SENCO Handbook: New Ofsted Inspection Framework & How Earwig Academic Supports You

Introduction

This handbook provides a clear, practical guide for SENCOs navigating the newest Ofsted inspection rules. Whether you're the SENCo in a mainstream school, a Pupil Referral Unit or a special school, this handbook explains what inspectors now focus on, how this impacts your daily practice, and how you can streamline evidence, reporting, and communication to ensure you are inspection-ready at all times.

1. Overview of the New Ofsted Inspection Approach

Ofsted's updated inspection approach places stronger emphasis on:

1.1 Quality of Education for All Pupils

Inspectors now look closely at how well the curriculum is designed, delivered, and adapted for SEND pupils. They expect:

- Curriculum ambition to match that of non-SEND peers
- Consistent implementation across subjects
- Evidence of progress over time, not just attainment

1.2 Inclusion & Leadership

Inspectors examine how leaders (including SENCOs):

- Identify needs accurately
- Allocate support effectively
- Monitor outcomes
- Ensure provision is equitable and high-quality

1.3 The Lived Experience of the Child

There is a heavier focus on:

- How SEND pupils feel about school
- How confident they are as learners
- Whether they attend and engage consistently

1.4 Evidence Through 'Deep Dives'

SEND is now woven into every deep dive. Inspectors expect:

- Clear examples of adaptations
- Lesson visits showing how SEND pupils access learning
- Work scrutiny showing progress according to need

2. What Ofsted Now Wants SENCOs to Demonstrate

2.1 Clear Identification of Need

- Timely assessments
- Clear use of graduated approach (Assess–Plan–Do–Review)
- Strong communication with parents and external agencies

2.2 Strong Systems for Monitoring Progress

You must show:

- Progress against individual outcomes
- Provision effectiveness
- Evidence of review cycles
- Data that is meaningful—not generic

2.3 High-Quality Provision Maps & Interventions

Inspectors look for:

- Logical provision mapping
- Evidence for why provision was chosen
- Measurable impact on pupil progress

2.4 Pupil & Family Voice

Expect to demonstrate:

- Pupil involvement in planning and reviewing outcomes

- Regular communication with families
- Evidence of co-production, not top-down decisions

2.5 Join-Up With Teachers

Inspectors expect teachers—not just SENCOs—to:

- Understand pupil needs
- Know how to adapt lessons
- Take responsibility for progress

3. Practical Steps to Prepare for Inspection

Step 1: Have Your Core SEND Evidence Ready

- Updated SEND register
- Individual plans with clear, measurable outcomes
- Intervention logs
- Attendance & engagement data
- Pupil voice summaries

Step 2: Ensure Teacher Accountability Is Clear

- Provide simple guides for adaptations
- Schedule termly SEND reviews with teachers
- Evidence how teachers use strategies in practice

Step 3: Make Provision Impact Easy to Demonstrate

- Use before/after evidence
- Keep short notes for each cycle
- Have a clear rationale for all interventions

Step 4: Prioritise Pupil Voice

- Keep quotes, short videos, or tagged observations
- Record feedback in reviews

Step 5: Show That Parents Are Partners

- Document meetings
- Provide copies of plans
- Evidence co-production

3.1 Expanded Deep Dive Scripts (SEND-Focused)

Below are ready-to-use scripts for SENCOs, teachers, and leaders during Ofsted deep dives. These help ensure consistent, confident responses.

Deep Dive Script: SENCO

Inspector: *How do you identify pupils with SEND?*
SENCO: We use a combination of teacher referral, assessment data, observations, and parental input. Earwig helps us gather evidence and track emerging patterns. We follow the APDR cycle, with each stage recorded and reviewed termly.

Inspector: *How do you monitor progress for SEND pupils?*
SENCO: We track progress through outcome-led evidence on Earwig. Each piece of evidence is tagged to the pupil's specific targets or EHCP outcomes. This builds a clear learning journey that shows progress over time.

Inspector: *How do teachers know how to adapt for these pupils?*
SENCO: Every teacher has immediate access to strategies, targets, and plans through Earwig. During learning walks, we see these adaptations consistently implemented.

Inspector: *How do you know your provision is effective?*
SENCO: We review intervention data each half-term. Earwig's costed provision map and impact reports show what is working and where adjustments are needed.

Deep Dive Script: Classroom Teacher

Inspector: *Tell me about the SEND pupils in your class.*
Teacher: I access each pupil's plan through Earwig. I review targets weekly and record evidence directly to their outcomes.

Inspector: *How do you adapt teaching?*
Teacher: I use scaffolded tasks, pre-teaching, visuals, and chunked instructions. My adaptations are consistent, not occasional.

Inspector: *How do you know they are making progress?*
Teacher: I tag evidence to specific outcomes and APDR targets on Earwig. I can clearly see what they've achieved over time.

Deep Dive Script: Senior Leadership

Inspector: *How do leaders ensure SEND is part of curriculum design?*
SLT: SEND is embedded across subjects. We use Earwig reports to identify gaps and guide CPD.

Inspector: *How do you monitor impact?*
SLT: We triangulate observations, work scrutiny, and Earwig progress data. This shows alignment between curriculum intent, implementation, and pupil outcomes.

3.2 APDR (Assess–Plan–Do–Review) Cycles

Below are templates and examples you can use immediately.

