SEN support: a survey of schools and colleges

Research Report

July 2017

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Disclaimer

This research is not an endorsement by DfE of any of the views expressed by those surveyed or of the strategies and interventions described. Neither does it represent Government policy or indicate future policy direction.

Tthe strategies and interventions described in this report will not have been consistently and robustly evaluated, rather they represent examples of practice in schools and colleges that participated in the survey.

The materials, resources, websites and commercially developed programmes and products referred to in this report are included because they were being used in the schools and colleges involved in this research. Other materials and products offering similar functions are available. Reference to any named and /or third party products and materials should not be interpreted as an endorsement of use or of any particular company or its products, by the authors or Department for Education.

The detail provided throughout this report is specific to those surveyed. It is in no way intended to provide a comprehensive list of all strategies and interventions being used across all schools and colleges.

Executive Summary

Background

SEN support is the term given to children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities and require support, but who do not have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or Statement of SEN. Almost all children and young people on SEN support are educated in mainstream schools or colleges, rather than specialist settings or units.

Schools and colleges have freedom in how they support children with SEN, guided by the SEND Code of Practice. They can choose to 'buy in' particular professional/specialist support or programmes, or to provide their staff with training in particular areas. Therefore, it was felt there was a need to understand how students on SEN support are currently supported, and how this practice can be shared, improved and developed.

All of the practice described in this report reflects the views and experiences of education professionals in the schools and colleges surveyed, and is not an endorsement by DfE or a reflection of Government policy. DfE has funded a separate parallel review of robustly-evaluated interventions and strategies (Carroll et al, 2017).

Methodology

The evidence was collected by means of an online survey sent to primary schools, secondary schools and colleges throughout England. In total, 1566 settings were contacted and 219 members of staff completed the survey. The research was carried out between January and March 2017. The survey was open to all members of staff including teaching assistants, teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and members of senior management team to gather views and experiences from a range of educational professionals who work with children and young people on SEN support. The sample is not intended to be representative of all staff in school and college settings – the views of staff in certain roles and from certain settings for example, are over- or under-represented.

The survey asked about the identification of students with SEN, the support put in place for students with different needs, the issues and barriers to supporting students on SEN support, how teaching assistants are deployed, and what sources of information are used to develop understanding of how to support students with SEN.

Key Findings

Identification of SEN

- A third (33.8%) of staff in a range of job roles across primary, secondary and college settings said they did not have responsibility for identifying students with SEN. Respondents who did report responsibility for identifying SEN used different methods for doing so, depending on whether they were SENCOs or other members of staff.

- SENCOs received referrals regarding students potentially having SEN from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers and professionals from outside their setting. They often used a variety of assessment methods, including standardised tests, and referred to documentation recorded throughout the school year on whether students were making expected levels of progress.

- Most other members of staff reported that if they identified a student as potentially having SEN, they would pass this information to their SENCO. Many said they would then implement appropriate strategies to support the student, often with advice and guidance from the school or college SENCO.

Support for children and young people on SEN support

- The most common action to support students with language and communication difficulties was to make a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist. Across all settings, staff also referred to using techniques to modify the language they used to make it easier for students to process and understand. Other strategies differed depending on the type of setting, for example in primary schools visual aids were often used and in colleges there was greater use of assistive technology.

- A wide variety of classroom resources were suggested by respondents across all settings to support students with fine motor control difficulties, including chunky pencils and specialist pens. Staff also reported providing age appropriate activities to build fine motor skills, such as threading beads or building with Lego. Again, in college settings there was a greater emphasis on the use of assistive technology.

- Across all settings respondents used similar strategies to support students with high levels of anxiety. The most frequent was to provide a 'trusted' or 'key' adult for the student to talk to when needed. Staff also reported that providing a safe space for the student to access when feeling overwhelmed was beneficial, as was supporting the student to develop techniques to manage their anxiety such as meditation and breathing exercises. Referrals to outside professionals such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or Educational Psychology Services were also reported.

- When supporting students with reading and spelling difficulties, the most frequently reported strategy was to provide individual or small group teaching. Respondents also suggested providing classroom resources such as word mats or key word lists. There was also a focus on using materials and strategies to develop enjoyment and build confidence when reading. The need to explore difficulties through talking to parents and making referrals to outside agencies was also highlighted.

- Respondents identified a range of strategies they would use when supporting students who found it difficult to concentrate. These included making adjustments in the classroom environment such as considering seating plans, providing fidget toys and breaking tasks into manageable chunks. It was also reported that staff should consider how the language they used impacted on students' ability to concentrate and attend to instructions.

- When supporting students displaying challenging behaviour, the most frequently reported strategy was to refer to the school or college behaviour policy. Across all settings staff said they would attempt to understand the causes of the behaviour and implement classroom strategies to support the student, including removing distraction and using de-escalation techniques. Staff also suggested providing a safe space, which could be accessed when needed. Building a positive relationship with the student was also highlighted as important.

- Staff also described a number of issues and barriers that impact their ability to provide effective support for students with SEN. Respondents said that implementing interventions could be difficult, often due to not having access to staffing issues and difficulty matching programmes to students needs. It was also highlighted that resourcing issues could act as a barrier, as there could be difficulty accessing outside professionals.

Deployment of teaching assistants

- The majority of primary and secondary schools reported that teaching assistants provided in-class support working with individuals or groups of students. In addition, teaching assistants were also often assigned to provide SEN support outside the classroom, usually through delivering intervention groups. In college settings teaching assistants were often given different job titles and were used to support students to prepare for life in college and beyond.

- Headteachers, Deputy and Assistant Headteachers, and SENCOs reported that the main support that teaching assistants received was through training. This could be delivered either through external courses or, more commonly, within setting. In primary and secondary schools it was reported that SENCOs played an

important role in supporting teaching assistants either through regular meetings to discuss their work and by sharing information or through modelling strategies.

- Class teachers reported some barriers they experienced when deploying teaching assistants effectively in lessons. These barriers included lack of time to plan together and teaching assistants not being available for entire lessons or consistently due to other commitments in school making continuity of support difficult.

Sources of information

- Staff named other professionals as their most common sources of information about how to support students with SEN, rather than published resources. Over three-quarters of respondents said they used their SENCO frequently as a source of information, and over half frequently used teachers and other staff in their school or college.

- Similarly, the most common source of information reported by SENCOs was other professionals.

Introduction

Around 12% of pupils in primary school and 10% of pupils in secondary school are on SEN support (Department for Education, 2016). In mainstream Further Education (FE) colleges, around 19% of 16-19 year olds and 16% of 19-24 years olds have a self-declared learning difficulty or disability (LDD), the majority of whom will be on SEN Support (Department for Education, 2014). SEN support is the term given to children and young people who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and require support, but who do not have an EHC plan or Statement of SEN. Almost all students on SEN support are educated in mainstream schools and colleges, rather than specialist settings or units.

In 2014, a new [SEND Code of Practice](#) was introduced in England, which was extended to cover students with SEND in education up to the age of 25. In addition, through the staged approach to raising the participation age, individuals are expected to remain in education or training until the age of 18. These two changes have the potential to mean that further education colleges and other post-16 educational institutions will be supporting more individuals with SEND.

Following these changes, and in a context where settings have freedom in how they choose to support students with SEN alongside guidance in the Code of Practice, there is a need to understand how these students are supported in schools and colleges, and whether there are ways this practice could be shared, improved or developed. An online survey of education professionals was developed to answer these questions. Given the differences between primary schools, secondary schools and colleges, we felt it was important to have a significant sample of each to allow a comparison of approaches.

Different education professionals are likely to have different viewpoints on the support of children with SEND. While a SENCO will have a broad overview of the school or college's aims and approaches, teachers and teaching assistants are likely to have a more in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of individual students and how these interact with different approaches. Education professionals will also have different roles in different environments. In primary schools, a SENCO may also be a class teacher, while in secondary schools they may spend the majority of their time supporting children with SEN. In colleges, SEN support is often provided by specialist learning support services. It is therefore crucial to gain information from a wide variety of education professionals.

This survey was carried out in parallel with two related projects: a rapid evidence assessment of research evidence on effective support for children with SEN in mainstream schools, and a series of case studies examining practice for students on SEN Support in a selection of schools and colleges. The findings from the survey will be interpreted in this report alongside those from the REA where possible.

Methodology

A random stratified sample of schools and colleges in England was used. The sample was stratified by type of establishment (primary, secondary and college) and by local authority to include a representative sample of UK educational establishments. Due to the anonymised nature of the survey, only data focusing on the type of setting respondents worked in (primary school, secondary school or college) was gathered. It was not possible to ascertain whether there was any response bias in terms of Local Authority or multiple members of staff from the same school responding. The survey does not intend to provide a representative sample of the views of all staff in schools and colleges. Analysis of the profile of respondents indicates that staff in certain roles and types of settings are over- or under-represented.

Once establishments had been identified the Headteachers (in primary and secondary schools) or Learning Support Teams (in colleges) were contacted by email and letter using information from edubase and school websites. In total, 1566 settings were contacted. To supplement the college sample, principals at colleges were also contacted via the Association of Colleges. The email and letter explained the purpose of the research and asked for up to five staff members to be nominated to participate in the survey and their email address sent to the research team. It was stated that they could be employed in any teaching role within the setting.

When the contact email addresses of nominated members of staff were received, a link to a Qualtrics survey was sent to each individual. Qualtrics is a secure system which meets strict ethical guidelines. It was stated in the invitation email that participation in the study was voluntary and that the person who nominated them would not be informed if they did or did not participate. In total 456 members of staff were nominated and had links sent to them. The survey was open from January to March 2017.

The Qualtrics system monitors which potential participants have and have not completed the survey and also which surveys have been partially completed. A week after sending out the initial link to the survey, a reminder email was sent to those who had not started the survey or who had not fully completed it.

The survey was designed to collect data relating to the experience of school and college staff in regards to identifying and supporting students with SEN. Different routes through the survey were provided depending on the job title given by the participant.

The survey (see Appendix 1) began by asking participants for information regarding their job role, including what areas they taught in, how long they had been teaching and what qualifications they held. The survey then asked about the identification of students with SEN, including whether participants had responsibility for this. The survey also examined different areas of support for students with Special Educational Needs. All participants

were presented with scenarios of six different students displaying potential SEN and asked what strategies they would use to support each student. Participants were then asked about any issues and barriers they faced when supporting students with SEN in their settings. These questions were different depending on whether the participant was a SENCO or another member of staff.

Members of staff who identified themselves as teachers were then asked questions regarding how they work with teaching assistants within their classroom. SENCOs and those who identified as being members of the senior management team were asked how they deployed teaching assistants to support students with SEN and how they supported this provision. Finally, all participants were asked about the sources of information they used to develop their understanding of how to support students with SEN.

In total 262 questionnaires were completed. Only 219 are included in this analysis as 43 had not completed any questions relating to identifying or supporting students with SEN. In terms of the different settings, 68 responses were from individuals working in primary schools, 98 were from secondary schools and 53 were from colleges

The data were analysed on a question by question basis. For the questions regarding the identification of Special Educational Needs, the issues and barriers faced and the deployment of teaching assistants the data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis identifies, analyses and reports on patterns (or themes) within data.

The responses to the questions relating to the scenarios for supporting students with SEN were analysed through collating the different strategies, interventions and assessments the respondents would use and, where possible, links are made to the findings from a rapid evidence assessment of effective support for students on SEN support (Carroll et al, 2017).

Profile of respondents

The following section gives an overview of the information provided by each participant in regards to their current job/role, employment history and qualifications. Overall, 68 responses were from staff working in primary schools, 98 were from secondary schools and 53 were from colleges.

Respondents were asked to identify their job/role within school. Respondents were able to choose multiple roles if they worked in more than one position within their setting.

The responses indicate that the majority of respondents were teachers (35.1%) and SENCOs (31.9%). There was, however, the greatest overlap for these two roles with nine respondents identifying as being both a teacher and a SENCO.

