



## Professional Supervision: Guidance for SENCOs and school leaders

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# Contents

<a href="#">Acknowledgements</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Foreword</a> .....	3
<a href="#">Background and Rationale</a> .....	4
<a href="#">1. Introduction</a> .....	5
<a href="#">1.1 What is supervision: the role of context and purpose</a> .....	5
<a href="#">1.2 Why is supervision needed <i>for</i> and <i>by</i> SENCOs?</a> .....	7
<a href="#">1.3 Models of supervision</a> .....	9
<a href="#">2. A school wide strategic approach to supervision: information for Senior Leaders</a> .....	9
<a href="#">3. Provision of supervision</a> .....	11
<a href="#">3.1 Roles and responsibilities</a> .....	11
<a href="#">3.2 Supervision agreement</a> .....	11
<a href="#">3.3 Frequency and length of supervision meetings</a> .....	11
<a href="#">3.4 Record keeping</a> .....	12
<a href="#">3.5 Evaluation of supervision</a> .....	12
<a href="#">3.6 Training</a> .....	12
<a href="#">4. Supervision Skills for SENCOs – training and competencies</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Appendices</a> .....	15
<a href="#">Appendix 1: Supervision Agreement</a> .....	15
<a href="#">Appendix 2: Supervision Meeting Record</a> .....	17
<a href="#">Appendix 3: SENCO Supervision Competency Framework</a> .....	18

## Foreword

One of the main reasons that teachers choose to come into the profession is their desire to make a difference for the children and young people they work with. The knowledge of the impact we can have is one of the greatest joys of teaching, but it also brings with it significant pressures. Teachers can feel great responsibility and are tasked with making many hundreds of decisions each day, from seemingly insignificant to hugely important – and the nature of classroom practice means many of these need to be made in relative isolation.

And whilst in other professions, a culture of ‘professional supervision’ exists – where practitioners have access to an expert supervisor to support them as they develop their knowledge and practice – this model is not established in teaching. Coaching and mentoring play their roles, but the notion of supervision is one that is rarely addressed.

We know the challenges above can exist for teachers across all roles, but they can be particularly profound for SENCOs, who often have responsibility for a very wide area. It is fitting, therefore, that the important piece of work around supervision in the teaching profession that is outlined in this guidance has started with a focus on SENCOs.

Of course, its relevance does not stop there – the model and principles discussed here have application across a wide range of roles in and out of the classroom, and it is imperative that we see work in this area develop and grow into all areas of teaching in time.

The knowledge, skills and expertise of a supervisor should not be underestimated. Many SENCOs will never have experienced supervision themselves, so do not have a model for how it can work. Even those who have had access to high-quality supervision need to be trained in how to act as a supervisor.

At the Chartered College of Teaching, we know how important it is that professional development for teachers is carefully designed and well-supported, and we are pleased to see the powerful model that has been developed here for training and supporting SENCO supervisors. We look forward to seeing how it is adopted and built upon, and to seeing a culture of supervision flourish for SENCOs, and, in time, the wider teaching profession.

**Cat Scutt**

**Director of Education and Research**

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## Background and Rationale

Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) with teachers, teaching assistants, learning mentors and support assistants are at the ‘forefront’ of supporting many of the most vulnerable pupils in schools. However, unlike most, if not all, of the professions concerned with the education and wider wellbeing of children and young people such as social work, educational psychology, speech therapy, nursing, occupational therapy and counselling, there is no formal tradition of supervision for educators in schools.

Recognising this, the Centre for Inclusive Education at UCL Institute of Education, with the Chartered College of Teaching, has developed this guidance and resources to enable school leaders, SENCOs and training providers to establish effective and safe supervision practices. The guidance is based on findings and recommendations from a working group set up in September 2018 that included:

- Lecturers in special educational needs and/or disabilities with diverse backgrounds: teaching, educational psychology, supervision and coaching;
- SENCOs from primary, secondary and specialist settings and
- The Chartered College of Teaching.

The remit of the working group was to:

1. Write, deliver and evaluate a pilot Supervision Skills for SENCOs training course;
2. Incorporate, as part of the course, a supervision skills competency framework and
3. Consider recommendations in relation to SENCO entry qualifications and experience and course quality assurance indicators.

