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Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCOs' perspectives of the first six months

Introduction

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms have been reported as the most significant reforms of their kind for over 30 years (DfE, 2014a). Through the Children and Families Act 2014 the Government are seeking to effect cultural and systemic change within the area of SEND and education; specifically the development of an aspirational and outcome based system for individuals with SEND, with the family at the centre (DfE and DoH, 2015). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) came into effect on 1st September 2014. The SEND Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as the Code) provides statutory guidance relating to the Children and Families Act 2014 for organisations, including schools, which work with children and young people with SEND. After publication a small number of amendments followed, with an updated version published in January 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015).

The Code states that the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) has an 'important role to play' regarding the strategic direction of SEND in schools (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). Additionally the SENCo is typically responsible for the operational management of the SEND policy. Therefore the SENCo may be regarded as a key implementer of the SEND reforms.

However, despite such prominence in policy for 20 years since the introduction of the first Code of Practice (DfE, 1994), the role of the SENCo has been considered unclear in policy and literature (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013). Hallett and Hallett noted that the role is 'as varied as the schools and settings in which the post-holders are employed and the role is delivered' (2010:1). In addition to the variation within context, a further complexity is that the role has been 'perceived as low status and operational rather than at a senior, strategic management level' (Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013:34). This therefore suggests that there may be a tension with the SENCo as a key policy implementer due to the barriers historically identified regarding the status and execution of the role.

This paper forms part of a PhD which is developing research within the area of SEND policy reform, through exploring and analysing the in-depth experience of the SENCo as a policy implementer during the first academic year post-reform. Through a semi-naturalist narrative inquiry approach, a group of SENCos have participated in individual half-termly semi-structured interviews for the first academic year of reform. The aim is for the SENCos to share their lived experience as policy implementers, providing an expert eye witness account as policy is narrated in their settings. However, policy enactment does not take place in isolation (Ball et al., 2012). Therefore interviews are situated within wider data sets,

gathered from experienced SENCos, Local Authorities (LAs) and the Department for Education (DfE) through interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis.

This paper discusses the emerging themes from one of the wider data sets which sought to gather the views of SENCos six months after the introduction of SEND reforms and the Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). The data was gathered through an online questionnaire and the SENCos were asked to reflect on the support they had received to implement the Code. They were also asked about the changes they had made in their setting as a response and whether they had perceived any impact in their setting, as a direct result of the new Code. This paper seeks to explore the question 'What is the SENCos' perspective of the SEND reforms, six months after implementation?'

Whilst the study is limited to a relatively small, partially localised sample, early findings indicate that SENCos have sought support from a variety of sources, predominantly the Local Authority and other SENCos. During the early stages of the reforms, the data suggests that the more bureaucratic elements have been focused upon, for example the school SEND policy and the SEND information report. A number of SENCos also reported that since the introduction of the SEND reforms the number of children recorded on their Special Educational Needs (SEN) registers has reduced. Responses suggested that understanding of the term SEN, the introduction of the new 'SEN Support' category and a perceived drive to reduce SEN numbers were all factors which contributed to this occurrence.

Policy enactment and the role of the SENCo

The role of SENCo is statutory within schools; legislation states that the SENCo must be a qualified teacher and, since 2009, teachers working as a SENCo must achieve the National Award for SENCo within three years of taking up the post (The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations, 2014). Statutory guidance cites that the post holder should be responsible for the strategic and operational coordination of provision for children who have been identified as having SEN (Hallett and Hallett, 2010; DfE and DoH, 2015). The role has been described in government guidance as 'pivotal' (DfES, 2004: 116). A view echoed by Hallett and Hallett stating that 'it is clear that best practice has the role of the SENCo at the heart of the education processes occurring within a setting' (2010: 1).

However, research has suggested that the role of SENCo remains ambiguous, and in some cases low status and operational (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013). The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report (2006) acknowledged that the role of the SENCo did not have the status which was required to have strategic influence. Tissot (2013) suggested that this may be attributed in part to the discrepancy between the legal requirement for the

position and the lack of guidance to all stakeholders, including the SENCo, regarding the execution of the role. Additionally the varying settings within which the role is executed may also explain this variation (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Robertson argued that despite such uncertainty, the SENCos' ability to establish and execute the role despite these issues illustrates their 'resilience and capacity' (2012: 82).

