

## **What are educational psychologists?**

Educational psychologists (EPs) are 'applied psychologists' who use our knowledge of psychology and child development help to improve the learning and wellbeing of all children.

All EPs in Greenwich are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This means that that we all need to adhere to certain standards of conduct, proficiency and continuing professional development. Psychologists are also likely to practice in line with various codes of ethics, for example the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct.

We work with children and young people who experience a broad range of needs, some examples include children and young people who:

- Find communicating difficult e.g. have trouble expressing themselves or find playing with others tricky
- Find an area or areas of learning difficult e.g. are having trouble learning to read or remember things
- Might be feeling low, worried, angry or want to hurt themselves
- Have a disability or sensory impairment

As well as working with children who experience a wide range of needs, we work a lot with parents, teachers and other professionals. This work is wide ranging and benefits all children. Some examples of this type of working include:

- Training small groups of staff or whole schools
- Running parent workshops
- Supervising head teachers, teachers and support staff
- Doing research in schools e.g. finding out whether something has worked or not
- Helping schools write policies
- Supporting schools with organisational change
- Working to reduce school exclusions
- Working to identify and reduce inequalities for children and young people

This is just a small sample of the work that EPs do. If you want to know more, talk with your EP.

## **How might an EP become involved with my child?**

Typically, in Greenwich, children can access support from EPs via two routes:

1. Your child's school might ask for support from their link EP. Most schools in Greenwich 'buy-in' an EP service. They get a set amount of 'visits' each year and a member of staff (normally the special educational needs co-ordinator or SENCo) will liaise with the EP to decide how that time is used. This can be for work with individual children or delivering some of the other services listed above. If a SENCo is worried about a child or thinks it would be helpful for the EP to become involved, they will usually talk to the EP about their concerns and a decision will be made about the best steps to take. You will be asked to consent to school staff having a conversation with the EP about your child, and you will be asked for consent again if the EP decides it would be useful to do some direct work with your child.

2. The EP might be asked to write a report about your child's needs as part of the Education Health and Care needs assessment process. In most cases, your child is likely to have already had some input from an EP before then.

### **Should I worry if the school wants my child to see the EP?**

Getting an EP involved early on can be most effective – even if it is for reassurance. Having an EP involved does not mean there is anything 'wrong' with your child. EPs do not diagnose children, but we might suggest referrals to other services who do if we think this might be beneficial. However, whether or not to do so remains the parent's choice.

Early intervention can be powerful, though sometimes people can wait until a situation feels at crisis point before requesting EP involvement.

Rarely, in our experience, do problems suddenly appear. Often, adults who work with children and young people have a gut feeling that something isn't right. It can be useful to speak to an EP at this early stage, even for reassurance. Sometimes an EP might suggest that the best support would come from another agency or professional.

By working together and sharing expertise, any actions or next steps, will be right for that child at that particular time.

EPs don't have magic wands and won't be able to 'fix' the problem or offer simple strategies that will solve all difficulties that a child or young person might be experiencing. However, we can help those working with your child to understand their unique needs and how to support them.

### **What would an EP assessment involve?**

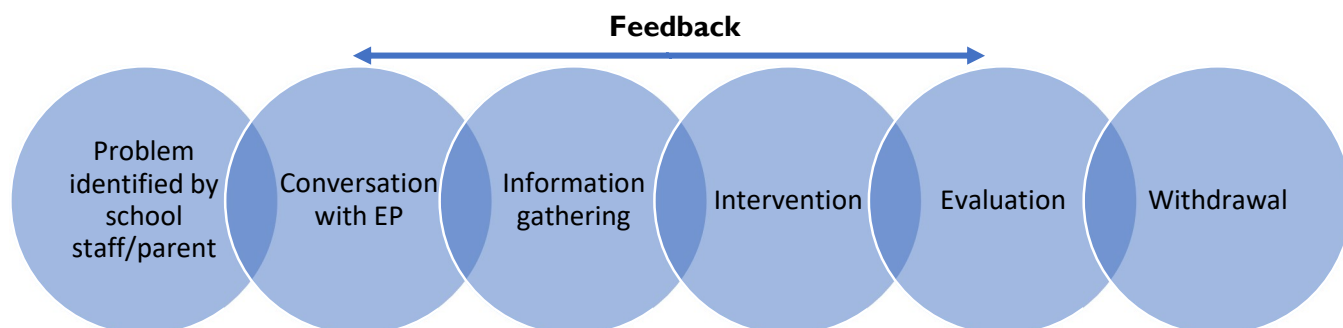
EP assessment can be any number of things which help to develop a holistic understanding of a child's life – their needs, views and perhaps more importantly, their strengths.

