

Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service

Impact Evaluation



January 2025

Educational Psychology skills and training	3
Context	5
Determining impact from Educational Psychology work	5
Derbyshire EPS impact	6
School Feedback	6
Parent Views	9
Training Feedback	9
Timeliness Data	10
Further exploration: deep dive into EP impact in individual schools	10
Casework	11
Training	11
Projects	11
Further exploration: deep dive into DCCEPS impact in county wide intervention (e.g. ELSA)	12
Reflective Supervision	12
ELSA Impact in schools	12
ELSA Summary	15
Conclusion	15
Reflections	16
Learning points moving forward	16
Appendices	17
Appendix 1:	17
Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation	17
Impact of EP Casework in schools	17
Appendix 2:	21
Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation	21
Impact of EP Training in schools	21
Appendix 3:	24
Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation	24
Impact of EP Project Work in schools	24
References	29



Educational Psychology skills and training

Educational psychologists (EPs) have extensive training and qualifications relating to education and child development. Every EP has, as an absolute minimum, 7 years of training before they become qualified. This includes an undergraduate degree in psychology, training in research and statistical analysis as well as direct experience in education followed by a doctorate (or previously a masters) in applied child and educational psychology.

The majority of EPs in Derbyshire are trained to doctoral level and all EPs are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (www.hcpc-uk.org). This makes EPs uniquely placed to offer support on a wide range of issues and ensures we are continually adhering to a clear code of ethics in our work.

EPs are trained in applied psychology which helps them both to understand complex problems and to find solutions that work. EPs use this knowledge to support child development, learning, emotional wellbeing and behaviour and work with children and young people of all ages.

EPs work at different levels including the individual child or family, school and Local Authority (LA). The range of work that an EP engages in is most helpfully categorised using the Currie Matrix (2002). This is illustrated below with a sample¹ of activities undertaken by Derbyshire County Council Educational Psychology Service (DCCEPS) at different levels:

¹ Please note this is a sample rather than a definitive overview of EP work in Derbyshire.

EP work at different levels						
	Consultation	Assessment	Intervention	Training	Research	
Child and family	Consultation meetings involving staff / parents / young people (<i>using a range of applied psychology frameworks</i>)	Observation Direct assessment (<i>standardised, dynamic</i>)	Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) Therapeutic work Adoption East Midlands supervision	Parent training (e.g. Emotion Coaching) <i>Past involvement in parenting programmes</i>	Emotionally Based School Attendance project (<i>leading to the development of the EBSA toolkit</i>) Race Awareness	Exclusions
Schools / EY settings	Consultation regarding individual pupils (<i>using approaches such as Solution Paths, Solution Circles, Circle of Adults etc</i>) Support at Behaviour Cluster meetings	Force Field Analysis Policy development (<i>school values, relational policy etc</i>)	Critical Incident support SENDCo supervision groups Designated Safeguarding Leads / Creative Mentor supervision Working On What Works (WOWW)	Staff training offered through school subscriptions (<i>e.g. Emotion Coaching, Mediated Learning, Precision Teaching Training, Lego Therapy</i>) Baby Brain Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training	Mindfulness project Position Papers (<i>e.g. Identity, Auditory Processing Disorder, Literacy Difficulties etc</i>) Development of Derbyshire's sensory processing needs approach and toolkit	Race Awareness
Local Authority	Involvement in Workstreams SEND panel contribution	Adult Social Care assessments Statutory assessments SEND directed work Tribunal work (<i>including preparatory / preventative work and attendance where appropriate</i>)	Emotionally Based School Attendance project Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools Neurodiversity Hubs	Understanding sensory processing needs Handling change (<i>delivered for Behaviour Support Service</i>)	Turning the Curve Out of County Placements Exclusions (<i>leading to the development of both Primary and Secondary Behaviour Box resources</i>)	Sensory Processing Needs Toolkit
						EBSA

Context

DCCEPS provides a range of psychological support to schools, settings and to the LA. Support to schools is provided through trading and every school in Derbyshire is invited to subscribe to our service each year. Despite year-on-year increases in session cost, close to 2800 sessions of work have been commissioned by schools and other settings in 2024-5. Support is provided to the LA for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA's), SEND directed work, SEND panels, Tribunals and Critical Incidents.

It is well documented that the rising number of pupils requiring special educational needs support has resulted in a nationwide increase in demand for EPs² and that capacity is not keeping pace with demand which is resulting in unmet needs and unequal access to EP services³. This is helpfully summarised in the conclusion of the 2023 research report examining school perspectives on EP impact:

Overall, EPs deliver an important and valued service, providing unique functions as part of a complex system of support for children and young people. Capacity, primarily driven by the rise in EHCP numbers, has become an increasingly pressing issue and was consistently identified as the main barrier to EPs delivering the most effective service. A vicious cycle was identified in which the need for EPs to prioritise EHCPs reduced the time available for early intervention work and whole-school advisory work. Without this early intervention, the issues experienced by the child or young person can intensify, leading them to need an EHCP, and placing further pressure on EPs' capacity to engage in early intervention and systemic work.

(Atfield, Baldauf & Owen, 2023)

Demand for Educational Psychology support in Derbyshire currently outstrips capacity. This is in the context of a 272% increase in demand for EHCNA advices between 2013 and 2023 at the same time as a reduction in staffing and a currently imposed freeze on recruitment.

