North West ADCS Leading Children's Services

A Practical Guide for Data Professionals Working in SEND



September 2026

North West ADCS Leading Children's Services

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Part A – Orientation and Foundations

1. Introduction and Purpose of the SEND Analyst Guide

The SEND system is a highly complex, legally governed area of local authority responsibility, requiring coordinated work across education health and care. It operates within a detailed statutory framework set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice (0–25), and is subject to significant scrutiny. Robust data analysis is therefore essential to support lawful decision-making, assurance and service improvement.

Pressure on the system continues to grow, with rising demand for EHCPs, delays in accessing support, variation between local areas, and persistent gaps in outcomes for children and young people (CYP). To address this, the SEND policy landscape continues to evolve and there is a clear ambition to develop a more inclusive, evidence-led system that supports earlier intervention, improves outcomes and reduces conflict. Analysts should be familiar with both the Department for Education's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (2023) and subsequent SEND reform proposals set out in SEND reform: putting children and young people first and Every Child Achieving and Thriving. These documents provide important context for changes in policy, accountability, inclusion, service delivery and future data requirements, all of which can influence the interpretation of SEND data and performance over time

This guide supports SEND data and intelligence professionals, particularly those new to SEND or local government, by explaining how the system operates, how processes, decisions and thresholds translate into data, and how to produce analysis that is accurate, consistent and defensible. It also highlights the importance of careful interpretation in a changing policy environment, with transparency around trends and limitations.

Designed as both an introduction and a reference, the guide aims to strengthen analytical practice and support better planning, assurance, inspection readiness, and ultimately improved outcomes for CYP with SEND.

2. Overview of a SEND Analyst Responsibilities

The SEND analyst supports local authorities to understand and improve SEND delivery by translating complex statutory activity into clear, reliable insight. The role connects data, statutory requirements and service delivery, enabling informed decisions on risk, capacity and compliance. It ensures SEND data is accurate, aligned with the SEND Code of Practice (0–25), clearly contextualised to local practice, and robust enough to support scrutiny, including inspection and audit.

SEND analysis spans statutory assurance, operational oversight and strategic planning, helping services understand demand, backlogs, performance and outcomes for CYP. As SEND data reflects decision-making, thresholds and system capacity as well as need, analysts must interpret trends carefully, explain variation, including small number effects, and be transparent about limitations.

The role is collaborative, working across SEND teams, children's social care, education, health, finance and commissioning to ensure insight reflects operational reality and is trusted in decision-making. SEND analysts are expected to work to strong professional standards, including lawful and ethical data use, and alignment with the Government Analysis Function and the ICO Data Accuracy Guidance, ensuring analysis is clear, defensible and fit for purpose.

3. Starting out as a SEND Analyst

Starting work as a SEND analyst requires building confidence in context, practice and statutory expectations, rather than focusing immediately on metrics or tools. SEND analysis operates within a legally defined and highly scrutinised system, so early effectiveness depends on understanding how that system works in practice. Familiarity with the SEND Code of Practice (0–25) is essential, alongside an understanding of how statutory guidance is applied locally and how this shapes data.

SEND is best understood through exposure to local practice. New analysts could spend time with SEND services, understand decision-making processes, and be supported to shadow experienced analysts as part of their induction and early development. This helps build understanding of how statutory processes translate into operational activity and data which supports more accurate interpretation of performance and assurance information. New analysts are encouraged to build networks with peers in other local authorities through regional and national SEND analyst groups.

North West analyst network

Analysts across the North West collaborate through the NWADCS SEND Data Forum and the North West SEND Analysts Group meeting. These networks provide opportunities to share learning, discuss emerging issues and seek peer support from colleagues working in SEND analytics across different local authorities.

Early analytical focus should be on understanding local data arrangements, including core datasets, refresh cycles and how data is used for reporting and governance. Analysts should prioritise checking data completeness and accuracy, building relationships with services, identifying known risks or limitations, and producing clear analysis.

Part B – Understanding the SEND Framework

4. Main Stakeholders and Collaborative Partnerships

SEND is designed as a multi-agency system, with responsibility shared across education, health and care. This means activity and data are distributed across organisations, requiring coordination and creating complexity in how information is captured, understood and reported. Analysts therefore need a clear understanding of each partner's role and how their data contributes to the overall picture. While national expectations are consistent, local delivery varies, shaping how services operate and how data is recorded.

Local authorities are responsible for coordinating the SEND system, including **managing assessments, making decisions on EHCPs, securing provision, and ensuring plans are reviewed and maintained.** They hold the primary data used for statutory reporting and are accountable for ensuring duties are met across the system.