The course was developed in the autumn of 2018, with delivery across the spring and summer of 2019. After a review of course experiences and outcomes in autumn 2019, the following guidance was published. In respect of supervision *for* and *by* SENCOs it is the first guidance of its kind in England and therefore, we hope it will inform practice that is currently in place as well as prove helpful for senior leaders, SENCOs and training providers who may be seeking to implement and/or deliver supervision training. This is not a manual of ‘how to do’ supervision but is guidance that should be used alongside formal supervision training (see section 4). As practice develops, we envisage that the guidance will require updating in light of greater engagement and learning and look forward to further developments in the field, including how such a framework might be extended to all school educators.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is supervision: the role of context and purpose

Even in professions where supervision is well established, there is no universally agreed definition of supervision. This is in part, the need for a definition to reflect the specific context, professional role and purpose within which it operates. Hence, the following terms such as clinical, professional, reflective and counselling supervision are commonly used. The authors have adopted the following definition of supervision that is cognisant of the school and wider education context within which SENCOs practice:

*A structured process that supports the development of knowledge, competence and confidence on the part of the supervisee in order to address provision for pupils with SEND in a setting.*

However, it is impossible to condense the complexities of supervision into one sentence and hence Table 1 shows in more detail, what supervision is and what it is not within the school SENCO context.

Table 1. *Defining supervision: The cornerstone for all stakeholders including the supervisee*

Supervision is...	Supervision is not...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirming</li> <li>• About listening and being heard</li> <li>• A distinct professional learning and development tool</li> <li>• A safe space to question and challenge</li> <li>• A structured framework for process and reflection</li> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Self-driven/self-owned by participants</li> <li>• Supportive of personal accountability</li> <li>• An exploration of the relationship between actions and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A performance management tool</li> <li>• Therapy (although it may be therapeutic)</li> <li>• Counselling or an opportunity to practice as a counsellor</li> <li>• Part of the reporting process</li> <li>• A teaching session</li> <li>• A judgement or assessment of practice</li> <li>• Mentoring or coaching</li> <li>• A place for blame</li> </ul>

Adapted from Helen and Douglas House (2014). Clinical Supervision Toolkit<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helen and Douglas House (2014) Clinical Supervision Toolkit  
<https://www.helenanddouglas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/hdh-clinical-supervision-toolkit.pdf>

For school leaders supporting and practitioners providing supervision, it is important to have clarity as to how supervision differs from some of the more common professional development activities such as coaching and mentoring (Figure 1). Moreover, more experienced practitioners may inhabit the role of supervisor, mentor and coach at different times in their career and clarity therefore, will allow for more effective support.

Coaching	Mentoring	Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner's practice*</li>   <li>• Coach is usually chosen by professional learner</li>   <li>• Coach has knowledge and expertise relevant to the goals of the professional learner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports professional learner through significant career transitions</li>   <li>• Led by experienced colleagues with knowledge of the requirements of the role</li>   <li>• Broker access to a range of increasingly self-directed learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of knowledge, competence and confidence in everyday practice</li> <li>• Explores the relational aspects of the professional role across the different working contexts</li> <li>• Explores and helps to process the emotional impact of the professional role</li> <li>• Facilitates understanding</li> <li>• Focus on individual 'cases' (pupils, practitioners, organisational structures and systems) related to SEND provision</li> <li>• Process not expert/same experience led</li> <li>• Agenda participant led</li> <li>• On-going throughout career</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Supervision and other forms of professional learning and development

## 1.2 Why is supervision needed *for* and *by* SENCOs?

A recent study of 363 SEND teachers across 34 states in the United States found a statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher burnout.<sup>2</sup> The authors of the study analysed a number of related research papers and identified the following factors that contributed to greater job satisfaction for SEND teachers:

- Leaders that value input, provide effective feedback and involve teachers in decision-making;
- Leaders that provide positive reinforcement to help alleviate self-doubt and instil commitment and motivation;
- Meaningful professional development opportunities that are relevant to their classrooms and enhance learning and
- Opportunities for teachers to learn and grow in their profession.

