

Briefing note on the new SEND inspection

This note is based on a discussion about this new inspection regime at the ADCS Standards, Performance and Inspection Policy Committee meeting at the end of May. An authority that piloted the inspection led this agenda item.

In essence the new inspection is seeking to understand what has changed in local areas since the introduction of the SEND reforms in September 2014. The inspection team, made up of representatives from Ofsted, the CQC and a local authority rep, will seek to establish how need is being identified, if local partners are meeting this need and how well they are working together to improve the outcomes of children and young people with a special educational need or disability.

Logistics of the inspection

There is a five day notification period for this inspection. In advance of the team arriving on site they will review a wide range of information in the public domain. This includes the JSNA, the local health and wellbeing strategy, the local SEND offer, NHS provider analysis and nominated education / early years' provider information on school websites.

During this period the inspection team may also request to see additional information, for example the local SEND strategy, the area self-evaluation plus commissioning and performance data for the last 12 months including the healthy child programme, school nursing service, the neonatal screening programme and 0-25 CAMHS services. The inspection team will be happy to receive any other information the partnerships feels is relevant and / or important to share.

It is vital to engage parent and carer groups in the process – they will be invited to attend a range of strategy meetings and / or to take part in two online webinars so that inspectors can gauge their views about the local offer and better understand how partners work together to support and meet the needs of children and young people. The five day notice period was agreed as an acknowledgement that families need time both to arrange childcare to enable attendance and to prepare CYP to contribute to some meetings themselves.

Breakdown of inspection activity

Monday and Tuesday – strategy meetings

A series of strategic meetings will take place in the first two full days of the inspection covering areas such as EHCP planning, early years, SEN home to school transport, school nursing, therapy provision and CAMHS. Determining this meeting schedule is the responsibility of the local area. It is recommended that a nominated attendee makes a record of these meetings to note any issues arising, key messages the inspection team are likely to take away and any follow up actions.

It is good practice to not only arrange for strategic officers or managers to attend these meetings, but the frontline practitioners who are involved in the day-to-day delivery of services for children and young people e.g. physiotherapists or school nurses.

Representatives from the local parent carer forum(s) should be invited to input into the strategy meetings that form the first two days of inspection, their involvement is key to a successful inspection.

Wednesday and Thursday – visits to education settings

The focus of the inspection is on SEN support not just on the children and young people with the most complex needs (holders of EHC Plans).

Inspectors will also visit a selection of early year's providers, primary and secondary schools, special schools, post-16 colleges and PRUs. These visits are up to three hours long and will be attended by a single inspector.

Inspectors will meet with students, parents / carers, governors and the school's leadership team during their visit. This is not an inspection of the setting. Visits are focussed on how the setting is improving outcomes for learners – inspectors are looking for evidence and impact. These visits also allow inspectors to triangulate what they've heard in the strategy meetings with learners, their parents and school staff.

Inspectors aren't just looking at educational attainment they will also be looking for softer indicators of success e.g. efforts to prepare young people for adulthood or building resilience. This can be a challenge to both measure and demonstrate.

Inspectors will seek to understand how the LA and wider partnership is supporting learners in specific circumstances, for example EHE and those in youth custody (see Chapter 10 of the Code).

Friday – feedback day, the inspection results in a narrative judgement.

Additional top tips from the inspected

Be absolutely clear what constitutes the local area – it's the local authority area (although inspectors will stress it is not simply an assessment of the LA). A lot of the logistical arrangements will however fall to the local authority.

As part of your inspection readiness plan get together a list of all of the people you'll need to be engaged in this process in the local area. This is a huge undertaking. Keep it up-to-date, particularly email addresses.

The volume of people involved in this exercise across the partnership cannot be underestimated, use conference calls wherever possible rather than repeating the same call with individual partners, this not only saves time but ensures consistency.

Health partners found the level of scrutiny surprising; they are not used to this.

Whilst an area self-evaluation is not a statutory requirement, it is generally seen as expected best practice by the inspectors.

Involve parent carer forums in the local inspection readiness plan.