tragic, isn't it? I was exactly like you. In my final teacher training, I knew I was in the right class because you had two naughty boys stood up and I could respond to that. I couldn't do the nice children. I know that's really stupid, but I couldn't. I loved all the challenge of it, but when I put the question in, my supervisor said, 'they'll just say they didn't duck quick enough.' And some of that has come up, which is very sad.

J: It is.

INT: Because you couldn't do a role like you're filling at the moment without wanting to.

J: No, and it worries me.

INT: Yes, absolutely.

J: And I think the more pressure we put on what's expected of SENCOs, it's not going to get any better.

INT: Well, who is going to replace you?

J: I know and that's not being big headed.

INT: No, it isn't.

J: There aren't enough of me around, people who really want to be here.

INT: And will work 200 hours a week.

J: Yes, there aren't, and you know that from numbers of applicants for jobs. Harborne Hill have been trying to recruit a SENCO all year, because the advert keeps coming up.

INT: That's tragic, isn't it?

J: So they're obviously not getting...

INT: Or at least they're not getting the candidates that they need, are they?

J: No.

INT: I know my friend works in Worcester as a Deputy of a big secondary school, and she had exactly the same. I think she said, the last one left we appointed, because we had to appoint someone but we knew she was wrong.

J: Yes.

INT: And that's not going to work, you're already... but you've got to have somebody.

J: You've got to have somebody. And the girls' school don't regard SEN as significant; they're still using a higher level Teaching Assistant.

INT: That's something I wanted to do too, but obviously we all get on...

J: Yes.

INT: So this is a really hard question, but just speak general, what's a typical week like?

J: Well, goodness me, you've got your teaching and then...

INT: How much teaching?

J: I do teaching eight hours a week.

INT: So that's still quite a...

J: Yes, and sometimes teaching is the last thing that you're thinking about. So I can often walk into lessons and think, 'what were we doing, can you remind me?' <chuckles> I still enjoy my teaching.

INT: Yes, and you want to keep some.

J: And I want to keep some, and I love teaching key stage four, the older boys, we get on great and that's really good.

INT: It relights the fire, doesn't it?

J: Yes, it does, so there's the teaching. What I've now found, and I think it's taken me quite a while to reach the point at which you accept that you delegate and you delegate, or you do more successfully, so a lot of it now, and feeling that I'm looking at, is setting people up to do things. So a lot of my time now is spent thinking, that needs to be done, I need to devolve that responsibility to that member of my team and they need to go away and do it; and I think that takes quite a bit of getting to, that point.

INT: Absolutely, you can't just give things away, can you?

J: No. So I don't do... Louise does all the planning for the individual work with the boys.

INT: But that's something you particularly set up.

J: I'd reached that point, yes.

INT: So that wasn't always the case?

J: No. So we moved to it, it gradually somehow... what I do then is the leadership of the department. I think some SENCOs get too much into the nitty gritty. I don't need to be sitting and doing drills with boys, there are other people who can do that.

INT: And they're the very things that people should be doing.

J: I need to have more of a strategic view, so I have reached that point, although the strategic thing is very paper heavy in terms of the statutory requirements. So I will spend a lot of time in here dealing with the management and the maintenance of the SEN database, liaising with outside agencies, doing collaborative work with those sort of agencies, dealing with crises obviously, crisis management, dealing with things that erupt, you have to be doing that. Dealing with leadership issues, with conflicts out in other lessons. So those sorts of things, giving advice to teachers, as well as all the statutory stuff that is involved around having 36 statements and another 100 on the SEN database, so reviews. And I've tried to create systems, effective systems to reduce paperwork within the school, so that's been something that I've been quite strong on.

INT: How does that work? How successful, or it's a work in progress?

J: No, I think I've evolved. I started vigorously routinely having IEPs for every child on the SEN database, so they would go out to every department and they would sit in that drawer, and then twice a year I'd say I want those back.

INT: Yes, then you blow the dust of them.

J: Not worth it, absolutely not worth it. So I've now evolved a system of having an online SEN database, which has all the key information that is needed about that child, where they are, what their strengths are, what their difficulties are, what strategies you would apply. It's online so I can update it at the time, and that then links to a guidance handbook where there are commonsense strategies for all the conditions that you're going to encounter. Because if you apply commonsense strategies to your autistic child in the classroom, on the whole you will be okay. If you apply commonsense strategies to your teaching of children with learning difficulties, on the whole you will be okay.

INT: Yes, there'll always be the odd one.

J: There'll always be the odd one.

INT: Because they're people.

J: Because they're people. So that then has taken away the need for paper heavy things that I hate with a vengeance, mass produced. IEP Writer is just... it's pointless. And then I back that up with individualised targets for stuff around literacy and stuff around... So, as I said, my statement boys, they're in mainstream so they've got targets specific to them.

INT: And they've got copies of this as well.

J: They've got copies of this as well. And then we've got all the boys who come over here that have got their literacy based targets, and then Louise has got targets for the boys that she's working with individually over here.

INT: But actually they could be used, couldn't they, in a range of lessons.

J: Yes, absolutely

INT: And actually looking at that, you could easily slot that into any piece of planning.

J: Absolutely.

INT: So much more likely to work.

J: So that's how that works. So it's a system that I think suits, and then periodically I'll say to staff, just let me know how these boys on the SEN database, School Action, School Action Plus, are getting on. So that's how I deal with my statutory issues. That's the handbook that I produce for all staff, that gets updated once a year, and that's also hyperlinked from the SEN database as well so that people have got that information, it reminds them of their responsibilities.

INT: It's very accessible. If I was in a class with 30 children, I could flick through this and go to exactly what I want.

J: Yes, and the SEN database has pictures of all the children in it as well so you can see, and it's got all the information on reading ages and all that as well. So I feel that that's been a very effective way of working; it works for me, it might not work for some SENCOs but it works for me.

INT: And having had children with statements, then you look through the file you find out on top of everything else they're colour-blind but no-one bothered to tell you, silly things like that.

J: Absolutely.

INT: But actually if you'd have had key issues and somebody would've done that, which an admin person could do essentially, couldn't they really?

J: Yes, and it was an awful lot of work doing it the first time around.

INT: Absolutely, but then it's much less.

J: But now it's much easier. So it looks like that, and then you can see we can update it...

INT: That's fantastic, isn't it?

J: ... at a drop of a hat.

INT: But with things like photographs, that's so easily actually and it can stay with them.

J: Yes.

INT: And staff have responded positively to that?

J: Yes.

INT: You can see how that's so much better than IEP.

J: Yes.

INT: So if I was a class teacher I could also add a comment?

J: No, I've made it read-only for staff.

INT: But they could come and...?

J: They could come, of course they could.

INT: So that's how you do it, yes, that's a good idea, everybody will be adding.

J: Yes, I think

INT: Absolutely.

J: And then I've also still got boys who I'm referring for statutory assessment and all the paperwork that that involves. I do training sessions quite regularly, I'm regularly involved in delivering CPD, I'm regularly involved in working with NQTs. I very much have an open door, and often we'll have people coming in saying, could we come and look at your school, from the area. We work with the cluster, provide advice there – work, as I say, with specialist support teachers that come into school, we work to get them...

INT: What kind of CPD do you do?

J: Well, in school, I do CPD around autism or dyslexia or differentiation for those sorts of subject areas.

INT: And would that be staff meeting or...

J: Yes, we have twilight CPDs, we do our CPD now through twilight.

INT: So actually as a SENCO you are actually involved... One of the things that's come out is whilst the code suggests that you should be liaising with other teachers, as a knowledgeable guide, a lot of them are saying, staff come to me and say I've got Sam, I don't know what to do, what shall I do? But then actually they don't want to really know what to do.

J: No, they just want to be relieved of the responsibility.

INT: Yes.

J: Yes, so it's very much trying to empower them, to give them the tools, and those sort of things help.

INT: But I was thinking of the staff, absolutely, already it's not my problem.

