



THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS TO THE DELIVERY OF LOCAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

AEP/XI/10
15th December 2010

Why does a local authority need Educational Psychologists?

At its core, educational psychology underpins our understanding of how children learn and develop. Educational Psychologists (EPs) are a highly skilled section of the children's workforce, who are trained in applied scientific methods and diagnostic and assessment skills, and have a thorough understanding of child development.

However, educational psychology is often viewed in the narrowest of terms, solely as an educational resource used by local authorities to deliver statutory services for the assessment of special educational needs. EPs play a wide role beyond the boundaries of schools in the local community. This role provides important opportunities to work at preventive, early-intervention and direct intervention levels to deliver services with other education, welfare, health and social professionals which help local government to meet their statutory responsibilities and priorities right across children's policy.

Statutory responsibilities of local authorities with regard to children and young people

EP services enable local authorities to meet a wide range of statutory responsibilities for the education, wellbeing and welfare of children and young people. This will be even more important if local government is to meet future national policy objectives. The Department for Education's ongoing review of SEN will be outlined within a Green Paper expected in February 2011 and the Minister for Children and Families, Sarah Teather MP, recently confirmed that EPs will continue to play a prominent role within the revised SEN system.¹

Increasingly, schools will also be able to commission a greater range of specific services and EPs have invaluable knowledge about strategies and approaches which will be beneficial to schools. Local authorities need to ensure that schools can continue to access this valuable resource, even if services are traded, or to support EP services to operate as affiliated or stand-alone units.

Back in 1978 the Warnock report recommended an EP to child ratio of 1:5000 (0-19yrs); since that time the demands on and complexities of EP work have increased so this somewhat conservative recommendation should be considered as an absolute minimum when planning the local workforce.

Statutory SEN services

Education Act 1996 s321-331 (SI2001/3455 for consolidated SEN regulations)

Education and Inspections Act 2006 s74

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

Section 2 of the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010, which provides a new parental right of appeal to the First tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability)

The SEN Code of Practice (2001) states that under Part IV of the 1996 Education Act LEAs, maintained schools and early years settings receiving government funding are required to have regard to this code

There are increasing statutory demands on educational psychologists to carry out evidence based assessments and interventions with children and young people who have any combination of complex educational, behavioural, emotional and social, physical and sensory, communication and learning difficulties. EP services are the statutory support service that enables the local authority to discharge its duty to determine and arrange special educational provision for children with severe or complex educational needs

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/debtext/101018-0005.htm>

and ensure support is provided for schools and early education settings, including direct access to EP services.

Good practice would suggest that EPs carry out a minimum of three visits per year to every school within a local authority, just for liaison with schools and SEN monitoring. At a day-to-day level, an EP additionally:

- identifies any children with special needs – 7.74 of the SEN Code
- provides individual assessment of a child's learning and special educational needs – 5.64, 7.34 of the SEN Code
- monitors and assesses the progress of those children with statements of SEN
- supports teachers to develop and implement tailored learning plans for children with statements of SEN
- provides professionally independent advice to children's panels and SENDIST procedures
- facilitates and supports the reintegration of a pupil with behavioural difficulties to mainstream
- reviews and monitors services for children who are placed 'out of authority' and within independent schools

Early Years identification and intervention

Education Act 1996 – duty on health authorities to inform parents and a local authority about a child under school age who may have SEN

EPs provide support and guidance to health practitioners and early years' staff to identify and help the needs of young children, especially for those children with complex developmental and educational needs that are often identified soon after birth.

Improving the well-being, development and learning of all children

Whilst statutory SEN work is a convenient short hand it does not do justice to the range of activity undertaken by EPs in relation to improving the development and learning of all children and young people. In addition to delivering statutory SEN assessment services, EPs also provide valuable support to children who are most at risk of needing more formalised support services if their needs are not identified and met in the mainstream school environment. Identification and support at this stage prevents these at-risk children falling into the statutory bracket and requiring more serious and costly interventions at a later stage.