Figure 1: Current Job Role
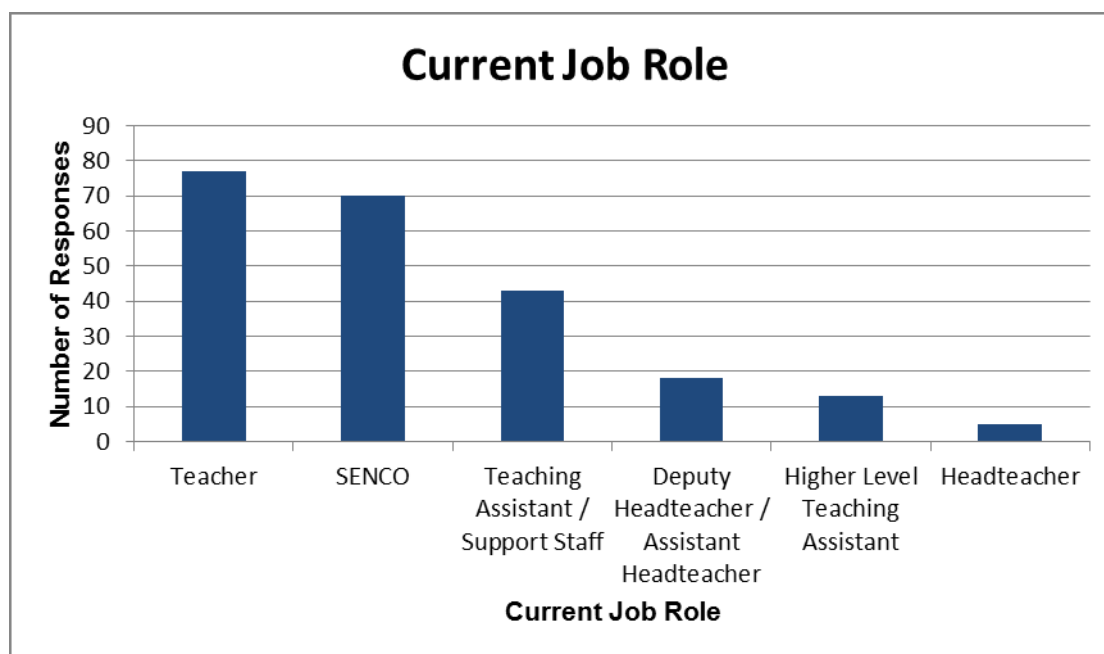
Respondents were asked to identify whether they were part of the Senior Management Team (SMT) within their setting. Thirty-nine (17.8%) of respondents said they were a member of the SMT. Fourteen respondents (35.9%) who said they were members of the SMT reported that they were a SENCO.

Respondents were asked to specify which key stage(s) they currently worked in. They were able to choose multiple key stages. 56 respondents said they did not teach, of which 8 worked in a primary setting (14.3%), 21 in secondary (37.5%) and 27 in colleges (48.2%). Eight were SENCOs, 2 were members of the SMT and 1 was a teacher. Thirty-two said they were Teaching Assistants, and therefore were likely to be working in classrooms with pupils, even if not teaching.

Figure 2: Current Key Stage Employment
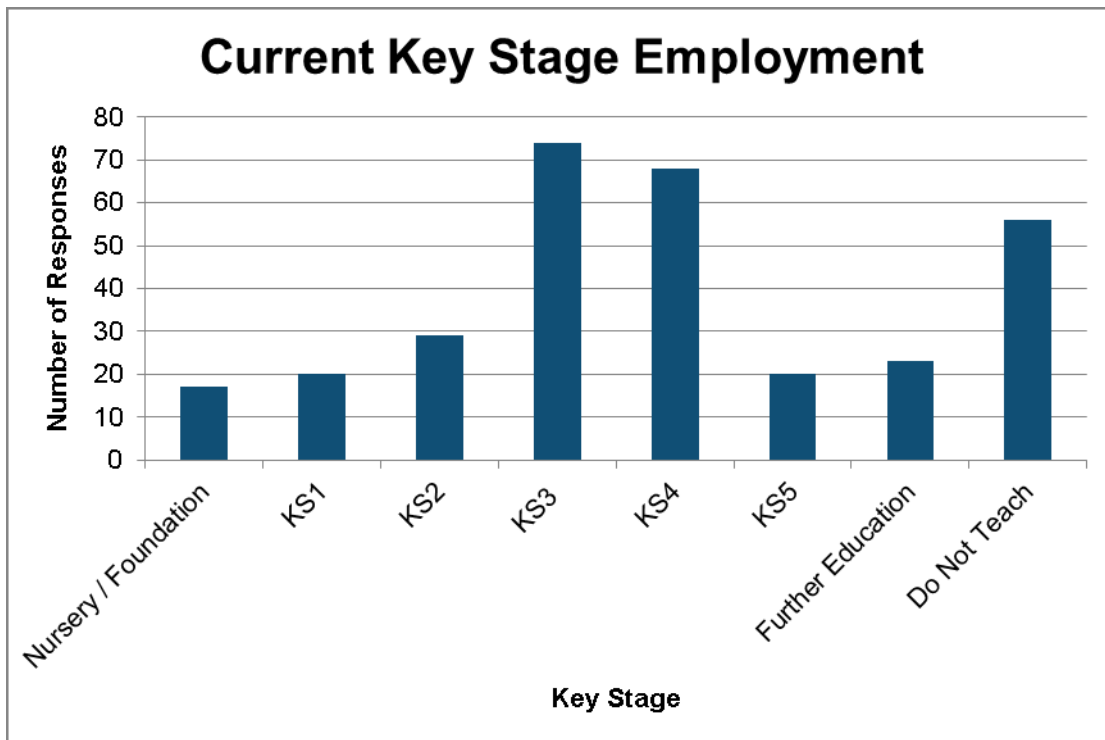
Among the 56 respondents who said they did not teach, 8 were in primary (14.3%), 21 in secondary (37.5%) and 27 in colleges (48.2%). Eight were SENCOs, 2 were members of the SMT and 1 was a teacher. Thirty-two said they were Teaching Assistants, and therefore were likely to be working in classrooms with pupils, even if not teaching.

Respondents were asked how long they had been employed in school or college settings. There were responses from all lengths of service. Those ranging from NQT to 5 years' experience totalled 37 responses (16.9%). The greatest number of responses were from those who had 6 to 10 years experience in educational settings (26.5%), followed by 11 to 15 years (20.1%).

Figure 3: Number of Years Employed in Schools or College Settings
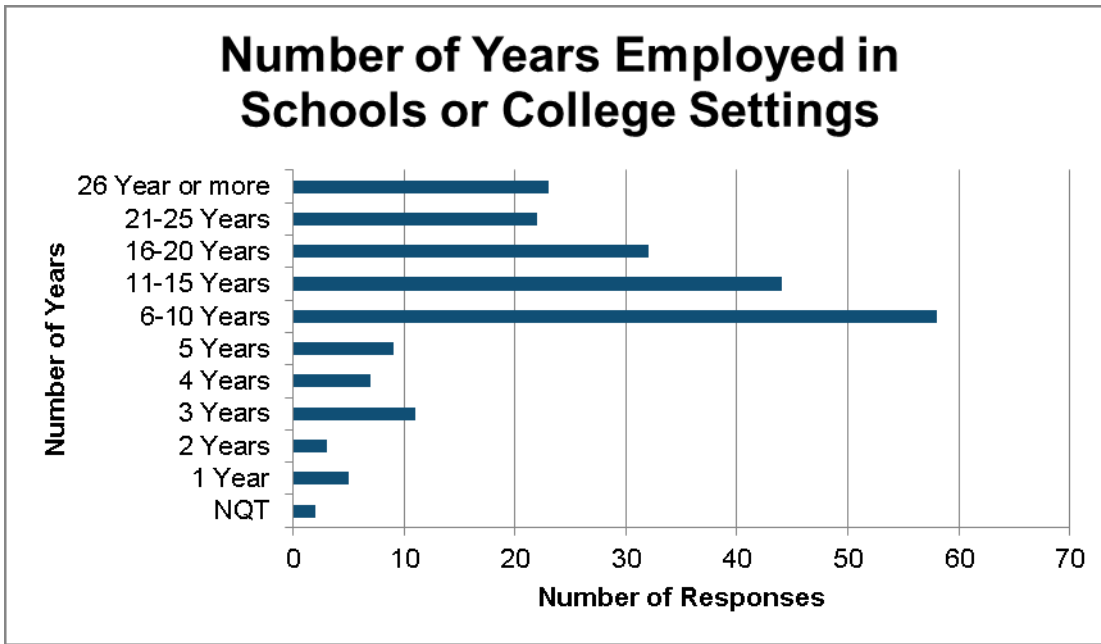
Respondents were asked to identify the teaching qualifications they held. Again, respondents could select multiple qualifications. The number of respondents identifying as holding a Bachelor Degree was high (39.3%), as was the number with PGCE/PGDE (42.0%). Thirty respondents who held a PGCE/PGDE also indicated that they had a Bachelor degree in another, non-teaching related subject.

Figure 4: Teaching Related Qualifications
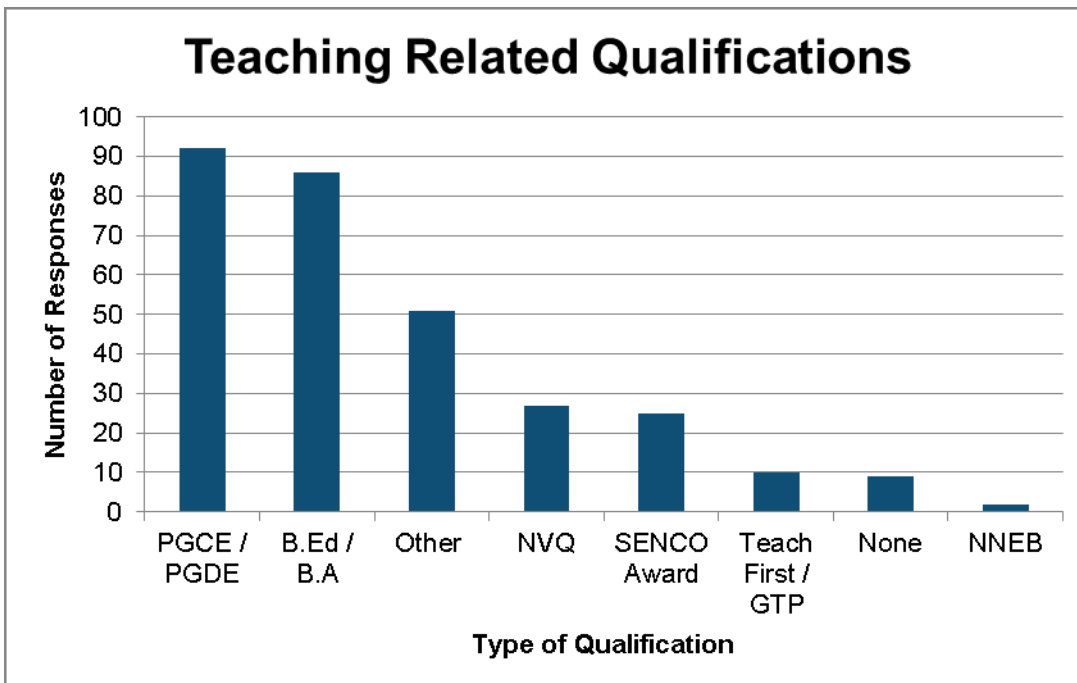
Identification of special educational needs

The need for all schools and colleges to have a clear approach to identifying SEN is set out in the SEND Code of Practice. Respondents were asked a number of questions about the identification of SEN, including whether they have responsibility for identification; how they identify SEN; and what they would do once they had identified a student with SEN.

Responsibility for identification of SEN

Respondents were asked if they have responsibility for identifying students who might have Special Educational Needs (SEN). The results concerning whether respondents believed they had this responsibility are presented below for each type of setting.

Nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of respondents indicated that they did have responsibility for the identification of SEN. Within primary and secondary schools, the majority of respondents who said they did not have responsibility for identifying SEN were teachers (11 in primary and 19 in secondary). The remaining respondents who answered 'no' were either Teaching Assistants or members of SMT. In college settings, it was primarily Teaching Assistants who answered that they did not have responsibility for identifying SEN.