Determining impact from Educational Psychology work

Educational Psychology Services nationwide have been grappling with the best way to evaluate their work (e.g. HEPS, 2010). The nature of EP involvement creates inherent difficulties in separating the impact of the EPs contribution from that of others who put advice into practice (Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018). Operating within a traded model creates further difficulty given the limits this can create on the work undertaken by the EP. Despite these difficulties, there are a number of studies which explore EP impact and determine a range of positive outcomes from EP involvement. For example, Atfield, Baldauf & Owen (2023) found that EP work led to:

² [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

³ [Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

- Accurately identified needs in children and young people.
- Children and young people feeling heard, understood and empowered.
- Parents and carers having enhanced parenting skills as a result of their improved understanding of their child's needs and their own strengths as parents/carers.
- Increased knowledge, ability and confidence in education setting staff.
- Whole school improvement in tackling issues.
- System level outcomes including informing Local Authority-wide policies, strategies and initiatives and an improved ability to identify local level needs.
- Positive influences on multi-agency practices.

Derbyshire EPS impact

In Derbyshire, we currently use a range of quantitative and qualitative measures to determine the quality and impact of our work. This includes:

- An annual school questionnaire distributed to school leaders.
- Key questions asked at each Request for Work meeting including *“what you see as the main advantages of working with an EP”*.
- Parental feedback for EHCNA advice submitted (prior to HUB).
- Parental feedback for all records of involvement completed.
- Advice timeliness data.
- Advice Quality Assurance for both DCC EPs and locum EPs.
- Training feedback.

School Feedback

Feedback gained from these measures highlights that DCCEPS is a highly valued service by both schools and parents. The service was rated 4.4 out of 5 in the annual school questionnaire with 31% of respondents adding additional comments to express that they were *exceptionally* happy with the support received from their EP. Equally, parents' average rating on both the advice and report feedback was 4.77 and 4.75 respectively.

Investigation into *why* the EP service is so highly valued can be determined from responses to the request for work question: “what do you see as the main advantages of working with an EP”. A thematic analysis of these responses suggests that schools value a range of distinct aspects of EP work including:

What do you see as the main advantages of having an EP?	
Area	Quotes
Strategies / advice / assessment / expertise	• Getting professional, up to date and research backed advice and suggestions. • Having an EP assessment really helps us to understand individual barriers to learning on a much deeper level, enabling us to adapt their learning and environment more effectively. • We feel that the EP Service supports the children in the classroom massively. We are given tools, suggestions and ideas for how to meet the children's needs so that they can progress and access learning more successfully.
Psychological support / problem solving	• To give us support and advice when we feel we have done all that we can to support a young person. It is when we need a bit more support on what to do next. • There are loads of benefits, it's being able to have the problem-solving discussions when we are stuck. • Understanding that it gives staff (e.g. brings up emotions so EPs help understand the why). • Space to talk things out and problem-solve. Lightbulb! • We have the discussion meetings, you always give us new ideas, other services usually just gave what we already do, which wasn't helpful, we want other ideas, you always suggest new ideas/resources/books etc.
Multi-level support	• The versatility of their offer, you can ask for sessions to assist with understanding needs and possible diagnoses if you have noticed traits, there can be specialist assessments for pupils to see where their strengths and weaknesses lie and to gather best learning styles, you can ask for supervision to assist SEMH of staff and pupils as well as CPD options for staff and parents. • We have been interested in strategic and organisational change work and staff training. • Having that one person to talk to who can address our concerns about the whole child - communication, learning, SEMH & physical/sensory.
SENDCO support	• The group sessions at my school were very helpful at developing our professional relationships and encouraged us to reflect and draw upon each other's experience and expertise as SENDCOs. • Being quite new to the SENDCo role, it is really helpful to have advice from the EP. I always feel I can come back to you and ask you something. • To know you are only ever an email away, to provide support to answer questions, in my role as SENCO, is invaluable.

What do you see as the main advantages of having an EP?	
Area	Quotes
Parents	• Parents feel very supported and listened to by the EP. • Parents appreciate the advice and support – we get good feedback from parents. • Supports relationships with parents through workshops and consultations.
Holistic understanding of setting	• There are a lot of advantages in terms of how you work with us in the way you do now, understanding of our school, the way we work, our students – it's gold dust. • (The EP has) got knowledge of how our staff work, and how our children fit into that. • Seriously, the expert advice from someone who understands the working life of a school and has knowledge of our school is invaluable.
Training	• To be able to get bespoke level of training about things like emotion coaching training is very positive. • Training for staff – it's delivered in a really good way for everybody, we really enjoy doing that. • We did lots of training together...her knowledge and experience was great.
Reports / graduated approach	• Having professional reports is helpful when applying for Inclusion Panel funding or EHCP as well as signposting teachers to best practice. • It has really helped with EHCP applications to gain independent evidence of a child's specific needs. • Targeted steps to build support plans as part of the assess do plan review process.
Relationships	• It feels like therapy for staff. • The conversations provide support and reassurance. • Connection - being a part of our team.

Parent Views

Investigation into why parents value the work of EPs can be found from examining the qualitative comments offered (both through the parent questionnaires and also at times emailed to us with gratitude):

“...you have a real skill with children like my boys who have lost trust with education. Your ability to gain that trust and make them feel safe is just something to be proud of and is testament to your hard work and compassion for children and families.”

“I absolutely thought that (the EP) understood my daughter on a level that I've not seen before.”

“(The EP) displayed a very high level of empathy and not sympathy. She was extremely calm, and listened attentively to hear my views and was able to deep dive (child's) issues while also reassuring me that my son will be treated fairly no matter what. I had a feeling that my son's case has not been treated fairly given the experiences we had prior to coming in contact with (the EP). (The EP) is an extraordinary human who puts people first and does their job professionally without fear or favour. I appreciate the time they invested in understanding the degree of challenge I face in dealing with a severely visually impaired child.”