No two EP assessments are the same. Sometimes there is a view that an EP assessment means one particular way of working, or doing one particular thing and so it can be a confusing term. Really, an EP assessment is anything that an EP does to try and make sense of the situation.

We know that every child is different. They have their own needs, strengths, skills and aspirations. Also, every family, school, classroom and teacher is different. With all this difference it might be odd if an EP did the same thing with every case they worked on.

## Consultation Model

In Greenwich we use a ‘consultation’ model to inform our assessment process. The diagram below provides an overview of the consultation model used by the EPS. When using a consultation approach, EPs will aim to address the problem being discussed in the *least intrusive* way possible. This might mean working with adults who support the child first, and only doing more direct work with the child at a later stage if the initial input hasn’t been successful.



Problem identified	Conversation with EP	Information gathering	Intervention	Evaluation	Withdrawal
	<i>ASSESS</i>	<i>ASSESS</i>	<i>PLAN &amp; DO</i>	<i>REVIEW</i>	
Interventions tried.  Request for EP involvement if unable to find solution.	The problem situation is raised with EP when they meet with the SENCo.  EP gathers further information by asking questions – they might want to speak to others who know the child well (e.g. the class teacher) for a more in-depth understanding of the situation.  A decision is then made as to whether or not the EP becomes involved. Sometimes these discussions alone are enough for school staff to get some ideas of things that they can try and no further involvement is needed. If the EP thinks it would be useful to do some further work, a discussion is had about what this might look like and to set goals to work towards.	EP develops hypotheses or ideas about the factors that might be contributing to the child’s difficulties.  EP might carry out further work – such as observations or 1:1 assessments.  EP will develop their formulation (understanding of the problem) and share this with the SENCo, class teacher and/ or parents.  Goals will be clarified and refined.	EP collaborates with school staff to design and plan intervention.  Usually, the school is responsible for implementing the plan.	The school (sometimes alongside the EP) considers the child’s progress and asks:  Have the desired outcomes been met?  What has been the impact of EP involvement?  What learning has taken place?  If the child has made progress the EP involvement would usually end. If not, the cycle can start again.	Desired outcomes achieved

### *Understanding 'the problem'*

EPs know that by the time they're asked to work with adults, children and young people, 'the problem' can be or seem complex and messy. Often we're asked to work in situations where the problem has been around for a long time.

It is likely that strategies and interventions will have been tried but, for whatever reason, the situation hasn't improved. Discussing this with an EP, who can use psychology to help unpick what has been tried, is likely to help towards working out what to try next.

### *Working together*

Every child is unique, as is every class, teacher, parent or carer and so every solution needs to be carefully considered and any suggestions need to be right for everyone involved.

While certain suggestions or actions might be right for a school, they might not be right for a particular child. EPs will most often want to work with different people to jointly solve a problem. Teachers have expertise about their classrooms and the curriculum. Parents and carers have deep expertise and knowledge about their children. EPs have expertise in child development and psychology.

Coming together and sharing all this expertise is the best way to solve problems, but we're also aware that this isn't a quick fix process. In our experience one of the most powerful steps forward is having a shared understanding of what is going on, and what changes we would like to see in the future.

