



ISA GUIDANCE

Practical Framework to Review SEND Provision within a Setting or Group

A practical framework for senior leaders, SENCOs and those responsible for overseeing or improving SEND provision across a setting or group.

Independent Schools Association

Introduction

This practical guidance is designed for senior leaders, SENCOs and those responsible for overseeing or improving SEND provision across a setting or group. It provides a clear, structured process for conducting a comprehensive review of current practice—covering strategic leadership, classroom provision, stakeholder engagement, documentation and impact. While the framework is presented in sequential sections, each area may require substantial time, detailed analysis and consultation to complete effectively. The guidance is intended to support reflective, evidence-informed improvement rather than compliance alone, offering prompts, tools and considerations that can be adapted to fit the context and capacity of your setting. An illustrative example at the end demonstrates how the framework can be applied in practice, helping to translate the process into a coherent, actionable review.

SECTION 1

Start With the Context

Before you dive into the detailed review, gather and understand:

What your setting or group currently state about SEND

- For example - we already outline a multi-agency, inclusive ethos with SENCO leadership, early identification, accessible curriculum and staff training.
- Understand which aspects of SEND you best support and serve.

Recent inspection outcomes

- ISI inspection reports will include findings on SEND provision/pupil outcomes, these are valuable starting points.

Legal and policy frameworks

- In England the SEND Code of Practice and related statutory requirements set expectations for identification, assessment and review, and this provides a benchmark for quality.
- Your setting or group legal obligations relating to SEND from The Independent School Standards and the Equality Act.
- Any current reviews or changes to SEND such as The Schools White Paper 2026

SECTION 2

Define the Scope & Aims of Your Review

Good SEND reviews typically look not just at compliance, but also at **impact, practice and strategy**.

These are the suggested aims of your review, but you may wish to add more or reduce the scope. Having clear aims makes it easier to develop evidence-based recommendations.

AIMS

- To define the current strengths and weaknesses in SEND provision?
- To ascertain if pupils with SEND making expected progress?
- To understand how well systems support consistency across the school or group?
- To learn about stakeholder (pupils, families, staff) perceptions?
- To see what opportunities exist for improvement?

SECTION 3

Gather Multiple Sources of Evidence

A SEND review shouldn't rely on your impressions alone, triangulate evidence from:

- **Data & outcomes**
 - Internal pupil progress data for SEND vs non-SEND pupils
 - Attendance, behaviour, access to curriculum and examination outcomes
 - Annual review documentation and intervention outcomes
 - Destinations data and post-16 outcomes
 - Exclusions, suspensions, alternative provision information and part-time timetable data; including whether these disproportionately affect students with SEND.
- **Documentation & policy**

Review:

- SEND policies and procedures
- Provision maps
- Graduated Response cycles (Assess–Plan–Do–Review)
- SENCO records and case studies
- Whole school CPD records relating to SEND
- Curriculum planning documents and/or schemes of work outlining adjustments for those with SEND
- **Stakeholder views**
 - Focus groups/interviews with pupils identified with SEND
 - Parent questionnaires or interviews
 - Teacher and TA feedback
 - Leadership and SENCO reflections
 - External agency feedback, such as SALT, EP, OT, CAMHS, peripatetic or advisory teachers, medical professionals etc.
 - Local authority input, such as SEND case workers.
 - Governing body/SEND governor feedback

This mirrors recommended practice frameworks which emphasise including **pupils and families** in structured review activities.

SECTION 4

Evaluate Key Areas of SEND Practice

Use a structured framework such as the **Whole School SEND Review Guides** (which can be adapted for independent settings).

Some key questions to consider in each area:

Identification & Early Intervention

- How swiftly and accurately are needs identified?
- Is support targeted before difficulties escalate?

Graduated Response (Assess–Plan–Do–Review)

- Is the cycle consistently applied and documented?
- Are targets clear, measurable and linked to outcomes?
- It is helpful to include the APDR cycle on review documentation or checklists.

Leadership & Management

- Does leadership actively champion SEND?
- Is there clarity on roles (Trustees → Head → SENCO → teachers)?
- How is this held to account in regard to governance? Is there a governor or trustee with a focus on SEND.

