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Guidance

Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook

Updated 30 January 2024

Applies to England

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 **This guidance came into force on 30 January 2024.**

Introduction

1. This document sets out the framework and handbook for inspecting local area arrangements for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It was devised jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for use from 2023 and will be periodically reviewed and amended.

2. This document has 2 parts:

- The area SEND inspection framework – the framework sets out the purposes and principles of inspection and its statutory basis, along with the inspection approach, model, frequency and timing
- The area SEND inspection handbook – the handbook sets out the evaluation criteria that inspectors use to make judgements, and examples of the kinds of evidence they gather and activities they carry out to evaluate the local area's arrangements for children and young people with SEND. It includes information about the inspection process before, during and after the inspection

3. These inspections are carried out jointly by Ofsted and the CQC. Inspectors who specialise in education, health and social care will work together as a single inspection team.

Collecting and processing personal information

4. During an inspection, inspectors will gather personal data and information that are necessary to help them evaluate local SEND arrangements. [Ofsted's privacy notice](#) and the [CQC's privacy statement](#) set out what data we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it and people's rights under data protection legislation.

The area SEND inspection framework

5. This framework sets out the purposes and principles of inspection and its statutory basis, along with the inspection approach, model, frequency and timing.

Principles and purpose of inspection

6. The purpose of inspection is to:

- provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements

7. Inspectors will uphold the highest professional standards in their work. They will treat everyone they meet during inspections fairly and with the respect and sensitivity they deserve. Inspectors will work constructively with leaders and staff, demonstrating professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times. Inspectors will evaluate a range of evidence against the [evaluation schedule](#). They will follow Ofsted and the CQC's published policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding and equality.

8. Our inspections of local area partnerships:

- lead to judgements about the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- provide information to help local area partnerships improve their arrangements for children and young people with SEND, and to support improvement of the SEND system as a whole
- ensure that information on the effectiveness of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements is available to children and young people with SEND and their

families, so they can make informed decisions about their education, health and care

- include an evaluation of the local authority's commissioning and oversight arrangements for children and young people in alternative provision; our reports include information on this, to help local authorities improve their arrangements
- provide information for the Secretary of State for Education, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and Parliament about the effectiveness of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements, to enable the government to act, if necessary; this information includes whether local area partnerships are working effectively to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND

Statutory basis for area SEND inspections

9. Ofsted and the CQC carry out joint inspections of local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

[\[footnote 1\]](#) At their discretion, they may also carry out monitoring inspections of local areas using their power in section 20(2) of the Children Act 2004.

Local area partnership duties

10. Inspectors assess the extent to which the local area partners are complying with relevant legal duties relating to arrangements for children and young people with SEND. Relevant legal duties may include duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Overarching approach to inspection

11. Inspections evaluate how well members of a local area partnership work together to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The focus is not on inspecting the specific individuals that work in the local area partnership.

12. 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area. A local area is the geographic footprint of a local authority. When

evaluating the local area partnership, inspectors focus mainly on how effectively the local authority and integrated care board (ICB) jointly plan, evaluate and develop services for children and young people with SEND. However, they also consider the duties of other area partners, which are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 and described further in the SEND code of practice.

13. Inspections evaluate arrangements for all children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 covered by the SEND code of practice, including those who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and those who receive special educational needs (SEN) support. The scope of the inspection covers children and young people who live in the local authority area but attend education settings or receive services outside of the local authority's geographical boundaries. However, it does not cover those who live in other local areas but attend an education setting within the local authority's boundaries.

14. The inspection will consider whether local authorities' approach to commissioning and overseeing alternative provision arrangements for children and young people in the local authority area meets their duties as set out in section 19 of the Education Act 1996 and in statutory guidance. [\[footnote 2\]](#)

Inspection model

15. Under this framework, we use previous area SEND inspection outcomes, as well as other information that we have, to inform our decisions about the timing and type of inspection.

16. The area SEND inspection system includes:

- full inspections, which evaluate and report on the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND. We ask all areas to update and publish their strategic plans after a full inspection. Where we have identified areas for priority action, we will require publication of a priority action plan (area SEND), in line with Regulations 3 and 4 of the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015 (this requirement will replace the requirement to produce a written statement of action (WSoA) under the previous framework)
- monitoring inspections, which evaluate and report on progress in areas where Ofsted and the CQC have identified areas for priority action at a full inspection. Monitoring inspections may also be carried out at the discretion of Ofsted and the

CQC where serious concerns have been identified

- engagement meetings between Ofsted and the CQC's representatives and representatives of the local area partnership to review the partnership's self-evaluation and action plan and discuss what is happening in the area, including any challenges and how leaders are addressing them
- area SEND thematic visits to a small number of areas, with the aim of investigating a particular aspect of the SEND system in depth. Ofsted and the CQC will share learning from these visits in national reports.

The guidance for each set of thematic visits will be published separately

17. Following a full inspection, inspectors will report on the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND. The report will include:

- the inspection outcome
- what it is like to be a child or young person with SEND in the local area
- what the local area partnership is doing well and what needs to be improved
- recommendations for improvements that the local area partnership should act on

whether any areas for priority action have been identified and which area partners are responsible for addressing them

- the likely type and timing of the next inspection activity

Frequency and type of area SEND inspections

18. The frequency and type of inspection activity for areas are based on inspection outcomes. All local areas will receive a full inspection at least once during a 5-year period. However, the frequency and type of inspection activity in any individual local area will be based on previous inspection outcomes and any relevant additional information received by Ofsted and the CQC.

19. We use the information we have when deciding how best to inspect each local area partnership. There will be times when concerns arise about a local area partnership. When this happens, the Ofsted regional director will decide whether to carry out an inspection. The information that informs our scheduling process includes regional intelligence, engagement meetings between inspectors and the local area partnership, and performance analysis.

20. There are 3 possible full inspection outcomes, leading to different subsequent inspection activity:

Inspection outcome	Subsequent meetings and inspection activities
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.	Engagement meetings Full inspection usually within 5 years
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.	Engagement meetings Full inspection usually within 3 years
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.	Engagement meetings Submission of priority action plan (area SEND) Monitoring inspection usually within 18 months of the publication of the full inspection report Full reinspection usually within 3 years

21. If we become aware of information that suggests a significant deterioration in performance or a serious concern, Ofsted and the CQC may carry out a monitoring inspection or bring forward an area's full inspection to take place sooner than originally planned.

22. If the local authority in the local area is also receiving monitoring visits under the ['Inspecting local authority children's services' framework](#), there will usually be no

more than 3 monitoring visits across both frameworks within a 12-month period.

23. Under the previous area SEND inspection framework, His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) required local areas identified as having significant weaknesses to produce a WSoA. Local areas with a WSoA that were not revisited under the previous framework will have a full inspection within the first 3 years of the new inspection cycle.

24. New local areas will have a full inspection within 3 years of coming into existence. Any monitoring inspections that were planned for the predecessor local area or areas will not be carried out.

25. There are other Ofsted and CQC inspections that will involve local area partners. As far as possible, we will take the timing of all these inspections into account when planning the overall inspection schedule.

The area SEND inspection handbook

26. This handbook sets out how inspectors gather evidence and judge a local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND. This handbook is primarily a guide for inspectors on how to carry out area SEND inspections. However, we have made it publicly available so that children and young people with SEND, their parents and carers, local area leaders and practitioners, and other organisations, are informed about the processes and procedures of inspection.

27. The handbook balances the need for consistency in inspections with the flexibility required to respond to the individual circumstances of each local area. It should not be regarded as a set of inflexible rules, but as a broad account of inspection procedures.

28. During the inspection, inspectors will visit providers such as early years settings, schools, alternative provision, colleges and specialist services to gather evidence. [\[footnote 3\]](#) These providers will not be under inspection; they will remain subject to separate inspection arrangements in line with Ofsted and the CQC's statutory and regulatory duties and powers.

29. This handbook has 4 parts:

- Part 1: The evaluation schedule – the evaluation criteria inspectors use to make

their judgements

- Part 2: How local area partnerships will be inspected – information about the processes before, during and after an inspection
- Part 3: Monitoring inspections – the purpose and details of monitoring inspections
- Part 4: Engagement meetings – the purpose and details of engagement meetings

Part 1: The evaluation schedule – how we will judge local areas

30. Ofsted and the CQC have identified the features of effective local SEND arrangements from research, inspection evidence and consultation with children, young people, families, leaders and practitioners. We have used these features to create the evaluation criteria. Inspectors will use the evaluation criteria to judge the effectiveness of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements and their impact on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people.

