

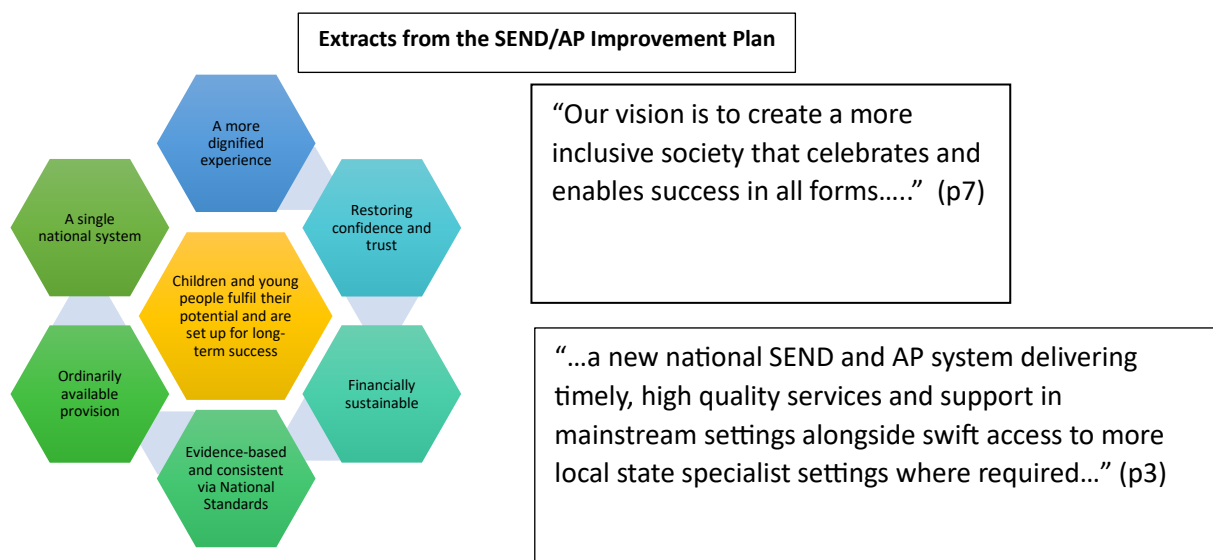
SEND and AP Improvement Plan – a DCS briefing paper

The LGA has produced a good briefing and commentary of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan [SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, 2 March 2023 | Local Government Association](#) and this, along with the DfE Roadmap [SEND and alternative provision roadmap - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) are relevant and helpful for all DCSs and senior teams and partners.

In leading change in this area, DCSs need to be particularly mindful of:

1. Cultural change

This is a cultural change not a technical one and as such it is both complex and complicated. The words and vision in the plan set a particular mood. You will need equal care in establishing with parents and partners the moral grounding, values and ambition for your local system – how are you doing this and how is it part of your overall ambition and focus for children?

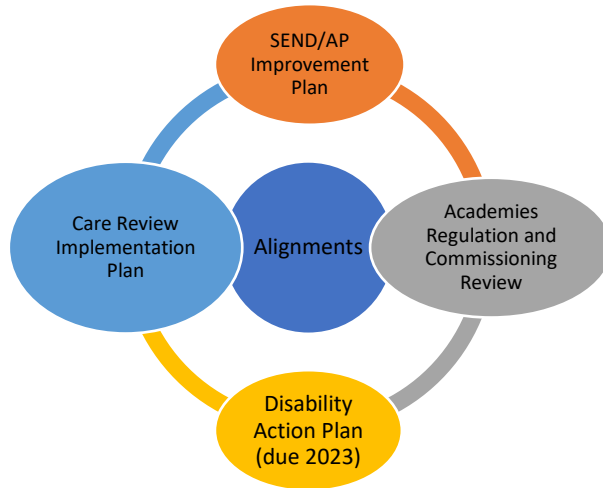


A significant feature of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan is the way in which local authorities engage with children, young people and parents. This also features to a much greater degree in the new SEND inspection process. Reviewing and, where necessary, enhancing your processes for engaging with children and young people should be a priority and will be time well spent. There are examples in the Improvement Plan of good practice:

- Lincolnshire Young Voices – Award for co-production to improve service delivery involving young people with SEND in the area.
- Telford and Wrekin’s Casework Team – investing in positive relationships with parents and carers and “doing the basics brilliantly”.

