

Early Years Inclusion & SEND Self-Evaluation Toolkit: Guidance and Examples

This resource gives you clear examples of good practice to help you complete the Early Years Inclusion & SEND Self-Evaluation Toolkit. It includes practical ideas linked to key questions, helping you reflect on your current provision and spot areas to improve. These examples are here to guide you in building inclusive practice and improving outcomes for children with SEND. It works alongside the main toolkit to support confident and meaningful reflection.

Questions	Examples
1. How do we notice and respond to children's SEND needs?	<p>We notice needs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Watching how children play, communicate and interactUsing observations to spot differences in developmentListening to parents' concerns and experiencesChecking progress against EYFS milestonesNoticing changes in behaviour, mood or engagementTracking progress against EYFS or developmental milestonesCompleting more detailed assessments (e.g. Solihull EY SEND Assessment Toolkit) <p>We respond by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Talking with parents and sharing what we've noticedFollowing the graduated approachPutting simple strategies in place and seeing what helpsCreating support plans with clear targetsAsking for advice from professionals like SALT or Area SENCoMaking changes to the environment or routines to support the childTracking smaller steps of progress <p>We know it's working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Children are more settled and engagedParents feel listened to and involvedStaff use strategies consistentlySupport plans are reviewed and updatedWe see progress in learning, communication or behaviour
2. How do we keep track of attendance for children with SEND, and what do we do when it's low or irregular to help them build good routines?	<p>We monitor attendance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Keeping daily registersNoticing patterns (e.g. frequent late arrivals)Talking to parents about reasonsRecording reasons for absence <p>We support better attendance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Offering flexible start timesUsing visuals to support routines

	<p>Making drop-off calm and predictable</p> <p>Working with parents to reduce barriers (e.g. transport, anxiety)</p> <p>Involving key person to build trust and consistency</p>
<p>3. How do we spot early signs that a child may be struggling with routines or learning, and what do we do to help</p>	<p>We notice when:</p> <p>A child is often late or absent</p> <p>They avoid group times, transitions or activities</p> <p>They seem anxious, quiet, or unsettled</p> <p>Parents mention struggles with getting ready or attending</p> <p>We respond by:</p> <p>Talking to parents to understand what's happening</p> <p>Using visuals, now-and-next boards, or social stories</p> <p>Giving extra support during tricky times (e.g. drop-off, tidy-up)</p> <p>Adjusting routines to reduce stress or sensory overload</p> <p>Involving the SENCo or key person to build trust and consistency</p> <p>Working with external professionals if needed</p>
<p>4. How do we decide what each child with SEND needs to learn next?</p>	<p>We use:</p> <p>Observations of what the child can do now</p> <p>EHCP targets or support plans</p> <p>Parent input about home progress</p> <p>Advice from professionals (e.g. SALT, OT)</p> <p>Staff discussions during key person meetings</p> <p>We look for:</p> <p>Small steps that build on current strengths</p> <p>Gaps in communication, social or physical skills</p> <p>What motivates the child to engage</p> <p>What helps them feel safe and ready to learn</p> <p>We plan by:</p> <p>Setting one or two clear, achievable goals</p> <p>Using visuals or sensory tools to support learning</p> <p>Adapting activities to match the child's needs</p> <p>Reviewing progress regularly and adjusting plans</p>
<p>5. How do we ensure children with SEND have a voice in their learning and experiences?</p>	<p>We listen to children by:</p> <p>Watching how they respond to activities and routines</p> <p>Giving choices using visuals, objects or gestures</p> <p>Noticing what they enjoy or avoid</p> <p>Using simple language, signs or symbols to support communication</p> <p>Encouraging children to express feelings through play</p> <p>We act on their voice by:</p> <p>Changing activities based on their interests and needs</p> <p>Adapting routines to help them feel safe and included</p>

