

## Educational Psychologists – A parent/carers guide

### What is an Educational Psychologist?

All Educational Psychologists have a PHD in educational psychology. Their training and experience focuses on using applied psychology to help the development and educational progress of children and young people (age 0 – 25). They are members of the Educational Psychology Service, which is one of Lambeth Council's support services. Schools can buy in the Lambeth Educational Psychology Service or they may choose to buy in services offered by private companies. All EP's work to the same set of professional standards.

### What do Educational Psychologists do?

They work together with the staff of schools and other organisations, to develop and improve the effectiveness of school based interventions on behalf of children and young people.

They work directly with children and young people and in partnership with their parents/carers. This work usually focuses on consultation, assessment and intervention. Its aim is to work closely with those who have responsibility for the child's care and education to help the child make progress.

They may be involved in discussions (consultation) about children without necessarily meeting them. The aim is to provide advice to those who have day to day responsibility for meeting children's educational needs because it is these adults who are in the best position to help. These children will not be named individually before a parent has given permission for this to happen.

### How does the Educational Psychologist become involved with my child?

Educational Psychologists become involved with those who have the most significant and complex difficulties which affect their learning and development.

There are usually a number of steps:

If your child's teachers have significant concerns about progress or behaviour in school, they will have discussed these with you. They will also have drawn up what is usually called an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** but may be called something else like a provision map or SEN Support Plan. This will identify targets the school is working on with your child. It also summarises what the school, you and your child are going to do to work towards these targets. The school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) draws up and monitors the IEP.

Your child's progress towards the targets listed in the IEP will be reviewed regularly by school. If there are still concerns about the child's progress, the SENCO may suggest asking for advice from the school's link Educational Psychologist. Parents and the SENCO should meet to complete the referral form TOGETHER. The parent should then sign the form if they are happy for the Educational Psychologist to see their child.

The next step will be for the SENCO to provide the Educational Psychologist with information about how your child is progressing in school. This will include details of strengths and successes, as well as information about what your child is having trouble with and approaches that have been tried. A date will be agreed for the Educational Psychologist to consult with staff in school about your child. The school will tell you about these arrangements and offer the opportunity for you to be involved in a consultation meeting either then or at a future date.

The aim of the consultation meeting is to try and find a practical way forward. The discussion may result in a range of actions:

- Building on and developing any approach that has already led to some progress.
- Planning and trying out different approaches.
- Gathering more information to get a better idea of the nature of the problem. Asking for advice from other professionals.
- Deciding that a more detailed assessment by the Educational Psychologist would be helpful.
- Whatever the outcome of the discussion, the school will keep a record of any action planned to help your child. Copies of any correspondence from the Educational Psychologist, about your child, will be sent to you, usually by the school.

## What happens if the Educational Psychologist does see my child?

This depends very much on what is causing concern, and what sort of information is already available. You will always be told when an assessment is going to happen by the school. You will not normally be asked to attend the assessment because a parents' presence can sometimes change a child's behaviour but if you have strong feelings about this your wishes should be accommodated. At the assessment the Educational Psychologist may decide to do some of the following:

- Observe your child in familiar situations e.g. class/play etc
- Work or play with your child, using a range of tasks and materials. The psychologist may also try out methods of teaching your child certain skills.
- Find out, wherever possible, your child's views about his or her educational progress and any things that are causing concern.
- Use a range of tests. These can help to get an objective picture of some of your child's skills, and allow comparison with others of the same age.

When an Educational Psychologist does assess your child, he or she is trying to identify the sorts of targets and approaches that will be helpful. The aim is **always** to get a clearer picture of how to help your child make progress in school.

## What happens when I meet the Educational Psychologist?

Parents are experts on their children. Your knowledge and experience of your child will be an essential part of the assessment. Your involvement may well be an important part of any plans for meeting his or her needs. The psychologist will want to find out about some of these things:

- Your child's early development.
- Your view of your child's difficulties.
- Your child's strengths.
- How your child is at home - particularly in terms of the concerns that are being experienced in school.
- Any sort of help that you've been able to offer your child.
- Your opinions about your child's progress and the sort of help that may be needed.

If you wish you may bring a relative or friend to the meeting with the Educational Psychologist and you may find it helpful to jot down or collect information to take to the meeting or to make a note of any questions that you want to ask. You can also make notes during the meeting if you wish.

## What happens next?

This depends on the plan of action agreed with teachers and yourselves after the Educational Psychologist's involvement with your child. Responsibility for helping your child remains with the school. His or her progress will continue to be monitored and reviewed after a reasonable period of time by the SENCO at the school.