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About Educational Psychology

1. Educational psychologists work to improve the learning and wellbeing of all children and young people.

A large part of our role involves supporting children and young people who experience special educational needs, but this represents only part of the breadth and variety of our work.

Educational psychologists support children and young people with a wide range of needs.

Some examples include those who:

- Find communication difficult, such as struggling to express themselves, understand others or engage in play and social interaction.
- Experience difficulties in specific areas of learning, for example, challenges with reading, writing, memory or processing of information.
- Are experiencing emotional or mental health needs, such as feeling low, worried, angry, overwhelmed or finding it hard to manage their feelings.
- Have a disability or sensory impairment that affects their access to learning or everyday school life.
- Require reports or assessments to support statutory processes, including Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA).

Alongside direct work with children and young people, we also work extensively with parents/carers, teachers and other professionals. This collaborative work is wide-ranging and benefits all children and young people.

For example:

- Supporting teachers to adapt and strengthen classroom practice.



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- Helping schools develop whole-school approaches to wellbeing and inclusion.
- Contributing to the development and review of school policies.
- Providing training, coaching and professional development for staff.
- Working with parents and carers to understand and support their child's needs.
- Working proactively to reduce school exclusions.
- Taking part in multi-agency planning and collaborative problem-solving.
- Developing and implementing evidence-informed interventions in schools.
- Completing school-based projects and research to inform practice.
- Offering supervision for headteachers, teachers and support staff.

2. Educational psychologists work in a variety of contexts

Whilst the majority of educational psychologists are employed by local authorities, work across both the public and private sectors has become increasingly common (DfE, 2019).

Other working contexts for EPs include:

- Local authorities.
- Social enterprises.
- Community interest companies.
- Co-operatives.
- Charities.
- Multi-academy trusts.
- Private EP services.

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- Independent sole-trader practice.

Whilst the way psychology is delivered may vary across these contexts, all educational psychologists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This means they must meet the same professional standards relating to conduct, proficiency and ongoing professional development.

Educational psychologists also typically work in accordance with recognised ethical frameworks, such as the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, ensuring that their practice remains safe, evidence-informed and grounded in strong professional values.

3. Getting an EP involved early can be highly effective, even if it is simply for reassurance

Early intervention is often powerful, yet many people wait until a situation feels overwhelming before seeking EP involvement. Difficulties rarely appear suddenly. Teachers, support staff and parents/carers often have an early sense that something is not quite right. We encourage schools and families to reach out at this stage, even if it is just to check in or seek reassurance. Sometimes, the most helpful next step may involve another professional or agency and EPs can guide you towards the right support.

4. Working together and sharing expertise leads to the right next steps for each child or young person

Educational psychologists do not arrive with quick fixes or magic solutions. By the time they become involved, the situation can feel complex, long-standing or emotionally charged. It's understandable that people want the problem to disappear quickly, but assuming there is a simple answer, can leave adults feeling unheard or misunderstood.

Often, a range of strategies will already have been tried. An EP's role is to use psychology to help unpick what has happened so far, understand why progress may have stalled and work out what might be most effective next step.

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Understanding the situation

Every child, family, classroom and teacher is unique. What works well for one child or young person may not be right for another. That is why EPs take time to understand the situation from multiple perspectives. Teachers bring expertise about their classroom and curriculum; parents and carers bring deep knowledge of their child; and EPs bring expertise in child development, learning and psychology. When these perspectives come together, the most meaningful and sustainable solutions emerge.

One of the most powerful outcomes of this collaborative process is developing a shared understanding of what is happening and what changes we hope to see.

5. What do we mean by an EP assessment?

An EP assessment is not a single test or a fixed process. It is any combination of approaches that help us build a holistic understanding of a child's strengths, needs, experiences and context. No two assessments look the same because no two children or situations are the same.

An assessment may explore learning, communication, emotional wellbeing, relationships or environmental factors. It is shaped by the child's unique profile and the questions raised by the adults who know them best.

6. What might an EP do to make sense of a situation?

Educational psychologists use a wide range of tools and techniques. The best way to understand what an EP is doing is simply to ask.

Some of the most common elements include:

Conversations and consultations

Talking with teachers, parents/carers and, sometimes, the child themselves is often the most valuable way to understand what is happening. These conversations are structured using psychological principles and allow EPs to explore different viewpoints, clarify concerns and think together about next steps.



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Gaining the child or young person's views

Children and young people are central to an EP's work. Educational psychologists use a variety of age-appropriate tools to understand their experiences, what they find difficult and what helps them. The approach we use depends on the child or young person's age, learning presentation, communication style and preferences.

Observations

Observing a child or young person in school helps us understand their day-to-day experiences, what is working well and what may be contributing to difficulties. Observations may take place in different lessons, settings or times of day, as children and young people often behave differently depending on the environment.

Cognitive assessment

A cognitive assessment explores how a child or young person thinks and learns. This may involve structured psychometric tests, which provide standardised scores, or dynamic assessment, which focuses on how a child or young person learns with support. Dynamic assessment can be especially powerful, as it helps identify the type of help that best moves learning forward and can be directly observed by teachers.

7. "We need an EP report" – what does this mean?

Before requesting a report, it is helpful to think about what you hope it will achieve. Reports vary widely because they reflect the unique work carried out with each child or young person. Often, the most valuable part of EP involvement is the process itself – the conversations, observations and shared thinking – rather than the written document.

Educational psychologists are not gatekeepers for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or specialist placements. Our role is to describe a child's strengths and needs and outline the support required to meet those needs.

Acknowledgement

This information has been adapted from open-access materials originally developed by Dan O'Hare and colleagues at edpsy, with contributions from a range of educational psychologists. The translated versions of the original resource

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were jointly funded by The Association of Educational Psychologists and several educational psychology services, including Waite Psychology.

Schools and families can access the original information sheets — including translations in Arabic, Bengali, Panjabi, Polish, Romanian and Urdu at:
<https://edpsy.org.uk/about/educational-psychology/>