

**An internal school report exploring the potential of Educational  
Psychologist reports when placing pupils within different educational  
pathways at Elm Tree Community Primary School**



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## **Abstract**

This internal school report has been created to help with the process of school restructuring of educational pathways. The purpose of the report is to explore whether Educational Psychologist (EP) reports are a sound and reliable means of deciding on which educational pathway a child should be placed in. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse a sample of EP reports in order to make a conclusion regarding their potential uses in school restructuring. Ultimately, this report found that, although each report must be treated individually, EP reports provide a sound basis upon which to decide on an educational pathway for each pupil. However, although the reports provide a starting point for deciding upon an educational pathway, the decision should be reviewed after the child has been in this pathway for a term or half term so as to ensure that their needs are being met.

## **Background and rationale**

According to Vivash and Morgan (2019), it was the 1981 Education Act (Department of Education Science, 1981) which resulted in Local Authorities (LAs) having responsibility to meet SEND needs of children in the UK education system, and consequently led to a change in the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) so that they have a direct role in the assessment of SEND children and in providing advice for schools in meeting their needs. As such, EP reports can be used by SEND schools to meet the needs of their pupils. This does not mean that EP reports always provide the best means of meeting children's needs, however. Some EP reports may place significant emphasis on empirical test results which are perceived as less valuable by teachers compared with reports that are individual to the pupils (Umana, Khosraviyani & Castro-Villarreal, 2020).

Currently, the school receives information concerning the pupil in the form of EP reports, EHCP plans, SALT reports, and through communication with other relevant parties such as Occupational Therapists and other educators. However, pupil placement within educational pathways is largely based on other factors such as interactions between the individual pupil and school staff. As such, educational pathways are determined based on the opinions of the senior management team (SMT) and teachers when the child comes to the school, or they may be placed in a pathway due to their age or because of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis. Understanding the content and uses of EP reports may provide an alternative way of placing pupils within different pathways at the school. . Additionally, the school is considering restructuring its educational pathways. Three educational pathways are currently being considered as part of school restructuring. These pathways are as follows: i) A traditional/ formal education pathway, ii) a play-based pathway, iii) an ASD pathway. It is the school's aim to make these pathways part of the formal structure of pupil placement within the school, and to use evidence-based methods to place pupils within the appropriate pathway in order to meet their individual needs. The aim of this report is to investigate how useful EP reports may be for restructuring the school's educational pathways, and for determining the most appropriate pathway for individual pupils.

In order to complete this report, thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse a sample of Educational Psychologist (EP) reports. TA is a type of qualitative analysis which involves making a series of conscious decisions to identify key themes within a text-based data set, such as an interview or case notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA was chosen to analyse the data set due to the fact that the EP reports are predominantly text-based. The quantitative measures used actually form part of the text report. TA also allows for larger themes across the reports to be identified which can help to make a more general conclusion about the type and quality of information disclosed within the EP reports. The analytic process is fully disclosed within the report, allowing for the role of the report writer's decision making in the analysis to be considered (Antaki et al., 2003). This type of analysis has been chosen for this report based on its flexible nature, its ability to identify key themes (which will help to identify which educational pathway is best suited to the individual pupil), and the fact that the EP reports are predominantly text-based, making quantitative analysis impossible. It also means that the EP reports will be analysed and interpreted using evidence-based methods, thereby showing that the school has thoroughly considered the information available to them in EP reports when meeting the needs of their pupils. Using this method, a sample of EP reports will be used to determine how useful EP reports may be for restructuring the school's educational pathways.

### **Overview of the content of EP reports**

The current BPS guidelines for writing EP reports indicate that there is no agreed upon structure, or 'must haves', for the report to include (BPS, 2020). The guidelines simply state that it can use 'any existing evidence' and be 'supplemented through contact with teachers, professionals, parents, and the child or young person themselves'. There are guidelines regarding reporting limitations and relevant supervision to ensure that the assessments and advice are ethical and accurate to the best of the EP's ability, but there is no clear structure. It is also evident from reading the reports that there is no formal template in place, which means that it may be difficult to reach a general conclusion about the depth of content in the reports. For example, some of the reports commissioned by a particular EP provider

follow a rigid structure, whilst others (notably those conducted by EPs working for the LA) are more individual to the child or young person (C/YP) for whom the report is about. Some reports also reference other materials, such as previous EP reports or ‘All About Me’ profiles without discussing them in depth in the report, therefore EP reports should always be considered in conjunction with such additional documents.

