Special educational needs co-ordinators: elements of the job in the light of the Code of Practice

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In England and Wales, the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs now places emphasis on the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator, or SENCO. Analyses the results of a study of 63 SENCOs, in primary and secondary schools in one urban local education authority in England. Examines status in school, levels of salary and time devoted to the role as well as the extent to which SENCOs managed other personnel, together with their reports on ways in which the use of resources was monitored within their schools. It appears that SENCOs' status is being recognized in many schools, not just by their salary levels but by the time which they have available to devote to their jobs. Administrative burdens brought by the Code of Practice are a continuing concern. Concludes that most SENCOs continue to view resource monitoring as an accounting exercise rather than one in which pupil involvement can be linked to expenditure on inputs.

Introduction

The job title of the special educational needs co-ordinator or SENCO has existed for a relatively limited time. The notion of "co-ordination" of services and differentiated provision which accompanied in-class support for children with learning difficulties in mainstream schools appears to have been first put forward in the UK by Sewell[1]. Looking particularly at secondary schooling, he identified the distinction between the head of the remedial department whose staff worked in narrowly-defined ways with children withdrawn from their usual lessons, and the co-ordinator of learning support who had oversight of the work of staff whose main function was to assist children with learning difficulties in understanding the content of lessons and carrying out the tasks assigned in them. A later study of secondary schools[2] revealed that many, though by no means all, schools had moved towards embracing the idea of support. The job descriptions of those responsible for special educational needs (SEN) tended to reflect the expectation that incumbents would manage people and arrange for differentiated approaches to learning.

By the beginning of this decade the continuing relevance of the support co-ordinator's role was starting to be challenged (e.g. [3]), given the combined impact of local management of schools and a national curriculum. However, the 1993 Education Act and its accompanying Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs[4] effectively allayed the fears of those who saw the special needs "specialist" role becoming under mined (e.g. [5]). The Code expects every school to have a designated special educational needs co-ordinator. The school must also publish a special educational needs policy. Above all the Code of Practice enshrines seven central elements of the job description of the SENCO. It thus confirms the need not only to differentiate what is done for children seen to have special educational needs, but also to identify one individual who is to be responsible for guiding, facilitating and monitoring the process.

Two recent studies highlight one central theme in relation to the SENCO's role. The increased administrative expectations placed on the designated person, coupled with the limitation of available time to meet them, emerge as the preoccupying element of both Lewis's[6] national survey and Bines and Loxley's[7] study of one county LEA. Looking only at primary schools, Lewis found that two-thirds of her sample had one hour or less per week to carry out the development and co-ordination of special needs provision and that 61 per cent had responsibilities which went beyond class teaching and being a SENCO. Bines and Loxley[7] have pointed to growing concerns in schools over the introduction of individual education plans (IEPs) for children who are placed on the Code's intervention stages. The increasing bureaucratization of the SENCO's role, they suggest, may draw her or him away from the central tasks of teaching and of supporting and advising colleagues.

The SENCO as manager

In a rather pessimistic review of the demands which the Code of Practice will make on the SENCO's role in the school, Bines[8] has suggested that the focus of special needs work will shift away from the concerns of most mainstream teachers. The Code has established policy and practice requirements which formerly were a matter for discretionary decision but are now formal requirements. The new accountability of SENCOs, she argues, deconstructs them as educators with professional careers and reconstitutes them as managers with managerial concerns. Among the latter[7] can be numbered the creation of individual educational plans, the organization of reviews, the systematization of parental involvement and the need to collaborate with health and social services agencies. Although Bines's[8] review mentions the allocation of resources as a component of the managerial role of the SENCO, it does little to link this function with responsibility for the direction of staff or for acting as lead teacher in a team of people working to support children's learning. Meetings and paper work appear to constitute the key elements of the managerial role.