“Me and (child) have had a bumpy journey in getting support and working towards a diagnosis. We did not have such a positive experience at a neuro assessment last year so when I was told we had been referred to yourselves I was reluctant to open up again. (The EP) was the first person to meet (child) and I didn't feel either of us were being judged. And I wasn't made to feel like my anxiety or my parenting was to blame. She took her time to get to know him and see beyond his mask. She straight away spotted his anxiety and insecurities and not just this loud, hyperactive boy everyone else sees. She saw all of his layers, which I have tried to explain to other professionals but nobody else could see what me or nursery see day in, day out. The report is thorough and I'm really hoping it will help us in school and at home. Thank you for being gentle, kind and for simply listening. From one exhausted Mum, it really is a relief to be heard.”

Training Feedback

The *quality* of EP work can be determined from measures such as that used for training feedback. 92% of attendees agree or strongly agree that they valued the trainer's delivery skills and presentation with over 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel equipped to put their new skills/knowledge into practice.

Timeliness Data

Further measures of EP efficiency can be found by examining timeliness data. In the academic year 2023-4, 85% of EP advice was submitted on time to meet statutory deadlines. This is despite carrying a wait list at the beginning of the year. 92% of DCC EP advice was submitted on time to meet the in-house deadline.

Further exploration: deep dive into EP impact in individual schools

The school questionnaire feedback highlights that high percentages of respondents agree or strongly agree that EP involvement contributed to:

- An improved understanding of strengths, difficulties and needs (87%)
- Additional ideas about what will help (90%)
- Increased confidence in setting staff in meeting the needs of children and young people (88%)
- Satisfaction with outcomes (84%)

The percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that improvements have been noticed following EP involvement was slightly lower (75%). In a bid to better understand the longer-term impact of different aspects of EP work, a small team of EPs created a semi-structured questionnaire to examine EP casework, EP projects and EP training. This approach was informed by considering the 'Results based Accountability Model' (Friedman, 1997). This model asserts that all performance measures can be sorted into four categories, represented by the following four-quadrant matrix:

	Quantity	Quality
Input	How much service did we deliver? ⁴	How well did we deliver service? ⁵
Output	How much did we produce? ⁶	How good were our products? ⁷

We recognised that the data we currently hold as a service answers the input quadrants well. We were keen to further understand more about the output of our work which, as stipulated in the beginning of this report, is more difficult to determine because of the nature of EP involvement.

⁴ How much effort did we put into service delivery? How hard did we try?

⁵ How well did we treat our service users? Was service courteous, timely, accessible, consistent etc?

⁶ How many service users showed an improvement in well-being? How much do we have to show for our service?

⁷ What percentage of our service users showed improvement? What do we have to show for our service in terms of output quality?

In order to do this, it was important to return to work previously completed. We therefore undertook further research into three aspects of our work in schools:

Casework *(to explore the difference made for staff, students and parents)*

Training *(to investigate implementation)*

Projects *(to consider the longer-term impact of systemic work)*

Semi-structured interviews were created and adapted for each area with the results explored in full detail in appendices 1-3. The table below presents key findings that were elicited in regard to identifying the **impact** of EP work in these areas:

EP Impact in...		
Casework	Training	Projects
Implementation and changes made within school <i>(identifying different ways of working, putting adaptations in, creating a bespoke plan).</i> Understanding, ethos and perspective <i>(creating a sense of hope, adults having a better understanding of needs, enabling a change in perspective).</i> Individual progress <i>(increased self-esteem, improved confidence, taking part, social engagement, learning progress, improved emotional regulation).</i>	Change (both quantitative and qualitative) has occurred as a result of EP training. Quantitative change: EP training has resulted in more interventions taking place as well as building on resources for a range of children and young people. Qualitative change: more awareness and understanding of the interventions; more gentle (and different) approaches, more consistency and robustness; and, because of all of the above, better outcomes for pupils, better relationships, and a positive impact for parents also.	Supporting improved relationships across the whole school community (including with families) with the EP featuring as an integral aspect to this enabling more in-depth conversations to take place. Increased confidence and consistency between school and parents leading to better outcomes for children and young people. Personalised and bespoke support from the EP's professional knowledge base, recognising the unique nature of every situation meaning that a lasting impact is made through suggestions offered. Improved understanding across teaching staff from the EP incorporating complex psychological theory and research in an accessible way. Increased staff ability to generalise and apply the knowledge beyond the specific children and young people to similar situations.

Where longer term impact was not realised (e.g. casework – see appendix 1) issues were raised such as the competing and complex nature of work in schools. Additional comments were made about the timing of EP input and whether earlier intervention would have been more impactful.

Further exploration: deep dive into DCCEPS impact in county wide intervention (e.g. ELSA)

As an example of a county-wide project, a deep dive into the impact of EP involvement in the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme was also undertaken. ELSA is an Educational Psychologist facilitated, targeted, evidence-informed intervention designed to enable within-school preventative early intervention to support social, emotional and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Following a successful pilot in 2017, to date there are 170 registered ELSAs in Derbyshire schools across 115 schools highlighting the scope of this project and potential for positive systemic impact on a wide scale.

Evaluation of the training is taken with each cohort and feedback from the most recent cohort indicates that ELSAs rated highly the new skills and knowledge that they had developed at the end of the course (mean average of 4.4 on a scale from 1-5), and they felt these skills and knowledge could be put into practice in their schools (mean average of 4.76 on a scale from 1-5).