Staff Development: Induction, CPD and Access to Expertise

- Effective SEND provision relies on staff who are confident, knowledgeable and well-supported. A strong review should therefore explore how staff are inducted, trained and connected to specialist expertise.
- Consider evaluating the following areas in depth:

Context and Whole-Setting Culture

- Understanding the broader culture in which staff develop is essential.
- How clearly is the school or setting's ethos around SEND communicated to all staff?
- Do leaders explicitly promote inclusive values and expectations?
- Are staff encouraged to view SEND as a whole-school responsibility rather than the remit of the SENCO alone?
- Is there consistency between the school's stated aspirations for SEND and what staff experience day to day?
- A positive, well-articulated culture underpins all other aspects of professional practice and development.

Induction for New Staff

- New staff, teachers, TAs, administrators, pastoral staff and visiting professionals, need a coherent introduction to SEND systems.
Look at whether induction includes:
- A clear explanation of the SEND profile of the setting, including key needs, common barriers and any particular contextual considerations
- An overview of the Graduated Response (Assess–Plan–Do–Review) and how it is implemented
- Access arrangements, safeguarding considerations and communication protocols
- Expectations for adaptive teaching, differentiation and use of support staff
- How to access pupil information, provision maps and support plans
- Opportunities to observe effective SEND practice in action
- Strong induction prevents inconsistency and ensures staff start with shared understanding.

CPD and Ongoing Professional Development

- SEND-related CPD should be strategic, regular and directly linked to school improvement priorities.
When reviewing CPD, consider:
 - Is there an annual plan for SEND training aligned with identified needs?
 - Does CPD cover both general inclusive practice (adaptive teaching, cognitive load, behaviour regulation) and specific areas of need (e.g., ASD, SEMH, dyslexia, ADHD)?
 - Are refresher sessions built into the cycle, especially for statutory or high-impact areas?

- Does CPD include opportunities for coaching, modelling and peer observation rather than one-off sessions?
 - Do TAs receive dedicated, high-quality training—not just teachers?
 - How is the impact of training evaluated (e.g., learning walks, pupil outcomes, staff confidence surveys)?
- Sustained, iterative CPD leads to meaningful change in classroom practice.

Access to External Agencies, Therapies and Specialist Expertise

- External specialists add essential depth to a school's capacity to meet diverse needs. A review might explore:
- How effectively staff access expertise from Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Educational Psychology, CAMHS, sensory services and advisory teachers
 - Whether external agencies are used reactively (when a problem arises) or proactively (to build staff skill and improve provision)
 - How feedback and recommendations from specialists are communicated to staff and embedded in classroom practice
 - Whether training from external specialists is planned, recorded and followed up
 - How early and how well external professionals are integrated into APDR cycles, annual reviews or multi-agency meetings
- The goal is not simply access, but effective use of external expertise to build internal capacity.

Inclusion & Accessibility

- Are SEND pupils fully included in school life (curriculum, clubs, trips)?
- How is accessibility monitored and improved?

Collaboration with Families & Agencies

- Are parents routinely involved in planning and review?
- For children receiving annual reviews, is there presence and participation from the local authority?
- Is external support accessed when required?

g) Classroom Practice

- Do learning walks and lesson visits promote inclusive teaching and provide adaptations and scaffolds, where necessary?
- Are curriculums and resources accessible and adaptable?
- Does marking and feedback demonstrate progress over time? How is this captured – not all progress is academic.

SECTION 5

Assess Quality vs Effectiveness

When reviewing SEND provision, it is essential to move beyond checking whether systems and processes simply exist. A strong review evaluates whether provision is making a meaningful difference to pupils' development and experience within the setting.

Consider the extent to which:

- **Provision leads to measurable progress**, recognising that progress may be academic, social, emotional, behavioural, communicative, or related to independence and self-advocacy.
- **Adjustments and interventions lead to real, observable outcomes**, not just increased paperwork or compliance.
- The school uses **feedback, evaluation and pupil/parent voice** to refine practice and adapt provision over time, rather than treating SEND systems as static or procedural.