J: And I'll often do... if we have whole school inset, then I'm often mugged to do something, to deliver some training.

INT: In that respect your role does reflect...

J: Yes, and I also get, the girls' school have invited me down to do CPD down there.

INT: So a real network actually, not just in the school.

J: Yes.

INT: It must make you feel quite good.

J: Oh I do, yes, absolutely, I couldn't just... And I do get... not blowing my own trumpet but people will say, they'll take things that I've done, so my pupil / school support is always taken. <laughter> 'Oh, I'll have that.' Ann chose it, so people know [SENCO] is reliable, she knows what she's doing, go and talk to her.

INT: And I think a lot of schools want that, don't they?

J: Yes.

INT: And if SENCOs were allowed to do... this is where I'm coming from actually, if you let SENCOs to do the SENCO bit, often you could empower them and schools generally.

J: Yes, parental contact obviously is another key thing.

INT: Is that quite positive, good here?

J: On the whole mostly good. I'm very conscious of the fact that once you leave primary, it's a bit scary, especially for parents in year seven and eight. So what I've

done, each of my Tas is linked to about three parents of boys with statements and high focus. They are the start of the year we write, a photograph of the TA, this is your TA, how do you want to communicate? Home / school book, email, or an occasional call, you set the agenda. So there's that link, and then I also have a drop in so that on a Monday afternoon I'm available if parents want to drop in.

INT: And do they?

J: They do, especially, as I say, year seven and eight, they're the ones you'll see and then my email address is available, so I do quite a lot of email communication now; so meeting the parents is quite significant.

INT: And that can take a lot of time as well.

J: Yes, and obviously then I performance manage my team. As part of SMT I'm involved in doing classroom observations of teachers.

INT: And would that focus on SENs or just general?

J: General.

INT: So that's another string to your bow, if you like.

J: Yes, so there's those sort of matters.

INT: But still time consuming.

J: Oh yes.

INT: Challenges – everything because you've got so much, but what are the significant challenges you face, particularly as a SENCO but you can't really disassociate that from your other...?

J: I think it will always be a challenge, the fact that you can't say inclusion is here. It is a journey and there will always be that need to sometimes persuade, cajole, bring people on board, and to remind them that SEN is important and significant, and that's the biggest challenge, and still attitude to change.

INT: Because my perception from what you said is actually senior management value your role, staff clearly value your role.

J: Yeah.

INT: But they still perceive SEN to be not as important... I don't want to say not important, less important.

J: Yes, I think there are still people who think this child shouldn't be in this school and I don't know... I think it'll be a long, long time before we reach a point where you won't get that, so and so shouldn't be here. I think that people have moved forward on being inclusive of young people, learning difficulties more.

INT: Yes, it's the behaviour.

J: It's behaviour. A lot of kids on the autistic spectrum, ADHD, and those are the biggest challenges, yes, because we're always human, aren't we, and there are some difficult young men.

INT: And sometimes you just don't want to deal with them.

J: And some days.

INT: And you'd like an easy afternoon just to sit down.

J: I know the staff can sometimes because you can't. If you alienate them, you'll never bring them on board, that I think is the biggest challenge. Because all the rest, you can... if you're tired, you can cope with all the rest. You can cope with the paperwork, the paperwork's a nightmare but it's not so much of a challenge.

INT: But I think perhaps you're quite different from some of the other people I've spoken to, because they've said paperwork and time are the two big issues, but perhaps you're a bit proactive in changing that, so you go beyond the – and I don't mean this disrespectfully – the minutiae to the bigger philosophical picture, if you like.

J: Yes, I think that's what I was saying about that devolving.

INT: Yes, exactly, that's enabled you to do those...

J: To look, because I always think I want to have a helicopter view not... the big picture. I forgot to say something else I have to do of course is exam access arrangements and that's quite difficult.

INT: Especially this time of year.

J: Yes, but again I've devolved to my TAs the running around bit of that, and the, you've got to do that.

INT: But you start to oversee.

J: So I start to oversee.

INT: Do you still think, even though you've created such a positive SEN department, I'm not sure I should use that term, do you still think you're occasionally... you're the SENCO, that's the least achieving group, so you're tarred with that brush?

J: Yes, and sometimes I still get overlooked.

INT: Yes, that's what I mean.

J: You do still get overlooked sometimes. So, for example, if we have open evening and there's stickers for every department...

INT: But not... It's interesting you say that because I looked on your website for the address, and everyone else had a department except SEN, and then I thought I hope I've got the right school. Then I looked at the staff list and you're right at the top actually, <laughter> so you were there. But it's quite interesting that the... even if it wasn't called SEN, which I can understand you wouldn't necessarily want to be associated with that department, you could have had an inclusion base.

J: Yes, and there is stuff on the website, there's policies and things, but yes.

INT: And it's been the same at other schools when I've checked other addresses – nobody really wants to quite mention it and it's often hidden in something else.

J: Yes, but because I shout quite loudly... I haven't been told by the boss that I'm too good at my job in terms of look at all these people that want to come. <laughter>

INT: Look what you've caused, but if you look what I've done with it ! But that is a challenge, isn't it?

J: And I sometimes think that my success isn't celebrated, that actually I'm more highly regarded outside the school than in the school.

INT: And that must hurt?

J: It does hurt sometimes, yes.

INT: I think if you keep it all down, that's what they want, isn't it, it's not noticed, but then it's not noticed.

J: But, yes, I know that my line manager, he knows exactly what we're doing over here. But I mean the SENCO role, even if you've got a big team, it's very isolating because you're the only mug who knows what you're doing in the school usually, and that carries quite a burden of responsibility.

INT: Particularly with that number of...

J: If you're thinking about tribunals, this is a legal document I'm writing here, I have a lot of reasonability.

INT: And I don't think people necessarily know that, do they?

J: No, so that you sometimes feel quite alone.

INT: Yes, and you ask for help but actually...

J: They don't know, no. I can ask for advice, but at the end of the day I'm naturally the only one who knows.

INT: You're inside it.

JP Yes, and that's...

INT: We have guidelines for things and you think if you'd followed them, it wouldn't work, and you then think have I got this all wrong?

J: Yes.

INT: Very lonely and I feel like I'm failing with a child, and I'm not sure why, and I'm not sure actually that's the reason, it's probably much bigger issues that you don't see.

J: Yes.

INT: So you have plenty of opportunities to support other colleagues.

J: Yes.

INT: How do you think they perceive you as SENCO and how they perceive SEN in the school? Because I know you said they don't celebrate it, but if they're in the geography department, are you equal to them as, say for instance, the English and Science department as core subjects?

J: Yes, I think...

INT: A key core element or...

J: Yes, I think I'm regarded as... I think sitting on SMT helps, so therefore it enhances my role, I think that's vital, absolutely vital. I think they respect my knowledge. I think the Tas feel... I try to celebrate my Tas, but I think they feel sometimes that they're second class in the eyes of management, and that I think is sad.

INT: Compared to other Tas or generally?

J: Well, I just think because they give quite a lot, and I think they do here and therefore they'd like to think that perhaps some bouquets could come their way sometimes. So departments will be praised publically; we're never praised publicly and that makes me angry at times. So there was an incident last year I think when a young man achieved a GCSE in business studies – actually it was Louise who got him that GCSE.

INT: And that would have been nice, even if it was just a, you worked really hard at that.

J: Yes, and I think that's when we get overlooked by the Head I feel, he doesn't recognise some of the things that a lot of... and there's TAs working with individuals. And if you get a child a G because you've worked with them, that should be celebrated as much as the same as A*s.

INT: Because they've come from there, not that child's going to get an A* and get an A.

J: Yes.

INT: They have made a big step.

J: Probably without a lot of help actually.

INT: And just turning up on the day and sitting and you got a C.

J: Yes.

INT: Yes, absolutely.

J: I think that is frustrating.

INT: Do you think though that because you've developed such a positive perception, if you hadn't done that, do you think it would have still been almost an overlooked completely department?