Reflective Supervision

ELSAs are provided with ongoing half-termly 'Reflective Supervision', which is required to maintain their registration, and supports ongoing ELSA implementation in schools. Evaluation of ELSA supervision was undertaken in the academic year 2023-2024 which indicated the following:

- ELSAs rated reflective supervision highly (mean average of 4.7 on a scale from 1-5), feeling it made a positive difference to the children and young people in their care.
- ELSAs felt that supervision provides an opportunity for them to have a safe space to share concerns, knowledge and resources.
- ELSAs felt they benefitted from coming together as a group and continuing their learning.
- The results indicated that ELSAs value supervision as it supports them to feel positive, inspired and full of new ideas and helps them to feel confident about the ELSA role.

ELSA Impact in schools

Feedback through supervision at times indicates that due to budget constraints and staffing issues, schools do not always feel able to implement ELSA interventions in the way intended. It is recognised therefore that one challenge in measuring the impact of ELSA interventions in schools is being clear that there is consistent implementation. Four ELSAs were identified where there was confidence the programme was being implemented consistently. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore the impact of ELSA and the following information was elicited about the impact of ELSA work, facilitated by EP involvement:

ELSA Impact in Schools	
Theme	Quotes
Understanding need	• ELSA improves the communication and relationship between ELSA and teacher. There is a clearer understanding of child's needs and the 'why'. ELSA work enables adults to 'unpick' what the real issues are for children, so they feel understood and there is a shared understanding of the underlying needs and a consistent response to them. • They [teachers] really appreciate the time we can give to unpick what might be happening for a child, which then helps their understanding of how to support them.
Observable change	• They [parents] have noticed things that are different. • They [teachers] have said she's like a different child – engages in lesson, actually sits and does the work. • [ELSA] can see the change in the children who come to see me, week 1, they walk in thinking "what is that room all about?", few weeks later, they bounce through the door – can see made impact on them already. • Parents comment that their child has used a particular strategy in the home (e.g., to support self-regulation). • School have received letters and cards from parents about the positive impact that ELSA has had on their child (e.g., improved attendance, improved emotional wellbeing etc). • ELSA has improved school attendance, removed barriers to learning so that children can access their education, helped children to develop their emotional literacy skills, helped children to socialise with others and provided a safe space for children to talk to adults.
Wellbeing and engagement	Children and young people: • By improving the well-being of some children, ELSA has also improved their engagement in the classroom. • Getting help and talking about your emotions is seen as 'normal' in school. • Feedback from teachers is that they are engaging better in lessons. • ELSA helps children to be happier in school – if they have time to talk to a trusted adult then they are happier and settled, this supports their engagement in learning and has an impact on other areas, for example, friendships develop. Ultimately, ELSA makes children feel safe, this has a positive impact on everything. Comments also indicated that it improved Teacher wellbeing: • For teachers, just knowing that they can refer a child for extra support makes a massive difference i.e., like a load has been taken off.

ELSA Impact in Schools	
Theme	Quotes
Relationships	• Just knowing they have someone in school that they can talk to has really helped get them into school. • ELSA helps children to develop positive and trusting relationships with one key adult in school, but it also enables children to extend their connections with other adults in school who, (because of ELSA) have a shared understanding of their needs and the strategies that will help meet these. Comments also highlighted an impact on child – parent relationships: • ELSA can empower parents and help them to feel more confident helping their child i.e., by giving them strategies to try with their child at home that are being implemented in the sessions (transferring of skills into the home). And an impact on school – parent relationships: • ELSA can improve and build connections and relationships between parents and school staff by regularly communicating about a child's needs (e.g., at relaxed parents' coffee mornings) and by offering ELSA as an action/intervention to support the child. Parents therefore feel listened to, supported and feel that 'things are happening' to help their child (action is taking place).
Developing ideas/ sharing skill set	• Sharing strategies that parents can use at home. • Helps teachers understanding of how to support them. • ELSA makes life easier for staff, there is a shared understanding of the child's needs and how best to help them. Resources and strategies can be discussed, implemented and shared. • ELSA has provided the school with a bank of resources which all staff can access (e.g., via the Cloud). This is helpful for developing staff skill set. The ELSA resources are also very simple but effective (e.g., planning sheets can be reused).
EP skills	• Regarding the training – all of it was informative, gave us lots of ideas – everything I know has come from you guys [EPs], you've trained me well. • EP is a consistent support. Listens and understands – they can look at individual cases e.g., bereavement. Advice can then be shared with school staff to ensure a shared understanding and a consistent approach. • The EP has been great – enthusiastic and supportive. Will focus on certain topics (e.g., bereavement) – offers training, consultation, signposting to other services and support and joint problem-solving.

ELSA Summary

The ELSA programme continues to be a valued contribution from the EPS. Training and Supervision provided by EPs are evaluated to positively impact upon ELSAs skills and wellbeing. The ELSA interventions they then deliver in schools are found to be having an impact on children and young people, their families, school staff and the school community. This is in line with a number of studies investigating the positive impact of ELSA (e.g. Silver, Emanuel & Jones, 2024; Gaffney, Brockbank & Davies, 2020).

Barriers to effective implementation are found where schools experience staffing shortages and are unable to release ELSAs to deliver interventions and attend supervision, thus limiting the impact of this important early intervention work.

Conclusion

Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service is an established team within the Local Authority, providing consistent support and involvement in a range of work, across a range of levels, over an extended period. The research undertaken has evidenced the impact of EP work and highlighted that all partners value the work undertaken by EPs. Derbyshire EPS is seen as a consistent, flexible, efficient, versatile, responsive service.

Applied psychological skill, which is unique to EPs, has been noted in a variety of ways (e.g. consultative skills which draw on understanding the psychology of change, bespoke intervention and training, group management skills, deep understanding of complex theory that is made accessible and relevant, ability to problem solve complex situations using a range of psychological frameworks and paradigms, additional skills that complement psychological knowledge and understanding such as active listening and emotional containment etc).

