

*Brief Note*

**Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) in Mainstream Schools: Views of Colleague Teachers at Primary and Secondary Schools in Greater Manchester**

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The present study highlights colleague teachers' attitudes towards various roles of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) in England. Colleague teachers ( $N=71$ ) of Special Educational Needs Coordinators working at primary and secondary schools in Greater Manchester County responded to a mailed questionnaire about the roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinators. The results included a summary of respondents' attitudes as to whether Special Educational Needs Coordinators were fulfilling their roles, and a comparison of the respondents' replies regarding the importance of the Coordinators' roles and the relation between their expectations and their ratings of how well those expectations were fulfilled. Responses from primary and secondary school teachers were also compared. The present findings indicated that colleague teachers have high expectations of receiving advice on how to teach, on implementation of Individual Education Plans, and on assessment of pupils' needs. However, the colleague teachers considered the actual activities of Special Educational Needs Coordinators to be quite different from those expectations, mainly involving keeping records, registers, and/or Statements, assessing pupils' needs, and, in secondary schools, doing direct teaching. These results suggest that, for collaboration and sharing of roles in schools, further in-service teacher training is needed.

**Key Words:** Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO), colleague teachers' attitudes, Greater Manchester

**Introduction**

The role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) in the schools of England and Wales is described in the Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994; Department for Education and Skills, 2001). That role includes: (a) overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's special educational needs (SEN)

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policy, (b) coordinating provisions for children with special educational needs, (c) liaising with and advising fellow teachers, (d) managing learning support assistants, (e) overseeing the records of all children with special educational needs, (f) liaising with parents of children with special educational needs, (g) contributing to the in-service training of staff, and (h) liaising with external agencies including the Local Education Authority (LEA) and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies.

These activities all seem to be very important. However, much research has pointed out that the many requirements of this role puts a heavy burden on Special Educational Needs Coordinators (e.g., Cowne, 2005; Layton, 2005; Layton & Robertson, 2004; Lingard, 2001; National Union of Teachers (NUT), 2004; Phillips, Goodwin, & Heron, 2001; Sanagi, 2003b, c, d).

Special Educational Needs Coordinators' excessive day-to-day workload prevents effective coordination for pupils with special educational needs. The revised Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) intended to reduce the heavy workload of Special Educational Needs Coordinators by decreasing the Coordinators' involvement in keeping registers for pupils with special educational needs, but no statement from the government released the Coordinators from other roles in the school, nor was a dedicated room established for Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

Despite the reduction in the job requirements, many Special Educational Needs Coordinators still suffered because of their increasing role and responsibility for pupils with special educational needs. Crowther, Dyson, and Millward's (2001) survey of primary school teachers highlighted the situation that almost 70% of primary school Special Educational Needs Coordinators reported that they had no time in their schedule allocated for work on special educational needs, and a further 27% reported that they had a half-day or less per week for this purpose.

How can we reduce the overly heavy workload of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators? Sanagi (2008) stated that expectations from colleague teachers adds incidental roles to the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' burden, causing overwork. For example, "direct teaching for pupils with special educational needs" (Sanagi, 2008, p. 55) is not a required role for the Special Educational Needs Coordinators, but rather is the job of the regular classroom teachers and teaching assistants. However, even so, because of colleague teachers' expectation, many Special Educational Needs Coordinators, especially in secondary schools, provide direct teaching for pupils with special educational needs, in addition to their other responsibilities as Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

While Special Educational Needs Coordinators recognize that their primary role includes coordinating provision of programs for students with special educational needs, management of staff, liaising with parents, and overseeing the day-to-day operation of special educational needs policy in the schools, there is a mismatch between Special Educational Needs Coordinators and their colleague teachers in relation to expectations for the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' role (Sanagi,

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2003d). Collaboration between the Special Educational Needs Coordinators and other staff is essential not only for the pupils with special educational needs, but also for all pupils.

Findings about colleague teacher's views towards Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles may provide information useful for improving school programs for pupils with special educational needs and for constructing more truly inclusive schools in which there is collaboration between the Special Educational Needs Coordinators and the teachers.

When teachers in special needs education field were informed about the revised Code of Practice, many of them were interested in the new guideline for special educational needs policy. The present author hopes that focusing on colleague teachers' attitudes toward the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators in this early period after the revision of the Code of Practice will contribute to the development of an effective special educational needs policy and improved practice in the schools.