Supervision both in content and structure incorporates all these elements associated with job satisfaction as part of the process.

Research evidence on supervision in schools is very much an emerging subject for study. Over the past two years, evidence from three small scale studies of supervision in schools for SENCOs and other professionals supporting vulnerable children reported very positive findings from participants and ‘tested’ different models/approaches to supervision.<sup>3 4</sup> Some of the benefits across the three studies included:

- providing a framework for discussing challenging situations in everyday real-world scenarios;
- time to consider and discuss the multitudes of possible avenues available for many complex problems faced by practitioners;
- supervision as a powerful and restorative experience, professionally and personally;
- provides opportunities to foster a greater sense of camaraderie between colleagues.

By introducing supervision into the teaching profession on a more formal basis, it is envisaged that it will contribute towards addressing three specific ‘real life’ matters in education.

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<sup>2</sup> Robinson, O. P., Bridges, S. A., Rollins, L. H., & Schumacker, R. E. (2019). A study of the relation between special education burnout and job satisfaction. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*.

<sup>3</sup> Reid, H., & Soan, S. (2018). Providing support to senior managers in schools via ‘clinical’ supervision: a restorative and purposeful professional and personal space. *Professional Development in Education*. ISSN 1941-5257

<sup>4</sup> Willis, J., & Baines, E. (2018). The perceived benefits and difficulties in introducing and maintaining supervision groups in a SEMH special school. *Educational Review*, 70(3), 259-279.



1. **Professional development and inclusive practice:** pupils with SEND make up approximately twenty percent of the school population. This is a fifth of the school population. In addition, within the current context of economic austerity and cuts to services that support vulnerable children, the complexities of leading and working within a school have increased with teachers, and particularly SENCOS, expected to support pupils and families who have experienced serious social issues, including domestic violence, abuse, drug and alcohol addiction. Supervision is a form of support and professional development that can assist SENCOS, teachers and support staff to manage both the personal and professional demands of such demanding, and often disturbing work.
2. **Teacher wellbeing:** teaching professionals are at an increased risk of common mental health disorders compared with other occupations. Findings from the Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) pilot study found that, among a sample of 555 secondary school teachers, scores on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale were approximately four points below the average of the general working population. Additionally, 19.4% reported experiencing moderate to severe levels of depression on the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), compared with a general population prevalence of 8–10%.<sup>5</sup> Supervision supports the wellbeing of individual professionals by allowing them to address elements of their practice that are of direct concern to them.
3. **Teacher retention:** national data indicate that this increased risk of mental health disorders may be contributing, negatively, on teacher retention. Recent Government data show that the percentage of teachers that were still in post three years after qualifying and entering service was 74 per cent, decreasing to 69 per cent and 60 per cent after 5 and 10 years, respectively (DfE 2017). These figures are supported by independent research that shows the number of qualified teachers leaving the state sector has been slowly increasing year on year with approximately 10–11% of qualified teachers leave each year.<sup>6</sup> Apart from workload leading to poor health, other reasons for leaving the profession reported by teachers include wanting more time to learn from others and to have time to reflect on their own practices. Supervision allows for structured reflection on practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Ford, T. J., Evans, R., Brockman, R., Grey, J., Bell, S., Harding, S., ... & Tilling, K. (2018). A cluster randomised controlled trial of the Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) Project—an intervention to improve the mental health support and training available to secondary school teachers: protocol for an integrated process evaluation.

<sup>6</sup> Worth, J., De Lazzari, G., and Hillary, J. (2017). Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Interim Report. Slough: NFER

### 1.3 Models of supervision

There are many models of supervision. A model is a way of conceptualising and applying supervision in a transparent and systematic way in any given setting. Supervision models are underpinned by different theories and practitioners are advised to explore in depth the models most appropriate for their context. Table 2 summarises the three supervision models most used by members of the working group during the pilot course.

