

**Natalie Packer**

The  
**Teacher's**  
**GUIDE** to  
**SEN**



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# Introduction

When you think about the pupils you teach, which ones immediately spring to mind? Is it the pupils who seem to effortlessly complete learning tasks and make progress easily? Is it the pupils who sit quietly in the corner of the classroom and just 'get on with things'? Or is it the pupils who find school difficult, display challenging behaviour and appear to require constant support to stay on task? It's probably the latter! The amount of time and energy focused on certain individuals as a result of their personalised learning needs can appear to be disproportionately high. However, every child has the right to be given the opportunity to succeed at school. For some, additional and targeted investment in them is exactly what they need in order to achieve.

The profile of pupils we teach today is very different to that of twenty (or even ten) years ago. Advancements in medicine have led to an increase in neonatal survival rates, meaning there are more pupils in our schools with complex learning difficulties and disabilities. A greater number of children and young people are now identified as having mental health problems, perhaps caused by traumatic early childhood experiences or external pressures, such as exam stress or the negative impact of social media. As professionals, we also have a greater awareness of the range of challenges children are experiencing and understand that their needs may be as a result of a variety of cognitive, communication, physical or emotional factors.

September 2014 brought with it some of the most significant changes to the national system for special educational needs (SEN) that we have seen for a long time. The introduction of the new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice raised the bar in terms of what is expected of teachers.<sup>1</sup> One of the key messages of the code is that every teacher is responsible and accountable for every pupil in their class,

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1 Department for Education, *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years* (2014). Ref: DFE-00205-2013. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>.

including those with SEN. So what does this mean in practice for you as a class or subject teacher? Essentially, it requires you to understand every individual's needs, have a range of knowledge and skills you can apply in the classroom and have the confidence to try out some new approaches. This isn't always easy, particularly when you may feel under pressure to demonstrate progress and achieve constantly improving results. However, being an inclusive teacher and getting great outcomes go hand in hand: what's good practice for pupils with SEN is, more often than not, good practice for all.

The information and advice given within this book is based on the assumption that, with a positive attitude, quality support and high aspirations, everyone can learn (albeit every child's learning priorities may be different). Your role is to enable all pupils to learn as effectively as possible. As committed teachers, we strive to do the best we can for all the children and young people we teach. If a pupil has SEN, this can often bring additional challenges for us as professionals, and this is where some guidance and support can be helpful.

*The Teacher's Guide to SEN* is for all primary and secondary teachers. It will be useful to those still training, those in the early stages of their careers and those more experienced practitioners who would like to refresh their knowledge or gather some new ideas to try in the classroom. Although the book has been predominantly written with teachers in mind, it will also be helpful to other education professionals who work with children and young people with SEN, including teaching assistants (TAs). The main aims of the book are:

- To give you an overview of SEN.
- To consolidate your understanding of what constitutes inclusive, high-quality teaching (HQT) for all pupils.
- To develop your knowledge of the main areas of SEN.
- To suggest strategies and ideas to use when teaching pupils with particular needs.
- To provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your own practice in relation to SEN.

The book is divided into two parts:

### **Part 1: The inclusive teacher**

This part has been written to give you an overall insight into what is meant by SEN. It aims to clarify your key responsibilities in providing HQT for all pupils and SEN support for some, where required. It also highlights the importance of working in partnership to meet the needs of those with SEN, for example with parents and TAs.

### **Part 2: The teacher's toolkit**

This part focuses on the broad areas of need, as outlined in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. It provides guidance on potential barriers to learning and offers practical strategies for supporting pupils with specific needs, such as moderate learning difficulties, autism and dyslexia. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive guide on every single learning need (now that would be a large publication!) but rather focuses on some of the most common areas of need you are likely to come across. There are examples of further resources which can be used to support each area of need covered. Part 2 has been written to dip in and out of, so you can visit the chapters most relevant to your needs or interests.

In each chapter you will find a wealth of information, underpinned by theory and research, and practical, hands-on ideas that can be used in the primary and/or secondary classroom. Each chapter contains the following:



#### **Did you know?**

Interesting facts and examples from research which will help build your knowledge of SEN and address some common misconceptions.





### Try it!

Practical activities for you to try in your classroom.



### Case studies

Examples of great practice from a range of teachers and other professionals involved in supporting children and young people with SEN.



### Reflect

Questions to ask yourself, to reflect on how you currently teach and consider how you could put some of the ideas into practice in your classroom (so you can have an even greater impact on learning!).



### Further resources

Examples of publications or websites that provide additional information on the topics covered in the chapter.

Although this book lists common barriers to learning and examples of strategies for pupils with different needs, this is not to suggest that if we simply apply the list of ideas, we will have all the solutions. Children with SEN are far too complex for that! No two children with SEN are the same and so no one way of teaching will be suitable for every child, even if they have similar areas of need.

## Introduction

Ultimately, this book is about teaching and learning for *all* pupils, including those with SEN. As committed teachers, we strive to do the best we can for all our pupils. We must recognise that some pupils will take longer to learn than others or will learn in different ways. Therefore we will need to be flexible and adapt our teaching to suit them. That's what makes teaching inclusive.

Part 1

# **The inclusive teacher**

## Chapter 1

# What are special educational needs?

## Defining SEN

Imagine it's the start of the year and you've been given a new class list by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) or your head of department. They tell you that this is a class with 'lots of SEN'. (Clearly they think you're up to the challenge!) What are your initial thoughts? What information will you need about the pupils? And what does 'having SEN' actually mean anyway?