In response to the House of Commons Education and Skills report (2006), a number of recommendations were made through the Select Committee, including the requirement for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Masters Level training; these recommendations were later reflected in legislation (The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations, 2014; DfE and DoH, 2015). It could be argued that such policies have begun to create impact. Recent research by Qureshi (2014) suggested that the strategic nature of the role is emerging within schools, despite membership to the Senior Leadership Team remaining a non-statutory requirement (DfE and DoH, 2015). The introduction of the SEND reforms may provide an opportunity to raise the status and profile of the SENCo; the leadership aspect of the role is likely to increase, therefore promoting the strategic nature of the role (Pearson et al., 2015). Robertson (2012) argued that this issue needs directly addressing, alongside addressing the issue of adequate time to carry out the functions of the role. Yet despite such tensions, the role remains central to policy enactment within schools (Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013).

The idea of policy enactment, with the SENCo as a policy 'actor' in this instance, stems from the work of Ball et al. (2012) who suggested that policy implementation is not a transaction from the top down, but it is an act carried out by an actor (of which there may be more than one). Ball et al. suggested that the work of policy enactment is a process of interpretation, involving key figures, who will attribute a sense of priority and interpretation to the practical translation of policy. The management level at which the policy is being enacted and the context for the enactment are also relevant features. This suggests that policy translation is not as simple as implementation, but it is more complicated due to a number of internal and external influencing factors and therefore becomes an enactment.

Norwich suggested that the SEND system is 'interdependent' on the general educational system which encompasses 'the National Curriculum and assessment, school inspection, the governance of schools and equality legislation' (2014: 404). This suggests that there are a number of external influencing factors during SEND policy enactment. Therefore the SENCo may need to negotiate not only competing educational policies, but also their alignment to the policies, many of which they may find 'controversial and challenging' (Brundrett, 2011: 339).

These issues present a question relating to the enactment of the SEND policy reforms which have been described by the DfE as the most significant for thirty years (DfE, 2014a). If the role of the SENCo remains

ambiguous, predominately operational and lacks status (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012; Cole, 2005 cited in Tissot, 2013), what is the experience of the SENCo when trying to implement policy driven change in their setting?

The research design

The central theme of the research intends to examine and explore the experiences of the SENCo as a policy actor, post policy reform and during policy implementation. As such it was imperative to consider the various methodological approaches which would reflect the nature and purpose of the research.

The research design consisted of five phases.

- Phase One: a questionnaire which sought initial views regarding the SENCos' understanding of the reforms and their views of preparedness. The aim of the questionnaire was to set the research within context.
- Phase two: semi-structured interviews with a group of nine SENCos, which explored the questionnaire responses further.
- Phase three: termly semi-structured interviews with the SENCos from Phase two. Interviews focused on the SENCOs narration of the SEND reforms for the first academic year of implementation.
- Phase four: a second questionnaire, focused on the SENCos' perceptions of the first six months of the reforms. Crucially this was to a broader group of SENCos, both in terms of experience and location than Phases 1, 2 and 3.
- Phase five: a final questionnaire to a broad group of SENCos reflecting on the first year of reform.

This paper will report on Phase four.

Phase Four

Phase four intended to explore the SENCos' views of the first six months of the SEND reforms. Phase three had provided a high level of detailed data, however due to the small sample size there were issues relating to the generalisability, validity and localised nature of the data. Therefore Phase four provided an opportunity to explore and consider the experiences and contexts from a wider group of SENCos, thus enabling the cross referencing of emerging themes from Phase three and consideration as to whether these were individual narratives or reflective of a wider view.

The questionnaire focused on the nature of the support the SENCos had received, changes they had made within their settings and enablers/ barriers to the process of policy implementation. The questionnaire

was a mix of open ended and closed questions, with space for the respondents to add additional detail. The period under review was from September 2014 to March 2015.

Due to the breadth of the questionnaire it is not possible to report the findings from this phase in full. Therefore this paper focuses on the following aspects from the questionnaire:

1. Who has provided support to SENCos for the implementation of the SEND reforms and what is the SENCos' view of this?
2. What changes were made in the SENCos' settings following the introduction of the SEND reforms?
3. Were any changes made to the schools' SEN register following the introduction of the SEND reforms? If so, why?
4. Had the SENCos observed any impact of the SEND reforms in their setting to date?