J: Yes.

INT: So you actively worked to include...

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: I think in speaking to others they've just said, they see me to help But it's very much they go to them with problems, but it's not an engagement, it's just...

J: Yes.

INT: Not a professional conversation, if you like.

J: No.

INT: Whereas if I need to know something about geography I go as a professional to another professional kind of thing.

J: Yes. No, I do think they do take on board, and they are receptive to some of the ideas I put out there, and I try and give ideas out, so you do see them being used and implemented which is good.

INT: So you've already said that you're a leader, so you do much more leadership than management?

J: Yes.

INT: And that's a deliberate development?

J: Yes.

INT: That's interesting.

J: I feel... reflecting back over the last, only more recently, yes, I have moved. I don't actually always know what's going on.

INT: But actually that's having the courage to do that really.

J: Yes. <laughter> And it can be scary, but I have to remind myself that's right, because the Head can't know everything that's going on and as Head, as an effective leader, I'm not going to know everything. But if I need to know what's going on, I can get that information.

INT: So that was a very deliberate thing that you did.

J: Yes, so I'm thinking I don't know... at the moment, that person is working with that person, I need to check out what's going on, because I've set them to it and...

INT: And then they've gone off with it.

J: Yes.

INT: So it's very much a strategic role really.

J: Yes.

INT: Which fits in with everything you've passed over though, so that wasn't like it when you started, and that's...

J: No, very much more doing nitty gritty.

INT: And that's what you inherited.

J: Well, I inherited a fairly bland department from somebody who had put her head above the parapet, and didn't actually want to be...

INT: Yes, didn't sit down quick enough. Well, I think that's perhaps where the new outline wants people to go.

J: I think so, yes, but I don't think it will happen in most situations. I think I am probably a good model. But what worries me, and this isn't me being big-headed, but when I go because I will go, what will happen?

INT: Will it just go?

J: Have I created enough ethos and momentum for it to stay?

INT: It needs someone to come in and take that vision on and live it and not just sustain it.

J: Yes.

INT: I wonder though if that's at all possible because it's a secondary. I'm just thinking if I was a primary SENCO still, there would be that expectation that I would still have to do a lot of the things, because I couldn't devolve it out, I've only got one TA..

- J: Yes
- INT: Can you do it? Okay, you've got a lot of children, so that comes into play, but even if you ignore that and you had a smaller team, a small number, in a primary it's going to be even smaller, so do you think you could have done that?
- J: I think that's possibly harder, isn't it? I think you'd have to reach a point where you're actually involving teachers more not just your Tas.
- INT: Where would you like, I know we've talked about this already, but the future to go? Because you've done so much.
- J: Yes, I think that it still pains me that NQTs are coming out of training having had a day and a half's SEN or something.
- INT: Yes, we have that experience.
- J: And that I still find... how will we ever have inclusion in its truest sense if that continues to happen?
- INT: You see I perceive that at work, because my undergrads aren't teacher trainers. But I have done one session with the undergrad teacher trainers and immediately talking to them, a whole... the way I look at things as a person coming from inclusion was completely different to how they look at it. They were very much... the session was about LAC and they very much came from the perspective of you've just got to get them into school and then we'll worry about... we're always right in school, I know what's best for them.
- J: Well, that's scary.
- INT: Yes, and these are second years. But I know our undergrads that often go onto PGCE say that they get quite intimidated and anxious because they know more about SEN than the lecturer. And I don't want to say anything of the lecturer, but we don't have that many graduates. So that's my experience, and I think the undergrads will do a day and a half within SEN
- J: I don't think it has, and I think especially subjects, secondary where you're just concentrating on your subject. And I just feel that I want a broader... so I'm there and I want to go there. So if I... it might be I'd like to think that with clusters and extended schools, you'd have somebody with SEN expertise or an advisory teacher.
- INT: Yes, working across schools and disciplines.
- J: I could devise a lovely job for myself. <laughter> [
- INT: But the trouble is there's no money in, is there?
- J: No, I think those jobs are...
- INT: But actually that could be fantastic, couldn't it?

J: Yes.

INT: A genuine inclusion officer in.

J: Yes.

INT: Absolutely and what you can achieve in mainstream.

J: Absolutely.

INT: We've done it so... because you've developed the SENCO role significantly, haven't you?

J: Yes.

INT: There isn't really, or I can imagine there's...

J: No, there's no point, I don't see the point in going to be SENCO at a bigger school or something like that.

INT: That's just more paperwork, isn't it?

J: More paperwork, yes. So I would like to go and actually move out of schools.

INT: Yes, kind of philosophical rather than a doing.

J: Yes, but we shall see.

INT: It's a good plan. I'm with you, if you want to talk about it. <laughter> It's a plan.

J: It's a plan. But yes, I mean perhaps we are a model for how a good SENCO could... perhaps you should get the Government to come down and have a look at me! <laughter>

INT:now I'm going to sell my knowledge! <laughter> But interesting you said, I haven't seen where I used to work and the people there for ages, and strangely enough, I met one of them the other day, and the person who took my SENCO job doesn't want to it anymore. So I think it does take a particular strange individual.

J: Oh yes, absolutely!

INT: It's not what people think it is.

J: No, it isn't. But you can make it.

INT: Yes. But you have to be willing to do it.

J: You have to. There's no point in complaining about other people, you've just got to get on and do it.

INT: Yes, and it won't go away.

J: No, it won't, it'll still be there, because some fool in some office has Something that I am looking to do, and I've started as well, is looking around person centred planning and using person centred tools, and I think that's something. So I'm working with a teacher advisor from the psychology service, and we've done some person centred training in school – a really lovely process with some young people, and we've also done some stuff around solution circles, that I think is a lovely area to...

INT: That's a big step forward, isn't it, yes.

J: ... move to as part of the inclusion journey.

INT: Yes, your children are actually quite involved in their whole...

J: Yes.

INT: Which is a big change compared to annual reviews – what do you think, and that was it.

J: I went to an annual review yesterday for a year 12 young man, he never attended his annual reviews before.

INT: Up to now, particularly in primary, they just didn't care and it went over them, but they always be invited.

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: And often at the start of it...

J: Oh yes. But I ran... well, I didn't run that, I was part of two person – going slightly off track, sorry – centred reviews last year, facilitated for me, and I think that's very important, that somebody facilitates it, and as SENCO I was part of the process. And they were lovely, they took a lot of planning, but they were really powerful.

INT: Year 12 as well for that boy, he could have a lot of opinions about...

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: We may be making important life decisions about him, whether you want to go to university, what you want to do.

J: Yes.

INT: It's quite scary.

J: It is scary, isn't it?

INT: Anything else you feel you want to share about your role? <laughter> That's been great, really enlightening.

J: No, I do enjoy it. I moan about it...

INT: Yes, about people.

J: ... because we all do, and my own management of myself is the one thing I'm not that good at.

INT: But I think as long as you've managed everything else, you just let it happen basically.

J: Yes, and I know that I burn out, so I take a break and then go at it and I'm like... And I know that and that's me, I don't know how I evolve from that, I do do too much.

INT: I think that's a teacher's thing.

J: I think it is, a lot. But I don't sit still; I can't bear sitting still.let's make it better and I think that's helped with us. Hopefully I've inspired some people along the way to change their views. And also although I don't know what's necessarily happening intimately with Johnny now, I do know that the boys come to my door because they want to, because they feel safe and this place is important. So even when I'm not here, they've got those people. And I think you can still... even though you're being a bit more strategic, it's still nice to know that there are individuals that you have impacted upon.

INT: Yes, and that's why you do it.

J: And that's why you do it. So I know that so and so still comes to school because of what I've set up, even if I'm not there sitting beside them, because I've set that up.

INT: Yes, and he probably wouldn't be here if you hadn't, so that's a huge step forward.

J: And that's what I mean about having moved my thinking to accepting that. And it's right that the people who do the grassroots stuff get credit for that.

