

# NZEI TE RIU ROA

SUPPORTING  
DIVERSE  
LEARNERS

## SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS CO-ORDINATORS (SENCO) 2016

### FOREWORD

Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) work alongside children with special educational needs and their whānau to ensure that learners have equitable access to a broad curriculum and get the most out of their years at school. They ensure the best possible outcomes for students with special educational needs through a range of duties, including: liaising between families/whānau, teachers, teacher aides and specialist providers, testing students and analysing results and completing a variety of administrative tasks.

Unfortunately, the SENCO role is not formally recognised or adequately resourced. This survey adds to a growing body of evidence that there is a large unmet need for support to make our education system truly inclusive of all our learners and give every child the opportunity to succeed.

Tens of thousands of children need specialist support and schools are struggling without the resources to provide it. This survey demonstrates that this need is very real. It's time for this inequity to be addressed.



*Louise Green*  
NZEI Te Riu Roa President

### ABOUT THIS SURVEY

In September 2015 NZEI Te Riu Roa sent out a survey to find out more about the role that SENCOs play in schools. Currently, there is no requirement for a school to have a SENCO position and this position does not generate any additional staffing, management units or release time. This survey was sent out to 801 SENCOs, identified at the beginning of 2015 during site visits by NZEI Te Riu Roa Field Officers. A total of 352 SENCOs completed the survey, representing 44% of those contacted.

## KEY FINDINGS

The numbers of students requiring additional support has grown and far exceeds the one percent eligible for ORS funding. This survey shows on average 16% of students are listed on schools' special needs registers.

A large majority of SENCOs who responded to the survey see current funding for diverse learning needs as inadequate. Further to this, 89% consider that government support for this aspect of teaching and learning at their school is inadequate.

The survey results indicate that this underfunding leaves a large proportion of students without the support they need. Despite schools working hard to make up the shortfall through their operations grant and fund-raising, almost half of respondents reported that up to 60% of children on special needs registers were not receiving adequate support and funding. Two thirds of the SENCOs we surveyed report that there is not enough time during their working day to be able to fully meet the needs of children they work with. Sixty-six percent commented that they need more or a lot more release time to do their role.

Over a quarter of SENCOs receive no additional financial compensation for the complex role they undertake.

Many SENCOs are unable to access the professional development that they need. Almost 40% took on the role in spite of having no prior professional development specific to inclusive education. This problem continues for SENCOs once in the job, with 23% having received no relevant professional development since taking up the role.

### Does your school have a special needs register?

Of those who answered this question 95% indicated that there was a special needs register in their school. Reasons for not having a special needs register were not explored in this survey, and we believe it is worth further research with individual schools the reasons for not having a register. One of the reasons a school has no register could be because there are no learners with identified special needs in that school. However, anecdotally 15%-20% of all students will require some support at some stage. This could be considered a conservative estimate. Other countries report that nearly a third of students require some form of additional support during their school life (Sahlberg 2011). Therefore, it is unlikely that there would be no students with additional learning needs in a school and it would be expected that a special needs register would be necessary in all schools.

### How many students are on your school's special needs register?

There were a range of responses to this question with some schools identifying a significant number of their students on the special needs register. The average number of students on the school roll of the respondent was 290. The average number of students on the special needs register was 46, giving an average of 16% of students on the special needs register.

## How does your school receive funding for students with special education needs?

Funding for students with special education needs comes from a range of sources, with the respondents able to select more than one response for this question. Therefore, the percentages in this section do not equal 100%. Of those that responded, 80% identified the Special Education Grant (SEG) as a way of receiving funding for students with special education needs. Seventy two percent identified Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS), 15% identified Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) and eight percent identified that funding came from parents. A further eight percent indicated that funding came from other, unidentified, sources.

## Is your school receiving enough government support to meet the needs of children with special education needs?

Of those who responded, 89% did not believe that their school was receiving enough government support.

A further question asked if the school was not receiving enough government support to meet the needs of children with special education needs, what percentage of children do not receive adequate support / funding?

Almost half of respondents believe that up to 60% of students are not receiving adequate support / funding.