Education providers, including early years settings, schools and post-16 institutions, deliver universal, targeted and SEN support and contribute to EHCP processes. Their data is critical to understanding need and provision and without it, there cannot be a complete picture of SEND system data in a local area.

Health and social care services contribute to assessment and delivery where needs extend beyond education, and this includes therapies, clinical input, disability support and safeguarding, amongst others. However, their data may be less accessible due to different data-sharing agreements, data governance, the use of different case management systems or a lack of common unique identifiers, which can limit visibility and alignment with SEND datasets.

Commissioning and finance functions provide insight into placements, sufficiency and costs, while parents, carers and young people contribute at every level, including the drafting and review of plans to meet CYP needs. Parents and young people may be particularly involved in disagreement resolution, mediation and tribunal processes. National bodies, including the Department for Education, Ofsted, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) set expectations and oversee system performance.

For analysts, this means SEND data must always be interpreted in context, recognising that different parts of the system hold different pieces of the picture, and that effective insight depends on understanding how these contributions fit together. Analysts should recognise

SEND is constantly evolving, and changes in policy, local practice and partnership arrangements can affect both the data collected and its interpretation.

5. Key SEND Processes and Pathways

The SEND system operates as a continuum of support rather than a fixed pathway, with CYP moving between stages as needs change. It begins with identification of needs, followed by targeted interventions and SEN Support, where CYP's needs are met without statutory involvement. Some of the early stages are not captured in national datasets except the records of children receiving SEN support; however, all the stages are critical in shaping demand entering the formal system.

Where needs cannot be met through SEN Support, a request for an Education, Health and Care needs assessment (EHCNA) is made, marking entry into the statutory system. This process, set out in the SEND Code of Practice (0–25), includes key decision points and timescales, culminating in a decision to issue or refuse an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Where an EHCP is issued, it becomes the central legal document setting out needs, outcomes and provision. EHCPs form the core of statutory SEND data and remain active through an ongoing cycle of implementation and review, with decisions made to continue, amend or cease plans over time.

Throughout this process, families and young people may also be involved in dispute resolution, including mediation or tribunal proceedings. For CYP aged 14 and over, preparation for adulthood becomes a key focus, including transitions into further education and employment, and some may access adult health and social care services. These elements can influence the experience of children, young people and families. The pathway therefore reflects system flow, decision-making and capacity, with the aim of meeting the needs of CYP in a timely and effective way.

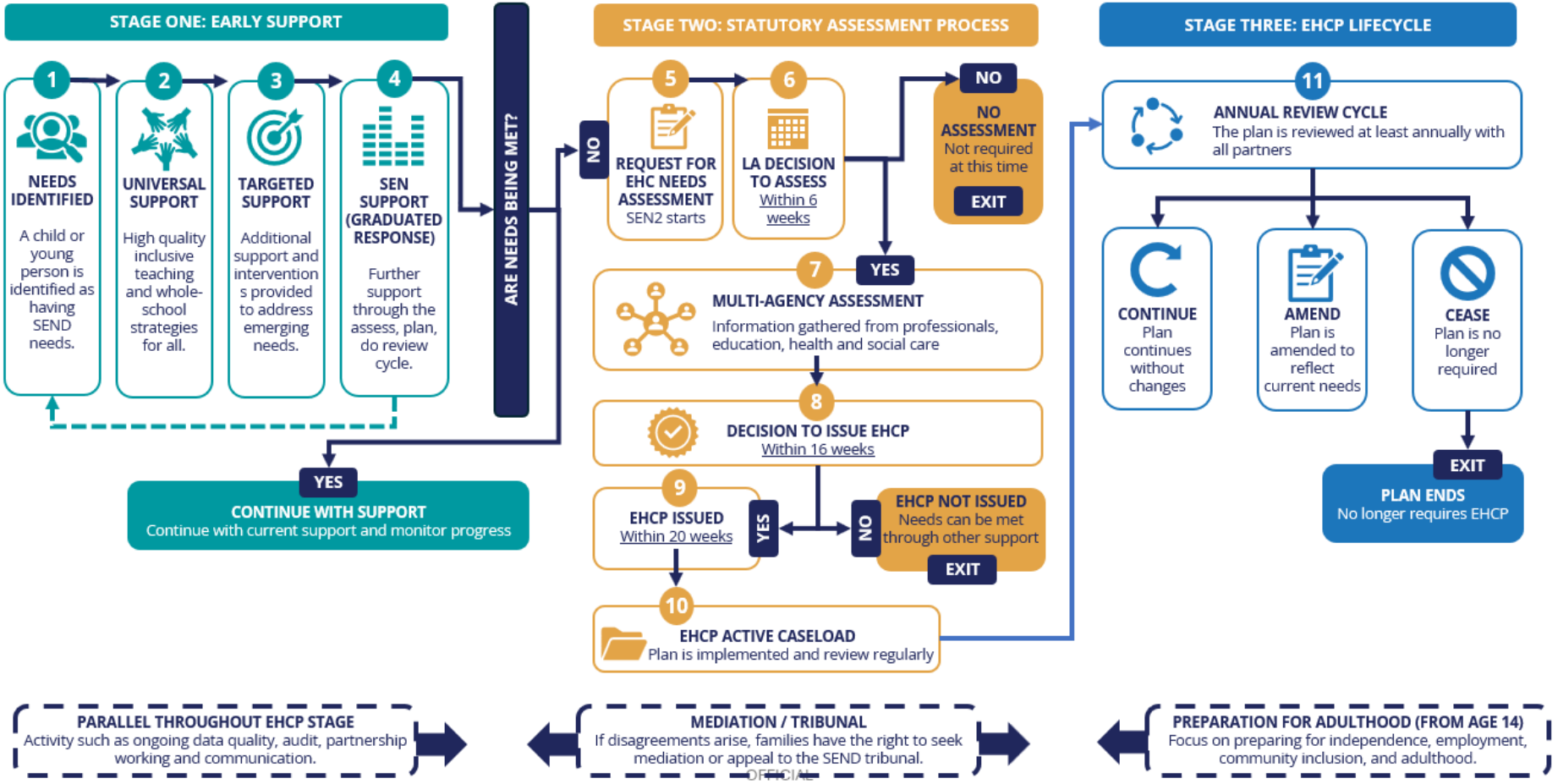
National data largely captures the records of children receiving SEN support and those who have undergone statutory processes of making a request for EHCNA, assessments, or those having an active EHCP or whose EHCPs ceased in the reporting period, while earlier support remains less visible. As a result, SEND data must always be interpreted within local context. Please see the flowchart on the next page for a visual representation of this pathway.