INT: But then you've set it up and had the courage to do that, which is a big thing.

J: Yes.

INT: Well, that's great. Thank you very, very much, I appreciate that.

Recording ends 55:34 minutes

APPENDIX FOUR:
Coded interview transcript

J INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Transcript Code

... = indicates a pause or switch of thought mid-sentence

[IA] = sentence(s) inaudible or indecipherable

Participants

INT = Interviewer

J = Interviewee

Yellow – Number of children with a statement/SEN

Blue – Amount of release time, additional roles

Pink – time pressures, expectations, additional pressures

Green – Leadership of SEN or school wide?

Red comments – notes added by JW

Recording starts

<interview from 4:05 onwards>

INT: The questions are very much, I'm not looking for a right or wrong answer or anything like that, it is purely about experience. I'm coming from the idea that I was a SENCO, and there's the new outlined suggested code and expectations and how people have experienced the job, because I look at the code and think <laughter> I never did any of that, but I did lots of that and that doesn't seem to be valid, and that's all I'm looking at.

J: Yes.

INT: And it will all be anonymised, and I can send you the recording, because it'll go onto the computer if you want to have a review of that. But if you could just tell me a bit about the school? Obviously I know a little bit having been around it.

J: So yes, we're a mainstream secondary, 11 to 19, so we do have a sixth form and it's a joint sixth form with the local girls' school. So at sixth form, there are girls onsite as well so the boys are going back and forth from the sixth form. And then historically, it was quite an academic sort of old type school, and although our area looks like a leafy suburb, we actually take from some quite deprived areas. So in terms of percentage of free school meals, we're quite high. So we've got quite a catchment of, as I say, socially deprived families.

INT: That's quite surprising.

J: And that obviously impacts on the school. I find that impacting on my end of the school in terms of SEN. So there are those young men who've got some behaviour issues. So we're small, we're four form entry so we're medium sized, we're not huge, we're small enough to be quite close. The staff get to know the children, so 120 in each year group, plus about another 120 in the sixth form.

INT: That's still quite a lot of children.

J: It is quite a lot, so we're 620 plus 120, so it's 700 plus. But it means that you don't have so much scope for setting and banding because subjects have to be on together, so it

means that the timetable's perhaps more rigid. We've found being more flexible at key stage four has been a difficult journey I think. So we're getting there, we're looking more at some non-academic - we're beginning to introduce some BTECs, we have some vocational stuff going on, we do ASDAN. I do entry level certificates as and when, just working with boys who switched off and are not going to lessons and things like that. So we've basically have an upper band and a lower band, and this little discrete SEN group at key stage three. So that's the context of the school, and achieving... in terms of boys' schools, like for like with boys' schools, we're quite high up in terms of the league tables, in terms of As to Cs, including English and Maths, we're quite high, just behind the grammar schools, on that sort of level. So we've got some very bright pupils.

INT: So parents would choose to come here.

J: Yes, we've certainly got waiting lists within the area, but there are other schools who are beginning to play catch-up, so you can't just sit back and rest on your laurels.

INT: Is the SEN part... because I think one of the other schools I've been to, they said actually the SEN department is good and parents choose to come for that reason...

J: Definitely.

INT: ...as well as the A-level pass rate, so actually that adds more pressure to yours.

J: Yes, and it is an odd one, isn't it, because as I've been more successful and created, and I can sit here and say that, I've got a very good learning support department. The more people would want to come here, and then that creates some pressures within school, because as I say, certainly I've got people, I've got SENCOS phoning me and saying, would you consider this young man who everybody else has said no to? And that brings with it pressures. Not time pressure, but does add to expectations on SENCO?

INT: It adds pressure for you then.

J: Yes, and adds pressure for staff. We sometimes forget that sense that<laughter> And we were Ofsteded in October, and that was really good because I got recognition in Ofsted. The Ofsted report actually said that I had quite good leadership. SENCO leader and other roles leader.

INT: Brilliant, yes, you need that though, don't you?

J: But what hurts a bit is that it hasn't been 'bigged up' by the Head.

INT: But it doesn't look good in the newspaper, does it?

J: That's the best way to put it.

INT: That's tragic.

J: And it is, yes. So we'll pick on other kids, but not actually the SENCO has been named in the report.

INT: That she's achieved so much, and those children recognise it.

J: Absolutely.

INT: And their parents.

J: Yes, and it should be. So yes, we definitely get parents choosing to come here. So my statement, in terms of statements I've now got 36 statements.

INT: That's a huge proportion to the other children.

J: Which is a huge proportion. So yes, that's 36 out of the 620, so it's...

INT: It's a huge...

J: Plus provision plans which effectively are statements, you're talking about six additional statements, and then you've got School Action Plus.

INT: And to get a statement now.

J: These days, yes, you have to go through...

INT: Absolutely.

J: Yes.

INT: That's a huge...

J: Yes, it is a lot.

INT: Presumably the more successful you are, the less likely they give a statement that say you can support in a school, we know you can, so there's...

J: Yes, that pressure as well.

INT: So all those statements, what about School Action, School Action Plus?

J: Yes, I've got 130, 130 plus on the SEN database in total.

INT: Wow.

J: And I've got boys with statements in the sixth form as well. So last September I had two boys come from different schools into our sixth form.

INT: But still requiring...

J: But still requiring... One young man had been at *****, which is a local special school, all his secondary career, probably shouldn't have been but had been. The autistic spectrum...

J: Yes, so we had to manage that transition very carefully, and his learning, he's a borderline A-level student, so he's being nurtured. And the other young man, much more high functioning Asperger's, but with additional significant mental health problems.

INT: So a very different challenge.

J: A very different challenge and was not supported effectively at his secondary, so I didn't get told and he just appeared, and oh, he's got a statement. So I didn't help him in his transition because...

INT: But then how could you?

J: How could I?

INT: Yes, absolutely. The kind of child just to be transferred without that is... you think that doesn't happen anymore? Very naively I know.

J: You would've hoped so, but no. So we've got that whole range, as I say, from non-readers right through.

INT: So that's essentially almost like an entire year cohort.

J: Yes. The school actually is...

INT: Yes, but you still need to have an overview of it, that you've got to keep a... even if you don't actively get involved.

J: Yes.

INT: And so lots of children, how many staff are linked to special needs?

J: I've got a team of 11 Teaching Assistants, most of whom are inter-generic and some linked to named students. One of the things I did fairly early on here was to change the way the TAs worked, because they used to be attached to boys, and then I've moved so that they're attached to departments, so that they build up subject knowledge and expertise in the subject area which I think is important. So they stay, they don't follow boys, and it also increases independence; I didn't want TAs following groups of boys, it's not good. But then I have some TAs who are named workers for... my two profoundly hearing impaired boys have got a named TA. I've got somebody who's attached to a high functioning autistic young man who'd had a very troubled primary career and had been excluded from mainstream. And in year six, nobody thought he'd function in a mainstream secondary. No mention of leadership issues here, but clearly managerial tasks – devolved to TAs. Comments below about other TA roles – on-going involvement with their work.

INT: So actually that was needed.

J: He's now in year eight and he's accessing lessons, and he's here five days a week.

INT: So she's done huge...

J: She's done a huge job, and I've got another young man who is a looked after child who's got long term support, because he'd been permanently excluded from another school. And I've got a couple of boys with significant behavioural problems who've got some one-to-one support.

INT: But presumably though that will be reviewed and...

J: Yes, that funding might tail off.

INT: But those people would still stay linked to the SEN department?

J: Yes, I've just got a couple of people, I'm using an agency staff for one, because that'll end.

INT: Of course, yes, and then that will...

J: Yes. But I mean there's likely to be funding for the bulk of them, there'll be somebody else coming through. And then, as I say, I've got my person in charge of learning support, and she runs learning support and everything that goes on in here.

INT: And then there's you?

J: Yes.

INT: And admin?