Figure 5: Responsibility for Identifying SEN
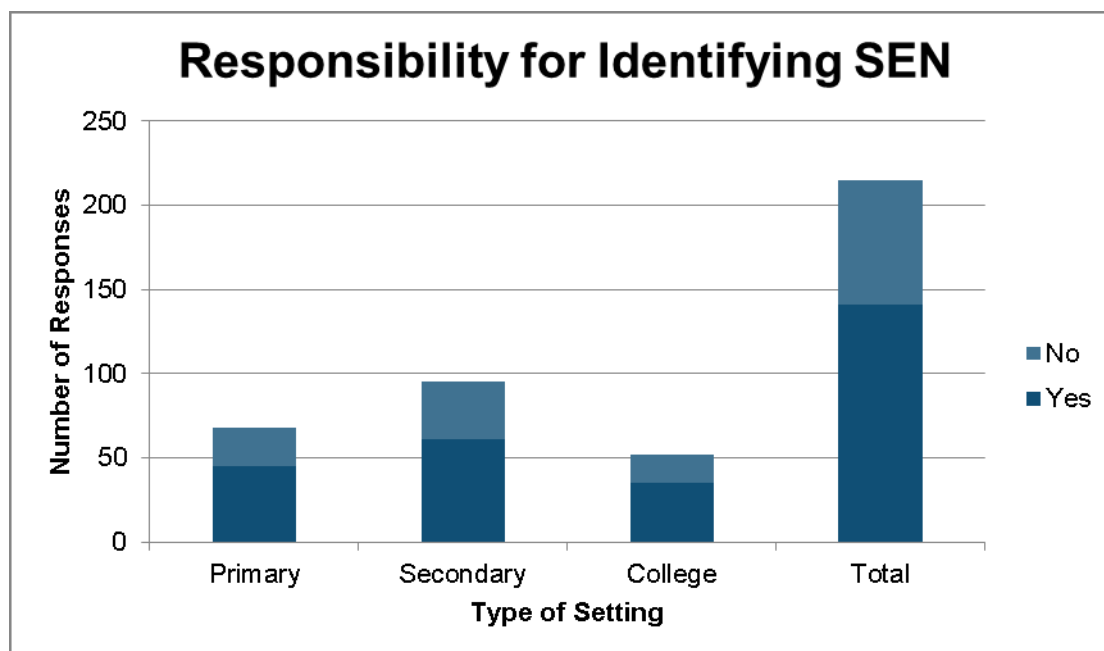
How special educational needs are identified

Respondents were asked how they identify students who might have SEN. Across all settings a wide range of methods were reported. These methods differed depending on whether the respondent said they were a SENCO or another member of staff (senior manager, teacher or support staff), therefore the findings are presented below for each of these groups.

Responses from SENCOs

SENCOs in all types of settings used a range of methods to identify pupils who may have SEN, which are divided here into three categories: referrals, assessment and documentation.

Referrals

Across all types of setting, SENCOs said they received referrals from a variety of sources. These sources included parents, teachers or tutors and outside professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists or medical professionals. Within secondary schools, and particularly in colleges, it was also highlighted that students could refer themselves for support if they felt it was required. In all settings the importance of referral information from students' previous settings during the transition process was considered useful.

> *"The school has regular pupil progress meetings between head teacher, class teacher and SENCO which could lead to further assessment, including classroom observation, to unpick whether a child has SEN"*

Primary SENCO

> *"Speaking with prospective learners/parents about learning support needs. Taking referrals from tutors/Learning Support assistant and others that work with the learners"*

College SENCO

Assessments

SENCOs indicated that a range of assessments were used to identify students who may have SEN, including standardised assessments to measure skills. The most common assessments mentioned by SENCOs in primary schools were 'The Ravens Progressive Matrices Test', 'British Picture Vocabulary Scale' (BPVS) and 'Neale Analysis of Reading Ability' (NARA). In secondary settings, the 'Cognitive Abilities Test' (CAT), 'York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension' (YARC) and 'Comprehensive Test of

Phonological Processing' (CTOPP) were most commonly used. Within a small number of secondary and college settings, there were 'screening tools' used - often a battery of different tests - when students transferred to the setting to gain insight into any difficulties they may experience.

"Information that comes from feeder schools, initial assessments carried out in the first term of year 7 in reading, spelling, comprehension and maths"

Secondary SENCO

Tests to assess social and emotional needs such as the Boxall Profile Test and Emotional Literacy Test were also described by SENCOs in primary schools, and the 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' and 'Pupil Attitudes to Self and School' in secondary schools.

Documentation

A range of documentation was used across the different settings. The main method reported by SENCOs in primary and secondary schools was the analysis of on-going assessment data which could highlight if a pupil was not making expected progress. While much of the focus was on academic progress, a minority of settings (one primary and two secondary) reported using behaviour logs or records to support the identification process. Within college settings, data which indicated a student had received exam concessions in their previous school was used by SENCOs, as well as information gained through the application process.

"All children's progress is tracked throughout the school. Use of a variety of standardised assessments for maths, reading, spelling, comprehension, ability scales, working memory"

Primary SENCO

"[The] college application form has a section for a prospective student to disclose LDD (Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities) or it might be picked up by a tutor at vocational interview…"

College SENCO

In a minority of primary settings, SENCOs reported that documents had been produced either at a Local Authority or school level to support the early identification of SEN through the use of checklists which could be completed by staff members and shared with the SENCO.

"I follow a pathway to move students to SEN support, this document has been created by myself and 5 other local schools…the information…is given to staff to help them identify children with additional needs"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"[The] school have created an initial concerns booklet…which initially teachers can highlight and comment on individual pupils they are concerned about. They can also talk to me about initial concerns and once the booklet is completed I will have a look through it"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

Responses from other staff members

In addition to the identification methods used by SENCOs, the experiences of other members of staff (senior managers, class teachers and support staff) were surveyed. These responses fell into two categories, referrals and classroom information.

Referrals

Within all settings staff reported that they used referrals from a variety of people when considering whether a student should be identified as having SEN. Unlike the SENCO responses, these were often people closely linked to the student rather than outside professionals. In primary and secondary settings these referrals were often from parents who had voiced concerns about their child.

Within secondary and college setting these referrals could also come from the students themselves, either during the application process or once a student had begun their studies.

"If a student self-refers querying a learning difficulty I follow-up with one-to-one meeting and may refer for further formal assessment as appropriate"

<div align="right">College Teacher</div>

"The college has a referral system. Some learners approach our team directly as they are already aware of us"

<div align="right">College Higher Level Teaching Assistant</div>

In primary and secondary settings, information gained as part of the transition process between settings was seen as helpful in identifying students who might have SEN.

"I teach in Reception and the children will come and visit my class the Summer term before they start. This is an opportunity to identify any children who may have needs…I will then have a home visit which gives me a chance to see a child in their home setting"

Primary Teacher

"When students transition to us from Year 6 I use information from student files that are sent to us by primary schools. I also attend meetings with primary school SENCOs where they share information about students"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Classroom information

Members of staff said they used the information they would gather as part of their everyday assessment procedures to identify if students were not working at expected levels to support the identification of SEN. In primary and secondary settings, it was also suggested that getting to know students was important to understand how they performed across different areas of learning and their social and emotional needs.

"Recognise that every child is different and every child has their own strengths and weaknesses. However, if a child significantly struggles compared to their peers then I would refer the child"

Primary Teacher

"Look at their abilities compared to an expected child of the same age"

Primary Teacher

"Informal assessment in class in terms of peer relationships, response to constructive feedback and an ability to manage the day to day challenges of school"

Secondary Teacher

In primary and secondary settings the use of observation, including during non-classroom based activities, was considered beneficial to support the identification process.

"Observation of child within class setting, how they cope with work set and the progress they make, how they interact with their peers and adults. Once any difficulties are identified, further observation and asking questions, then raise awareness within school"

Primary Teacher

21

> *"By observing and working with the students in the classroom situation, and during lunch time student support club"*

<div align="right">Secondary Teaching Assistant</div>

Action taken once special educational needs are identified

Respondents were asked what they would do next, once they have identified a student with SEN. A range of procedures respondents would follow were reported. Again, responses differed between SENCOs and other staff members and are presented separately.

Responses from SENCOs

In terms of the procedures that SENCOs would follow having identified a student with SEN, there were two areas identified: further information gathering and provision of support.

Further Information Gathering

SENCOs in all settings said that once they had been approached about a child who may have SEN, they would take the information provided and, if necessary, gather further evidence. This could involve discussion with parents and/or gaining more detailed information from a class teacher or previous settings. It could also involve the SENCO conducting further assessments or arranging for assessment from other professionals such as Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists or Occupational Therapists.

> *"All staff liaise with parents and if necessary, following school assessments, I may refer a child to an outside agency…to gain a deeper insight into how best to meet their needs / reduce barriers to learning"*

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

> *"Depending on the area of need e.g. literacy, numeracy, SEMH…run diagnostic assessments or, if I am unable/unqualified to run the assessment refer to someone who can…"*

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

In secondary and college settings it was highlighted that this further information gathering stage could involve discussion with the student.

"Contact...the student themselves most importantly to ask what kind of strategies help them learn"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

"Hold an initial assessment and have a chat with them (the student) *about any difficulties and how they impact on learning"*

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

Provision of Support

Once further information had been gathered, SENCOs in all settings described how they would provide additional support for students. This could involve supporting class teachers with additional teaching strategies, through the setting of targets, the provision of interventions and additional staff input.

"We put in place a passport for all teachers that informs them of further details of the child and what supports them best. We put in additional interventions if necessary"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"Write a pupil profile that includes strategies for adults to use in school. Organise appropriate provision to address their specific needs e.g. TA support, small group/paired work, one-to-one work"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

"Support plan produced…information shared with anyone who will be supporting the student"

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

In college settings, staff reported that it was important for students to be involved and agreed with the decisions being made in relation to the support they required.

"Identify the most appropriate support required for each student and implement in agreement with the student"

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

It was also highlighted that the provision of support should be monitored closely to ensure that it is working and the student was making progress.

"Interventions are implemented and tracked through standardised testing (depending on area of need). Interventions are monitored for impact"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"…a learning support plan is generated between the class teacher and the SENCO with specific, measurable targets. All staff that work with the child during the week would be made aware of these targets. Specific interventions would then be put in place, with assessment at the beginning and then regularly to chart progress"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"Plan appropriate support, put in place, agree review date, then review and readjust as necessary"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

Responses from other staff members

In terms of responses from other members of staff about what they would do once a student with SEN was identified, these can be separated into two actions: passing on information and provision of support.

Passing on information

Within primary and secondary settings the main response from other members of staff (teachers, SMT, and teaching assistants) once they had identified a student with SEN was that they would pass information on to the SENCO. It was sometimes unclear what responsibility these staff members would then take for designing and implementing support for students once this information had been passed on. In college settings it was reported that other staff members would approach the staff in the college Learning Support Team to access support for a student identified as having SEN.

"Any early identification criteria that the pupil meets is highlighted on a pro forma alongside any notes from observation and my interaction with the pupil. This is passed onto the SENCO"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

I'd contact the appropriate person in the Inclusive Learning team to find out how to support the student and meet their needs"

<div align="right">College Teacher</div>

Some respondents did highlight that they would 'consult' or 'discuss' with the SENCO regarding their concerns and would provide evidence to support their referral to the SENCO.

In some secondary settings it was also highlighted that information regarding concerns and SEN identification may be shared in a wider team before being referred to the SENCO.

"The department would discuss the pupil and the referral/observation"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Provision of support

Once a student had been identified as having SEN, in all settings there was a focus on developing appropriate support. The responsibility for arranging the support differed between settings, with class teachers leading in some schools or colleges and the SENCO in others.

"Meet with the class teacher and the SENCO to decide the correct course of action and the appropriate tests or assessments needed to confirm if that child does have a specific need. Then a planned package of support would be put in place which I review every half term"

Primary Headteacher

"Unpick the area of need and then select specific intervention/strategy to remove barriers/obstacles to learning. This could be in the form of adjustments to the way learning is accessed, helping to develop strategies to access learning, attending a targeted intervention. Always detailing the information in the child's one page profile"

Secondary Teacher

"Recommendation Forms are put in place to inform members of staff who are teaching or supporting the individual so they are aware of the individual's needs and most suitable ways to support the individual in class"

College Support Staff

In primary and secondary settings it was also noted that the involvement of parents during this stage of planning support was important.

"Discuss that child with the parents and SENCO to build some kind of support. If a support plan were required I would write one for the parent, child and SENCO to review and sign"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

"Parents are invited into school to meet with the SENCO who will discuss any concerns schools have. A plan will be made to help the student"

<div align="right">Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant</div>

In college settings there was a focus on consulting with the student about potential support. In two colleges, staff said they would seek the student's consent to share information about their SEN with other members of staff.

"A report is written and with the students written permission this is shared with tutors and learning support staff, this report will include advice and guidance for the tutors and many allocate a range of support and/or further assessment"

<div align="right">College Teacher</div>

The support provided by staff in college settings may be more targeted at helping a student manage the requirements of the FE setting, where the expectation is that students work more independently than at school.

"Put a plan in place with the learner to ensure they can access the full course with the necessary support. Guide them to attend workshops and help with planning and organising. Promote their independent working/study in FE (Further Education)"

<div align="right">College Support Staff</div>

Supporting students with SEN

Respondents were provided with six scenarios of students displaying a range of difficulties, and asked how they would support them within their setting. These difficulties were with language and communication; fine motor control; anxiety; reading; concentration; and challenging behaviour during lessons. Respondents were asked to list three things they would typically put in place to meet these particular needs. The questions could be answered freely and respondents were not prompted to provide specific information, such as the names of intervention packages or types of teaching strategies used.

For each of the six scenarios the responses are divided into two categories: strategies and interventions. Strategies sections refer to school or classroom based practices which were implemented to support pupils. This could include high quality teaching approaches, alterations to the curriculum or the provision of resources. Interventions sections focus on commercially available packages which the respondents referred to by name (when a package is named, at least two respondents referred to using it).