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SEND PATHWAY FLOWCHART

From early support to EHCP lifecycle and beyond

North West Association of Directors of Children's Services (NWADCS)



Part C – SEND Data Foundations

6. Understanding SEND Data Flow

Understanding SEND data flow means recognising how a CYP's SEND journey, including statutory activity and key decision points, is translated into recorded data, and how that information moves across systems and teams. Data only exists when activity is completed, recorded and entered in line with local processes and timescales. As a result, gaps or delays in recording can affect how accurately the needs, experiences and outcomes of CYP are reflected in the data.

SEND data broadly follows the statutory pathway set out in the SEND Code of Practice (0–25), from requests for assessment and decision-making, through to EHCP issue, review, amendment or cessation. However, different stages are often recorded by different teams and at different points in time, creating breaks in continuity that can appear as performance issues.

The flow of data also depends on handoffs between services, including education, SEND teams, decision panels, and commissioning or partner agencies. Each handoff introduces risk where recording responsibilities can be unclear, activity is entered retrospectively, or information sits outside core systems.

SEND data rarely sits in a single system. While case management systems hold core records, additional tracking is often used for tribunals, placements, costs and transitions. Timing is also critical, as data is not recorded in real time and statutory reporting relies on the date at which data is extracted or submitted for reporting purposes. Activity that has taken place but has not yet been recorded in the case management system by that date will not be included in the report.

Analyst Insight
Apparent changes in performance may sometimes reflect delays in recording rather than changes in operational activity. Understanding both the service process and the reporting timetable is essential before drawing conclusions from the data.

For analysts, understanding data flow is essential for interpreting performance, identifying data quality issues, and explaining variation. It supports assurance and inspection readiness by ensuring data is used in context, recognising that apparent issues often reflect how the system operates rather than underlying performance alone.

7. Structure of SEND Data Systems

SEND data sits within a complex and often fragmented system architecture, reflecting the multi-agency nature of SEND delivery and how systems have developed over time. For analysts, understanding this structure is essential to interpret data accurately, reconcile differences, and explain limitations clearly.

Most local authorities use a SEND case management system. Liquidlogic (EHM or EYES), Synergy, or Capita One are typically used to record statutory SEND activity, including assessments, EHCPs, key decisions and dates. These systems form the primary source for statutory reporting and inspection, but local configuration varies, meaning the same record may be entered using different systems. Analysts need to understand how their local system is structured, including how key fields and dates are generated.

SEND data is also shaped by wider system inputs. Education data is largely collected through school systems and national returns such as the school census, which do not always align with SEND timelines. Health and social care data often, but not always, sit in separate systems and are often less visible or only partially shared, reflecting governance constraints rather than gaps in delivery.