EPs are highly trained and skilled professionals. The impact of EP involvement has been noted at a child, family, school and systemic level which is consistent with wider research demonstrating the impact of EP work and the skills EPs use that are highly valued. We acknowledge the complex nature of the systems EPs work in, and the competing challenges often faced by schools which can at times limit the longer-term impact of EP involvement. In addition, we recognise there are areas which require further development which are addressed below.

Reflections

- We recognise that regular reviews would enable better capturing of and support for longer-term impact. However, our current model of trading with schools depends on them prioritising a plan-do-review approach which can be challenging given costs, capacity and time involved amongst competing demands in schools.
- Schools commented on the timing of EP involvement and recognised EP involvement may have been more impactful at an earlier stage. This aligns with data gathered (e.g. school questionnaire feedback, casework – appendix 1) that the impact of EP work can be compromised by the complex nature of entrenched needs at a later point.
- The school questionnaire feedback highlighted that assessment and consultation were the most frequently sought aspects of EP work. We reflected on the need to ensure schools are aware of the broader offer of EP involvement at all levels, which we have demonstrated can be impactful at all levels of their graduated response.
- This research has demonstrated the flexibility and accessibility of EPs and how much schools value the collaborative way in which EPs work, which is reported to be in contrast to other services. This highlights the unique nature of EP work, the breadth of work that EPs undertake and exacerbates the frustration felt at the currently imposed recruitment freeze.
- No deep dive was undertaken with parents which would be interesting and informative work to undertake.

Learning points moving forward

- We need to consider how we communicate the range of work that EPs can undertake to all partners to ensure that the impact of EP work is maximised.
- We need to build upon our current methods of gaining feedback from children and young people to ensure their voices are captured and acted upon.
- We need to build upon our current methods of gaining feedback from parents and consider how to capture EHCNA parental feedback since the introduction of the HUB and the changes that ensued.
- We need to consider co-production more broadly and how to maximise this within the EPS.

Appendices

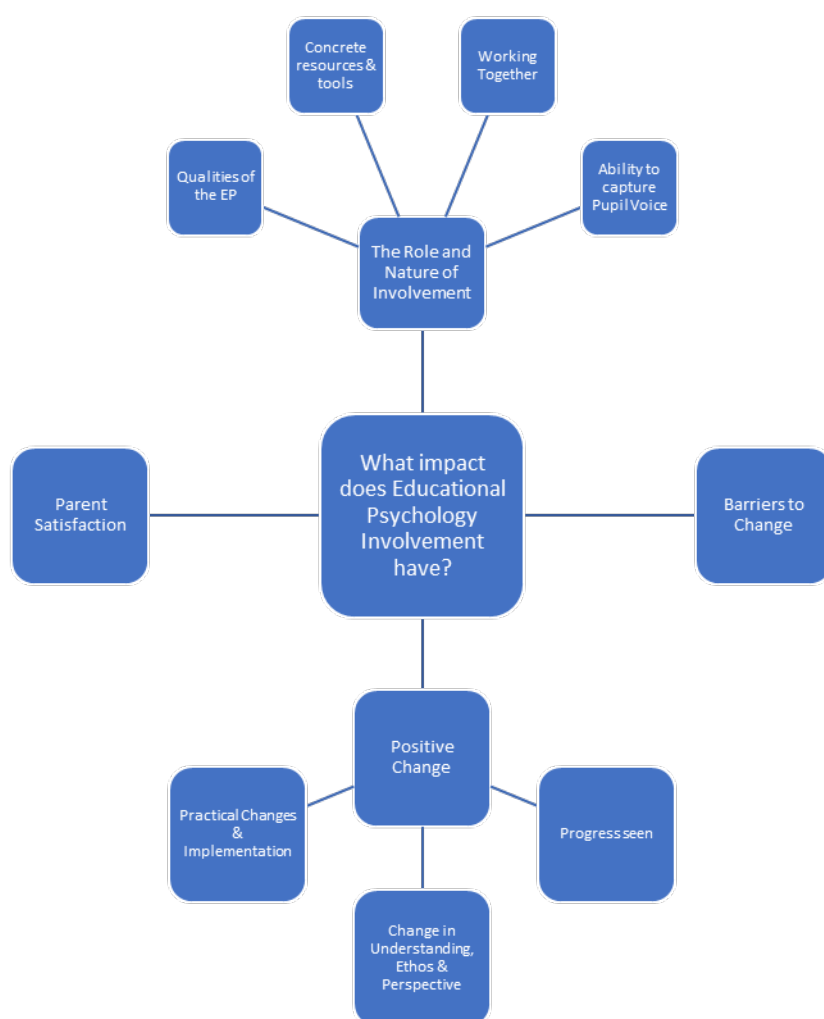
Appendix 1:

Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation Impact of EP Casework in schools

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, with two SENCOs, reviewing impact of involvement over five individual pieces of casework across a primary and secondary school.

Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data collected. Interview transcripts were analysed, identifying key themes and extracts relevant to each theme.

A thematic map presenting the themes, is shown in the image below:



Four key themes were identified, with subthemes within two of the themes, which were:

- The Role and Nature of Involvement
- Parent Satisfaction
- Positive Change
- Barriers to Change

Theme 1: The Role and Nature of Involvement

SENCOs described a variety of aspects of the Educational Psychologist's role which they value, appreciate, allow better understanding of children and young people's needs and how to support them. This theme was broken down into four subthemes: the qualities the EP brings, the tools and work that EPs offer, the ability to capture pupil voice and bring people together.