31. Inspectors will evaluate the impact of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements on 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 in a timely and effective way
- children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual 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

32. Inspectors will 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
- leaders create an environment in which effective practice and multi-agency working can flourish

33. The evaluation schedule is not exhaustive. In applying it, inspectors will use their professional judgement, together with the instructions and guidance in [part 2](#).

34. The evaluation schedule is a guide for inspectors. It can also support the local area partnership in its self-evaluation and ongoing improvement activities.

Approach to judgements

35. Following a full inspection, inspectors will make an overall summary judgement about the local area partnership. This judgement reflects the inspectors' evaluation of the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

36. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to decide how much evidence they need to gather against each of the evaluation criteria, following lines of enquiry as they emerge, to reach the final inspection outcome.

Inspection outcomes

37. There are 3 inspection outcomes:

The local area partnership's 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 next full area SEND inspection will be within 5 years.

Ofsted and the CQC ask the local area partnership to update and publish its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

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.

The next full area SEND inspection will take place within approximately 3 years.

Ofsted and the CQC ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

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.

A monitoring inspection will be carried out within approximately 18 months. The next full area SEND inspection will take place within approximately 3 years.

HMCI requires the local area partnership to prepare and submit a priority action plan (area SEND) to address the identified areas for priority action.

Reaching a judgement that the local area partnership's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes

38. Inspectors will make this judgement if, having gathered and evaluated evidence using the evaluation criteria, they find that:

- children and young people are typically achieving strong outcomes, and
- children and young people's experiences of their education, health and care are typically positive, and
- the local area partnership has identified any areas for improvement and is taking effective action to address them, and
- there are no areas for priority action

Reaching a judgement that the local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes

39. Inspectors will make this judgement if:

- either of the points in relation to the experiences and outcomes of children and young people in [paragraph 38](#) are not met, and
- there are no areas for priority action

Reaching a judgement that there are widespread and/or systemic concerns

40. Inspectors will make this judgement when:

- they have identified one or more areas for priority action; this will happen when there are significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people, because of particular systemic or widespread failings that have a significant negative impact on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people

Experiences and outcomes

41. The evaluation criteria describe the features of effective SEND arrangements. Inspectors will judge the impact of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements through the experiences and outcomes of children and young people.

42. Inspectors will evaluate individual children and young people's outcomes as part of their assessment of the local area partnership's self-evaluation of its strategic outcomes. Individuals' outcomes will be evaluated through inspection activities such as tracking and sampling. Strategic outcomes are those outcomes that partnership leaders want to see for all children and young people in their local area. Themes are likely to include: health and well-being, communication, independence, positive relationships, community participation, and moving into further and higher education and/or employment.

43. Inspectors will evaluate outcomes as described in the SEND code of practice, including the individual outcomes that children and young people with SEND have told us are important to them. Inspectors will assess whether outcomes are sufficiently ambitious and reflect high expectations. This includes whether children and young people with SEND:

- have developed the knowledge, skills and behaviours to gain employment or meaningful occupation, move on to further or higher education, and live as healthily and as independently as possible
- have developed their self-esteem and resilience
- have made friends, and feel safe, valued and visible in their local communities

44. When evaluating experiences, inspectors will assess whether children and young people's experiences of education, health and care in their local area are positive, and why. They will evaluate whether children and young people with SEND:

- have gained from stable, supportive relationships and environments
- have had the opportunity to participate in community activities to widen their understanding of the opportunities available to them now and in their future
- have participated in decision-making about their own plans and support
- have had support provided when they have needed it, and feel supported and believe that adults understand and advocate for them.

45. Inspectors will also seek to understand how children and young people have been supported through any adverse experiences they may have had.

46. Inspectors will not emphasise one type of evidence above others. Inspectors will gather evidence that is balanced and connected, to form a picture of the typical experiences and outcomes of children and young people and how the local area partnership's SEND arrangements have led to these.

The evaluation criteria

47. This section provides detail about what inspectors will consider when evaluating against each criterion.

48. The evaluation criteria apply across education, health and care, and to all children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 covered by the SEND code of practice, including those receiving SEN support and those with EHC plans.

49. Inspectors will evaluate the local authority's commissioning and oversight of alternative provision for all children and young people who attend, not only those with SEND.

Children and young people's needs are identified accurately and assessed

in a timely and effective way

50. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- children and young people are accurately identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities
- children and young people's needs are identified in a timely way, so as to prevent needs from escalating
- practitioners assess the strengths and determine the aspirations of the child or young person alongside their individual needs
- the criteria for carrying out assessments of need and for accessing services and support are understood, and the application of these criteria improves outcomes
- timely referrals are made to other services and agencies, where necessary

Children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support

51. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- children and young people access impartial information, advice and support that enable them to make informed choices about their future
- children, young people and families are supported to understand their rights, make choices and contribute to decision-making about their plans and support
- children and young people understand their plans and support, including intended outcomes, and why some changes are not possible

Children and young people receive the right help and support at the right time

52. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- plans are developed and support is provided in a timely way, and meets children and young people's needs
- children and young people receive support based on their identified needs when they are awaiting assessment
- plans and support are coordinated within and, where necessary, across providers and services, and are based on a shared understanding of the child or young person.
- plans and support are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in children and young people's skills, independence, understanding and other factors in their lives, including reduced support in line with reduced need where

appropriate

- the wider needs of the child or young person's family are considered, and barriers to learning and participation are addressed

Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes

53. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- the outcomes that are the most important to children, young people and their parents and carers are understood and planned for
- support and plans reflect children and young people's ambitions, and extend beyond required levels of support (such as the number of hours of support from a particular service) to focus on the planned outcome
- children and young people are supported before and during any point of transition, including when they will no longer be eligible for a service
- from an early age, children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to prepare for greater independence and adulthood, including in the areas of further and higher education, employment, more independent living, good health, positive relationships and participation in society

Children and young people with SEND are valued, visible and included in their communities

54. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- children and young people and parents and carers understand what community activities are available
- children and young people are supported to participate, where appropriate, in activities, and to make friends and develop positive relationships
- children and young people are supported to develop their confidence, resilience and knowledge, so that they can participate in universal and specialist activities as appropriate

Leaders are ambitious for children and young people with SEND

55. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- leaders have an ambitious strategy that defines the shared outcomes they will work collectively to achieve for all children and young people with SEND, and they embed an aspirational culture of high expectations and quality across services and provision.

- leaders understand their responsibilities and accountabilities, including their statutory duties and their individual responsibilities in the wider area strategy
- responsibilities are delegated in line with leaders' legal duties and there is strong oversight of these resulting activities
- processes for making decisions are structured so that the leaders responsible can swiftly agree to the changes that are required to improve services
- leaders challenge themselves and each other to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND

Leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families

56. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- leaders consider the specific needs of groups of children and young people with SEND, and how best to engage them in co-production
- leaders ensure that decisions relating to services are appropriately shaped by children and young people's needs, experiences, ambitions and outcomes
- leaders give feedback to children, young people and parents on changes they have made to their area's services, and explain where change is not possible and why

Leaders have an accurate, shared understanding of the needs of children and young people in their local area

57. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- leaders gather accurate, timely information about children and young people with SEND in their local area and monitor the changing needs of the population, including using the perspectives of children, young people and families
- leaders understand the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND in their area; their backgrounds and identities, including any barriers to them accessing support; and their needs and strengths
- leaders share information across education, care and health services so they can learn from different perspectives and approaches

Leaders commission services and provision to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people

58. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- services and systems have been designed around the needs of children and

young people, and are informed by evidence of what works in achieving good outcomes

- joint commissioning arrangements enable partners to make best use of all the resources available to improve outcomes for children and young people in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way
- joint commissioning arrangements meet the local area's statutory responsibilities for identifying, assessing and meeting needs
- leaders understand that children and young people with SEND may be more vulnerable to abuse, and ensure that this is carefully considered when commissioning and evaluating services
- the local authority identifies children and young people's needs accurately and arranges suitable full-time educational provision to meet the needs of children or young people who require alternative provision as early as possible, for example, ensuring that full-time education for children and young people who have been excluded begins no later than the sixth day of the exclusion
- the local authority ensures that there are intervention plans for each child and young person in alternative provision, including clear objectives and plans for their next steps, such as returning to mainstream education