The purpose of the present study is to clarify the attitudes and expectations about the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles of colleague teachers in primary and secondary schools in Greater Manchester County, and to examine the extent to which those expectations are fulfilled. Because conditions in the primary and secondary schools are different, those data are analyzed separately.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 100 teachers who were colleagues of Special Educational Needs Coordinators working in primary or secondary schools in Greater-Manchester County in England.

### *Procedure*

A questionnaire was mailed to 50 primary schools and 50 secondary schools selected randomly, in June and July, 2003. Returns were accepted until the end of August.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire contained 8 items from the revised Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001), 15 items on the importance of Special Educational Needs Coordinators' role, and 15 items on the respondents' view of the fulfillment of these roles by their Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

Participants were asked to rate the importance of various aspects of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles in their school. The scale of importance ranged from 1 = not important to 5 = very important.

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which Special Educational Needs Coordinators in the schools that they had viewed were fulfilling their roles.

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These ratings were also on a 5-point scale, anchored by “never do” it and “do it regularly”.

“Fulfillment” was rated in order to be able to that it will be explore more clearly the colleague teachers’ expectations for and satisfaction with the actual conduct of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

## Results

Questionnaires were returned by 29 primary school colleague teachers and 42 secondary school colleague teachers (total  $N=71$ ). The respondents’ average length of teaching experience was 13.0 years ( $SD=9.68$ ). About half of the colleague teachers ( $n=35$ ; 49.3%) had attended training courses that dealt with teaching pupils with special educational needs (17 primary school teachers; 18 secondary school teachers). Only five of the colleague teachers (7.0%) indicated that they wanted to become Special Educational Needs Coordinators in the future.

### *Colleague Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Fulfillment of Special Educational Needs Coordinators’ Roles*

Factor analysis. Responses to the items in the questionnaire that concerned fulfillment of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators’ roles were checked with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, in order to assess the appropriateness of those data for factor analysis. The KMO index was .73 and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was highly significant ( $p<.001$ ), indicating that the data were appropriate for analysis. The data were then analyzed via principal components analysis with a varimax rotation. Analysis of the scree plot confirmed the suitability of a four-factor solution. The four-factor solution accounted for 62.1% of the total variance.

The first factor, “Giving advice and information, and management,” accounted for 21.0% of the total variance. This factor related to the day-to-day operation of the special educational needs policy in the schools.

The second factor, “Direct teaching and relationship with parents,” accounted for 16.0% of the total variance. Items loading on this factor reflected direct support for pupils and their parents. The third factor, “Assessing pupils’ needs and information management,” accounted for 14.6% of the total variance. The items on this subscale related to management in the school, such as keeping records and establishing relationships with external agencies. The fourth factor, “Inclusive education,” accounted for 10.5% of the total variance. The items on this subscale related to the school’s policy of inclusion.

The factor loadings are displayed in Table 1.

*Primary school teachers’ view.* In the primary school teachers’ view, the role of liaising with external agencies was the part of their job most often carried out by Special Educational Needs Coordinators. The roles of keeping pupils’ records, registers and Statements, making a bridge between parents and the school, assessing

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**TABLE 1** Colleague Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Extent that SENCOs Fulfill Their Roles (multiple table: Factor Loadings and *t*-Tests)

	1	2	3	4	Primary school	Secondary school
Giving brief advice on implementation of IEPs	.878				3.79(.96)	3.67(1.06)
Giving advice on assessing and recording pupils' special needs	.863				3.64(.91)	3.36(1.16)
Giving advice on how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs	.758				3.46(1.14)	3.54(1.12)
Arranging and managing staff training opportunities	.517				3.32(.90)	3.51(1.14)
Giving detailed information on pupils' Special Educational Needs	.514				3.79(.92)	4.28(1.02)*
Managing good staff meetings	.394				3.39(1.10)	3.68(1.09)
Taking the role of consultant for parents		.757			3.71(.81)	4.21(.89)*
Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs directly		.712			2.85(1.29)	4.57(.69)**
Arranging the curriculum for pupils with Special Educational Needs		.669			3.00(1.19)	4.00(1.05)**
Making a bridge between parents and the schools		.667			3.96(.88)	4.51(.76)**
Keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements			.743		4.39(.79)	4.69(.52)†
Liaising with external agencies			.738		4.64(.68)	4.51(.82)
Assessing and evaluating pupils' Special Educational Needs in detail			.569		3.82(.82)	4.26(1.04)†
Helping to make the school more inclusive				.871	3.78(.80)	3.95(1.05)
Making sure to diffuse the inclusion policy in the schools				.719	3.46(.76)	3.74(.82)

*Notes.* Principal-factor analysis: varimax rotation. † $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Register=a record of detailed information on any pupil that does not have a Statement.

