



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT

www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Life February 2019

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your email of 5 February, addressed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) about the use of educational psychologists in additional needs assessments. Your email has been passed to this department and I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

As you are aware, Northamptonshire County Council is under government intervention. The government has appointed a team of commissioners who are responsible for the county's strategic financial management, and a Children's Services Commissioner, who is supporting the authority to stabilise and improve its children's social care services. This also includes reviewing options for the future delivery of those services, if a proposed local reorganisation of the County Council is implemented. More information about the government's intervention in Northamptonshire is available online at: tinyurl.com/Yxu32xak.

The government wants all children and young people, no matter what their special educational need or disability (SEND), to be able to reach their full potential and receive the right support to succeed in their education as they move into adult life. Since 2014 we have supported the implementation of significant reforms, putting children, young people and their families at the heart of the system, and focusing on outcomes and transition to adult life.

It is essential that children with SEND have their needs identified as early as possible in order to get the joined-up support they need and to achieve well in school and into adulthood. A child or young person does not need to have a diagnostic assessment in order for a school or college to identify and put in place additional support required to meet their needs.

Although arrangements for referrals for autism diagnosis are a matter for local determination, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) clinical guidelines, available at: tinyurl.com/YY1a4smb, aim to improve the diagnosis and experience of children, young people and those who care for them. They recommend the establishment of a multi-agency strategy group and multidisciplinary autism teams in each area. The assessment process should be child-centred and consider evidence of autism in the context of the child or young person's overall development. The guidelines state that a diagnostic assessment should start within three months of the referral to the autism team (by health or education).

Diagnosis and the assessment of needs can offer an understanding of why a child or young person is different from their peers and can open doors to support and services in education, health services and social care, and a route into voluntary organisations and contact with other children and families with similar experiences.

I would encourage you as a matter of urgency to discuss with the clinical commissioning group (CCG) to understand how the needs of children and young people are being met and how you can work together to improve the current position. You can find the relevant CCG by inserting a postcode or address at the following link: www.nhs.uk/service-search.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families