Where possible, links are made to a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al., 2017) which collates research on the effectiveness of approaches, strategies and interventions to support children on SEN support in mainstream schools.

It is important to note that the strategies and interventions suggested are not an exhaustive list of those available. They reflect how staff in schools and colleges report they would manage the needs of pupils in their own setting, taking into account the resources they have available.

Supporting students with language and communication difficulties

Respondents were asked what support they would put in place if a student was displaying difficulties with language and communication. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

The respondents reported using a range of strategies when supporting students with language and communication difficulties, including making referrals to Speech and Language therapists, using visual resources and language modification techniques, and working with students to build their confidence.

Speech and language therapy referrals

The most common strategy reported to support students with language and communication difficulties was to make a referral to a Speech and Language therapist. Nearly a quarter of the respondents (SENCOs and other members of staff) reported this as a strategy they would use. However, this was a strategy suggested in only a small minority of college settings. In primary schools a number of staff reported that they would make a referral to their SENCO if they had concerns in this area.

The majority of respondents who chose this strategy only described making initial referrals, however a small number reported that this would be seen as a starting point, with the Speech and Language therapist offering advice and activities for school staff to complete with the student, rather than the therapist working directly with them.

> *"Assessment by the Speech and Language Therapist who would then draw up a programme to follow. A specific teaching assistant would then have allocated time during the week to work with the child to achieve the given targets"*

> Primary SENCO

The use of Speech and Language Therapists was explored in a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017). Research has indicated that students with language and communication difficulties who receive early speech and language therapy show better literacy skills later in school than those who do not. Furthermore, nursery children with significant language difficulties performed better than waiting list controls when offered intervention by school staff, but less well than those who received Speech and Language Therapist input.

Visual resources

In addition to making referrals to outside professionals, within primary and secondary schools the next most commonly described strategy was the use of visual aids. In primary and secondary settings staff referred to using visual timetables or 'Now and Next' boards to support the students to understand what was expected of them. In primary schools computer packages such as Widgit were also used to create visual resources:

> *"…something like a task organiser / graphic organiser to help the child organise and get across their thoughts in a more structured way"*

> Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO

> *"Individual visual timetable and an adult familiar with the child to talk through the day"*

> Primary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

"Now and Next boards to help pupils to focus on one thing and not be overwhelmed"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Provide tasks lists which encourages their independence"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

In college settings, the most commonly used strategy was to provide students with access to assistive technology to support their learning, although specific types of technology were not mentioned. This was not a strategy highlighted in primary or secondary settings.

Language modification techniques

In all settings the use of language modification techniques was widely reported. These techniques involve providing additional support and over-learning to ensure that language is understood. In primary settings these included pre-teaching vocabulary, providing word banks or vocabulary books and allowing extra time for processing language.

"Pre-teaching of certain concepts, stressing new vocabulary and language"

Primary Teacher

"Use visual as much as possible where appropriate and allow sufficient processing time"

Primary Teaching Assistant

When giving directions the importance of breaking down instructions and chunking information was highlighted, as was the benefit of providing high quality speech role models.

"Break down instructions into small manageable sections using pictures/ symbols as required"

Primary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

"Speaking clearly and at an appropriate level for their understanding. Breaking tasks/ work down to small parts and feeding instructions in clearly and gradually"

Primary Teaching Assistant

"Chunking of information to ensure the pupil can process what they are hearing"

In secondary settings pre-teaching vocabulary was reported most frequently for this type of need. In addition, providing key words lists was highlighted as beneficial.

"Provide writing frames, word banks, sentence starters and planning mats to help students organise ideas and communicate them in specific language"

Secondary Teacher

"Ensure that topic vocabulary is provided. This can take the form of visual topic vocabulary sheets which should be provided by subject teachers"

Secondary SENCO

"Make sure that the start of each topic has a vocabulary sheet and definitions and this is regularly referred to"

Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

In secondary schools and colleges, providing extra time for processing language and formulating responses, simplifying language to enable understanding and differentiated questioning were also reported.

"Rephrasing to ensure that the young person understands what is being asked of them"

Secondary SENCO

"Differentiated questioning to again allow them to build confidence in themselves and their ability. Also allowing them enough time to answer"

Secondary Teacher

"Adapt oral communication e.g. simplify vocabulary, use shorter sentences and instructions, use gesture, ask very specific questions, model appropriate communication"

College Teacher

The use of the techniques described above was explored in a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017). Research suggests that providing training to secondary teachers in language modification techniques such as teaching key vocabulary, presenting instructions explicitly and using visual planners is an effective strategy to help students with language and communication difficulties to improve written expression and listening comprehension.

Strategies to build confidence

Although less widely reported than the strategies above, a small number of respondents reported using strategies to support students with language and communication needs to build their confidence. This was seen across primary and secondary schools and colleges but did differ by age.

Strategies included ensuring that staff knew about the students' needs and providing time with a trusted adult to discuss any issues they may be facing. Buddying up students with good language role models and ensuring that students felt comfortable to contribute to activities was also highlighted.

"Encourage them to share ideas with an adult or peer to build up their communication skills and confidence"

Primary Teacher

"A buddy system – pairing the child with a good role model"

Secondary Teaching Assistant

"I would ensure that the student was included in any group discussions even if s/he did not participate, although I would encourage participation"

College Support Staff

"Use of whiteboards for them to write a response if they felt uncomfortable in speaking out in front of their peers"

Secondary Teacher

Interventions

There were differences between primary and secondary settings in terms of the interventions considered beneficial for students displaying language and communication difficulties. In primary settings, a number of interventions were reported, with Language Link - a resource for screening assessment and intervention - being mentioned most often. In addition, primary schools also reported the use of Black Sheep, which provides language resources, and WellComm, which provides screening and intervention resources in the early years (up to 6 years old).

In secondary settings, fewer interventions were suggested, but Talk About was reported as useful even though it is designed for Key Stage 1 and 2 students. Elklan (which was also used in primary schools) was also considered effective. In addition, secondary schools also referred to using Lego Therapy as a form of intervention for students with

language and communication difficulties. A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) highlights that research has primarily focused on the use of Lego Therapy for developing social interactions. When research has found positive impact, this has been when the sessions are delivered by one of the creators or by a professional who has attended a week-long training session. More research is required to establish if Lego therapy shows the same impact when delivered in a school setting by staff without extensive training.

Supporting students with fine motor control difficulties

Respondents were asked what they would put in place if a student was displaying fine motor control difficulties affecting their handwriting and maths. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

The respondents reported using a range of strategies when supporting students with fine motor difficulties. These included providing specialist classroom resources and supportive activities designed to develop fine motor skills, using assistive technology and making referrals to Occupational Therapy.

Classroom resources

Across all types of setting a wide range of practical techniques were identified by staff to support students who were displaying fine motor difficulties. Nearly a third of primary and secondary respondents reported that chunky pencils, specialist pens and pencil grips were seen as useful. A small number of primary respondents reported the use of writing slopes or wobble cushions.

> *"…use specific aids to help the child e.g. pencil grips, specific larger/ chunkier pens/ pencils, writing slopes, stability cushions*

Primary SENCO

> *"Trial student with different pens/ grips to ascertain which makes writing easiest/ most legible*

Secondary Teaching Assistant

The use of these resources was also mentioned by college staff, but much less frequently. In these settings there was more reporting of the use of assistive technology (see here for further discussion on the use of assistive technology).

Although reported less frequently, in all settings it was suggested that everyday classroom resources could be adapted for students when necessary. This might involve using paper with wider lines or larger squares, enlarging worksheets or providing resources to reduce the amount of writing required.

"Differentiate activities, writing frames, larger format books"

Primary Teacher

"Ask teachers to provide printed work/ PowerPoints to reduce amount of handwriting"

Secondary Teaching Assistant

"Writing frames or step by step guide to cut down on the amount of their written input. Use symbols so they don't have to write every word down"

College SENCO

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) found that, while there have not been many research studies as to the effectiveness of such classroom strategies, this is likely to be because their effectiveness - or ineffectiveness - is immediately obvious. Considering purposeful adaptations using the M.A.T.C.H acronym can have considerable benefits. M.A.T.C.H stands for: Modifying the task; Altering expectations; Teaching specific strategies; Changing the environment; and Help by understanding.

Supportive activities

In both primary and secondary settings it was reported that activities to build fine motor skills which are age appropriate can be provided. In primary schools this could involve activities such as threading beads, peg boards or lacing, whereas in secondary schools the activities would include Lego, playing dominoes or tiddly winks.

"…activities to develop strength in a child's wrists and hand – squeezing a squishy ball, activities which involve manipulation of small objects – threading beads, play dough, large tweezers to move small objects, spray guns to develop grip"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant / SENCO

"Games such as tiddly winks, pick up sticks, dominos, Lego construction. Used in lunch club and one-to-one support"

Secondary Teaching Assistant

In addition, it was suggested across all settings that providing regular handwriting practice was beneficial, and in primary schools this could involve activities which focused on letter formation such as tracing letters or writing them in a sandtray.

"Handwriting practice for short periods of time. If there is progress made, continue this. This would involve going back to the basics of learning handwriting, e.g. pattern making, re-teaching letter formation, moving on to cursive writing"

Secondary SENCO

"Determine the need for developing handwriting skill or whether student is proficient using a laptop. I would investigate need for writing pens, grips etc. If the student was committed to improve handwriting I would start a handwriting programme"

College Teacher

"Letter formation practice – pencil and paper, painting, chalking, sandtray – tracing the letter/ number with the finger in the sand"

Primary Teacher

In primary schools there was more of a focus on using activities to practice fine motor skills, with nearly a third of respondents reporting using this. In secondary schools, while activities were mentioned, the focus moved towards handwriting practice.

Although only reported by a small number of respondents, it was also suggested that schools could send fine motor activities home for students.

"Speak to parents so they can support the child at home with easy strategies and activities"

Primary Teacher

"Communicate with parents/ carers and request that they support their son/ daughter's motor skills by building into the child's daily routine folding/ cutting/ wrapping objects…."

Secondary Teacher

The focus on using fine motor skills activities is interesting as a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) reports that by school age current best practice favours focusing on handwriting practice and the development of essential motor programs as opposed to remediation of motor difficulties. This direct instruction of handwriting has been shown to result in significantly greater legibility and fluency than non-instruction and

motor instruction. More specifically, hand manipulation and kinaesthetic awareness training have been shown not to be as effective, and sometimes deemed ineffective, without handwriting practice.

Assistive technology

In secondary and college settings the most prominent methods to support students displaying fine motor skills were the use of assistive technology, with nearly a third of respondents referring to this strategy. The use of assistive technology was also reported by primary schools, but not as frequently. For secondary and college students these types of assistive technologies could include laptops and tablets.

> *"School often arranges for these students to have laptops. My role is to ensure that the student receives the worksheets/ PowerPoints electronically so is not wasting time typing them out"*

<div align="right">Secondary Deputy/Assistant Headteacher</div>

> *"By the time the come to high school it is often very difficult to change their handwriting but a laptop often allows them the freedom to express their thoughts and knowledge"*

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

> *"We have found that assistive technology is particularly effective for students with handwriting difficulties. We encourage the use of their phones to take pictures of the board, record lectures instead of note taking, and the use of laptops and tablets for taking notes"*

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

It was also suggested in a small number of secondary schools that students could be taught touch typing.

> *"Touch-typing interventions are extremely helpful for students with severe handwriting difficulties"*

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) was supportive of the use of assistive technology for students with motor difficulties, finding that touch typing has been shown to improve legibility and motivation. In addition, predictive text and speech to text software is useful. However, it was also noted that the use of assistive technology does require extensive training and supportive environments.

Additional support

In secondary and college settings, although not as commonly used as assistive technology, there was also a focus on using scribes or voice activated software to enable students to express what they wanted without having to worry about handwriting. There was also consideration that providing extra time for activities which included fine motor skills was beneficial.

"If their standard of writing is affecting their grades for GCSE, I'd encourage them to use a laptop to write long pieces of writing or possibly a scribe if the laptop proves too much of a diversion"

Secondary SENCO

"It may be necessary to act as a scribe for the student, thereby allowing the student to dictate what should be written or drawn…this requires a developed level of communication between the student and scribe…"

College Support Staff

"Extra time to record information or getting them to record only the key parts for the lesson"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Occupational therapy referral

Within primary and secondary settings a small number of respondents reported that referrals to Occupational Therapy for assessment could be beneficial (more so in primary than secondary schools). In addition to this, many of the interventions that were used within primary settings had been recommended to schools by Occupational Therapists.