	<p>Using their preferences to plan support strategies Sharing what we learn with parents and professionals Including their voice in support plans and reviews We know it's working when: Children are more engaged and settled Staff can explain how children's views shape their learning Parents say their child is happy and involved Support plans reflect the child's likes, dislikes and needs Children show progress</p>
6. How do staff help children with SEND join in and learn during activities?	<p>We support participation by: Using visual supports (objects of reference, now and next, photo/symbol cards) Giving clear, simple instructions Offering choices to reduce anxiety Using sensory-friendly materials Sitting with the child to model the activity We support learning by: Breaking tasks into small steps Using repetition and praise Adapting activities to match interests Providing developmentally appropriate toys and activities Giving extra time to respond or complete tasks Using peer buddies or small groups</p>
7. What do we do to help children learn about others and celebrate differences? How do we help children with SEND feel part of the group?	<p>We support belonging by: Using photos of all children in displays Including SEND children in group activities with support Using key persons to build trust and confidence Adapting activities so everyone can join in child voice in planning (including children who are non-verbal) We celebrate differences by: Reading stories that celebrate neurodiversity and SEND Celebrating all achievements Talking about differences and what makes us special Using Makaton or visuals to include non-verbal children Encouraging children to share things about themselves We notice impact when: Children with SEND join in more confidently Peers show kindness and understanding Children talk about similarities and differences Children with SEND are included in play and routines</p>

<p>8. How do we notice when a child is finding learning difficult, and what do we do to support them?</p>	<p>We notice by: Watching children closely during play and routines to spot changes in behaviour, interests or needs. Listening to what children say and how they communicate, even without words. Talking to parents about what they see at home. Checking progress using observations and assessments. Noticing signs of struggle, like avoiding activities, getting upset, or not joining in.</p> <p>We respond by: Adapting activities to make them easier, more hands-on, or linked to the child's interests. Using visuals or sensory tools to help children understand or feel calm. Changing the environment, like creating quiet spaces or reducing noise. Giving more adult support or key person time when needed. Starting/changing support plans to include new strategies or tools. Asking for advice from the Area SENCo or other professionals. Working with parents to plan next steps together.</p>
<p>9. How do we make sure children with SEND are challenged in their learning, not just supported?</p>	<p>We challenge children with SEND by: Setting high but achievable goals Using their interests to stretch thinking Giving them problem-solving tasks with support Scaffolding changes to play Encouraging independence in small steps</p> <p>We notice impact when: Children try new things without prompting They show pride in their achievements They stay focused for longer periods They begin to take more risks in learning Tracking small steps of progress (e.g. SEND toolkit) Regular APDR and updating SEND support plan</p>
<p>10. How do we support children who find talking or listening hard?</p>	<p>We support communication by: Using visual aids (objects of reference, photos, pictures, Makaton) and gestures Using key communication strategies such as anticipation games (e.g. Ready, Steady, Go) and friendly sabotage Giving extra time to respond Using key words and simple sentences Encouraging choices with pictures or objects Using quiet spaces for small group time Using songs and routines to build understanding</p> <p>We notice progress when: Children start using new words, signs, gestures or visuals to say what they want They follow simple instructions more often (with objects of reference/photos/pictures) They show interest in interacting with adults and/or children They respond to their name or familiar cues</p>

<p>11. How do we help children with SEND learn to manage their feelings and behaviour (self-regulation), and what strategies work best for them in our setting?</p>	<p>We support self-regulation by: Using emotion coaching and visual prompts Practising calming techniques like breathing or sensory breaks Giving choices to reduce frustration Using timers to help with waiting or transitions Reducing demands Build communication skills (gestures, pointing, leading, visuals)</p> <p>We notice progress when: Children start asking for help instead of reacting They use calm-down areas independently They wait their turn more often Less episodes of meltdowns and dysregulation Reduced lashing out at others Reduced lashing out at others</p>
<p>12. How do we support children with SEND personal needs through hygiene routines, and how do we help them become more independent over time?</p>	<p>We support personal care by: Following consistent hygiene routines like toileting, handwashing, and nappy changing Using visuals, signs, and simple language to explain each step Giving children time, privacy, and reassurance during routines Respecting sensory needs (e.g. using unscented wipes or soft textures) Working with families to understand what works best at home</p> <p>We build independence by: Encouraging children to try small steps (e.g. pulling up trousers, using soap) Using Now & Next boards to help them understand what's happening Offering adapted tools like step stools, easy-grip soap, or wipes Praising effort and progress to build confidence Giving choices to help children feel in control (e.g. choosing a towel or toilet area for changing)</p> <p>We know it's working when: Children start doing more for themselves with less help Staff notice children are more confident and settled Parents say their child is becoming more independent at home Children feel proud after completing hygiene tasks Staff adjust support based on each child's progress</p>
<p>13. How do we make our space accessible and calming for children with different needs?</p>	<p>We make our space calming by: Using soft lighting, sensory tents, and quiet corners Offering noise-reducing headphones for busy times Creating cosy areas with cushions and soft textures Keeping routines predictable with visual timetables and cues Using calming colours and reducing clutter</p> <p>We make our space accessible by: Providing adapted seating, cutlery, and tools Using clear pathways for mobility aids or walkers</p>