### *Use of psychometric scales*

One way in which differences between EP reports are reflected is through the use of psychometric scales or assessments. EPs may use the British Ability Scale Third Edition (BAS3; Elliot & Smith, 2011) as this is considered to be trustworthy, reliable, and well-established (GL-Assessment, 2021). Nevertheless, some EPs may use other scales such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fourth Edition (WISC-IV; Wechsler, 2003), the Boxall Profile (Bennathan, Boxall & Colley, 2018), or the Gilliam Autism Scale: Third Edition (GARS-3; Gilliam, 2014). These scales may be used either in place of or in addition to the BAS3, and may be used in any combination depending on the aims of the EP report in question. A brief overview of the main scales used in the EP reports currently available to the school, including their strengths and limitations, is included below.

#### *The British Ability Scale: Third Edition (BAS3; Elliot & Smith, 2011)*

The BAS3 consists of 20 individual scales, although the EP administering the test can choose which of these scales to use depending on the age of the child, among other factors (GL-Assessment, 2021). These scales are used to measure general cognitive ability (GCA) through spatial ability, verbal ability, and non-verbal reasoning ability. These abilities are determined by measuring copying pattern, construction, matrices, naming vocabularies, picture similarity, and verbal comprehension. Ability scores are also provided to explain academic ability (number, reading, spelling). Each child has a test score for each dependent variable which can be compared to a standardised test score. A percentile rank is also provided to show where the test scores place the child relative to the rest of the population. For example, being scored in the 4th percentile means that there would be three children below the child being assessed and 96 above them for that variable. The EP also provides a

confidence interval which can be used to show how confident they feel that the test scores are an accurate representation of that child's GCA. The scale can be used across a range of ages, and there is an Early Years version of the BAS3 for ages three years and zero months (3Y0M) to 7Y11M and a School Age version for ages 6Y0M to 17Y11M. Overall, the test takes approximately 30-45 minutes to complete (GL-Assessment, 2021).

*The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children: Fourth Edition (WISC-IV; Wechsler, 2004)*

The WISC-IV measures children's intellectual ability and is used for children aged 6Y0M to 16Y11M (Pearson Education, 2021c). Specifically, this test measures general ability, verbal ability, numerical ability, spatial ability, non-verbal ability, perceptual speed, and memory. The test takes between 62 and 106 minutes to complete depending on the C/YP (BPS, 2014), which may be part of the reason why most EPs typically use the BAS3 instead, as the shorter test time for the BAS3 may work better for primary school aged children. Despite this, it has been considered to be a reliable and widely used method for determining C/YP intelligence (Kaufman et al., 2006). What is important to note about this scale is that there is now an updated edition, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fifth Edition (WISC-V; Wechsler, 2016), which has updated psychometric properties and may give a more thorough interpretation of children's intelligence and ability (Pearsons, 2021b). This does not mean that the WISC-IV is unreliable, but it means that it may be slightly outdated and more up-to-date measures may be preferable.

*The Boxall Profile (Bennathan, Boxall & Colley, 2018)*

The Boxall Profile (Bennathan, Boxall & Colley, 2018) is a psychometric tool which is specifically used to assess Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs of C/YP. The assessment can be carried out quickly by teachers, or other staff who know the C/YP well, and is divided into two parts: the first part addresses the C/YP development, the second part assesses specific behaviour which inhibit involvement within the school (Nurture UK, n.d.). There are two versions of the Boxall Profile, one for nursery/ primary school aged children and one for secondary school aged children,



both of which can be used to assess SEMH needs, compare individual test scores to standardised emotional literacy scores, and can be used to set targets for each individual C/YP (Nurture UK, n.d.).

*Gilliam Autism Rating Scale: Third Edition (GARS-3; Gilliam, 2014)*

The GARS-3 (Gilliam, 2014) is used to test for autism in people aged between three and 22 years. The scale is made up of six subscales which were created using both the Autism Society (Autism Society, 2012) and the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) definitions of autism. The scales focus on repeated/restrictive behaviours, social interaction, social communication, emotional responses, cognitive style, and maladaptive speech (Gilliam, 2014). Whilst the scale can be administered by a range of professionals, including EPs and speech pathologists, it is also rated by school teachers or someone who has significant contact with the C/YP (Gilliam, 2014; Karren, 2017). The test has been shown to be reliable and accurate at differentiating between children with and without ASD, with the internal reliability coefficients being greater than .85 for the subscales and greater than .93 for the Autism Index (Pearson, 2021a).

