



One minute guide

Area SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) inspections

No. 206, August 2025

What are Area SEND inspections?

In January 2023, [OfSTED](#) and the [Care Quality Commission](#) (CQC) adopted a new inspection framework for the inspection of local area arrangements for children and young people with special educational needs (SEND).

The framework replaces the previous SEND inspection framework that began in 2016 (please see the [one minute guide](#)). The 2016 inspection framework looked at the support and services provided to children and young people with SEND after the introduction of the [Children Act](#) in 2014, which introduced new statutory duties for local areas and extended the age range that services must be provided for, from 0-19 to 0-25 years. Leeds was inspected under this framework in 2016; please see the published [letter](#).

The Area SEND inspections still look at the extent to which local areas are meeting their legal responsibilities, but the focus of the inspections has expanded to include the impact that local area partnerships have on the lives of children and young people with SEND. The framework also evaluates the local authority's commissioning and oversight of [alternative provision](#).

The 2023 framework introduces three possible inspection outcomes:

- 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.
- 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 (or more frequently depending on the previous inspection outcome). Local areas are also subject to themed inspections and an annual engagement meeting with Ofsted and the CQC to explore their self-assessment of their SEND system and plans for meeting the current and future needs of children and young people with SEND.

How are the inspections carried out?

Inspections take place over three weeks. Weeks one and two are focused on the local area providing inspectors with a range of information and data about their SEND arrangements and documents relating to cases selected by inspectors for tracking, while inspectors are on-site in week three for fieldwork, evidence gathering and feedback to the local area.

The fieldwork begins with a meeting between the inspection team and senior leaders from the local authority and health partners. Individual inspectors then attend planned meetings with a range of leaders and practitioners from education, health, social care and third sector agencies to discuss and evaluate provision for SEND across the local area. They also meet with children and young people, their parents and carers and the practitioners working with them to discuss their experiences and views of the support they have received.

How are providers and services involved?

Inspectors carry out sampling visits to a number of providers and services across education, health and care to review the experiences of children and young people. Inspectors evaluate children and young people's experiences and outcomes by reviewing documents, talking to practitioners and viewing children and young people's records.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of the providers and settings themselves are not evaluated under this inspection framework; such settings remain subject to their own inspection arrangements and the SEND inspection will only be focused on the impact of the local area's effectiveness for children and young people with SEND.

The scope of the inspection covers children and young people who live in the local authority area, including those educated out of area. It does not cover those who live in other areas but attend an education setting within the local authority's boundaries.

How will inspectors evaluate local areas?

The inspection framework sets out the evaluation criteria inspectors use to evaluate the local area. The criteria is set out in detail in the inspection framework and handbook; please see the link in the further information section below.

Inspectors evaluate the effectiveness of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements and the experiences and outcomes of 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 evaluate how the 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 arrangements for children and young people in 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 [inspection framework and handbook](#) outlining how the inspections are carried out are available from the central government gov.uk website.