	<p>Offering sensory-friendly materials (e.g. dry rice instead of paint)</p> <p>Using Now & Next boards and photo cues for routines</p> <p>Making sure all areas are reachable and safe for all children</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Children are calm, settled and engaged</p> <p>Staff say the space helps children feel safe</p> <p>Parents notice their child is more relaxed</p> <p>Children can move around and join in easily</p> <p>Staff use the space flexibly to meet different needs</p>
14. What helps us know if our plans are working well, or not working well, for children with SEND?	<p>We check progress by:</p> <p>Looking at learning journals, observations and trackers (assessment monitoring)</p> <p>Talking to staff and parents about changes</p> <p>Noticing if children are more engaged or settled</p> <p>Reviewing support plans and EHCP targets</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Children with SEND join in more often</p> <p>Children are calmer and often regulated</p> <p>They show new skills or confidence</p> <p>Staff feel the strategies are helping</p> <p>Parents say they've noticed progress</p> <p>Support plan targets are achieved</p> <p>We know it's not working when:</p> <p>Children avoid activities or seem frustrated</p> <p>Staff say they're unsure what's helping</p> <p>Plans don't lead to change over time</p> <p>Children are not achieving the targets on their support plans</p> <p>Parents raise concerns or ask for more support</p>
15. How do we change our plans when a child's needs change? What do we do if a child isn't making progress?	<p>We respond to changing needs by:</p> <p>Observing child closely to look for new behaviours, interests or challenges</p> <p>Updating support plans with new strategies</p> <p>Talking to parents and professionals</p> <p>Adjusting activities or environment</p> <p>Adding visuals or sensory tools</p> <p>If progress is slow, we:</p> <p>Review what's working and what's not</p> <p>Adapting activities – make easier, more hands on, or more challenging and include child's current interests</p> <p>Try different approaches (e.g. smaller groups, more repetition)</p> <p>Ask for advice from Area SENCo or external specialists</p> <p>Increase adult support or key person time</p> <p>Involve parents in planning next steps</p>

16. How have we used advice from external professionals to improve outcomes for children? What changed, and how did it help?	<p>We used advice by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking SALT for help with a child's speech delay Following OT advice to set up a sensory circuit Using Area SENCo suggestions of strategies Seeking additional support on processes/referrals etc. from Area SENCo Sharing professional reports with all staff working with the child Adding recommended strategies to daily routines <p>What changed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We added more visual prompts and simplified language We created quiet spaces and sensory breaks based on OT input Staff used specific speech sounds and repetition strategies We adjusted activities to match the child's sensory needs Support plans became clearer and more focused <p>How it helped:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child started using more words and joined in with peers They were calmer and more focused during group times Parents noticed progress and felt more supported Staff felt confident using the strategies The child showed progress against EYFS, support plan/EHCP targets, developmental milestones, EY SEND Toolkit
17. How do we help staff feel confident supporting children with SEND? What training or support has made a difference for our team (and how do you know it's made a difference)?	<p>We build confidence by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We explain SEND roles during staff induction. We give staff clear guidance and responsibilities. We talk about SEND in team meetings. Offering focused training sessions Giving staff time to talk with the SENCo Using coaching or peer support Sharing simple strategies that work Clear SEND procedures Access to SEND resources <p>Training that helped:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makaton Area SENCo Shorts Dingley's Promise Autism awareness sessions SENCo support/modelling in room EY Team ISP setting support <p>We know it's made a difference when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff use strategies more confidently