***Interviews and in-person observations***

Psychometric scales may be used in conjunction with interviews with parents, carers, and school staff directly involved with the child (BPS, 2020). A study by Mitsis et al. (2000) discussed the role in parent and teacher opinions when identifying subtypes of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in a clinically referred sample of children. The study concluded that there was relatively little agreement between parents and teachers, and emphasises the importance of using interviews in conjunction to psychometric tests. In particular, it noted that parental reports of their child's behaviour at school were more in line with the child's behaviour at home and so did not often match up with teacher reports of the child's behaviour. Although this report is now a little outdated, having been produced in 2000, it emphasises the fact that, although interviews with both parents/ caregivers and teachers can give detailed and important information relevant to children's educational and socio-emotional needs, they may not always be the most reliable source of information.

Nevertheless, interviews with the C/YP and their parents/ caregivers are an integral part of the process of writing EP reports as they adhere to one of the four key parts of an EHC plan emphasised in the SEND Code of Practice, namely to take into account the views of the C/YP and their parents/ caregivers (BPS, 2015). Furthermore, EPs are held to a code of conduct which states that their observations and advice must be grounded in evidence-based psychological theory, and so such interviews are used in conjunction with a variety of other methods including the observations of a qualified EP, or an assistant EP who is under supervision of a qualified EP (BPS, 2015).

### *Use of labels/ SEND terminology*

Whilst it is not possible to provide a thorough overview of all labels/ SEND terminology used in EP reports, a brief overview of some of the main terms used in EP reports available to the school will be provided here. The purpose of this is to show some of the benefits and difficulties when using these labels, and to focus particularly on terms which are used frequently within this school in particular. The terms which will be discussed are Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH), and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

#### *Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)*

One of the most apparent problems with the term MLD is that there are no clear diagnostic criteria for MLD, and the criteria being used for it within the UK education system may even change depending on what region you are in so there is no uniform understanding of the term (Dyslexia South, 2016). The term is partly based on academic achievement and partly based on cognitive ability tests, however it has come to be used in over-generalised terms within SEN education (Norwich et al., 2014). Indeed, Norwich et al. (2014) found that, in some of the schools which participated in their study, there was no reason to distinguish between Specific Learning Disability (SpLD) such as dyslexia, and MLD. This emphasises the confusion over how to define MLD and the general lack of cohesion among professionals over how to apply the term. In general, there is very little research about the use of MLD as a label. It is not clear if this can change with environment change and/ or time. Depending on how the term was used in the first place, it may have the potential to change

simply because there is so little research into this area. Teacher attitudes towards inclusion of children with MLD are ‘stronger in principle than in practice’ and that doubts around this centre around the lack of clarity in differentiating MLD from ‘low attainment’ (Ylonen & Norwich, 2012). This shows the same thing, namely that we need to treat the MLD label very carefully. Some children may have an underlying cognitive disability which could be explaining the MLD symptoms. Others may simply have low attainment, which could be due to the environment.

Additionally, Kelly and Norwich (2004) completed a study which looked at self-perception of children with MLD in both mainstream and SEND schools. They concluded that MLD children in mainstream had more negative self concept than their counterparts in sen education, and were often called ‘thick’ or other negative labels, so they felt worse about their educational ability. Perhaps this shows that there may be a benefit to the MLD label just as far as placing children within specialist education so that their self concept does not become completely negative, but after they have been placed in a special school the term MLD should be treated with some caution. Furthermore, Kelly and Norwich (2004) highlight some important limitations of using the term MLD and of carrying out EP reports in general, specifically by discussing how some children may be just trying to please the interviewer, or conversely may perform badly in an EP assessment because they are with an unfamiliar adult and so cannot do their best in the assessment. They also acknowledge that their findings are hindered by the lack of clarity over the MLD label in the first place. Overall, there is a general consensus that the term MLD is poorly defined and is over-used, meaning that it should be treated with caution when implementing the content of EP reports.

