The assessment of learning difficulties by Educational Psychologists in Cambridgeshire Local Authority.

Summary sheet:

Cambridgeshire Local Authority educational psychologists will use both the term learning difficulties and learning disabilities, depending on the needs of the child/young person and the preference of the family. We recognise that there is an overlap between these terms.¹ When using the term learning disability we will apply the criteria found in Valuing People: a new strategy for learning disabilities for the 21st century (2001) ii currently used by the Cambridgeshire Learning Disability Partnership and endorsed by the British Psychological Society. This definition does not rely on IQ cut offs, but on a thorough, holistic approach to assessment.

Learning disability includes the presence of:

- a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with;
- a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning);
- which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.

All three criteria must be present for a person to be considered to have a learning disability.

This definition encompasses people with a broad range of disabilities. The presence of a low intelligence quotient, for example an IQ below 70, is not, of itself, a sufficient reason for deciding whether an individual should be provided with additional health and social care support. An assessment of social functioning and communication skills should also be taken into account when determining need.

We may also refer to the legal definition of disability under equality act 2010¹, which states that:

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“You’re disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. Long-term is defined as ‘a year or more’ and ‘substantial’ is defined as ‘more than minor or trivial’.”

This definition applies to a very large group of disabled people and it is important to note that the purpose of this definition is to protect disabled people from discrimination. It is not a definition which has been developed with regard to providing eligibility to services.

**How do we assess?**

We want to ensure that Cambridgeshire children/young people can access resources based on evidenced need. When assessing a child/young person, adaptive functioning, social functioning and learning all need to be explored.

Assessments will be hypothesis driven and may include:

- Subtests of cognitive assessments
- Observation in school, home other settings
- Parent reporting
- Direct work with child/young person
- Adaptive Behaviour assessments
- Developmental history
- Teacher reporting

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1 Hertfordshire CC v (1) MC, (2) KC (SEN) [2016] UKUT 0385 (AAC)
3 Equality Act (2010)