2. Connections

The DfE and DoH are trying to ensure that several different reviews are connected-have you got adequate arrangements in place to ensure these are connected locally?



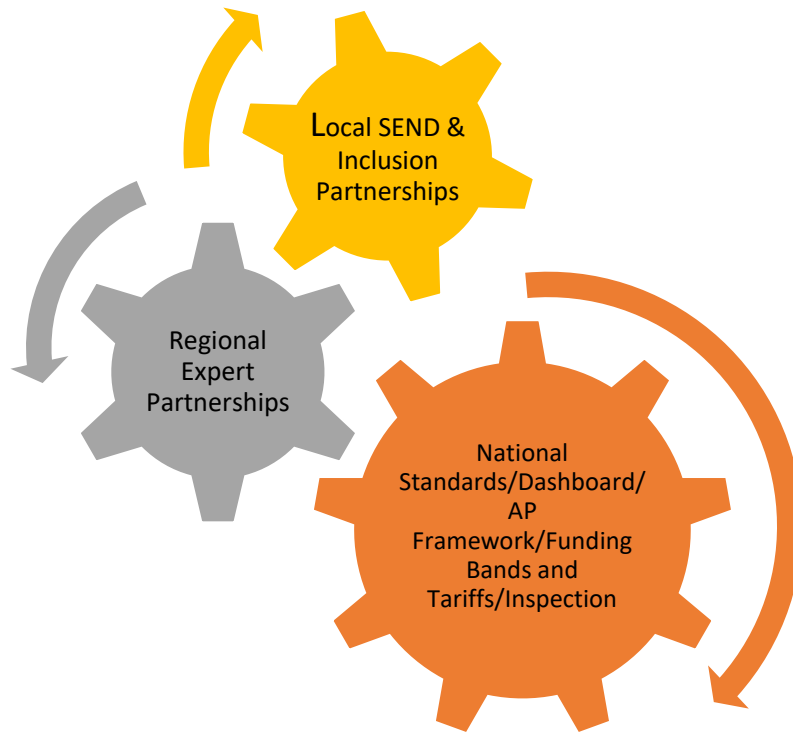
3. Drivers

The DfE and DoH have recognized there are some underpinning drivers to the review. As with the review connections, how are you ensuring these drivers are being considered together locally as a full systems wide, long-term strategy?

Strong robust workforce	
Strengthened accountabilities	
Sustainable, fair resourcing	

4. Machinery

The review establishes or reinforces several mechanisms for local, regional and national development and accountability. Have you got the right people involved in your local partnership at a strategic and operational level? How are you building the performance frameworks into your local performance and QA arrangements? How are you ensuring you and your partners' key people are productively involved in peer support and development to learn from and share expertise?



5. And a few other issues for DCSs to think about:

- One of your biggest challenges will be holding schools to account for their inclusive practice. Setting clear expectations and establishing a narrative where all schools are schools for children with SEND will be important. One of the challenges for local authorities has been to persuade or direct schools to admit some children with SEND. This includes MATs and academies. Investing time to build mutually supportive systems and relationships will help the local authority to demonstrate to all its schools a fair and transparent system and hopefully an equitable distribution of SEND places.
- If National Standards are not going to be introduced until the end of 2025, the existing challenges continue for local authorities and families. How will you manage these expectations now and what approaches will you use to ‘control’ the demands on High Needs budgets when the system changes will not really be effective until 2025 and beyond?
- The introduction of ‘National Standards’ will inevitably raise expectations amongst children, young people and their parents/carers who will rightly assume that the same support will be available wherever they live and delivered in the same way. You will need to work closely with Parent/Carer forums now so that they understand what these reforms translate to in practice. What will you do to ensure that children, young people and their parents/carers understand very clearly what the local offer for SEND is **in their local area** and what they can ordinarily expect.