#### *Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)*

Whilst MLD was the most common category of need among Lancashire children in SEND schools, SEMH was found to be the fourth most common category of need, encompassing a total of 1709 C/YP (Booth et al., 2019). Despite this, the definition of SEMH remains fairly vague. Booth et al. (2019) define SEMH in their report as ‘children and young people who have social, emotional and mental health needs experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying

challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour.’ In reality, it seems as though the term SEMH is used to refer to behavioural difficulties which mainstream teaching staff feel unable to address. This means that the use of the term SEMH provides little insight into the needs of the child in question, and so the information in the EP report may need to be quite detailed with regards to the individual needs of that child in order to properly meet their needs.

Despite this, there are other points of note which can be made about SEMH needs in general. First, it must be noted that there is a certain level of stigma surrounding the SEMH label which can lead to negative self perceptions of those given it (Sheffield & Morgan, 2016). Consequently, it is important to be aware of the effect on children’s self-esteem when using the label. Secondly, a study which used thematic analysis on interviews with children with SEMH needs in primary schools investigated ways to meet the children’s needs, and identified the two main themes of social relationships/ interactions, and emotional and behavioural reactions, and stressed that children with SEMH needs need to be made to feel safe and supported by the adults in their schools (Dalton, Adams & O’Reilly, 2019). Whilst this is still a fairly general conclusion to make about SEMH needs, it adds to the first point that, when SEMH children’s needs are not met properly, it can have a strong negative effect on self-esteem and self-concept. Whilst this provides little clarity with regards to determining educational pathways, it does suggest that relationships need to form a strong part of education and that the SEMH label should not be considered a great indicator of what a child’s individual needs are and how they should be met.

#### *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*

A diagnosis of ASD involves a number of professionals including SENCOs, psychiatrists, EPs, and general practitioners (National Autistic Society, 2020). However, the role of EPs is not actually to diagnose but to assess the individual C/YP’s needs and offer support for education (National Autistic Society, 2020). In the EP reports, the EP may refer to ASD in order to recommend that a diagnosis is sought, to offer educational support post-diagnosis, or simply to observe whether any traits of autism are present which may be affecting the C/YP’s education or well-being. As ‘autism’ is a medical term there are EPs are not qualified to diagnose autism, and so the content in EP reports should focus on

how to meet the educational needs of children with ASD or suspected ASD, as a diagnosis is not required to seek EP advice and support (OEAC, 2011).

## **Aims of the report**

Whilst planning the restructuring of the school's educational pathways, it is the intention of the SMT to use the EP reports currently provided to them as the primary method of determining appropriate educational pathways for pupils. The motivation behind this decision is to ensure that decisions within the school are evidence-based. As such, this report will investigate how useful EP reports can be for this school's internal use when meeting pupil SEND needs.

The aims of this report are as follows:

1. To investigate how useful EP reports are for placing pupils in the educational pathways currently being considered within the school.
2. To investigate how this school should consider the terms Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties and Moderate Learning Disability (MLD) when addressing the needs of a pupil.
3. To evaluate how much emphasis this school should place on EP reports when meeting the needs of a pupil.

The reports will consider these three aims as a means to inform school policy and the process of restructuring educational pathways.

## **Method**

### *Selecting reports for analysis*

Before beginning the process of TA, twenty EP reports which are currently available to the school were selected to be part of the data set for analysis.. Initially, it was thought that only ten reports would be selected. This number was decided on as being the appropriate sample size based on other

qualitative meta analyses (Vivash & Morgan, 2019). However, after inspection of the total number of EP reports available to the school, it became clear that a larger sample size would be needed to be able to answer the aims of this report. Specifically, there were approximately 120 reports available to the school (not all pupils have an EP report) and many followed different structures, used different psychometric scales, or gave different amounts of detail or emphasis in certain areas. For example, some reports have placed the greatest amount of emphasis on interviews with staff and parents/caregivers of the pupil rather than on psychometric tests, which means that there is not a universal pattern to the reports. As such, a larger sample size of twenty was used so as to be able to give a comprehensive analysis of the information which is available to the school, in general.

The inclusion criteria for selecting these EP reports are as follows:

1. The EP report is currently available for use by the school.
2. The EP report concerns a pupil who is not currently in Year 6.
3. In the case that the pupil has more than one EP report available, the most recent EP report is used.
4. The EP report is carried out by a qualified Educational Psychologist, and not an assistant Educational Psychologist.
5. The EP report is not written for a child with whom the author of this report has had significant contact with.

