



THE 2026 PRIMARY SEND & INCLUSION GUIDE

What the new Ofsted framework really means for inclusion, assessment and showing progress.

**10 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS
FOR TEACHERS**

BSquared 



THE 2026 PRIMARY SEND & INCLUSION GUIDE

Dale Pickles, Managing Director of B Squared and a leading figure in education and SEND for more than 25 years, shares his top 10 essential insights that every school should know.

Ofsted is not asking schools to do more for pupils with SEND. But it is asking schools to understand more.

Inspectors are clear that inspection is about insight, not paperwork. Their focus is on how well leaders and staff understand pupils' needs, barriers and progress — particularly for those with SEND.

“Inspectors seek to understand the needs of individual pupils and their particular challenges and barriers.”

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Do school leaders understand the needs of pupils with SEND?
How are leaders removing barriers?

**INSPECTION IS
ABOUT INSIGHT, NOT
PAPERWORK.**



INCLUSION IS NO LONGER A SEPARATE CONVERSATION

In the current framework, SEND is not treated as an add-on.

INCLUSION IS:



Curriculum
design



Teaching
decisions



Assessment
practice



Leadership
understanding

Ofsted is explicit about where effective inclusion starts:

“The most effective inclusion strategy begins with everyday high-quality inclusive teaching.”



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This means SEND is not about extra systems or extra paperwork.
It's about how well schools adapt what they already do — every day.



Does your current approach support planning and creation of
meaningful learning opportunities for pupils with SEND?



WHAT INSPECTORS ARE REALLY LOOKING FOR (AND WHAT THEY'RE NOT)

One of the biggest misconceptions about inspection is the role of data. Ofsted is very clear:

“Inspectors will not review internal data.”



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What inspectors will do is talk to leaders about how assessment information is used and what it tells them.

Strong schools don't overwhelm inspectors with spreadsheets. They explain what they know — and what they've done because of it.



What insights do you have into the learning, strengths and needs of pupils with SEND?

**INSPECTORS DON'T
WANT MORE DATA.
THEY WANT BETTER
UNDERSTANDING**



PROGRESS MEANS PROGRESS FROM STARTING POINTS

For pupils with SEND, progress is not defined by age-related expectations. Inspectors explicitly recognise this

“Inspectors consider pupils’ starting points and the progress they make from them.”



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They also acknowledge the limits of headline outcomes:

“Published outcomes may not give a sufficiently detailed picture of the progress and achievement of some groups of pupils, including pupils with SEND.”



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PROGRESS FOR SEND PUPILS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:



Increased independence



Improved communication



Sustained engagement



Application of skills over time

What matters is that schools can explain why it matters.



Can you show progress from starting point, or are pupils with SEND simply labelled “below”?



KNOWING PUPILS MATTERS MORE THAN KNOWING SYSTEMS

HIGH-QUALITY INSPECTION CONVERSATIONS SOUND HUMAN. THEY INCLUDE:



"This is what this pupil finds difficult..."



"This is what changed when we adapted..."



"This is what progress looks like for them..."

Inspectors expect leaders to have this level of insight:

"Leaders have a secure understanding of these pupils' needs and the progress they make."



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This confidence doesn't come from software or forms alone. It comes from assessment being meaningful and embedded.



Does your assessment limit your understanding of your pupils with SEND?



SEND EVIDENCE LIVES IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE

Inspectors do not arrive expecting bespoke SEND folders. They gather evidence through what they see and hear:

“Inspectors collect first-hand evidence mainly through professional conversations.”



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SEND EVIDENCE IS VISIBLE WHEN:



Assessment informs teaching



Adaptations are purposeful



Support is reviewed regularly



Staff share a common language

Not when schools create documents for inspection.



How is the information about works well for your pupils with SEND passed on to the next teacher?



CONSISTENCY MATTERS MORE THAN BRILLIANCE

OFSTED REPEATEDLY EMPHASISES SUSTAINED IMPACT OVER TIME.

FOR SEND, THIS MEANS:



Monitoring progress
regularly



Reviewing support
systematically



Adjusting provision
when needed

“Leaders monitor the progress of pupils with SEND, and review adaptations and support systematically, making any necessary changes.”



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Simple, consistent approaches
outperform complex systems that
staff don't fully understand.



What data do you have for pupils with SEND
that can help you improve provision?

INCLUSION STARTS WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

The framework is explicit on this point. Supporting pupils with SEND must not mean lowering ambition.

“Leaders make sure their work improves the progress and achievement of pupils with SEND and they do not lower their expectations of them.”



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**EFFECTIVE SUPPORT REMOVES BARRIERS —
IT DOES NOT NARROW OPPORTUNITY**



Does your current approach work for pupils with SEND or have they become a forgotten cohort?





