



How can an Educational Psychologist help my child?

*Information for parents
about Educational Psychologists*



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What is an Educational Psychologist?

Educational Psychology emerged as a profession following the 1944 Education Act, which acknowledged for the first time in Britain, that all children were “educable.” Educational Psychology is a growing profession because of the increasing recognition that Psychologists can have a major role to play in the social, emotional and academic education of children and young people.

An Educational Psychologist holds an honours degree in Psychology, is additionally, a qualified teacher with a minimum of two years teaching experience, and holds a postgraduate qualification, usually a Masters degree, in Educational Psychology. A minimum of seven years training is required in order to become fully qualified and chartered status can be applied for after five years of practice.

Educational Psychologists have expertise in “normal” child development and deviations from the norm together with expertise in cognitive, linguistic, sensory, physical, social and emotional development. They understand how schools work and how children and young people learn. Educational Psychologists also understand those factors that facilitate development and learning and understand how to achieve change in complex social settings. A sound theoretical knowledge of Psychology and its application in an educational context underpins all such work.



How does a Schools Psychology Service work?

In the majority of cases, the Schools Psychology Services in Britain operate a fair and equitable “time allocation” system to schools. Each school is allocated an amount of time or number of sessions for the school year. The allocation is based on pupil numbers and estimated level of need. Psychological work undertaken in a school will include consultation and individual casework, statutory work, training, professional development and projects.

At the start of the school year schools will plan with their designated Educational Psychologist, the use of their school’s allocation, identifying priorities through negotiation. Priorities may have to alter during the year, if unexpected circumstances arise in school; for example, a traumatic event may require significant psychological input, or a pupil with severe and complex problems may be admitted to the school unexpectedly.

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice

A 3 Stage Approach.

The SEN Code of Practice describes the graduated approach that schools should follow in order to meet the needs of their pupils. The graduated approach recognises that pupils learn in different ways and that pupils can have a range of Special Educational Needs. Once a pupil is identified as having needs over and above those normally provided for within a mainstream school setting, increasingly step by step specialist expertise can be brought into school to help with the difficulties the pupil may have.

School Action (Stage 1)

School Action refers to the arrangements made by school, to help a pupil who is experiencing difficulties. A wide range of arrangements are possible and



might include a different approach within a small group, use of specialist equipment or additional help from an adult already working in school.

A pupil who is registered at School Action must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP describes the help the pupil is to receive and must include details of the special help being given, the frequency with which this help will be given, who will provide the help, what targets the pupil is working towards and how and when the pupils' progress will be reviewed.

School Action Plus (Stage 2)

School Action Plus refers to the arrangements made by school in the event of a pupil failing to make sufficient progress at "School Action". School may feel the need to

request help from an outside agency; for example, a Speech and Language Therapist or an Educational Psychologist.

The criteria for referral to an outside agency, for example, a Schools Psychology Service, are becoming more and more stringent. Teachers are increasingly sophisticated in their ability to identify and provide for, pupils with mild difficulties and it is therefore pupils with severe and complex problems who tend to be referred to a service with scarce resources.

A pupil who is registered at School Action Plus will be assessed by an outside agency. Assessment by an Educational Psychologist is likely to include observation, discussion and individual work and will result in a series of recommendations to all those involved with the pupil, and where appropriate, with the pupil him or herself. Recommendations will generally be included in the pupils' IEP and arrangements made for a review of progress towards targets.

Statutory Assessment (Stage 3)

Statutory Assessment is requested if a pupil's needs cannot be adequately met by school without additional targeted resources. Statutory Assessment refers to a detailed investigation carried out by the Local Education Authority in order to find out more exactly what a pupils' needs are and what special provision is required. Following Statutory Assessment the Local Education Authority may draw up a Statement. A Statement of Special Educational Needs is a legal document identifying a pupil's needs and identifying the provision the Authority is able to make available in order to meet those needs. A Statement is issued to parents in draft form prior to completion. A pupil with a Statement of Special Educational Needs, must, by law, be reviewed annually.



Why offer a private service?

An average sized Primary School will be allocated between 8 and 12 sessions (a session is a morning or afternoon) of Psychologist's time throughout a school year. An average High School will be allocated between 20 and 30 sessions throughout a school year.

In order to undertake an individual pupil assessment, which would normally include consultation with staff and parents, observation and individual work with the pupil, between two and three sessions would generally be needed. Because only very few pupils can be seen in any school year, it is generally those pupils with severe and complex difficulties who are referred to the Schools Psychology Service.

If your child is causing you concern, it may be little comfort to know that his or her difficulties are not sufficiently severe to merit Psychological investigation by the Schools Psychology Service. Your child's problems may indeed be minor when set against the problems presented by "high priority" pupils but how you and your child perceive the problem determines the impact the problem has upon your life, that of your child and sometimes that of your family.

A private service allows you access to help should you yourself believe your child needs help.



What is a private assessment by STEPS likely to involve and what information will be obtained?

Each assessment is different because the unfolding strengths and weaknesses of the pupil serve to determine where the emphasis of investigation should be made. An initial assessment will take in the order of 3½ - 4 hours.

As a guide however, the following areas would generally be covered.

- 1 An exploration of concerns, of parent(s), teacher(s) and pupil.
- 2 A view of the pupil's perceptions of the "presenting problem", and of school and learning in general.
- 3 Detailed information about a pupil's cognitive strengths and weaknesses following a full "psychometric" or "ability" assessment.
- 4 Information regarding the pupils approach to problem solving, his or her attitude to learning, learning potential and self esteem.
- 5 Information regarding levels of attainment in Literacy and Numeracy and comparisons of attained levels with expected levels, calculated on the basis of the pupil's age and ability level.
- 6 Diagnostic testing where appropriate in order to further examine any identified weaknesses.
- 7 Conclusions and Diagnosis.
- 8 Recommendations to all those concerned, including the pupil. If appropriate, recommendations will include where and how to seek appropriate additional help for the pupil.