Responsibility for managing staff is traditionally associated with enhanced remuneration. So far there is little evidence either that SENCOs receive such enhancement or that the Code of Practice has influenced rates of
Policies and resources

All maintained schools in England and Wales are required by the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1994 to state in their SEN policies the way they allocate resources not only to, but also among, pupils with special educational needs. This last term relates both to, and among, pupils with SEN. A recent survey of SEN practice commissioned by the Department for Education’s Circular 6/94 expands on the requirement. The school’s policy must set out the principles which underpin resource allocation and the way that the governing body ensures that funds are used to fulfil its duty to identify and meet the special educational needs of pupils. The circular (paragraph 40) stresses the importance of schools understanding the basis on which funds are allocated to them for special educational needs for the policy to have effect.

A recent survey of SEN practice commissioned by the Department for Education[11] touches on but fails to explore in much detail the principles of resource management in primary and secondary schools. Perhaps understandably, practical matters such as methods of in-school support, the use of classroom assistants, clustering arrangements and, for secondary schools, the flexible use of support teaching staff, are given prominence. The monitoring of their effectiveness by schools’ governing bodies, as well as of the ways in which children are targeted, receive little attention. These, however, were key points identified by the Audit Commission/HMI[12] report on special educational needs.

In many LEAs, expenditure on special educational needs has increased well beyond the general rate of educational expenditure[13]. The presence of grant-maintained schools makes little difference. The funding arrangements for non-statemented pupils are reflected in the common funding formula used for grant-maintained (GM) schools within an LEA’s boundaries, a step back from the universal situation at first envisaged[14]. In particular, the types of provision made for pupils at stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice (the “pre-statementing” stages), whether via a delegated funding, devolved funding or centrally-funded support personnel, are likely to impact on the requirement to conduct formal assessments for statements and so commit further resources as a result of this process.

Local authorities are increasingly reviewing the ways in which resources are deployed to schools to meet special educational needs. This study reports the findings of part of such a review carried out at the end of 1995 in an outer London borough. Separate questionnaires were sent to the head teachers and the SENCOs in all maintained schools within the boundaries of the LEA. Sixty-five replies were received from SENCOs, 11 of them in secondary schools (one GM), 52 in primary schools, and two in nursery schools. Because the nursery schools did not have delegated budgets, their responses have not been included in this analysis. Of the primary schools, 11 were specifically designated as junior schools and 13 as infant schools.

For the purposes of this paper, five main elements of the data obtained from the SENCOs will be addressed. These are:

1. the extent to which SENCOs’ responsibilities are linked with or overlap others ascribed to them;
2. the proportion of working time reported to be devoted to fulfilling the SENCO role;
3. the remuneration received by SENCOs;
4. the SENCOs’ responsibilities for managing the activities of other staff in the school;
5. the extent to which respondents’ schools have articulated a system for scrutinizing the ways in which resources are allocated to and among pupils with SEN.

Finally, key issues and concerns relating to the management of resources, construed in financial, material or personnel terms, will be examined. Any such examination has to take account of the ways in which the LEA allocates resources, and this is briefly explained later in order to contextualize SENCO responses.

Titles and responsibilities

A job title is obviously not enough to tell us what a job entails. However, it is reasonable to assume that somebody whose sole responsibility is embodied in just one title, in this case...
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SEN co-ordinator or SENCO, is able to devote the bulk of his or her time to what the Code of Practice views as the role of the SENCO. This can be summarized as teaching pupils with special educational needs, training and organizing the work of others (e.g. classroom assistants or support teachers) who do this, conducting assessments and reviews, devising appropriate programmes, liaising with parents and being the link person with LEA staff and other agencies involved with SEN.

The possession of other job titles, unless they are in some way synchronous with the tasks above, suggests that the SENCO role is a part-time one. The question of time for the job was obviously in the minds of those framing the Code of Practice. In language familiar to readers of government circulars, it is suggested that heads and governors “may need to give careful thought to the SEN co-ordinator’s timetable” [4, 2:15]. Such thoughts are, however, qualified in terms of available resources.