Leaders evaluate services and make improvements

59. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- leaders jointly evaluate whether their services and provision are improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND, not only whether children and young people have received the services
- leaders monitor whether there are sufficient services and provision to meet the needs and aspirations of the children and young people in their area and take appropriate action as a result
- leaders use information from a range of sources in their evaluation, including feedback from representative groups, children and young people using services and data relating to outcomes to improve their services and provision
- leaders have established clear processes to enable services and providers to evaluate and improve their provision regularly
- the local authority evaluates how well the alternative provision it commissions is improving outcomes for children and young people, and takes action if needed
- the local authority maintains strong oversight arrangements for alternative provision it commissions, including oversight of each alternative provision's safety and suitability, and in particular of alternative providers that are not registered as schools

Leaders create an environment for effective practice and multi-agency working to flourish

60. Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- processes and systems are set up to support practitioners to work together and share appropriate information in a timely manner, including strong systems for identifying and responding to risks to children and young people with SEND
- leaders ensure that practitioners are clear on their individual roles and how they can best work together to improve outcomes for children and young people
- leaders ensure that practitioners have the appropriate skills to understand children and young people's needs and aspirations, and to create an inclusive environment
- leaders encourage practitioners working together to focus on the child or young person, identifying alternative solutions when existing options do not meet needs and aspirations effectively
- leaders ensure that practitioners working with children and young people with SEND have the right knowledge and skills to reduce the risk of harm, and understand that children and young people with SEND may be more vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation

Alternative provision

61. Inspectors will use the evaluation criteria to evaluate the local authority's commissioning and oversight of alternative provision for all children and young people in placements directly commissioned by the local authority. This includes evaluating how the local authority ensures that placements: meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people; provide the support they need; prepare them for their next steps; and enable them to feel valued and included in their community. Inspectors will consider whether the local authority's use of unregistered and online provision is lawful and appropriate to children and young people's needs.

62. Inspectors will gather evidence to help evaluate the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND in local authority-commissioned alternative provision. Where local authorities work with schools or trusts to commission and oversee placements, inspectors may gather and evaluate evidence about the local authority's role. In graded education inspections, we look at the experiences of pupils in alternative provision commissioned directly by schools.

63. Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on local authorities to

arrange alternative educational provision in school or elsewhere 'for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education'. [\[footnote 4\]](#) The education provided under section 19 should be full time (unless medical needs make this impossible) and suitable for the child, taking account of their age, ability and special educational needs (if any).

64. When evaluating the local authority's commissioning and oversight of alternative provision, inspectors will:

- meet local authority leaders to understand their strategy for alternative provision commissioning and oversight
- review information provided to Ofsted by the authority about its alternative provision arrangements
- have discussions with senior leaders and special educational needs coordinators to understand the authority's processes and decision-making
- review the fair access protocols
- carry out sampling in one or more alternative provision settings

Legal duties

65. The area SEND framework focuses on the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND. Its fulfilment of legal duties is part of this impact. Inspectors will not check compliance with every legal duty in relation to children and young people with SEND. However, there are legal duties underpinning our evaluation criteria. Where inspectors find that those duties are not being met, they will report on how this affects children and young people with SEND.

66. The legal duties that may be considered include duties outlined in the [SEND code of practice](#) and in the [Department for Education \(DfE\)'s alternative provision guidance](#).

Other areas of focus

67. Inspectors may gather evidence in relation to the oversight for children and young people with SEND who are not attending a school or alternative provision. This includes children and young people with SEND who are educated somewhere

other than a school, are not on a school roll or are home educated.

68. Inspectors may also consider the local area partnership's approach to improving attendance of children and young people with SEND at education settings. Some pupils with SEND face greater barriers to attendance than their peers and may need additional support to help them access their education. Inspectors will also evaluate information in relation to part-time timetables, and may request further information. Children and young people with SEND have, on average, lower attendance rates than their peers, which affects their education. The [DfE's attendance guidance](#) explains the responsibilities of all partners, including local authorities.

69. Inspectors may consider the local area partnership's oversight and commissioning for children and young people who are placed in residential special schools, including those who are placed outside their local authority area and those who are in residential special schools for more than 295 days a year. Inspectors may evaluate how effectively the local area partnership is ensuring that these children and young people are being safeguarded, having positive experiences and achieving strong outcomes.

Liberty Protection Safeguards

70. The government consulted on changes to the Mental Capacity Act 2005, and implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards, in summer 2022.^[footnote 5] Following the outcome of the consultation, the area SEND inspection framework and handbook may be updated to include an approach to monitoring and reporting on Liberty Protection Safeguards in area SEND inspections.

Safeguarding

71. Safeguarding is not a specific judgement area, but inspectors will always consider it as part of any inspection activity. Inspectors will look at how well children and young people are helped and protected so that they are kept safe. Inspectors will follow established procedures if they receive information during the inspection that raises concerns about the safeguarding of children or young people. This includes following up concerns with the appropriate leaders in the local area.

72. ['Safeguarding concerns: guidance for inspectors'](#) should be read alongside this

guidance. It sets out the approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding. It is essential that inspectors, local area partners, and individual providers are also familiar with, and follow, statutory guidance on safeguarding:

- 'Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges'[\[footnote 6\]](#)
- 'Working together to safeguard children 2018'.[\[footnote 7\]](#)

Part 2: How local area partnerships' provision for children and young people with SEND will be inspected

73. This part sets out the methodology for full inspections.

How local areas are selected for inspection

74. All local areas will have a full inspection at least once during a 5-year period. The type and timing of the inspection will be based on the area's previous inspection outcomes, as set out in [paragraphs 18 and 20](#) of the framework. The selection of local areas to be inspected will, wherever possible, take account of the timing of other Ofsted and CQC inspection activity. Inspections will usually take place during school term time.

75. Where intelligence suggests that there are concerns about arrangements for children and young people with SEND in a particular local area, we may inspect that local area earlier than originally planned.

Composition of the inspection team

76. The inspection team will be led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, and will include Children's Services Inspectors from the CQC, and

education and social care inspectors from Ofsted.

77. Ofsted and the CQC may vary the composition and size of the inspection team. We base this decision on several factors, including the complexity of the local SEND system, and the size and nature of the geographical area.

78. At times, other Ofsted and the CQC inspectors may visit on site, to shadow the work of the inspection team. This is done for training, development and quality assurance purposes only. Any activities carried out by these inspectors will not form part of the evidence gathered by the inspection team or contribute in any way to the team's judgement.

Overview of the inspection

79. Area SEND full inspections will follow the structure set out below. The lead inspector will provide a detailed timeline when they notify leaders in the local area of the inspection.

80. Inspection activities are structured to enable inspectors to draw together evidence from across education, health and care services and form a connection between the different findings to reach an inspection outcome. Inspectors will use their evaluation of children and young people's experiences and outcomes to build a picture of the impact of the local area's SEND arrangements. During the inspection, inspectors will need to speak to a range of people. They will do so in line with our code of conduct, and act at all times with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect. Inspectors should take careful account of the well-being of leaders and staff and adjust their approach or activity, as appropriate, as they go about their inspection work. If inspectors see or suspect that a staff member (including all leaders) is upset or distressed at any point during the inspection, inspectors should respond sensitively. Where appropriate, inspectors will consider suitable adjustments to enable the staff member to continue. Where appropriate, inspectors will inform those responsible for the person's well-being. The lead HMI should contact the duty desk to discuss what action to take. There may be exceptional occasions when a pause to inspection needs to be considered. We will consider these on a case-by-case basis.

Activities in week 1

- Inspectors notify the local leaders of the inspection 8 working days before the

fieldwork begins and 10 working days before coming on site. This will usually be on a Monday, but may be in the previous week if there is a bank holiday in week 1 or 2 of the inspection.

- Inspectors request information to support the inspection (this information is set out in [Annex A](#) of this guidance).
- Inspectors and local leaders hold a set-up discussion (this is carried out virtually).
- The local area partnership distributes surveys for children and young people with SEND, parents and carers, and practitioners (please see [paragraph 88](#) for additional information).
- The local area partnership shares information to support the inspection.
- Inspectors select individual children and young people, and ask the local area partnership to set up tracking meetings.
- Inspectors carry out planning and pre-inspection analysis.

Activities in week 2

- Inspectors work with the local area partnership to agree an inspection timetable.
- Inspectors hold tracking meetings.
- Inspectors carry out pre-inspection analysis and review the information set out in [Annex A](#).
- Inspectors may meet virtually with local leaders, staff, representative groups and stakeholders.

Activities in week 3

- On-site evidence gathering.
- Inspection findings fed back to the local area partnership.

Pre-inspection activity

81. Ofsted and CQC inspectors will review relevant information held by the inspectorates about the local area arrangements for children and young people with SEND. This will include previous inspection outcomes and any WSoA that an area was required to produce under the previous framework.