The first inclusion criteria is being used based on the fact that this report is being created for internal school restructuring and so must be based on the needs of current pupils whose EP reports the school already has permission to access and use. The second inclusion criteria has been selected as Year 6 pupils will be moving on to secondary education after the end of this academic year, and so they will not need to be placed in one of the new educational pathways for the academic year 2021-22. The third inclusion criteria has been decided upon due to the fact that some pupils have multiple EP reports to their name, and so the most chronologically recent report has been used in order to ensure

that the information pertaining to the pupil is up-to-date and as accurate as possible. Without this, it is possible that the school would be using information which is no longer relevant to the child's needs or circumstances. Additionally, some pupils have multiple EP reports with at least one of these reports being written by a trainee or assistant EP rather than a qualified EP. In this case, the report written by the qualified EP will be used. Finally, it was decided not to use the EP reports of pupils with whom I have had significant contact, namely the children in a class where I have worked for more than five consecutive days. This is to prevent any detailed prior knowledge of children's ability influence the evaluation of the EP reports. This is necessary as school staff will not have this same background knowledge from face-to-face interactions when placing children in educational pathways, and it is to better protect the confidentiality of the pupils.

### ***Ethical considerations***

The reports used for the sample are readily available to the school for the purpose of meeting the needs of the pupils. This report has been created for internal school use only in order to assist the management team in making decisions which meet the needs of its pupils. As such, this report has used the school's EP reports for their intended purpose. Permission was sought from the headteacher and the senior management team before any analysis took place. The school's data security policy was fully adhered to throughout the process, no external parties have been involved, and any excerpts of data used in this report have been completely anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the pupils.

### ***Familiarisation with data***

After randomly selecting 20 EP reports from the school's available reports, the data was anonymised to protect the identity of the pupils and to prevent them from being identified from this report. Each report was read to provide an overview of the general structure and content of the reports. Prior to this, there had been little background reading on different psychometric scales and their properties, or on the use of terms such as MLD and SEMH. Once all the reports had been read, background research

was conducted to provide greater insight into the strengths, limitations, and uses of the EP reports for the school.

### *Generating initial codes*

After becoming familiar with the data set, 20 reports which met the inclusion criteria set out above were randomly selected for analysis. The data was then anonymised to protect the identity and confidentiality of the pupils concerned. A separate document was created for codes which corresponded to the data set to be written. Each report was read individually, and contributed codes to the document so that each of the twenty reports made a contribution to the subsequent analysis. The codes could initially be described as being structure-based, for example 'relevant background' and 'provision' appeared frequently. However, many codes relating to reliability, psychometric assessment, and specific content/ use of psychological terms relating to the pupil were also created. A decision was made at this point to code all the content relating to the report, including both the structure of the report and the individualised content which differed between reports. Once all twenty EP reports had been coded, the process of searching for themes could begin.

### *Searching for themes*

In order to search for emerging themes, the codes were organised using a colour-coding system by which codes were grouped together based on an overarching theme they represented. This resulted in a total of eleven initial themes being identified. These themes were identified as i) psychological terms and jargon, ii) advice to help meet needs, iii) description of needs and possible triggers, iv) date of report, v) company, vi) psychometric assessment and interview with EP, vii) clarity of where the information came from, viii) view of the child, ix) home vs school/ differing opinions about the child, x) background information and home life, xi) referral to another document. Some of these codes could reasonably fit into more than one of these eleven themes, for example some codes fit into both 'psychological terms and jargon' and 'description of needs and possible triggers'. At this stage, the codes were colour-coded to identify them with both themes, in order to help with the refining process



later. These eleven initial themes which were identified using the colour-coding process are shown in Figure 1.

### ***Reviewing themes***

Organising the codes into these initial eleven themes helped to differentiate between emerging latent and semantic themes. Many of the initial eleven themes were semantic in nature, meaning that they were largely descriptive and needed no deeper interpretation. For example, 'company' is a latent theme as it is simply showing the different companies and sources of the EP reports. A semantic theme is one which requires deeper interpretation, and many of these initial themes could not be described as semantic. However, identifying these initial eleven themes helped to then identify overarching semantic themes during the review process. Ultimately, two overarching themes were identified, one of which was semantic and one of which was latent in nature. The semantic theme related to the basic content of the EP reports. It was important to include this as a theme in its own right as the content of the EP reports varied depending on the company who produced the report. By understanding what content school staff could expect to be provided, this enabled a more detailed analysis and interpretation of the potential of these EP reports to allow a child to be placed within an educational pathway. The latent theme, on the other hand, concerned the accessibility and reliability of the report. This could be described latent as it requires a deeper understanding and interpretation of whether the content necessarily provides the best portrayal of the child's needs, and whether the information is conveyed clearly and efficiently for school staff.