Participants

Due to the limitations of earlier phases, particularly in terms of SENCo experience and location, Phase four was tailored to address this. Therefore a variety of channels were selected to try and promote as wide a reach as possible in terms of experience and location of SENCOs. The main channels used were: Twitter, the SENCo-forum, Times Educational Supplement (TES) forums and Local Authority contacts. The participants were able to opt in to the online questionnaire by clicking a link. Due to accessibility, students who had completed the National Award for SENCo in previous years were also contacted. The questionnaire was completed by 74 SENCos, with two thirds from primary settings.

Due to the small size and reach of the sample it is imperative to consider the limitations of the results in terms of validity. In terms of geographical representation, the questionnaire did have a wider reach than earlier phases, with respondents citing locations throughout the UK. There was still a large response from the South West, with 51% (n=38) of respondents citing this as their location. This is unsurprising given the channels which were selected; 53% (n=39) of the respondents were contacted directly via email or via a Local Authority contact. It is also noteworthy that one of the LAs in the South West acted as a pathfinder for the SEND reforms and this, alongside the large proportion of South West responses, may have impacted on the results. The second largest geographical group was from London and the South East (16% n=12).

With regards to experience, 56% (n=42) of SENCOs stated that they been in the role for more than four years, indicating that just over half had experience of the previous statutory guidance and therefore may

be able to make draw comparisons with the new guidance. 74% had completed the National Award for SENCo (n= 53) with a further 5 currently near completion.

Findings: Phase four

Support for implementing the SEND reforms

76% of SENCos (n=55) reported that they had received support from their LA relating to the implementation of the SEND reforms. 72% of SENCos (n=52) stated that they had received support from other SENCos. Other avenues of support reported included accessing support from NASEN and SENCos carrying out their own research. 49% (n= 35) stated their main source of information was their LA (See Figure 1.) This suggests that LAs have played a key role supporting SENCos, alongside other organisations such as NASEN. With the reported reduction of LA services, in addition to the introduction of the Education Excellence Everywhere White Paper 2016 and the focus on all maintained schools to convert to academies, typically as part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), it does pose the question: 'What level and type of support will SENCOs be able to access in the future and how dependent will this be on budgets and school priorities?'

Figure 1: Responses to the question: 'What was your primary source of information regarding the SEND reforms?'

Other 1%
Other SENCos 10%
Head Teacher 1%
Own research 14%
NASEN/ Other Organisation 25%
Local Authority 49%
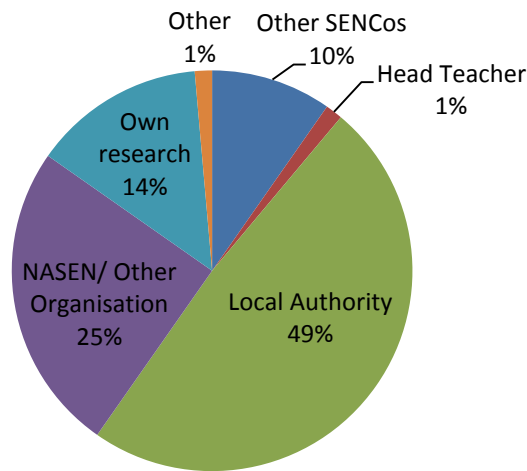
Pearson et al. (2015) have suggested that schools will need to become more self-reliant with an increased focus on networks between schools. With potential future educational policy directing all schools to become part of a MAT, could this mean that the support for SENCos may be provided from within a MAT? Prompting the question, what opportunities will there be for SENCos for wider sharing and dissemination of good practice? The responses from the questionnaire suggested that SENCos were already relying on each other for support; illustrating the general increase of inter-school support. It could be that the National Award for SENCo has the potential to develop such opportunities at a local level, which national systems may not be able fulfil. In addition to the type of support that the SENCos have received, SENCos were also asked to consider how satisfied they were with the support (See Figure 2). Responses here indicated a balance between respondents feelings of satisfaction (40% n=29) and dissatisfaction (40%n=29), potentially reflecting localised experiences. Whilst the additional information provided by the SENCos reflected this mixed picture, the responses provided some further insights:

Figure 2: Responses to the question: 'In general, how satisfied have you been with the support you have received regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms?'