Week 1: notification, set-up and information request

Notification

82. On day 1 (10 working days before the on-site evidence-gathering), inspectors will contact the relevant leaders in the local area to notify them of the inspection:

- Ofsted will contact the director of children's services (DCS).
- The CQC will notify the chief executive of the ICB.

83. Each local area will be asked to nominate a representative – a local area nominated officer (LANO) – who will act as a single point of contact on behalf of the local area partnership throughout the inspection. Their role will be to liaise with the lead inspector throughout the inspection, so that inspection activities can be coordinated effectively.

84. While it is important that we carry out our planned inspections wherever possible, sometimes there may be reasons that a planned inspection may not go ahead. Ofsted and the CQC will only defer the inspection of a local area in exceptional circumstances. If a local area partnership has a concern about the timing of an inspection, it may submit a deferral request in line with [Ofsted's deferral policy](#).

Set-up discussion

85. Once the inspection has been confirmed, the lead inspector and the CQC inspector will make an extended telephone call to the LANO and the ICB representative. The lead inspector will make it clear that the LANO and the ICB representative are encouraged to have someone present during the call to assist and support them if they wish. This should be at least one other senior leader who typically deputises for them and can understand and discuss the content of the call. The purpose of this call is to:

- check on the leaders' well-being and whether any steps need to be taken to ensure any issues or concerns are addressed, including that appropriate support is available. The lead inspector should ascertain how to contact whoever is responsible for the leaders' well-being on a day-to-day basis, so that they can pass on well-being concerns when appropriate and necessary
- discuss the arrangements for the inspection, including the timetable of activities, arrangements for talking to children and young people and families, the key officers and representatives to involve in specific meetings, and arrangements for giving regular feedback and having discussions regarding the emerging findings of the inspection

- discuss the arrangements for distributing the surveys for children and young people, parents and carers, and practitioners
- discuss the information requested for the inspection ([Annex A](#))
- ask that the key stakeholders involved in arrangements for children and young people with SEND and the commissioning of alternative provision are made aware of the inspections, including providers, services and parents and carers

Information request (Annex A)

86. [Annex A](#) sets out the information inspectors will request and the timeline for the local area partnership to share it. The information includes:

- information about the local area partnership's strategy and commissioning arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- information about the local authority's commissioning arrangements for alternative provision
- person-level data, which inspectors will use to select the children and young people whose experiences they will evaluate
- information about providers and services (including alternative education providers)

87. Inspectors may ask for additional information not set out in [Annex A](#), and may agree to look at additional information provided by the area partners. Any additional information must be:

- necessary for an accurate understanding of children and young people's experiences and outcomes in relation to the scope of the inspection
- not already available through the request in Annex A

Arrangements for surveys

88. Inspectors will share 3 surveys: one for children and young people with SEND, one for parents and carers, and one for practitioners. The surveys will go live on the day the local area is notified of the inspection. The questions have been developed with Parent Carer Forums, children and young people's groups and local area leaders and practitioners. Local area partnerships should make arrangements for surveys to be sent to all children and young people with SEND, their parents and carers, and made available to all settings and services working with children and young people with SEND.

89. The 3 surveys will remain live for 6 working days from the notification day.

Inspectors will ensure that they work with the local area partnership to consider accessibility issues, including making paper copies available on request.

Selecting children and young people for tracking meetings

90. During week 1, inspectors will select approximately 6 children and young people to be involved in tracking meetings. These are meetings with children and young people, their parents or carers (if appropriate) and the practitioners who are directly involved with them. The meetings are for inspectors to hear directly about children and young people's experiences and outcomes. Tracking meetings will help inspectors to establish initial lines of enquiry before they begin their on-site activity. Other evidence will also feed into the initial lines of enquiry, including: evidence gathered from area-wide surveys; information from the local area partnership; and information from meetings with leaders, parents and carers, and groups of children and young people. Inspectors will test their initial lines of enquiry through other inspection activities, such as having meetings with stakeholders and sampling of larger groups children and young people across education, health and care.

91. When selecting the children and young people to track, inspectors will take into account: information shared by the local area partnership; the demographic make-up of the local area, including protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010; and any contextual issues specific to the local area. They will choose children and young people with a range of needs, who access a range of services, from a range of age groups and who are at different stages in their involvement with health and social care services. The scope is children and young people who live in the area, including those who are educated out of area. However, the scope does not cover children and young people who live in other areas, but attend education within the local area boundaries.

92. Inspectors will usually include at least 1 child or young person who is studying in alternative provision, and at least 2 children who are receiving SEN support. Inspectors will usually include at least one child or young person whose needs are in each of the 4 categories of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health difficulties; sensory and/or physical needs.

93. Once children and young people have been selected, the LANO will:

- arrange for a practitioner who knows the child or young person well to approach them, and their parents or carers, for their agreement to be involved
- share information about the child or young person as outlined in [Annex A](#)
- arrange tracking meetings with children and young people, their parents and

carers

- arrange a multi-disciplinary tracking meeting with practitioners who work with the child or young person

Week 2: off-site analysis and creating an on-site timetable

Off-site analysis

94. Inspectors will review the information requested from the local area partners outlined in [Annex A](#). Any evidence submitted should be a part of the local area partners' business as usual, and not produced solely for inspection.

Creating the inspection timetable

95. The Ofsted lead inspector will coordinate the creation of a timetable for gathering evidence off site in week 2, and on site in week 3. They will work jointly with the lead inspector from the CQC to liaise with the LANO and the ICB representative to help create the timetable. This will include arrangements for meeting with practitioners, managers and leaders to discuss their work. Inspectors will also make arrangements for keep-in-touch and feedback meetings to share inspectors' findings.

96. When creating the timetable, the Ofsted lead inspector and the CQC lead inspector will:

- consider which activities should be carried out in person, and which should be carried out by phone or video call
- include enough time for inspectors to travel between appointments
- include time for inspectors to review and analyse their evidence, individually and together
- ensure that the timetable is flexible enough to be changed in response to emerging findings
- work with the LANO to ensure that local leaders and practitioners are aware of the timetable and any changes to it

97. Inspectors will meet during week 2 to discuss the plan for the inspection and any matters arising from their off-site analysis.

Weeks 2 and 3: discussions with children, young people, parents and carers, and tracking meetings

98. Discussions with children and young people, and parents and carers, and tracking meetings will take place off site in week 2, and on site in week 3. The lead inspector will agree the timetable of activities with the LANO.

Discussions with children and young people

99. Inspectors will meet with groups of children and young people to:

- understand their experiences and outcomes
- understand how the local area partnership engages with children and young people, and the impact this engagement has
- identify any common themes that will contribute to lines of enquiry for the inspection
- discuss their views on effective practice and how the local area partnership could improve its arrangements for children and young people with SEND

100. Inspectors will meet with one group of children and young people at the start of the inspection. They will also meet with children and young people as part of the tracking meetings. Inspectors may arrange to meet with additional children and young people to discuss relevant lines of enquiry, discuss their individual experiences or seek their views on a specific aspect of the local area's arrangements.

Discussions with parents and carers

101. Inspectors will meet remotely with representatives from the Parent Carer Forum and/or other representative groups of parents and carers at the start of the inspection. This is to:

- identify any common themes that contribute to developing lines of enquiry for the inspection
- discuss their views on effective practice and how the local area partnership could improve its arrangements for children and young people with SEND

102. Inspectors will also meet with parents and carers during the inspection to:

- understand the impact on their child of the local area's SEND arrangements
- understand the impact on the wider family

- identify effective practice and how arrangements could be improved
- gain more information about specific lines of enquiry

Tracking meetings with children, young people, parents and carers

103. Inspectors will use tracking meetings to gather evidence of the impact of the local area partnership's strategy and commissioning on individual children and young people with SEND. Tracking meetings enable inspectors to understand specific children and young people's experiences and journeys through the SEND system. Inspectors will look at the impact of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people, including how decisions have been made, how children, young people and their families have been involved and whether they have received the right help at the right time. Tracking meetings will help inspectors to identify lines of enquiry they wish to review through the range of inspection activities.

104. Inspectors will discuss the child or young person's experiences with them. Inspectors will ask the LANO to work with practitioners and families so as to understand how inspectors can best support the child or young person to share their experiences. Inspectors may also discuss children and young people's experiences with their parents and/or carers, either together with or separately from their child, depending on the age of the child or young person and the family's preferences.