Additional datasets, including commissioning, finance and placement data, are sometimes held outside core SEND systems. Some areas use data warehouses or reporting layers to bring this together, while others rely on manual reconciliation using spreadsheets. This can lead to differences in figures if sources, definitions or update cycles vary. Hence, understanding how systems connect, where data is held, and how it flows between sources is critical to producing accurate, consistent and defensible analysis.

Children and Young people at the Centre

Data may be stored across multiple systems, but each record ultimately relates to a child or young person receiving support. Bringing these sources together helps create a more complete picture of needs, provision and outcomes.

8. Reporting Tools and Analytical Platforms

SEND reporting sits on top of multiple data systems and converts recorded activity into usable insight. While core company (for example **Liquidlogic, Synergy or Capita One (MRI)**) hold the record of SEND activity, they rarely meet all reporting needs on their own. Analysts therefore use reporting and visualisation tools reporting and visualisation tools such as **Power BI, Tableau or Qlik** to extract, combine and present data. These platforms apply consistent logic across datasets and support dashboards, reporting and analysis for services and leaders.

SEND reporting serves different purposes, including **statutory returns (e.g. SEN2), operational monitoring, performance and assurance, and longer-term strategic planning**. Each requires clear alignment to definitions and consistent interpretation across systems. Outputs are shaped by data refresh cycles and recording lag, which means reports may differ depending on timing. All reporting should therefore be clear on "as at" dates and any known limitations.

For analysts, the focus is on producing accurate, consistent and defensible outputs, ensuring data is aligned across sources, clearly explained, and trusted for decision-making.

9. Single Source and Single Version of the Truth

Due to the use of multiple systems and data being recorded at different points in processes, differences in reported figures can arise. These differences are usually driven by multiple datasets, inconsistent definitions or unclear logic, rather than calculation errors. Establishing a Single Source of Truth (SSoT) and a Single Version of the Truth (SVoT) is therefore essential for credible analysis, consistent reporting and inspection readiness.

A Single Source of Truth defines which dataset or reporting output is treated as authoritative for a given purpose, such as statutory returns, performance reporting or inspection evidence. In practice, this is achieved by bringing together data from multiple systems into a single, agreed reporting view that is aligned and reconciled, even where underlying systems remain separate.

A Single Version of the Truth ensures that data from this source is calculated and presented consistently. This means using the same definitions, logic and refresh points across all reports, so figures do not change depending on where they are viewed.

This is particularly important in SEND, where data is subject to high levels of scrutiny from inspectors, leaders and families. Inconsistent figures can undermine confidence, create confusion and weaken decision-making.

For analysts, the focus is on maintaining clarity and consistency by agreeing on authoritative sources, applying definitions consistently, and clearly explaining differences where they exist. This ensures reporting is reliable, defensible and well understood.

10. Distinct Characteristics of SEND Data

SEND data has several characteristics that influence how analysis should be interpreted. It combines information from education, health and care services, reflects statutory decision-making processes, and is often subject to significant public, professional and regulatory scrutiny. While the overall population of CYP with SEND is large, some specific groups may be relatively small. For example, CYP with EHCPs whose primary need is Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD), Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD), Down syndrome, or other less common needs may form small cohorts. This requires careful interpretation of trends, rates and percentages, as relatively small changes in numbers can appear disproportionately large.

SEND data is directly linked to legal duties designed to ensure CYP receive the support they need in a timely and appropriate way. Measures such as assessment timeliness, annual reviews and plan management help local areas understand whether statutory processes are supporting CYP effectively and whether support is being delivered when it is needed. Because these measures are also used to provide assurance to families, leaders, regulators and inspectors, accuracy, transparency and clear interpretation are particularly important.

CYP and Family Perspective
SEND data represents the experiences of real children, young people and families. While analysts often work with measures, rates and trends, these figures ultimately reflect how effectively needs are identified, support is provided and outcomes are achieved.

SEND data also reflects decision-making as much as need. Variations in assessments, EHCP volumes or outcomes may be driven by local thresholds, practice or capacity, not just demand. SEND data carries high public sensitivity, with strong interest from families, leaders, regulators and the government. Analysts must therefore present data carefully, clearly explain limitations, and avoid overinterpretation to ensure insight is accurate, balanced and trusted.

Part D – Data Quality, Assurance and Statutory Responsibilities

11. Data Quality and Assurance in SEND

SEND data quality is critical to statutory compliance, inspection confidence and effective decision-making. The focus for analysts is on ensuring data is robust, transparent and fit for its intended purpose, rather than attempting to eliminate all imperfections. This is particularly important in SEND, where data is used to evidence legal duties and system performance.