Very Dis-satisfied 4%
Very satisfied 8%
Dis-satisfied 36%
Satisfied 32%
Neither 20%
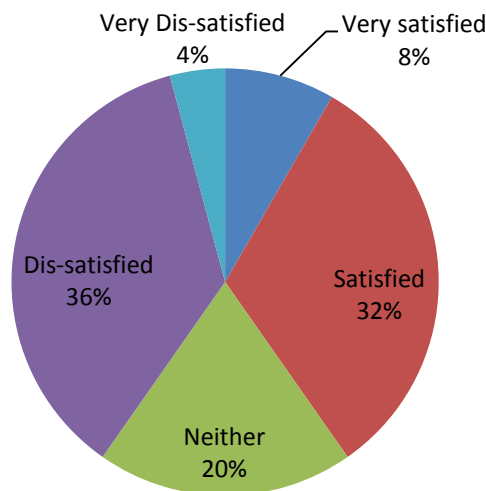
'Initially there was so much confusion about the practicalities of the reform'

'LAs have been less than clear about the requirements'

'LAs have not been very helpful and seem to be using the new system to cut costs and take statements away from vulnerable children'

Good practice was also reported, although such reports were rarer: 'I have attended some very well planned and resourced sessions by our LA Inclusion Service'. However the question posed requires further exploration. As Rumsfeld is quoted, there are the 'unknown unknowns' (1932 cited in Danchev, 2014: 1186). In this context this suggests that some SENCos do not know what they do not know and therefore whilst 40% may be satisfied, this does not necessarily mean that the support was effective and/ or provided them with the support they needed. This is could be problematic due to the common theme throughout the data regarding the importance of finding out information for themselves, or utilising self-started networks of local SENCos or larger organisations such as NASEN.

'The Local Support Group was set up as a direct result of us not feeling supported by the LA through the SEND reforms'
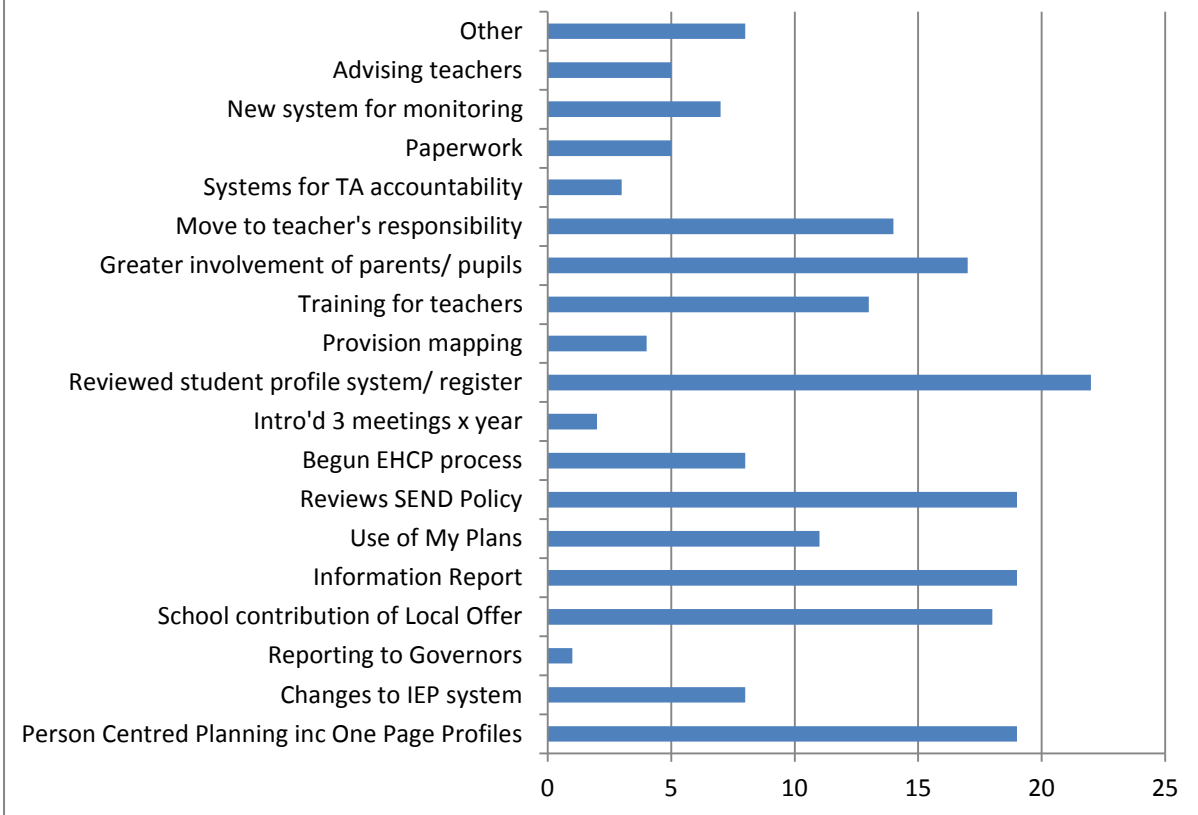
A number of respondents acknowledged that some LAs had done 'the best they could' given the time frame, although a more gradual introduction would have been preferred. Even the positive responses regarding the support from the LA noted that there was confusion and many elements felt rushed.

