

Guidance about the Local Area SEND Inspection - Children's Social Care

The Local Area SEND Inspection is undertaken jointly by Ofsted and CQC. It is not an inspection of Children's Social Care in isolation, but of how effectively education, health, and social care partners work together to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND aged 0-25. Inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of the Local Area Partnership and how services work together to identify needs, assess needs, deliver support and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Children's Social Care services are sampled as part of inspectors' evidence gathering because they play a key role in identifying need, safeguarding children, contributing to EHC assessments, delivering provision and supporting positive outcomes.

Inspectors will focus on:

- Experiences of children and young people with SEND and how needs are identified accurately and assessed in a timely way.
- Whether social care provision is timely, appropriate and impactful.
- How children, young people and families are involved in decision-making.
- How well services work together across education, health and social care, including during transitions.
- How effectively children and young people are prepared for adulthood and supported to transition under the Preparing for Adulthood principles.
- How effectively Children's Social Care leaders evaluate services and drive improvement through the SEND Local Area Partnership.

Children's Social Care services should be ready to:

- Explain their role within the SEND Local Area Partnership.
- Demonstrate how children and young people with SEND are supported.
- Show how they contribute to EHC needs assessments, plans and annual reviews.
- Explain how they know their support is making a difference.
- Demonstrate effective multi-agency working with Adult Health and Care, Education Settings and Health Services.
- Provide evidence of co-production with children, young people and families.

1. Your Role as Children's Social Care

Children's Social Care services may include Early Help, Family Support Services, Children in Need Teams, Child Protection Teams, Children in Care Teams, Disabled Children's Teams, Youth Justice Services, Leaving Care Services, Independent Reviewing Officers and commissioned social care providers where appropriate

During inspection you may be asked to:

- Contribute, in a timely way, to case sampling for selected tracked learners providing insight into current pathways and impacts. Provide assessment, chronologies and evidence related to tracked learners.
- Participate in meetings or case discussions about individual tracked learners, that you work directly with, selected by Inspectors
- Attend thematic discussions regarding SEND arrangements.
- Explain how social care contributes to SEND outcomes.
- Demonstrate how social care needs and provision are reflected within EHCPs.
- Explain how children and families are involved in assessments and planning.
- Share examples of effective multi-agency working.
- Disseminate surveys to staff, parents, carers and young people

Inspectors may request information at very short notice and meetings may be arranged the same day. Inspectors may also request to visit social care settings to talk to children, young people and staff.

2. What You Must Be Ready to Demonstrate

A. Identification and Assessment of Need

Inspectors will explore:

- How social care identifies children and young people with SEND, including identifying unmet needs.
- How social care assessments inform understanding of need.
- The quality and timeliness of social care advice provided during EHC assessments and annual reviews.
- Decision-making and escalation processes, including any wait times for assessment and support.
- How safeguarding and SEND considerations are brought together.

- How children's voices are captured and reflected in assessments.

B. Quality of Social Care Support and Provision

You should be able to demonstrate:

- Appropriate social care assessments.
- Timely access to support and interventions.
- Effective delivery of services specified in EHCPs.
- Support for children in need, children subject to child protection plans and children in care with SEND.
- Coordination between social care, education and health professionals.
- Effective transition planning.
- Support that enables independence, inclusion and family resilience.

C. EHCP Contribution and Statutory Duties

Children's Social Care has specific responsibilities within the EHCP process.

Inspectors may ask about:

- Contributions to EHC Needs Assessments, including supporting reports and advice (section K).
- Accuracy and quality of advice provided for social care needs related to SEND (Section D), provision under the Chronically Sick and Disabled persons Act (H1) and provision under the Children's Act (H2).
- Attendance and contribution to annual reviews.
- Alignment between EHCPs, Care Plans and PEPs for Children in Care.
- Preparation for adulthood planning from at least Year 9 onwards.

D. Co-production and Family Engagement

Inspectors will want to understand:

- How children and young people influence planning and support.
- How social workers gather and reflect wishes and feelings.
- How families contribute to assessments and plans.
- How concerns and complaints are addressed.
- How feedback influences service improvement.

Be ready with examples that demonstrate genuine co-production rather than consultation alone.

E. Multi-Agency Working

Inspectors will explore:

- How Children's Social Care works alongside Education and Health to contribution to EHC needs assessments.
- Appropriate attendance input into annual reviews for children and young people with EHCP's.
- Partnership working and information sharing arrangement in place with education settings and health services, including joint commissioning and planning for complex cases.
- Collaborative approaches to transition planning

Provide practical examples showing how social care involvement improved outcomes.