In a SEND context, quality means data is accurate enough to support agreed measures, consistently defined using agreed standards, and clearly explainable so that services, leaders and inspectors understand what it represents in practice. It must also be traceable, with a clear audit trail from reported figures back to source systems.

Data assurance in SEND is centred on confidence and defensibility. This includes validating data against statutory expectations, reconciling across systems and supplementary trackers, reviewing trends for unexpected variation, and working with services to confirm interpretation. These approaches align with the principle of proportionality, documentation and transparency.

SEND data is frequently affected by changes in practice, thresholds or system configuration, meaning trends are not always directly comparable. Recording may also lag operational activity due to decision-making and administrative processes. Analysts should clearly explain where definitions, timing or recording practices have changed and ensure limitations are transparent, in line with the ICO Data Accuracy Guidance.

Not all data quality issues pose equal risk, so improvement should focus on areas that affect statutory compliance, inspection and key decision-making. This ensures data remains reliable and defensible while recognising the practical constraints and pressures within SEND systems.

12. Statutory SEND Data Returns

Statutory SEND data returns, commonly known as the Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2), are a formal requirement for local authorities and form a key part of assurance, accountability and national oversight. The term "SEN2" is a longstanding historical name for the return, with the "2" reflecting an earlier DfE numbering convention. The return is used to evidence compliance with legal duties, support policy development, enable comparison across areas, and inform inspection, performance monitoring and wider scrutiny.

The SEN2 return represents one of the most significant annual SEND data exercises undertaken by local authorities. Even where reporting is highly automated, considerable analyst time is often required to validate data, investigate anomalies, reconcile figures and support sign-off, particularly during the January to March submission period.

These returns must follow Department for Education definitions and rules exactly, as set out in the Special educational needs survey guide, even where they differ from local reporting. Analysts should apply definitions consistently.

> **All returns are subject to validation checks designed to identify inconsistencies, breaches of logic and unexpected values. Where errors or queries arise, these should be resolved either by correcting the return template (where issues are significant) or directly within DfE COLLECT (where issues are minor). However, priority should always be given to correcting source data, ensuring consistency between system records and submitted returns.**

Statutory returns should be subject to local sign-off before submission, including reconciliation with internal reporting and clear briefing for SEND operational managers, service leaders and senior leadership teams. This ensures the data is accurate, understood and defensible under external scrutiny.

For analysts, the focus is on accuracy, consistency and clear explanation, recognising that statutory returns represent the formal position of the local authority and must withstand inspection and challenge.

Part E – Performance and Insight

13. Performance and Assurance Frameworks

Each local authority will typically have a SEND performance and assurance framework, providing a structured approach to monitoring compliance, understanding system pressure and maintaining oversight. SEND data analysts play a key role in this, shaping how data is organised, interpreted and communicated to leaders, governance bodies and inspectors.

These frameworks are used to:

- provide assurance regarding the experiences of children, young people and their families
- identify emerging risks, backlogs and capacity pressures
- support operational and strategic decision-making
- enable clear and consistent reporting for governance and inspection

In practice, frameworks bring together a focused set of core measures, typically covering:

- **statutory timeliness**, such as the timeliness of EHC needs assessments, EHCP issuance and annual reviews
- **volume and flow**, including requests, assessments and EHCPs
- **System pressure**, including indicators of backlog, delay and the timeliness with which CYP receive support.

Frameworks should align with national expectations and inspection practice, with local authorities able to explain how they monitor compliance, manage risk and maintain oversight. At the same time, interpretation must reflect local context, including the needs and experiences of CYP, alongside local service models, thresholds, provision and capacity.

These frameworks are embedded within regular reporting and governance. Analysts should ensure consistency of definitions and measures, stability over time, and clear explanation of any changes, so that performance information is trusted, understood and supports effective decision-making.

14. Inspection and Review Activity

SEND services are inspected through Area SEND inspections, which assess how effectively local authorities, health partners and education providers work together to meet statutory duties and improve outcomes. Inspections focus on the system, with strong emphasis on joint working, transparency and system understanding, as set out in the Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook.

Role of data in inspection
During inspection, data is not judged on headline figures alone. Local authorities are expected to:

- understand their data and how they evidence the quality of SEND services being delivered
- explain trends, variation and exceptions clearly
- be open about pressures, backlogs and limitations

Inconsistencies or unclear explanations can weaken assurance and shift focus away from improvement.

SEND analysts support inspection by:

- preparing and validating inspection datasets
- aligning statutory returns and performance reporting
- briefing leaders on key risks and trends
- responding to data queries during inspection

Transparency and follow-up
Inspection places high scrutiny on SEND data, so analysts must present data clearly and transparently, explaining limitations rather than overstating performance. After inspection, data supports action planning, monitoring progress and demonstrating sustained improvement.

