

General

1. You are not expected to know everything but you need to know where to go to find out!
2. Don't be afraid to ask for help
3. Time spent networking is never wasted. It might look like a chat to others but it really pays to be on speaking terms with all school staff, advisors, those who work at County Hall, governors, parents etc etc. You also make good friends along the way.
4. Make a point of attending cluster meetings etc It is vital to network. This is where you will pick up some of your best ideas.
5. Form good relationships with outside agencies – if you do they will help you when they need them.
6. Visit other schools and find out what other SENCOs do.
7. Join the SENCO forum.
8. Do NASEN training for SENCOs
9. Be realistic about what you can do. Set realistic targets – you don't have to do it all at once.
10. Don't do the job if you are the kind of person who needs a lot of thanks and praise -you don't often get it as a SENCO. Treasure the thanks you do get from the parents who recognise your efforts. You have to understand that for some parents (especially in primary) you are the bearer of the news they don't want to hear. Some parents may not even want to be seen talking to you -it is an acknowledgement in front of other parents that their child has problems. Fathers of boys with difficulties can be particularly tricky-anger/grief/guilt can make them very hard to engage with. .Sometimes the more severe the problem the easier the parents are to work with-they have come to some terms with their child's problems before school.
11. Be assertive – if you need information from colleagues they must stick to deadlines.
12. Have a notebook (hardback!) date each other page and write down both your to-do lists and every single thing you do and your reflections upon what you did and how you will/would do it differently next time.
13. Don't pretend you have all the answers-or a magic wand.
14. Don't underestimate your own value in the school- it is easy to be sidelined especially in an 'academic' and high achieving school. Your role is important. Some of the teachers who do very well with the very able wouldn't have a clue how to teach the much less able.
15. Do it for the children-or don't do it at all. It may well be a stepping stone in your career but if you really don't enjoy it and find it more rewarding than any other job don't do it!
16. Learn how the SEN finances work and fight your corner.
17. Appoint and surround yourself with people with 'the right stuff'!
18. Never throw anything out thinking you won't need it – you will! You may get enquiries about provision made at school years after students have left.
19. Save everything you make for students. File it away on your computer. You can re-jig an awful lot of ideas over and over again

Tips for SENCOs - SENCo Forum - Janice Rolnick

20. Collect policy documents – training materials etc that those generous people on the forum offer. Writing your own “cold” takes a great deal of time. It is easier to see what other people have done and then decide what you want for your own school – and a great deal quicker too.
21. Get comfortable chairs – buy tissues in bulk.
22. Share the problems. Some staff may be as difficult as students. Everyone gets to work with them at some time. Find what works best.
23. Join the SENCO forum, one of the best resources you will ever find. senco-forum@lists.education.gov.uk
24. Always be honest. Tell parents you can't do something if you can't do it. Tell TAs their jobs depend on funding if that's the case.
25. Shout up when you are overloaded. Ask 'what do you want me to stop doing' if asked to take on too much.
26. Model good practice. Tell others when they do well. Everyone needs praise!

Management of TAS

1. Get your TAs on your side – make them feel they are part of a team. Make managing the TAs a top priority, if they are behind you they will be supporting the pupils effectively and efficiently, if they're not you'll be spending all your time dealing with the fall-out.
2. Fight their corner if necessary.
3. Be clear about your expectations of TA conduct and behaviour/dress code etc
4. Listen to your TAs, but let them know you have the ultimate say so
5. Make sure they have a timetable, and that they stick to it.
6. Give them training opportunities, in-house and out when relevant.
7. Treat them fairly, but not all the same!
8. Nip bickering in the bud, don't allow grudges to fester.
9. If you lose some along the way because they can't accept that you are in charge - so be it!
10. Treat them with respect at all times - even when it hurts.
11. Develop your LSAs. Allow them to choose an area to develop – literacy – Asperger's – whatever the need in school and for their own interest. They read the books, go on courses, then share information.
12. Send them on courses which allow them to gain qualifications so they have a career ladder and something to aim for.
13. Make sure they have performance management.
14. Produce a TA handbook.

Admin

1. Get your year mapped out. Plan ahead e.g. set dates for important meetings such as annual reviews at the beginning of the year. There may be times when you will have to take support away to use elsewhere e.g. for public exams.
2. Try to find time to support some children in school.
3. Have an open office when the children can come and talk to you whenever they need to.
4. Write a half-termly newsletter for the teachers in the school keeping them up to date with what you are doing.
5. Send the SEN list to all teachers via e-mail and save it on the school system - no-one has an excuse then for not reading it.
6. Circulate pupil profiles or IEPs (whatever you write) in hard copy - as well as by e-mail.
7. Write regular information sheets for staff on various aspects of SEN.
8. Be meticulous about systems, paperwork and records – it will pay dividends in the long run.
9. Be organised-lists, lists, lists
10. Remember that a special need arises when there is a mismatch between what the curriculum demands of the child and what the child brings to the curriculum; the first response should be 'how can we change the curriculum so that it better fits the child and their learning needs?' rather than the other way round.
11. Don't conceptualise support only in terms of TA/LSA support: work to create learning opportunities that do aim to develop and improve children's core skills, especially literacy. Individual targets for children with special needs should be individual to them, not curriculum targets.
12. Budget to keep your area open and staffed from 8am until an hour after school has finished by using LSAs. Often problems are sorted there before they are real problems. Include lunchtime as well.
13. Encourage mixed year group working in your area.
14. When parents / carers are going through a rough time, ask 'and how are you?'. Kids who need support need parents / carers who can support them. Helping a parent / carer through a difficult time helps the child as well.
15. My mantra as a SENCo is always 'Big impact – Low Effort' – especially key in the current climate whereby SENCOs can feel 'un-skilled' with other pressures politically!! The premise behind my thinking here, is that if the SENCo can demonstrate a high impact-time ratio staff attitudes and perceptions change. Once opinion and attitudes start to support your work and ideals – harder issues can be addressed etc ...To assist – feel free to point anyone in direction of free stuff on my website – www.gdmorewood.com – I always feel a starting point of docs/materials that can be modified for immediate results is very handy – good luck!