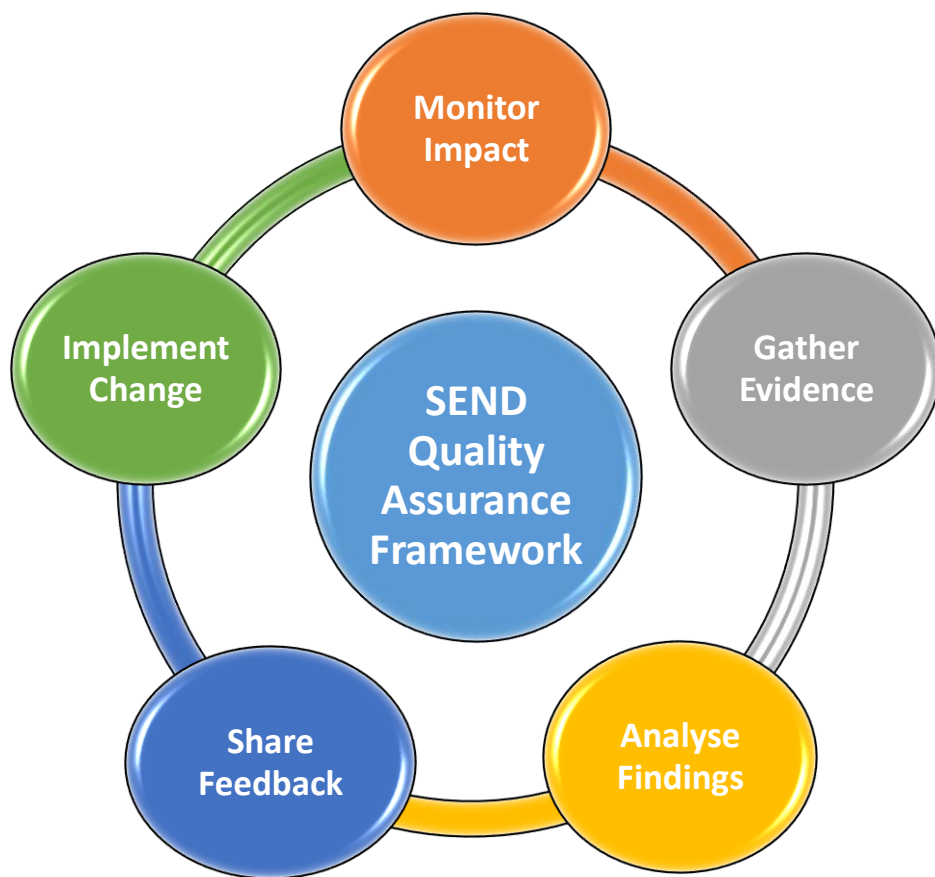


Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Quality Assurance and Learning Framework 2021 – 2024



**Improving outcomes for children and young
people with Disabilities**

1. Introduction

As part of our improvement journey Thurrock SEND is launching this framework which will help us to achieve excellence across all SEND services. It provides a framework within which all stakeholders commit to work together to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Thurrock SEND brings together all partners, including parents and carers, to provide strategic leadership to deliver of the local SEND offer. We will ensure an inclusive and integrated system which ensures that Health, Education and Social Care work together to provide quality services and achieve positive outcomes for young people and children with SEND.

Thurrock SEND values the role of parents and carers and will work together with them both strategically to develop priorities and individually to develop person centred Education, Health and Care Plans with clear outcomes and provision.

The voice of children and young people in influencing and designing processes and services, and ensuring we remain focused on what matters to them will be embedded in all we do.

This framework sets out our vision for excellence supported by a three year implementation plan to ensure improvements are sustainable.

We will develop a structured way of working in order to assure excellence across the SEND service.

The Quality Assurance (QA) Framework, should be read in conjunction with the Local Area SEND Strategy, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and the Written Statement of Action (WSoA) and will help deliver its objective and ensure that services are well planned and of good quality through a systematic and partnership-wide approach to case and service-level audits.

This will help deliver the SEND Strategy's commitment to ensuring that:

- Children, young people and families are at the heart of an effective SEND system.
- Every child and young person is making good progress and attends a good place to learn.
- Children, young people and families are well supported.
- There is an effective and responsive approach to assessing and meeting children, young people and families' needs.
- There is early identification of and early support for children with SEND.
- Young people are well prepared for adulthood.

Partner agencies will have their own internal QA arrangements.

This Framework sets out a shared approach to QA across the partnerships, which will enable a joined up approach to the cycle of learning, continuous improvement and evidencing its impact for children and young adults.