APDR Template

Assess:

- Assessment results
- Teacher observations
- Parent/pupil views
- Baseline evidence (photos, videos, written work)

Plan:

- Measurable short-term outcomes
- Strategies and interventions
- Responsible adults
- Timescale

Do:

- Daily adaptations
- Intervention sessions
- Notes on engagement
- Evidence tagged on Earwig

Review:

- What progress was made?
- Did the strategies work?
- What evidence shows this?
- Next steps or new targets

Example APDR Cycle: Year 3 Pupil with Speech & Language Needs

Assess:

- Struggles with expressive language; SALT report confirms difficulty forming complex sentences
- Teacher observation: avoids speaking in whole-class situations
- Baseline evidence uploaded to Earwig

Plan:

- Outcome: Pupil will use 3-part sentences in structured small-group activities 3 times per week
- Strategies: visual sentence starters, pre-teaching vocabulary, small-group speech sessions
- Responsible: teacher + TA
- Timescale: 6 weeks

Do:

- Daily in-class scaffolding
- Weekly small-group speech sessions
- Evidence collected and tagged to outcome

Review:

- Progress seen in small-group sessions; pupil used 3-part sentences with prompts
- Evidence confirms improved confidence
- New target: extend to whole-class contributions once weekly

Example APDR Cycle: Secondary Pupil with Dyslexia

Assess:

- Reading age significantly below chronological age
- Avoids extended writing; teacher notes poor stamina
- Samples uploaded to Earwig

Plan:

- Outcome: Produce extended writing of at least 100 words using assistive technology
- Strategies: laptop use, speech-to-text support, chunked writing tasks
- Responsible: English teacher
- Timescale: 8 weeks

Do:

- Laptop used in all writing lessons
- Weekly writing stamina intervention
- Evidence tagged to outcomes

Review:

- Student achieved 120-word piece using assistive tech
- Increased independence noted
- Next outcome: improve spelling accuracy in high-frequency words

4. How Earwig Academic Helps SENCOs Meet the New Ofsted Requirements

Earwig Academic is designed to provide a complete evidence and reporting ecosystem for SEND. Here is how it supports each of the new inspection expectations.

4.1 Clear, Measurable Progress Evidence (Deep Dive Ready)

Earwig allows you to:

- Capture real-time photo, video, and written evidence
- Tag evidence directly to EHCP outcomes, IEP targets, or curriculum steps
- Generate progress timelines that inspectors can understand instantly

This means you can show learning journeys—not just data.

4.2 Graduated Approach Made Automatic

Earwig structures your Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycles so you can:

- Input assessments
- Link provision and support strategies
- Evidence reviews with one click
- Track impact over time

Everything is stored chronologically, making it easy to demonstrate consistency.

4.3 Provision Mapping & Impact Reporting

Earwig provides:

- A full digital provision map
- Costed interventions
- Automatic impact reporting using your real evidence

This directly supports Ofsted's focus on leadership and decision-making.

4.4 Teacher Accountability & Whole-School Consistency

Teachers can:

- Upload evidence from any device
- Tag SEN activities to specific pupils and outcomes
- Access strategies and targets instantly

Inspectors will now see SEND provision happening across subjects—not locked in the SENCO's office.

4.5 Strong Pupil & Parent Voice

Earwig supports:

- Shared portfolios for families
- Parent views included in plans and reviews
- Pupil comments captured as evidence

This helps show co-production in a simple, transparent way.

4.6 Inspection-Ready Reporting in Minutes

With one click, you can generate:

- Ofsted-ready SEND impact reports
- Provision effectiveness summaries
- Individual pupil learning journeys
- Cohort-level progress insights

This means you are always inspection-ready, without scrambling to gather last-minute evidence.

5. Inspection Day: What to Prepare Through Earwig

Have ready:

- A report showing progress for each SEND category
- Evidence collections for pupils featured in deep dives
- Provision map with costings and impacts
- APDR cycles for selected pupils
- Examples of adaptations in different subjects

Inspectors love clarity—Earwig helps you present information cleanly and confidently.

6. Checklist: What Ofsted Wants to See

SEND Leadership

- ✓ Clear processes and monitoring
- ✓ Effective use of assessments
- ✓ Impact of interventions

Quality of Education

- ✓ Ambitious curriculum for SEND
- ✓ Adaptations embedded across subjects
- ✓ Evidence of progress over time

Pupil Experience

- ✓ Voices heard and reflected
- ✓ Engagement in learning
- ✓ Good attendance and relationships

Parent Partnerships

- ✓ Transparent communication
- ✓ Co-produced plans
- ✓ Evidence that concerns are addressed

How Earwig Supports All of This

- ✓ Centralised evidence
- ✓ APDR structure
- ✓ Impact reporting
- ✓ Family engagement
- ✓ Teacher involvement

7. Final Tips for SENCOs

- Keep evidence small and frequent rather than long and rare
- Make teachers responsible for tagging their SEND pupils
- Review data half-termly, not termly
- Use Earwig reports to guide meetings and planning
- Keep the language simple and outcomes measurable

Conclusion

With Ofsted's focus shifting towards clarity, consistency, and real progress, SENCOs need a system that captures the full story of each child. Earwig Academic gives you the evidence, structure, and reporting tools to demonstrate impact confidently and efficiently.

With the right processes and an organised evidence system, inspections become far less stressful and SEND provision becomes even stronger.