### **How are parents / carers involved?**

The SENCo will have discussed EP involvement with a child's parents or carers who will have signed consent forms which enables such involvement. Sometimes EPs will meet with parents or carers at the start of involvement to find out a bit more about a child's history or how they are at home – as well as to establish the perspective of parents or carers. However, this is not always the case and sometimes it might be agreed that an EP will work with school or setting staff. It might be decided that the EP (probably with members of staff) will meet with parents or carers after interventions that have been agreed with school staff have been tried. The SENCo will ensure that parents or carers are kept updated about EP involvement.

### **Can you tell me more about what an observation and/or 1:1 work might involve?**

#### *Observation*

Often it can be useful to observe a child at school. This can help an EP understand what life might be like for the young person they're working with. An observation can give an EP the chance to think about what a child or young person might be struggling with, but also what's already working well in a particular situation. A key focus of these observations is exploring environmental influences on a child's learning, wellbeing and development.

It can be difficult for school staff to have the time to carry out an in-depth, focused observation and so sometimes an EP might spot things that have previously been missed. EPs might carry out

observations in lots of different ways e.g. at different times, in different places. This is because we know that children and young people can behave in different ways in different environments.

### *Gaining a child or young person's views*

This is an important part of an EP's job. Often, we're asked to become involved to support a child or young person who seems to be experiencing difficulties. Children and young people are at the centre of our thinking and work and so it's important to try to understand what they think about what is going on, what the difficulties are and what they think is working well.

Again, there are a huge range of tools and techniques that an EP can use to gain a child's view and no two children will be the same. In most cases, an EP will decide what tools or techniques to use based on the conversations they have with adults that know that child best.

### *Cognitive assessment*

Cognitive assessments can be done in lots of different ways and a cognitive assessment is not the same as a cognitive test.

This can be a tricky term to understand. 'Cognitive' refers to anything to do with thinking or learning. This means that a 'cognitive assessment' might look at a whole range of skills e.g. memory, problem solving, attention skills, learning.

A cognitive test is usually a series of activities carried out in a controlled way, designed to 'test' different skills. They are also referred to as psychometric assessments. Cognitive tests can give a series of scores that can then be compared to a larger group of children of the same age. Cognitive tests can tell us what a child can do in the test situation with no help or encouragement (we sometimes call this mediation). Cognitive tests give a snapshot of performance on the day.

There are lots of other tools that EPs can use to carry out a cognitive assessment with children and young people. A popular and effective way is to do a dynamic assessment with a child or young person.

Dynamic assessments (as the name suggests) are ways of working with a child or young person that help people understand a few things:

- What a child or young person can do by themselves
- What they can do with the careful help of an adult
- What type of help and support is best moving a child's learning on
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Dynamic assessment also allows an EP to explore other things that can affect learning. These things include motivation to learn, how the child thinks about themselves as a learner (mindset) or the impact of the language used by the EP or the task itself.

It can be useful if a teacher watches an EP carry out a dynamic assessment – lots of what they observe will be directly relevant for the classroom. Cognitive tests usually can't be observed.

**What will the follow-up be?**

EP involvement is rarely a one-off event and during discussions agreements will be reached about what different people will do next. This might be actions to be taken by members of staff – including interventions that will be delivered – or information / resources that the EP will send through. This discussion will also involve consideration of a review meeting – and timeframe regarding this.

### **Will I get a report?**

EPs usually provide feedback verbally (during a meeting). Often members of school staff will want to take their own notes to remind them of what has been agreed. EPs might also provide a written summary of their involvement. Just like no two EP assessments are the same, no two EP reports are the same. The EP will decide with the school whether or not a report is needed. Different types of records might be completed by the EP (including handwritten consultation records or a brief typed record of what has taken place during a visit and what has been agreed. This depends upon the type of work that has been done. A copy of all records will be left with or sent to the SENCo who will share them further with parents / carers and relevant members of the school team.

If the EP has seen your child for an Education Health and Care needs assessment, then you will get a detailed report as part of this process.

### **Acknowledgements**

This information has been put together with reference to the following source:

O'Hare, D.P. (2021, October 22). Educational psychology. edpsy.

<https://edpsy.org.uk/about/educational-psychology/>

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