In the secondary school sample surveyed, two of the 11 respondents gave their job titles solely as “SENCO”. The most frequently occurring other job title, though, was one which is often associated with the special educational needs co-ordinator’s role. The terms “head of learning support” and “learning support co-ordinator” were respectively offered five times and once. Given the emphasis placed on in-class support over the last decade (c.f. [15]), it seems reasonable to assume that these two job titles comprise the central elements of the SENCO role. The managerialism which Bines [8] has identified in the role appears within the epithet “head of” rather than in the more neutral notion of “co-ordinator”. One respondent’s title was “head of curriculum support”, thus shifting the emphasis from the pupil focus implicit in the term “learning” to the organizational or pedagogical underpinnings of what is taught and how it is taught. Only three secondary SENCOs mentioned other duties. Just one specified that he or she was a form tutor, though it may be that others neglected to mention this. One was also head of home economics. One, the SENCO who reported devoting least time to this task, rather ambiguously described his or her other job title as “senior teacher”.

Of the 52 primary school SENCOs, 13 described themselves as having just that job title. Only one used the term “learning support co-ordinator”, but 14 saw themselves as “learning support teacher”. Five of the 52 were headteachers, 12 were deputy heads. Of the remaining 36, six specified that they were also class teachers, two had the role of “art co-ordinator”, two described themselves as “music specialists” and one was also responsible for co-ordinating health education in the school. In one school where the LEA has a resourced base for children with physical disabilities, the SENCO also took the title “Co-ordinator for physically disabled”, implicitly making a distinction between the special needs which a SENCO might usually encounter and those experienced by children with manifest disabilities.

Time allocations
As might be expected, all the secondary SENCOs in our survey held full-time posts. The 52 primary SENCOs consisted of 15 heads or deputy heads and these, of course, held full-time appointments. Of the remaining 37 SENCOs, only six were appointed part-time. Three worked the equivalent of three days per week, one did three and a half days and two worked for four days. Time worked and time devoted to the duties of a SENCO will not always be the same, and in our survey respondents were asked to identify the proportion of their working week given to the SENCO role. In the case of the part-timers, the figures quoted in Table 1 are proportions of their working time, not of a full working week.

A test of significance between mean working times of secondary and primary SENCOs showed no difference in their reported allocations ($t = 0.55$, $df = 61$, n.s.). However, the reported proportions of working time devoted to SENCO duties differed markedly between primary teacher SENCOs and primary head and deputy headteacher SENCOs ($t = 5.08$, $df = 50$, $p < 0.001$).

Levels of pay
Clearly, if a teacher’s entire working duties relate to the role of the SENCO it seems reasonable to assume that all payments that he or she receives relate to those duties. Only four of the 11 secondary SENCOs reported that all their time was devoted to SEN work. No heads or deputy heads of primary schools were simply SENCOs, and of the remaining 37, 23 had all their time allocated to the role. Of the 48 non-head/deputy head SENCOs therefore, 21 devoted some of their time to other tasks.

Table 1
Proportion of working time reported devoted to SENCO duties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All secondary SENCOs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.07-1.0</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All primary SENCOs</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.05-1.0</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary head and</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.05-0.8</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deputy head SENCOs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary teacher SENCOs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.2-1.0</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and responsibilities, making it difficult to disaggregate additional payments made for being SENCO from those made for other elements of their work.

There is no legal obligation placed on governors to allocate additional responsibility payments to SENCOs. The 1995 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions[16] only require an additional point on the salary scale to be paid when a teacher works in a special school or is engaged wholly or mainly in teaching pupils with statements of special educational needs in an ordinary school. The emphasis of the Code of Practice is on intervention with special needs in non-statemented children, and governors have no obligation to recognize these by awarding additional points on the pay spine.

The value of any additional point on the pay spine is determined by just where that point arises. If we assume that a teacher has reached the maximum level on the spine which his or her experience allows (point 9: £20,145), one additional point at the time of the survey would increase that teacher's salary £1,248, two points by £2,520, three by £4,329, four by £5,961 and five by £8,046. The additional pay points received by secondary SENCOs in this survey are set out in Table II, together with the pay additions received by the primary SENCOs who were not heads or deputy heads.