The term special educational needs is one that has been used within education for a number of years. It refers to children and young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it significantly harder for them to learn or access education than most of their peers. A formal definition of SEN is given on page 15 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice:

A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

According to the code, a pupil has a learning difficulty if they have:

- a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of their peers of the same age, or
- a disability that prevents or hinders them from making use of the facilities generally provided for their peers (this includes difficulties in accessing the curriculum)

Learning difficulties and disabilities cover a wide range of issues, including challenges in acquiring basic skills, specific difficulties with reading, writing, numeracy or motor skills, communication problems, emotional difficulties, mental health issues, sensory needs, physical needs, etc. This is by no means an exhaustive list and later on in this chapter you will

come across further information about the broad areas of need which are identified within the Code of Practice. Whatever the difficulty might be, however, the pupil will require special educational provision to help remove potential barriers to learning.

## Special educational provision

If delivering high-quality lessons is the norm for you, no doubt you'll be meeting the needs of most of the pupils in your class. But even as a brilliant teacher, you will still come across some pupils who require *additional* provision. Additional provision goes beyond the differentiated approaches and learning arrangements that we would usually expect to be in place as part of HQT. Special educational provision *may* include some, or all, of the following:

- A highly personalised curriculum and individual timetable – e.g. a curriculum that includes life skills lessons.
- Specialist resources or equipment – e.g. a wheelchair, communication aids.
- The use of specific and individualised strategies in the classroom – e.g. time out, alternative forms of communication.
- Additional interventions to target basic skills – e.g. literacy or numeracy group intervention.
- Additional support from an adult or peer – e.g. support from a TA.
- Support with physical or personal care difficulties – e.g. eating, toileting, getting around school safely.
- Input from other professionals – e.g. specialist teachers, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists.
- Individualised learning plans that identify specific targets and outline the special educational provision to be put in place.

Schools have a duty to make special educational provision available for any pupil who needs it. This means that every teacher within the school

has a responsibility to deliver HQT and to support any special educational provision in place for individuals.



### Did you know?

Just over 14 per cent of pupils in the UK are currently identified as having SEN.<sup>1</sup> On average, that equates to approximately four pupils in every mainstream class.

## A little bit of history

In the UK today, there is no question over the right of pupils with SEN to be included within our education system. However, this was not always the case. When compulsory schooling began in the late 1800s, many children with learning disabilities were deemed to be ‘uneducable’ and so were denied the formal right to any education. Some provision existed for deaf, blind, ‘defective’ and epileptic children under the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893 and the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act 1899. However, it was almost one hundred years later before any significant change took place when the Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970 was introduced to ensure entitlement to an education for every child, irrespective of their needs or difficulties.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1970s the government set up an inquiry, led by the Warnock Committee, to look at the needs of children who required additional provision in school. The committee’s report<sup>3</sup> gave rise to the Education

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1 Department for Education, *Special Educational Needs in England: January 2016* (2016). Ref: SFR 29/2016. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/539158/SFR29\\_2016\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/539158/SFR29_2016_Main_Text.pdf).

2 See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/52/enacted>.

3 HMSO, *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (1978). Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.html>.



Relevant to all primary and secondary practitioners, *The Teacher's Guide to SEN* outlines what all teachers need to know about SEN, and provides a range of practical tips and ideas that can be applied in the classroom.

One of the key messages of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, first introduced in 2014, is that *every* teacher is responsible and accountable for *every* pupil in their class, including those with SEN. So what does this mean in practice for you as a class or subject teacher? Essentially, it requires you to understand every individual's needs, have a range of relevant knowledge and skills and have the confidence to try out some new approaches. This book is your essential guide to meeting these requirements.

*The Teacher's Guide to SEN* details the areas of need teachers are most likely to encounter and offers practical hands-on strategies to ensure high-quality teaching for all as well as key facts, real-life case studies and questions for reflection.

**An essential point of reference for busy teachers, including trainees, NQTs or any practitioners who would like to gain a few new ideas to try in the classroom.**

*The Teacher's Guide to SEN* is both practical and informative; an ideal read for teachers, SENCOs and school leaders wishing to understand how best to support the needs of all learners. Highly recommended!

**Professor Dame Alison Peacock, CEO, Chartered College of Teaching**

This book demystifies the process of removing barriers to learning and will help new and practising teachers alike to develop confident and independent learners.

**Rob Webster, Researcher, Centre for Inclusive Education, UCL Institute of Education**

Natalie Packer uses her expertise, knowledge and vast experience in SEN to produce a book that should be read by every new teacher entering the profession.

**David Bartram OBE, Director of SEND, London Leadership Strategy**

This is a really practical and readable guide. This book will contribute to an increased knowledge and understanding of SEN at a critical time in the implementation of the government's reforms.

**Malcolm Reeve, Executive Director for SEND and Inclusion, Academies Enterprise Trust, National Leader of Education, National College for Teaching and Leadership**

**Natalie Packer** is an education consultant who specialises in SEN and school improvement. Having previously been a teacher, SENCO and head teacher, and having worked with local authorities and alongside the Department for Education, Natalie has a significant amount of experience in the education sector. She runs professional development courses across the country and is a consultant for a range of national and international educational organisations.

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