J: Some admin support, but that's a new thing, the first four years I had no admin support.

INT: And so you did all of it?

J: I was running... well, yes, I had no assistant SENCO. No assistant SENCO, so I'm running 36 statements without an assistant.

INT: How do you even get them all done? That's a silly question I know, but eight I think at most. But just getting eight was... to organise the meetings and things to... it's a huge...

J: Yes, it's a huge role. We also then have a teacher who works primarily with our small SEN groups, and she teaches across subjects. So she teaches the English, History, Geography and RE at year seven and year eight as a sort of a bridge from primary to secondary to them to help that. So they've got that certain sense of security and support.

INT: And she's part time?

J: And she works four days a week. So that's how we're structured as a department.

INT: It's a big department. Had to be more than management? Large department, increasing numbers of pupils with SEN – staff expect more from SENCO?

J: It is quite a big department, and growing.

INT: Yes, compared to others.

J: Yes, oh absolutely, in terms of the size of my department, yes.

INT: So that's managing a lot of people, a lot of students, but a lot of people with those students.

J: Yes.

INT: So you're a full time SENCO.

J: Yes.

INT: You don't have any other role surely?

J: Well, yes, I do. I sit on the senior leadership team, which is very important.

INT: Is that because you're a SENCO or for other reasons?

J: It's because I'm a SENCO, although it will be interesting to see what happens as and when I leave, to make sure that that is secure. I think it's also because I bring things to the table. I do some whole school stuff, I lead on SEAL in the school for example, we brought SEAL into year seven, and so I've led on that and yes, I've got some other...

INT: So you do have other...

J: Yes.

INT: I don't know how you do it! Most SENCOs I've spoken to are only part of SMT when it's SEN. They only get invited to the meetings, they aren't part of it, but you couldn't really not be with such a big department.

J: No, and my line manager is Deputy Head for pastoral, and he very much sees the importance of my role. So I do that, and I'm then part of the curriculum team leaders and part of the achievement team, so I actually straddle both sides of the school in terms of achievement and the pastoral side. Pink - expectations are positive here. Knows that SENCO does a good job and has a lot to contribute.

INT: It's so diverse and all of those could be areas in themselves.

J: Yes, I don't do a lot around behaviour, and I don't do Able and Talented. Did not discuss specifics re release time. Checked with J when she reviewed data. 8 teaching slots are the only 'fixed' part of her TT. The rest is fluid, depending on needs etc.

INT: But at least SMT did recognise the need for SENCO to have that leadership.

J: Yes, absolutely, yes.

INT: So part of SMT, other roles, so qualified teacher?

J: Yes.

INT: And you're working towards a Masters I know.

J: Yes.

INT: Anything else? <laughter>

J: Well, I had pre-school experience, so I didn't go straight into teacher training, so I think that's important. So I've got a background, I worked in the health and social care sector, and I worked around learning difficulties and advocacy, so I bring that.

INT: So SEN in other areas.

J: Yes, I bring that experience into school and in terms of other, I've got a SPLD qualification. Did these things impact on J's view of SEN/inclusion which led to the approach adopted? Can do?

INT: So a diverse range of things you've done.

J: Yes, and I'm primary trained, as I think a lot of SENCOs are...

INT: <laughter> So how did you end up... is that a silly question?

J: Well, I'm primary trained and I trained in Wales and when I qualified, there were no jobs, no teaching jobs, you come out of the training in primary in Swansea, and you suddenly realise there's no jobs. So I had a dispiriting couple of years, I did some NVQ work, I was working in NVQ, I did the assessors award and stuff, I did that and then I went back into supply. And I always thought when I was doing my primary PGCE, I thought I'll veer towards special needs. A job came up in a mainstream secondary as a SEN teacher, temporary, took it and I followed on the path; so assistant SENCO.

INT: Always in secondary?

J: Always in secondary.

INT: So you trained but never went into primary?

J: Only in supply, I only ever did short term stuff in primary and I would never ever go back to primary, it's much happier... and mainstream, I wouldn't ever be a special... maybe behaviour.

INT: But that's actually different.

J: Yes, it's very different. I wouldn't ever want to work in special provision either. That's my path, as it were.

INT: So you wanted to be a SENCO really?

J: I wanted to be a SENCO and I think that's so important, because I can be boring because I'm prepared to bore people about it and bang on about it. I'm really passionate about it because it's always what I wanted to do, and so I feel passionate about it. And I think that's an issue because I think there are many SENCOs who didn't quite duck quick enough when somebody said, would you like to take on some of this? Leadership, but also recognising the challenges of role and the need to keep it manageable.

INT: Yes, that's why I asked the question.

J: And I think that's a reflection and I think that's not going to get better.

INT: And that's tragic, isn't it? I was exactly like you. In my final teacher training, I knew I was in the right class because you had two naughty boys stood up and I could respond to that. I couldn't do the nice children. I know that's really stupid, but I couldn't. I loved all the challenge of it, but when I put the question in, my supervisor said, 'they'll just say they didn't duck quick enough.' And some of that has come up, which is very sad.

J: It is.

INT: Because you couldn't do a role like you're filling at the moment without wanting to.

J: No, and it worries me.

INT: Yes, absolutely.

J: And I think the more pressure we put on what's expected of SENCOs, it's not going to get any better.

INT: Well, who is going to replace you?

J: I know and that's not being big headed.

INT: No, it isn't.

J: There aren't enough of me around, people who really want to be here.

INT: And will work 200 hours a week.

J: Yes, there aren't, and you know that from numbers of applicants for jobs. ***** have been trying to recruit a SENCO all year, because the advert keeps coming up.

INT: That's tragic, isn't it?

J: So they're obviously not getting...

INT: Or at least they're not getting the candidates that they need, are they?

J: No.

INT: And that's not going to work, you're already... but you've got to have somebody.

J: You've got to have somebody. And the girls' school don't regard SEN as significant; they're still using a higher level Teaching Assistant. Expectations of what is needed in the role and its 'position'?

INT: That's something I wanted to do too, but obviously we all get on...

J: Yes.

INT: So this is a really hard question, but just speak general, what's a typical week like?

J: Well, goodness me, you've got your teaching and then...

INT: How much teaching?

J: I do teaching eight hours a week.

INT: So that's still quite a...

J: Yes, and sometimes teaching is the last thing that you're thinking about. So I can often walk into lessons and think, 'what were we doing, can you remind me?' <chuckles> I still enjoy my teaching.

INT: Yes, and you want to keep some.

J: And I want to keep some, and I love teaching key stage four, the older boys, we get on great and that's really good.

INT: It relights the fire, doesn't it?

J: Yes, it does, so there's the teaching. What I've now found, and I think it's taken me quite a while to reach the point at which you accept that you delegate and you delegate, or you do more successfully, so a lot of it now, and feeling that I'm looking at, is setting people up to do things. So a lot of my time now is spent thinking, that needs to be done, I need to devolve that responsibility to that member of my team and they need to go away and do it;

and I think that takes quite a bit of getting to, that point. Also expectations – changing the role from doing to leading? Also below.

INT: Absolutely, you can't just give things away, can you?

J: No. So I don't do... Louise does all the planning for the individual work with the boys.

INT: But that's something you particularly set up.

J: I'd reached that point, yes.

INT: So that wasn't always the case?

J: No. So we moved to it, it gradually somehow... what I do then is the leadership of the department. I think some SENCOs get too much into the nitty gritty. I don't need to be sitting and doing drills with boys, there are other people who can do that.

INT: And they're the very things that people should be doing.

J: I need to have more of a strategic view, so I have reached that point, although the strategic thing is very paper heavy in terms of the statutory requirements. So I will spend a lot of time in here dealing with the management and the maintenance of the SEN database, liaising with outside agencies, doing collaborative work with those sort of agencies, dealing with crises obviously, crisis management, dealing with things that erupt, you have to be doing that. Dealing with leadership issues, with conflicts out in other lessons. So those sorts of things, giving advice to teachers, as well as all the statutory stuff that is involved around having 36 statements and another 100 on the SEN database, so reviews. And I've tried to create systems, effective systems to reduce paperwork within the school, so that's been something that I've been quite strong on. Some of this – not additional roles, but does reveal diverse nature of SENCO role and how it grows. GREEN – steps from management to leadership

INT: How does that work? How successful, or it's a work in progress?