When evaluating interventions and provision, the focus should be on impact, not just implementation. This includes reviewing the quality of evidence gathered, how progress is demonstrated across a range of domains, and how the setting uses this information to inform future planning. It is important to note that pupils with SEND may make significant gains that are not solely academic, and these outcomes should be recognised, valued and captured as part of a holistic assessment of effectiveness.

SECTION 6

Benchmark Against Best Practice

Compare what you find to sector-wide frameworks and evidence:

Department for Education SEND review guidance for schools in England (GOV.UK)

Whole School SEND review frameworks (peer-to-peer or self-review guides) (Whole School SEND)

These help judge whether practices are comprehensive, consistent and evidence-based.

SECTION 7

Report Clearly with Actionable Recommendations

The final report should present findings in a way that is clear, accessible and easy for all stakeholders to interpret. A high-quality report balances professional rigour with clarity, ensuring that leaders, governors, staff and families can understand both what is working well and what needs to improve. Consider structuring your report as follows:

- **Executive Summary**
A concise overview highlighting key strengths, main priorities for development and headline findings.
- **Analysis of Evidence**
Draw together data, observation findings and stakeholder feedback. Where possible, use visuals, such as charts, graphs, tables or RAG-rated summaries, to present information clearly and support interpretation.
- **Areas of Notable Practice**
Celebrate strong or innovative SEND practice across the setting, with clear examples.
- **Areas for Development**
Outline specific aspects that require attention. Ensure these are framed constructively and linked directly to evidence.
- **Short-, Medium- and Long-Term Recommendations**
Present recommendations that are actionable, time-bound and proportionate.
- **Success Criteria and Impact Measures**
Articulate how improvement will be recognised. This may include academic progress but should also consider **wider forms of progress** such as engagement, independence, wellbeing, communication or behaviour.

To enhance accessibility, reports should not rely solely on narrative text. Visual representations of data and findings, such as infographics, timelines, provision-mapping visuals or pupil voice summaries, can make complex information easier to understand and more meaningful to a wider audience. Incorporating mixed media also reflects the best practice you advocate throughout the review process.

SECTION 8

Support Implementation

A review is only impactful if its findings lead to meaningful, manageable change. Implementation should be planned collaboratively and realistically, taking into account the capacity of those responsible for delivering improvements.

To support effective follow-through, settings should:

- **Communicate findings clearly** with leadership teams, SENCOs, governors and relevant staff so everyone shares ownership of next steps.
- **Update SEND strategy, improvement plans and resourcing decisions** in line with prioritised recommendations, ensuring responsibilities are clearly assigned.
- **Embed monitoring cycles**, such as termly review points, to track progress and adjust actions as needed.
- **Build staff capacity** through training, coaching and targeted professional development that supports the identified priorities.
- **Re-evaluate progress periodically** to ensure improvements are sustained and to refine provision over time.

It is important to recognise that the person conducting the review—often a SENCO or senior leader—may not have the capacity to implement every recommendation without additional support. Implementation plans should therefore be feasible, proportionate and resourced appropriately, with leadership ensuring that staff have the time, authority and support needed to carry out agreed actions. Clear discussion about feasibility, workload and prioritisation should form part of the implementation process.

SECTION 9

Practical Tips for Effectiveness

Be collaborative, not punitive. Reviews work best when those involved see it as improvement-focused and focused on the needs of the student and where appropriate, their families.

Use mixed methods. Data + voices + observation = robust conclusions.

Align with inspections and strategy. Link your findings to inspection frameworks and wider school improvement plans and be ready to update these when changes come in.

Involve governors/trustees early – they need to understand and own SEND strategy, especially the governor for SEND.

Reflect on the past but think ahead with a fresh vision.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Example: SEND Review for SAMPLE School

How to Use This Example

This example models one way to present findings from a whole-school SEND review (EYFS–Sixth Form).

One-Page Visual Summary (for Governors & SLT)

Headlines (3–5 bullets):

- Strengths: Inclusive culture is evident across phases; strong pastoral collaboration; pupil voice is valued and acted upon.
- Priorities: Consistency of APDR documentation; strengthening adaptive teaching in upper KS2–KS4; sharper evaluation of intervention impact.
- Capacity: TA deployment is positive but requires clearer alignment to pupil outcomes and teacher planning.
- Next 12 months: Embed common APDR pro-forma; focused CPD on adaptive teaching; introduce termly impact reviews.