2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) is central to ensuring that children, young people and their families receive the right services at the right time and that those services have a positive and lasting impact.

2.1 Purpose:

- Embed quality into practice to strengthen practice and improve both the child/young adult's experiences of the service and their outcomes
- Embed quality into the service through adherence to the underpinning principles
- Ensure that services achieve and maintain consistently high standards
- Ensure regular evaluation of both the quality and impact of service
- Ensure matters of equality and diversity, and anti-discriminatory practice will be considered, respected and promoted in all aspects of quality assurance activity
- Support systemic organisational cultures that promote continuous learning and development of the total workforce (both paid and unpaid workers) who come into contact with children and young adults with SEND
- Develop an accountable workforce, which is focused on delivering quality services and engaged in the quality assurance process as a means of ensuring this

2.2 Underpinning principles:

- It is focused on the 'lived experience' of children/young adults and the contribution made by the services they receive
- It values the contribution of children, young adults, family members, carer representatives, advocates, staff, partner agencies and others to achieving positive outcomes for children
- It is based on current best practice, guidance and research from relevant professional and inspectorial bodies
- Everyone in the workforce has both a responsibility for, and a vital role in improving, service quality
- Quality assurance is not a single event but part of a continuous improvement cycle

2.3 QA is supported by:

- All members of the workforce having access to comprehensive policies, procedures, practice guidance and information about research evidence to inform their practice and professional development
- QA being built in from the outset as an integral part of any new service development to ensure that practice and the delivery of outcomes for recipients can be monitored and evaluated including effective management oversight
- The availability of key messages from a wide evidence base to provide an overview of quality and learning and support activities that drive continuous improvement

3. Quality Assurance is everyone's business

It is essential that everybody working in the SEND partnership contribute to driving forward good quality work. Those conducting inspections, audits and other quality assurance activities share responsibility for ensuring that all levels of staff are actively engaged in the quality assurance process, whether this be through auditing, observations, case discussion, focus groups, workshops or forums.

3.1 The role of staff working across SEND

Everybody employed within SEND, including system partners, is individually responsible for ensuring their work is of a consistently high quality. People will be held accountable for ensuring that practice standards are met at all times.

3.2 The role of managers working across SEND

Managers need to be very clear about their role in the appraisal process and how practice principle and success indicators are included within this. They also need to demonstrate the importance of these principles by ensuring that any employee who is unable to meet the required principles receives the appropriate support. Managers should also use quality assurance processes to recognise and praise good performance.

3.3 The role of the Quality Assurance & Professional Development Manager in SEND

The Quality Assurance & Professional Development (QAPD) Manager in SEND is responsible for supporting quality assurance and service improvement activity across the SEND partnership.

Operational managers retain lead responsibility for their services, the QAPD Manager complements their role by providing a 'critical friend' and undertaking the 'arm's length' quality assurance activity in a systemic way across the whole system. This is achieved by:

- Developing and implementing an annual Audit Plan to ensure a systemic approach to audit and internal inspection / review activity
- Reporting to audit outcomes, including the development of service improvement or action plans at both EHCP QA Groups and SEND Implementation Board
- Identifying the need for, and undertaking, themed audits in conjunction with partners on a single, or multi-agency basis
- Recognising and promoting good practice and highlighting any concerns to operational managers
- Offering support and constructive challenge, focusing on standards of practice and optimising outcomes for children
- Monitoring and tracking the delivery of actions following audit completion
- Contributing to the development of policy and procedures, quick guides, checklists and other tools to support practice
- Identifying the need for and undertaking wider quality activities, including the delivery of learning events, including workshops and reflective spaces, observation of operations and consultation with service users and staff
- Supporting and at times undertaking activity that seeks feedback from children, young people, families and carers through consultation and participation work to ensure service user's views inform service delivery

4. Continuous Improvement Cycle

The SEND Quality Assurance Framework is modelled on a continuous improvement cycle to:

- ✓ Improve outcomes for children
- ✓ Support the professional development of staff
- ✓ Improve frontline practice
- ✓ Identify areas for service improvement

The model involves the analysis of evidence gathered about service delivery and practice to identify themes and patterns to inform service development and continuous improvement.



Evidence about practice is found from quantitative and qualitative data (both internal and external) and feedback, in accordance with the quality assurance model below:

Quantitative Data (Internal & External)

All managers use quantitative data to understand activity levels and trends and to take mitigating action when needed to maintain accuracy of data and performance.