Table 2. *Models of supervision*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Overview</b>
Functional Interaction Model (Proctor 1987)	Three main functions of supervision: Developmental/Normative and Restorative
CLEAR model (Hawkins & Smith 2006)	Distinct stages in supervision - Contract/Listen/Explore/Action/Review
Solution Focused (Wasket 2006)	Invites and develops supervisee's preferred future for themselves as a professional and in supporting other students/staff/parents

Although not applied by any member of the working group (published towards the end of the pilot) Tangen and colleagues have proposed a supervision protocol, based on six learning theories, to be used to inform the development of novice supervisors.<sup>7</sup> The working group reviewed the protocol and found it to be informative and particularly relevant for educators due to the emphasis on learning theory which is integral to everyday practice.

## 2. A school wide strategic approach to supervision: information for Senior Leaders

Lessons from the pilot programme clearly demonstrated that senior leadership support and a school wide strategic approach was an essential component of more effective supervision. To this end, some of the activity during the pilot programme focused on feasibility concerns and how a setting might gradually introduce supervision being mindful of:

- that this is a relatively 'new' practice for school leaders and SENCOs to learn how it might best be provided for practitioners in their setting and

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<sup>7</sup> Tangen, J. L., Borders, L. D., & Fickling, M. J. (2019). The Supervision Guide: Informed by Theory, Ready for Practice. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 41(2), 240-251.

- that there will be a demand on resources and that these need to be used wisely in the first instance and in a way that offers the best chance of success.

Table 3 presents an overview of how some of the SENCOs were strategically introducing supervision into their settings.

Table 3. *Strategic approach to introducing supervision in a setting*

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>
<b>Intended change</b>	<b>Actions to achieve change</b>	<b>Actions to achieve change</b>	<b>Actions to achieve change</b>
Supervision is embedded within school structures and practice	<p>SENCO attends external supervision training that includes their own supervision</p> <p>Discussions and draft policy confirming preparations for year 2 to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aims/objectives</li> <li>-Participants</li> <li>-How often</li> <li>-Protected time for supervisees and supervisor</li> <li>- Venue</li> <li>-Agreed paperwork</li> <li>-Review and evaluation of supervision</li> </ul>	Review of draft policy	<p>Review of year 2 pilot findings</p> <p>Supervision policy confirmed</p>
Practice and wellbeing of identified members of staff is developed and supported through supervision	SENCO to pilot supervision with two/three colleagues as appropriate in the setting	<p>SENCO to receive ongoing external supervision</p> <p>Year 2 of pilot with extended number of one to one supervision provided by SENCO</p> <p>Introduction of one group supervision</p>	<p>SENCO to receive external supervision</p> <p>Full offer of supervision programme</p>

## 3. Provision of supervision

This section addresses many of the practical elements of supervision and where relevant makes links to exemplars in the appendices that can be used or adapted.

### 3.1 Roles and responsibilities

Before embarking supervision within a setting, it is important to be clear about who will hold overall responsibility for its provision. Alongside planning, implementing and evaluating supervision, this person will lead on creating a *culture of supervision*. This includes how the leadership team demonstrates that supervision is valued, through for example, the allocation of protected and undisturbed time and the fact that all those who take part in supervision also hold responsibility for what happens in and as a result of supervision.

### 3.2 Supervision agreement

The supervision agreement (sometimes called a supervision contract) is the working agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee and an example is provided in Appendix 1. It should be seen as a positive document that ensures transparency and security in supervision. An agreement, for example, helps to clarify:

- The responsibilities of both parties and their shared responsibility for the process;
- Expectations of supervision;
- Boundaries and how confidentiality will be addressed;
- How difficulties might be handled and
- Practical arrangements.

### 3.3 Frequency and length of supervision meetings

Frequency and duration of supervision meetings will need to be decided by the senior leaders and the participants within an individual setting. It will vary according to individual requirements, but the general principles of purpose, consistency and regularity should be considered. During the pilot programme SENCO supervision sessions were fifty minutes in length and took place once a term as the emphasis was on developing supervision skills which the SENCOs were developing in parallel in their settings.

### 3.4 Record keeping

In addition to the supervision agreement, a record of each supervision meeting should be kept. Appendix 2 is one example of a supervision meeting record format, used during the pilot that can be adapted for use. As part of the wider school policy on supervision, the school will need to agree such issues as: who will see the records, where will they be stored and how for how long.