F. Impact on Outcomes

Inspectors will ask what difference your intervention has made, how you know and what evidence you have to demonstrate improved outcomes.

Be ready to discuss outcomes relating to:

- Safety and safeguarding
- Family stability
- Access to education
- Attendance
- Community inclusion
- Emotional wellbeing
- Independence
- Preparation for adulthood
- Successful transitions to adult services
- Childrens lived experience of support

3. Tracked Learners

Inspectors select a number of children and young people as tracked learners, this requires a deep dive into individual cases through a multi-agency audit. This will be followed by meetings between inspectors, children, young people and families, and the professionals who work most closely with that child or young person. For

example, the most appropriate person may be a Social Worker rather than the Team Manager. Tracked learner cases are led by a named professional who will coordinate evidence and gain consent from the family, the lead will contact social care to request information with a very short turn around to coordinate the multi-agency review.

For children known to Children's Social Care, practitioners may be asked to:

- Provide assessments and plans, share chronologies and key interventions very rapidly.
- Attend in-person and online meetings with inspectors about your practice and individual children and young people known to you
- Explain decision-making.
- Discuss the child/young person's journey through services including decisions made, impact and outcomes.
- Describe partnership working with education and health services.

Inspectors are interested in lived experience rather than paperwork alone. Practitioners who know the child directly are most likely to be involved.

Inspectors will also select a range of other settings to visit; settings should prepare even if you are not supporting a tracked learner

4. Surveys and Engagement

During Week 1 surveys are issues for parents and carers; children and young people and professionals.

Children's Social Care should:

- Share surveys promptly with parents/carers and children and young people they are working with
- Promote the Local Area Partnership and Local Area SEND Inspection to prepare parents/carers and children and young people; there are a range of tools to signpost too on the [Local Offer](#).
- Complete professional surveys and share with colleagues across the SEND System
- Encourage honest responses from everyone engaging.

Survey evidence forms part of inspectors' evidence base prior to their onsite visits.

5. Practical Expectations During Inspection

You Must:

- Respond promptly to requests for information.
- Ensure records are accurate and up to date.
- Ensure key staff can be contacted and made available for meetings with inspectors
- Support information sharing arrangements.
- Be familiar with EHCP responsibilities and ensure assessments and plans are readily accessible.

You Should:

- Keep children and young people at the centre of all answers.
- Focus on impact rather than process, using real-life examples.
- Be confident discussing both strengths and challenges and explain improvement activity.
- Be honest and reflective in discussions with inspectors.

People attending meetings with inspectors will be invited to pre and post de-brief meetings with the Local Authority Inspection Logistics team to ensure you are comfortable and confident with engagements.

6. Likely Questions Children's Social Care May Be Asked

- How do you identify and assess the needs of children and young people with SEND?
- How do you ensure children/young people's wishes and feelings inform planning?
- How does your team contribute to EHC assessments and annual reviews, ensuring social care needs and provisions are reflected?
- How do you work with education and health colleagues?
- What difference has your intervention made for children and families?
- How do you support preparation for adulthood?
- How do you support children in care with SEND?
- How do you contribute to the SEND Local Area Partnership's priorities?
- How do you learn from feedback and improve services?

7. Top Tips for Children's Social Care Staff

- Keep answers simple, jargon free and child centred.
- Focus on impact rather than activity, showcasing an understanding of the experiences of children and young people with SEND
- Be familiar with the SEND Code of Practice and understand your role in EHCP's
- Know how social care contributes to the wider SEND system and improvement planning through the SEND Local Area Partnership.
- Explain how children's voices influenced decisions.
- Understand preparation for adulthood principles.
- Be aware of Local Offer arrangements.
- Be honest about strengths and areas for development and demonstrate how improvement activity is making a difference.

8. Key Messages

- This is a SEND system inspection, not a Children's Social Care inspection or ILAC. The inspection process is unique and education, health and social care are jointly accountable for outcomes.
- Inspectors are interested in lived experience and impact.
- Children's Social Care has a critical role within EHC assessment, planning and review processes.
- Children's voices and family experiences are essential evidence; inspectors are interested in lived experience of the system.
- Successful partnership working is a key area of focus.
- Inspection is about improvement and effectiveness, not perfection.
- Every practitioner interaction contributes to inspectors' understanding of the SEND system.
- Be clear, be honest, and keep the child at the centre of every answer.