ASSESSMENT SHOULD REDUCE WORKLOAD, NOT INCREASE IT

Assessment is not about generating evidence for Ofsted. It exists to support learning.

“Assessment is used to help pupils embed key concepts, use knowledge fluently and develop their understanding.”

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When assessment becomes burdensome, it stops serving its purpose — **AND INSPECTORS ARE ALERT TO THAT.**



Can you identify next steps, identify barriers to learning and show progress for pupils with SEND?



THE GRADUATED APPROACH IS A MINDSET, NOT A FORM

Inspectors are clear that effective SEND support follows a continuous cycle:

“Leaders use the ‘graduated approach’ (a continuous cycle of ‘assess, plan, do and review’).”



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The strongest schools live this cycle daily. They don't complete it for compliance — **THEY USE IT TO GUIDE DECISIONS.**



How do you monitor the APDR cycle? How can you measure the impact to know what is or isn't working?

CALM SCHOOLS FEEL SAFER

SCHOOLS THAT FEEL CONFIDENT IN INSPECTION:



Don't panic



Don't overproduce
evidence



Don't chase
last-minute data

They trust their systems because those systems are already part of everyday practice. Ofsted reinforces this:

"Inspectors do not need leaders to produce documents specifically for an inspection."



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Do your systems include pupils with SEND by design?



CONNECTING STEPS OFFERS A SOLUTION TO SHOW MEANINGFUL DATA TO OFSTED

What is Connecting Steps? Connecting Steps is an inclusive pupil progress tracker for Primary Schools that's quick and easy to use. It reduces teacher workload and simplifies whole school assessment data for senior leaders.

"IT HELPS US EXPLAIN WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW." BY



Capturing progress
that matters



Identifying next
steps and barriers



Supporting the
assess-plan-do-
review cycle



Keeping assessment
meaningful



Covering soft skills
as well as academic
skills



Giving leaders
confidence
in conversations



Book 15-minute demo

Would you like to see what this looks like in your school? Book a 15-minute demo of Connecting Steps! Our expert will share their screen and take you through the software to show what it can do.

CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS

Here's a small selection of feedback from customers using Connecting Steps.



We see B Squared's Connecting Steps as a valuable part of our comprehensive assessment programme. We can now demonstrate all student progress, however small. It has also helped us to be secure in our judgements and improve learning outcomes as a result."

Michelle O'Reilly, Head of School

Cedars School



"B Squared has played an important role in our school in terms of unifying our school's assessment approach, reducing workload, and clarifying how we measure steps of progress made by our pupils."

Joanne Watson, Assistant Head Teacher

Bluebell Park School



"It is a really useful assessment tool for children who do not fit within our whole school assessment system. It provides precise, exact targets to measure progress and support some of our most vulnerable children."

Mariya Bobeen, Inclusion Lead and SENDCo,

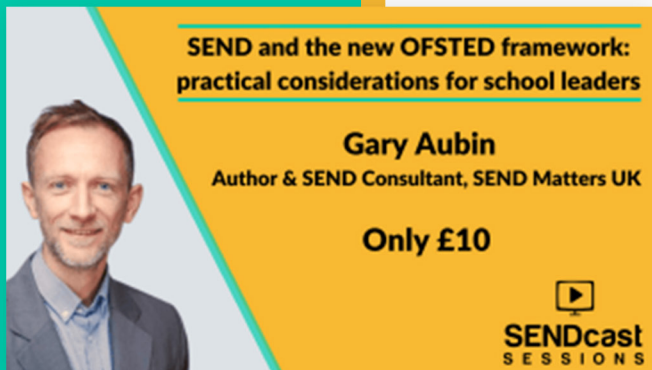
Lapage Primary School and Nursery



"Connecting Steps has been a really valuable tool in our school. It gives us a clear picture of development over time and helps us celebrate achievements that might otherwise go unnoticed. It's simple to use and makes tracking progress much more meaningful for both staff and pupils."

Jennie Marinho, Headteacher

New Horizon Academy



BUILD UNDERSTANDING BEYOND SYSTEMS

Inspection readiness is not just about frameworks — it's about understanding.

That's why many schools turn to The SENDcast as the go to hub for all things SEND:



Podcast – free weekly conversations that deepen SEND understanding.



Sessions – online CPD training sessions focused on inclusion.

Helping schools to stay updated on best practices, policy changes, and practical strategies to improve knowledge and understanding.



A FINAL THOUGHT FROM DALE



The schools that feel most secure going into inspection aren't doing anything extraordinary. They:



Know their
pupils



Understand
progress



Use assessment
wisely



Talk about **SEND**
with clarity



If this guide feels familiar, you're probably already closer than you think. **Need help?**
[Click here for a free 15 min demo](#)



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Managing Director, B Squared
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