

REPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

REPORTING IN REVIEW OF STOCKTON EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

Background

1. Educational Psychologists have to have an accredited qualification at Masters or Doctoral level (amassed over a minimum of 8 years training plus 2 years supervised practice) and have to be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in order to use the title Educational Psychologist. Registration with the HCPC indicates a level of competency deemed necessary to practise and protect the public. All Educational Psychologists (EPs) are trained to apply psychology in order to help others understand how to remove barriers to a child or young person's development.
2. Stockton Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is a specialist service within Schools and SEN.
3. The service aims to support and promote positive outcomes for all children and young people (0 – 25 years old) living in the Borough through the application of psychology. The service works largely with children identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) and looks to try to support children, families and schools to overcome barriers to access learning. Educational Psychologists engage with those children undergoing statutory assessments for an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This work is free to schools as it is a statutory role through the SEND Code of Practice. The service also provides a small amount of time into additionally resourced provisions free at the point of contact. The service seeks to address the needs of those children not at statutory level through partnership agreements with schools (commissioned through schools) which generates an income to the service and LA (currently £400 a day).
4. Educational Psychologists try to support positive outcomes for young people through working at different levels; child and family, school or educational setting, community and Local Authority/national. An EPs role includes the following five elements;
 - Consultation – solution focussed discussions to re-frame situations and identify achievable actions to bring about positive change for individuals, groups and systems
 - Assessment – can take many forms with the aim to provide new information, advice and guidance. When focussed on the individual it is always made within their specific family and community context and with consideration to information from others who are also involved
 - Intervention – individual or group based
 - Training – delivery to others to improve knowledge, understanding, skills and application of these to bring about positive change
 - Research – may take several forms e.g. Action Research to support evaluation and change in a setting. EPs are trained to undertake research around complex social issues and situations.

5. The future of the service is now under review. This is due to:
- An inability to recruit and to sustain appropriate levels of staffing;
 - Consideration of the place of educational psychology services within the council;
 - Consideration of how such services are funded in the context of reducing council and school funding.

The service in Stockton

6. Staffing within Stockton has become problematic. The team is carrying many vacancies and constant recruitment drives have yielded few applications or appointments. The service has advertised 11 times in the time period January 2013 – November 2016. The recent review of the Schools and SEN Service has also seen the Principal Educational Psychologist leave.

Present Structure	Actual staffing
1 Senior Educational Psychologist who also manages The Portage Team	1 Senior Educational Psychologist who also manages the Portage Team and is also a fieldwork supervisor to Newcastle University
7 main grade Educational Psychologists	3 FTE Educational Psychologists 0.4 casual term time only EP
4 assistant educational psychologists	3 assistant EPs 1 seconded assistant EP (due to end 31.12.16)
	Two Trainee EPs are funded via income generated from partnership agreements in Years 2 and 3.

7. The Educational Psychology service would like to be involved in:
- supporting in the development of parenting in the borough;
 - helping in the reduction of EHCP assessments through earlier intervention and training for schools;
 - helping in the early help assessments – an EP does sit on the early help panel but EPs could be involved further in delivering targeted interventions to reduce pressure on specialist time and focus on developing resilience;
 - supporting children in need of protection and help, particularly those with attachment difficulties;
 - playing a role in the Future in Mind strategy and delivering training to develop well-being teams and capacity in schools.

The lack of staffing capacity prevents this wider working.

8. Different recruitment strategies have been used by the service but to little effect (the cost of advertising is £1300-1500 per advert):
- The advert for main grade EPs has been redrafted several times to make this more attractive reflecting the Shaping Brighter Future position with regard to culture and values.

- Newcastle University have been consulted as to why they believe Trainee EPs are not interested in applying to Stockton. The consensus is trainees are applying to their home or own local area or where they have been on 2nd and 3rd year placement.
 - The British Psychological Society website has been used to advertise positions; however, we have had no enquiries to date.
 - A job description was specifically redrafted to focus on Early Help for an EP to work within Tithe Barn House whilst continuing to receive clinical supervision from the SEP.
 - The SEP has recently become field work supervisor with Newcastle University with effect from September 2016. This role requires 12 days delivered to the university in the form of fieldwork supervision for trainees placed in Stockton and a combination of lecturing, moderation of course work and involvement in interviewing prospective student candidates. This will raise the profile of Stockton with trainees at this university, and custom and practice suggests attracts 2nd and 3rd year trainees to seek placement with a fieldwork supervisor.
9. The shortage of EPs is not restricted to Stockton. Nationally the profession had 2253 (1836 FTE) EPs employed on Soulbury Scale in 2013. (The Soulbury Scale is a professional pay spine for EPs with salaries from £33k to £81k.) This represented a 14% reduction from 2011. Many EPs have, or are due to retire in the next 5 years and in the last survey of Soulbury Educational Psychologists (2013) it was recognised that many EPs were choosing to do compressed working within a Local Authority and independently working in non-work time or were moving from LA employment to full independent work entirely.
10. More recently (2016) the Association of Educational Psychologists noted two thirds of LAs had experienced difficulties in recruiting in the previous 12 months to main grade EP posts. Vacancy rates are reportedly higher than for teachers.
11. Neighbouring LAs have experienced similar recruitment problems and the Tees Valley appears to be a particular area of challenge, with the exception of Hartlepool. It seems this is related to distance travelled from the university, the high number of trainee EPs (TEPs) they have supported over the last 5 years and the more attractive offer of work being offered to staff. Unlike other LAs, Hartlepool has been able to expand its team.

