

SENCo Review: Findings & Next Steps

A strategic summary for Headteachers

About This Review

An independent review of how our SENCos are working — their experience, workload and capacity to lead inclusion.



9 individual

1-to-1 sessions
with each SENCo



2 group

sessions — primary
& secondary



Survey data

triangulated across
all 9 schools



Independent

external consultant
John Ivens

Findings are anonymised — this is about shared patterns across the trust, not evaluating individuals.

What We Found

Four themes emerged consistently across all nine schools.



Pulled in too many directions

SENCOs regularly absorb behaviour, SEMH, safeguarding and admin alongside their statutory role — leaving little capacity for strategy and leadership.



Reactive demand crowds out strategic work

Immediate pupil needs pull SENCOs away from training and system improvement, making it harder to build sustainable inclusive practice.



Statutory workload is invisible to others

EHCP and legal work is time-heavy and high-stakes, but rarely seen or valued by colleagues. Several SENCOs described significant stress around this.



Cross-trust collaboration is underdeveloped

Peer connection was the lowest-rated area in the survey. Many SENCOs feel professionally isolated but also find hard to make time.

Why This Matters Now

The landscape is changing fast — and it points directly at what our SENCos have been telling us.

Staff sustainability

SENCos are stretched to their limit. Without change, we risk losing people.

Compliance & quality

Statutory duties - EHCPs, reviews, consultations - can't be deprioritised. Overload creates risk.

Parental confidence

Overloaded systems mean slower responses and harder conversations. Families notice.

Ofsted readiness

The framework now has a dedicated inclusion evaluation area. How we lead inclusion will be scrutinised.

Our Next Steps

Three areas where we can take action

1
Clarity

2
Shared
Ownership

3
Containment

1 Clarity: Defining the SENCo Role



What we will do

- Develop a trust-wide SENCo Role Framework clarifying what the role includes and what it doesn't
- Give headteachers a shared reference point for how the role should operate in their school
- Establish clear decision-rights in high-stakes areas: tribunals, LA consultations
- Create a structured trust induction for incoming SENCos



Why this matters

Role drift is the most consistent pressure across all nine schools.

SENCos absorb behaviour support, safeguarding, pastoral and admin because there is not shared understanding of where their responsibilities end.

A clear framework protects SENCos and gives headteachers a tool to make better decisions about how inclusion is organised. For new SENCos in particular, joining without clear boundaries leaves them vulnerable to inherited workloads from day one.



Low impact on SENCo workload

Shared Ownership: Inclusion Across the School



What we will do

- Pilot a distributed inclusion model - spreading SEND, safeguarding and pastoral responsibilities across SLT and middle leaders
- Make inclusion a standing item on SLT and trust agendas
- Build purposeful cross-trust networks for SENCoS - connecting by shared challenge and area of strength
- Introduce shared case ownership for complex pupils: SENCo, DSL and pastoral leads working together



Why this matters

Inclusion is described as whole-school - but in practice, the work lands on the SENCo. When a pupil is struggling, the SENCo gets called. When a family is unhappy, the SENCo carries it.

SENCoS are simultaneously expected to absorb immediate difficulties and lead the systems that would reduce those difficulties — a genuine contradiction the trust needs to address. Distributing responsibility shifts inclusion from something the SENCo manages to something the school owns.

● Low impact on SENCo workload — redistributes rather than adds

Containment: SENCo Wellbeing and Resilience



What we will do

- Introduce an optional reflective supervision offer - half-termly as standard, more frequent for new or stretched staff
- Establish a half-termly Inclusion & Safeguarding Oversight Forum, chaired by a senior leader
- Introduce a light-touch reflection process after high-intensity incidents
- Create a shared trust learning log for critical incidents — procedural, not narrative



Why this matters

Several SENCos described real emotional strain - difficulty sleeping before statutory deadlines, a sense of carrying responsibility alone, in some cases past burnout. One rated the sustainability of their role at 4 out of 10.

Some secondary SENCos are carrying institutional anxiety linked to past incidents - not because they were involved, but because the worry is embedded in the school's culture. This needs a collective response.

Supervision is a professional investment, not a remedial step — the same kind of support offered in other high-stakes roles.

● Low impact on SENCo workload — this is about giving time back, not adding tasks

Feeding Back to Our SENCos

Before any changes land in schools, we will share these findings with SENCos themselves.



Validation

We share findings as recognition — not critique. SENCos have been heard, and the trust takes their experience seriously.



Co-design

The three areas are a menu, not a mandate. SENCos help identify which shifts will make the biggest practical difference.



Supervision: an offer, not an obligation

Introduced as an optional professional investment — a sign of trust commitment to wellbeing, not a signal something is wrong.

The aim is to build on this review — and to make sure SENCos feel like partners in what comes next.

What We're Asking of You

- 1 Reflect on how today's findings map onto your school
- 2 Consider how inclusion leadership is shared — or not shared — across your SLT
- 3 Engage with the co-design process for the SENCo Role Framework
- 4 Support your SENCo to access the supervision offer when it's introduced