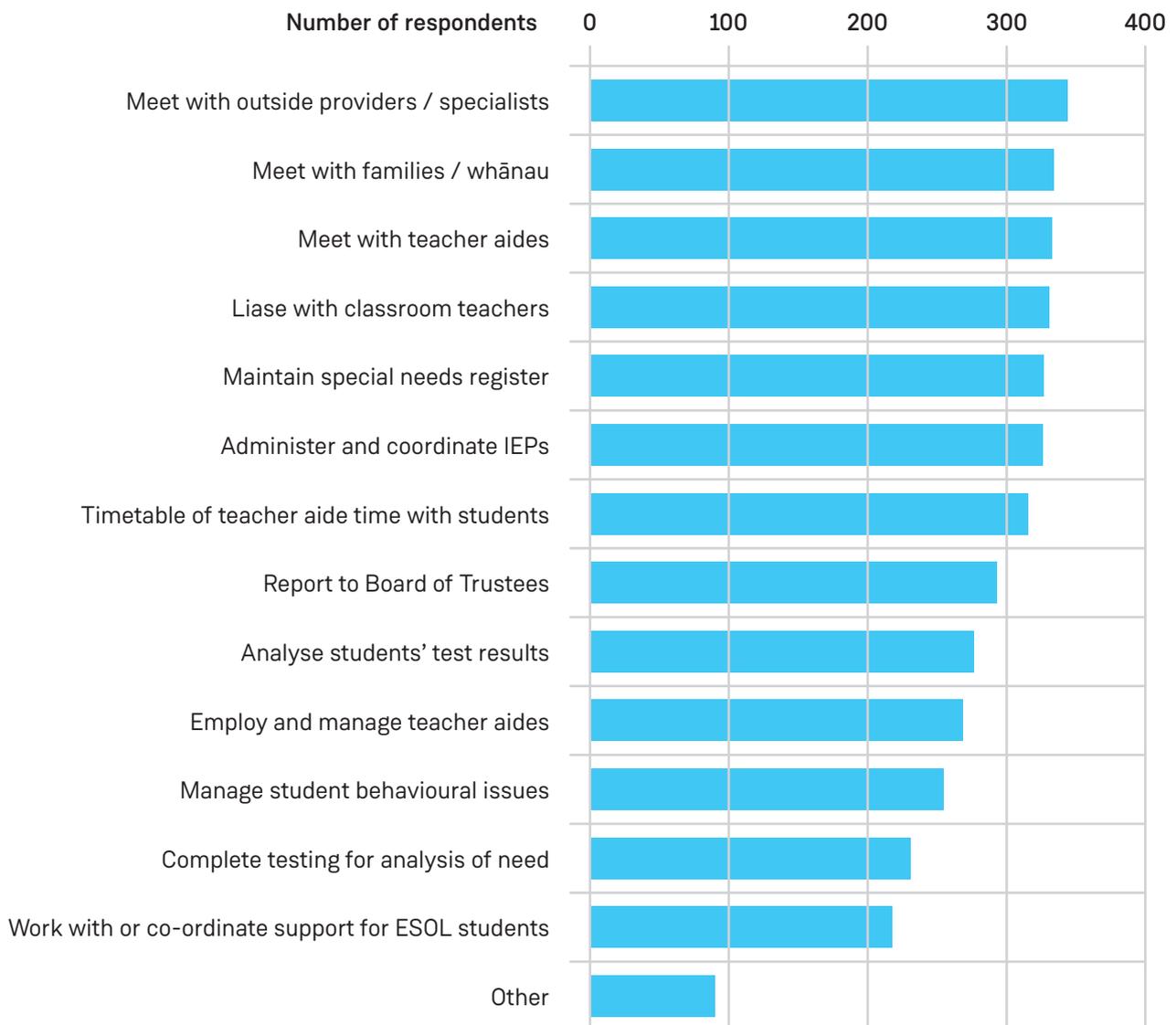
## Employment type (excluding the SENCO role)

The majority of respondents, 81%, indicated that they are employed in permanent full-time positions in schools.

## How long have you been in the SENCO role?

A quarter of respondents, have been in the SENCO role up to two years. Just over a quarter of respondents, 27%, have been in the role between two and five years. Only 48% have been in the role more than 5 years.

