The Communication Commitment and the 2014 SEND Code of Practice

Introduction to the SEND Reforms

The **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 0-25** received Parliamentary approval in July 2014 and is in force from 1 September 2014. The Code provides the statutory guidance relating to the **Children and Families Act**, which contains clauses on special education needs (SEN) that put into place wide-reaching reforms to the SEND system for children and young people aged 0 to 25 in England. These reforms are taking place in the context of wider changes to schools' policy including a new curriculum and accountability measures.

The Code of Practice applies to all organisations who work with and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This includes local authorities, health agencies and ***all educational settings***.

The Government have stated that the principles underlying the Code and the wider reforms are:

- a focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning
- successful preparation for adulthood, including independent living and employment
- the early identification of children and young people's needs and early intervention to support them
- collaboration between education, health and social care services to provide support
- high quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND
- the participation of children and young people and their parents in decision making
- greater choice and control for young people and parents over support

This factsheet illustrates how the Communication Commitment (www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/commitment) relates to these principles, detailing:

- how each priority area of the Commitment links to the Code
- which of the actions within the Commitment support school's specific duties under the Reforms.

There is also an index of updates to the Commitment to reflect the 2014 Code of Practice that will help you easily find the updated content on the site.

The Commitment has been developed by The Communication Trust, the organisation cited in the Code as providing advice, information and training on speech, language and communication.[1]

The Commitment provides a structure for schools to support best practice around speech, language and communication **for all their pupils**. This structured framework can also help in supporting pupils with SEN; a greater focus on communication across the school enables you to identify pupils who are struggling and provide the support they need.

Greater understanding and emphasis on communication in the classroom and school as a whole can have a positive impact on pupils with SEN and SLCN. Limited communication, speaking and listening can be a huge barrier to learning. Teachers with robust knowledge of how this works are in a much stronger position to shift their language and effectively scaffold learning. As the Code states, *"High quality teaching, differentiated for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEN."* (Section 6.37)

This factsheet first sets out what schools' duties are under the Reforms, and then states how the Commitment links to these duties.

You can access the 2014 SEND code of practice online at www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25.

What do schools need to do under the Reforms?

The legislation affects all schools and teachers. It includes changes to the support and services children and young people with SEND will receive. The Department of Education set out the changes in a letter to all teachers in April 2014, and will be providing additional information and support going forward. This letter and other documents relating to the Reforms can be found at www.gov.uk/childrens-services/special-educational-needs.

In letters and implementation packs from the Minister for Education, the Department has highlighted key issues that schools need to be aware for implementation:

- The **new code of practice** implemented from 1 September 2014 which sets out a more individualised and graduated response
- A **graduated response of SEN support replaces School Action and School Action Plus** – beginning with high quality teaching, appropriately differentiated for individual pupils, the graduated response is designed to ensure support is focused on individual need and personal outcomes rather than classifications.

[1] The Communication Trust is referenced in the 'Improving practice and staff training in education settings' section of the Code

- The reforms emphasise the need for schools to have clear systems for **early identification** and a **single assessment** for pupils with SEND**.**
- Following the assessment, the reforms make clear the need for means of **monitoring** and **securing appropriate support** for children with SEND.
- Schools are also required **to involve parents in a more structured and systematic way** to shape the support their child receives and to be more transparent about what the school can provide.
- All schools must publish an **SEN Information Report** on their websites and update it annually. This document must set out the school's policies and systems for supporting pupils with SEN and will be the school's link to the Local Offer.
- Schools should review the support currently given to pupils on School Action or School Action Plus in light of the changes during the school year 2014-15. The Department states that they would expect most **reviews under the new approach** to take place, in consultation with parents, by the spring term 2015.
- For those pupils with the most complex needs, a single birth-to-25 **education, health and care (EHC) plan** replaces Statements of Special Educational Need and Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs). The EHC plan places much more emphasis on personal goals and clearly describes the support a child will receive across different services, including at school, to achieve these ambitions. Pupils with a Statement or LDA will be **transferred by the local authority to an EHC plan within the next three and a half years.**

In addition to the changes that specifically affect schools, there are also changes to how local authorities and health agencies provide services and how they work together, for example through the local offer and joint commissioning.