### 3.5 Evaluation of supervision

Evaluation of supervision needs to take place regularly, at different levels and in various ways. There will be informal evaluation at the end supervision meeting but at regular intervals, the SENCO and school leadership team should undertake more formal evaluation, through for example, a before and after questionnaire after a set period. How supervision is to be evaluated in any setting should be considered from the outset which includes what is to be evaluated as well as how. Some of the questions that might be considered at an individual level and as part of a school wide evaluation of supervision include:

- What new knowledge has been learnt that wasn't known before supervision took place?
- What new skills have been applied as a result of supervision?
- How has provision for pupils with SEND developed?
- What are the implications for practitioner wellbeing?

### 3.6 Training

Supervision, like teaching, is complex and a 'more difficult task than it looks'. There is a body of knowledge and a range of skills to be acquired and developed, that are not part of everyday teaching practice. Therefore, supervisors in schools should attend externally provided formal training in supervision which preferably allows time and opportunities to practise the development of supervisions skills. Moreover, when introducing supervision for the first time to a setting, it is important that it is introduced as part of the whole school continuing professional development programme, so that all staff are aware of its purpose, benefits, specific aims in a setting and procedures.

## 4. Supervision Skills for SENCOs – training and competencies

This content of this section is specifically aimed at university and training providers who are and/or may wish to offer supervision skills training for SENCOs. As with the rest of the guidance it is based on learning from the pilot course and outcomes from the working group.

### *Course content and structure*

Table 4 presents a summary of a course very similar to that provided by UCL but with some minor changes as a result of post course evaluations. The rationale for the content and structure of the two term course is that it allows for:

- Time for knowledge and skills to be understood, applied and developed;
- One-to-one supervision time to address individual and setting specific issues and
- Group supervision for SENCOs to explore understandings of shared challenges.

Table 4. *Supervision Skills for SENCOs course content and structure*

<b>Days</b>	<b>Content</b>
Day 1 and 2	Introduction to supervision to include subjects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitions and purpose of supervision;</li> <li>• Principles and values of supervision;</li> <li>• Models of supervision;</li> <li>• Practical elements of supervision;</li> <li>• Ethical elements of supervision;</li> <li>• Goal setting;</li> <li>• Group supervision and</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>
Day 3 and 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group supervision followed by individual supervision</li> </ul>
Day 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group supervision</li> <li>• Review and evaluation</li> <li>• Next steps planning</li> </ul>

### *Entry requirements*

The following entry requirements were stipulated as part of the pilot and after reviewing no further changes were made:

- Completion of the National Award for SEN Coordination;
- A minimum of two years post Award experience;
- Head teacher and school support and
- A 300 word written application by the SENCO explaining their reasons for course application.

Due to the skills required of supervisors, the working group considered that some post-qualifying time was required to allow newly appointed SENCOs to focus on meeting and embedding learning on the main requirements of the SENCO role. Moreover, the course afforded an opportunity for experienced SENCOs to develop professionally in their roles and contribute to the wider professional learning function within and beyond their settings.

#### *Course delivery quality assurance*

In recognition of the demands of the course and in many ways the importance of leading by example the working groups recommended that all tutors on the course had to:

- Have completed their own formal supervision training;
- Take part in tutor group supervision during the course and
- Have extensive SEND experience.

#### *Supervision competency framework*

In order to inform the content of the course and ensure continued self-reflection and development once the course was completed, the working group has published a SENCO Supervision Competency Framework (Appendix 3).

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Supervision Agreement

This is a supervision agreement between

..... (supervisee)

and

..... (supervisor)

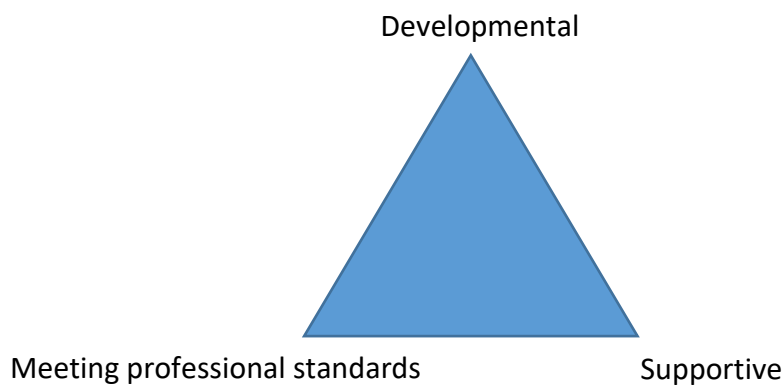
on ..... (date).

