

Ofsted/CQC Inspection Guidance for SENDIAS Services

The following document is designed to support SENDIAS service managers and teams with preparing for and engaging with Ofsted inspectors during the Ofsted/CQC local area SEND inspection process.

The document begins with key preparation tips before moving into real examples from inspection experiences. Each example highlights what inspectors focused on, what information was shared, and what approaches proved helpful. Services may find it useful to use the tips as a checklist and draw on the examples when preparing their own evidence or meeting notes.

Local area SEND inspections can feel daunting, but they are also an important opportunity to demonstrate the value and impact of SENDIAS services. This guidance has been created to help you approach the process with clarity and confidence.

A SENDIAS service manager's top tips for inspections

- Aim to have two of you present to give one another breathing space/thinking time/breaks.
- Share any reasonable adjustments to meet your own needs ahead of time.
- Use post it notes with key statistics on and easy to read lists of headings. You can tick them off as you go along and then check at end that you have said as much as you wanted to.
- Think about day-to-day operational life of the service and how to best present and celebrate this.
- Think of what could be better and what you can and could be doing to achieve this.
- Consider your local area and your knowledge of how it works including who to signpost to.

What to expect from your meeting with the inspectors

Example 1

Our meeting was a one-hour virtual session with two inspectors: 1 x Ofsted inspector; 1 x CQC inspector. Our commissioner was also present. The meeting was ahead of them being in the district and with intention of supporting them to identify their "key lines of enquiry".

We tried to share as much as we could rather than awaiting the questions. This gave the sense of more control over the meeting as well as feeling we gave the sense of really knowing our service/local area.

We shared the following with the inspectors:

- General overview of our service, staff team make-up and how we work as a SENDIAS service, giving some historical context and describing changes in the service since changing provider.
- Social media presence and associated statistics.
- Details of our steering group including members and examples of coproduction.
- How we link with many other professionals across the district with the main question being about the Parent Carer Forum.
- How we link with the Family Hubs.
- How we promote the local area's advocacy service.
- Our commitment to "You said we did" as a service and as a local area.
- Common concerns/worries, including EBSA increases; breakdown in communications between settings and families; specialist places - related to the national picture; not attending tribunals etc.
- Links with other SENDIAS services both within our provider organisation and regionally.
- What service users struggle with the most in terms of our service and how we manage/learn from this e.g. that we have a legal duty to be impartial; that we do not have the power to tell settings what to do. We discussed how we manage expectations and associated documents/detail on our webpage.
- What's next for our service and key projects for the year ahead. We talked about our internal standards document that we're working on and making our "Working together" document that we provide to all new registered service users more accessible (e.g. with voice recordings); also revisited wanting to further increase involvement with a newly appointed SEND Hub Coordinator.

- Briefly spoke about the SEND Change Programme and how this is working in our area in relation to our service.
- Our challenges and explained how we are tackling these e.g. capacity; understanding and managing service user expectations; coproduction directly with children and young people; what's available in the local area to provide support when it's not our role etc.

We also prepared the following which were not asked for by the inspectors:

- Case studies.
- Positive feedback/comments from service users.
- Any statistics (but still gave some of them!).
- Asked other questions and we gave feedback but that related to the Local Offer element of our contract e.g. reach of the newsletter produced; website statistics; how children and young people in AP are consulted in terms of co-production; whether parents are raising concerns about support for young people to access apprenticeships/internships.

Example 2

During the meeting with the inspectors, they were looking at how the LA/Health shared information within the local area, including with other organisations and parent/carers/children and young people. They were also keen to hear about the impact of services/changes on service users.

A lot was covered within the meeting including but not limited to:

- Local area policies, ordinarily available provision, improvements, changes, co-production between LA, partners and service users etc.
- We were asked about how we share information with service users and where we signpost to for further information i.e. Local Offer, ordinarily available provision document, local information hubs (which included information from LA and Health).
- We were able to share concerns around short contracts/lack of funding for the SENDIAS service and how these impact on staffing/resource.
- We shared monitoring reports, highlighted key data, and provided service user feedback.
- There was a focus on the area partnership and the current challenges as well as what was working well. We felt we were able to give a balanced and fair overview of how the service users we support see things currently.

Example 3

This was a **monitoring inspection**, so the focus was on local area improvement following the previous full inspection, which had identified widespread and/or systemic failings. Unlike a standard inspection, the emphasis was not on the SENDIAS service alone during our meeting.

Inspectors were particularly interested in:

- Feedback from families and clarity on why they were seeking advice and support.
- Themes such as neurodiversity pathways and what is available in the interim.
- Timeliness of new assessments and those issued after annual reviews.
- How the local area collaborates as a partnership.
- SENDIAS service involvement in the improvement journey and ongoing development work.

I was notified by the local area (the SEND Leader in this instance) and invited to attend a one-hour virtual meeting at the end of week one, ahead of their key lines of inquiry. To prepare, I

- Created a presentation (and separate notes for ease), highlighting service achievements and next steps, data, key themes, case studies, IASSN national involvement, and local improvement work.
- Conducted a helpline and casework survey with the team one month prior, then summarised the issues raised by 71 contacts/families over a 10-day period to provide anecdotal evidence alongside data.

Although the meeting was informal, the presentation helped me stay focused and ensure I covered everything. Inspectors requested a copy of the presentation afterward for further review.

Final thoughts

Taken together, these experiences show that inspectors are mainly trying to understand how SENDIAS services fit into the wider local picture — how information is shared, how families experience the system, and how services work together across the area. They pay close attention to what families are telling you, the pressures they are facing, and how openly you talk about

challenges as well as what's going well. What comes through strongly is that preparation helps, but so does simply being clear, honest and grounded in real-life experiences. All of these things help inspectors build a fair view of the service, the local area, and the progress being made.

Finally, inspections are an opportunity to highlight the commitment, expertise, and impact of SENDIAS services. By preparing confidently and using the shared experiences included in this document, services can engage constructively with inspectors and contribute to a stronger, more effective SEND system for children, young people, and families.