RAG Overview by Domain

Key: ● strong and consistent ● developing / variable ● urgent attention needed

Domain	EYFS	Prep/Junior	Senior	Sixth Form
Identification & Early Intervention	●	●	●	●
Graduated Response (APDR)	●	●	●	●
Adaptive Teaching & Classroom Practice	●	●	●	●
Inclusion & Accessibility	●	●	●	●
Partnership with Parents/Agencies	●	●	●	●
Outcomes & Destinations	●	●	●	●
Leadership, Governance & QA for SEND	●	●	●	●

Context & Scope

Purpose: Evaluate the effectiveness of SEND provision across the Foundation, with reference to the Independent School Standards and ISI inspection focus on quality of education, pupils' personal development, leadership & management, and safeguarding.

Scope: EYFS to Sixth Form; pupils at SEN Support and with EHCPs; academic and co-curricular contexts; identification, provision, impact and strategy.

Methodology & Triangulation (What We Did and How We Judged It)

Evidence gathered: policy/doc reviews, provision maps, APDR samples, learning walks (n=32), lesson visits (n=18), pupil voice groups (n=6), parent survey (n=142), staff interviews (n=24), outcomes/attendance/behaviour data, annual review sampling, and exam access arrangements scrutiny.

Triangulation in practice (example):

Finding on APDR consistency derived from: document scrutiny (variation in target quality), teacher interviews (confidence varies), and learning walks (adaptations present but not always linked to plan targets).

Finding on adaptive teaching derived from: lesson visits (clear modelling/scaffolding in English/Geography; less evident in some science sets), pupil voice (helpful use of checklists/visuals), and outcomes data (progress stronger where strategies are embedded).

Impact Snapshot (Progress Is More Than Academic)

To capture a rounded view, we sampled indicators across five domains:

- Academic: KS3 English progress for pupils with SEND in line with peers in 4/6 year groups; maths shows variability in Y8–9.
- Communication: SALT-informed visuals in KS1 and lower KS2 linked to improved task initiation and reduced prompts.
- SEMH/Wellbeing: Reduction in recorded anxiety-related incidents in Y7 transition group (–28% term-on-term) following targeted key-worker model.
- Independence: Increased self-advocacy in Sixth Form (students request and manage access arrangements; staff report greater readiness for exams).
- Engagement: Attendance for pupils with SEND improved by 1.6pp overall; co-curricular participation has widened (music/tech clubs).

Note: Where academic movement is modest, gains in engagement, independence and wellbeing are substantive and valued. These should be reported as meaningful outcomes alongside attainment.

Findings by Evaluation Area (Illustrative Extracts)**Identification & Early Intervention**

- What we found: Timely identification in EYFS/early KS2; robust use of observational assessment and screening tools. Transitions into Y10/11 require sharper exchange of information.
- Evidence: Early years observations; screening logs; transition meeting minutes; parent feedback.
- Impact: Early support reduces escalation; some late adjustments in KS4 compress the time for impact.

RAG: ● (strong in early phases; variable later)

Graduated Response (APDR)

- What we found: APDR cycle is understood; documentation quality is inconsistent (targets not always measurable or linked to classroom strategies).
- Evidence: APDR sample review; teacher interviews; learning walks.
- Impact: Provision present but evaluation of impact is uneven; harder to evidence progress over time.

RAG: ●

Adaptive Teaching & Classroom Practice

- What we found: Effective modelling, chunking and scaffold removal seen in English/Geography; less consistent in some science/maths sets.
- Evidence: Lesson visits; work scrutiny; pupil voice.
- Impact: Where adaptive teaching is consistent, pupils articulate what helps them learn and progress is stronger.

RAG: ●

Partnership with Parents & Agencies

- What we found: Positive parent relationships; external agency advice is available but translation into day-to-day practice varies by department.
- Evidence: Parent survey; SALT/OT reports; staff feedback.
- Impact: Best outcomes where specialist recommendations are modelled and revisited with staff.