Certainly the lack of prescription in terms of what to do was a source of frustration with one SENCo stating, 'considering that SENCos across the country all need to do the same thing it still feels like I am reinventing the wheel alone.' SENCos also reported that competing policy issues within schools made the reforms less of a priority. The reforms were introduced on the same day as the new National Curriculum, exemplifying the interdependence of the SEND system within the general system (Norwich, 2014)

Policy in practice: changes made

The questionnaire asked the SENCOs the 'top three things' that they had changed or introduced since September 2014 (See Figure 3). Reviewing the SEND register was a priority for 22 of the respondents (30%). Other activities included reviewing the SEND policy, creating the SEND Information Report and focusing on Person Centred Planning/ One Page Profiles. It is perhaps unsurprising that the more bureaucratic elements have been focused upon. The requirements to have an up-to-date SEND policy, an SEND information report and to contribute to the LA Local Offer are all statutory, and could be considered the more perceivable elements of the SEND reforms. For future research it would be interesting to look at the execution of the activities and the SENCOs' perception of how these activities have impacted on both their role and the school.

Figure 3: Responses to the question: 'What are the top 3 things you have introduced/ changed since the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice?'

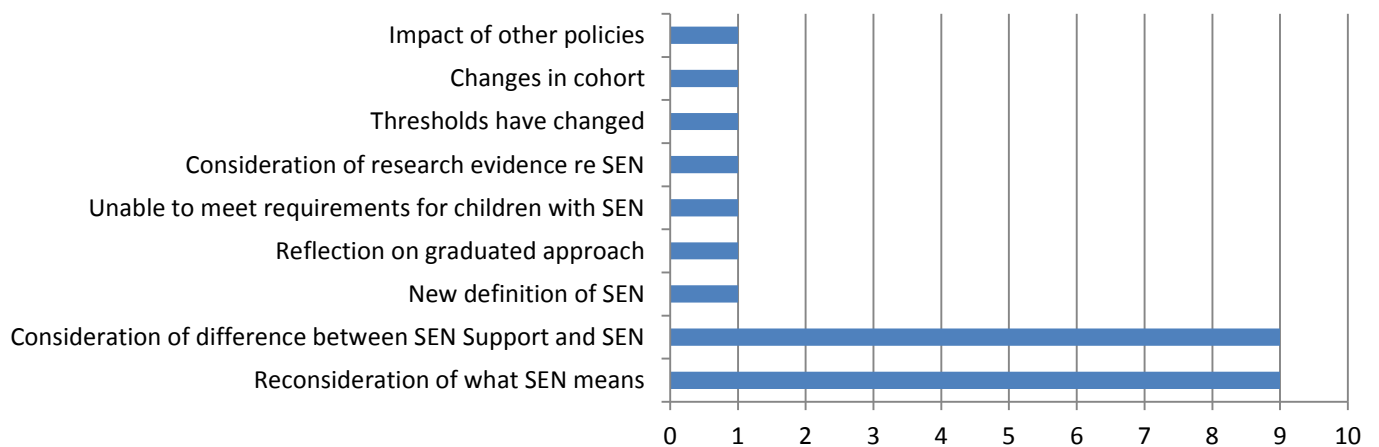| Response	Count
Other	8
Advising teachers	5
New system for monitoring	7
Paperwork	5
Systems for TA accountability	3
Move to teacher's responsibility	14
Greater involvement of parents/ pupils	17
Training for teachers	13
Provision mapping	4
Reviewed student profile system/ register	22
Intro'd 3 meetings x year	2
Begun EHCP process	8
Reviews SEND Policy	19
Use of My Plans	11
Information Report	19
School contribution of Local Offer	18
Reporting to Governors	1
Changes to IEP system	8
Person Centred Planning inc One Page Profiles	19