J: No, I think I've evolved. I started vigorously routinely having IEPs for every child on the SEN database, so they would go out to every department and they would sit in that drawer, and then twice a year I'd say I want those back.

INT: Yes, then you blow the dust of them.

J: Not worth it, absolutely not worth it. So I've now evolved a system of having an online SEN database, which has all the key information that is needed about that child, where they are, what their strengths are, what their difficulties are, what strategies you would apply. It's online so I can update it at the time, and that then links to a guidance handbook where there are commonsense strategies for all the conditions that you're going to encounter. Because if you apply commonsense strategies to your autistic child in the classroom, on the whole you will be okay. If you apply commonsense strategies to your teaching of children with learning difficulties, on the whole you will be okay.

INT: Yes, there'll always be the odd one.

J: There'll always be the odd one.

INT: Because they're people.

J: Because they're people. So that then has taken away the need for paper heavy things that I hate with a vengeance, mass produced. IEP Writer is just... it's pointless. And then I back that up with individualised targets for stuff around literacy and stuff around... So, as I said, my statement boys, they're in mainstream so they've got targets specific to them.

INT: And they've got copies of this as well.

J: They've got copies of this as well. And then we've got all the boys who come over here that have got their literacy based targets, and then Louise has got targets for the boys that she's working with individually over here.

INT: But actually they could be used, couldn't they, in a range of lessons. What staff expect for children with SEN and how role evolved.

J: Yes, absolutely

INT: And actually looking at that, you could easily slot that into any piece of planning.

J: Absolutely.

INT: So much more likely to work.

J: So that's how that works. So it's a system that I think suits, and then periodically I'll say to staff, just let me know how these boys on the SEN database, School Action, School Action Plus, are getting on. So that's how I deal with my statutory issues. That's the handbook that I produce for all staff, that gets updated once a year, and that's also hyperlinked from the SEN database as well so that people have got that information, it reminds them of their responsibilities.

INT: It's very accessible. If I was in a class with 30 children, I could flick through this and go to exactly what I want.

J: Yes, and the SEN database has pictures of all the children in it as well so you can see, and it's got all the information on reading ages and all that as well. So I feel that that's been a very effective way of working; it works for me, it might not work for some SENCOs but it works for me.

INT: And having had children with statements, then you look through the file you find out on top of everything else they're colour-blind but no-one bothered to tell you, silly things like that.

J: Absolutely.

INT: But actually if you'd have had key issues and somebody would've done that, which an admin person could do essentially, couldn't they really?

J: Yes, and it was an awful lot of work doing it the first time around.

INT: Absolutely, but then it's much less.

J: But now it's much easier. So it looks like that, and then you can see we can update it...

INT: That's fantastic, isn't it?

J: ... at a drop of a hat.

INT: But with things like photographs, that's so easily actually and it can stay with them.

J: Yes.

INT: And staff have responded positively to that?

J: Yes.

INT: You can see how that's so much better than IEP.

J: Yes.

INT: So if I was a class teacher I could also add a comment?

J: No, I've made it read-only for staff.

INT: But they could come and...?

J: They could come, of course they could.

INT: So that's how you do it, yes, that's a good idea, everybody will be adding.

J: Yes, I think

INT: Absolutely.

J: And then I've also still got boys who I'm referring for statutory assessment and all the paperwork that that involves. I do training sessions quite regularly, I'm regularly involved in delivering CPD, I'm regularly involved in working with NQTs. I very much have an open door, and often we'll have people coming in saying, could we come and look at your school, from the area. We work with the cluster, provide advice there – work, as I say, with specialist support teachers that come into school, we work to get them...

INT: What kind of CPD do you do?

J: Well, in school, I do CPD around autism or dyslexia or differentiation for those sorts of subject areas.

INT: And would that be staff meeting or...

J: Yes, we have twilight CPDs, we do our CPD now through twilight.

INT: So actually as a SENCO you are actually involved... One of the things that's come out is whilst the code suggests that you should be liaising with other teachers, as a knowledgeable guide, a lot of them are saying, staff come to me and say I've got Sam, I don't know what to do, what shall I do? But then actually they don't want to really know what to do.

J: No, they just want to be relieved of the responsibility.

INT: Yes.

J: Yes, so it's very much trying to empower them, to give them the tools, and those sort of things help.

INT: But I was thinking of the staff, absolutely, already it's not my problem.

J: And I'll often do... if we have whole school inset, then I'm often mugged to do something, to deliver some training.

INT: In that respect your role does reflect...

J: Yes, and I also get, the girls' school have invited me down to do CPD down there.

INT: So a real network actually, not just in the school.

J: Yes.

INT: It must make you feel quite good.

J: Oh I do, yes, absolutely, I couldn't just... And I do get... not blowing my own trumpet but people will say, they'll take things that I've done, so my pupil / school support is always taken. <laughter> 'Oh, I'll have that.' Ann chose it, so people know [SENCO] is reliable, she knows what she's doing, go and talk to her. Positive impact – change perceptions of SEN/inclusion.

INT: And I think a lot of schools want that, don't they?

J: Yes.

INT: And if SENCOs were allowed to do... this is where I'm coming from actually, if you let SENCOs to do the SENCO bit, often you could empower them and schools generally.

J: Yes, parental contact obviously is another key thing.

INT: Is that quite positive, good here?

J: On the whole mostly good. I'm very conscious of the fact that once you leave primary, it's a bit scary, especially for parents in year seven and eight. So what I've done, each of my TAs is linked to about three parents of boys with statements and high focus. They are the start of the year we write, a photograph of the TA, this is your TA, how do you want to communicate? Home / school book, email, or an occasional call, you set the agenda. So there's that link, and then I also have a drop in so that on a Monday afternoon I'm available if parents want to drop in. Systems, not doing.

INT: And do they?

J: They do, especially, as I say, year seven and eight, they're the ones you'll see and then my email address is available, so I do quite a lot of email communication now; so meeting the parents is quite significant.

INT: And that can take a lot of time as well.

J: Yes, and obviously then I performance manage my team. As part of SMT I'm involved in doing classroom observations of teachers.

INT: And would that focus on SENs or just general?

J: General.

INT: So that's another string to your bow, if you like.

J: Yes, so there's those sort of matters.

INT: But still time consuming.

J: Oh yes.

INT: Challenges - everything because you've got so much, but what are the significant challenges you face, particularly as a SENCO but you can't really disassociate that from your other...?

J: I think it will always be a challenge, the fact that you can't say inclusion is here. It is a journey and there will always be that need to sometimes persuade, cajole, bring people on board, and to remind them that SEN is important and significant, and that's the biggest challenge, and still attitude to change.

INT: Because my perception from what you said is actually senior management value your role, staff clearly value your role.

J: Yeah.

INT: But they still perceive SEN to be not as important... I don't want to say not important, less important.

J: Yes, I think there are still people who think this child shouldn't be in this school and I don't know... I think it'll be a long, long time before we reach a point where you won't get that, so and so shouldn't be here. I think that people have moved forward on being inclusive of young people, learning difficulties more.

INT: Yes, it's the behaviour.

J: It's behaviour. A lot of kids on the autistic spectrum, ADHD, and those are the biggest challenges, yes, because we're always human, aren't we, and there are some difficult young men.

INT: And sometimes you just don't want to deal with them.

J: And some days.

INT: And you'd like an easy afternoon just to sit down.

J: I know the staff can sometimes because you can't. If you alienate them, you'll never bring them on board, that I think is the biggest challenge. Because all the rest, you can... if you're tired, you can cope with all the rest. You can cope with the paperwork, the paperwork's a nightmare but it's not so much of a challenge Ethos.