- Local regional and national targets
- Benchmarking and targets

- Data and trends activity
- Performance reports
- Management data and tools

Qualitative data (Internal):

- Case level and thematic audits
- Local peer audits / reviews
- Practice observations
- Case monitoring and alerts
- Remedial actions tracker
- Unannounced service inspections

Qualitative data (External):

- Ofsted inspections
- Ofsted focus visits
- External peer reviews
- Safeguarding practice reviews
- SEND multi-agency reviews
- Research and publications
- Sector led improvement

Feedback (Internal & External)

- Complaints
- Compliments
- Feedback from children, young people, parents, carers, advocates, representations, staff and other professionals

4.1 Quality Assurance across SEND provision

Audit of EHCPs and annual reviews process

Level 1: Single Agency Audit of EHC Plans and Reviews

To drive learning and improvement across the local area, our starting point is the arrangements that individual agencies have in place to audit the quality of their own contributions to EHC, including the delivery of training as appropriate.

In Education, this may mean:

Schools and other education providers will have in place appropriate audit arrangements focusing on the quality and timeliness of their contribution to EHC assessments (referral, advice and review). They will also ensure mechanisms are in place to share good practice and areas of development through appropriate networks, e.g. SENCo network.

In Health, this may mean:

Health providers will have in place appropriate audit arrangements focusing on the quality and timeliness of their contribution to EHC assessments (referral, advice and

review). They will also ensure mechanisms are in place to share good practice and areas of development through appropriate networks.

In Social Care, this may mean:

Children's Social Care will have in place appropriate audit arrangements focusing on the quality and timeliness of their contribution to EHC assessments (referral, advice and review). They will also ensure mechanisms are in place to share good practice and areas of development through appropriate networks.

Level 2 – Audit of Draft and Final EHC Plans

The SEND Service is responsible for producing EHC Plans that are compliant with the SEND Code of Practice (2015) and the SEND Regulations (2014).

SEND Caseworkers will, from September 2021 write EHCPs. The Team will have in place appropriate audit arrangements focusing on the quality and timeliness of their contribution to EHC assessments (referral, advice and review). They will also ensure mechanisms are in place to share good practice and areas of development through appropriate networks. Audit activity may include:

- EHC Plans reviewed at the SEND Initiation & Case Management Panel
- EHC Plans and drafts peer reviewed by caseworkers using an agreed checklist
- EHC Plans and Reviews (draft and final) audited by SEND casework supervisors

Level 3 – Multi-agency audit of plans and reviews

Alongside single agency audit, and in driving learning and improvements, there will be multi-agency arrangements to audit the quality of EHCPs and the review process. This means:

Both single and multi-agency audit may be themed and may include children and young people at risk of permanent exclusion, looked after children, preparing for adulthood, or with a specific type of need.

Level 4 – System Leader Case Review

In addition to single and multi-agency audit, on a monthly basis there are a number of audits completed that will include contact with parents or carers and with consent, children and young people to understand their experience and the quality and impact of their EHCP. System Leaders can include Strategic Leads, Clinical Leads, Social Care Leads and Assistant Director.

Level 5 – Quality Assurance of Provision

Provision in Resource Bases in mainstream schools; in commissioned special schools and post 16 provision is subject to an annual quality assurance visit. As part of these

audits a sample of parents and children will be consulted to understand the experience and quality of provision.

The systemic approach to quality assurance set out in this Framework is intended to apply to the range of SEND activities and processes, some single agency, others having multiple partner involvement. Across the partnership, it is anticipated that service user surveys and feedback both individual and event-based; staff surveys; schools feedback; and SEND Partnership Groups challenge will be key to ensuring services meet the needs of children, young people and their families.

Analyse findings

QA activity findings will be analysed on a monthly basis by the QA & Professional Development Manager for themes, trends, learning about strengths to build on and identifying areas for improvement and that this information is disseminated accordingly.

Analysis will help to measure and evidence the impact of QA on improving service user outcomes and maintain focus on continuous improvement. All audits completed will be further analysed and reports and practice briefings will be produced.

4.2 Quality Decision Tree

The quality decision tree will be used by auditors to determine the quality of the plan against each of the following five standards:

Quality Standard One
The plan clearly records the views, interests and aspirations of the child, young person, their parents and carers and these are (a) fully represented in the plan and (b) inform the outcome of the plan
Quality Standard Two
Plans are clear, concise, understandable, and accessible, and outcomes are SMART. In addition they should be aspirational, person centred and identify prior attainment.
Quality Standard Three
Plans are holistic, all agencies involved with the child, young person, their parents and carers have contributed to the plan within timescales.
Quality Standard Four
Plans are focussed on individual special educational needs and not medical diagnosis, highlight strengths and capabilities as well as the need for support or intervention
Quality Standard Five
Plans specify the provision required and how education, health and care services will work together to meet the child or young person's needs and support the achievement of the agreed outcomes, including transition planning.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) covers the 0-25 age range and identifies the following key points that should be considered throughout the assessment and delivery of SEND support and services:

- A clear focus on the participation and contribution of children and young people, their parents and carers
- A strong focus on high aspirations and improving outcomes for children and young people to enable them to be in the best possible place to have an independent future
- A greater focus on support that enable those with SEND to success in their education and make a successful transition to adulthood
- An emphasis on the joint planning and commissioning of services to ensure close co-operation between education, health and social care
- Specific guidance for education and training settings to apply a graduated approach to identifying and supported pupils and students with SEND
- Integrate our public duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 into the Code of Practice

4.3 EHCP evaluated against the Quality Standards

Each audit will have a summary of findings, identify areas of good practice and make recommendations for further action where appropriate.

Judgement Criteria			
Outstanding Plan meets all the majority of the quality standards	Good Plan meets most of the quality standards	Requires Improvement A significant number of standards are not met	Inadequate The plan fails to the quality standards across the standards



5.0 Feedback from QA audit activity

Audit Reports and short practitioner briefings will be disseminated following completion of all audits. Remedial actions or safeguarding concerns identified during audit activity are communicated directly to the case responsible worker and their team manager at

the time they are identified. Remedial actions and case alerts are recorded on a tracker by the QA service. Themes of remedial actions and escalations are analysed to inform professional development.

Any case audit identified as being 'inadequate' will form a case escalation, which will also be sent to respective Strategic Lead for further action. This provides a robust pathway for action and monitoring.

These processes ensure that any safety concerns that come to light in audits will be addressed immediately. As part of this framework the SEND Improvement Board will receive regular reports from all agencies to satisfy themselves of the quality of service.

This will be managed by the Quality Assurance & Professional Development Manager.

5.1 Other audit activity

The systemic approach to quality assurance set out in this Framework is intended to apply to the range of SEND activities and processes, some single agency, others having multiple partner involvement. Below are examples of wider audit activity which will be undertaken, this list is not exhaustive:

5.1.1 Participation Reports. A regular Participation Report will pull together an analysis of feedback from parents and carers, children and young people and its impact for service delivery and improvement. 'What People told us'.

How... A series of engagement programmes with parents, carers and young people to ensure views are gathered which will assist service delivery improvements.

5.1.2 Local Offer. Ensuring that the Local Offer in Thurrock meets statutory requirements, is accessible and well publicised so that access and use by both the public and professionals is maximised. 'Local Offer Hub'

How.... By reviewing the scope of the offer, obtaining feedback from users, undertaking mystery shopping.

5.1.3 Complaints and compliments. Reviewing complaints and compliments received into the service, celebrating success and learning from upheld complaints. 'Getting it right first time'.

How.... By understanding themes and types of complaints and implementing a continuous cycle of learning and producing case studies.

5.1.4 Tribunals. A cycle of reports on tribunals, including volumes received, mediation, outcomes and impact.

How.... by analysing data and the impact of mediation, driving up learning and improving practice.

5.1.5 Annual Reviews. Ensuring that annual reviews are planned in good time, seek the voice of the child, are person centred and evidence progression.

How.... By analysing data trends and acting swiftly with stakeholders where appropriate to ensure the review cycle is robust.

Implementing change

6. Implement change

The reporting of findings and learning from QA activity to the SEND Improvement Board will contribute to the ongoing review of the implementation of the SEND Strategy and joint SEND strategic plan to inform future strategic planning and service development.

Learning from individual audits and other QA activity will also inform individual agency service process and delivery. Once learning is identified and shared, it can support service improvement. Staff will develop their understanding of required practice and have commitment to completing remedial actions arising from audit. Staff can reflect on learning with their managers and peers, line managers can support professional development of staff through supervision and professional development reviews.

Workforce Development training can be reviewed as a result of audit findings and allows for a broader understanding of emerging needs of case workers, practitioners.

Agencies can review procedural / practice requirement and documentation to better reflect required practice.

Monitor Impact

6. Monitor Impact

The SEND Partnership Groups and SEND Improvement Board will seek evidence of service improvement and the positive impact of quality assurance activity including against the joint SEND strategic action plan. Activities designed to measure and evidence the impact of QA on children with SEND and their outcomes include:

- Improved findings on re-audit of case files
- Improved outcomes for service users
- Service user surveys / focus groups
- Feedback from staff / partner agencies
- Improved performance data
- Increased take up of training / evidence of learning transfer
- Improved external inspection outcomes