

# What Works in SEND

## *Thinking about evaluating a SEND project*

Practical tools to accompany the Effective Practice Evidence Framework for SEND system leaders to use when planning projects or considering submitting a case study to the Framework

May 2023



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# Introduction

## Who and what is this document for?

**This document is designed to accompany the Effective Practice Evidence Framework**, which aims to capture evidence of effective practice in establishing and sustaining effective local SEND (special educational needs and disability) systems from local systems' practice.

**The document has been designed to be used by system leaders of local SEND systems during the life cycles of specific SEND system improvement projects** – it contains tools and templates that could be used at the start of a project (to capture plans – hence some of the tools are written in the future tense), as well as during and at key milestones of a project (to capture impact – hence the evidence standards for Framework are written in past tense).

**This resource is not intended to be a “how to evaluate” guide**, nor to teach people about research or evaluation methodologies. Instead, this document has been designed to align with the evidence standards of the Effective Practice Evidence Framework to provide practical reminders and tools for SEND system leaders to use when planning and evaluating SEND system improvement projects. Our idea has been for these tools to be things that could be used in a short planning workshop to frame and capture system leaders' thinking.

**Overall, we want to create a virtuous circle** – whereby using these tools helps local SEND system leaders with planning and delivering their projects, which then achieve their aims, and create examples of effective practice for the Framework, which inspire SEND system improvement projects in other local areas.

# Introduction

## About the What Works in SEND programme

The “What Works in SEND” programme is an ambitious learning and innovation programme designed to generate high-quality evidence of what works in improving practice, support and outcomes within the SEND system in England. The programme is led by the RISE (Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence) Partnership, which is made up of four partners – the Council for Disabled Children, Isos Partnership, the National Development Team for Inclusion, and the University of Warwick.

## About the Effective Practice Evidence Framework

Alongside capturing insights about what works in SEND from published research, we also want to capture evidence of what works in SEND from practice in local SEND systems. This is the aim of what we are calling the “Effective Practice Evidence Framework”. Put simply, **our intention is that the Effective Practice Evidence Framework will provide a robust process for capturing, validating and sharing examples of effective practice, drawn from local SEND systems in England, about what works in establishing and sustaining effective approaches within local SEND systems.** By “local SEND systems”, we mean the arrangements across all partners for identifying, assessing and supporting children and young people with SEND within local authority areas in England.

# Introduction

## The structure of this document

**Case studies included within the Effective Practice Evidence Framework are those that meet three evidence standards.**

1. Projects should have a clear aim of improving an aspect of the local SEND system.
2. Projects should be evaluated, show quantifiable evidence of impact, and share findings.
3. Projects should be sustainable and relevant to other local areas (and potentially replicable).

**This document is structured around those three evidence standards.** For each one, we –

- explain what we mean by each evidence standard;
- set out some key questions to consider when planning or capturing a project;
- offer a template that SEND system leaders could use to frame and capture thinking; and
- use an illustrative example to show how a SEND system improvement project could be captured using the template.

**On the next page, there is an overall SEND system improvement project planning template that brings together the three evidence standards in one framework.**

# Overall planning framework

## Linking the three evidence standards

### Part 1: Aims

What are you trying to change?

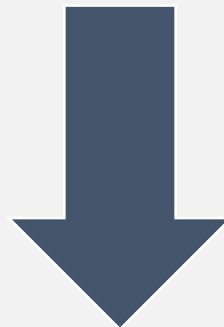
What is the issue(s) you want to address?  
What are the root causes?



### Part 2: Impact

What do you hope will happen as a result?

What is the impact you want to achieve?  
When will you see it?



### Part 3: Sustainability

How will this project be sustained?

How will you incorporate this into day-to-day work? Is the project replicable?



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# Part 1: Aims

## What did the project set out to change?

### Introduction / about the evidence standard

We are looking for projects that have a clear aim(s) of improving a specific aspect(s) of the local SEND system. We are looking specifically for projects where the activity undertaken has made a positive difference to the experiences of and support for young people with SEND and their families. While we are not overly prescriptive and recognise that what would constitute evidence of success will depend on each project, we insist that, for inclusion on the Framework, projects should be able to quantify baselines or benchmarks at the start that can be used as a point of comparison to judge whether the project has achieved its goals. We are equally interested in projects undertaken on system-wide scale, or projects where a strategic initiative is piloted on a smaller scale as a microcosm of the SEND system (e.g., a locality, or a cluster of settings, schools and services).

**To summarise, to be included in the Effective Practice Evidence Framework, projects must –**

- ❖ have a clear **aim(s)** of improving a specific aspect(s) of experience and/or support for young people with SEND and families.
- ❖ have quantifiable **pre-project baselines / benchmarks** and **post-project goals** through which success in achieving the aims of the project can be measured (and ideally some form of comparison group).