INT: But I think perhaps you're quite different from some of the other people I've spoken to, because they've said paperwork and time are the two big issues, but perhaps you're a bit proactive in changing that, so you go beyond the – and I don't mean this disrespectfully – the minutiae to the bigger philosophical picture, if you like. Not about additional roles but how to avoid some roles that SENCO usually has. A way forward?

J: Yes, I think that's what I was saying about that devolving.

INT: Yes, exactly, that's enabled you to do those...

J: To look, because I always think I want to have a helicopter view not... the big picture. I forgot to say something else I have to do of course is exam access arrangements and that's quite difficult. GREEN – vision, ethos.

INT: Especially this time of year.

J: Yes, but again I've devolved to my TAs the running around bit of that, and the, you've got to do that.

INT: But you start to oversee.

J: So I start to oversee.

INT: Do you still think, even though you've created such a positive SEN department, I'm not sure I should use that term, do you still think you're occasionally... you're the SENCO, that's the least achieving group, so you're tarred with that brush?

J: Yes, and sometimes I still get overlooked.

INT: Yes, that's what I mean.

J: You do still get overlooked sometimes. So, for example, if we have open evening and there's stickers for every department...

INT: But not... It's interesting you say that because I looked on your website for the address, and everyone else had a department except SEN, and then I thought I hope I've got the right school. Then I looked at the staff list and you're right at the top actually, <laughter> so you were there. But it's quite interesting that the... even if it wasn't called SEN, which I can understand you wouldn't necessarily want to be associated with that department, you could have had an inclusion base.

J: Yes, and there is stuff on the website, there's policies and things, but yes.

INT: And it's been the same at other schools when I've checked other addresses - nobody really wants to quite mention it and it's often hidden in something else.

J: Yes, but because I shout quite loudly... I haven't been told by the boss that I'm too good at my job in terms of look at all these people that want to come. <laughter>

INT: Look what you've caused, but if you look what I've done with it ! But that is a challenge, isn't it?

J: And I sometimes think that my success isn't celebrated, that actually I'm more highly regarded outside the school than in the school.

INT: And that must hurt?

J: It does hurt sometimes, yes.

INT: I think if you keep it all down, that's what they want, isn't it, it's not noticed, but then it's not noticed.

J: But, yes, I know that my line manager, he knows exactly what we're doing over here. But I mean the SENCO role, even if you've got a big team, it's very isolating because you're the only mug who knows what you're doing in the school usually, and that carries quite a burden of responsibility.

INT: Particularly with that number of...

J: If you're thinking about tribunals, this is a legal document I'm writing here, I have a lot of reasonability.

INT: And I don't think people necessarily know that, do they?

J: No, so that you sometimes feel quite alone.

INT: Yes, and you ask for help but actually...

J: They don't know, no. I can ask for advice, but at the end of the day I'm naturally the only one who knows.

INT: You're inside it.

JP Yes, and that's...

INT: We have guidelines for things and you think if you'd followed them, it wouldn't work, and you then think have I got this all wrong?

J: Yes.

INT: Very lonely and I feel like I'm failing with a child, and I'm not sure why, and I'm not sure actually that's the reason, it's probably much bigger issues that you don't see.

J: Yes.

INT: So you have plenty of opportunities to support other colleagues.

J: Yes.

INT: How do you think they perceive you as SENCO and how they perceive SEN in the school? Because I know you said they don't celebrate it, but if they're in the geography department, are you equal to them as, say for instance, the English and Science department as core subjects?

J: Yes, I think...

INT: A key core element or...

J: Yes, I think I'm regarded as... I think sitting on SMT helps, so therefore it enhances my role, I think that's vital, absolutely vital. I think they respect my knowledge. I think the TAs feel... I try to celebrate my TAs, but I think they feel sometimes that they're second class in the eyes of management, and that I think is sad.

INT: Compared to other TAs or generally?

J: Well, I just think because they give quite a lot, and I think they do here and therefore they'd like to think that perhaps some bouquets could come their way sometimes. So departments will be praised publically; we're never praised publicly and that makes me angry at times. So there was an incident last year I think when a young man achieved a GCSE in business studies - actually it was Louise who got him that GCSE.

INT: And that would have been nice, even if it was just a, you worked really hard at that.

J: Yes, and I think that's when we get overlooked by the Head I feel, he doesn't recognise some of the things that a lot of... and there's TAs working with individuals. And if you get a child a G because you've worked with them, that should be celebrated as much as the same as A*s.

INT: Because they've come from there, not that child's going to get an A* and get an A.

J: Yes.

INT: They have made a big step.

J: Probably without a lot of help actually.

INT: And just turning up on the day and sitting and you got a C.

J: Yes.

INT: Yes, absolutely.

J: I think that is frustrating.

INT: Do you think though that because you've developed such a positive perception, if you hadn't done that, do you think it would have still been almost an overlooked completely department?

J: Yes.

INT: So you actively worked to include...

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: I think in speaking to others they've just said, they see me to help But it's very much they go to them with problems, but it's not an engagement, it's just...

J: Yes.

INT: Not a professional conversation, if you like.

J: No.

INT: Whereas if I need to know something about geography I go as a professional to another professional kind of thing.

J: Yes. No, I do think they do take on board, and they are receptive to some of the ideas I put out there, and I try and give ideas out, so you do see them being used and

implemented which is good. Change view of SEN – possible to include, and useful for others.

INT: So you've already said that you're a leader, so you do much more leadership than management?

J: Yes.

INT: And that's a deliberate development?

J: Yes.

INT: That's interesting.

J: I feel... reflecting back over the last, only more recently, yes, I have moved. I don't actually always know what's going on.

INT: But actually that's having the courage to do that really.

J: Yes. <laughter> And it can be scary, but I have to remind myself that's right, because the Head can't know everything that's going on and as Head, as an effective leader, I'm not going to know everything. But if I need to know what's going on, I can get that information.

INT: So that was a very deliberate thing that you did.

J: Yes, so I'm thinking I don't know... at the moment, that person is working with that person, I need to check out what's going on, because I've set them to it and...

INT: And then they've gone off with it.

J: Yes.

INT: So it's very much a strategic role really.

J: Yes.

INT: Which fits in with everything you've passed over though, so that wasn't like it when you started, and that's...

J: No, very much more doing nitty gritty.

INT: And that's what you inherited.

J: Well, I inherited a fairly bland department from somebody who had put her head above the parapet, and didn't actually want to be...

INT: Yes, didn't sit down quick enough. Well, I think that's perhaps where the new outline wants people to go.

J: I think so, yes, but I don't think it will happen in most situations. I think I am probably a good model. But what worries me, and this isn't me being big-headed, but when I go because I will go, what will happen?

INT: Will it just go?

J: Have I created enough ethos and momentum for it to stay? Also expectations?

INT: It needs someone to come in and take that vision on and live it and not just sustain it.

J: Yes.

INT: I wonder though if that's at all possible because it's a secondary. I'm just thinking if I was a primary SENCO still, there would be that expectation that I would still have to do a lot of the things, because I couldn't devolve it out, I've only got one TA..

J: Yes

INT: Can you do it? Okay, you've got a lot of children, so that comes into play, but even if you ignore that and you had a smaller team, a small number, in a primary it's going to be even smaller, so do you think you could have done that?

J: I think that's possibly harder, isn't it? I think you'd have to reach a point where you're actually involving teachers more not just your TAs.

INT: Where would you like, I know we've talked about this already, but the future to go? Because you've done so much.

J: Yes, I think that it still pains me that NQTs are coming out of training having had a day and a half's SEN or something.

INT: Yes, we have that experience.

J: And that I still find... how will we ever have inclusion in its truest sense if that continues to happen? I don't think teacher training has caught up with inclusion, and I think especially subjects, secondary where you're just concentrating on your subject. And I just feel that I want a broader... so I'm there and I want to go there. So if I... it might be I'd like to think that with clusters and extended schools, you'd have somebody with SEN expertise or an advisory teacher.