	<p>Children with SEND are more settled and make progress</p> <p>Staff ask for more ideas and share what works</p> <p>Parents say they've noticed positive changes</p>
18. How do we use coaching or mentoring to support inclusive practice in our team?	<p>SENCo models strategies during sessions</p> <p>Staff shadow experienced colleagues</p> <p>We use peer support to share what works</p> <p>We give feedback after observations</p> <p>We meet regularly as a whole team to reflect and problem-solve together</p>
19. How do we ensure children with SEND are safeguarded effectively, and how do we promote a culture of openness and safety?	<p>We safeguard children with SEND by:</p> <p>Making sure all staff know and follow safeguarding procedures</p> <p>Keeping clear records of concerns and actions taken</p> <p>Using visual prompts and social stories to help children understand safety</p> <p>Being alert to signs that may look different in children with SEND (e.g. changes in behaviour or communication)</p> <p>Working closely with families to understand each child's needs and risks</p> <p>Having relevant risk assessments in place that all staff know and follow</p> <p>Regularly reviewing risk assessments</p> <p>We promote openness and safety by:</p> <p>Encouraging children to express feelings in ways that suit them (e.g. through play, visuals, or gestures)</p> <p>Creating a calm, predictable environment where children feel safe</p> <p>Making sure staff feel confident to raise concerns or ask for help</p> <p>Talking openly about emotions, boundaries, and safe choices</p> <p>Including safeguarding in team meetings and supervisions</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Children with SEND feel safe, settled and understood</p> <p>Staff frequently ask questions/raise concerns to leaders</p> <p>Staff notice and respond quickly to changes or concerns</p> <p>Families say they feel listened to and involved</p> <p>Safeguarding records show clear actions and follow-up</p> <p>Staff feel confident and supported in keeping children safe</p>
20. How do we support staff well-being while delivering good SEND provision?	<p>We support staff by:</p> <p>Giving staff time to talk about children's needs and share ideas</p> <p>Checking in regularly to see how staff are feeling, especially when things are challenging</p> <p>Offering training on SEND so staff feel confident using strategies</p> <p>Encouraging teamwork so no one feels they have to manage alone</p> <p>Being flexible with routines and planning to reduce pressure</p> <p>Celebrating small wins and progress with children to boost morale</p> <p>We work together by:</p> <p>Sharing strategies across the team so everyone knows what works</p> <p>Using support plans that are easy to follow and update</p> <p>Asking staff what helps them feel supported and acting on feedback</p>

	<p>Making sure staff know who to go to for help (SENCO, manager, etc.)</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Staff say they feel supported, confident and less stressed</p> <p>Children with SEND are settled and making progress</p> <p>Staff use strategies consistently and share what's working</p> <p>Staff attendance is good</p> <p>There's a positive team atmosphere and less burnout</p> <p>Everyone feels involved in supporting SEND</p>
21. How do we build trusting partnerships with parents to support their child's learning and development?	<p>We build trust by:</p> <p>Having regular, friendly chats at drop-off and pick-up</p> <p>Listening to parents' concerns and ideas</p> <p>Being honest and open about progress and challenges</p> <p>Involving parents in planning and reviews</p> <p>We support learning by:</p> <p>Sharing simple strategies parents can use at home</p> <p>Sending photos or updates about what their child is doing</p> <p>Asking parents what works well for their child</p> <p>Celebrating small steps together</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Parents feel comfortable talking to us</p> <p>They share more about their child's needs</p> <p>They say they feel supported</p> <p>Children seem more settled and confident</p>
22. How do we share information about children's progress and support with parents and professionals?	<p>We share with parents by:</p> <p>Giving regular updates at pick-up or through home diaries</p> <p>Using photos, learning journals, online journals</p> <p>Holding review meetings and parent chats</p> <p>Sharing simple strategies they can use at home</p> <p>We share with professionals by:</p> <p>Organising and holding EHCP reviews</p> <p>Attending multi-agency meetings</p> <p>Providing professionals with copies of support plans and assessments</p> <p>Following up on advice from professionals e.g. SALT, Area SENCOs, SISS</p> <p>Keeping clear records of what's working</p> <p>We know it's working when:</p> <p>Parents feel informed and involved</p> <p>Professionals say our input is helpful</p> <p>Support plans are joined-up and consistent</p> <p>Children show progress</p>