Changes to the SEN register

During the in-depth interviews with the SENCos at Phase three, a recurring theme was the reduction of children recorded on the SEN register. Therefore this was included as a focus within the questionnaire to query the validity of this phenomenon. In response to the question, 'Has your SEN register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND reforms?' 63% of SENCos (n=45) reported that they had reduced their SEN register since September 2014 with 82% (n=60) stating that this was a direct result of the Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Responses to the question: 'Has your SEND register changed as a result of the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice?'

Yes - it has increased 4%

No - it is the same 33%

Yes - it has reduced 63%
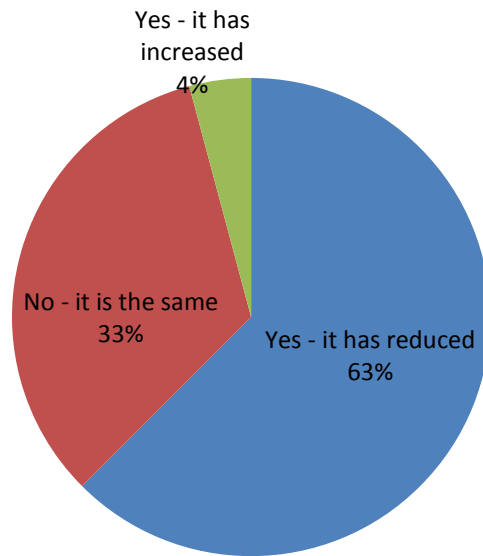
When asked specifically why the SEN register had changed, the responses were varied (See Figure 5).The most commonly cited reasons for changing the SEN register related to the definition of 'SEN' and the new 'SEN Support' category. A number of SENCos reported that the SEND reforms provided an opportunity to reconsider whether the children on their register actually met the definition of SEN or whether there may be a different reason for the concern, for example a lack of effective teaching. This reflected the Ofsted report (2010) which suggested that children were being over-identified with SEN.

Figure 5: Responses to the question: 'If your SEN register has changed, can you say why?'

Impact of other policies
Changes in cohort
Thresholds have changed
Consideration of research evidence re SEN
Unable to meet requirements for children with SEN
Reflection on graduated approach
New definition of SEN
Consideration of difference between SEN Support and SEN
Reconsideration of what SEN means

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The report suggested a number of reasons for this trend, including concerns that the definition of SEN was being inconsistently applied and children who were summer born were over-represented. Stobbs (2014) suggested that part of the issue was a lack of understanding of what constituted a schools' core offer and therefore skewing a schools' definition of SEN, in part reflecting the importance of context as remarked upon by Hallett and Hallett (2010). Equally this issue could impact on the role of the SENCo. How does a SENCo respond to, and manage, expectations regarding the definition of SEN, particularly for parents? However, comments by the SENCos did not suggest that changes to the register were solely a result of revisiting the definition of SEN. Some SENCos reported that they considered there to be a clear distinction between a child receiving SEN Support and a child with SEN. A number of SENCOs reported that they were only recording children who were in receipt of 'SEN Support'. In some instances SENCos reported that only children who had access to external agencies were recorded as in receipt of SEN Support. As a consequence numbers on school registers had reduced. Responses included:

'Streamlined the SEND register in line with the new SEN criteria'

'Changed school SEND register in line with new single SEN support category'

'Only including children who have involvement from outside agencies'

