

Our Ref: N5609-20184  
Date: 22 May 2019  
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**Confidential**

Mr Chris Heaton-Harris MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Heaton-Harris

**Re: ASD Assessments in Northamptonshire**

Thank you for your email dated 27 February 2019. You explain that many of your constituents are very concerned with the use of educational psychologists in additional needs assessments. This refers to the removal of Educational Psychologists from supporting Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessments in September 2018. You ask if the CCG could look into this and attached some of the letters received specifically:

- letter dated 23 January 2019 from Dr Chandra Kantha, Consultant Community Paediatrician and Clinical Director, Northampton General Hospital regarding the waiting list for ASD assessments
- letter dated 24 February 2019 from Mr Nadhim Zahawi, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

I asked the Head of Complex Care to investigate these concerns, and I can now respond on behalf of NHS Nene Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

There are currently two diagnostic care pathways for school aged children in South Northamptonshire:

- Children aged 0 to 11 in South Northamptonshire are referred to Northampton General Hospital (NGH)
- School age children aged 11 to 18 are referred to Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) who provide an assessment and county-wide diagnostic service

Some of the communications from NGH, including the letter dated 23 January 2019 you enclosed, have given the impression NHFT stopped accepting referrals at the first phase of diagnostic



assessment for school aged children. I can confirm that there have been no changes to this initial part of the diagnostic assessment process. NGH have assured NHS Nene CCG that they continue to accept referrals for initial diagnostic assessments. This stage in the referral process includes a consultant-led assessment to see if there is evidence to request additional diagnostic assessment, of which an ASD assessment may be considered.

NGH have acknowledged that there may have been some miscommunication to families and have revised their communications to make it clear that they have not stopped accepting referrals.

The Local Authority considered that it was not their statutory responsibility to provide resources such as Educational Psychologists for diagnostic assessment. Based on this decision, they removed their Educational Psychologists from supporting ASD assessments in September 2018.

NHS Nene CCG are aware of the impact on waiting times for children who require access to an ASD assessment. Since January 2019, we have been undertaking a county-wide review of the impact caused by no longer having access to Educational Psychologists. We are working with NGH and NHFT, to identify what resource is needed to support the autism diagnostic pathway in the absence of Educational Psychologists. We are also reviewing other models of care for autism, which include a range of multi-disciplinary expertise.

We are working with NGH and NHFT to understand the scale of the problem and what resources the Trusts can put in place to reinstate local provision in the short term and for the longer term. This will include reviewing how many children on the current waiting list require an ASD assessment and whether some children could be supported by using other multi-disciplinary tools and techniques. Children will be assessed for clinical need through this process. This is an ongoing workstream and I am sorry that it is not possible at the moment to give an exact date when it will be concluded.

I agree with Nadhim Zahawi, MP, in his letter dated 24 February 2019, that it is important that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (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.

Access to education, health and care support in the school setting is via the local school SEN coordinator (SENCO). We have advised the constituents that have contacted us that if they haven't already done so, that they contact their child's school SENCO to arrange for an Educational Health and Care Assessment.

I hope this response enables you to respond to your constituents accordingly

Yours sincerely



**Toby Sanders**  
Chief Executive for NHS Corby and Nene CCGs