The Qualities of an EP

SENCOs recognised the interpersonal skills including *"soft and sympathetic"* (Case A), *"the way you lead those meetings and give a sense of time...your manner and thoughtfulness... you listen really carefully"* (Case A) whilst remaining *"impartial and (providing) reassurance"* (Case C). These skills and *"expertise"* (Case A) were noted to have an impact on staff, parents and young people. Staff *"softened towards him"* (Case A) and *"parents feel valued... at ease to talk about some really challenging stuff"* (Case A).

The Tools and Work Offered

Schools seemed to value the *"professional opinion"* (Case D) and the tools EPs use in their work, such as *"cognitive assessments"* (Case B) and *"PATH"* (Case C) meetings. Staff felt that as a result of involvement children and young people's *"needs were unpicked"* (Case D), and the *"guidance provided in your report was really practical and gave us something to work from"* (Case B). The secondary school spoke about feeling EP involvement *"gave (them) permission to do things"* (Case E), allowing them to be more flexible and person centred.

Pupil Voice

Schools felt that EPs *"facilitated (their) voice being captured more than school have done"* (Case A) and that pupils were more *"available to talk to you than (they) have been before, you got the real truth about how they felt about school"* (Case E). Schools felt *"guided to listen to (them)"* (Case A) and pupils feeling *"listened to and understood"* (Case A).

Working Together

SENCOs valued the EP's ability to bring stakeholders, namely parents and school, together in order to work together and collaboratively. *"Everyone was around the table, we were all invested and workshopping ideas"* (Case C) and that it made *"us realise we have the same purpose"* (Case A). This shared understanding and goal impacts relationships and ability to make a difference.

Theme 2: Parent Satisfaction

Schools spoke about parents appreciating schools being “*supported by a professional*” (Case C) and an “*extra layer of support*” (Case E). Schools felt involvement from the EP service reassured parents that schools were “*openminded and will do whatever we can do to help him*” (Case A) and the situations were being taken “*seriously and (had) escalated*” (Case C) beyond school. Involvement from the EP service also meant parents had “*the opportunity to have their views listened to and recognised*” (Case E).

Theme 3: Positive Change

Although in different ways, unique to the individual, and of varying degrees of level and magnitude, change was spoken about in each of the cases reviewed. This theme was divided into three subthemes, with schools speaking of changes they had made to their provision for children and young people, the change in understanding and perspective of those involved (at staff, pupil and parent level) and the positive impacts seen for the individual child or young person following EP involvement.

Implementation and changes made within school

Schools spoke about changes they had made to their provision for the children or young person following EP involvement in all five cases, varying from “*(working) on a quality first teaching offer based on what she needs*” (Case D), putting “*adaptations in place... different ways of working*” (Case B), to more bespoke “*(creating) a classroom which meets his needs*” (case A), “*implemented a key person for period 1 every day and have since offered academy 21 tuition*” (Case C). Two of the cases also spoke about onwards referrals which had been made following EP involvement, as “*we spoke about neurodiversity, and you supported his referral which will have a long-term impact*” (Case B).

Impact on understanding, ethos, and perspective

Involvement from the Educational Psychology Service had evidently had an impact on understanding of need, encouraged staff to take a child centred approach and see things from a different perspective. A “*sense of hope*” (Case C) was created for adults as well as in one case the young person having “*expressed hope that tomorrow was going to be a better day*” (Case A). “*Teachers have a good understanding of (their) needs*” (Case D), which gave a SENCO a feeling of being “*empowered... you gave me the power to advocate for him better*” (Case B). Where this understanding was shared with the young person, “*involvement gave young person reassurance... she deserves an understanding... she understands where she might struggle*” (Case D).

One SENCO spoke about it being “*difficult not to stay locked in our own thinking*” (Case A), and that EP involvement had made them realise:

“We need to spend more time with the individual and take a child centred approach. We have to remember that they are someone’s child...The impact of taking a soft, child-centred approach has been massive” (Case A)

Individual Progress

In three of the five cases reviewed, SENCo’s spoke positively about the changes that had been seen for the young person since EP involvement. Impact was seen in a number of different areas and was unique to the individual. Staff reflected on the positive impact of young people and staff understanding their needs on the individual’s wellbeing and self-esteem, with the children and young people described as *“happy in school now”* (Case D) and having *“grown in confidence”* (Case B). Social inclusion was promoted in two cases, with school reporting *“He is taking part in everything...there has been no question as to whether he should or shouldn’t be going, whereas last year trips wouldn’t have even been an option”* (Case A) and the young person *“mixing with people she wouldn’t have done before”* (Case D).

Engagement with learning had developed for one young person, with them *“engaging with some work that is there on offer and he is voluntarily showing some interest and having a go”* (Case A) and academic progress seen for another young person having *“just done reading assessment... he is close to greater depths”* (Case B).

In two cases, changes at home had been observed with improved relationships with parents (*“being helpful at home... showing warmth towards (Mum)”* (Case A)) and physical aggression reported to have *“got better”* (Case D).

Theme 4: Barriers to Change

The complexity of the situations where we are involved was evident, with change not always being sustained over time. Schools recognised that on occasions parents *“didn’t feel things were in place”* (Case B) or the *“young person feels no one stuck to the PATH”* (Case C), highlighting the difficulties implementing change and people’s perceptions of the support available.

The greatest barriers to change were evident from the secondary school case work, where the SENCO reflected on whether they had *“(left) it too late before getting (us) involved”* (Case C), relationship breakdowns with parents, becoming *“them and us”* (Case C) and not having the *“capacity to pull off what (was) needed”* (Case C).

The secondary school SENCo also reflected on the external factors which she perceived as out of her control, such as *“the timetable is so constricting... curriculum needs shifting, gutting and starting again”* and the inability to *“change the school site”* (Case E).