Multi-agency tracking meetings with practitioners

105. Inspectors will have a multi-agency discussion with the child or young person's health, care and education professionals, and any other practitioners involved. Where relevant, this may include providers of commissioned services (for example, practitioners working directly with the child or young person at a children's home or through children and young people's mental health services) or other services that may be relevant to understanding the child or young person's experience. The lead inspector will ask the LANO to ensure that the practitioners involved in the discussion include any staff who coordinate the child or young person's overall plan of support, or who have the greatest awareness of it. Leaders and/or practitioners may always be accompanied by a colleague of their choice when speaking to inspectors if they wish. However, it is important that they are able to express their views freely to inspectors.

106. Inspectors may discuss children and young people's records with practitioners, using their knowledge of the child or young person, file structure and recording systems. They may also consider any case supervision notes. Where case records are held wholly or partly electronically, the service should arrange for identified

inspectors to have secure access to the electronic system. This activity will be carried out in line with our [privacy notice](#).

107. Inspectors will base their findings on contemporary practice that has an impact on the child or young person's current situation. However, they will also review some historical information to understand the child or young person's journey.

Week 3: focused sampling of decision-making and oversight

108. Inspectors will evaluate the decision-making processes and oversight, including those related to legal duties, for specific groups of children and young people with SEND, by sampling cases from these groups with officers from the local area partnership.

109. Inspectors will ask to discuss a selection of children and young people's experiences with one or two officers who are directly involved in the decision-making and oversight of their support. Leaders and/or practitioners may always be accompanied by a colleague of their choice when speaking to inspectors if they wish. However, it is important that they are able to express their views freely to inspectors.

110. Inspectors will choose which children and young people they want to discuss. They may do this before the meeting, using the information provided by the local area partnership. Alternatively, they will ask the officers to show them records based on certain criteria, and will choose the children and young people that way.

111. Topics that may be a subject for focused sampling include the decision-making and oversight of the quality of EHC plans, fair access protocols, and use of the dynamic support register. Inspectors may also use focused sampling to review the local area partnership's oversight for particular cohorts of children and young people with SEND, for example those who have high rates of absence from school, are educated somewhere other than a school, are known to youth justice, are not on a school roll or are home educated.

Week 3: sampling visits to providers and services

112. Inspectors will visit a number of providers and services across education, health and care to review the experiences of a wider group of children and young people, in line with their specific lines of enquiry. These visits are not to directly inspect the quality of provision, as these providers are subject to other inspection arrangements. Leaders and/or practitioners may always be accompanied by a colleague of their choice when speaking to inspectors if they wish. However, it is important that they are able to express their views freely to inspectors.

113. These sampling visits enable inspectors to review the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements on a larger group of children and young people with SEND. Inspectors will evaluate children and young people's experiences and outcomes by reviewing documents and talking to practitioners.

114. Ofsted and the CQC will select providers and services to visit, and will discuss their suitability with the LANO and the ICB representative. The lead inspector will provide the LANO with notification letters to send to the chosen education, health and care providers. The LANO will set up the visits and arrangements for case sampling.

115. During sampling visits, inspectors will visit a specific provider or service and ask for information about individual children and young people's experiences. These may include children and young people who have a specific need, who are receiving a specific service and/or who are at a particular point in their care or education.

116. Inspectors will choose the children and young people. They may do this before the visit, using the information provided by the local area partnership. Alternatively, they will ask practitioners to show them records based on certain criteria established from the lines of enquiry, and will choose the children that way.

117. Inspectors will look at any documents relating to the children and young people, and will discuss their experiences and outcomes with the practitioners in that provision or service. Inspectors may also look at case supervision notes. Where case records are held wholly or partly electronically, the provider should arrange for the inspectors to have secure access to the electronic system.

118. Inspectors sampling in education settings will include children and young people receiving SEN support. This may include meeting children and young people and, if appropriate, scrutinising files and talking to practitioners. These visits may include settings such as nurseries, schools, colleges, alternative provision and specialist services. The scope of the inspection covers children and young people who live in the local authority area, including those educated out of area. However, it does not cover those who live in other areas but attend an education setting within

the local authority's boundaries.

119. Inspectors sampling in health providers and services will gather evidence of the assessment, intervention and transition stages of health support. These visits will include universal, targeted and specialist health teams, such as speech and language therapy services and children and young people's mental health teams.

120. Inspectors sampling in social care will consider the identification, assessment, intervention and transition stages of social care support. This may include visits to services such as the disabled children's team, early intervention support and adult social care teams.

121. Findings will be based on contemporary practice, and on practice that has an impact on the child or young person's current situation. However, inspectors will read some historical information about the children and young people in the group to understand each child's journey.

Week 3: inspection team meetings

122. The inspection team will meet at different points during the 5 on-site days, and remotely during the 2 working days before being on site. In particular, the team should, as far as is practicable, meet each day to discuss and record emerging findings and ensure that the lead inspector has the most recent evaluative information to feed back to the LANO and the ICB representative.

123. During the final team meeting, inspectors will summarise the key evidence and make final evaluative judgements. The main points for feedback to the local area partners will be recorded as the meeting progresses, including the overall inspection outcome, strengths and recommendations for improvement.

Week 2 and 3: meetings with leaders

Initial meeting with leaders

124. The lead inspector and the CQC inspector should meet with the LANO and other colleagues, as agreed by the lead inspector and the LANO and the ICB representative, prior to on-site activity.

125. At this first meeting, the LANO and other colleagues will share information on the local area partnership's context.

Meeting to discuss the local area partnership's self-evaluation and strategic planning

126. The lead inspector and the LANO will arrange a meeting with leaders on the first day on site, to review the local area partnership's self-evaluation, strategy and associated action plans.

127. This meeting may include the following people:

- the DCS and elected members with specific responsibilities for SEND
- the ICB representative
- representatives of the Parent Carer Forum
- senior managers responsible for the strategic development and operational management of education, health and social care provision for children and young people with SEND
- senior local authority managers responsible for the commissioning and oversight of alternative provision
- a colleague chosen by the DCS, the ICB representative or the LANO, if they wish, such as another senior leader who typically deputises for them and can understand and discuss the content of the meeting

Keep-in-touch meetings

128. At the heart of our inspections is a professional dialogue between inspectors and leaders. The lead inspector will establish keep-in-touch meetings at key points during the inspection. This will enable the inspection team to feed back to the DCS, the ICB representative and the LANO on any emerging lines of enquiry, identify any additional evidence required, answer any questions and make changes to the timetable if necessary. The DCS, the ICB representative and the LANO may always be accompanied by a colleague of their choice, if they wish, such as another senior leader who typically deputises for them and can understand and discuss the content of the meetings.

129. The local area partnership is responsible for providing evidence of the impact of its arrangements for children and young people with SEND. This includes the local area partnership providing appropriate information and data, such as any analysis of the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND in its local area. It also includes opportunities to meet relevant managers and other

local area representatives.

130. The local authority is responsible for providing evidence of its arrangements for commissioning and overseeing alternative educational provision for children in its area.

131. Inspectors may also work with the LANO and the ICB representative to arrange additional meetings with leaders and/or practitioners throughout the on-site inspection. This will enable inspectors to discuss specific lines of enquiry or information that they have gathered through tracking meetings or sampling visits. Leaders and/or practitioners may always be accompanied by a colleague of their choice when speaking to inspectors if they wish. However, it is important that they are able to express their views freely to inspectors.

The feedback meeting

132. The inspection concludes with a final feedback meeting attended by the LANO and representatives of the local area. Attendance is voluntary and any attendee may leave at any time, including leaving for a short time and then returning. If the feedback is likely to be challenging or is likely to raise difficult issues, the lead inspector will be sensitive to any implications arising from this. The lead inspector will liaise with the DCS and the ICB representative, through the LANO, to agree who attends this meeting. However, it is likely that the attendees will include:

- the LANO
- the DCS and elected members with responsibility for SEND from the local authority
- the ICB representative
- a colleague chosen by the DCS, the ICB representative and the LANO to accompany them
- the Parent Carer Forum representatives

133. During the final feedback meeting, the lead inspector will ensure that all attendees are clear:

- on inspectors' evaluation of the local area partnership's effectiveness in improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND
- about any areas of significant concern that will result in further monitoring and the requirement for a priority action plan (area SEND)
- the inspection outcome and resulting time frame for the next inspection activity
- that any safeguarding concerns identified during the inspection have already been

fed back to senior leaders and/or acted on

- that all feedback remains confidential to those present at the meeting, until the report is published; that, on receiving the draft report, the local area partnership must ensure that the report remains restricted and confidential to the relevant senior personnel; and that the information it contains is not, under any circumstances, to be published. Leaders may share inspection outcomes, in confidence, with others, provided the information is not made public. This may include leaders' colleagues, family members, medical advisers and/or their wider support group
- that, in addition to being able to raise concerns at any stage during the inspection, the local area partnership has an opportunity to raise any issues, concerns or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can also contact Ofsted on the working day after the end of the inspection, if needed

After the inspection

Arrangements for publishing the report

134. The lead inspector is responsible for writing the inspection report and submitting the evidence to Ofsted shortly after the inspection ends. Findings and inspection outcomes are reached jointly by the inspection team. The lead inspector is responsible for writing the report, with contributions from the full inspection team across education, health and care.