"Use Occupational Therapy Clever Hands and Bodies programme to improve core strength and develop fine motor skills"

Primary SENCO

"Having buy-in Occupational Therapy is invaluable"

Secondary SENCO

The use of programmes developed by, or alongside, Occupational Therapists was reviewed in a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017), which reports that adaptions recommended by a specialist (such as an Occupational Therapist) are most likely to be effective. This is due to the understanding that these professionals bring in

terms of the difficulties children and young people with physical needs face in the classroom.

Interventions

In terms of interventions, a wide variety were used within primary schools, mainly for groups of students who had been identified by school staff as requiring additional support to develop their fine motor skills. In terms of younger students, [Big Moves FUNdamentals](#) was reported to be beneficial. For older students [Speed Up](#) was suggested as it has been developed to support students aged 8 to 13 years who have writing which is slow, illegible or lacks fluency.

In primary and secondary settings [Write from the Start](#) was reported as being beneficial. This intervention is designed to develop fine motor and perceptual skills necessary for writing.

Supporting students with anxiety

Respondents were asked what they put in place if a student was displaying high levels of anxiety. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

A variety of strategies were identified by staff including identifying a 'trusted' or 'key' adult for the student to talk to and a safe space for them to access if they were feeling overwhelmed. Staff also reported providing activities to help manage anxiety such as breathing exercises and making referrals to outside professionals.

Key adults

The responses from primary, secondary and college settings regarding how they would support a student displaying high levels of anxiety were very similar. The most frequent response was that they would provide a 'trusted' or 'key' adult that would be available for the student to talk to.

"Nominated adult support where anxieties and worries could be discussed"

Primary Teacher

"Named person to speak to regularly. Share episodes of anxiety, identify triggers and discuss possible alternative to avoid similar situations"

Secondary SENCO

Within secondary settings, it was reported that there may be more than one adult nominated for this role. Across all settings it was suggested that availability of key adults should be flexible and they should try to be available when the students indicated they needed support and not just at set times.

Safe spaces

The second most frequently reported strategy by staff across all types of setting was providing a 'safe space' for students to access if they were feeling overwhelmed. It was reported that these students should know where these spaces were and that a method for the student to indicate to the teacher that they required to access them was necessary. Furthermore, accessing these spaces should not be seen as a punishment.

> *"I would ensure that the child had a safe place to go when feeling extremely anxious"*

> Primary Teacher

> *"Have a timeout strategy with a designated safe place that pupils can go to and calm down"*

> Secondary Teacher

> *"I would agree an 'exit strategy' so that the student had an agreed signal to indicate when their anxiety levels rise so high that they need to leave the class and go to a safe place"*

> College Teaching Assistant

A small number of primary schools reported that 'safe spaces' could be provided within the classroom through creating an area with blankets, cushions and cuddly toys. In all settings these areas were often also available for students to access break times and lunchtimes.

> *"Use of a 'chill out' room at playtimes and lunchtimes. Often the noisy outdoor environment can be alarming for some pupils and a quiet, safe play area where they can take a friend really help to keep down anxiety levels"*

> Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

In colleges it was suggested that it was beneficial to provide areas where students could 'drop in' at any time to discuss issues they were facing and how they were impacting on their anxiety.

"Access to our Oasis Room for relaxation time and time to talk one-to-one. We have an open door to the Oasis Room early morning to enable students to relax and talk prior to going into lessons to help avoid meltdowns"

<div align="right">College Deputy/Assistant Headteacher/SENCO</div>

Provision of support

A further area which was highlighted as being beneficial for students across primary schools, secondary schools and colleges was staff providing access to strategies which could be used to help manage anxiety. While not as many settings reported using this strategy compared to key adults and safe spaces, there was a broad range of activities provided including mindfulness training, yoga, meditation and breathing exercises.

"At our school we have a meditation type activity which proved effective with a rather volatile class. One anxious child in that class would relax completely in it. I believe training children to manage their emotions in this way is a good life skill"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

"Support them to control their breathing allowing oxygen to flow more easily around the body"

<div align="right">College Support Staff</div>

The use of yoga in schools is supported by evidence reviewed as part of a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017). Research has indicated that yoga can have a calming effect and reduce restlessness, impulsivity and inattentiveness in pupils with ADHD. It is suitable across all education settings, however does require a trained instructor.

There were a number of strategies only reported by staff in primary settings. While not reported in high numbers, they did provide a picture of how schools are using resources to work with younger children. Examples given included using story books with a focus on anxiety to explore issues and picture cards to enable students to show how they were feeling. The use of daily 'meet and greets' at the beginning of the school day was also deemed to be effective in reducing anxiety.

"Stories and books that could be used as a way of discussing anxiety in class"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

"Give a child a card to display when feeling anxious to communicate this without having to discuss"

<div align="center">39</div>

"Daily Meet and Greet in the mornings to enable the child to settle with a familiar adult and give them an opportunity to talk about anything worrying them or anything which has gone well/ poorly since the previous day. An opportunity to discuss the day ahead around specific times where a child may be feeling anxiety"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO

Referrals to professionals

Across all settings there was a focus on referring students to other professionals. These professionals included those who were employed directly by the settings such as school counsellors, but also outside agencies such as CAMHS, Educational Psychology Services and the School Nursing Service.

"Involve Educational Psychologist to ensure no deeper underlying issues"

Primary SENCO

"We have a counsellor on staff who is highly trained to work with individuals"

Primary SENCO

"School nurse referral to check that the issues are not more severe and do not needs CAMHS"

Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

In colleges there was a small number of staff who suggested that students would be signposted to support they could access themselves. Some also reported providing information around campus on how students could access support if they wished. While this was only suggested by a small number of settings, it does demonstrate a different approach between schools and colleges.

"We have notice boards around college where students can get information and support in college"

College SENCO

"We have found that raising awareness of the causes for a lot of anxiety, emphasising current statistics – how common it is and that they are not alone, celebrities with anxiety to demonstrate that it doesn't have to be barrier to achievement has helped"

College Support Staff

Additional support

In primary settings there was a focus on working with the student, but also their parents and staff to explore the underlying causes for the student's anxiety. This strategy was reported nearly as often as the use of key adults. In secondary and college settings this focus moved away from consultation with parents and more towards talking to staff to ascertain if anxiety was prominent throughout the school day. It was also reported that supporting students to develop a plan of action to help manage and understand their anxiety could be beneficial.

"Discuss with parents and staff the anxiety and any cause or trigger we can spot"

Primary SENCO

"Contact staff to see how the anxiety is manifesting in lessons. Make staff aware that there are concerns over anxiety levels and ask for immediate feedback"

Secondary SENCO

"Meeting with the student on a weekly basis and working on how to challenge unhelpful thoughts"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Interventions

In both primary and secondary settings the most commonly mentioned intervention was the use of an [Emotional Literacy Support Assistant](#) (ELSA). These would be trained members of staff who worked with student to support them to understand and regulate their emotions.

Supporting students with reading difficulties

Respondents were asked what they put in place if a student was excessively slow at reading and sounding out letters when spelling. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

Staff suggested a range of strategies for supporting students with reading and spelling difficulties, including providing individual or small group work and using specialist classroom resources including assistive technology. There was also a focus on using strategies to develop students' enjoyment of reading and build confidence, as well as methods to further explore reading difficulties.

Individual or small group support

Nearly half of respondents across all settings reported the need to support students displaying reading and spelling difficulties using individual and/or small group teaching.

"Additional reading time with one-to-one adult support, reading with parent helpers, teaching assistants and teacher"

Primary Teacher

"Provide the student with extra intervention with reading either daily or several times weekly with the same member of staff so that progress can be monitored"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

"Encourage easy, achievable reading activities with support staff across the curriculum with lots of positive engagement"

College Teacher

In primary and secondary schools staff said it may be beneficial to assess the basic phonics knowledge of a student to ascertain if there were any gaps in understanding and to provide extra reading support. In addition, in secondary schools it was suggested that 'catch-up' reading groups could be beneficial.

"Check phonic knowledge and establish any unknown sounds then work on these"

Primary Teacher

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) found that additional small group tuition which focuses on phonics, in combination with learning key sight words and reading good quality texts can be beneficial. Phonological awareness tuition is most effective when it is closely linked to learning about letters, words and phonemes. There is also strong evidence that that a wide range of structured literacy interventions can be helpful at improving general literacy skills, particularly between the ages of 7 to 11 years. The rapid evidence assessment did also highlight that whilst research has found that teaching assistants can effectively deliver structured and evidence based interventions they require proper training.

Classroom support/materials

A number of classroom resources were also suggested to be beneficial for students encountering reading difficulties. The use of these was reported by nearly a quarter of the respondents across all settings. In primary schools there was a focus on teaching sight words, using phonics and word mats. In secondary schools and colleges, methods

including providing key word lists, highlighting key words, pre-teaching vocabulary and providing wall displays of vocabulary were reported to be useful.

> *"Ensure they have access to a phonics mat to help them to locate the correct sound more swiftly"*

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

> *"When giving a piece of text to the class to read, highlight key phrases and ask the student to read these to the teaching assistant or to themselves rather than expecting them to read the whole thing"*

<div align="right">Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher</div>

> *"Tutors are encouraged to display key terms in the classroom, and students are encouraged to start a glossary in their study files"*

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

Although only reported by a small number of respondents, the use of assistive technology was mentioned by staff from all settings. In primary schools, this could involve the use of tablets to listen to stories or computer programmes which read back what a student has written. Secondary schools also reported using tablets and laptops to support reading. In colleges, the use of assistive technology was the most reported resource when working with students with reading and spelling difficulties.

> *"Some students have access to a college laptop which they can take home if they want to complete homework"*

<div align="right">College Support Staff</div>

> *"Text to speech software may assist the student as they will be able to hear the words spoken to them instead of reading them as they may be able to process the words more quickly if heard verbally than attempting to read them"*

<div align="right">College Support Staff</div>

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) highlighted that the use of assistive technology to support students in Key Stage 4 and above can be beneficial. However, it was noted that such technologies should be chosen with the student as an active participant, selecting support that works well with their strengths and weaknesses. It was also reported that, across all age groups, assistive technology requires extensive training and supportive environments for it be most effective.

Creating enjoyment and building confidence

There was a focus by some staff on supporting students to find enjoyment in reading activities. In primary settings it was suggested that using activities students would enjoy, such as playing phonics games, could build confidence. In secondary schools and colleges there was a focus on finding reading materials that were suitable for both the students' ability and age and which would encourage the enjoyment of reading.

"Enjoyment of reading through library sessions"

Primary Teacher

"Encourage reading of chronologically age appropriate books (at the right level of interest for the age group whilst still being accessible to the child) to continue developing a sense of enjoyment"

Secondary Teacher

"Use reading materials reflecting students areas of interest, embedding materials relating to vocational area of study"

College SENCO

Buddying students with a stronger reader and paired reading were highlighted in primary and secondary schools as being beneficial, and was the most recommended strategy in secondary schools. In secondary schools, a number of methods were highlighted to help to build confidence, including not asking pupils to read aloud in class and differentiating reading tasks to ensure they were appropriate to reading levels. In addition, providing reading and homework clubs was viewed as beneficial.

"Buddy reading with an older/more able pupil on a daily basis"

Primary SENCO

"Never ask pupil to read aloud, if they do want to make sure other pupils are supportive"

Secondary Teacher

The use of buddying and peer tutoring techniques was explored in a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017). This suggested that peer tutoring needs to be carefully planned and managed, with appropriate training for tutors and a task set at the correct level. It was also reported that students with SEN can act as tutors for younger children which can help to build confidence and consolidate knowledge.

Exploring reading difficulties

Nearly a quarter of respondents across all types of setting highlighted methods they would use to explore reading and spelling difficulties. In primary settings the use of discussions with parents regarding reading issues and strategies that could be used at home was reported as being effective. It was also suggested that it would be beneficial to find out if there were any concerns regarding hearing or sight issues. In secondary and college settings it was suggested that referrals to outside professionals such as Educational Psychologists or dyslexia specialists may be of benefit.

> *"Contact parents where appropriate to discuss if the child finds reading tricky at home"*

Primary Teacher

> *"Possible referral to Educational Psychologist for assessment and further information"*

College SENCO

Interventions

Interventions to support students experiencing reading and spelling difficulties were suggested by staff in all types of settings. In primary schools the main interventions highlighted were [Acceleread and Accelerwrite](#), which are apps aimed at improving reading and writing. In secondary schools the use of [Lexia](#) which is designed to support struggling readers develop fundamental skills was highlighted as beneficial. A further intervention, [Toe-by-Toe,](#) which is designed to help students with reading difficulties and/or dyslexia was reported to be effective. All of these interventions were used in both primary and secondary settings.

In colleges, the main intervention that was highlighted was [Read and Write Gold](#) which is literacy software used to support independent working.