Appendix 2:

Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation **Impact of EP Training in schools**

In order to review the impact of training delivered by the Educational Psychology Service qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the SENCos of three schools – two primary schools and one secondary school. The training topics covered included Precision Teaching and Direct Instruction, Emotionally Based School Avoidance and Emotion Coaching.

Thematic Analysis was used to identify and present recurring patterns or themes in the data collected – this involved reading and interpretation of the material to extract meaning and understand different subjects and interpretations. Three main themes were identified, namely **Change** (the difference/ change that the training brought about), **Time** and **EP Qualities** (the skills that the EP used that were valued by school). In one theme, a number of sub-themes were also identified.

Theme One: Change

Although in different ways and to varying degrees, change was spoken about in each of the schools interviewed. This theme was further divided into two subthemes (two types of change took place) – quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative change

SENCos spoke about how, because of the training, ‘more’ was happening – not only “*a lot more interventions are happening for older (KS2) children*” but they also “*... built on resources and these can/ have also been used with other pupils*”.

Qualitative change

The sense of ‘more’ and ‘better’ was further evidenced throughout this subtheme – more awareness and understanding of the interventions; more gentle (and different) approaches, more consistency and robustness; and, because of all of the above, better outcomes for pupils, better relationships, and a positive impact for parents also.

SENCos spoke about how the training had “*an impact on staff understanding*” and, linked to the above subtheme (Quantitative Change), it also developed the understanding and awareness of a wider audience – “*this also included lunchtime staff*”, “*has also helped SLT [to be] able to ‘guide’/ prompt ...*” and “*parents are more aware of the approach*”.

SENCoS also spoke about how *“whereas before [staff] were not sure of what to do ... the training opened up a few more doors”*, and about how the training led to more gentle approaches (*“approaches used are different and feel more gentle”*) and to a sense of calmness:

“There has been a change in the school/ staff ethos – a lot of staff are calmer and feel as though they have a direction [they are] following the same steps and are more confident and engaging with children”

“There is a calmness in staff ... and the training has taken away the worry that staff were not doing the right thing”

The training *“... helped staff feel less like they were fighting a losing battle”* and there was *“reassurance that there is no magic wand and that there is no one answer”*. The training also led to a *“more robust process – whereas before staff felt like they were grasping in the dark, they now have a more systematic process in place”*. SENCoS spoke about staff *“staff being in a bit of a rut”* and noted that although *“bits and bobs were happening ... nothing (was) consistent, the training won a lot of staff over because it showed the intervention was not going to be a massive ‘constraint’ on their time”*. SENCoS also spoke about writing interventions/ approaches into pupils’ plans, noting that *“this has been really effective”*.

Although in different ways and to varying degrees all SENCoS spoke positively about the changes that they had seen since receiving the training. There was a positive change/ impact on pupils’ learning/ achievement (*“having received the training and implemented the intervention, pupils made progress”*) but also on their social, emotional and mental health needs:

“Child came to know that they would be understood, safe in school and treated kindly”

“Pupils are communicating their feelings/ emotions more, and more quickly”
“Positive impact on pupil confidence and self-esteem”

SENCoS also spoke about the positive impact that the training had on relationship building between staff and pupils (*“pupils see staff relating to how they are feeling...”*) and for parents (*“parents appreciated the approach and patience”* and *“felt supported and reassured by the process”*). Where change had been less impactful this was because of more external factors (*“i.e., difficulties around staffing and timing”*) or because *“... school was already in the middle of it (process), although “training helped streamline things”*. Although one SENCo did also share that the *“community that school serves do not ‘care’ about what is going on in school ... (and) one parent, for instance, did not give ‘consent’ to school using this approach with their child”*) it did lead to more conversations and to further awareness raising (*“the more*

SENCo and parent spoke, the more the latter understood. This, and other conversations, have led to the Parent Coffee Morning”).

Theme Two: Time

Schools clearly valued the time given by the educational psychologist, both during the training but also afterwards:

“EP is measured and offers space and time”

“Not long after the training was delivered, the EP/ TEP was in school again – to follow things up and if needed, give more support”

“EP has ‘checked in’ since training ... EP makes it full circle”

Theme Three: EP Qualities

Over and above the time given by the educational psychologist, SENCos also described a number of interpersonal skills used by the educational psychologist. This included the educational psychologist making *“staff feel valued and [doing] this skilfully – encouraged real life examples, gave staff opportunity to reflect on how they practice their craft”*, being *“very good at getting each group to contribute ideas”* and being *“very friendly and approachable”*.

Appendix 3:

Thematic Analysis: Educational Psychology Service Impact Evaluation **Impact of EP Project Work in schools**

A thematic analysis using a 'bottom up' approach was carried out on the transcripts from two full interviews and one shorter discussion. One of the interviews and the shorter discussion was with a SENDCo from a federation of primary schools in which the work took place and one interview was with a SENDCo from a single junior school. Two main themes were identified; The Power of the Team and Bespoke responses/Systemic Solutions. These can be seen as the main impact of the project work (including parent workshops on anxiety, parent drop-in clinics, parent groups for neurodiversity and therapeutic parenting and a resilience project) that was carried out in the schools in terms of CYP, parents and staff.

The Power of the Team

The overarching theme of The Power of the Team encompassed three sub-themes: Responsiveness/Flexibility, Consistency and Trust. This view of the EP as being viewed as an integral part of the school team was unique and differed significantly from how other professionals were viewed.

"The fact that you are the named EP for our whole federation works really well. We see you as part of the team."

Furthermore, following the introduction of the parent projects, the feeling of 'teamship' extended much more significantly to include parents also.

