

SEND has to be more than just paperwork

ANITA DEVI shares her views on how SEND paperwork could be reduced and gives feedback on a recent event on this topic

I was appointed as a SENCO 12 years ago. It was a difficult time for the school and I had just moved to the area. I started in the middle of the year and was a senior leader, teaching Year 6, and my partner teacher was on long-term sick leave. In addition, we had Ofsted (the long four day inspections) arriving within six weeks of my arrival. A true baptism of fire! My predecessor had been at the school and in post for a long time and there were established and historical systems in place. However, as a new starter, I was able to cast a fresh pair of eyes on what was happening and how effective it was. Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) were the norm, but these left me with more questions than answers and so began my mission to reduce the paperwork and make it purposeful. For me, purposeful SEND paperwork has impact at the point of planning and delivery and is not about having information stored in files.

Making changes

To make the changes I wanted, I started reflecting on a number of questions and many of these were shared with my team for their input.

- How does the paperwork we do (whatever shape or form that is) impact on teaching and learning?
- How does it improve outcomes for children and young people and engage support from parents and carers?
- Is there repetition in the system?
- What could be done better or differently?
- Do we have a progressive data/information/paperwork flow system that enables us to build up our knowledge of children's needs year-on year?
- How do we share information with external agencies, so their input builds on what we have done, or are already doing?

These six questions are good starting points for any school to authentically reflect on what they do, how and why.

A sustainable model of change

Change did not happen overnight and I had to think about the

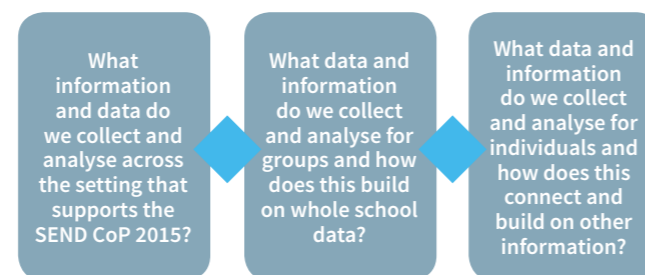
sequence of development events to ensure overall sustainability for my model of change, as well as ensuring buy-in from the staff. My starting point was reviewing the records teaching assistants kept for in-class support and out-of-class interventions.

We started by exploring what is useful information, to whom, why and in what format. The outcome was creating targeted feedback for teachers to inform planning, and specific information to measure the impact of interventions. This work predates the DISS and MAST Reports as well as the work on Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA). My teaching assistants became more focused and saw themselves as contributors to learning, rather than there to support behaviour or task completion.

The approach also supported my vision to increase the independence of children.

How to evaluate paperwork

Since moving on from my SENCO role I have supported many schools across the country in examining what they do to support pupils with SEND effectively. My work has been both strategic and operational (i.e. casework based). The process starts with a clear model of provision i.e. what is on offer whole-school, for specific groups and individuals with specific needs? This naturally lends itself to evaluating the paperwork in terms of the three points below.



Reducing the paperwork in SEND and making it meaningful and purposeful is still a work in progress. Over the years I have picked up individual cases where one piece of vital information about a child has been missed out resulting in the wrong diagnosis and provision. SEND is complex. However, I do feel we are travelling in the right direction.

Time to take action

In 2015-16, the two most common issues raised by SENCOs (on the SENCO forum and in other local and national discussions) was time and paperwork. In order to address both of these, we set up two projects.

Take Time

This is an ebook to help SENCOs manage their time. It is a method I have shared with SENCOs through a number of providers who deliver the National SENCO Award, my assurance being, 'You will be ahead of yourself within six weeks, provided you follow through'. Most walk away in disbelief and then six weeks later I get the message saying 'It works!'. The ebook contains five principles and activities for SENCOs to work through and adapt to their own personalities, lifestyles and work situations.

The ebook was launched on 8th March 2016 and that evening we received the following feedback.

'After an incredibly difficult day where I came home full of anxiety and feeling overwhelmed by my enormous workload, I sat down to trawl through my never ending trail of emails only to find the one below.

'I admit I normally delete such emails as I "don't have time" however the title of the ebook seemed too good to be true after the day I have had! I initially thought "this seems like what I need - I will read it after I've done XYZ" however (thankfully!) something made me read the ebook. I am so glad that I did. Not only was I totally overwhelmed by my workload I was emotionally and physically tired thinking of the challenges in front of me. Reading this book has energised me and given me practical strategies, that seem simple but so useful and I am eager to try them. Tomorrow I am pressing pause at work and sorting out my diary, office space and draws full of 'to do lists' and I'm taking control of my time. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!'

Other SENCOs around the country have shared how implementing the strategies proposed in the ebook has prevented them from resigning from a job they love!

To access *Take Time*, go to: my.optimus-education.com/node/15463

Reducing SEND paperwork training day

At the beginning of July, we held for the first time a SEND training day on 'Reducing SEND Paperwork'. More than 20 practitioners (primary and secondary)



Anita Devi kicks off the workshop

attended, including one from Bucharest and another from the Isle of Man. The day was structured to help participants define what a good system looks like, evaluate their own practice and formulate a plan for change.

We briefly touched on retention policies and the DPA/FOIA in light of the SEND reforms. In effect, SENCOs and SEND leaders left with a clearer vision on how to make the paperwork meaningful and how to develop accountable outcomes for children and young people.

Also launched on the day on the Optimus Knowledge Centre was a new template to help SENCOs translate completed EHCPs into meaningful classroom practice. Too often we focus on the paperwork up to and during assessment, but not what happens after. How do we support teachers in taking responsibility for the graduated approach with EHCPs? You can access 'Translating an EHC plan into active, provisional outcomes' at my.optimus-education.com/node/15952

The approach we adopted throughout the day aligns very much with the current national agenda of reducing the workload of teachers.

The next CPD conference on Reducing Paperwork is on 8th November. Look out for further details! ■

Feedback from the day

- I have a clear view of the task at hand and I can see how to support and implement this approach
- Very useful and thought provoking – good time to reflect
- Really enjoyed it – gained lots of ideas for changing our existing paperwork
- Brilliant, very powerful and worthwhile
- One of the best courses as time to reflect and plan (relevant!)
- Succinct and thought-provoking. Now need to prioritise
- Excellent and very helpful advice
- Lots of ideas to share with staff and improve practice
- Very focused, clear guidance and great resources