15. Commissioning and Cost Analysis

SEND commissioning and cost intelligence focuses on how statutory decisions translate into provision, placements and financial exposure, particularly for higher-cost placements such as independent and non-maintained provision. For analysts, the focus is on linking cost to demand, decision-making and system constraints, rather than viewing spend in isolation.

These insights are used to:

- understand key drivers of SEND expenditure
- identify pressure points in provision and placement pathways
- support sufficiency planning and market development
- provide assurance on financial control to leaders, elected members (local councillors) and inspectors

In practice, SEND costs are driven by a combination of need, placement type, and availability of local provision. Where local capacity is limited, reliance on external or specialist placements can increase costs. As a result, cost growth often reflects system pressures and statutory duties rather than inefficiency alone.

Cost data is typically held outside SEND case management systems, including finance and commissioning systems or local trackers. These datasets are designed for financial control, so analysts must understand how costs are recorded, what is included, and how frequently data is updated.

Cost analysis is most meaningful when linked to SEND activity, including the number of CYP with EHCPs, assessment rates, placement stability and transitions. SEND costs are also highly sensitive to small numbers, where a small number of high-cost placements can significantly affect budgets, requiring careful interpretation and clear explanation of volatility.

Part F – Effective SEND Analyst Practice

16. Data Governance, Ownership, and Prioritisation

Effective SEND analysis depends on clear data governance, shared understanding of ownership, and disciplined prioritisation. This ensures data is used lawfully, consistently and with appropriate oversight, supporting reliable reporting and decision-making.

SEND data ownership is distributed across services, including SEND teams, education providers, commissioning and finance, and partners in health and social care. Analysts need to understand who is responsible for recording and maintaining data, who can authorise changes, and where accountability sits for statutory measures.

Strong governance is typically supported by:

- defined data ownership for key datasets and measures
- agreed definitions and reporting rules
- clear routes for escalating and resolving data issues
- oversight through performance and assurance forums

SEND data environments are often high demand, with competing priorities. Analysts should focus effort on:

- statutory reporting and compliance
- data used for inspection, governance or legal purposes
- analysis that informs key decisions or risk management

SEND analysts support governance by clarifying ownership, ensuring consistency, and highlighting risks, while recognising that resolving data issues often requires coordination across services rather than technical fixes alone.

17. Data Automation and Maturity

SEND data automation and maturity describe how effectively a local authority moves from manual, fragile processes to more reliable, repeatable and sustainable analytical practice. In a high-pressure statutory environment, improving this reduces risk and makes better use of limited analytical capacity.

Data automation in SEND focuses on using structured processes to:

- extract, transform and load data for analysis
- refresh datasets consistently based on local policy
- apply agreed definitions and logic
- reduce manual handling and reconciliation
- support timely and reliable reporting

Automation supports efficiency and consistency, while still requiring professional judgement in interpretation.

SEND data maturity reflects how well data processes are:

- documented and understood
- consistent and repeatable over time
- resilient to staff or system changes
- capable of supporting statutory and inspection demands

In practice, many areas operate at mixed maturity, combining automated processes with manual workarounds.

Lower maturity is often characterised by reliance on individual knowledge, repeated manual extracts, spreadsheet-based processes, and difficulty reproducing figures quickly. Improving maturity helps standardise outputs, reduce preparation time and strengthen confidence in data

Part G – Professional Development

18. Developing as a SEND Analyst

Developing as an effective SEND analyst is an ongoing process combining technical competence, system understanding and professional judgement. In a statutory environment, credibility depends not just on methods, but on how analysis is interpreted and explained.

Effective SEND analysts develop across three core areas:

- **analytical and technical skills**, including validation, interpretation and clear presentation
- **SEND system knowledge**, covering statutory duties, local practice and how decisions translate into data
- **communication and influence**, enabling clear explanation and informed decision-making

Building strong system understanding is essential. This is supported by engaging with SEND services, attending assurance and decision-making forums, and understanding how statutory guidance is applied locally. This depth of knowledge improves judgement and reduces misinterpretation, especially where data appears volatile or counterintuitive.

Communication is critical, as SEND analysis is used by leaders, governance bodies and inspectors. Analysts should:

- focus on clarity and relevance rather than volume
- explain assumptions, uncertainty and limitations
- distinguish between data, interpretation and judgement

SEND analysts are expected to maintain high professional standards, including consistent use of definitions, transparency about data quality, and willingness to challenge misuse.