# Evidence standard 1: Aims

## What did the project set out to change?

### Key questions to consider

1. **What is the issue you were / are trying to solve?** Why was / is it a problem? What was / is causing this issue? Describe and evidence the issue currently – symptoms, causes, linked factors, location and comparison to other local areas, baseline / benchmarks.
2. **What did / do you want to be different?** What would success look like? – clear and measurable goal(s), directly comparable to the pre-project baseline or other appropriate benchmarks (e.g., comparison to similar local SEND systems).
3. **What actions were take to / will address the issues and achieve success?** What evidence of “what works” have you used to develop your plan of action? How did / do you know that these actions will address the issues you have identified? – e.g., local feedback, research evidence, effective practice case studies.
4. **What barriers could get in the way?** What could prevent your project achieving its goals? How will these be managed?

# Evidence standard 1: Aims

A practical tool (template)

**KQ1. What is the issue you want to address?**

**KQ2. What should be different? What would be success?**

**KQ3. What actions will address the issue?**

**KQ4. What barriers could get in the way?**

# Evidence standard 1: Aims

## A practical tool (with illustrative example)

**KQ1. What is the issue you want to address?**

There is a lack of systematic capturing of the voices, views and lived experiences of young people with SEND. This means strategic initiatives are not informed nor impact lived experiences. The reasons for this are a lack of capacity + systematic routines for capturing feedback and co-production.

**KQ2. What should be different? What would be success?**

That feedback from and co-production with young people feature increasingly in strategic decision-making across the local SEND system – at strategic partnership and individual service / setting level. As a result, young people feel more engaged in shaping aspects of the local SEND system, and report positive changes in the way support is delivered.

**KQ3. What actions will address the issue?**

Based on evidence of effective engagement with young people with SEND (from research evidence), developed a plan to pilot new approaches to gathering views from young people in one locality, working with and through schools and colleges. Ambition is to test how to develop a network of young people's groups to identify priorities and co-produce solutions.

**KQ4. What barriers could get in the way?**

Capacity and skills – lack of right capacity and skills to engage meaningfully.  
Communications – communications barriers; exercise appears tokenistic and superficial.  
(Mitigation: Work with staff skilled in engaging young people in settings.)

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# Evidence standard 2: Impact

## What were the results?

### Introduction / about the evidence standard

We are looking for projects that can show quantifiable evidence of positive impact in achieving project goals compared to pre-project benchmarks. Projects should have been formally evaluated (internally by a local partnership, an independent review, or a research study), and have shared (or have a plan for sharing) the findings publicly with key strategic partnership fora. When we talk about impact in the Effective Practice Evidence Framework, there are four broad areas that we will focus on –

1. positive feedback about impact on lived experiences of young people with SEND and families;
2. quantifiable education, health and/or wellbeing outcomes for young people with SEND;
3. positive feedback about impact from professionals working in the SEND system; and
4. evidence of impact on long-term outcomes for children / young people with SEND.

**To summarise, to be included in the Effective Practice Evidence Framework, projects must –**

- ❖ have a clear plan (methodology) for **capturing** and **evaluating** evidence of change;
- ❖ have **quantifiable evidence of impact**, showing positive change compared to pre-project benchmarks; and
- ❖ have **shared** (or have a plan for sharing) the evaluation of impact and any recommended actions (e.g., for sustaining / rolling out the project) publicly with key partnership fora.

# Evidence standard 2: Impact

## What were the results?

### Key questions to consider

1. What impact did / do you expect to see and when? How did / will you track and capture impact? Given what you expect to be different (evidence standard 1), what evidence would tell you if this had been achieved (see the four areas of impact on the previous page)? From whom can you capture qualitative feedback (young people, parents, professionals)? How can this be done systematically? What data is available and would show impact? Are there any “leading or proxy indicators”?
2. Who is best placed to evaluate the project? A local / partnership, an independent review, or an academic research study?
3. How have / will the findings of the evaluation be shared? What is the right format to capture and present findings – a short briefing, paper with recommendations, formal report? Who / which fora needs to know about the project and can make decisions about how any recommendations to sustain it are taken forward?

# Evidence standard 2: Impact

## A practical tool (template)

<b>KQ1. What <u>impact</u> expect to see? When?</b>	<b><u>What</u> impact do you expect to see?</b>	<b><u>When</u> do you expect to see this impact</b>	<b>What <u>evidence</u> can you collect to show this?</b>
<b>KQ2. <u>Who</u> is best placed to <u>evaluate / capture impact</u> of the project?</b>	<b><u>Who</u>?</b>		<b><u>Why</u>?</b>
<b>KQ3. How will the findings be <u>shared</u>?</b>	<b>Shared <u>where</u> / what fora?</b>		<b>In what <u>format</u>?</b>

# Evidence standard 2: Impact

## A practical tool (with illustrative example)

**KQ1. What impact expect to see? When?**

**What impact do you expect to see?**

Feedback from and co-production with young people featuring in decision-making. Young people feel engaged in shaping system-wide developments.