135. The text of the report should explain the judgements and reflect the evidence. The findings should be consistent with the feedback given to the local area at the end of the inspection, but are likely to be a succinct account.

136. Inspection reports will be quality assured before we send a draft to the local area. In most circumstances, the local area will receive the draft report within 14 working days of the end of the inspection. The draft report is restricted and confidential to the relevant personnel, and should not be shared more widely or published.

137. The local area has 10 working days to comment on the draft report, inspection process and findings. We will consider all comments. We will respond to them when we share the final report with the local area, in most circumstances within 30 working days of the end of the inspection.

138. If the local area wishes to make a formal complaint, it has 5 working days after we have shared the final report with it to do so. If a complaint is not submitted within 5 working days, we will normally publish the report on our [reports website](#) 3 working days later. If a complaint has been submitted, the publication of the report may be delayed.

139. Once a local area has received its final report, relevant recipients of the report are required to publish it on their organisation's website and supply a copy to a member of the public, on demand, for a reasonable charge.^[footnote 8] The local area partnership should ensure that the Parent Carer Forum receives a copy of the report.

140. As required by The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Ofsted and the CQC will disseminate the report to:

- the Secretary of State for Education
- the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
- the local authority for the area inspected
- the principal authority that is responsible for making the action plan, if HMCI has determined that the principal authority is different from the local authority
- any other people or organisations HMCI considers appropriate for the nature of the inspection

141. In all cases, the inspection process should not be regarded as complete until all inspection activity has been carried out and the final version of the inspection report has been sent to the local area.

142. The evidence base for the inspection must be retained in line with Ofsted's retention and disposal policy. We may decide that retaining it for longer is warranted for research purposes. The evidence base for the CQC will also be retained in line with the CQC's retention and disposal policy.

Request for local area partnerships to update their strategic plans

143. We ask all local area partnerships to update and publish their strategic plans after a full inspection. The plan should include the actions it is taking, or will take, in response to the recommendations made in the inspection report. Local area partnerships may update existing plans or choose to produce new plans.

144. Local area partnerships should aim to update their strategic plans within 35 working days of receiving the inspection report intended for publication. They should follow the recommendations in the inspection reports, and are expected to engage with all partners and stakeholder when deciding what actions they need to take.

145. All strategic plans and priority action plans (area SEND), including those produced as described in [paragraphs 146 to 150](#), should be published in a way which ensures that they are accessible to children and young people with SEND, and their parents and carers.

Requirement for local area partnerships to produce a priority action plan (area SEND)

146. If the inspection finds that there are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, then the local area partnership is required to develop and publish a priority action plan (area SEND), which should be submitted to both Ofsted and the CQC.

147. The inspection report will name the principal authority responsible for making the priority action plan. The principal authority may be the local area partnership as a whole or one particular partner.

148. The principal authority is asked to submit the priority action plan (area SEND) to Ofsted and CQC within 35 working days of receiving the report intended for publication. Ofsted and CQC will then review whether the priority action plan (area SEND) meets the criteria outlined below.

149. The priority action plan (area SEND) must include: the local area partnership's proposed measures to address the areas for priority action areas identified in the inspection report; the responsible partner for each proposed action; and the period within which the action is to be taken.

150. Ofsted and CQC ask that the principal authority, and any other local area partners who were involved in making the priority action plan (area SEND) publish it within 5 working days of receiving confirmation that it meets the criteria outlined above, and supply a copy to a member of the public on demand (a reasonable charge may be specified for this).

Quality assurance and complaints

Quality assurance

151. All inspectors are responsible for the quality of their work. The lead inspector must ensure that inspections are carried out in accordance with the principles of inspection and [the Ofsted code of conduct](#).

152. We monitor the quality of inspections through a range of formal processes, and HMI/Senior HMI may be on site in some local areas, or may monitor remotely, to quality assure inspections. We may also evaluate the quality of an inspection evidence base. The lead inspector will be responsible for giving team inspectors feedback on the quality of their work and their conduct.

153. Additionally, quality assurance inspectors from the CQC may either join inspectors on site or provide off-site quality assurance of area SEND inspection activity.

154. All local areas are invited to take part in a voluntary post-inspection survey in order to contribute to our ongoing improvement of our inspection work. The link to this survey is provided when the local area receives the final copy of its inspection report.

Handling concerns and complaints

155. The great majority of our work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns do arise during the inspection, they should be raised with the lead inspector as soon as possible in order to resolve issues before the inspection is completed. Any concerns raised, and actions taken, will be recorded in the inspection evidence. If an issue remains unresolved, the local area partnership can contact a senior Ofsted leader the working day after the inspection using the number provided during the notification process. This will be an opportunity for the local area partnership to raise informal concerns about the inspection process or outcomes, queries about next steps or to highlight information they feel was not fully considered during the inspection. This will be directed to an inspector separate to the inspection to discuss and to resolve where appropriate, at the earliest opportunity.

156. If it is not possible to resolve concerns during the inspection, through a phone call the working day after the inspection, or through submitting comments in response to the draft report, the local area partnership may wish to lodge a formal complaint on receiving the final report. The lead inspector will ensure that the local area is informed that it is able to make a formal complaint, and that [information about](#)

[how to complain](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Part 3: Monitoring inspections

157. When a local area is judged to have widespread and/or systemic concerns and required to produce a priority action plan (area SEND) following a full inspection, Ofsted and the CQC will carry out a monitoring inspection around 18 months after the initial inspection.

158. The purpose of the monitoring inspection is to assess the extent to which the local area partners are taking effective action to address the areas for priority action set out in the inspection report.

159. Inspectors will carry out activities that are similar to those carried out during full inspections, such as discussions with leaders; sampling visits to education, healthcare and social care providers; and holding meetings with children and young people, parents and carers, and professionals. Depending on the areas of focus, this may include tracking meetings and surveys of children and young people, parents and carers, and practitioners.

160. However, inspectors will tailor their enquiries and evidence gathering to focus on the issues that the area was required to address in the priority action plan (area SEND). If inspectors identify any new significant weaknesses during the monitoring inspection, the monitoring inspection outcome letter will refer to these.

161. In monitoring progress, inspectors will take account of:

- any actions taken by leaders, since the initial inspection, to address the significant weaknesses identified
- evidence provided by the local area that shows how leaders have assured themselves that the necessary progress is being made against each area of significant weakness
- any up-to-date self-evaluation carried out by the local area
- the views of children and young people and their parents and carers, gathered through surveys and/or other forms of engagement agreed with the area

162. Ofsted and the CQC retain the discretion to carry out a monitoring inspection in

any local area if information held, or received, by Ofsted and/or the CQC raises sufficient concern about the effectiveness of arrangements for children and young people with SEND and their families. This may be carried out in a local area that was not previously required to produce a priority action plan (area SEND). In such cases, inspectors will gather evidence that is relevant to the issues that gave rise to the decision to inspect.

Arrangements for monitoring inspections

163. The process for notifying the local area is the same as for full inspections (see [paragraph 82](#)). On the same day as the notification to the local area, the lead inspector will also notify the Parent Carer Forum or other parents' groups involved in the priority action plan (area SEND), if known. The inspector will handle any deferral requests as set out in [paragraph 84](#).

164. Following notification, the Ofsted lead inspector and the CQC lead will contact the LANO and the ICB representative to arrange for any relevant up-to-date information to be made available to inspectors before the on-site week.

165. The local area partnership is responsible for providing the monitoring inspection team with any relevant data/information. However, this must only be what the local area partnership produces as part of its routine practice. We do not expect the local area partnership to provide any data or information in a particular format.

166. The local area partners should provide evidence to show how they have assured themselves that they are making the necessary progress in addressing the areas of significant weakness set out in the priority action plan (area SEND).