SENCO=Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

IEP=Individual Education Plans.

Factor 1 : Giving advice and information, and managements

Factor 2 : Direct teaching and relationship with parents

Factor 3 : Assessing pupils' needs and information management

Factor 4 : Inclusive education

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and evaluating pupils' special educational needs in detail, giving brief advice on implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEP), and giving detailed information on pupils' special educational needs were also regarded as fulfilled well.

On the other hand, primary school teachers indicated that other roles were not fulfilled as well, such as teaching pupils with special educational needs directly, arranging the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs, and arranging and managing staff training opportunities.

*Secondary school teachers' view.* According to the secondary school teachers, the aspect of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' job that was most consistently carried out was keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements. Other roles also regarded as being well performed included teaching pupils with special educational needs directly, making a bridge between parents and the school, and liaising with external agencies.

In contrast, the items on giving advice to teachers, such as giving advice on assessing and recording of pupils' needs and giving advice on how to teach pupils with special educational needs, and also the items on in-service training were regarded as not fulfilled well by the Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

*Comparison of primary and secondary school teachers.* Primary schools in England are usually rather smaller in size than secondary schools. In the primary schools, the Special Educational Needs Coordinators often have to take the additional job of being a classroom teacher, in addition to their roles as Special Educational Needs Coordinator. However, Special Educational Needs Coordinators in secondary school generally do not have to be classroom teachers. In this way, the background of the fulfillment of the roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinators differs between primary and secondary schools.

In order to clarify this point, the replies of the primary and secondary school teachers were compared with an independent-samples *t*-test. This analysis revealed that primary and secondary school teachers' attitudes towards Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles were significantly different on five items. Secondary school teachers were rated the following five items higher than primary school teachers: giving detailed information on pupils' special educational needs ( $t(62)=2.100$ ,  $p<.05$ ), taking the role of consultant for parents ( $t(61)=2.300$ ,  $p<.05$ ), teaching pupils with special educational needs directly ( $t(62)=6.900$ ,  $p<.01$ ), arranging the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs ( $t(54)=3.500$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and making a bridge between parents and the school ( $t(53)=2.700$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

All but one of these items belonged to the second factor ("Direct teaching and relationship with parents") from the factor analysis.

### ***Comparison of Respondents' Attitudes About Which Aspects of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Roles Were Important and How Well Those Roles Were Fulfilled***

In the questionnaire, the respondents rated the same items both in terms of how well they were fulfilled by the Special Educational Needs Coordinators and how

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**TABLE 2** Primary School Teachers' Replies as to Which Aspects of the SENCOs' Roles Were Important and Which Were Fulfilled

		Importance	Fulfillment
Factor 1	Giving brief advice on implementation of IEPs	4.19(.74)	3.78(.97)
	Giving advice on assessing and recording pupils' special needs	3.82(.82)	3.64(.91)
	Giving advice on how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs	4.32(.77)	3.46(1.14)**
	Arranging and managing staff training opportunities	3.64(.83)	3.32(.90)
	Giving detailed information on pupils' Special Educational Needs	4.32(.72)	3.79(.92)**
	Managing good staff meetings	3.43(1.00)	3.39(1.10)
Factor 2	Taking the role of consultant for parents	3.46(.96)	3.71(.81)
	Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs directly	2.85(1.08)	2.77(1.24)
	Arranging the curriculum for pupils with Special Educational Needs	3.50(.92)	3.00(1.19)*
	Making a bridge between parents and the schools	3.75(.75)	3.96(.88)
Factor 3	Keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements	3.54(1.00)	4.39(.79)**
	Liaising with external agencies	4.25(.89)	4.64(.68)*
	Assessing and evaluating pupils' Special Educational Needs in detail	3.11(1.20)	3.82(.82)**
Factor 4	Helping to make the school more inclusive	3.70(.82)	3.78(.80)
	Making sure to diffuse the inclusion policy in the schools	3.54(.81)	3.46(.76)

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

SENCO=Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

IEP=Individual Education Plans.

Factor 1 : Giving advice and information, and management

Factor 2 : Direct teaching and relationship with parents

Factor 3 : Assessing pupils' needs and information management

Factor 4 : Inclusive education

important they were. Comparisons of the replies as to what was important and also as to how well the roles were fulfilled was made with paired samples *t*-tests.