**When do you expect to see this impact**

After young people's network established and first round of co-production projects completed (c.2 years). Interim feedback for those involved after 1 year.

**What evidence can you collect to show this?**

Systematic benchmarking surveys / engagements with young people using a consistent set of questions to track progress. Audits of specific projects.

**KQ2. Who is best placed to evaluate / capture impact of the project?**

**Who?**

Small internal team (multi-partner, including young people reps), with partnership steering group and an external adviser to check / validate findings.

**Why?**

Initially requires fast feedback on small-scale project to drive action. Thereafter, manage routine feedback routines. (Needs to be owned, driven locally – no need for independent evaluator.)

**KQ3. How will the findings be shared?**

**Shared where / what fora?**

Reported to SEND Board and senior leadership teams within key partner agencies – to ensure feedback from young people is central to their self-assessments and decision-making.

**In what format?**

Short written report with key findings, practical lessons, and practical recommendations / next steps.



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# Evidence standard 3: Sustainability

## Introduction / about the evidence standard


**We are looking for projects that have been “sustained”**, by which we mean that the practice that the project was testing has been continued and become part of “business-as-usual”, or it is planned for this to be the case. We also want to include case studies where the learning from the project would be of interest and relevant to other local SEND systems in England facing similar challenges, and could potentially be replicated (and adapted) in other locality or local SEND system from the original project. Put simply, we want to include case studies in the Effective Practice Evidence Framework that have led to lasting change where they have been developed and have the potential to influence and inform practice in other parts of the SEND system in England. (We consider that there is less value highlighting practices that are so dependent on specific circumstances or context that they could not be sustained or be of relevance to other local SEND systems.)

**To summarise, to be included in the Effective Practice Evidence Framework, projects must –**

- ❖ show evidence that the project has been **sustained** or have a clear plan for how the project will be sustained as “business-as-usual” (i.e., not discontinued); and
- ❖ be able to demonstrate that the findings from this project are relevant to, and could be **replicated and adapted** in, other local areas (i.e., the project is not dependent on conditions unique to one local area).

# Evidence standard 3: Sustainability

## Key questions to consider

- 1. How has / will the work of the project be embedded and incorporated into day-to-day practice?** Consider how the project will be continued and incorporated into “business-as-usual”. How will this be overseen, monitored, and ongoing impact tracked to ensure it is sustained? What conditions are necessary for this project to be successful (e.g., human or financial resources)? Can these be sustained long-term?
  - 2. How has / will the learning from the project be rolled out or used to inform similar approaches beyond where the project originally took place?** Would the learning from this project be relevant and of interest to other local SEND systems dealing with similar challenges? Would it be possible to roll out the project to another setting / locality within the original local SEND system or to replicate and adapt in another local SEND system? What would be required to replicate and adapt this project in another location?
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# Evidence standard 3: Sustainability

## A practical tool (template)

**KQ1. How will the project be embedded and sustained?**

What are the conditions necessary for the project?

Can these be sustained? Is there a plan to do so?

What actions needed to sustain the project?

Where / on what scale will the project take place?

Could it be rolled out in another locality / area?

What actions needed to roll out / replicate?

**KQ2. Is there scope to roll out and replicate the project?**



# Evidence standard 3: Sustainability

## A practical tool (with illustrative example)

**KQ1. How will the project be embedded and sustained?**

What are the conditions necessary for the project?

Required dedicated capacity to co-ordinate the network of young people, and the willingness of existing young people's groups to be part of the network.

Can these be sustained? Is there a plan to do so?

Yes – requires decision to be made about continuing to fund a “Young People’s Voice Coordinator” post, and commitment from senior partners to use feedback from young people systematically.

What actions needed to sustain the project?

Agree a rolling programme of gathering views / feedback from young people, identifying and agreeing specific priorities, and undertaking specific co-production projects.

Where / on what scale will the project take place?

Project took place with schools and colleges in one locality.

Could it be rolled out in another locality / area?

Yes – the approach could be rolled out to other localities, where existing young people’s groups could be brought into the wider network.

What actions needed to roll out / replicate?

Work with phase associations to identify existing young people’s groups. Develop specific offer / set of asks to be part of the local area’s new young people’s network.

**KQ2. Is there scope to roll out and replicate the project?**