167. Inspectors will review the uploaded evidence and arrange a telephone call with the LANO and the ICB representative. This will be to discuss the schedule for the monitoring inspection and any other practical arrangements. The telephone discussion will enable the monitoring inspection team to focus its evaluation on the impact that the local area partnership's actions have had on the areas of significant weakness identified in the priority action plan (area SEND). The lead inspector and the CQC inspector will also hold a discussion with the officials from the DfE and NHS England about any support they have given the local area partnership. The discussion will be about the local area partnership's progress in carrying out the identified priority actions. All discussions must be recorded in the evidence base.

The inspection team

168. The monitoring inspection will always be led by a lead inspector from Ofsted, accompanied by a Children's Services Inspector from the CQC. The team will normally comprise inspectors from education, health and care.

The on-site week

169. Typically, inspectors will spend a minimum of 2 days on site, although this may vary depending on the circumstances of the local area. Inspectors and local areas will discuss and agree on the precise timing of activities.

Feedback to leaders

170. The inspection team will provide feedback on the final day of the monitoring inspection to inform leaders about whether sufficient progress has been made to address the areas of significant weakness detailed in the priority action plan (area SEND). The attendees at this feedback meeting will be agreed between the lead inspector, the CQC inspector, the LANO and the ICB representative.

The monitoring inspection letter

171. The lead inspector is responsible for writing the monitoring inspection outcome letter and submitting the evidence to Ofsted shortly after the end of the monitoring inspection. The CQC inspector will contribute to the process of finalising the letter.

172. The letter will include:

- the findings on whether the local area has taken effective actions in relation to the serious weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
- a clear and brief summary of the effectiveness of leaders' actions against each area for priority action identified in the action plan
- clarification that inspection findings will be communicated to the DfE and NHS England, and may be used to determine further intervention and/or support

173. In cases where Ofsted and the CQC have had reason to carry out a monitoring inspection of a local area that was not previously required to produce a priority action plan (area SEND) (see also [paragraph 161](#), the contents of the letter will directly address the issues that gave rise to the decision to inspect. Inspectors may decide that the local area should produce a priority action plan (area SEND) and/or that the next planned full inspection should be brought forward.

174. As far as possible, and subject to the outcome of the quality assurance process, the findings in the letter will be consistent with the feedback given to the local area partners at the end of the inspection.

Quality assurance and publication of the monitoring inspection letter

175. Ofsted will publish the monitoring inspection letter on the local authority section of [Ofsted's reports website](#). The final letter will normally be shared with the local area partnership within 30 working days of the end of the monitoring inspection.

176. The process and arrangements for quality assuring and finalising the monitoring inspection letter are the same as for inspection reports (please refer to [paragraphs 134 to 141](#)).

177. The process for ensuring the quality of monitoring inspections is the same as that for full inspections, as set out in [paragraphs 151 to 154](#).

After the monitoring inspection

178. Any complaints about monitoring inspections will be subject to the same arrangements as for complaints about full inspections. Information about this is set out in [paragraphs 155 to 156](#).

179. Arrangements for securing, retaining and disposing of the evidence base for monitoring inspections are the same as for full inspections, as detailed in [paragraph 142](#).

Part 4: Engagement meetings

180. Ofsted and the CQC will invite local area partnerships to hold engagement meetings between inspections. These events are not inspections. They are intended to support local area partnerships as they work to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

181. These events will help keep a spotlight on SEND provision. Through these engagement meetings, Ofsted and the CQC will seek to:

- be assured that the local area partnership understands the needs of children and young people in its area, and is working to improve its services for children and young people with SEND and their families
- identify any issues of concern
- remain up to date with any changes to the local SEND system

Self-evaluation in advance of engagement meetings

182. Local area partnerships will be asked to provide a self-evaluation before the engagement meeting. This should draw on existing documentation and activity. It should reflect the local area partnership's business as usual. We do not expect local areas to carry out additional work specifically for the purpose of the meeting. We will ask the local area partnership to provide the self-evaluation early enough for us to analyse its content, but not so far in advance that the information becomes out of date by the time of the engagement meeting.

183. There is no prescribed format for the self-evaluation, but it should be kept concise and include information about recent developments to the local SEND system. It should also include any improvements to areas of weakness identified by Ofsted and the CQC (for example, at a previous inspection) or by the local area partnership. The local area partnership's self-evaluation should:

- address the 3 questions set out below
- make sense as a stand-alone document (appendices can be included, but should be kept to a minimum)
- be succinct, focused and evaluative

184. The 3 questions for local area partnerships to cover in their self-evaluations are:

1. What do you know about the impact of your arrangements for children and young people with SEND?
2. How do you know what impact your arrangements for children and young people with SEND are having?
3. What are your plans for the next 12 months to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND?

185. During engagement meetings, Ofsted and the CQC will explore how the local area partnership evaluates the SEND system and what evidence it has used to make its assessment, particularly in relation to the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

186. Ofsted and the CQC will want to understand the leaders' plans for meeting the current and future needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. This will include how the local area partnership is making changes based on its evaluation of the effectiveness of the SEND system.

187. Ofsted and the CQC will also want to explore how the local area partnership has ensured that strategic planning and decision-making are informed by the views and aspirations of children and young people and their families.

Arrangements for engagement meetings

188. Engagement meetings will take place at a mutually convenient time. The Ofsted regional director may exercise their discretion about the timing of the meeting, taking into account inspection outcomes and any recent inspection activity. A regional representative from Ofsted will chair the discussion. This could be the relevant Ofsted regional director, Senior HMI or HMI, as determined by the Ofsted region. The regional representative will be accompanied by a Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

189. On the part of the local area partnership, we expect that the DCS and the ICB representative will attend. It is for the DCS and the ICB representative to determine who else attends from the local authority and the health teams. For the meeting to be effective, all attendees should have a clear purpose for being there.

190. The meeting should be a transparent account of the local area's progress, and should benefit everyone involved. The intelligence gathered at the meeting will inform any plans for future inspection activity. Ofsted's regional director, a Children's

Services Inspector from CQC, the LANO, the DCS and the ICB representative, or their delegates, will agree the agenda before the meeting. The meeting should cover:

- the content of the self-evaluation – what leaders know about children and young people’s needs, aspirations, experiences and outcomes, and the impact of the strategies and commissioning, and the evidence that supports this
- the impact of the information shared – what local area leaders are doing to address weaknesses and maintain or improve good practice, including evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their actions
- actions taken in response to previous inspections, including what progress has been made against the local area partnership’s action plan and any recommendations for improvement, or, where relevant, progress made in addressing areas of concern as set out in a WSoA from the previous framework or a priority action plan (area SEND)
- the broader issues that affect delivery of services, for example closures of schools and early years provision
- the approximate timing of the next engagement meeting

191. Ofsted and the CQC will write to the DCS and the ICB representative within a month of the meeting. The meeting note will not be published and will set out:

- the date of the meeting and who attended
- a factual summary of the agenda items discussed
- the approximate timing of the next engagement meeting
- any next steps

Annex A: information requested to support inspections

192. This annex sets out the information that inspectors request when they notify the local area partnership of an area SEND full inspection. It also sets out the information that the inspectors will request to assist them in selecting children and young people’s cases for tracking, and the further information they will request about those selected. Inspectors may request some or all of the Annex A information for

monitoring inspections. The table below sets out the high-level timeline for sharing this information.

Day/time	Activity
Week 1, Monday	Inspectors request the information set out in Annex A
Week 1, Tuesday, by 11am	Local area partnership provides person-level data to assist inspectors in selecting children and young people to track Local area partnership provides list of providers and settings to assist inspectors in selecting which providers will have sampling visits Local area partnership provides requested information about SEND arrangements
Week 1, Tuesday, by 5pm	Inspectors select children and young people's cases to be tracked
Week 1, Friday, by 5pm	Local area partnership provides additional information about children and young people selected for tracking Local area partnership provides additional information about SEND arrangements

193. Inspectors will provide details for accessing an online system that the local area partnership can use to share the information.

194. Inspectors will gather personal information, including some sensitive personal data, that is necessary to help them evaluate local arrangements for children and young people with SEND. [Ofsted's privacy notice](#) and [the CQC's privacy notice](#) set out what data we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under the Data Protection Act 2018.

195. If information is shared that is relevant to more than one of the requests, it does not need to be replicated in each section, but the lead inspector should be made aware of it.

Week 1: person-level data

196. When the lead inspector contacts the local area partnership, they will ask for lists [containing person-level data](#). The local area partnership should provide the person-level data lists by 11am on the day following notification. The person-level data lists should be as up to date as possible. However, if the most recent available data is a historic snapshot, such as from the [special educational needs survey \(SEN2\)](#) or the [alternative provision](#) census, this will be acceptable. Please provide these lists in Excel.