The Council for Disabled Children provides a useful overview of all the changes under the Reforms - www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sendreforms.

Nasen has provided detailed guidance for SENCOs in ***Everybody Included: The SEND Code of Practice explained*** which gives key guidance on delivering the Code, including an action plan of what SENCOs need to do when: www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd.

There is a wide range of guidance available to help practitioners deliver the Reforms. A full list is provided at the end of this factsheet.

How can the Commitment help you meet your responsibilities under the Reforms?

The Communication Commitment has five key priority areas for thinking about communication.

1. **School leadership**
2. **Workforce development**
3. **Communication - friendly schools**
4. **Supporting pupils with SLCN**
5. **Engagement with parents, families or employers**

Each of the priority areas includes suggestions for practical actions schools can take to address that particular area. In the table on the following pages, we note what the new Code of Practice says schools must do in relation to each of the five priority areas of the Commitment. We then specifically show how the Commitment can support schools to develop their plans and practice around key aspects of the Code as well as ensuring that all pupils develop their communication skills. Suggested actions that are particularly relevant to the Code are in bold.

In order to support Commitment schools in their plans for delivering the Reforms, we have also updated relevant Commitment downloads to show how they link to the Code; these are indicated by the symbol shown on the right.

You can also access an index of all updated downloads which highlights where the changes have been made and includes links to specific sections of the Code.

Communication Commitment priority area and actions	What does the Code of Practice say about this area?	How the Commitment helps you deliver the 2014 SEND Code
Priority area one: School Leadership 1.1 Appoint Communication Champions on the senior leadership team and governing body **1.2 Include actions around communication in the school development plan** 1.3 Dedicate a senior leadership team meeting to communication. **1.4 Adopt a strategy for identifying pupils who are struggling with communication.**	"School leaders should regularly review how expertise and resources used to address SEND can be used to build the quality of whole-school provision as part of their approach to school improvement." - 6.3 "The identification of SEN should be built into the overall approach to monitoring the progress and development of all pupils" - 6.5 "...School leaders and teaching staff, including the SENCO, should identify any patterns in the identification of SEN, both within the school and in comparison with national data, and use these to reflect on and reinforce the quality of teaching."- 6.4 "The governing bodies of maintained schools and maintained nursery schools and the proprietors of academy schools must publish information on their websites about the implementation of the... policy for pupils with SEN..." - 6.74 "...The SENCO, Headteacher and governing body or proprietor should establish a clear picture of the resources that are available to the school. They should consider their strategic approach to meeting SEN in the context of the total resources available, including any resources targeted at particular groups, such as the pupil premium."- 6.92	The Commitment supports school leaders to take a strategic whole-school approach to communication. Specific links to the code include **school development planning** and support of a strategic systematic approach to **early identification and monitoring**. By making explicit links between the Commitment and school improvement, leaders are supported to build the quality of whole-school provision in relation to communication as part of their approach to school improvement (see action 1.2). Importantly, the Commitment provides school leaders with the resources to develop a strategy for identifying pupils with SLCN. It is a **statutory duty** that a school must set out its strategy for identifying pupils with SEN in its **SEND Information Report** (see action 1.4).