Table II
Additional pay increments received by teacher SENCOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional points on pay spine</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary SENCOs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary SENCOs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III
Breakdown of positions held by primary school SENCOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional points on pay spine</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMI</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III shows the allocation of points in the primary schools, broken down into infant, junior and JMI. For purposes of comparison, the allocation of the SENCO role to heads and deputies in each of these school types is included.

The six part-time primary SENCOs are included in the above data. Two were given additional pay points; the other four were each paid one additional point on the salary spine.

The management role

The very term "co-ordinator" implies an endeavour to bring together the efforts of other people within the overall activity of the school. In an attempt to operationalize the SENCO's role, the Code of Practice[4, 2:14] uses the present participles "liaising" (three times), "maintaining", "contributing" and "co-ordinating". While "managing" does not appear, the Code does specify that the SENCO is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy. In many cases, that policy is likely to involve the provision of in-class support for children with learning difficulties. "Support teachers" or "support assistants" are often therefore a central element of the policy's implementation.

SENCOs were asked to specify how many people they were responsible for managing. Because of their potentially mixed responsibilities, the question quite specifically asked them only to consider staff whose work involved them in teaching or supporting individual children or groups of children with special educational needs, whether or not they were statemented.

Responses demonstrated different assumptions about managerial responsibility. Some SENCOs included in their calculations both the support staff employed by the school and those who were employed by the LEA's centrally-funded learning support service to support statemented pupils within their school. Others quite specifically excluded them, saying that they were line managed by the service's manager, not by anyone in the school. Seven primary and two secondary SENCOs reported that they had to tackle their work with SEN pupils without any assistance, while two further primary SENCOs emphasized that their headteachers managed SEN staff. A discomfort with the term "manage" was evident in the responses of four other primary SENCOs. They preferred to use phrases such as "liaise with", "have insight of" or "consult with" when looking at their relationship with staff employed to support SEN pupils.

For the purpose of analysis, the staff whom SENCOs actually claimed to manage were
divided into teachers and assistants. This last group, consisting usually of unqualified staff, had various labels attached to its membership: "learning support assistants", "welfare assistants" and "classroom assistants" were the most commonly occurring. The nature of the SENCOs' responses made it hard to discriminate between part-time and full-time staff. Subsequent interviews with selected SENCOs demonstrated the complexity of such differentiation. Some classroom assistants, for example, worked part of their time with nominated children with special needs and part in general support of a teacher. Some teachers had a class teaching role but were relieved for, say, one day a week to support particular children or groups of children with special educational needs. Therefore the actual numbers of teachers and assistants which each SENCO considered that she or he managed were examined, not the length of time for which they fell under the SENCO's direction.

Two of the 11 secondary SENCOs claimed to have no management responsibility for the activities of any personnel concerned with special needs. One of these, whose reported allocation of time to the role was only 7 per cent, worked in a school which had a local reputation for encouraging excellence and whose brochure proclaimed that the school specialized in "the able child". The SENCO who reported a 95 per cent time allocation to the role, replied: "We don't have anybody. I'm the only one!" before launching into complaints about the diversion of money, supposedly allocated to special needs, to other purposes. At the other end of the scale, two secondary school SENCOs managed nine teachers, with one of these also managing nine assistants. Overall, secondary SENCOs in this survey managed an average of 3.5 teachers.

In the primary schools surveyed, the average number of assistants managed by a SENCO was 1.23. Fourteen primary SENCOs reported no responsibility for the activity of teachers, while three were responsible for as many as four other teachers. Similarly, in 14 primary schools SENCOs reported that they did not manage any assistants, while in two schools they had as many as ten different assistants to manage within a given week. Overall, the average number of assistants managed by SENCOs in primary schools was 2.44.