Funding 2015/2016

12.

Funding £	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Partnership Agreements	112,311.00	107,580.00	21,300.00	19,600.00
SEN GRANT	76,479.00			
Dedicated Schools Grant	96,000.00	95,540.00	95,540.00	95,540.00
SBC Budget for EPS	376,539.00	499,428.00	500,462.00	519,967.00

13. There has been a steady increase in the number of days schools/academies have purchased over the last four years of trading – this is the ‘partnership agreement’ funding. This income is not fixed but variable depending on the school/academies needs and financial situation in a given year. There has been an increase in the number of days requested by schools for 2016/2017 producing an income of £178,000. The work that is facilitated through these partnership agreements can include training school staff to understand specific conditions and adapt curriculum and approaches according. This can move schools towards looking more systemically at addressing the needs of more children. This may be through building resilient schools, considering the impact of mindfulness, devising systems for bullying, providing approaches to deal with loss and bereavement, and ensuring schools are addressing children’s emotional needs as this leads to increased attainment and achievement.
14. The service from Educational Psychologists is well regarded by schools. The survey at the end of 2015/2016 reported:
- 100% said the involvement of the EP has led to improved understanding of a child’s needs
 - 97% have made changes to their practice following the involvement of the EP
 - 90% said the EP team have helped staff to understand the child’s needs and developed their skills, knowledge and confidence in supporting the child
 - 96% said the EPS provides value for money
 - 92% would welcome more time from the EPS
 - 96% said buying EP time is a barrier to improving outcomes for children
 - 67% said buying EP time is a barrier to understanding children and young people’s needs.
15. The amount of statutory work, however, has increased year on year; the team completed 277 pieces of statutory work in the time scale July 2015 – August 2016. This is costly work and potentially diverts capacity away from more effective preventative work.
16. On average each statutory report takes 20 hours. If more days were available to an EP to do partnership agreement work, funded by schools, this would see income rise and positive impact on children and families improve. A Newcastle University research project (2016) was conducted by Dr Gibbs and Dr Paps of Newcastle University. It identified a local authority who had pared back EP services, Middlesbrough, and one where EP services had been prioritised and grown, Hartlepool. Middlesbrough is now reportedly struggling to meet demand at statutory level whereas Hartlepool had provided an attractive offer that schools and the wider community could purchase. Their level of statutory work has become very low as a more proactive approach has been implemented. The number of requests for statutory assessments has dropped significantly and the buy in from schools has increased. This approach has brought benefits to the schools as training and capacity building has been implemented, it has brought benefits to the Local Authority as far fewer statutory assessments have been needed and it has brought benefits to the service as recruitment has been very strong and the service is thriving and fully staffed. The proactive approach uses the family consultation model. This is where the EP works with the family to see how they interact with the child. Any interventions are at a family level and involve all agencies working with the family. This moves away from just strategies for the individual child by single agencies.

Recent research by Al-khatib & Norris (2015) has shown the delivery of a Family Consultation Service is supportive in the strengthening of mental health and wellbeing for children and their families.

17. Educational Psychology services are extremely well positioned to contribute to the Future in Mind work being developed with health and other local authority teams. The area of emotional well-being and mental health are the foundations of psychology. The EPS elements will be focussing on system change exploring different frameworks to help school based support and capacity building with colleagues from a range of teams e.g. school nursing, health visitors, school staff using evidence based approaches, focussing on attachment, the impact of neglect and domestic violence on resilience and learning. There is a recognised need to support schools with the emotional health and wellbeing of their students; the Schools Health Unit Exeter Survey conducted in Stockton revealed high levels of anxiety amongst students and little capacity for schools to respond.
18. Nationally services offering a consultation model have been the most successful. Kensington and Chelsea historically trained many LAs in the model, as did Universities. The joint problem solving approach provides ownership of the agreed strategies and allows evaluation through the process.

Options to explore

19. Presently, the Stockton educational psychology service is too narrow, staffing has shrunk due to the long standing recruitment issue and work streams are predicated on statutory assessments rather than proactive work with children, families and schools. This means the service is costly and unable to secure more income from schools.
20. In order to ensure an effective service for Stockton schools the following options are available to be explored:
 - 1) The service could be commissioned from a successful service elsewhere which is able to support a full staffing complement and recruit to new posts.
 - 2) The culture of a consultation model could be developed to enable a richer offer to build capacity in schools and reduce the demand for statutory assessments. The consultation services would be costed to schools. Presently, there is not the capacity within the Stockton EP service to do both statutory assessments and consultation work, so either could be externally commissioned.
 - 3) Prepare a better structure for the service to enable professional development within the service and sustainable recruitment. This might mean: creating senior posts with specialisms; providing places for more trainees with spaces for trainees in their second and third year of practice; sponsoring an assistant each year on to the 3 year doctorate course with a hook of a job on qualifying.
 - 4) Provide more work to schools free at the point of delivery. In this way the EPS would be able to re-gain the ability to act proactively at a much earlier stage, and this would reduce the number of children undergoing EHCP Assessment and support better outcomes for the children, young people, their families and the setting they attend. Earlier intervention with children would also reduce High Needs Funding allocations to schools as support for teachers would enable the needs of children to be met earlier and more effectively. This is a much more cost

effective use of the service compared with one off assessments when situations have deteriorated and outcomes for children less favourable. However, it would require more initial council funding before the benefit of fewer statutory assessments and more school partnership agreements could be felt.