## Activities undertaken as part of the SENCO role



From those SENCOs surveyed, 60% complete all of the above activities. The activities that SENCOs are most likely to undertake are meeting with outside providers / specialists (98%), meeting with families / whānau (95%) and meeting with teacher aides (95%).

### Do you receive any financial compensation for this role?

Over a quarter of SENCOs (26%) who responded do not receive any financial compensation for this role. Of those who do receive financial compensation, 66% receive one management unit on top of their base salary, which equates to \$4000 per annum.

### Is your SENCO role permanent or fixed term?

Sixty-three percent of the surveyed SENCOs have permanent positions; however, 11% of SENCOs are unsure if their role is permanent or fixed term.

## How much release time do you get for SENCO responsibilities?

Release time for SENCO responsibilities	Number of responses	Proportion of responses
None	67	19.3%
≤ 0.1 FTTE	88	25.3%
≤ 0.2 FTTE	31	8.9%
≤ 0.3 FTTE	7	2.0%
≤ 0.4 FTTE	5	1.4%
≤ 0.5 FTTE	2	0.6%
≤ 0.6 FTTE	7	2.0%
≤ 0.7 FTTE	0	0.0%
≤ 0.8 FTTE	1	0.3%
≤ 0.9 FTTE	0	0.0%
Fulltime	35	10.1%
Combined with other role/s	37	10.6%
Part of AP/DP role	43	12.4%
Part of principal role	11	3.2%
Not specified	14	4.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Nineteen percent of those who responded to the survey get no release time to enable them to fulfil their SENCO responsibilities. A further 26% of respondents have to manage SENCO duties in addition to their other roles and get no specific release time for the SENCO position. This means that nearly half of all respondents are expected to manage their SENCO duties in addition to their formal employment arrangements.

## Do you think you get enough release time to enable you to fulfil the SENCO role?

The majority of surveyed SENCOs, (66%), consider that they need either “some more” or “a lot more” release time to do the role. Only 34% of respondents believe that they either have the “right amount” of time to do the role (33%), or could do the role in “less time” (1%).

## What qualifications / experience / professional development for learners with special needs did you have before you took up the SENCO role?

A significant number of SENCOs, 38%, had no qualifications, experience or professional development directly related to learners with special needs prior to taking up the role. Please see following table for further breakdown of qualifications, experience and professional development undertaken before SENCOs took up the role.

Qualification <sup>1</sup>	Percentage
Relevant qualification post-graduate	8%
Relevant qualification graduate	10%
Relevant PLD	32%
Relevant experience >5 years	8%
Relevant experience < 5 years	11%
Family member with special education needs	2%
None	38%

### What qualifications / professional development for learners with special needs have you gained since you took up the SENCO role?

Twenty-three percent of respondents identified that they had received no professional development or gained qualifications since taking up the SENCO role. Please see table below for further breakdown of qualifications and professional development undertaken after taking up SENCO role.

Qualification <sup>2</sup>	Percentage
Relevant qualification post graduate	3.6%
Relevant qualification graduate / diploma / certificate	3.0%
SENCO-run PLD	21.5%
RTLB- / RTLit-run PLD	19.7%
MoE-run PLD	6.4%
Other relevant PLD	57.9%
None	23.0%
Not specified	6.1%

### Have the qualifications / experience / professional development you have gained been sufficient to enable you to feel confident in the SENCO role?

While only seven percent of SENCOs report that the qualifications / experience / professional development they have gained have not been sufficient to enable them to feel confident in the SENCO role, a further 44% note that the qualifications / experience / professional development has enabled them to feel confident to a certain extent. Therefore, while half of SENCOs feel confident in the role due to the qualifications / experience / professional development they have gained, half do not.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were able to cite a range of qualifications, experience and professional development opportunities that they had undertaken before taking up the SENCO role, therefore the percentages for this section do not add up to 100%.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents were able to cite a range of qualifications, experience and professional development opportunities that they had undertaken after taking up the SENCO role, therefore the percentages for this section do not add up to 100%.

