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Dear Parent / Carer,

### **Update for parents and carers waiting for educational psychology assessments and EHCPs**

Guide to the terms used in this letter:

**EHCNA – Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment:** A request by either yourself, your child or your child’s school to have an assessment of your child’s needs. This is the process to consider whether an EHCP is required.

**EHCP - Education, Health and Care Plan:** This is the legal document which outlines the provision that your child needs. This is given to you at the end of the assessment if your child is eligible.

**EP – Educational Psychologist:** An Educational Psychologist, is a qualified practitioner who specialises in helping children and young people experiencing problems that can hinder their chance of learning. The law states all EHCNA, must include advice from an EP.

**EHCP Assessment Officer –** A SEND professional who will support the assessment process, gather all the evidence together and keep you informed of where your child is in the process.

**EHCP Plan writer -** A SEND professional who will consider all the evidence and draft your child’s EHCP.

Currently the length of time taken from application to finalising an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) is not as it should be. We have taken steps to rectify this. The national shortage of EPs (Educational Psychologists) available to meet the increasing demand has been a significant contributing factor to delays. We apologise that services to date have not always met statutory timescales, we have listened to your concerns and your expectations, this will change.

To address these challenges, Medway council has invested £1.5m into assessment teams and agency EPs to clear the delayed assessments and to make sure that in future we provide an improved service for children and families by meeting statutory timescales. On 15th July 24, 712

young people were waiting on the completion of their EHCNA, of which, 477 were waiting for an EP assessment.

**We are committed to:**

- processing all 712 outstanding EHCNAs (Education Health and Care Needs Assessment) over the next six months, these are applications received before 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024. We are calling this cohort – Cohort A.
- ensuring that EHCP applications received after 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024 are processed in a timely manner. Nationally only 50.3% are completed within 20 weeks, however, we are aiming for all requests to meet this timeframe. This is Cohort B.

**Cohort A**

Your child is in Cohort A if the EHCNA was received by the LA **before 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

**Cohort B**

Your child is in Cohort B if the EHCNA was received by the LA **after 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

*If you are unsure of the cohort your child falls into, your child's school can advise you.*

**To enable these improvements, we have:**

**For Cohort A:**

- Recruited a dedicated team of EPs to specifically work on assessments for children and young people.
- Recruited a dedicated assessment team, to ensure decisions are made in a timely manner, offer advice and provide an allocated officer who will update you throughout the ECHNA process.
- Recruited a team of professional EHCP writers who will create high quality EHCPs in a timely manner. This will result in a shorter time between EP assessment and the final panel decision.

**For Cohort B:**

- Recruited a dedicated assessment team, to ensure decisions are made in a timely manner, offer advice and provide an allocated officer who will update you throughout the ECHNA process.
- Provided new dedicated email address for all schools and families undergoing an EHCNA. You can use this or contact your allocated officer to submit information or ask questions. This address is: [ena@medway.gov.uk](mailto:ena@medway.gov.uk)
- Published guidance for families who have sought private EP reports, on how we may use these and if we will refund you for them, up to £1,100.

## **Funding and support for schools for children and young people without an EHCP, or waiting for an EHCNA**

All schools have a statutory duty to meet your child's SEND needs, even where there is a request for an EHCNA in process. Details on what this means and what you can expect from your child's school are outlined in the **Ordinarily Available Document** that can be found:

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/7845/ordinarily\\_available\\_provision\\_guide\\_for\\_parents\\_and\\_carers](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/7845/ordinarily_available_provision_guide_for_parents_and_carers)

We recognise that the delay to issuing EHCPs may delay additional support (over and above what is listed in the Ordinarily Available Document) being available. Since June 2024, schools have been able to apply for additional funding to meet your child's needs without the need for an EHCP, or during the EHCNA process. We are processing these applications as a priority so that support is available as soon as possible.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **If I applied for an EHCNA before 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024, what can I expect?**

Your child is in Cohort A.

- Your child's school has been allocated an EP who will work with the SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) to coordinate assessments for all children in their school who are in Cohort A.
- You will receive communication from your allocated assessment officer, giving you an estimated time scale for when your child is likely to be seen by an EP.

There will be a two-strand approach to allocation of EPs carrying out assessments:

**STRAND 1** – Schools that require several EP assessments. There will be one or more EPs allocated to the school setting. They will work with the school to assess all the children that have been waiting in the academic year 2023-2024.

**STRAND 2** – EPs will be allocated to children who have been waiting the longest, regardless of the setting they are in. This will happen at the same time as Strand one.

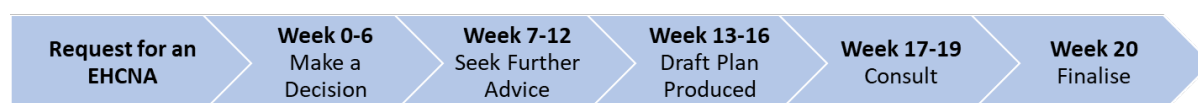
Some children will fall in both Strand 1 and Strand 2. For these children, the EP and the school SENCo will prioritise the child waiting the longest to be seen first by the EP.

Following EP assessment, an improved system is in place for the draft EHCP to be written and to be taken to the panel. The remainder of the process will be carried out by your allocated assessment officer who will guide you along the journey.

### **If I applied for an EHCNA after 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024, what can I expect?**

The team will work to carry out the EHCNA within the statutory timeframes, as set out below.

#### **EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) Statutory Timescale**



## **Does this mean some children will get their EHCNA before others who have been waiting longer?**

Cohort A will be assessed by an EP in the priority order explained above. The dedicated team will work to process these as quickly as possible. Our target is to have them all completed by March 2025.

Cohort B will experience the usual statutory timeframes. This means that for a few children in Cohort B, it is possible that they will have received their EHCNA before some children who have been waiting longer in Cohort A. We agree that children being assessed by an EP before others that have been waiting longer, is not ideal.

The purpose of taking this short-term action, to address the cohorts separately, is to enable a more targeted approach to Cohort A. Typically an EP assessment takes two days due to the time taken to set up meetings, travel and write the related paperwork. For Cohort A, we are allocating EPs to a school to work on all the outstanding EP assessments in that school. This saves time as observations can be carried out consecutively, EP conversations with yourself and the school can be organised in a more time efficient way. The EP develops a better understanding of the school, and there is no need to spend time travelling between schools.

If we operate like this for both cohorts, the unfairness of seeing children out of order would be considerably worse.

## **Where can I get more advice and support?**

Our Inclusion teams are located in the family hubs. They are there to support enquiries regarding any education or SEND issue. The hubs have allocated drop-in times where you can go in and speak to a professional. Details on the location and opening times can be found on your local offer website <https://www.medway.gov.uk/localoffer>.

We also offer a free independent advice service, SENDIASS, provided by family action who would be happy to support, their details can be found: <https://family-action.org.uk/>

Medway has a very active Parents and Carers forum, (MPCF) where you will find lots of people with similar experiences to help and support you. You can contact them through their website: <https://medwaypcf.org.uk/>

I will be available to answer your questions will be attending an online MPCF event on the 15<sup>th</sup> October at 7pm on Zoom. If you don't have access to Zoom you can sign up for free on: <https://zoom.us/>

You will need to enter the Meeting ID and Passcode:

Meeting ID: 835 7067 6830

Passcode: 660900

If you have any issues, please contact MPCF as detailed above.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding as we work to address the system issues.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

**Celia Buxton**

**Assistant Director Education and SEND**

**Medway Council**