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Official Statistics

Methodology: area SEND inspections and outcomes in England as at 31 December 2024

Published 26 June 2025

Applies to England

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Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information relevant to our [official statistics release of area SEND inspections and outcomes in England](#) data, which we intend to publish once a year.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (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](#).

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Relevant legal duties may include duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

In 2016, Ofsted and the CQC were commissioned to carry out a one-off cycle of inspections to evaluate how well local areas had implemented the 2014 SEND reforms. We completed this programme of full inspections in 2022.

In late 2022, we and CQC jointly launched a new area SEND inspection framework. The new framework has a greater focus on hearing directly from children and young people with SEND, and their families. This enables inspectors to get a better understanding of what it's like to be a child or young person with SEND in that local area. Inspections under the new framework began in January 2023.

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 who work in the local area partnership.

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.

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.

This statistical release includes outcomes of our inspections of the effectiveness of local area partnerships' arrangements for children and young people with SEND. If we have not yet inspected a local area in its current form, we will not include the inspection outcome of its predecessor. If we have not yet inspected a local area under the current inspection framework, we will not include the outcome for that local

area under the previous inspection framework.

We also publish [management information of area SEND inspections and outcomes in England](#) twice a year. These are smaller releases, which do not ordinarily include a written commentary.

‘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.

Methodology

Data in this official statistics series is from area SEND inspections carried out in local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under [section 20\(1\)\(a\) and 20\(2\) of the Children Act 2004](#). If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date given in the release, then it will not be included in the release.

We will present and analyse:

- in-year inspection outcomes for inspections carried out between 1 January and 31 December of the latest reporting year
- from 1 January 2023, inspections that have occurred under the new framework up to the reporting date

The most recent statistics, displayed in the tables and charts, count the number of local areas that have been inspected. Local areas that have not yet been inspected are excluded from the measure.

The number of area SEND inspections completed each term is relatively low. Because of this, rather than using a cut-off date, we aim to schedule official statistics and management information so that there is enough time to include all inspection reports for the reporting period in each release. This helps to ensure almost all inspections carried out within the reporting period have reports that are published

and reflected in the statistics. We do this to minimise bias.

Under exceptional circumstances, we may withhold or withdraw publication of an inspection report. We do not include outcomes of withheld or withdrawn inspection reports in any of the datasets.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR).

OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

You are welcome to contact us directly data.AreaSEND@ofsted.gov.uk with any comments about how we meet these standards.

Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

Applying the code of practice

This section is broken down by the 3 pillars of the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#):

- trustworthiness
- quality
- value

Trustworthiness

Timeliness and punctuality

Data is currently published once a year and includes details of inspections that have taken place and been published within the reporting period.

We publish data at 9.30am on the date pre-announced in the [publication schedule](#).

You can also find information on any delay in publication on the publication schedule.

The average production time for this official statistics release is approximately 6

months after the last inspection in the calendar year. This time includes waiting for publication of inspection reports, obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs, internal sign-off and uploading the information to GOV.UK.

We announce publication of the statistics on our social media channels on the day of publication. We give pre-release access in accordance with the [Pre-release to Official Statistics Order \(2008\)](#).

You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access as a separate document accompanying each release.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

When we hold sensitive or personal data, our disclosure control processes ensure that it is not published.

All data releases follow [our confidentiality and revisions policies](#).

Quality

Accuracy and reliability

We extract information on inspection outcomes from our administrative systems. While we aim to produce the highest-quality statistics, there are occasional differences between the data on the administrative system and the final inspection report. This could be due, for example, to changes during the quality assurance process. We perform rigorous quality assurance checks, including checking a sample of entries to ensure that the inspection report matches the data on the administrative system. In the event that the data recorded on the system affects reporting, we will provide a note in the release.

Where inspection reports are delayed, we would potentially publish revisions to the data (adding in the inspection outcomes of any inspection reports published after the original cut-off date) in line with our [revisions policy for official statistics](#).

Technical production

Technical production of the official statistics publication may also result in manual errors. We use a rigorous procedure for assuring data quality, with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting errors. If an error is discovered in the document, we place a note on the website and upload a corrected version of the document as soon as possible.

Read [more information on issues relating to the use of administrative data](#).

Data obtained from other sources

Data from external sources is not used in this publication.

Coherence and comparability

The tables and charts in the release compare inspection outcomes over the past few years.

There has been a framework change since the first release of statistics, the current [area SEND inspection framework](#) came into force on 1 January 2023, therefore tables and charts after this date reflect inspection outcomes after 1 January 2023.

When changes to local government boundaries, inspection frameworks or methodologies have been implemented, we will add guidance footnotes for clarity.

Other sources of similar data

No comparable data is published by other organisations that produce official or national statistics for Area SEND inspections in England.

We also produce [management information](#) twice a year on the outcomes of Area SEND inspections.

Several third parties provide interactive tools displaying publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. Third parties appear to collate these by using advanced computer techniques to harvest information from published inspection reports. We cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

Changes to inspection frameworks

Framework changes have an impact on the comparability of data and reporting over time. The change in judgements and considering the effects of these mean that between frameworks there may be breaks or changes in the way we report certain judgements.

We introduced the new [area SEND inspection framework](#) in January 2023, following a consultation. Tables and charts in our official statistics after this date reflect inspection outcomes after 1 January 2023.

The framework is accompanied by an [inspection handbook](#). This sets out how inspectors gather evidence and judge a local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND.

The impact of the changes to the area SEND inspection framework on inspection

outcomes is as follows:

- inspection outcome: this was introduced in January 2023 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks
- monitoring inspection: this was introduced in January 2023 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks
- number of areas of priority action: this was introduced in January 2023 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks
- priority action plan: this was introduced in January 2023 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks

As a result of these changes, analysis is only possible for inspections completed after 1 January 2023 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of SEND provision nationally

The previous [inspection framework](#) ran between April 2016 and December 2023.

The selection process

Local areas are not inspected with equal regularity. Ofsted must inspect all local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004. At our discretion, we may also carry out monitoring inspections of local areas using their power in section 20(2) of the Children Act 2004.

Refer to the [inspection framework and handbook](#) for details of the selection process.

Value

Relevance

Information in this release has 3 distinct purposes:

- it allows local areas, sector leaders, families and providers to be informed about key findings from our area SEND inspections
- it allows media outlets to use our key findings to inform the public about the quality of SEND provision across the country and in local areas
- it allows Ofsted staff to use inspection profiles to inform inspection framework development and underpin policies to improve standards; the important

messages in the official statistics also contribute towards the findings in His Majesty's Chief Inspector's Annual Report to Parliament

The data included in the release is generated by our inspection process and is, therefore, administrative data.

Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The information is publicly available, and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes outcomes from completed inspections that have been published. The aim of the data is to keep users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the area SEND sector.

Each release includes underlying supporting data in an accessible format, to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the [Open Government Licence](#).

Performance, cost and burden on respondents

There is no burden on respondents in relation to this statistics release because data is a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

Assessment of users' needs and perceptions

We regularly review these official statistics to ensure that they meet users' needs.

We welcome feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the area SEND data and analysis team on data.AreaSEND@ofsted.gov.uk.

Glossary

Definitions of terms are in the [statistical glossary](#).

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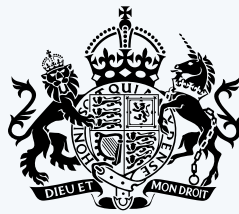
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