

## Paediatric Referrals

### **Background**

Most children will progress as expected, but some may find it harder and experience specific difficulties which may need additional input, sometimes from universal services and sometimes from more specialist services. Children are clearly all individuals and there will be differences between them which may not be best understood using a diagnostic framework. It is important to understand that a child's difficulties require recognition and support, not necessarily a specific diagnosis.

The majority of children presenting with behavioural and/or developmental concerns at home and possibly at nursery or school can, and should, be supported by universal services, such as health visiting (HV), school nursing (SN), nurseries and schools. Professionals who know the child should be able to provide advice, support and reassurance (where appropriate) without immediate referral to specialist services.

### **Who should be referred**

Children who present with behavioural and developmental difficulties, where there is concern there may be an underlying neurodevelopmental condition requiring a diagnostic assessment.

Difficulties should be causing an impact on the child's functioning and should have been present and persistent for a period of time in different settings, although presentation may vary. There should be ongoing concern, even after early intervention/support.

### **Before Referral**

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) fall into four broad categories. Any, or all, can impact on learning, behaviour and social development.

The four areas are:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health
- Sensory and/or physical needs

Schools should follow the SEND Code of Practice:

- Assessment and identification of the child's needs
- Ensure the child has access to quality first teaching, and that a graduated approach/ response is implemented to support the child's needs
- Relevant and purposeful action and reasonable adjustments should be made and, where necessary, drawn together in an SEN support plan
- Review of the support should take place regularly

Schools should:

- Consider whether the child's difficulties may be due to an underlying learning problem and seek advice from relevant specialists, for example, educational psychologist, SENSS, or LSS if there are significant concerns regarding cognitive ability, or specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia
- School should ensure parents/carers have been offered an evidence based parenting/behaviour management course (e.g. Triple P, Incredible Years/Webster Stratton)
- Consider the whole context of the child's daily life and note the potential impact of family disruption, social deprivation, parental mental health difficulties and traumatic life events on their presenting behaviour
- Consider whether the child's difficulties may be due to an underlying problem with core speech and language skills and, if so, make a referral to the Speech and Language Therapy Service
- Provide early support/intervention for identified needs whilst assessment continues. Support should be 'needs led' and does NOT require a specific medical diagnosis to have been made
- Ask the school nurse to check hearing and signpost parents/carers for vision testing at a local optician/optometrist where relevant
- Advise parents to take their child to the GP if there are concerns regarding physical health.
- Support for children with identified difficulties with social communication:
- Schools should implement strategies known to be good practice in supporting social communication and interaction difficulties. These include visual approaches, structured work systems and support to develop social and emotional skills such as Social Thinking, input from an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) and Social Use of Language Programme etc.
- Such approaches should be implemented, monitored and evaluated in order to assess the child's response to interventions known to support children with social communication needs

- The Autism Education Trust produces a set of “Autism Standards” which outline good practice. Schools should aim to be meeting these standards.

### **Useful Links**

<https://www.dchft.nhs.uk/service/paediatrics-community/>

<https://www.dchft.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CPBehaviourandDevelopmentReferralPack.pdf>