This presents an issue relating to what comes first, the external agency involvement or the identification of an SEN? The challenge here is that the terms 'support', 'provision' and 'intervention' are open to interpretation. The Code states a child has SEN if they require 'provision [that is] different from or additional to that normally available to pupils of the same age' (DfE and DoH, 2015:94). The Assess, Plan, Do, Review process set out with the Code discusses SEN Support in terms of 'removing barriers' and providing 'effective provision' (DfE and DoH, 2015: 100). When the process of identification is considered, it is an involved process and is not determined by participation in an intervention. Yet, some responses indicate that SEN support may have been interpreted as such:

'Those students who do not have more support are monitored'

'The definition of SEN Support – no support means not identified as such'

In some instances SENCos suggested that children who were previously identified at School Action no long met the 'criteria' for SEN Support:

'School Action children no longer listed'

'The large chunk at School Action have disappeared…'

However, changes to the register also related to concerns regarding the management of the SEN register. One SENCo reported that it would be impossible to manage an SEN register with all the identified literacy needs. Therefore a 'literacy register' had been created. Further respondents concurred, stating that they had developed alternative systems, such as a 'concern' or 'monitoring' list to try and address issues related to the manageability of the SEN register. This implies that whilst pupils are still being monitored, the processes may not necessarily reflect the requirements for monitoring as stated in the Code (DfE &DoH, 2015).

The responses above raise some questions regarding the nature of identifying and recording SEN. The term 'SEN register' could be considered misleading. Whilst it is not a requirement to have an 'SEN register', the Code does stipulate a number of recording requirements (DfE and DoH, 2015). This tends to be typically referred to as the SEN register. This therefore suggests that there may be some confusion regarding this area.

Certainly for some SENCos the communicated aim was that SEN registers should be reducing:

'I anticipate it [the SEN register] will reduce'

'I was involved with the changes from 2 years earlier and we phased in the reduction in the SEND register over 18 months'

'I was involved with the consultation through the DfE regarding SEN changes back in 2012. I had therefore a head start and reduced my register a long time ago'

The respondents did not elaborate on why they felt it was necessary to reduce the number of children as requiring SEN support. This can possibly be tracked back to the start of the reforms with the introduction of the Green Paper, 'Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability' (DfE, 2011) which, in part, responded to the idea that children were being over identified as having an SEN (Ofsted, 2010). This supports the earlier comments made by other respondents regarding re-evaluating children and their needs.

However, the responses given raise questions regarding how the definition of SEN is understood, how SEN support is understood as a category, and how this process has been managed with the introduction of the new Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). Whilst the data from this phase is limited, it does suggest that there is ambiguity regarding all of these areas. At a policy level there has been a lack of specific guidance

regarding the assessment and identification of SEN (Norwich, 2014). It could be argued that this has happened at a time when SENCos would have benefitted from such guidance. The argument that the Government is reluctant to regulate practice (Norwich, 2014) may lead to a greater disparity in practice with interpretation based on experience, knowledge, school priorities and budget amongst other external and internal influencing factors. It is also noteworthy that the reforms have been set within not only a period of wider educational reform, but also a period of economic austerity. Edward Timpson stated the former system for supporting SEN cost £5 billion and did not deliver good outcomes, financially or otherwise (Timpson, 2013). **Perceived impact: 6 months in**

67% of SENCos (n=42) stated that they had observed the greatest impact of the SEND reforms on teachers and parents. SENCos stated that parents were better informed and engaged. SENCos noted that parents welcomed the formality of process, for example the requirement of three meetings per year. Expectations for parents were clear.

'[Parents are] more engaged and [they are] appreciating the increased involvement'

'Families feel much more part of the process now'

However, this is not a pattern which is echoed nationally. The National Deaf Children's Society reported that only 6% of parents reported improvements to the support their child/ren received over the last year (NDCS, 2015). This is echoed by the National Autistic Society, whose recent research suggested that only 23% of those who had been through the new statutory assessment process were satisfied with it (NAS, 2015). Other SENCos reported that they did not think the reforms gave enough clarity to parents, stating that 'some are demanding 1:1 support', which suggests that there may be some confusion relating to what is known good practice and what parents expect. Some concerns related to parents and the application of personal budgets, although this has yet to be reported upon fully.

