



One minute guide

Area SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) Ofsted and CQC inspections

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What are joint area SEND inspections?

In January 2023, [OfSTED](#) and the [Care Quality Commission](#) (CQC) adopted a new framework for jointly inspecting local area arrangements to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). These inspections assess how effectively education, health, and social care services in the area work together to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 years, and their families.

The new inspection framework builds on the framework first introduced in 2016. This was focused on how effectively local areas deliver new statutory duties introduced by the [Children and Families Act 2014](#) and the [SEND Code of Practice 2015](#). Leeds was inspected under this framework in 2016; please see this [letter](#) from inspectors.

What does the inspection framework cover?

The new inspection framework continues to assess how effectively education, health, and social care services in the area deliver statutory duties. However it also responds to the national SEND review 2022: [Right support, right place, right time](#) with some new features, as follows:

- A greater focus on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND and their families. Inspectors will meet with children, young people and their families, and they will also send a survey to every child or young person with SEND in the local area, and their family, asking about their experiences.
- Greater focus on partnership working, joint arrangements, and clear accountabilities across the local education, health and care partnership. Lead inspectors for education, for health, and for social care, will lead multi-disciplinary inspection teams
- A new focus on alternative provision (which provides education for children who cannot attend a mainstream school) and how it is commissioned and overseen locally
- A new cycle of inspections, based on 3 new judgements to be made by inspectors:
 - *The local area partnership's SEND arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed;*
 - *The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements; and*
 - *There are widespread and/ or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.*
- Each local area will be inspected at least once during a five year period, with more frequent re-inspection for areas where arrangements do not typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes.
- Local areas are also subject to themed inspections, and to an annual engagement meeting.

How are the inspections carried out?

Inspections take place over three weeks. In weeks one and two, the local area must provide a range of local data and information. This includes person-level data (lists of all children and young people with SEND who live in the local authority area, including those educated out of area) and information about how local education, health and care services commission and deliver services for children and young people with SEND and their families. Inspectors will also select specific children and young people's cases for 'tracking', and will require data and documents relating to those cases. They will aim to talk to all the children and young people who are 'tracked', and their families. They will also ask for surveys to be shared with all local children and young people with SEND and their parents or carers.

In week three, inspectors are on-site for fieldwork, including meetings with leaders and practitioners and visits to a sample of local education, health, and/ or care settings. During visits to settings, inspectors will evaluate children and young people's experiences and outcomes by reviewing documents and records, and talking to practitioners. The settings visited are not subject to evaluation or judgement under this inspection, as they are subject to their own inspection arrangements, but their records and practice will be scrutinised. The joint SEND inspection is focused on how effectively local education, health, and care partners work together to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, with shared accountability.

How will inspectors judge local areas?

The [inspection framework and handbook](#) set out in detail the evaluation criteria inspectors use to judge the area. In brief: inspectors evaluate the effectiveness of the area's partnership SEND arrangements in improving experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, including the extent to which:

- Children and young people's needs are identified accurately and assessed;
- Children, young people and families participate in decisions about plans and support;
- Children and young people receive the right help at the right time;
- Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps, and achieve strong outcomes
- Children and young people are valued, visible and included in their communities.

Inspectors also evaluate how effectively local area partners work together to plan, evaluate and develop the SEND system, including the extent to which:

- Leaders are ambitious for children and young people with SEND;
- Leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families;
- Leaders have an accurate, shared understanding of the needs of children and young people in their local area;
- Leaders commission services and provision to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people, including commissioning of alternative provision;
- Leaders evaluate services and make improvements; and
- Leaders create an environment in which effective practice and multi-agency working can flourish.

Further information

The full [inspection framework and handbook](#) is available online.