EPs also deliver a range of 'core' services that often include statutory prevention work and post-statutory services. A key role of EPs is therefore to advise and support teachers who would otherwise need to perform this diagnostic role alone. This work often includes:

- ensuring children who are out of, or between, schools are not lost from the system of care and continue to receive adequate support
- observing/giving feedback on classroom management
- advising schools on behaviour management policies
- creating a forum to share best practice between practitioners
- attending case conferences, including various forms of Child Protection meetings, and contributing to the local authority's safeguarding agenda

Supporting Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs)

Standard Six - National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services – requirement for local authorities to meet 'The mental health and psychological wellbeing of children and young people'.

Through effective liaison with multi-agency staff and mental health teams to work on complex cases, the EP service supports and enables a local authority to deliver its CAMHs Strategy and discharge its statutory duty.

Narrowing the gap

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

Equality Act 2010

EPs support local authorities to address discrimination and meet obligations in the Equality Act to regularly review policies and practices in all children's care and educational settings to ensure they are not discriminatory. Other work includes:

- running anti-bullying initiatives, peer group support and conflict resolution in schools
- advising how to make "reasonable adjustments" for children and young people to access the curriculum

Parents

7.85 of the SEN Code - as part of statutory assessment, a local authority "should seek to ascertain the view of children and young people"

SENDIST regulations (2008) require that the views of the child be made available to the Tribunal

EP service delivery has a strong community emphasis and EPs actively work with parents to provide a vital link between them and the full range of children's service professionals who hold a duty of care towards their child. There are also good links between EPs and the third sector. EPs' independent, professional advice is much appreciated by parents and they are often able to involve the parent and child in decisions to foster a co-operative approach and response. There are also a range of specialist parenting programmes which are both developed and delivered by EPs eg for parents of children with autism.

The voice of children

Within their direct work with children EPs will always ensure that they promote the child's views within any forum but will also encourage parents and other children's professionals to listen to children and enhance their participation within their own lives and communities.

Looked After Children

Section 22(3)(a) of the Children Act 1989 (as amended by section 52 of the Children Act 2004) – local authorities, in carrying out their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after by them, must give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children

Statutory guidance on the duty of local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children under section 52 of the Children Act 2004 (2005)

By working with other education professionals and carers to ensure that any provision meets the particular welfare, wellbeing and educational needs of a looked after child, EPs form one of the key services that enable the local authority to discharge this duty. Similarly, EPs are also able to provide specialist advice to fostering and adoption panels and court proceedings.

In-service training

Because of their own continued high level of training (many EPs have recent doctoral research experience) EPs play a crucial role in building the capacity of the full range of the children's workforce to deliver greater expertise and value to the local authority. This is especially important to support the delivery of early years provision, which directly enables the local authority to meet targets for the number of qualified practitioners and number of early years places available. This work often covers:

- delivering training for TAs, early years practitioners and SENCOs on all aspects of child development and especially SEN – this might include speech, language and communication needs, autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia, dyspraxia, physical or sensory impairment and promoting positive behaviour
- classroom management
- supervision for Family Support Workers, Educational Welfare Officers and Early Years Workers
- convening professional/practitioner interest groups in specific conditions

- development projects on behalf of the authority e.g. SEN Index
- publishing information sheets on conditions of interest based on the latest published research e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD
- contributing to professional support and development programs

Emergency Planning and Civil Contingencies

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Often the EP service is the only resource that can support local authorities in emergency situations with speed, efficiency and with the necessary skills to address the needs of vulnerable children in the most challenging circumstances. EP services specifically meet obligations placed on local authorities by providing:

- help with emergency planning to ensure that local authority response plans adequately and effectively meet the needs of children in vulnerable situations
- specialist input to Critical Incident response – both through supporting school staff, students and parents through the immediate crisis and then with follow up work which fully understands trauma of the bereavement process and its emotional/social impact

Summary

EPs provide a wide range of interventions for local authorities that contribute to meeting statutory responsibilities across children's services. As EPs work across the full range of educational and children's settings, they are well positioned to identify and analyse trends across localities and implement strategies to address local need effectively.