"We are seeing less blame going in both directions. Parents aren't blaming us because they can see we're a caring school. As a school, we're not just blaming parents, I feel like we're all working together much more which brings it back to the difference for children."

The positive and enduring impact of the team was felt to be common to CYP, parents and staff although within them there were basic themes that differed.

Sub-theme 1 – Responsiveness / Flexibility

The importance of responsiveness and flexibility was a consistent theme running through the interviews. Primarily this was in terms of the EP being available and responding to requests in a different way to other professionals and services.

"It means so much that you are accessible in a way other professionals and services aren't. And ... you are contactable, and you respond really quickly. That takes away so much stress. "

However, by introducing project work into the offer this also led to a greater level of responsiveness on school's behalf, to the needs and requests from parents.

"We have invited parents to request ideas / topics for further workshops."

"They can see we asked them what they needed and then we gave it to them. We were responsive and I don't think they expected that."

"I also want to send a survey out to parents in the new year to see what kinds of things they would like your support with next. It's really good that we can do it that way round instead of 'you can have this or this' because they can see we are being responsive, and we can because you are."

Sub-theme 2 – Consistency

One major benefit of the team approach was felt to be a significant increase in consistency between school and parents in terms of strategies, approaches and beliefs in supporting CYP.

"They feel more confident from the workshop and the drop ins, they have tools and we can talk about it [anxiety] using the same language."

"...months after a session, they are still telling us things they are doing differently now and how much it has helped."

"it's not just us making changes in school, parents are making changes too and we're talking to each other more, trying to do the same things, you said that consistency really helped and we're seeing that."

The impact of this was felt to be universally positive, increasing parent confidence, supporting staff and providing a clarity and simplicity for CYP that was yielding positive changes at home and in the classroom.

Sub-theme 3 – Trust

Another positive benefit of the EP being seen as an integral part of the team is the sense of familiarity that is developed through the project work for both staff and parents.

"It's like with staff, our parents know you. So even if they haven't been to a workshop or drop-in, they will know someone who has, and they will ask for you by name or they won't need any convincing if I want to make a referral to you. They're excited."

This was also felt to have created a greater sense of trust in the EP in comparison to other professionals.

“...staff will ask, “Has [EP name] suggested anything about this or that issue?” No one is worried about you coming in to observe, they all know you and trust you.”

“Parents feel confident to tell you things they haven’t told us before and be open and you make it safe.”

“You are very relatable to parents; they always feel very comfortable with you very quickly. You normalise things without being dismissive and it takes feelings away from them, like feeling guilty or getting frustrated. You share in how difficult it is, but then you also give them practical things to do about it...They’re listening because you’re listening and then we all end up listening to each other much better instead of feeling so frustrated and some of them were feeling really alone before.”

Bespoke responses / Systemic solutions

The overarching theme of Bespoke responses / Systemic solutions also encompassed three sub-themes: Better understanding, Increased confidence and Wider Impact. SENDCOs felt that despite the broad aims of the project work being more homogenous than in individual casework, the interactions with individuals all differed, contingent upon individual need.

“It’s not just off the peg. Every situation and every child, you notice things we haven’t, or you ask certain questions and it’s different to other services because of that. It always feels really personal to that one child or family.”

However, although the specific needs within different families varied and the conversations did not always follow the same structure, there were commonalities in terms of the recommendations offered by the EP and the solutions that were co-constructed. SENDCOs reflected on this and found ways to incorporate these into more systemic approaches and solutions in school.

“As a SENDCO, the different types of work with parents has helped me directly, but the drip down effect to the rest of the staff is also making a difference.”

“...we have discussed using the resilience framework more consistently in school.”

“We have realised that we need to think much more broadly than we were and it’s not just about interventions, we are reviewing our whole curriculum.”

Sub-theme 1 – Better understanding

SENDCos appreciated the extent to which the EP ‘gives psychology away’ and incorporates sometimes complex theory and research in an accessible and useful way.

“It makes it not seem complicated. I mean it is complicated, a lot of it but you de-mystify what’s happening so that it makes sense.”

This means that rather than viewing learning needs and SEMH or sensory needs as being separate (and often competing in terms of how best to support),

“Teachers are realising that they can’t just focus on academic results in isolation from everything else. It’s connected.”

One specific example of relates to the anxiety workshops;

“We knew we had some anxious children and that some of the parents suffered with anxiety, but we didn’t realise how it might be impacting lots of different behaviours that we were seeing.”

The work carried out by the EP as part of the Resilience project also facilitated a shift in thinking and led to a more nuanced understanding and an appreciation of how the CYP felt about school and the things they valued.

“The interviews with pupils were revelatory (Resilience Project). We had got caught up in the parents’ narrative and had been responding reactively to that.”

Sub-theme 2 – Increased confidence

SENDCos reported increased confidence in both staff and parents in terms of feeling enabled and competent.

“Your approach is very good at helping people realise how much they are already doing that is great. It gives people such confidence. I’ve really seen that.”

Furthermore, SENDCos felt that the project work had increased their confidence to generalise and apply the knowledge beyond the specific CYP to similar situations.

“We don’t wait for a diagnosis, and we do more in-house assessment to inform intervention.”

“The findings [from the Resilience project] gave us so much confidence in what we were doing. We had a rationale for it.”

Sub-theme 3 – Wider impact

SENDCos therefore felt that the projects had a wider impact in terms of the numbers of children who benefitted from the work by increasing the capacity of the school community to support parents.

“It’s like with your reports, I’m starting to pick things out of them, like suggestions and resources and I can apply them to other children too without having to do a referral.”

“We put support / interventions in place for more CYP because of what we have learned.”

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