- Funding and budgets will remain an issue despite an increase in funding. Councils are facing huge deficits in their High Needs budgets and despite the 'Safety Valve' and DBV programmes to help Councils bring their High Needs spend under control, the deficits will take many years to address. This is a national issue but locally, Directors of Finance will be exerting as much pressure as possible on you, as DCSs, to reduce these deficits. Without the new reforms and funding for additional places (they take time to deliver), it is going to be incredibly difficult to make any significant impact on High Needs overspends in the next two years and then what will be the government plan for treating High needs deficits post 2026?
- Digitisation of EHCPs should not disadvantage families without digital skills or the IT hardware. How will your local authority find compensating processes to ensure ALL families can access the new EHCPs and make their input in a timely way?
- The Improvement Plan makes reference to the need for a new strategy for children and young people with the most complex needs. At the time of publishing the Improvement Plan, the DfE was "considering how to respond to these system wide issues." Funding of these placements and securing an appropriate share from Health colleagues continues to present major challenges for local authorities. This is an issue which needs urgent attention as these costs are the most significant in Children's Social Care and High Needs budgets.
- Capital funding has been announced for 2023/24 and 2024/25, so those authorities under pressure for places need to have plans in place quickly to secure some of that funding. However, there will not be enough for every authority to benefit. What about those local authorities who will need funding for subsequent years? Consideration needs to be given to how extra places can be funded in the future.
- Local authorities should have reliable capacity assessments so you will need to make sure that work is underway so that you have an accurate picture of mainstream, special schools' and AP capacity. This will inform who gets what funding when, from central government.
- DCSs need to be alert to the opportunities to bid for funding e.g. short breaks fund and funding for projects which establish more robust links between SEND and the Early Help system. Not all authorities will be able to benefit from all of the funding.
- The establishment of Multi Agency Panels in all local areas is a positive move but local authorities need to be confident that Health can provide services quickly. DCSs need to work closely with Health providers so that services such as those linked to mental health can be available quickly and do not hold up the whole process of addressing needs promptly.

6. SEND/AP Inspections

The following information has been shared by two local authorities who have recently been inspected under the new Framework.

Preparation for Inspection

- Your SEF should be ready well before the inspection call as there is no time to work on documentation during the inspection process. It should demonstrate a shared narrative of your local area and it should be a whole system response about what is happening for children and young people with SEND. Parent/carer views should be accurately included. It should be open and honest and not seek to present a perfect picture. It is nevertheless helpful if you have an action plan that has emerged from the SEF.

Other essential documents include your SEND/AP Strategy. If you have completed a JSNA, that is also very useful. The 'Annex A' document should be treated in the same way as an ILACS inspection – have your evidence ready and ensure it is quality assured and signed off well in advance. Give yourself time to go through this.

It is important that partners are briefed about the process in advance and that there is a clear understanding about your data. Some people may need coaching to respond to the inspection interviews and know how to challenge back.

Relationships with partners are critical. Invest time with parents/carers and young people both before and during the inspection itself. Keep them updated on what they can expect to happen and how they will be involved.

A timetable for the 3 week process is attached.

Some of the Key Lines of Inquiry

- How effective are short breaks?
- Do children and young people have access to health services in a timely manner?
- How well are the voices of children and families heard and acted upon?
- Are SEND needs identified in a timely way?
- How well are excluded children supported and how are they reintroduced into education, employment or training?
- What support is in place for young people who are on a list for mental health services? ('Waiting well')
- How far are the views of children, young people and families used to shape provision?
- Questions relating to the safety of children living away from the area and the quality of their provision
- Questions in relation to attendance, NEETS, Alternative Provision and commissioning.

Additional information about the support and challenge regime following inspection can be found at:-

[Area SEND inspections: support and challenge following inspection - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Week One – Off Site

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
09:00 Notification call	By 11:00 Document upload of child data, local arrangements for health and social care . Also section 1 of Annex A		09:00 – 17:00 Multi-agency audits of tracked cases	09:00 Production of the overview report of thematic audits
11:30 Initial call with relevant leads				
15:00 Surveys sent to Parents, Carers, Children and Practitioners	17:00 Tracked cases confirmed			

Week Two – Off Site

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
				09:00 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case
10:30 Timetable planning meeting			13:00 Local Area Context Meeting	10:30 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case
			13:45 Meeting with Parent/Carer Forum	
			13:45 Telephone calls to parents, carers and young people of tracked cases	13:00 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case
		15:00 DCO Meeting		
			15:00 Meeting with SENDIASS	16:00 Meeting with Leaders

Week Three – On Site

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Visits to settings and focus groups across education, health, and social care				
12:00 Self – Evaluation Meeting	09:00 KIT Meeting		09:00 KIT Meeting	11:00 KIT Meeting
14:30 Strategy and Commissioning Meeting	09:00 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case	12:30 KIT Meeting		
14:30 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case		15:30 Meeting with Children and Young People		13:15 Final Feedback
16:00 Practitioner Meeting – Tracked Case			16:00 Meeting with Leaders	