



Navigating SEND Inspections

Understanding Education – Briefings

What do I need to know?

Overview

Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) local area inspections are joint reviews carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Over a five year period, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission are due to have inspected 152 local areas. Inspections began in May 2016 although these have been put on hold during the Covid pandemic outbreak and currently only 'interim' visits are taking place (see an update on this below).

During an inspection, the local area is assessed on how the different aspects of the SEND reforms have been implemented. They focus specifically on three key requirements:

- The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people who have special educational needs/disabilities
- The effectiveness of the local area in assessing and meeting the needs of these children and young people
- The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people who have SEND – this could include the timeliness of assessments and EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plans), how effective SEN support is in the area, school, academy and college provision, joint commissioning etc.

Inspectors will also look at children and young people:

- attending an educational setting within their area or out of area
- missing from education
- being educated out of school/college
- children looked after and/or care leavers subject to youth justice
- in transition between placements or phases of education or health services, including between child and adult services

These are inspections of the local area as a whole, so education, health and care are all part of the inspection. The inspection takes place over a five day period and will involve both parents, carers and young people. Inspection teams will include an HMI (lead), a CQC inspector and an Ofsted inspector.

The Inspection Process

Inspection fieldwork – discussions with elected members, key local area officers from health, education and social care, meetings with leaders of early years settings, schools and colleges and specialist services as well as visits to settings and services – this will focus on their understanding of and participation in meeting the area’s responsibilities and impact on improving outcomes for children.

- Review of files – a sample of children and young people’s files will be reviewed to inform inspection findings
- Strong emphasis on gathering the views of young people, parents, carers – meetings during visits to early years settings, schools, colleges; meeting with established parent and carer groups; meeting any reference groups established in the local area and a webinar for parents and carers during the inspection

Reporting

- Local areas receive feedback during and at the end of inspection
- HMI write a report letter identifying key strengths and areas for development
- The report is a narrative evaluation using the three key evaluation questions in the framework. There are no graded judgements
- If the inspection team determine there are significant concerns, the local area may be required to produce and publish a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) following the inspection
- There may be follow up inspection activity if this is deemed appropriate
- The findings of the local area SEND inspections may be considered for other relevant CQC and Ofsted inspection activity

Be prepared to evidence as good practice:

- Established Working Groups involving parents/carers, education, health and social care that reflect on current practice in relation to the SEND reforms – each focusing on a particular area
- Clear methods of feedback from wider the community on policy and provision
- Embedded working with parents/carers at a strategic level
- Well informed local authority staff evidenced through ongoing CPD
- Senior leaders in the local authority and health addressing SEND as a routine part of their business
- The processes for the joint commissioning of services

Inspectors will focus on:

- Any delays in the legal processes around assessment
- Evidence of strong clear processes and adequately trained staff leading in this area
- Communication with schools and parents
- Confirmation that there is a Designated Medical Officer in role – this is essential so that the CCG role can be effective for CYP with SEND
- The contributions from health and social care to EHCPs. Strong leadership should ensure these inputs are of high quality and that staff understand the terminology/structure of plans
- Good use of the Local Offer
- Impact of actions on outcomes – there should be high expectations for every child and young person
- How well the area identifies and meets the needs of 16-25 year olds and how well young people are

prepared for the world of work and wider preparation for adulthood

- How well the local area engages with children and young people, and their parents and carers, to inform decisions about the strategic commissioning of services

Questions to prompt self-evaluation

- Is there a joined up strategic approach in the local authority for children and young people with SEND which is delivering high quality provision and outcomes? Is SEND integral to strategic plans in the area?
- Is the DCS aware of staff turnover at all levels? Difficulties here will make the LA vulnerable with a lack of consistent staffing/ leadership that will contribute to failings/gaps/lack of a co-ordinated approach
- Parent/Carer co-production – this needs to be approached from a strategic level, with parental representation and contributions towards policy, planning and commissioning. Often relationships with parents and carers are seen as reactive resulting in a lack of confidence in local authority systems and provision
- In schools, leadership and management of SEND should be everyone's business. Is the LA communicating not just through SENCO networks but to senior leadership teams and governors in schools? Are Headteachers involved in panels and forums to share successful practice? Is there a strength in the understanding of inclusive practice at leadership level?
- School Ofsted inspections now have SEND threaded through all aspects of the Framework so it should be seen as a whole school approach. Local authority information and advice need to support this with their

school improvement strategy. Is it inclusive of SEND? Inspections frequently highlight a lack of cohesiveness between school improvement, SEN teams (statutory and advisory), EP services, Early Years etc.