This agreement will be reviewed on ..... (date). We will meet every

..... (frequency) at .....

(day & time) for a period of ..... (duration). This will only be rearranged in event of illness or crisis. It will occur in a room which enables both parties to concentrate and to reflect in depth. Both parties will be punctual and all efforts made to ensure privacy and no interruptions.

The purpose of the supervision will be to address the supervisee's development, offer them support and enable them to meet professional standards. The supervision will consist of a balance of the three activities indicated below:





Purpose of supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the supervisee’s development</li> <li>• Offer them support</li> <li>• Enable them to meet professional standards</li> </ul>
Supervisee’s goals	

A range of methods will be used within sessions, but the main focus of the work is the practice of the supervisee.

Each session will be recorded and signed by both parties as an accurate record. This record will be kept safe and secure by both parties.

In the event of any dispute on this or any other issue within supervision, either party can approach ..... who will act as a mediator.

All disclosures within supervision should be treated with a high level of discretion. All *thoughts and feelings* disclosed within supervision are absolutely confidential except if they relate to risk to a child/children or may indicate a serious mental health problem.

Disclosures that relate to *behaviour* such as breaches of professional conduct and/or issues related to risk to self or others are not confidential.

In exceptional circumstances supervisors will have to share disclosures with their own supervisor when they need advice or support.

Supervision will be monitored through informal evaluation at the end of each session - what was helpful about the session and what was difficult or less helpful about the session. Formal evaluation will be conducted on .....

Signature: (supervisee) .....

Signature: (supervisor) .....

Date: .....

## Appendix 2: Supervision Meeting Record

### Supervision Record

Supervisee name:

Supervisor name:

Date of supervision meeting:

Meeting number:

<b>Goals agreed as part of Supervision Agreement</b>	
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<b>Actions/Decisions/Advice</b>	<b>Person(s) responsible</b>	<b>Completion/Feedback or review date</b>

Supervisee signature:

Supervisor signature:

Date:

### Appendix 3: SENCO Supervision Competency Framework

		Emerging	Developing	Competent
<b>1</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>			
1.1	Know the purpose and benefits of supervision			
1.2	Know about the models and theories of supervision			
1.3	Know what supervision is and what supervision is not within the SENCO context			
1.4	Know the research on supervision			
1.5	Know about the legal and ethical issues relevant to supervision			
1.6	Know how to evaluate the process and outcomes of supervision			
1.7	Know the importance of and how to support a school wide culture of supervision			
<b>2</b>	<b>Qualities</b>			
2.1	Demonstrates authenticity in practice and in relationships			
2.2	Demonstrates ethical practice in all contexts			
2.3	Values diversity and individual difference			
2.4	Encourages professional growth of colleagues			
<b>3</b>	<b>Skills</b>			
3.1	Can support senior leaders in establishing a school wider supervision culture			
3.2	Can negotiate a mutually agreed and clear contract			
3.3	Can establish and maintain clear boundaries at the start of and during supervision			
3.4	Can manage the challenge of simultaneously holding a line management and supervision role when required			
3.5	Can agree goals at the start of supervision			
3.6	Can apply a range of supervisory models			
3.7	Can engage in reflective and meaningful feedback			
3.8	Can effectively record supervision meetings			
3.9	Can respond appropriately and confidently to any legal and ethical issues that might arise during supervision			
3.10	Can effectively evaluate the process and outcomes of supervision			
<b>4</b>	<b>Commitment to own development</b>			
4.1	Have ensured supervision of own supervision			
4.2	Committed to updating own supervisory skills			
4.3	Committed to updating wider professional knowledge and skills in relation to SEND			