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Your SENCO is doing two jobs. Only one is strategic.

 SEND RAPID RESPONSE

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SEND
Rapid Response

The SENCO Role Is Being Rewritten. A School Leader's Guide To The Strategic SENCO.

Most SENCOs I meet are doing two jobs at the same time. The job their school pays them for, which is strategic SEND leadership. And the job they end up doing, which is paperwork, parent meetings, panel applications, annual reviews and crisis cover. The strategic job is the one that drives outcomes. The paperwork job is the one that drives burnout.

The 2025 Schools White Paper changes the maths on this. Strategic SENCO leadership becomes a school improvement priority. Paperwork capacity becomes a system risk.

What the new framework expects from your SENCO

Three SENCO responsibilities are sharpened in the new framework.

First, strategic leadership of inclusive teaching. The SENCO is the school's expert on the graduated approach and is expected to lead training, classroom monitoring and pedagogical coaching for every teacher. Source: SEND Code of Practice 2015 chapter 6, reinforced in the 2025 White Paper Tier 1 expectation.

Second, accountable leadership of Tier 2 provision. ISPs sit between SEN Support and EHCPs in the new model. The SENCO designs the school's ISP framework, writes the template, trains teachers in evidencing it and chairs the review cycle.

Third, statutory leadership on EHCPs. The SENCO is the school's lead for EHC applications, annual reviews under regulation 20 of the SEND Regulations 2014, transition reviews under regulation 18 and tribunal preparation.

Why most SENCOs cannot deliver this on their current allocation

Story. A SENCO in a two-form entry primary in East London told me she has 0.4 of a week of release time. In that 0.4 she is expected to chair fifteen annual reviews per term, draft three EHC applications per term, run six parent meetings per term and lead inclusion CPD for thirty teachers. The maths does not work. The strategic job loses to the urgent job every week.

If your SENCO is on less than 0.6 release in a one-form entry, less than 0.8 in a two-form entry, or anything less than full-time in a three-form entry or larger, the strategic role is being squeezed out by the operational role. That is a leadership decision, not a SENCO decision.

Three actions for school leaders

1. Reset the SENCO's job description. Write the strategic responsibilities first and the operational responsibilities second. Calculate the time each one takes. Compare the total to the release time you have allocated. If the total is greater than the release, the role is over-loaded by design.
2. Move EHC application drafting off the SENCO desk where the volume is high. EHC drafting is a specialist skill that takes ten to fifteen hours per application when done to the standard that secures Section F specificity and high-banding funding. Buying that capacity in is often cheaper per pound of funding secured than absorbing it inside the SENCO release.
3. Resource the strategic SENCO with the same seriousness you resource the deputy head. Strategic SENCO is a leadership role under the new framework. Pay it on a leadership scale. Release it for leadership work. Hold it to leadership accountability.

Worked example

At a primary school in East London the EHC drafting work I led secured £155,000 of high-needs funding in one academic year. That funding paid for specialist provision the school would otherwise have absorbed into the pupil-led budget. The drafting work itself was bought-in capacity, not SENCO release time. The SENCO kept her release for the strategic Tier 1 and Tier 2 leadership work the new framework demands.

The strategic question

If your SENCO left tomorrow and you wrote the job advert, would you write the role as it is currently working in your school, or would you write the role the new framework expects. The honest answer to that question tells you how big the redesign job is.

Where SEND Rapid Response fits

If your SENCO is sat on a stack of EHC applications that have not gone out, SEND Rapid Response clears the backlog as a paid service for the school.

Visit www.sendrapidresponse.co.uk and request a school services call.

At one East London primary the same approach unlocked £155,000 of high-needs funding in a single academic year.

Sources

Children and Families Act 2014, Part 3, especially section 42.

SEND Code of Practice 2015, chapters 6, 9 and 10.

SEND Reform Schools White Paper 2025, three-tier model and transition timeline.

Equality Act 2010, sections 20 and 85.

SEND Regulations 2014, regulation 20.