In any discussions that a local authority is having about re-organisation of service delivery, it must ensure that there is access to sufficient EP input to meet its statutory responsibilities with regards to children and young people effectively. This will be especially important if local authorities are to continue to deliver improved outcomes for all children and meet national impact indicators to narrow the attainment and welfare gap.

For further information, please contact:

Kate Fallon, General Secretary, The Association of Educational Psychologists

Email: enquiries@aep.org.uk Tel: (0191) 3849512

APPENDIX I - ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY EPS AS PART OF THEIR STATUTORY CORE FUNCTION IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

From birth to statutory school age

Early Years Action [SEN Code of Practice pp 16-43]

- Assisting staff of early years settings with their responsibilities to identify, assess and make provision for children with SEN, through consultation and advice
- Informal staff development work to increase the capacity of early years settings to include children with complex needs, disabilities and challenging behaviours
- Work with parents/carers and practitioners to facilitate communication
- Work with parents/carers e.g. to support the development of positive parenting strategies
- Consultation with SENCOs and others where agreed interventions do not enable the child to make satisfactory progress, e.g. because of social, emotional or behavioural difficulties

Early Years Action Plus

- Work with individual children, with parental permission, following consultation at Early Years Action, including observation and assessment in different contexts
- Planning with practitioners and parents/carers to meet children's needs through target setting, direct interventions and reviews of progress, including work related to transition into school and the use of Inclusion Partnership Agreements.
- Participation in health and Children's Services multiagency meeting, which consider all preschool children with special needs in the locality

Statutory Assessment

- Providing advice to the local authority on the needs of children who have severe and complex difficulties and/or who have demonstrated significant cause for concern, based on consultation, observation and assessment work as above.

Children and young people of school age

School Action [SEN Code of Practice pp 44-134]

- Providing consultation and advice to school staff and parents/carers, as per Early Years Action, to assist them in implementing national and local policy on inclusion
- Providing advice on the management of severe and complex needs in special school settings
- Assisting primary schools to prepare for and ensure the successful inclusion of children with complex needs from early years settings
- Helping secondary schools to ensure successful transition of vulnerable children and those with complex needs at start of KS3
- Helping school staff and parents with early identification and intervention to prevent children developing more significant needs
- Bookable problem solving (consultation) sessions for school staff, parents, carers, and others concerned about a child or young person's behaviour and/or learning

School Action Plus

- Work with individual children/young people, with parental permission, following consultation at School Action, including observation and assessment in different contexts, designed to assist the development of effective teaching and learning strategies
- Individual interventions with children/young people to facilitate the development of emotional well-being
- Planning with SENCOs, other school staff and parents/carers to meet children/ young people's needs through help with target setting, as appropriate, for example assisting schools with the development of Individual Education Plans, Behaviour Support Plans, Personal Education Plans, and Inclusion Partnership Agreements

Statutory Assessment

- Providing advice to the local authority on the needs of children/young people who have severe and complex difficulties, as per Early Years SA [above].
- Discussing findings with school staff and parents/carers

Work to ensure that the needs of children/young people with statements are met

- Attendance at interim or annual reviews of children/young people with statements where schools, local authority and/or parents have significant concerns about failure to make satisfactory progress and where a change in provision may be required
- Attendance at annual reviews of children/young people placed out of County where there are concerns as above, particularly where placements mean that the child/young person may be geographically isolated, in need of advocacy etc.
- Attendance at Transitional Reviews

Young people post statutory school age

Attendance at reviews of young people 16-19 with statements.

Other core functions - These largely involve work to assist the local authority, for example:

- Contributing to local authority decision-making for SEN resource allocation, including evaluation of provision and approaches
- Assistance with strategic development and deployment of local authority support services
- Preventing and resolving disagreements with parents/carers
- Expert witness work, including at the SEN Tribunal
- Work as a Corporate Parent on behalf of Children in Public Care
- Inter-agency work to support the effective discharge of statutory responsibilities
- Support to schools and other settings in the aftermath of a critical incident
- Leading on the provision of a research ethics and governance process