Monitoring the use of resources
A school's SEN policy should, according to Circular 6/94 issued by the DfE, describe "the principles governing the school's allocation of resources to and among pupils with special needs" (paragraph 40). It goes on to stress that the policy should explain how funds are used to help governors fulfil their duties under Section 161 of the 1993 Education Act to make provision for pupils with special educational needs. SENCOs in the survey were therefore asked what arrangements were made to ensure that resources allocated to the school for SEN were targeted appropriately.

All local management schemes assume that part of the pupil unit which underpins the formula allocations to schools should be directed towards children with special educational needs. This is the opaque element of SEN funding which is not always acknowledged by schools when resources are allocated to special needs. The LEA from which the schools in this survey were drawn has two further means of delegating SEN resources. The first, through the social factor of its formula, uses the take-up of free school meals in each school as its indicator. The second employs an annual audit of special educational needs in every school. The numbers of pupils agreed to be at Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the Code of Practice's school-based stages are differentially funded. At the time of the survey, a stage 1 unit value was £62, stage 2 £496 and stage 3 £527. In addition, pupils at stage 3 received allocated teacher time from one of the LEA's three special educational needs support services.

Analysis of all schools' budget statements for the year 1995/96 showed that 2 per cent of the formula allocations to secondary schools and 9.4 per cent of those to primary schools were constituted by the combined social factor and SEN audit. Since the purpose of these elements is to skew the otherwise uniform pupil-related funds going to schools, it may be misleading to quote averages here. However, for illustrative purposes, the average secondary school in our survey received an additional £48.40 SEN allocation per pupil on roll, while the average primary school received an extra £157. A typical 300-pupil primary school, therefore, might be expected to receive a delegated SEN component of £47,100.

Only four of the 63 SENCOs responding to our survey actually attempted to define the ways in which their schools monitored the use of resources. Six replied that they did not know, one that the matter was "being reviewed" and two failed to respond to this item. All the remaining SENCOs simply offered, in varying degrees of detail, the components which accounted for the SEN allocation expenditure. This usually consisted of the SENCO's salary and the salaries of support teachers or assistants employed by the school. Additional items such as staff in-service
training, library books and loosely-defined "equipment" were sometimes included. One secondary SENCO went into considerable detail in describing the ways in which groups of pupils were withdrawn from particular lessons and the numbers of sessions for which school staff provided in-class support. Another simply commented that "All the SEN budget goes towards the education of these children". Such responses appeared to demonstrate an assumption that the process of monitoring was synonymous with accounting for expenditure.

The four SENCOs whose reports of monitoring went beyond listing staffing and other resources were all from primary schools. One was a deputy head as well as SENCO; the other three were teachers. In one response, the forms of assessment employed to target pupils for additional attention of staff, together with the status and skills of those staff, were set out in some detail. Another described the prioritization given according to the point within the Code of Practice's five-stage model a child was placed and to the availability of staffing via the school support timetable. Priorities could be set outside these guidelines, it appeared, if a child's IEP was agreed to demand additional attention at the point of its review. A third respondent described the function of the governor responsible for special educational needs in liaising between the headteacher, the SENCO and the school's finance committee to ensure that adequate support was employed at any given time. Four part-time teachers and four part-time assistants were employed in the school for SEN, and their hours could be modified as necessary. The final response in this group described a similar process, but this entailed the submission of bids from the SENCO, based on an internal audit of need, which were calculated alongside bids by other co-ordinators within the school.

Administrative demands

These were predictable, since the Code of Practice lays down a range of procedures which involve letter writing, meetings and the completion of paperwork. IEPs in particular were mentioned by SENCOs; not merely their preparation but the time that was taken to put their contents into practice and to make adequate records. This is consistent with Bines and Loxley's[7] finding, but may have been intensified by the LEA's establishment of stage 3 moderation procedures. This calls for IEPs to have been used at stage 2 of the Code of Practice in ways which LEA assessors consider appropriate before the centrally-funded SEN services will be deployed to assist a child placed at stage 3. A high number of responses indicated that because of the resource implications of LEA moderation of IEPs, SENCOs found the administrative load irksome. To alleviate the pressure, a few had used delegated funds within their control to purchase regular supply cover, so releasing class teachers from their normal duties to concentrate on IEP construction, implementation and review.