List number	Description
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List 1	All children and young people with an EHC plan for whom your local authority is responsible.
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List 2	All children and young people who are in receipt of SEN support educated in settings within your local area.
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197. Below is an outline of the broad contents of each list. Detailed guidance about the fields for each list is available in the [person-level data guidance and template](#). Included in the spreadsheet is a template for each person-level list.

198. Where possible, we have aligned the information in the person-level lists with DfE guidance on SEN2 and the school/alternative provision census. The spreadsheet template includes an overview of the codes to use, sourced from the SEN2 or school/alternative provision census guidance.

199. The person-level data lists should represent the local area partnership's most recent available data at the point of notification. When the local area partnership shares the lists, they should indicate what date(s) the data in each list represents as far as possible.

200. If certain data is unavailable, the lead inspector may wish to discuss how the local area partnership monitors those areas.

201. In the future, we may request different information, but this will always happen following engagement with local area partnerships.

202. Queries about the person-level data should be sent to Area.Send@ofsted.gov.uk. However, if you have any queries after you have been

notified that an inspection is to take place, please contact the lead inspector.

Week 1: information about the local area partnership's SEND arrangements

203. In the first week of inspection, the local area partnership should provide the information set out below.

204. The local area partnership should not provide all of the information that it holds on each subject. The inspectors will want only the local area partnership's best and most recent information that relates to the scope of the inspection. Inspectors will not review information that they deem to fall outside the scope of the inspection.

Information to be provided by the local area partnership following notification

Number	Item	Description
1.1	Local area partnership structure	The education, health and care partners involved in the local area partnership; the governance arrangements, decision-making structures, how partners work together and who is responsible for delivering what
1.2	Assessment of needs	The local area partnership's assessment of the needs of children and young people with SEND in the local area; this will include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and any further assessment of needs
1.3	Self-evaluation	The local area partnership's self-evaluation of its effectiveness in improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND
1.4	Strategic planning	The local area partnership's strategic planning for children and young people with SEND; this may include parts of the joint health and well-being strategy
1.5	Representative and support groups	Contact information for established representative and/or support groups for children and young people with SEND, and parents and carers

1.6	Dynamic support register	List of all children and young people aged 0 to 25 on the dynamic support register.
1.7	Health system overview and commissioning arrangements	The structure of the local health services, which includes who commissions the service and who provides the service (the CQC will provide a template at notification); and information on commissioning specifications for local health services, including for young people aged 16–25 years; this also includes any significant changes planned for the services and/or services where there are recovery plans needed

Additional information to be provided by the local area partnership at the end of week 1

Number	Item	Description
2.1	Engagement plans and impact	Information about the local area partnership’s strategy and approach for engaging with children, young people and their families in planning and evaluating SEND arrangements; information on the impact this engagement has had on local SEND arrangements
2.2	Approach to EHC plans	The local area partnership’s approach to the development, oversight and quality assurance of EHC plans, including the services involved; this may include documents relating to the processes and internal policies.
2.3	Personal budgets	Data on the number of personal budget applications and acceptances across education, health and care
2.4	Tribunals and single route of redress	Data on appeals to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability), including cases resolved before tribunal hearing; data about appeals through the single route of redress
2.5	Information about specific	The numbers of children and young people with SEND who are: not attending an education setting, including those who receive home education; attending alternative

	cohorts	provision; known to youth justice services; eligible to receive adult care services; on part-time timetables for their education
2.6	Outcomes	Information on the local area partnership's measures of outcomes for children and young people in their area, including outcomes relating to their preparation for adulthood
2.7	Employment	Data on current employment of 18 to 25 year olds with SEND
2.8	Multi-agency audits	The results of any multi-agency audits of support for individual children and young people with SEND that have been carried out in the 12 months prior to inspection

Information about education at the end of week 1

Number	Item	Description
3.1	Education system overview	The structure of the local education system, including the types of education setting, and which settings have specialist provision available
3.2	Residential special schools	Information about the commissioning and oversight of placements of children and young people in residential special schools
3.3	Out-of-area placements	Information about the commissioning and oversight of education settings outside the local area that provide education for the area's children and young people with EHC plans; data on the number of children and young people with SEND who are placed out of area, and the reasons for this
3.4	Destinations	Data about destinations after leaving school, including data about young people not in education, employment and training
3.5	Part-time education	Data about children and young people who have EHC plans, or are in alternative provision on part-time

	timetables	timetables; to include the numbers of children and the timescales
3.6	Home-to-school transport	Information about the strategy for home-to-school transport, and any consultation outcomes; data on the number of children and young people with SEND who are supported, and who has requested support
3.7	Attendance	The most recent evaluation of attendance of children and young people with SEND in the local area

Information about care at the end of week 1

Number	Item	Description
4.1	Care services overview	The structure of local care services, provision and teams, including details of any services in the area that have been commissioned from the community or voluntary sector for children and young people with SEND
4.2	Short breaks	The local authority short-break statement, and information on the current provision and uptake
4.3	Thresholds, assessments and provision	Information about thresholds, assessments and provision for children and young people with SEND, including early help and services for disabled children
4.4	ILACS lists	ILACS person-level data lists 2, 6, 7, 8, 9 as described in ILACS Annex A
4.5	Virtual schools	Information about the virtual school arrangements in the local area

Information about health at the end of week 1

Number	Item	Description
5.1	Performance data	Performance data (including current waiting times) on delivery of: the healthy child programme, spanning early

years and school-age children (previous 12 months); children and young people's mental health services 0–25 years; speech and language therapy; occupational therapy; and physiotherapy

5.2	Pathways	Pathways for referrals to health services for assessment and outcomes information or data as related to those pathways, including children and young people's mental health, therapies and child development centres
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Information from the local authority about alternative provision at the end of week 1

Number	Item	Description
6.1	Strategy and commissioning arrangements	Information about the local authority's strategy and commissioning arrangements for alternative provision
6.2	Needs of children and young people	Information about the needs of the children and young people in the area who are in alternative provision; information about how the local authority monitors likely future need for placements, and maintains sufficient provision
6.3	Settings and attendees	Information about the alternative provision settings used by the local authority and the children or young people attending, including where these are part-time placements; this should include a record of all individual intervention plans for children and young people
6.4	Monitoring and oversight information	The most recent information about the quality and performance of alternative provision settings, including outcomes for children and young people, such as destinations following alternative provision; information on how the local authority quality assures alternative provision, including relevant frameworks

Week 1: selecting providers and settings for sampling visits

205. The lead inspector will ask the LANO and ICB representative to identify a list of providers and services where inspectors can sample the records of individual children and young people. The inspection team will then select the providers and services where it will carry out sampling, and will ask the LANO to inform the providers and services.

Week 1: additional information about children and young people selected for tracking

206. The lead inspector will ask the LANO to coordinate the sharing of information with the inspection team about the children and young people who are being tracked. For each child or young person, this information will include:

Number	Item	Description
7.1	Multi-agency audit	A multi-agency audit of the child or young person's programme and support, including an evaluation of the impact of plans and support, and learning for the providers and services involved
7.2	Chronology	A chronology of significant events in the 2 years before the inspection
7.3	Pen portrait	A pen portrait of the child or young person, including information about their needs, aspirations and support
7.4	Assessments	The most recent assessments, including an early help assessment, if applicable
7.5	Plans	The most recent plans including an EHC plan, personal education plan or care plan, where relevant
7.6	Discussion notes	Notes of any key multi-agency discussions or equivalent
7.7	Commissioning	The current commissioning agreement, when the child

1. [Children Act 2004](#), section 20. ↵
2. [‘Alternative provision: statutory guidance for local authorities’](#), Department for Education, January 2013. ↵
3. Health services for children and young people with SEND are provided through acute and community services, and Mental Health Trusts and other non-NHS providers. The majority of services are termed as community services. These include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, orthotics, community and specialist nursing, and medical care and interventions. Children and young people with SEND also use children and young people’s mental health services (community and inpatient) and may access health and justice services and secure estates. Children and young people with SEND may also need access to specialist equipment, wheelchairs, continence supplies and assistive technology. ↵
4. [‘Alternative provision: statutory guidance for local authorities’](#), Department for Education, January 2013. ↵
5. [‘Changes to the MCA Code of Practice and implementation of the LPS’](#), Department of Health and Social Care, Ministry of Justice, Department for Education, and Welsh Government, March 2022. ↵
6. [‘Keeping children safe in education’](#), Department for Education, 2015. ↵
7. [‘Working together to safeguard children’](#), Department for Education, 2018. ↵
8. [The Children Act 2004 \(Joint Area Reviews\) Regulations 2015](#). ↵

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