Colleague teachers at primary schools. Table 2 shows an analysis of the primary school teacher's replies, using *t*-tests to compare those aspects of Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles that those teachers considered to be important and those considered to be fulfilled. The items for which differences were statistically significant are listed in Table 3.

The primary school teachers reported that the Special Educational Needs Coordinators fulfilled their roles better than expected in keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements ( $t(27) = -4.100$ ,  $p < .01$ ), assessing and evaluating pupils'

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**TABLE 3** Items in Which the Primary School Teachers' Ratings of Their Expectations Were Statistically Different From Their Ratings of the Fulfillment of Those Expectations

Expectation > Fulfillment	Expectation < Fulfillment
Giving advice on how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs	Keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements
Giving detailed information on pupils' Special Educational Needs	Assessing and evaluating pupils' Special Educational Needs in detail
Arranging the curriculum for pupils with Special Educational Needs	Liaising with external agencies

special educational needs in detail ( $t(27) = -3.100$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and liaising with external agencies ( $t(27) = -2.100$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Conversely, the primary school teachers regarded the Special Educational Needs Coordinators as falling short of their expectations in giving advice on how to teach pupils with special educational needs ( $t(27) = 4.076$ ,  $p < .01$ ), giving detailed information on pupils' special educational needs ( $t(27) = 2.948$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and arranging the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs ( $t(27) = 2.260$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

*Colleague teachers at secondary schools.* Table 4 shows an analysis of the secondary school teacher's replies, using  $t$ -tests to compare those aspects of Special Educational Needs Coordinators' roles that those teachers considered to be important and those considered to be fulfilled. The items for which differences were statistically significant are listed in Table 5.

The secondary school teachers reported that the Special Educational Needs Coordinators fulfilled their roles better than expected in keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements ( $t(38) = -2.890$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and teaching pupils with special educational needs directly ( $t(36) = -3.400$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, the secondary school teachers regarded the Special Educational Needs Coordinators as falling short of their expectations on four items: giving advice on how to teach pupils with special educational needs ( $t(38) = 4.499$ ,  $p < .01$ ), giving brief advice on implementation of Individual Education Plans ( $t(38) = 2.767$ ,  $p < .01$ ), giving detailed information on pupils' special educational needs ( $t(38) = 2.110$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and assessing and recording pupils' special educational needs in detail ( $t(38) = 4.027$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

In the view of their colleague teachers, the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' most important roles were recording and assessing pupils' special educational needs, advising on teaching methods and/or giving information about special educational needs, and managing the pupils Individual Education Plans. In contrast, in both primary and secondary schools, the colleague teachers were not satisfied with the performance of Special Educational Needs Coordinators in the roles of giving



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**TABLE 4** Secondary School Teachers' Replies as to Which Aspects of the SENCOs' Roles Were Important and Which Were Fulfilled

		Importance	Fulfillment
Factor 1	Giving brief advice on implementation of IEPs	4.23(.78)	3.67(1.06)**
	Giving advice on assessing and recording pupils' special needs	4.26(.91)	3.36(1.16)**
	Giving advice on how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs	4.49(.68)	3.54(1.12)**
	Arranging and managing staff training opportunities	3.82(.94)	3.51(1.14)
	Giving detailed information on pupils' Special Educational Needs	4.67(.53)	4.28(1.02)*
	Managing good staff meetings	3.42(1.08)	3.68(1.09)
Factor 2	Taking the role of consultant for parents	4.05(.86)	4.21(.89)
	Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs directly	3.76(1.26)	4.57(.69)**
	Arranging the curriculum for pupils with Special Educational Needs	4.08(1.04)	4.00(1.05)
	Making a bridge between parents and the schools	4.36(.87)	4.51(.76)
Factor 3	Keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements	4.23(.96)	4.69(.52)**
	Liaising with external agencies	4.49(.72)	4.51(.82)
	Assessing and evaluating pupils' Special Educational Needs in detail	4.46(.76)	4.26(1.04)
Factor 4	Helping to make the school more inclusive	3.85(1.04)	3.95(1.05)
	Making sure to diffuse the inclusion policy in the schools	3.86(.91)	3.74(.82)

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

SENCO=Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

IEP=Individual Education Plans.

Factor 1 : Giving advice and information, and management

Factor 2 : Direct teaching and relationship with parents

Factor 3 : Assessing pupils' needs and information management

Factor 4 : Inclusive education

them advice and information on teaching pupils with special educational needs.