Supporting students with difficulties concentrating

Respondents were asked what they put in place if a student found it hard to concentrate and attend to instructions. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

It was reported that staff would use strategies such as making adjustments to their classroom environments and the language they used when talking to students. It was also suggested that making referrals to outside professionals such as Educational Psychologists could be beneficial.

Environment Adjustments

When supporting students who have difficulty concentrating and attending to instructions the use of a fidget or tangle toys was the most commonly reported strategy in secondary and college settings and was also a high priority strategy in primary schools.

> *"Bit of blu-tac or tangle toy for the child to hold and 'fiddle with' on the carpet during times when the child is finding concentration and attention more challenging"*

> Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) highlights that research focusing on the use of fidget or tangle toys has shown mixed results. It would appear that when used during auditory tasks (such as responding to verbal questioning) there may be benefits, but there may be less use or even counterproductive results during visual tasks (such as reading from a board). However, it is important to consider that this was small-scale research.

The importance of considering appropriate seating arrangements was also reported across all settings and was the second most commonly reported strategy in secondary schools and colleges. In primary settings this would involve considering the students position in relation to the teacher and also, potentially, the use of individual workstations or table dividers. In secondary and college settings there was more emphasis on the benefits of placing students near positive student role models or members of staff and actively reducing or removing distractions. These distractions could be identified through observation of the students in classroom settings.

> *"Good seating, minimum distractions within the environment, short tasks with rest breaks"*

> Primary Teacher

> *"Strategies provided to teaching staff regarding limiting distractions such as where the pupil is seated, distractions in the classroom such as being sat near a window or door"*

> Secondary SENCO

"Think carefully about seating plan – sit on the outside of the classroom, next to a student who is able to focus quicker"

Secondary Teacher

Methods used to support students to plan how to complete activities were found to be beneficial across all settings. In primary schools this was the most reported strategy and involved the use of visual planners or Now and Next Boards and checklists. These were highly visual with limited words and used pictures and symbols. In secondary and college settings these strategies were not used as widely, but were provided through using written lists of instructions rather than relying on verbal ones, although visual planners were highlighted as effective by some staff in secondary settings.

"Task planner with dot of blu-tac to enable the child to follow the instructions for the session (blu-tac moved as instructions are completed)"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO

"Task list of what they have to do which is visible for them to access and they know what they have to do for each activity"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

In all settings the benefits of providing tasks broken down into small and achievable chunks was highlighted. It was suggested that these tasks should be separated, with opportunities for breaks, and could be supported through the use of sandtimers to ensure the student knew when their next break would be.

"Sand timers – clear visual timer for how long they need to focus on the activity until they can have a break – building up the time as/ when concentration improves"

Primary Teacher

"Giving them frequent breaks after completing an activity"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

"Break down lesson into a certain amount of time so it is easier for the student to digest all the information"

College Support Staff

"Regular breaks when you get them to stand up, do an exercise on the spot, then return to the work you were doing"

Use of language

Across all types of setting there was a focus on how language used by teaching staff could impact a student's ability to concentrate and attend to instructions. In both primary and secondary settings one of the most frequently reported strategies was breaking down or 'chunking' instructions and allowing time for the student to repeat them back to ensure understanding. In college settings, staff suggested it was beneficial to limit the amount of talking in teaching sessions and use multi-sensory approaches.

"Ensure instructions are broken down and given progressively – direct instructions to the pupil and ask them to repeat them back"

Primary Teacher

"Have visual reminders of instructions that need carrying out, easily accessible to pupil"

Primary Teacher

"Only give one instruction at a time – put the lesson tasks on separate bits of paper and give one out each time he/she finishes the former one. Put them on the desk in front of him/ her"

Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Tutors to ensure instructions are written down where possible and broken down if needed"

College SENCO

Further information gathering

In a small number of primary and secondary settings it was reported that referrals to outside agencies such as Educational Psychology could be made to gain further insight.

"…following discussion with parents and class teachers it could lead to a referral to paediatrics with regard to further investigation"

Primary SENCO

"Find a cause. Sometimes it is tiredness and a word with parents about appropriate bedtimes is the way forward. Is it a hearing problem? Many young children suffer from glue ear"

In college settings, there was a focus on working with the student to ascertain what they found most useful and what had worked in the past and making sure that all tutors knew these strategies.

> *"A support plan would be agreed. We have a bank of strategies. Tutors would employ the strategies the student has chosen, if these did not work others would be tried"*

College SENCO

Interventions

In terms of interventions, the only one highlighted was Language Link, a resource for screening assessment and intervention. Interestingly, this was only mentioned for secondary schools even though it was considered to be beneficial for students with language and communication difficulties in primary schools.

Supporting students displaying challenging behaviour

Respondents were asked what they put in place if a student displayed challenging behaviour in lessons, such as shouting out or leaving their desk. They were also asked to list any resources, strategies or interventions they had found to be particularly effective when supporting students with these needs.

Strategies

Strategies reported as being effective by staff included referring to the school or college behaviour policy and using methods to try and understand the underlying causes of the behaviour. It was also suggested that implementing classroom strategies such as de-escalation techniques and providing a safe space could also be beneficial.

Behaviour policies

When working with students who display challenging behaviour in lessons the most frequently reported strategy identified by staff in all types of settings was to refer to the school or college behaviour policy and ensure that it is being applied consistently.

> *"Providing child with a clear plan with clear sanction and rewards that are applied consistently"*

Primary SENCO

"Make expectation, rewards and sanction very clear to the pupil. Individual prompt cards as a reminder"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

"A calm and assertive manner and explanation of boundaries at the beginning of each session usually sets up a good workshop"

<div align="right">College Support Staff</div>

Understanding the causes of behaviour

It was also reported in all types of settings that staff exploring the underlying causes of student behaviour was important. This was reported as many times as following a behaviour policy in secondary schools. In primary and secondary schools it was suggested that this process should also involve talking to parents.

"Discussion with staff/ parents/ child about when they are being disruptive and consideration to possible reasons why"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"Identify the reason for behaviour – is work too hard, is it the neighbouring students? Have conversation with student as to why the behaviour is bad"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

"Parent engagement – is there something we do not know causing this behaviour?"

<div align="right">Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher</div>

In a small number of colleges it was highlighted that discussion with the student would be important in order to agree a support plan, and that all tutors knew and understood a student's triggers. While staff in primary and secondary schools did report talking to students, in colleges there would appear to be more of a focus on the student reporting issues themselves and being involved in planning support.

"If a student discloses a support need or circumstance which has been a contributing factor to poor behaviour we agree a support plan with the student and arrange for the Progression Specialist to meet and monitor the student on a regular basis"

<div align="right">College SENCO</div>

In primary and secondary schools it was also suggested that further understanding of student needs could be ascertained through referral to outside agencies such as Educational Psychology, CAMHS or a specialist behaviour support team.

"As a last resort, in very extreme cases, we would refer to the Primary Behaviour Support Service who would work in school and at home to enable best chance of change for the child"

Primary SENCO

"Liaison with parents to discuss referral to GP to request a referral to identify origins of difficulties"

Secondary SENCO

Classroom strategies

In all settings there were a number of classroom strategies suggested to support students who were displaying challenging behaviour. These included the use of 'planned ignoring' or distraction for low-level behaviour and the careful consideration of seating plans or individual workstations to ensure student were removed from distractions and/or placed next to positive role models.

"Ignore disruptive behaviour where possible but praise nearby children who are doing the right thing"

Primary Teacher

"Seating plan – surrounding the student with calming influences"

Secondary Teacher

"Strategies to engage for a short period then ability to move about whilst not disturbing others"

College Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO

In addition, it was suggested that it is important to ensure that staff stay calm, use de-escalation techniques and do not become confrontational with students.

"Being honest and fair with the child. Not shouting but giving constructive feedback"

Primary Teacher

"Never be confrontational. We all mirror behaviour so a student is likely to respond negatively if they perceive negative behaviour"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

In primary schools the use of visual resources to support a student and provide cues regarding appropriate behaviour were suggested as being beneficial. These included 'Now and Next' boards, emotion cards so a student could indicate how they are feeling, and photographs of the student demonstrating good behaviour to show them as a reminder. This type of visual prompt was also used to demonstrate to pupils when they had been successful in terms of their behaviour.

"Reminders of the good listening rules – individual set for the child on a lanyard – class teacher with a set on their lanyard to prompt by just holding up"

<div align="right">Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher / SENCO</div>

"Personalised motivation rewards for example 'how many marbles can you get in the jar?"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

In all types of setting building a positive relationship with a student who is displaying challenging behaviour was described as important. This could be achieved through the use of positive praise for 'on-task' behaviour and 'catch me being good' strategies. It was also reported in primary schools that agreeing behaviour targets with students which were manageable was important. These types of strategies need to be applied consistently for them to be most effective.

"Highlight good behaviour when child is not calling out or getting on with their work"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

"Agree targets/ rewards for not shouting out in part of the lesson NOT the lesson as a whole that would not be achievable. This would be a long term goal"

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

"Develop a positive relationship, investing time and effort into understanding the root causes of the behaviour"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"Ensure that the environment and lessons are calm and suitable for the student, as students often show difficult behaviour if they are finding work difficult. Also, ensure that the student feels valued and respected by others in the class"

College Teacher

In primary schools the use of social stories was described as being beneficial for students displaying challenging behaviour. A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) indicates that these stories support the provision of social information and situations students may find it difficult to respond to. Research focusing on social stories found that adding perspective sentences could enable stories to become more meaningful. It is important, however, to note that the majority of research focusing on social stories has been conducted with students with an autism spectrum disorder, and therefore may not be as effective for other students.

In secondary settings staff said that some students benefitted from the use of Daily Report Cards (DRCs).

"Monitoring report to be filled in by staff in every lesson and shared with parents"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) highlighted that students who used DRCs for one school year significantly improved their classroom behaviour compared to a non-intervention group. Further research concluded that adherence to using Daily Report Cards was relatively stable throughout the year, although teacher adherence increased slightly around monthly research observation visits when adherence was being assessed. Therefore, best practice would be for SENCOs or Student Support Teams to support teachers using DRCs to ensure adherence and consistency are maintained.

An important aspect of the success of DRCs is that students understand why targeted behaviours are unhelpful and what steps they need to take to make those positive changes and achieve their goals. Best practice would be to develop DRCs in consultation with students and parent/carers, and they are most effective when goals are few in number and written in a positive manner.

Safe spaces

Across different types of settings, providing students with a 'safe space' was highlighted as beneficial. It was reported that safe spaces should be available to students when they are feeling overwhelmed and should not be viewed as punishment or isolation. There should be key adults available to students at these times to support the student to feel more contained and discuss issues if they wish to do so.

"Specific plan agreed by staff giving clear expectations with regard to the child and the use of a time out space, either in classroom or the nurture rooms"

<div align="right">Primary SENCO</div>

"Named person to build up a relationship with and verbalise frustrations. Opportunities for retrospective conversation based on incidents and new alternative reactions"

<div align="right">Secondary SENCO</div>

Interventions

Similarly to students who were experiencing anxiety within primary and secondary settings the use of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention was highlighted by staff as beneficial. In addition to this, in primary settings the use of the [Thrive Approach](#) which is designed to support optimal social and emotional development through the application of neuroscience, attachment theory and child development theory was said to be useful.

Barriers to supporting students with SEN

Staff were asked to about any resources, strategies and interventions they had used which they felt had limited effectiveness and also, any barriers and issues they encountered when supporting students on SEN support. There were very limited responses given in terms of specific resources found ineffective and therefore these are not reported here. The responses focusing both on ineffective strategies and interventions and issues staff encountered had a great deal of overlap, and are therefore considered in this section by theme.

Intervention issues

Across all settings respondents focused on barriers and issues they encountered when implementing interventions for students on SEN support. They reported that sourcing suitable interventions could be problematic for a number of reasons and that some students could find accepting and engaging with this type of support difficult.

It was reported that, while an intervention may work for one student, it may not for another.

"Different interventions have varying levels of effectiveness depending on the child. Sometimes an intervention is tried, but proves ineffective for that particular child, so other avenues for support are then sought"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Knowing the pupil is key. Knowing what they can cope with and what helps them. Something that works for one pupil won't necessarily work for another"

Secondary Teacher

Across all settings reasons for interventions not being effective for some students were suggested. These included students not being ready to engage with support due to their emotional state or being disengaged from learning.

"If a child arrives at school in an agitated state because of something that has happened at home it can be a long process to settle them"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Lack of interest on the part of the student…different maturities, difficulties or attitudes towards learning"

Secondary Teaching Assistant

In college settings it was reported that students who were now studying and succeeding in vocational courses could be disinclined to attend intervention sessions for Maths and English.