Ongoing development is supported through inspection, peer learning and engagement with sector resources. Analysts should remain connected to national developments, collaborate with peers, and make use of resources that support continuous learning and reducing isolation in specialist roles.

Finally, SEND analysis can be demanding, particularly during inspection or periods of system pressure. Building resilience through effective workload management, seeking support, and reflective practice is essential to sustaining performance and supporting long-term capability.

19. Common Pitfalls and Mitigation Strategies

SEND analysis involves recurring risks linked to the statutory, multi-agency and small-cohort nature of the system. Many issues are not data problems, but challenges in interpretation, communication or understanding of process.

Key pitfalls to be aware of:

- **Over-interpreting small numbers**: small changes can create large percentage shifts; always present volumes alongside rates and explain volatility
- **Confusing compliance with outcomes**: statutory measures (e.g. timeliness) reflect process, not impact or experience
- **Ignoring changes in practice**: shifts in thresholds, recording or systems can distort trends, annotate and test with services
- **Assuming complete datasets**: SEND data is fragmented; no single dataset provides a full system view
- **Over-simplified benchmarking**: comparisons should provide context, not act as targets or league tables
- **Overloading outputs**: too much detail reduces clarity; focus on key messages and relevance

A further common risk is failing to document assumptions, exclusions or limitations. Without this, analysis becomes difficult to reproduce or defend. Analysts should ensure methods are transparent and clearly recorded, in line with guidance such as the Aqua Book (Analytical Quality Guidance)

20. Useful Resources and Learning Networks

Effective SEND analysis relies on using authoritative guidance, appropriate tools and professional networks. Given the complexity of the SEND system and the level of statutory and inspection scrutiny, analysts should use resources that are reliable, recognised and aligned to public sector standards.

These resources support analysts to:

- maintain alignment with statutory and inspection expectations
- apply consistent definitions and analytical approaches
- reduce duplication across local authorities
- build capability and resilience in a specialist role

Core resources include up-to-date statutory guidance, technical notes and inspection frameworks. These underpin statutory returns, assurance reporting and preparation for Area SEND inspections, and are essential for producing defensible and inspection ready analysis.

SEND analysis is typically delivered using general analytical tools and platforms rather than SEND specific systems. Effectiveness depends on:

- clear analytical purpose
- consistent application of definitions and logic
- transparent documentation and reproducible methods

Engagement in professional networks such as the NWADCS SEND Data Forum and the North West SEND Analysts Group quarterly meetings, is also important, as SEND analysis is a specialist discipline. Peer collaboration supports shared interpretation, early awareness of changes in guidance, and ongoing professional development.

Detailed examples of commonly used resources, tools and learning networks are provided in **Appendix B – Recommended SEND Analytical Resources**. This should be used to support onboarding, capability development, and preparation for inspection or system review.

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Appendix A – SEND Terminology and Acronyms

This appendix provides a reference glossary of commonly used SEND terminology and acronyms. It is intended to support consistent use of language across SEND analysis, assurance reporting, inspection preparation and governance documentation.

The terms included reflect those most frequently encountered in SEND datasets, statutory processes and analytical outputs. This appendix should be read alongside statutory guidance and local data governance arrangements.

Core SEND Terminology and Acronyms Table

Term / Acronym	Full Term	Statutory or Operational Meaning	Notes for Analytical Use
SEN	Special Educational Needs	Statutory classification defined in the Children and Families Act 2014; identified where special educational provision is required; recorded in datasets via SEN Support and EHCP status	Core analytical variable; always segment by SEN Support vs EHCP to avoid aggregation bias
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Umbrella policy and system-level term covering children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities, across education, health and care services	Do not treat as a discrete cohort unless explicitly defined; clarify whether analysis refers to SEN-only, EHCP, or wider disability groups
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	A legally binding plan setting out needs, provision and outcomes	High statutory and legal significance; accuracy is critical
EHCNA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment	Statutory assessment process leading to a decision on issuing an EHCP	Timeliness and decision outcomes are key compliance measures
SEN Support	Special Educational Needs Support	Support provided by education settings for CYP without an EHCP	Commonly reflects identified need below EHCP threshold;
EHM	Early Help Module	A case management system used prior to statutory social care for early intervention, family support, and targeted help	