### ***Defining and naming themes***

After much consideration, the themes were labelled as 'Content of the EP report' and 'The reliability and accessibility of the EP report to school staff'. This was to allow for the greatest level of clarity when reading the report. Two sub-themes were identified for 'content of the EP report' and three sub-themes were identified for 'The reliability and accessibility of the EP report to school staff'. A table showing these themes and their sub-themes can be seen in Figure 2.

### ***Producing the report***

The entire process of this report, including the background research, selecting reports, and beginning the analysis, was recorded. This meant that the report-writing process was relatively straight-forward. Background research was completed and included at the beginning of this report, and the actual analysis of the data sample was included in a separate section of the report. Throughout this process, the analytical decisions made by the author have been documented. Most notably, since this report was created to explore the potential of EP reports for placing pupils within educational pathways, many of the decisions relating to identifying themes were made with this in mind.

### **Analysis**

#### ***Theme 1: The content of the EP report***

This semantic theme will address the literal content of the EP report. It will explore what type of information is available in the EP reports and how this may be used to place pupils within one of the school's educational pathways.

#### *A description and explanation of the child's needs, both academic and social*

The primary aim of the EP reports is to attempt to give an overview of the child's needs, and one means of doing this is to literally describe the needs of the child within the report. Most EP reports are divided into sections which provide a kind of structure to describe and explain these needs. For example, 'self help and independence skills' is an example of a subheading which goes on to provide a description and explanation of how developed this child's independence skills are. Descriptions of 'sensory needs', 'emotional state', and 'friendships with peers' can provide a thorough description of the child's needs. Whilst the reports can provide a description of academic needs ('cognition and learning') there is also a description of social needs ('finds it very difficult to get on with his peers') which help to provide a more comprehensive view of the child's needs. In particular, descriptions of how able a child is to access a traditional curriculum provide one of the most clear views of the child's needs. For example, 'was able to follow whole class instructions', 'age appropriate

concentration skills’, and ‘sit quietly and listen for a few minutes at a time’ all show whether the child would be able to access a traditional education model or whether their needs would be better met in a play-based learning pathway.

*Resources to help meet the needs of the child, including planned outcomes, resources and methods, and identification of triggers*

Within the descriptive information concerning the child’s needs, the reports often identify different ‘triggers’ for behaviours, such as ‘control’ and ‘lots of children doing different things’. These triggers can provide insight into which pathway they may be better suited to, for example if the child needs to be able to have ‘choices’ and be able to follow their own agenda then they may not be suited to a traditional academic pathway. Furthermore, many of the EP reports have a dedicated section titled ‘outcomes, suggested methods and approaches’. This section often provides a detailed description of different resources which can be used to meet the child’s needs at school and/ or at home. It may list specific activities or books which may be of use to the teacher. In terms of outcomes, it may list academic, social, or other outcomes which need to be met to help the child. This in itself can help the school determine which pathway they are best suited to, and different pathways may be more geared towards specific outcomes.

### ***Theme 2: The reliability and accessibility of the EP reports to school staff***

This latent theme will address how easily the content of the EP reports can be used by school staff. It will explore whether the reports can be considered reliable, comprehensive, and clear. This theme should demonstrate whether the EP reports available to the school give a complete picture of a child’s needs and how they may be met by the school.

*The use of jargon and whether this is used appropriately*

EPs typically use psychological terms throughout their reports. This can include terms such as ‘autism’, ‘ADHD’, and ‘scaffolding’. Sometimes, these terms are described and an explanation is given to show how the term applies to the specific child in question. For example, the term ‘zone of

proximal development' is often explained so that it can be used when meeting the child's needs. However, this is not always the case. A key example of this is the use of the term 'moderate learning difficulties'. While some reports provide a definition of this term, or perhaps more accurately a definition of how that particular EP is using that term, not all reports do this. This can limit the usefulness of the reports and can make it less accessible to school staff who may not know how to interpret those terms. Another example of this can be seen in one report where an EP advises that staff 'complete ABC charts'. This refers to a technique used in Applied Behavioural Analysis. Whilst some staff may know what this means and how to do this, it may not be the case for all staff. Therefore, whilst many EP reports use psychological terms appropriately, it would be an exaggeration to state that they are universally accessible to school staff.