A need for independence

This was highlighted by a sense in the responses that the LEA was still seen as a provider, particularly in the light of its support services' involvement in direct pupil contact with pupils at stages 3, 4 and 5 of the Code of Practice. With just two exceptions, both of them primary SENCOs, all respondents indicated that they would wish to have control over some or all centrally-held funds for pupils at stage 3. Greater flexibility of working, the ability to choose who worked in the school, the opportunity to operate whole school rather than pupil-centred approaches to SEN were all cited. Alongside this need for greater control, however, ran a consistent concern that funds for statemented (stage 5) children might be delegated to schools. This was seen by a number of respondents as potentially stretching them beyond their expertise and requiring too much administrative support. Only ten SENCOs (three secondary, seven primary) saw the delegation of funds for statemented pupils as desirable, even though LEAs are encouraged to consider it by the DfE's local management circular 2/94. Further, 15 gave stage 5 delegation reserved support, the reservation usually consisting of wishing still to draw on centrally-funded support where necessary. The assumption of so many SENCOs that something could be delegated but still be held centrally, or that the LEA might double-fund statemented pupils, suggests that the full implications of local management had not been universally grasped. A widespread call for more INSET both for SENCOs and for support assistants employed by

Issues and concerns

The SENCOs in our survey had had a little over a year in which to apply the guidelines of the Code of Practice. These guidelines had to be set within the context of the overall arrangement of their own schools and the means of resource allocation used by the LEA. They were asked a series of specific questions which essentially sought their perceptions of existing problems and the need for change.

Four main themes arose, which can be summarized under the following headings:

1. Administrative overload;
2. Conflict between independence and dependence on the LEA;
3. The resource delivery system;
4. Empowerment or disempowerment within the school.
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the school also indicates an assumption that the traditional provider role of the LEA is still in place.

Resource delivery
This centred on two elements. The first was the audit, the second the central services which provided assistance at stage 3. The audit of need was seen by some SENCOs as untrustworthy and erratic. There was sense of unease with its fairness, particularly since the SENCOs themselves had been involved in moderating other schools' submissions. Even those who were satisfied with their own schools' allocations expressed concern that others' might be inadequate. The criteria used in the audit were also viewed as capable of misinterpretation. A further concern, particularly among those in infant and small primary schools, revolved around the "lagged" nature of audit-based funding. The audit in this LEA, conducted late in the summer term, generated funding which was delegated for a year commencing in the summer term of the following year. The funding which arose from it was therefore still in place five terms later; many of the pupils to whom the funding related, however, had by then moved on.

Uncertainties surrounding the central service provision related both to when, or whether, the provision promised at stage 3 actually arrived. Some SENCOs reported delays in excess of two terms between agreement that a child was at that stage and the allocation of a member of a support service to work with him or her. One of the services focused on children with emotional and behaviour problems, and set as its priority the provision of advice rather than direct teaching. For some SENCOs this was beneficial; others, however, wanted more "hands on" assistance with the pupils who most challenged them and their colleagues. Finally, there were question marks over the competence and qualifications of some support service members, since schools had no part in choosing who would work with them or in selecting who would be part of the service on which they depended.

Empowerment
This was not always seen as accompanying further delegation of resources. Five SENCOs expressed concern that delegation might result in appropriation of funds meant for special educational needs. They saw the retention of ear marked central resources as the main means of preventing the headteacher, governors, or both from putting the money to other purposes. It may be, of course, that their suspicions were misplaced. Alternatively, the model of direct one-to-one provision on which many central support service personnel embodied may have been the only one they could envisage. Nevertheless, their replies suggested a lack of confidence or even trust in those managing the school when it came to meeting pupils' special needs. Delegation was for them potentially disempowering.

