

What can I expect from an Educational Psychology (EP) Advice & Assessment when my child is undergoing an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA)?

Do EPs always have to give advice?

It is a statutory requirement for psychological advice to be included in every EHC needs assessment

However, the local authority should only seek this if they do not already have it.

If there has already been involvement from an EP which you and the local authority think is still accurate, then no additional advice will be provided during the EHCNA process.

What impacts how EPs carry out their work as part of an EHCNA?

Standards- Educational Psychologists have to follow professional standards. This means that they have to have a clear reason for the work activities they do and so use their professional judgement to decide this

Time – EPs have to provide their advice for an EHCNA within 6 weeks. This means that their assessment is best seen as an ‘assessment in time’ rather than a complete assessment of everything.

Purpose – EPs are asked by the local authority to provide advice and so when giving their advice this is the main audience the EP is writing for. It may be that parents or settings feel they would like different or additional information; this can be discussed and requested through our regular work with schools which is separate to the work we do for EHCNAs.

What does an ‘assessment’ look like?

There is no standard approach as it is dependent on the information already available.

EPs look at the available information and try to ‘fill gaps’ in their knowledge or triangulate (check out) existing information. They will only do what they need to do to understand your child well enough to provide advice. Due to the limited time available they will never be able to know everything and may have to choose to focus on certain areas.

There are lots of ways of doing assessment, this can include talking to adults who know the child, observing, doing tests which assess specific skills or talking more informally with your child.

We understand that sometimes assessment is seen as the time we spend with your child and that this is valued as the best way to ‘see’ your child’s needs. Please be reassured our psychologists are very skilled at using a range of information to understand your child’s needs

Will they always do direct work with my child?

Not necessarily, for the reasons given above. Each assessment is individual and the reasons for working with or not working with your child (and what the EP does with your child) will differ.

In some cases direct work is not appropriate, e.g. very young children or children who are looked after; and EPs may work through other adults who have a relationship with the child.

Where the EP has not previously been involved with your child it is more likely that the EP or an assistant EP will do some form of direct work.

In some cases direct work is more about seeking your child's views, which are very important.

What is a cognitive assessment and will my child have one?

A cognitive assessment is not a single thing; there are actually a range of assessments that explore a child's thinking (cognitive) skills.

People most commonly associate this with a certain type of assessment which gives scores for the child's different cognitive skills (a 'standardised' cognitive assessment). EPs are strongly associated with these as they are one of the few professionals who can carry these out.

For the reasons given above this will not necessarily be carried out with your child unless the EP feel this is needed. In most cases the EP will however, 'assess' your child's cognitive skills by using available information and a range of assessment tools – as needed – to form a judgement on your child's cognitive abilities.

How will they give their advice to the local authority?

This is done via the EHCHub which is online. At the moment we are trialling a new template which the Department of Education requires us to trial

Sometimes they may attend a coproduction meeting and give advice verbally, particularly if they have been involved already, this will be included in the written minutes so there is a record.

If they have been involved before they might not give any further advice and will direct the council to their last advice

If you or your school have already paid for a private EP report, the Oldham team will consider this and only provide additional advice if needed.

What do they have to include in their advice?

EPs are asked to provide 'psychological advice' and outcomes in the Code of Practice (which governs how EHCNA are conducted)

They often also give advice on provision but are not required to.

They will only complete the parts of the template they feel they can, or need to give advice on, and this may differ in each case, depending on what is available elsewhere. They will direct you to a different report or professional where advice from them is more appropriate.

I've heard about specificity? Do EPs need to be specific in their provision

As above there is no statutory requirement for the EP to recommend provision.

However, the EHC Plan is required to have needs, outcomes and provision and provision must be specific. The plan is written by the SEND officer and not the EP

However, where EPs do write provision it is good practice to be as specific as they can be. Lots of things can limit this and we do have a service guide on how to do this as well as we can

I don't agree with the needs stated in the EP report or I'm worried they've missed something, what should I do?

The EP is just one advice giver and so if they don't identify a need it has probably been identified in other advice (including the original submission and your opinion).

The EP will identify the needs they can see, this is a time limited assessment and so sometimes they may not identify all needs and cannot state needs they have not seen. This is why the wider assessment doesn't rely on one advice giver.

As the parent, if you or worried that needs are not identified anywhere in the assessment process (across all of the advice givers) speak to your SEND Officer

You are welcome to speak to the EP if you are concerned about the needs stated in their report, but it is an independent, professional opinion and in some cases may differ to the opinion of others. We cannot change things because others don't agree.

Should you have any queries about the process of EP involvement please contact the allocated EP whose details will be on the EHCHub.