23. How do we promote the local offer and help families find extra support?	<p>We share leaflets and links during parent meetings</p> <p>We talk about the local offer during support plan and EHCP reviews</p> <p>We help parents contact services like SALT or family support</p> <p>We display information in the entrance or parent area</p> <p>We explain what's available in simple, clear language</p>
24. What is our inclusive vision for SEND?	<p>Our vision includes:</p> <p>Every child is valued and supported to thrive</p> <p>Differences are respected and celebrated</p> <p>We focus on strengths, not just needs</p> <p>We believe all children can learn and belong</p> <p>We show this by:</p> <p>Including children with SEND in all activities</p> <p>Adapting the environment and teaching</p> <p>Barriers to learning are identified and removed</p> <p>Celebrating progress, no matter how small</p> <p>Listening to families and working together</p> <p>Staff have high expectations and are ambitious for all children</p> <p>A clear SEND policy that is understood and followed by all staff</p>
25. How do we communicate a clear and inclusive vision for SEND across our setting?	<p>We communicate our vision by:</p> <p>Talking about inclusion in team meetings and inductions</p> <p>Displaying inclusive values in shared spaces</p> <p>Including SEND in our policies and improvement plans</p> <p>Our SEND policy is easy to understand and shared with staff and families</p> <p>Sharing our approach with parents during settling-in and reviews</p> <p>We show it in practice by:</p> <p>We include SEND in our induction for new staff</p> <p>We use positive language about all children's abilities</p> <p>Making sure all children are included in activities</p> <p>Adapting routines and environments for individual needs</p> <p>Celebrating progress for children with SEND</p> <p>Encouraging staff to reflect and share what works</p>
26. How do leaders show SEND is a priority?	<p>Leaders show it's a priority by:</p> <p>Talking about SEND in team meetings and planning sessions</p> <p>Making sure staff have time and support to meet children's needs</p> <p>Giving the SENCO time to do their role properly</p> <p>Making sure SEND is part of training and staff development</p> <p>Checking that support plans are in place and being used</p> <p>Leaders work with others by:</p> <p>Meeting with parents to talk about SEND support</p> <p>Working with professionals like SALT, Area SENCo, and SISS</p>

	<p>Making sure staff follow advice from outside agencies Keeping SEND on the agenda in reviews and audits We know it's working when: Staff feel confident and supported in SEND Parents say they feel listened to and involved Children with SEND are making progress SEND is part of everyday practice, not just paperwork Leaders can explain how SEND is supported in the setting</p>
27. How does governance (owners/stakeholders) help us improve SEND provision and make sure we're doing it well?	<p>Governance supports us by: Checking that SEND is part of our improvement plan Asking questions about how children with SEND are doing Making sure funding (like EYIF and EYPP) is used well Encouraging staff training and development Joint observations/learning walks with leaders We know it's working when: Leaders feel supported and challenged SEND is regularly discussed in meetings Resources are allocated fairly Children with SEND are making progress and feel included</p>
28. How do we gather and use evidence to evaluate and improve our SEND provision?	<p>We gather evidence by: Observing children during play and routines Using learning journals and progress trackers Talking with parents about what they notice at home Collecting feedback from staff and professionals Reviewing support plans and checking what's working We use evidence by: Updating support plans based on what we see and hear Changing strategies if something isn't helping Sharing findings in team meetings and supervisions Planning training based on gaps or needs we notice Using evidence to support referrals and EHCPs We know it's working when: Children with SEND are making progress Staff feel confident using strategies Parents say they feel involved and informed Support plans are clear, up-to-date and effective Our SEND provision improves over time</p>
29. How do we share good practice and	<p>We share good practice by: Talking about what works in team meetings</p>

<p>learn from others to improve our SEND support and leadership?</p>	<p>Sharing ideas and strategies between rooms Adding SEND tips to our staff board or online system Encouraging staff to share what's gone well Welcoming visits from other setting staff We learn from others by: Attending local SEND meetings and training Working with professionals like SALT, SISS, and Area SENCo Visiting other nurseries or inviting others to visit us Reading updates from Ofsted and EYFS together Asking parents and professionals for feedback We know it's working when: Staff try new ideas and feel confident Children with SEND are making progress Parents and professionals say we're doing well Our team feels up-to-date and supported SEND plans include current best practice</p>
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