INT: Yes, working across schools and disciplines.

J: I could devise a lovely job for myself. <laughter> [

INT: But the trouble is there's no money in, is there?

J: No, I think those jobs are...

INT: But actually that could be fantastic, couldn't it?

J: Yes.

INT: A genuine inclusion officer in.

J: Yes.

INT: Absolutely and what you can achieve in mainstream.

J: Absolutely.

INT: We've done it so... because you've developed the SENCO role significantly, haven't you?

J: Yes.

INT: There isn't really, or I can imagine there's...

J: No, there's no point, I don't see the point in going to be SENCO at a bigger school or something like that.

INT: That's just more paperwork, isn't it?

J: More paperwork, yes. So I would like to go and actually move out of schools.

INT: Yes, kind of philosophical rather than a doing.

J: Yes,, I mean perhaps we are a model for how a good SENCO could... perhaps you should get the Government to come down and have a look at me! <laughter>

INT:now I'm going to sell my knowledge! <laughter> But interesting you said, I haven't seen where I used to work and the people there for ages, and strangely enough, I met one of them the other day, and the person who took my SENCO job doesn't want to it anymore. So I think it does take a particular strange individual.

J: Oh yes, absolutely!

INT: It's not what people think it is.

J: No, it isn't. But you can make it.

INT: Yes. But you have to be willing to do it.

J: You have to. There's no point in complaining about other people, you've just got to get on and do it.

INT: Yes, and it won't go away.

J: No, it won't, it'll still be there, because some fool in some office has Something that I am looking to do, and I've started as well, is looking around person centred planning and using person centred tools, and I think that's something. So I'm working with a teacher advisor from the psychology service, and we've done some person centred training in school - a really lovely process with some young people, and we've also done some stuff around solution circles, that I think is a lovely area to...

INT: That's a big step forward, isn't it, yes.

J: ... move to as part of the inclusion journey.

INT: Yes, your children are actually quite involved in their whole...

J: Yes.

INT: Which is a big change compared to annual reviews - what do you think, and that was it.

J: I went to an annual review yesterday for a year 12 young man, he never attended his annual reviews before.

INT: Up to now, particularly in primary, they just didn't care and it went over them, but they would always be invited.

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: And often at the start of it...

J: Oh yes. But I ran... well, I didn't run that, I was part of two person – going slightly off track, sorry – centred reviews last year, facilitated for me, and I think that's very important, that somebody facilitates it, and as SENCO I was part of the process. And they were lovely, they took a lot of planning, but they were really powerful.

INT: Year 12 as well for that boy, he could have a lot of opinions about...

J: Yes, absolutely.

INT: We may be making important life decisions about him, whether you want to go to university, what you want to do.

J: Yes.

INT: It's quite scary.

J: It is scary, isn't it?

INT: Anything else you feel you want to share about your role? <laughter> That's been great, really enlightening.

J: No, I do enjoy it. I moan about it...

INT: Yes.

J: ... because we all do, and my own management of myself is the one thing I'm not that good at. SENCO struggles to let everything go??

INT: But I think as long as you've managed everything else, you just let it happen basically.

J: Yes, and I know that I burn out, so I take a break and then go at it and I'm like... And I know that and that's me, I don't know how I evolve from that, I do do too much.

INT: I think that's a teacher's thing.

J: I think it is, a lot. But I don't sit still; I can't bear sitting still.let's make it better and I think that's helped with us. Hopefully I've inspired some people along the way to change their views. And also although I don't know what's necessarily happening intimately with Johnny now, I do know that the boys come to my door because they want to, because they feel safe and this place is important. So even when I'm not here, they've got those people. And I think you can still... even though you're being a bit more strategic, it's still nice to know that there are individuals that you have impacted upon.

INT: Yes, and that's why you do it.

J: And that's why you do it. So I know that so and so still comes to school because of what I've set up, even if I'm not there sitting beside them, because I've set that up.

INT: Yes, and he probably wouldn't be here if you hadn't, so that's a huge step forward.

J: And that's what I mean about having moved my thinking to accepting that. And it's right that the people who do the grassroots stuff get credit for that.

INT: But then you've set it up and had the courage to do that, which is a big thing.

J: Yes.

INT: Well, that's great. Thank you very, very much, I appreciate that.

APPENDIX FIVE:

Key themes from the coding

The table overleaf uses the four key themes identified through analysing data from the questionnaires, linking these issues to each other and broader issues raised by the literature review. This enabled the identification of current challenges facing SENCOs, opportunities for future development and priority areas for SENCOs, in terms of their professional life, provision within their setting and career development.

The comments in black are ‘sub themes’ related to each of the four main themes from the questionnaires. Those in pink are the same issues, but related to another one of the four key themes, used as headings. This highlights how each theme is an issue for SENCOs in itself, but also how each theme is related to other aspects within the SENCO role. Links were also made between the themes and the two core elements of the knowledgeable guide; leadership and the ethic of care.

Number of children with SEN/statement	Time pressures and expectations	Amount of release time	Leadership role, linked to SEN or whole school.
No link between the amount of time dedicated to the SENCO role and the number of children on the SEN register.	Additional roles might be linked to the SENCO post, such as line managing TAs, child protection, but they are often labour intensive. Secondary SENCOs tended to have more additional roles but primary SENCOs often maintained a class teaching responsibility. (Leadership)	Expectations from staff, pupils and parents often means that a SENCO is meeting with these people, formally and informally, sometimes on a daily basis. Do SENCOs need to change and reduce this level of involvement or are these relationships valuable within the education system (ethic of care)?	Career progression is not obvious. (Leadership)
The number of children with SEN might be in line with expected averages, but in a large school this could be over 100 pupils. (Management roles rather than leadership, due to number?)	The legal element of the role. SENCOs did not reject this responsibility, but this element is unique when comparing it to other coordination posts. (Expectations of a leader.)		Teaching children with SEN was a very valued aspect of the SENCO role, even though the Code of Practice does not recognise this as an element. (Ethic of care as a commitment to these pupils and their family.)
	SEN is about people, unlike other subject areas. Starts with people and goes into other areas (ethic of care).		SENCO role relates to all children with SEN in school. In the future, it could relate to all children, moving towards pedagogy and away from SEN. (Leadership)
	Typical working week often involves external agencies, administration, management, teaching etc. Leadership opportunities for the SENCO? Only a manager? Involvement of other staff in SEN issues?		

Expectations from staff, pupils and parents often means that a SENCO is meeting with these people, formally and informally, sometimes on a daily basis. Do SENCOs need to change and reduce this level of involvement or are these relationships valuable within the education system (ethic of care)?	No link between the amount of time dedicated to the SENCO role and the number of children on the SEN register.	No link between the amount of time dedicated to the SENCO role and the number of children on the SEN register.	Additional roles might be linked to the SENCO post, such as line managing TAs, child protection, but they are often labour intensive. Secondary SENCOs tended to have more additional roles but primary SENCOs often maintained a class teaching responsibility. (Leadership)
	Expectations from staff, pupils and parents often means that a SENCO is meeting with these people, formally and informally, sometimes on a daily basis. Do SENCOs need to change and reduce this level of involvement or are these relationships valuable within the education system (ethic of care)?	Typical working week often involves external agencies, administration, management, teaching etc. Leadership opportunities for the SENCO? Only a manager? Involvement of other staff in SEN issues?	The legal element of the role. SENCOs did not reject this responsibility, but this element is unique when comparing it to other coordination posts. (Expectations of a leader.)
	Teaching children with SEN was a very valued aspect of the SENCO role, even though the Code of Practice does not recognise this as an element. (Ethic of care as a commitment to these pupils and their family.)		
Number of children with SEN/statement	Time pressures and expectations	Amount of release time	Leadership role, linked to SEN or whole school.