#### *Sources of information and their use across the sample*

In terms of where the information for these reports come from, it is difficult to make a general conclusion. This is because the reports come from a range of different organisations who use different structures and different sources of information. Corban Psychology created many of the reports used in this sample, and they use an established structure for their reports. In these reports they consider the 'views of the child', 'view of the parent', and the views of the teaching staff. This provides a comprehensive understanding of the child's needs and shows that the EP is using a range of different sources of information to support their conclusions. This does not necessarily mean that the conclusion is accurate as the views of the parent may directly contradict the views of teaching staff ('meltdowns at home... does not have meltdowns at school'). These contradictions are also evidence in the interactions/ observations the EP has with the child. For example, it may be the case that the child was 'having a good morning' during the EP observation and so the 'snapshot' of that child provided by the EP on one particular day may not be the most accurate picture of the child and their needs in general. Additionally, not all of the EP reports provide the same breadth of evidence for their conclusions. This varies depending on the organisation who commissioned the EP report. For example, reports by David Wasilewski Ltd. are frequently shorter than reports by Corban Psychology and may omit the views of the child or the parent. The most clear example of this within the sample is

a report by David Wasilewski Ltd. which was four pages in length, compared with a report by Corban Psychology which was 23 pages in length. Based on this alone, it is impossible to make a general conclusion about EP reports. Their potential to be useful in determining an educational pathway will depend on the organisation who produced the report, and will then be additionally hindered by a range of external factors which affect the child on the day, and the conflicting opinions of staff and parents alike.

#### *The strengths and limitations of using different psychometric assessments*

One of the ways in which EPs determine a child's abilities is through the use of psychometric assessments. The most commonly used psychometric assessment across the sample was the BAS3 which provides a thorough understanding of the child's cognitive abilities and attainment. However, different organisations prefer to use different scales, such as the WISC-IV which is favoured by David Wasilewski Ltd. Typically, the reports commissioned by Local Authorities (LAs) do not follow a rigid structure, and so may use a combination of different assessments depending on the child in question. It may also be the case that the report does not use any form of psychometric assessment. Whilst the absence of any information is justified by the EP, the lack of psychometric assessment may limit the usefulness of the report as it will then totally rely on the EP's observations and interviews with adults connected to the child.

## **Discussion**

#### *The potential benefits of using EP reports to determine educational pathways within schools*

The analysis of the sample EP reports showed that there are a number of benefits when using EP reports to help decide on the most appropriate educational pathway for pupils at Elm Tree Community Primary School. Overall, the EP reports available to the school includes a significant amount of information about the child in question. It is difficult to make a generalisation about the EP reports in

the sample as they are created by different organisations which follow different structures and use different methods of assessment. However, in general the reports provide relevant background information, a thorough overview of the child's cognitive ability and current academic achievements, and an overview of their SEMH needs. Many of the reports also provide a wealth of information on target outcomes for the child, including which resources may help to achieve these outcomes. This is of particular use to the school as it enables the management team to see what the child's specific needs are and which department/ educational pathway is best equipped to meet these needs. For example, an EP report may show that a child has difficulty accessing a whole class curriculum because they are unable to focus for a prolonged period of time, and that their needs are best met through short periods of active learning which are broken up with play. If this is the case, then the child may be best placed within the play-based educational pathway. Furthermore, the majority of the reports use the BAS3 to assess the child's cognitive ability as well as their current attainment level. Differentiating between these two variables may allow the school to see whether the child is able to access a higher level of the curriculum if placed in the right environment, or whether they will need to be accessing the curriculum at a lower level to their chronological age peers.

#### *Difficulties with relying on EP reports to determine educational pathways within schools*

Nevertheless, the EP reports are created by a range of different organisations who do not all follow the same structure. While some reports include a detailed overview of the child's cognitive needs, attainment, SEMH needs, family background, and an index of resources to help meet the child's needs, other reports only provide a fraction of this information. Most notably, the EP reports created by David Wasilewski Ltd. provide a stark contrast to the reports created by Corban Psychology, with the former being approximately a fifth the length of the latter. The differences in psychometric assessments also mean that the school may have a great deal of valid information from the BAS3, but may have a narrower form of information from a report using a different measure. However, perhaps the biggest limitation of the EP reports is the fact that, ultimately, they are unable to provide a complete overview of the child and their needs. Many of the reports show discrepancies between the opinions of school staff and parents/ carers, and the EP themselves can only provide information

based on their interaction with the child on a limited number of occasions. These discrepancies, combined with the limited interaction between the EP and the child, mean that the reports cannot be considered as an irrefutable account of a child's abilities.