RAG: ● – ●

Leadership, Governance & QA for SEND

- What we found: Clear strategic commitment; SEND reported termly to governors. Need for a shared, concise "impact dashboard".
- Evidence: SLT/governor interviews; existing SEND reports.
- Impact: Strong oversight; opportunity to sharpen evaluative reporting and sustainability planning.

RAG: ●

Recommendations with Rationale, Roles, Capacity & Success Indicators

Feasibility note: If the SENCO led the review, do not assume they can deliver every action alone. Leadership should confirm protected time, define shared ownership (e.g., HoDs for implementation), and, where necessary, provide administrative support for documentation and data.

Priority	Recommendation (Actionable & Time-Bound)	Rationale (Evidence-Linked)	Lead & Team	Capacity/Feasibility	Timescale	Success Indicators (Impact)
High	Standardise APDR: introduce a shared pro-forma with measurable targets and strategy–target links; termly APDR reviews.	Documentation variable; targets not consistently measurable; hard to evidence impact.	SENCO (Lead); HoDs; Class Teachers	Requires: 6 hrs SENCO setup; 1 hr dept launch; 2× twilights for staff	0–3 months (rollout)	90% plans with SMART targets; learning walks show strategies aligned to targets; pupil voice can name "what helps me".
High	Focused CPD on adaptive teaching with coaching cycles in Maths/Science.	Lesson visits show variability; stronger progress where strategies embedded.	VP/T&L; SENCO; Coaching Leads	Requires: cover for 6 coaching cycles; CPD time ring-fenced	3–9 months	Improved observation ratings; closing progress gaps in Y8–9; reduced reliance on TA prompts.
Medium	TA deployment review to align roles with outcome targets (promote independence).	TA impact positive but not always linked to APDR outcomes.	SENCO; HR/Timetabling; HoDs	Requires: scheduling review; TA training (independence-focused)	3–6 months	Increase in independent task completion; staff/pupil feedback evidences reduced over-scaffolding.
Medium	Transition data handshake at KS4 entry/option choices with specialist briefings.	Late adjustments compress intervention time.	Heads of Year; Exams Officer; SENCO	Requires: 2 structured briefings; shared template	6 months	Earlier reasonable adjustments; fewer last-minute changes; student confidence rises.
Low	Create a concise SEND Impact Dashboard for SLT/governors (termly).	Strong oversight; benefit from sharper, visual evaluation.	SENCO; Data Lead; Clerk to Governors	Requires: template build; data collation cycle	0–3 months	Dashboard adopted; actions tracked; minutes reflect impact discussion.

Monitoring & Review Plan (Practice What We Preach)

Termly Review Points: APDR sampling, learning walks focused on adaptive teaching, dashboard update to governors.

Pupil & Parent Voice: Short, targeted pulse surveys after each intervention cycle.

External Input: SALT/OT/EP to model strategies in-class once per term in target departments; brief follow-up drop-ins.

Reporting: 1-page visual summary appended to SLT and governor papers each term.

Suggested visuals to include:

Small bar charts for progress indicators,

A timeline for the CPD/coaching cycle,

A Sankey/flow-style diagram showing evidence triangulation (policy → practice → impact).

Concluding Narrative (Model Tone & Balance)

The Foundation demonstrates a clear commitment to inclusive education and pupil wellbeing. Strengths include early identification, positive parent partnerships and effective pastoral collaboration. The principal opportunity is to convert good intentions into consistently high-quality planning and classroom adaptation—particularly through a standardised APDR process, focused coaching in Maths and Science, and deliberate alignment of TA support with independence goals. With a feasible, resourced implementation plan and termly monitoring, the Foundation is well placed to strengthen outcomes across academic progress, engagement, independence and wellbeing over the next 12 months.

Appendices (Optional, for Accessibility)

Appendix 1: APDR Pro-forma (example)

Appendix 2: RAG Criteria Definitions

Appendix 3: SEND Impact Dashboard Template (sample layout)

Appendix 4: Pupil/Parent Voice Question Bank (short forms)

Appendix 5: Observation/Coaching Prompt Sheet for Adaptive Teaching