On all items relating to the Special Educational Needs Coordinators providing advice and information, the secondary school teachers reported that the Coordinators did not fulfill their expectations. From the results of the survey of the colleague teachers, it seems that the Special Educational Needs Coordinators in the secondary schools in Greater Manchester saw their role more as teaching pupils directly than in terms of advising their colleagues. This was supported by the high average scores on the item on fulfillment of direct teaching ( $4.57 \pm .69$ ).

Indeed, many Special Educational Needs Coordinators have enough teaching experience and skills to be able to teach pupils with special educational needs, and

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**TABLE 5** Items in Which the Secondary School Teachers' Ratings of Their Expectations Were Statistically Different From Their Ratings of the Fulfillment of Those Expectations

Expectation > Fulfillment	Expectation < Fulfillment
Giving detailed information on pupils' Special Educational Needs	Keeping pupils' records, registers, and Statements
Giving advice on how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs	Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs directly
Giving advice on assessing and recording of pupils' needs	
Giving brief advice on implementation of IEPs	

*Notes.* IEP=Individual Education Plans.

they are expected to do highly skilled direct teaching of those pupils. Their skilled teaching may even have become a model of effective teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

However, there are some possible disadvantages to excessive dependency on Special Educational Needs Coordinators for direct teaching. That dependence of the colleague teachers on the Special Educational Needs Coordinators may isolate the Coordinators and their pupils with special educational needs from the rest of the school. In the 1970s, many remedial teachers had the experience that they and their pupils with special educational needs were isolated from the main body of the school. Sometimes, the remedial departments were regarded as a "backstop" to the main classrooms. The remedial teachers' attitudes and practice was that they were "professionals" in teaching pupils with special needs, and in providing a very individualized educational experience, but in practice, few opportunities arose where they could work together with others. This may have been one of the causes of the isolation in remedial schools, which were obviously "exclusive". This prevented diffusing a policy and practices of inclusion in mainstream schools.

Because differences in pupils' needs are more extensive in secondary than in primary school, colleague secondary school teachers are easily confused about how to make suitable provisions for pupils with special educational needs. This may be why the secondary school colleague teachers tend to depend on the Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

The direct teaching provided by the Special Educational Needs Coordinators may be another cause of exclusive conditions. When the Special Educational Needs Coordinators take time to do direct teaching, this has some potential disadvantages. First of all, it promotes a waste of professional resources, because the Coordinators could, acting as coordinators, affect the educational experience of many more pupils with special educational needs than they could teach directly. Second, when the Special Educational Needs Coordinators do direct teaching, this could easily cause their colleague teachers to depend on them too much. Finally, direct teaching imposes

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an excessive burden on Special Educational Needs Coordinators' workload.

In light of the failures in the remedial teaching system in the past and the Special Educational Needs Coordinators' burdens in the present, direct teaching by the Special Educational Needs Coordinators is not effective for pupils with special educational needs.

Ainscow and Muncey (1989) pointed out that successful schools are characterized by a strong emphasis on collaboration and sharing.

Sanagi (2003) has also argued that it is essential for an effective Special Educational Needs Coordinator system that coordination occurs throughout the school as a whole. One of the most important factors leading to school improvement is collaborative work among the Special Educational Needs Coordinators, their colleague teachers, and other staff, such as teaching assistants.

Colleague teachers should understand the primary roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinators, and make sure that their Special Educational Needs Coordinators exercise the role of coordinator. Colleague teachers should develop their own role of teaching pupils with special educational needs directly.

In-service teacher training and adequate sharing of roles should be regarded as very important in every school (Sanagi, 2003). In-service training for teachers should encourage teachers to take effective roles in collaboration with the Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

For developing such collaboration in schools, a theoretical model of special educational needs, known as the interactive model, can be considered. An interactive model of special educational needs (Sanagi, 2007) regards teachers as an environmental factor that influences pupils. According to this model, the way to establish effective schools for pupils with special educational needs is to have colleague teachers take the roles as teachers with adequate skills for pupils with special educational needs, and let their teaching skills become more effective through collaborative work with the Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

In Japan, there is a coordinator system similar to the Special Educational Needs Coordinators system in England and Wales. However, many colleague teachers in mainstream schools in Japan expect the Coordinators to be professional teaching staff rather than coordinators. In Japanese mainstream schools, many coordinators provide direct teaching at their schools, as well coordinating. This may cause their colleague teachers to depend on them and isolate some pupils with special educational needs and the coordinators from the rest of the school. There is room for investigation about teachers' attitudes toward the roles of coordinators in Japan.

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