### *The use of terms such as SEMH and MLD*

The terms MLD and SEMH can be seen throughout the data set, and are frequently used by EPs to describe the needs of pupils. As previously explained, there is no clear definition for either MLD or SEMH (Dyslexia South, 2016; Norwich et al., 2014). Some reports which have discussed SEMH needs have been able to provide a definition of the term, however (Booth et al., 2019). From the content of the school's EP reports, it seems that there is a general consensus that the term SEMH largely refers to behavioural difficulties which mainstream school staff feel unable to meet, however each child would still need to be treated individually. The reports often give information about the child's triggers and describe the specific behaviours of the child which may help school staff to better meet their needs and understand what the term SEMH means in the context of that particular child. In contrast, there is still a significant amount of confusion surrounding the term MLD (Dyslexia South, 2016; Norwich et al., 2014). The school's EP reports are similarly vague about the definition of MLD, and there is no agreement between the different EPs on how to use the term. Whilst some EPs provide a specific definition of the term and how they have used it in the report, others do not define the term at all. As such, it may be more appropriate to depend on other information within the report which specifically describes the child's abilities rather than using the term MLD as a basis for deciding on how to meet the child's needs.

### *Limitations of this report*

Furthermore, this report itself has its own limitations. The sample size was selected to provide the best possible overview of the EP reports available to the school, but it was not possible to provide an analysis of each individual report. As a result, the school may yet encounter reports which are created by different organisations or which use other psychometric assessments which were not present in the sample. This report was also based solely on the analysis of the sample, and was not created by a

chartered EP but instead by a person with Master's training in psychology. As such, the analysis is open to interpretation and another person may have created a report which produced a different analysis with different themes. Additionally, qualitative analysis is informed through the conscious decisions of the person conducting the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conscious decisions were made during the creation of this report to analyse the data sample in order to determine how useful the EP reports would be to the school when restructuring educational pathways. Therefore, the conclusions of this report are based around this primary aim, and a different conclusion may have been reached by someone who made different analytical decisions.

*A note for implementation as part of school restructuring and meeting the needs of pupils*

To conclude, although it is difficult to make a generalisation about the school's EP reports, they have the potential to be an incredibly valuable tool when restructuring educational pathways and determining the most appropriate educational pathway for pupils. Many of the EP reports are created by Corban Psychology and include a detailed amount of information relating to the child's home life, cognitive abilities and attainment, SEMH needs, desired outcomes, and resources to support the outcomes. Given this vast amount of information about each child, the EP reports should enable the school to make a sound decision regarding educational pathways prior to the child starting at the school. Since the reports would be written by a chartered EP, it would allow the school to be using an established educational resource to make an evidence-based decision regarding pupil placement. However, each report would have to be treated individually, as some EP reports are of extremely limited use to the school whilst others would allow the school to confidently make decisions about educational pathways. Because of these limitations, it would perhaps be more appropriate to use the EP reports to decide on an initial educational pathway for the child, and then review the decision after a term or half term at the school by which time the school will have compiled its own evidence of the child's abilities/ needs within the specific environment of Elm Tree Community Primary School.



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## Appendix

Figure 1: Initial themes identified using a colour-coding scheme

Initial themes:

- Psychological terms/ jargon (including MLD and SEMH)
- Advice to help meet needs
- Description of needs and possible triggers
- Date of report
- Company
- Psychometric assessment and interview with the EP
- Clarity of where the information came from.
- View of the child
- Home vs school/ differing opinions about the child
- Background information and home life
- Referral to another document

Figure 2: A table showing the two refined themes and their respective sub-themes

Theme	<b>The content of the EP report</b>	<b>The reliability and accessibility of the EP report to school staff</b>
Sub-theme	A description and explanation of the child's needs, both academic and social.	The use of jargon and whether this is appropriately used.
Sub-theme	Resources to help meet the needs of the child, including planned outcomes, resources and methods, and identification of triggers	Sources of information and their use across the sample (including the difference between parent and teacher views, missing information, and differences between different organisations who commission the reports).
Sub-theme		The strengths and limitations of using different psychometric assessments.