"(Students) are unwilling to give up time from their own breaks or vocational subject to work on spelling and maths concepts"

College SENCO

"For many of our less able students they aren't able to see the value in studying English and Maths, many feel they will never pass in those subjects"

College SENCO

In secondary and college settings it was also suggested that students could feel self-conscious about receiving support and not want to be seen as different from their peers.

"Pupils may feel singled out or different and very conscious of that in front of others"

Secondary Teacher

"Students have not been very keen to use suggested IT resources especially not in front of other students"

College SENCO

The design of some interventions was also considered to be important if they were to be effective. Interventions which were overly complicated, too narrow in their focus, did not encourage transfer back into the classroom or were not age appropriate were all considered to the problematic.

"Only focusing on phonics doesn't work because learning to read and write should be taught by using all the strategies teachers have available to them"

Primary Teacher

"Some strategies/ programmes are very young for secondary school pupils. Do not inspire a teenager"

Secondary Higher Level Teaching Assistant

"Online programmes are not age appropriate for 16 to 18 years old. The target audience is too young"

College SENCO

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) reports that research evidence suggests transfer of skills from interventions should not be assumed and there needs to be explicit links between tasks being practised to an academic skill which is being developed and supported. In addition, this report also highlights the difficulties faced by many secondary and college settings in finding age-appropriate interventions.

Staffing issues

A further barrier reported by staff when supporting students with SEN was staffing issues, which included difficulties caused by changes in staff, insufficient time to plan, a need for more staff training, and limited staff availability.

One of the main issues highlighted was that it could be difficult for teachers and teaching assistants to plan their work together.

"In class support from teaching assistants is a resource that has so much potential but is often limited by the lack of time for the teacher and teaching assistant to interact and plan together"

Secondary Teacher

"Teaching assistants are not able to share their expertise on strategies and student needs. It also means that the teacher cannot optimise the use of teaching assistants as there is no shared planning time"

Secondary Teacher

The responses also indicated that changes in staffing can have an impact on the effectiveness of interventions and the consistency of support provided.

"Staff changes can affect these (interventions) *so being consistent is so important and keeping the same staff in the class is most helpful"*

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Learning Support staff are constantly being moved from class to class rather than being with the same classes all year which makes it more difficult to build relationships and is unsettling for some students"

College Support Staff

Staff reported that a lack of knowledge among staff regarding SEN and the limited availability of staff specifically trained in delivering interventions for students with SEN could act as a barrier to successful support.

"Employing quality staff for SEN support when support staff wages are so low"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"There are too many time/ funding restraints on the SEN Higher Level Teaching Assistant to use their specialist knowledge to help children with SEN"

Primary Teacher

There were also implications in terms of providing support due to the availability of staff.

"Our teachers and teaching assistants are spread too thinly. We have to be selective about the use of teaching assistant/ teacher time to support interventions for SEN pupils"

Primary SENCO

"Lack of time within the classroom to apply individual interventions such as speech activities. Sometimes in a class there can be more than one child required to have 1:1 activities daily and it can become unmanageable"

Primary Teacher

"SEMH support has recently taken a blow with staffing cuts to mentors. Money has been prioritised over the SEMH needs of some students"

Secondary SENCO

Access to resources

Staff reported access to resources such as external agencies was a barrier in terms of providing support. In some cases this was due to lack of agencies in the local area or long waiting lists, but school budgets were sometimes unable to support buying in outside professionals.

"I am certain I have at least two children with dyslexia but they won't be diagnosed until they are older so I get no extra support"

Primary Teacher

"Local Authority support is expensive to schools or limited. There is currently no Educational Psychology support available"

Secondary SENCO

Within college settings, there was a focus on the impact of resources in terms of support available to them in comparison to school settings.

"College does not receive the standard external support compared to schools. Support changes when a young person reaches Further Education"

College SENCO

Classroom based issues

In terms of classroom based issues, there were concerns raised from some settings about specific issues, including the level of differentiation that was occurring, the lack of challenge for some SEN students and inconsistency across classrooms.

"Lessons are not always differentiated as they should be. This has improved a lot over the last couple of years but still an issue in some classes"

Primary SENCO

"Teachers are not always aware of SEN students in their classes…pace of work of often too fast and does not allow sufficient time for overlearning"

Secondary Teaching Assistant

"A supportive and consistent approach is required across all settings dealing with the individual student. This can be challenging within a secondary school environment when pupils come into contact with a number of staff across the day"

Secondary SENCO

Parental Engagement

Finally, in both primary and secondary schools the impact of lack of parental engagement was considered as a barrier when supporting students with SEN.

"If a child does not practice the skills being taught in school when they are at home then this has a significantly negative impact upon progress, attainment and feelings of achievement for the child"

Primary SENCO

"Difficult home circumstances which hinder effective engagement and home support"

The issue of parental engagement was explored in a recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) which highlighted the vital role parents play in supporting students with SEND. The report suggests that parental engagement is important as parents or carers can provide support and consistency for any approaches or interventions used at school. However, parents can often require additional support from settings.

Deployment of Teaching Assistants

The following section reports the findings on the deployment of teaching assistants in schools and colleges to support students with SEN. Senior managers and SENCOs were asked questions regarding how teaching assistants were used and supported across the whole school. Teachers were asked to comment on the role of teaching assistants in lessons and if they felt there were any barriers to their effective deployment when working with students with SEN.

How Teaching Assistants work with students on SEN support

Headteachers, Deputy and Assistant Headteachers, SENCOs and teachers were asked how teaching assistants typically work with students on SEN support in their school or college. The findings are reported separately for schools and colleges.

Schools

The majority of respondents from primary and secondary schools said that teaching assistants provided in-class support, working with individuals or groups of students who required input in addition to that given by the class teacher. Teaching assistants were often informed about which students to target and their input could involve checking students' understanding of a task, providing pre-teaching and differentiating tasks.

> *"To work either one-to-one or within small group to ensure children are engaged in work and stay on task. To further differentiate/ adapt work as needed through the lesson and to monitor/assess and feedback to me on progress/ difficulties experienced by the children"*

Primary Teacher

> *"I ask them to target particular students and give specific instructions to help them support students' key needs"*

Secondary Teacher

> *"They* (teaching assistants) *are assigned to classes and informed of which students are SEN and the kind of assistance they may need"*

Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

In some schools, staff felt very strongly that teaching assistants should not be deployed to support individual students, as this could cause students to become too reliant on support.

"We do not promote one-to-one support as we understand that this can result in students becoming reliant on the additional adult support"

Secondary SENCO

Teaching assistants were also often assigned to provide SEN support outside the classroom, usually through providing interventions for pupils with certain needs.

"Teaching Assistants support specific actions on a Learning Support Plan. They do this through additional class support either first thing in the morning or during the school day when the child is not engaged in other learning. They are trained to deliver the majority of interventions that take place in the school"

Primary Headteacher

"I have a team of 5 SEN teaching assistants who work across school to support class and withdraw. This can be one-to-one, small group or within class"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher and SENCO

"Teaching assistants are important to supporting pupils at SEN support, they…implement programmes such as literacy/dyslexia programmes"

Secondary SENCO

Different models from those above were also reported in some schools. For example, respondents described teaching assistants having a more pastoral role, running clubs for students or acting as key workers. A small number of schools also reported not employing any teaching assistants.

"They provide a strong link between school and home and develop a good relationship with parents"

Primary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"Many are 'key workers' attached to the more needy students. They follow the student through the timetable and help them with homework"

Secondary Deputy/ Assistant Headteacher

"The lunchtime club offers free access to a teaching assistant and a lot of pupils on SEN support attend"

Secondary SENCO

Colleges

Teaching assistants in colleges often had alternative titles and could be deployed differently than in schools. Some respondents from colleges described teaching assistants in roles to guide and prepare students for life in college and beyond, with titles such as a 'Learning and Behaviour Coach' or a 'Support worker'. These roles were usually not classroom based:

"We don't have teaching assistants…instead we have progression specialists, and as their name suggests, they focus on the progression of SEN students, monitoring, attendance, helping with applications, study skills and pastoral care"

College SENCO

"Learning and Behaviour Coaches are allocated to departments/ schools to support students on one-to-one, groups, workshops. They attend tutorials, support online, in exams and with behaviour strategies"

College SENCO

"We do not have teaching assistants. We have support workers that keep learners on track"

College SENCO

Some college respondents described teaching assistants being deployed in a similar capacity to those in schools, through providing support to students in lessons.

"Some in-class support, note taking, one-to-one support with homework"

College SENCO

"Rephrasing, explaining words/ tasks, breaking down tasks into smaller parts"

College SENCO

A recent rapid evidence assessment (Carroll et al, 2017) found that teaching assistants can certainly provide benefits to children with special educational needs, but they need to be appropriately supported to do so. For example, teaching assistants can deliver structured, evidence-based interventions effectively to individuals or small groups, but they should be given proper training, a thorough knowledge of a child's strengths and weaknesses, and adequate time to prepare and record their teaching. The Education Endowment Foundation have developed a [guidance report](#) for schools on how to make best use of teaching assistants.

How teaching assistants are supported

Headteachers, Deputy and Assistant Headteachers, and SENCOs were asked how they support teaching assistants to work effectively with students on SEN support in their school or college. Responses given by staff across settings and in different roles were very similar.

Within all types of setting the main method used to support teaching assistants was training. This was delivered in a number of ways, either through external training courses or, more commonly, within settings. In some secondary schools it was highlighted that teaching assistants were supported to be specialists within certain subject areas or SEN.

The SENCOs within primary and secondary schools played an important role in supporting teaching assistants, either through regular meetings with them to discuss their work and share information or through modelling strategies. From the perspective of members of the senior management team, teaching assistants were supported through being observed and reviewed, and through the performance management process.

Barriers to deploying teaching assistants effectively

Class teachers were asked what barriers they experience, if any, to deploying teaching assistants effectively in their lessons. A number of barriers were highlighted by teachers across all settings. Many teachers focused on issues surrounding the training and experience of teaching assistants.

It was reported by some respondents that teaching assistants did not always have the up-to-date knowledge regarding curriculum changes to support students in the most effective manner.

> *"Teaching assistants may have limited understanding of the content of the lesson e.g. knowledge of grammar within the new English curriculum. They do not know how to effectively deal with misconceptions which pupils have"*

Primary Teacher

A lack of training could also be an issue when teaching assistants were asked to deliver interventions to students with SEN.

> *"They have not had the training, therefore they do not feel confident to deliver the intervention"*

Primary Teacher

There were also concerns about teaching assistants' experience working with students who had SEN. This could become a particular issue when teaching assistants

misconstrued their input, which could result in a situation where the student was too reliant on support.

> *"Less experienced teaching assistants are sometimes unsure or less confident to work with SEN children"*

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

> *"Some teaching assistants are too quick to suggest answers rather than supporting children to find the answer themselves"*

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

> *"Some teaching assistants will be overly helpful and take away the thinking process for the student which then has an effect on assessment situations"*

<div align="right">Secondary Teacher</div>

Another barrier highlighted by staff in both primary and secondary schools was that of time. Some respondents said that teaching assistants are often not in a class for the whole lesson, or are removed to cover other classes, which made continuity of support difficult.

> *"If they are doing play duties I lose them for the times when I am doing input and these children would benefit from input as a smaller group"*

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

> *"Once again financial pressures mean that there is never as much teaching assistant support as is needed, nor enough time to fully brief teaching assistants or receive their feedback"*

<div align="right">Primary Teacher</div>

> *"Most teaching assistants are off timetable and support exam access several times in the academic year"*

<div align="right">Secondary Teacher</div>

A lack of time meant that teaching assistants were often not available to plan with class teachers. This could mean they sometimes did not know what was expected from students they were working with. This was particularly difficult, as often the teaching assistants would have a more in-depth overview of the students and their needs throughout the school setting.

"Teaching assistants are only paid for teaching times so there is no allocated time for us to sit and discuss strategy"

Primary Teacher

"Teaching assistants often understand the needs of particular individuals better than anyone else and could provide an insight into the planning and delivery of lessons"

Secondary Teacher

"Our team is excellent but we could do with more time to plan together"

College Teacher

Sources of information to support students with SEN

Staff in schools and colleges were asked to identify where they go for knowledge about how to support their students on SEN support. The responses from Headteachers, Deputy/Assistant Headteachers, Teachers, Tutors and Teaching Assistants are shown in Figure 6.

The most frequently used source of information was talking to others, rather than published resources. Using the school SENCO as a source of information was the most reported, with just over three quarters (76.2%) of respondents stating that they used this frequently. This was followed by talking to other staff and talking other teachers in their school or college, which was used frequently by over half of respondents (54.5% and 54.0% respectively). Using outside professionals such as school nurses, Speech and Language therapists and Educational Psychologists was used frequently by nearly half of respondents (48.0%).