- Variabilities in school SEND provision across the area will prompt questions about the local authority's strategic approach. Is this helping to raise the quality of provision so that there is consistency in practice across schools? Do some schools have persistent issues with parents and how does the local authority tackle this?
- Is the Local Authority responsive to feedback from schools and families?
- Does the Local Authority know their local statistics for SEND in comparison with others in their region and nationally? Are they analysing it and looking at trends across time? Is this linking with commissioning and planning across the local area and services? Are they involving schools, health and social care in this? This is essential so that service development and capacity match local needs. This should include analysis of attendance and exclusion so there is a clear understanding of whether their area is higher than local and national averages, and if so, what is being done to address this?
- Identification of SEND is a reoccurring theme across many areas – lack of identification, misidentification, over identification. Is there joint working across agencies and with school leaders so accuracy of identification becomes consistent?
- What is the quality of the SEND Local Offer? Is it clear and user friendly? Have parents and carers been involved in its design and content? (This is the outward facing part of SEND for a local authority and so it needs to be accurate, up to date and accessible).
- What have been the changes in leadership approaches to SEND since the reforms were introduced in 2014?

Key points of the Ofsted report on the 'evaluation of the framework for inspection of local areas' SEND services published in July 2020

- The evaluation finds area leaders and professionals credit inspections for raising the profile and priority of SEND, which supports strategic planning
- The joint nature of inspections had reinforced collective responsibilities
- Inspections lacked sufficient focus on social care so a main partner in the process was neither able to articulate their contribution nor be held to account
- There was recognition that areas have focused too much on the implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms and too little on the quality and impact of provision on children's lives
- The one-off nature of the inspection cycle can encourage providers and areas to implement short term approaches to improvement that fail to address underlying issues
- The breadth and nature of the inspection framework present challenges to areas in deciding what evidence to make available to inspectors and who it would be best for them to meet
- The government has confirmed that there will be a second round of area inspections and the framework will be updated to address issues highlighted in the evaluation

Full Inspections to resume in June 2021

In March 2020, Area SEND inspections were suspended because of the impact of COVID-19. However, the government has recently announced that from April 2021, Ofsted and CQC will be revisiting areas where there were significant concerns about SEND provision when they were last inspected. The areas will be given 10 working days' notice ahead of the revisits.

The full area SEND inspections will restart in June 2021 at the earliest. These will be to areas that have not yet been inspected under the current framework. The precise date for full inspections is being kept under review subject to government guidance and COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time.

When visits were suspended, 117 out of 152 areas had been inspected since 2016. Of these, 60 were deemed to have services of such poor quality that the CQC and Ofsted instructed system leaders across health, education and social care to publish a Written Statement of Action or improvements that would be made.

New Inspection Programme and Framework planned

The government has commissioned Ofsted and the CQC to develop a new area SEND inspection framework to launch after the existing cycle has been completed. The new framework will involve a continuous cycle of inspections, focused “more sharply on the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families”. New inspections will also feature more prominently the “quality, integration and commissioning of education, health and care services for children and young people with SEND”. Stakeholders will be consulted on the framework’s design.

Where can I access further information?

GOV.UK Guidance documents:

- Local Area SEND inspections: information for families
- Local area SEND inspections: guidance for inspectors
- Local area SEND inspections: one year on
- Outcome letters from joint local area SEND inspections

The framework for the inspection of local areas' effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities April 2016 No. 160025

Ofsted Report: An evaluation of the framework for inspecting local areas' special educational needs and/or disabilities services July 2020, No. 200008