For other SENCOs, the current system was disempowering. The desire for more control over funds has already been mentioned. One SENCO head expressed frustration with what was seen as a de-skilling process: There is a mystique about "programmes", "advice" and paper work. Often teachers do not know what to do. This needs to be supported and extended. The weekly visits of many support staff prevent schools from developing school-based expertise.

In conclusion
This survey of SENCOs has concentrated on just one LEA. It may be that other LEAs would yield a different picture. However, since the appointment, remuneration and timetable of the SENCO are no longer within LEA control, it is unlikely that local authority policy will have had a strong influence on the findings. The increased managerialism predicted by Bines[8] was certainly revealed here, although these SENCOs' activities took the managerial function beyond the procedural components which she has identified. In many cases SENCOs manage people. Through them, much of what is additional to, or different from, what is normally available in the classroom can be offered to pupils with learning or other difficulties. Clark et al.[11] have touched on this aspect of the SENCO's role, as has the survey by OFSTED 10, but it remains an under-researched area in the wake of the Code of Practice. Unlike OFSTED's findings, the current survey showed that headteacher and deputy headteacher SENCOs were in the minority in primary schools. More than 70 per-cent of SENCOs in such schools did not have management status of this kind.

The actual amount of time available to devote to special needs co-ordinator duties appears to be greater than that found by Lewis[6]. Of the primary SENCOs whom she surveyed, only 8 per cent had five or more hours per week available for this. All the teacher SENCOs in primary schools in the present survey had more time available than this, although three headteacher SENCOs appeared to fall at or below the five hour level. Lewis's findings, of course, are based on data gathered some time before the present survey was conducted. It is quite possible that over the intervening period there has been a tendency to make more time available for SENCOs to address the demands which the Code of Practice makes on schools.
The marked difference between the amount of time that primary school teacher SENCOs and head/ deputy head SENCOs had to devote to the special needs role may not be unsurprising; however, it highlights the fact that designated teacher SENCOs appear to be able to give more of their attention to SEN issues than those with overall school management responsibilities. Superficially, it appears that primary-age pupils with special needs may be disadvantaged when a member of senior management is the SENCO. The present research has not addressed whether school size or prevalence of special educational needs influenced the allocation of the SENCO role, or whether head/ deputy head SENCOs delegated aspects of the co-ordinator’s task to other staff. This is to be analysed and will be reported on in a later paper.

One of the most revealing elements of this survey may lie in the way that SENCOs viewed the resource monitoring process in their schools. On the whole they saw it as accounting for how the money was spent. Little or no attention was paid to the “value added” element of what was done for pupils with special educational needs. A child’s IEP can potentially provide a benchmark, or a series of benchmarks, against which the effectiveness of an individual or small-group intervention can be measured. None of the SENCOs in this survey appeared to view the function of the IEP in this way, however. When IEPs were mentioned, their resource demands appeared to be the critical feature, not the ways in which the achievement of outcomes could assist in monitoring the effectiveness with which those resources were used. It is perhaps natural, given the history of mainstream school provision, that the amount of extra attention that a child receives should have a prominent place in monitoring resources. However, this concentration on inputs can prevent a commensurate concern with outcomes being shown. Progress in the light of resource commitment did not feature prominently in the responses from SENCOs in this survey.

If any one role is central to the Code of Practice, it is that of the special educational needs co-ordinator. What is done in mainstream schools to assist children with a wider range of learning difficulties will impact on the number of children requiring statements, on the need for special schooling and on LEA budgets. The role of SENCO is likely to be an organic one and will vary according to the internal structure of the school, the attitudes and priorities of those leading the school and the extent to which funding structures highlight the financial elements which should be specifically directed towards pupils needing additional attention. This survey provides a snapshot in time within one LEA; the picture will almost certainly change as the components which influence it change. However, it demonstrates that many schools are devoting substantial amounts of resource to pupils with special educational needs and that the status of the SENCO, in salary terms at least, is becoming widely recognized.

References