The term 'accountability' was used frequently by SENCos; stating that teachers were now 'more understanding of their accountability' and were 'taking on more responsibility for the SEN children… not passing the responsibility onto me which had previously happened on occasions'. As a consequence SENCos reported that the teachers were taking ownership for the learning of all pupils and consequently developing better relationships with both parents and pupils. Some SENCos reported that as a consequence teachers were becoming more proactive, with the child and the parents.

Concluding comments

The SEND reforms 2014 have been publicised as the most significant SEND reforms for 30 years (DfE, 2014a). It could be argued that central to the execution of the reforms is the statutory role of the SENCo; a role which previously has been suggested to be low status and ambiguous (Pearson, 2010; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Robertson, 2012). Whilst the reforms themselves have the potential to influence the strategic role and status of the SENCo (Pearson et al., 2015), the question remains as to how effective can the role be at a time of such change particularly when the status and understanding of the role is so mixed?

This paper sought to explore the question, 'What is the SENCos' perspective of the SEND reforms, six months after introduction?' The paper focused on three key elements: the support SENCos had received to implement the reforms, key changes they had made in their settings within the first six months and whether SEN registers had changed as a result of the SEND reforms.

Responses from SENCos indicated that the early changes related more to the bureaucratic, statutory elements of the reforms, for example writing of the school SEND policy and SEND information report; activities which were unsurprising given their statutory nature. SENCos reported that they had accessed support for implementation, with the three quarters of SENCos accessing support from their LA. It does not necessarily correlate that the support was effective, accurate or useful as this was not reported upon. SENCos, however, did remark that information was often mixed with some SENCos suggesting that they felt the information provided lacked clarity.

Significantly, 63% of SENCos reported that they had reduced their SEN registers since September 2014, with 82% stating that this was a direct result of the introduction of the SEND reforms. SENCos cited mixed reasons for this; including revising their understanding of the term SEN and their understanding of the SEN Support category. However, themes related to the definition of SEN, the newly introduced SEN category and the need for the SEN register to reduce were persistent in this small sample. Whilst Ofsted (2010) reported a concern of the over identification of SEN, the opposite may also be true. Certainly figures for SEN have been steadily declining since the publication of the Ofsted report. In 2010 a reported 18.3% of children had SEN; however there was a marked drop from 2014 to 2015 from 17.9% to 15.4% (DfE, 2015). A DfE response to the reduction in numbers suggested that this was the result of a clearer understanding of the legal definition of SEN and a clear distinction of the SEN Support category (Tirraoro, 2015). However, responses from this small sample suggested the opposite, indicating that SENCos remain confused in relation to the consistent application of the term SEN and the practical application of the new SEN category.

Wider issues relating to the perceived government driver for a reduction in numbers of children recorded as having SEN and the manageability of the role may also be a factor. If present, a drive to under-identify

children due to a host of internal and external influencing factors may create significant problems for children, parents and teachers in terms of accessing appropriate support and certainly would be the antithesis of the SEND reform aims which are to create an aspirational and outcome focused system (DfE and DoH, 2015). In addition to the potential issue of under identification, there is also a question regarding how the process of 'removing' children has been managed and communicated to parents during this period.

It is noteworthy that, despite the short period explored, SENCos have reported on the positive impacts that they have observed with parents at a school level, citing better communication and co-production. It should be noted, however, that this is not a national trend. Greater exploration as to the reasons behind this is required. It is also important to consider whether the positive impact reported has been achieved because of the SEND reforms, or in spite of them.

This paper represents a small sample of SENCo responses, and therefore has limitations in its validity. However, a number of themes raised through this paper have been echoed by the Driver Youth Trust report which considered the early impact of the SEND reforms (LKMco, 2015). Themes included the inconsistency with identification, the importance of developing wider networks and the importance of SEN as a whole school priority. Certainly much remains to be seen regarding the impact of the SEND reforms, much of which will not be evident until the longer term, with the timeframe for transferring statements to Education Health Care Plans stated as April 2018 (DfE, 2014b). However, it is already clear that there is an emerging, mixed picture relating to the SENCo experience and the potential, related impact on the children, families, the school and the SENCo (LKMco, 2015; NAS, 2015; NDCS, 2015).

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