50.4% of respondent reported never using social media. This was followed by non-education based agencies (such as charities or the police) (42.4%) and government websites (41.7%).

Figure 6: Other Staff Sources of Knowledge on SEN
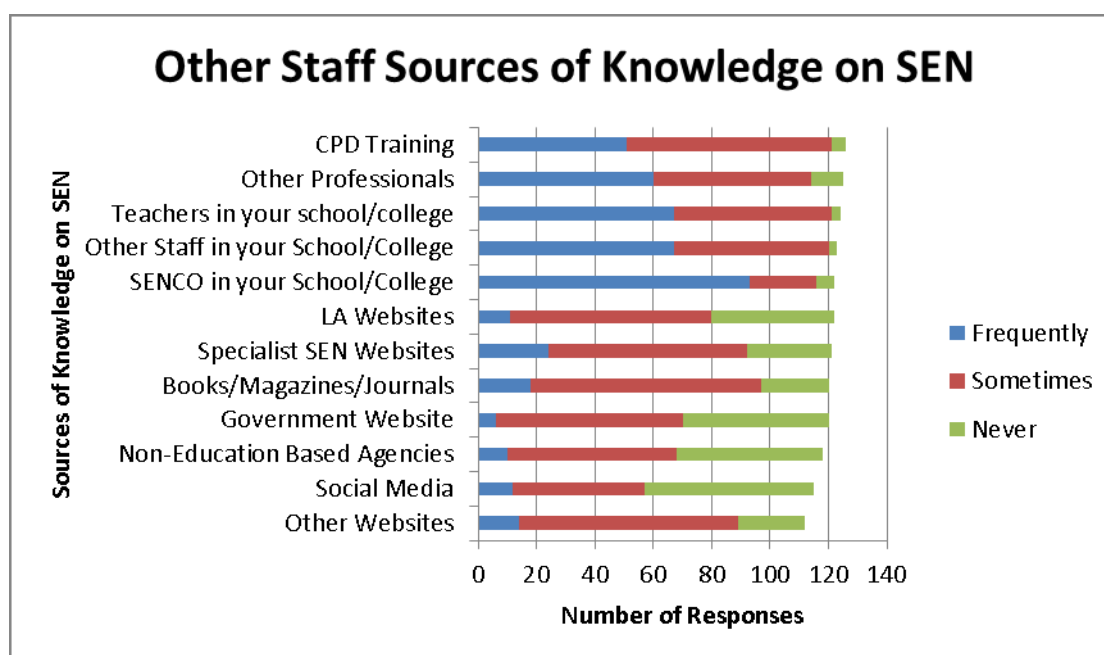
Due to the role of a SENCO being more specialised compared to other staff members, the options given to this group were different. The responses from SENCOs are shown in Figure 7. The most common source of information for SENCOs was from outside professionals, with nearly two-thirds (63.0%) stating that they did this frequently. This was followed by using CPD training, reported as used frequently by half (50.0%) of SENCOs. Discussing issues with SENCOs in other schools to gain information was also common, reported by nearly half of SENCOs (48.1%). Accessing specialist SEN

websites was the most used online resource, used frequently by nearly half of SENCOs (SENCOs). The majority (62%) of SENCOs reported never using social media or chatrooms as a source of information.

Figure 7: SENCO Sources of Knowledge on SEN
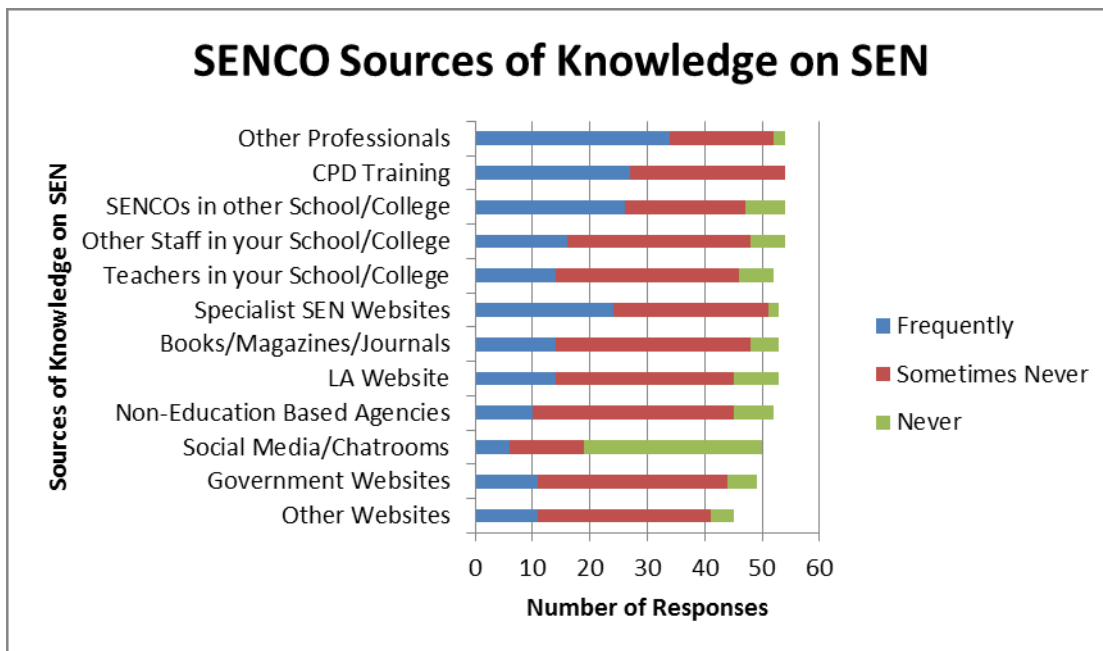
Respondents who said they used 'specialist SEN websites', 'other websites', 'books/ magazine/ journals', 'social media/ chatrooms' or 'non-educational based agency or service' frequently were asked to name the particular resources they used.

This question did not receive a high number of responses. Where answers were given they are reported for each area in order of frequency, with the number responses provided in brackets.

Table 1: Frequently Accessed Resources

Type of Resources	Specific Resources Accessed
Specialist SEN Websites	• Charity/Specialist Education Websites (for example, Autism Society, Communication Trust, National Literacy Trust) (20) • NASEN (12) • Special Needs Jungle (3) • Optimus Education (2) • SEN Magazine Online (2)

	• SEN Leader (1), Yellow Kite (1), Essential SEN Database (1), Special Needs UK (1), SENDIAS (1), NAPLIC (1), senteacher.org (1), Inclusive Technology (1)
Other Websites	• Charity/Specialist Education websites (MIND, National Autistic Society, British Dyslexia Association) (10) • TES (6) • Health Websites including NHS (3) • NASEN (2) • DfE (1), BBC (1), Elsa Network (1), Inclusive Technology (1)
Books, Magazines or Journals	• Specialist Education / textbooks (7) • Specialist SEN Magazines (such as SEN Leader, SEN Magazine) (6) • NASEN (6) • TES (6) • Online journals (6) • NAPLIC (1), Articles recommended by SENCO (1)
Social Media or Chatrooms	• Facebook (SEND related links) (11) • Twitter (6) • Pinterest (2) • Instagram (1)
Non-Educational Based Agency or Service	• CAMHS (2) • Police Liaison/PCSO (2) • Social Worker (1), NSPCC (1), Speech and Language (1), NHS (1), Charity Workers (1), Counsellors (1)

Conclusions

The results of the survey have provided insight into how primary, secondary and college settings are working to meet the needs of students with SEN. From the early stages of identification a wide range of methods are used by both SENCOs and other members of the teaching staff. There was, however, lack of clarity in relation to who should be responsible for identifying SEN across all settings.

Education professionals from all types of setting suggested a wide range of methods that they would put in place to support students with different needs. There was overlap between primary, secondary and college settings for some of the methods suggested for example, the benefit of working with a wide range of people including the wider school or college staff, parents and outside professionals was highlighted across settings. There were also marked differences to take into account the age and developmental stage of student. Differences included the increased use of assistive technology as students progress through school settings and into college and greater emphasis being placed on including students in the planning and implementation of their support as they progress through their education.

When working with students with SEN a number of barriers to providing the most effective support were identified. Across all types of setting staff said there were issues with resourcing and the consistency of support available in terms of both support staff within settings such as teaching assistants and also the availability of outside professionals. There were also issues surrounding the quality of lessons for students with SEN and the difficulties staff could find in meeting needs within a classroom setting. Within college settings, one of the main barriers identified was that students were often disengaged by education by the time they arrived or were reluctant to receive support. Staff in secondary and college settings also highlighted the lack of interventions and strategies suitable for these age groups. This finding is supported by research contained within the rapid evidence assessment

School staff also reported on how teaching assistants were deployed within school and college settings. Within schools, these staff members were generally viewed as a valuable resource, however there could be issues in regards to students becoming too dependent on the support and inconsistency of provision. In college settings, teaching assistants often took on differing roles which were less focused on in-class provision and more on supporting students with a wider range of issues including developing life-skills.

Finally, staff from all sectors highlighted a wide range of sources of information they accessed to gain knowledge about meeting the needs of students with SEN. These were wide ranging and included accessing websites, journals and specialist training. Respondents also reported gaining knowledge from other members of staff in their

schools and from professionals and non-education based agencies from outside their settings.

Overall, the survey has provided a valuable insight into what is actually happening in primary, secondary and college settings to support students with SEN from the viewpoint of all members of staff who work with students. A number of areas were highlighted which staff view as requiring further work or input, however there were positive responses in terms of the wide range of strategies that settings are able to implement to benefit students with SEN.

References

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Appendix 1

Identifying Special Educational Needs

Question 1: Do you have responsibility for identifying students who might have Special Educational Needs?

Question 2: How do you identify students who might have Special Educational Needs?

Question 3: Once you have identified a student with Special Educational Needs what would you do next?

Supporting students with Special Educational Needs

Question 4a: If a student was displaying difficulties with **language and communication** what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 4b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students with **language and communication** needs?

Question 5a: If a student was displaying difficulties with **fine motor control** affecting their handwriting and maths what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 5b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students with **fine motor control** needs?

Question 6a: If a student was displaying difficulties with **high levels of anxiety** what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 6b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students with **high levels of anxiety**?

Question 7a: If a student was **excessively slow at reading and sounding out letters when spelling** what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 7b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students with **reading and spelling** difficulties?

Question 8a: If a student found it **hard to concentrate and attend to instructions** what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 8b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students who find it **hard to concentrate and attend to instructions**?

Question 9a: If a student was **challenging** in lessons (e.g. shouting out, leaving their desk) what would be your plan of action? Please describe what you would typically put in place.

Question 9b: Are there any resources, strategies or interventions you have found to be particularly effective in supporting students who show **challenging behaviour**?

Barriers and Issues

Question 10: Have you tried any resources, strategies or interventions to support students with Special Educational Needs that you found did not work or had limited effectiveness?

Question 11: Why do you think these resources, strategies and interventions did not work or had limited effectiveness?

Questions 12: Is there anything not happening in your school / college that you think should be happening to enable SEN support for students to progress well?

Question 13: What barriers do you experience, if any, in supporting SEN support students to progress well?

Deployment of Teaching Assistants

For headteachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and SENCOs only

Question 14: How are teaching assistants typically involved in work with students on SEN support in your school / college?

Question 15: How are teaching assistants supported to work effectively with student on SEN support in your school / college?

For teachers only

Question 16: How do you typically use teaching assistants to support students on SEN support in your lessons?

Question 17: What barriers do you experience, if any, with deploying teaching assistants in your lessons effectively?

Sources of knowledge

For teaching assistants, teachers, assistant headteachers, deputy headteachers and headteachers only

Question 18: Where do you get your knowledge from to support students on SEN support?

- Government websites

- Local authority websites

- Specialist SEN websites

- Other websites

- Books / Magazines / Journals

- Social Media / Chatrooms

- SENCO in your school / college

- Teachers in your school / college

- Other staff in your school / college

- Outside professionals

- Non-education based agencies

- CPD training

Question 19: You answered that you frequently use other websites / specialist websites / book, magazines, journals / social media and chatrooms / non-education based agencies or services, can you tell us which you use?

For SENCOs only

Question 20: Where do you get your knowledge from to support students on SEN support?

- Government websites

- Local authority websites

- Specialist SEN websites

- Other websites

- Books / Magazines / Journals

- Social Media / Chatrooms

- SENCO in other schools / colleges

- Teachers in your school / college

- Other staff in your school / college

- Outside professionals

- Non-education based agencies

- CPD training

Question 21: You answered that you frequently use other websites / specialist SEN websites / book, magazines, journals / social media and chatrooms / non-education based agencies or services, can you tell us which you use?