Term / Acronym	Full Term	Statutory or Operational Meaning	Notes for Analytical Use
EYES	Early Years and Education System	A case management system that manages data, funding, and tracking for early years education, schooling, and special educational needs workflows	
Annual Review	Annual Review of an EHCP	Statutory review of an EHCP at least every 12 months	Should be analysed alongside timeliness, and resulting changes to provision
Amendment	EHCP Amendment	Statutory process to change some contents of an EHCP following review or reassessment, including proposed amendments and issuance of an amended final plan	Key driver of EHCP lifecycle timelines; analyse separately from review completion and link to plan issuance timescales.
Cease	Cease to maintain an EHCP	Legal decision to end an EHCP	Reasons for ceasing materially affect interpretation.
Tribunal	SEND Tribunal	First-tier Tribunal hearing appeals against SEND decisions	Data often held outside core systems; handle cautiously
PfA	Preparation for Adulthood	Statutory requirement within EHCP planning from Year 9 (age 14), focusing on outcomes related to employment, independent living, community inclusion, and health	Outcomes are not consistently captured in standard datasets; analysis often requires linking education, employment, and post-16 destination data
AP	Alternative Provision	Education arranged by local authorities or schools for pupils who cannot attend mainstream provision, typically in settings such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or other alternative providers	Definitions differ across datasets; align with AP Census and account for dual registration and movement between provisions
LA	Local Authority	Statutory, LA coordinates the SEND system including conducting EHC assessments, and securing provision for children and young people with SEND	Not interchangeable with “local area”; LA refers specifically to the statutory authority, not the wider SEND system across partners.
Timeliness	Statutory timescales	Legal deadlines governing EHC needs assessments, plan issuance, and annual reviews	Indicates compliance with statutory deadlines; does not measure quality of plans, appropriateness of provision, or outcomes for children and young people

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Appendix B – Resources and Learning Networks

This appendix provides a reference list of commonly used resources that support SEND analytical practice in LAs. It is not exhaustive and should be reviewed periodically to reflect changes in guidance, inspection focus or local arrangements.

SEND Resources and Tools Reference Table

Resource Category	Example Resources	Primary Use	Notes for SEND Analysts
Statutory Guidance	SEND Code of Practice; SEN2 Technical Guide	Statutory compliance and definition setting	Treat as authoritative sources for definitions and timescales
Inspection Frameworks	Area SEND Inspection Framework	Inspection readiness and assurance	Ensure alignment with internal dashboards and narratives
National Data Sources	SEND Dashboard (DfE); Explore Education Statistics	Contextual and comparative analysis	Avoid simple rankings of areas (league tables); interpret differences in context rather than assuming they reflect performance
Analytical Standards	Government Analysis Function guidance	Sets standards for public sector analysis (quality, transparency, QA)	Supports defensible, reproducible analytical practice
Data Protection Guidance	ICO data protection guidance	Lawful and ethical data handling	Particularly relevant for SEND personal data
Sector-Led Insight	Data to Insight resources	Shared learning and benchmarking	Reduces duplication and isolation
National Statistics & Official Releases	Special Educational Needs in England (DfE Statistical Release; Explore Education Statistics (SEND dataset)	Annual national statistics on SEN/EHCP populations, characteristics, and trends; Interactive data platform with API access for SEND datasets	Core baseline for national context and benchmarking; Enables self-serve tables and integration with tools like Power B
Data Compendiums & Meta Sources	DfE SEND Data Sources Analysis (2024)	Comprehensive mapping of SEND-related datasets across education, health, and care	Useful for understanding data coverage gaps and fragmentation

Resource Category	Example Resources	Primary Use	Notes for SEND Analysts
Parliamentary and Policy Data Tools	House of Commons SEND Data Dashboard	LA and constituency-level SEND indicators	Includes EHCP timeliness, funding, tribunals, and trends
Multi-agency & Outcomes Framework Tools	Outcomes-Based SEND Data Dashboard (CDC); 0–25 Multi-agency SEND Data Dashboard (CDC)	Tracks outcomes (voice, health, learning, safety, etc.) across SEND system. Integrated education, health, and care dataset for commissioning	Supports move from compliance to outcomes-based assurance
Benchmarking & Comparative Analytics	LG Inform (SEND indicators)	Local government benchmarking platform	Useful for combining SEND with wider children's services metrics
Advanced Analytical & Consultancy Tools	Mime SEND Dashboard & Forecasting Models; Mime SEND Inclusion & Analytics Services	Integrated dashboards combining >100 data sources; Forecasting, reform modelling, and SEND analytics frameworks	Supports demand modelling, benchmarking, and inspection prep; Useful for scenario planning and reform readiness

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Acknowledgements
NWADCS would like to thank SEND analysts and performance colleagues across the North West who contributed their time, expertise and feedback during the development of this guide.

Feedback and Enquiries
This guide is intended to evolve over time. Comments, feedback, suggested amendments and questions should be directed to the North West Association of Directors of Children's Services (NWADCS) using the contact details below. Please include "SEND Analyst Guide" in the subject line of your email.

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