## What PLD opportunities would assist you in your SENCO role?

Professional development opportunities <sup>3</sup>	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Condition-specific PLD	123	40.9%
Navigating the special education system	87	29.2%
Collaboration with teacher aide & RTLB	62	16.8%
Awareness of access to agencies / networks / providers	37	12.4%
Awareness of access to resources	35	11.7%
Formal SENCO cluster / network / days	34	11.4%
Writing ORS applications	26	8.7%
Paid release time to attend SENCO related PLD	20	6.7%
Teacher aide - specific training / appraisal	15	5.0%
Behaviour management PLD	12	4.0%
SENCO specific training / induction/ qualification / job description	10	3.4%
Mentor	6	2.0%
RTLB network / PLD	4	1.3%
Learning support specific PD	3	1.0%
Liaison with specialists	2	0.7%
PLG groups	1	0.3%
Data gathering	1	0.3%
Modifying curriculum to special needs	1	0.3%
Managing difficult conversations	1	0.3%
Attending conferences	1	0.3%

## Do you have the opportunity to collaborate with other SENCOs?

Just over half of the SENCOs surveyed, (53%), do have opportunities to collaborate with other SENCOs. However, nearly a quarter, (24%) do not have opportunities to collaborate, with the final 23% having opportunities to meet, but not at times that suit.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were able to cite a range of professional development opportunities that would assist them in their SENCO role therefore the percentages for this section do not add up to 100%.

## Is collaboration between SENCOs based on formal or informal networks?

Most SENCOs collaborate via both formal and informal networks (39%). Only 28% collaborate via formal networks alone, with 13% collaborating through informal networks alone.

## What impact do you think the following would have for learners with special education needs?

Respondents were asked to rank five categories on their potential impact. These were: more money for students with special education needs, quicker access to professionals, more PLD, more time, and more money for the SENCO role.

Potential remedy	Number of responses	Ranked by weighted average
More money for students with special education needs	218	4.54
Quicker access to professionals	194	4.45
More time	126	3.95
More PLD	68	3.65
More money for the SENCO role	49	2.86

Weighted averages were used because respondents were able to select more than one option as having the most potential impact. The ranking scale was from one to five, with one having the least and five having the most impact. Therefore, those potential remedies with weighted averages closer to five are considered by the respondents to be the most effective. It is apparent that more money for students with special education needs and quicker access to professionals were considered by respondents as likely to have the most potential impact.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that a significant number of SENCOs consider that they need more support through both formal and informal networks. SENCOs also see that PLD specific to the SENCO role is a priority. Many SENCOs receive no financial compensation for undertaking the role nor additional time to complete the array of complex tasks expected. There appears to be an expectation that this role is incorporated with other duties, such as assistant principal, deputy principal or principal, regardless of expertise in special and inclusive education.

## REFERENCES

Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York, NY, Teachers College Press.

## GLOSSARY

### **ACC**

Accident Compensation Commission

### **FTTE**

Full-Time Teacher Equivalent

### **IEP**

Individual Education Plan

### **MoE**

Ministry of Education

### **ORS**

Ongoing Resourcing Scheme. The scheme provides funding for support for a very small number of students, with the highest level of need for special education.

### **PD**

Professional development. Also used for PLD.

### **PLD**

Professional learning and development. Formal and informal processes used to improve the knowledge and practice of teachers.

### **PLG**

Professional Learning Group. Groups of professional educators formed to develop understanding and enhance practice, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes.

### **Release Time**

Time outside the classroom during the working week for teachers. Release time allows primary teachers time out of the classroom to do other work such as planning, evaluation, reporting, professional development, and assessment.

### **RTLB**

Specially trained teachers who support and work in schools to assist staff, parents and community members to meet the needs of students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties.

### **RTLit**

Specially trained teachers who support and work in schools, assisting staff to meet the needs of Years 0-8 students with reading and writing difficulties.

### **SENCO**

Special Education Needs Coordinator. A resource person in a school who leads and coordinates support for students with additional learning needs. The role is also sometimes called Learning support coordinator (LSC).

### **SEG**

Special Education Grant. A grant provided to schools to support students with moderate special education needs, such as learning and behaviour difficulties, in accordance with NAG 1(c) and (d). It includes a base amount plus per-student funding. The SEG is allocated on the basis of a school's roll number and decile rating and may be spent on professional development, new resources and materials, and additional staffing.

### **TA**

Teacher aide. People who help educators support children and young people who have special education needs. Also known as kaiāwhina.