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Priority area two: Workforce development **2.1 Run an all staff briefing on speech, language and communication in school or at a faculty meeting** **2.2 Identify key members of staff who will undertake professional development activities focussing on communication.** 2.3 Implement a classroom strategy to support communication across school and reflect on it as a staff team. 2.4 Set up a Communication Innovation Bank where staff share activities and ideas they find useful.	"The quality of teaching for pupils with SEN, and the progress made by pupils, should be a core part of the school's performance management arrangements and its approach to professional development for all teaching and support staff." - 6.4 "Making higher quality teaching normally available to the whole class is likely to mean that fewer pupils will require such [special or additional] support. Such improvements in whole-class provision tend to be more cost effective and sustainable." - 6.12 "When reviewing and managing special educational provision, the broad areas of need and support... may be helpful, and schools should review how well-equipped they are to provide support across these areas."- 6.22 The Code is clear that all teachers are responsible for pupils with SEN, not just the SENCO.	The Commitment provides actions, tools and resources for the professional development of all staff in supporting speaking and listening and pupils with SLCN (see actions 2.1 and 2.2). The Commitment gives you the resources to ensure all teachers have the appropriate information and training about SLCN (the largest reported group of SEN in primary schools at 30.6%, as reported by DfE in May 2014). The Commitment helps you audit your team's knowledge about SLC/N in school and then supports you to develop this further (Commitment Checklist and action 2.2). The Code states that the quality of teaching for pupils with SEN is a core part of the performance management arrangements. One of our Commitment schools has given all staff Performance Management Targets linked to the Communication – would this approach work for you?

Communication Commitment priority area and actions	What does the Code of Practice say about this area?	How the Commitment helps you deliver the 2014 SEND Code
Priority area three: Communication - Friendly schools 3.1 Implement the 'think time rule' in classrooms. 3.2 Introduce a visual support strategy in classrooms (visual timetables, talking frames, symbol support) 3.3 Include speaking and listening activities explicitly in lesson plans for example by running *No Pens Day Wednesday* (for primary and secondary). 3.4 Run a competition about communication (for our pupils or the most communication friendly classroom. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' Voice Box is a good example of this.	The Code puts an emphasis on high quality teaching as the first step in SEN support - "Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset. Lessons should be planned to address potential areas of difficulty and to remove barriers to pupil achievement. In many cases such planning will mean that pupils with SEN and disabilities will be able to study the full national curriculum." - 6.11 "High quality teaching, differentiated for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEN. Additional intervention and support cannot compensate for a lack of good quality teaching. Schools should regularly and carefully review the quality of teaching for all pupils, including those at risk of underachievement. This includes reviewing, and where necessary improving, teachers' understanding of strategies to identify and support vulnerable pupils and their knowledge of the SEN most frequently encountered." - 6.34	The Commitment provides guidance on how to achieve high quality teaching in terms of speech, language and communication. Pupils' language and communication can be a significant barrier to learning. Therefore we have placed particular focus on teaching strategies and learning environments that remove barriers to learning for all pupils and particularly for those SLCN. The Commitment also gives practical ways in which high quality speech, language and communication teaching can be achieved (quick wins include action 3.1 and a range of suggested resources linked to action 3.2 and differentiated lesson plans and resources in 3.3).

Communication Commitment priority area and actions	What does the Code of Practice say about this area?	How the Commitment helps you deliver the 2014 SEND Code
Priority area four: Supporting pupils with SLCN 4.1 Raise awareness of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) by disseminating factsheets on SLCN to all staff. 4.2 Use identification guidance, tools and checklists in our classrooms 4.3 Collate the interventions across school or through the SEN department that we are using to support pupils with SLCN. 4.4 Read guidance on commissioning specialist speech and language support and discuss your actions as a leadership team.	"Schools support pupils with a wide range of SEN. They should regularly review and evaluate the impact of the support they offer or can access..."- 6.8 "There is a wide range of information available on appropriate interventions for pupils with different types of need, and associated training which schools can use to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to use them."- 6.23 "The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding to their particular strengths and needs and seek to address them all using well-evidenced interventions targeted at their areas of difficulty." - 6.27 "Where a pupil is identified as having SEN, schools should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place." - 6.40 "Schools should work closely with the local authority and other providers to agree the range of local services and clear arrangements for making appropriate requests. This might include schools commissioning specialist services directly..." - 6.55 "The SENCO and class teacher, together with the specialists, and involving the pupils' parents, should consider a range of evidence-based and effective teaching approaches, appropriate equipment , strategies and interventions in order to support the child's progress." - 6.62	The Commitment gives schools the resources and guidance to develop both the policy and practice to deliver support to pupils with SLCN, including: • guidance, tools and checklists to identify pupils with SLCN; identification strategies need to be contained with the school's SEND Information Report (see action 4.2) • guidance on evidence-based interventions that are appropriate to their pupils' needs (see action 4.3) • guidance on commissioning speech and language therapy in schools (see action 4.4), and support linking to the cycle of **plan, assess, do and review**. • guidance on accessing specialist support from the wider **local service offer** (see action 4.4).

