



20th September 2021

Update for Schools on Therapies: Speech and Language Therapy; Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy

Dear Colleague

As the new academic year gets underway, we thought it would be helpful to provide an update to schools on therapies, including some background information about the Whittington Health NHS Trust who is the new provider for these services.

Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy have been provided by North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT) since 2018. However, the London Borough of Barnet, North Central London NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (NCLCCG), North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) and Whittington Health NHS Trust have agreed that Whittington Health NHS Trust is best placed to provide these services.

The original contract with North East London NHS Foundation Trust was due to run until 31 August 2021.

A managed transfer is underway between Whittington Health NHS Trust and NELFT to support safe, smooth high quality service delivery. Transition is anticipated to be between 1 September to 31 December 2021.

All planned care will continue as normal during the transition.

We have provided responses to some Frequently Asked Questions below:

What is happening?

Whittington Health NHS Trust will run services for Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy until 1 September 2022 in the first instance. If successful in delivering improvements to the services, there is an option for the London Borough of Barnet and North Central London Clinical Commissioning

Group (who jointly fund them) to extend the contract for a further year to 1st September 2023.

What does this mean?

All scheduled and booked appointments will still operate as planned.

Over the coming months, during the Autumn school term and beyond, Whittington Health will be investing in the service to bring about improvements. In particular, they will be focussing on reducing waiting times for assessment and intervention and ensuring that services are more resilient.

Whittington Health aims to ensure that services are high quality, person centred and deliver effective care to those who need it, in a timely way.

Why is this change being made now?

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS services were necessarily and urgently re-directed to support hospitals in the treatment and care of patients who were acutely unwell with COVID-19. As the pandemic has continued to put unexpected pressure on NHS services this support has been required for a considerable period.

This has led to an increase in waiting times for assessment and treatment of children and young people by the Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies (CIT) service.

As a result of this challenge, as well as difficulties which existed prior to the pandemic and in order to consolidate existing community health providers within North Central London, the London Borough of Barnet, North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group, North East London NHS Foundation Trust and Whittington Health have agreed that Whittington Health is best placed to deliver the service and the necessary service recovery work.

Tell me more about Whittington Health...

Why has it been appointed to run the service?

Whittington Health NHS Trust aims to help local people live longer and healthier lives by providing safe, personal, coordinated care for the community they serve.

It provides hospital care from Whittington Hospital in Archway and community care services to over 500,000 people living in Islington and Haringey as well as other London boroughs including Barnet, Enfield, Camden and Hackney. As one organisation providing both hospital and community services, it is known as an 'Integrated Care Organisation'.

In its latest inspection report, published in March 2020, the Care Quality Commission rated Whittington Health as Good overall and Outstanding for being caring. It found that its community services for children and young people had made considerable improvements in meeting target times for people accessing these services and that its staff provided individualised child-centred care.

How is therapy being prioritised?

Prioritisation is given to children who fall into the following priority categories:

Dysphagia – difficulty with swallowing

Post-surgery – require therapeutic input within a fixed period post-surgery

Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA), contributing to

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Equipment requirements (such as specialist chairs, walkers etc)

Initial Assessment

Support for Tribunals

Attendance at the Complex needs Panel

Attendance at Intake meeting

Delivery of universal Training

Is the Referral process changing?

There is no change to the referral process.

Referrals should continue to be made on the joint referral form.

If there is no allocated therapist in your school please provide as much information on the referral form as possible, including: SENCO screener from the SENCO pack.

Is the Rag rating system for schools still running, and what does this mean for schools?

To help prioritise the delivery of therapy services during this transition period to the new provider, schools have been Rag rated according to the length of time therapy has been offered to children in the school. Some individual children within schools will be prioritised due to their high clinical need.

The Rag rating is being updated as additional resources become available.

How will schools know what their Rag rating is?

All Red schools and most Amber schools have already been contacted.

Remaining Amber schools will be contacted before the end of the first half of this term.

If a school is unclear about their Rag rating they can contact Barnet CIT on 0300 300 1821

Are children with therapy provision in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) being picked up?

Children with Therapy Provision in their EHCP are being prioritised for input following the dysphagia and post-surgery priority.

How will Whittington Health manage Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCP) assessments with the huge demand on resources?

Whittington Health has been providing mutual aid support to assist in clinical assessments for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Barnet since May 2021. It will continue to build on the work already started and support children and young people with assessments for EHCPs.

At the same time, there will be a piece of work across North Central London to review how therapy services are provided and help the service in Barnet to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Additional capacity for clinical staffing is being identified. There will be no change to planned assessment/provision already agreed.

Whittington Health will work alongside and engage with existing children and young people who use the service, their parents and carers and schools to develop any changes to the service to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of present and future service users: taking the best of the current approach as well as delivering even higher quality, timely care.

Will EHCP assessments be cancelled?

No, if you have an assessment booked it will run as planned.

The EHCP assessment process will continue under Whittington Health as it currently stands and Whittington Health will be continuing to support therapy staff to maintain the timelines set out in law.

This will be closely monitored with Barnet Local Authority and Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS) to ensure that assessments continue to be undertaken within the statutory timescales.

Will staff change?

No, all staff who currently work in the Children's Integrated Therapies team will transfer to Whittington Health NHS Trust. We all appreciate the importance of continuity and consistency for children with SEND. If you currently see a particular member of the team, this is unlikely to change as a result of the changes to the organisation which runs it.

Over time, Whittington Health hope to address the recruitment and retention challenges the service has faced (alongside many other similar services across the country) by recruiting additional professionals to join the team.

Yours sincerely



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On behalf of:

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Whittington Health:
North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)