Communication Commitment priority area and actions	What does the Code of Practice say about this area?	How the Commitment helps you deliver the 2014 SEND Code
Priority area five: Engagement with parents, families and employers 5.1 Share information on communication with parents. 5.2 Invite employers and further education and higher education providers into school to discuss communication 5.3 Focus on interview skills by inviting people from the community into your school to ask them about communication skills 5.4 Include communication as a topic at parent's evenings and in transition meetings for new parents.	One of the key principles of the Reforms is the involvement of parents and families in decision-making. This principle underpins the entire Code of Practice. "Class and subject teachers, supported by senior leadership team, should make regular assessments of progress for all pupils... It can include progress in areas other than attainment- for instance where a pupil needs to make additional progress with wider development or social needs in order to make a successful transition to adult life." - 6.14-15 "In deciding whether to make special educational provision, the teacher and SENCO should consider all of the information gathered... This information gathering should include an early discussion with the pupil and their parents. These early discussions with parents should be structured in such a way that they develop a good understanding of the pupil's areas of strength and difficulty, the parents concerns, the agreed outcomes sought for the child and the next steps..." - 6.36 "Schools must provide an annual report for parents on their child's progress. Most schools will want to go beyond this and provide regular reports for parents on how their child is progressing" - 6.59	The Commitment supports schools to implement a way of keeping parents up to date on their child's speech, language and communication progress and of regularly talking to parents about talk effectively (see actions 5.1 and 5.4). The Commitment also offers ideas around supporting pupils to make a successful transition to adult life through a focus on the role communication skills play in further education and employment (see actions 5.2 and 5.3).

Other support to deliver the 2014 SEND Code of Practice

There is a wide range of guidance available to help practitioners deliver the Reforms.

- The Code itself, alongside a wide range of supporting information and guidance, is available from the Department of Education at www.gov.uk/childrens-services/special-educational-needs.
- The SEND Pathfinder website shares learning from the pathfinders and pathfinder champions in order to support the delivery of Reforms - www.sendpathfinder.co.uk
- The Communication Trust is committed to supporting all those implementing the SEND Reforms to meet the needs of children and young people with SLCN and their families. In particular, on behalf of The Communication Council, we have recently published a free online report on joint commissioning for children and young people with SLCN. You can find this and all our other guidance and resources relating to the Reforms at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/sendreforms.
- The Communication Trust's Consortium is a group of nearly 50 voluntary and community sector organisations that provide a vast range of resources and services relating to children and young people's speech, language and communication – you can find out about all that they provide in the Consortium 0-25 Catalogue: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/consortiumcatalogue.aspx
- The Council for Disabled Children provides a wide range of information and guidance relating to the changes under the Reforms - www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sendreforms
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' website includes a number of briefings and other information on the Reforms, which you can find at www.rcslt.org/governments/policy_and_campaigns and at www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/commissioning/intro
- Nasen has provided detailed guidance for educational settings in ***Everybody Included: The SEND Code of Practice explained*** which gives key guidance on delivering the Code: www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd
- The Dyslexia SpLD Trust, another of the organsiations named as offering support and guidance in the Code, has produced specific guidance on the SEND Reforms, available at www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk

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