



# Coleraine Grammar School

**Policy on the Use of the School Counselling Service**



---

---

## Coleraine Grammar School

### Policy on the Use of the School Counselling Service

---

---

This policy is based on and should be used in conjunction with the guidance provided in the ICSS Handbook, (September 2012.)

#### INTRODUCTION

There is a strong body of evidence about the beneficial impact of all pupils having access to counselling support when necessary. The significant role schools can play in helping to promote the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils is now recognised. Pupils experiencing stress or emotional problems find it difficult to engage with the education process and to reach their potential. Where schools' staff can recognise and respond appropriately to their needs the educational outcome is maximised.

At any time pupils may need extra emotional support beyond the normal pastoral care offered by teachers. Pupils may appreciate the opportunity to speak to an adult who is not directly involved with their education. Independent school based counselling provides that opportunity.

All pupils of post-primary age in grant-aided schools have access to counselling which is independent of the school.

The counselling support provided conforms to high professional standards and current best practice for school based counselling.

The counselling relationship by its nature is confidential. The independence of the service is an important aspect for pupils, particularly those who prefer not to discuss issues with school staff.

A counselling service that is responsive to pupils' needs and operates as an integral part of a school's pastoral care provision requires a collaborative and cooperative partnership.

#### DEFINITION

The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) uses the following shared understanding of the process for helping pupils.

*"Counselling is a way of helping young people through a process of talking, listening and empowerment. Young people are provided with a safe place to express their feelings and thoughts about what they perceive to be an issue in their life. Counselling can help young people to understand themselves and their situation better. It can give them new ways of coping with issues that cause them upset therefore increasing their capacity for learning. Successful counselling is based on trust, self-motivation and commitment."*

#### KEY PARTIES

The school's Senior Management Team,  
The Counselling Provider,  
The Key Contact, (Mr T A Hamilton)  
The Counsellor, (Ms J Anderson)

#### ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN COLERAINE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

##### SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Senior management team (SMT) supports the work of ICSS and acknowledges the contribution that counselling can make to promote the emotional wellbeing of pupils. SMT encourages pupils, parents and staff to

make appropriate use of the intervention. SMT also support the Key Contact and the counsellor by providing suitable accommodation for counselling and time for both to review pupils' needs.

The **key contact** Mr T A Hamilton is a member of SMT and is the counsellor's main point of contact within the school. A **Deputy Key Contact** (Mr J Frew, Ms L Magee, Mrs S Taggart) provides cover when the Key Contact is absent or unavailable. Staff, pupils and all within the school community are aware of who holds these roles. SMT works with the service provider through the Key Contact to agree how counselling will operate within the school. The agreed arrangements are set out in an ICSS Information Sheet (Appendix 1) which includes the names of key personnel, the level of service to be provided, the process for making referrals and the evaluation process (Appendix 2).

Through the Key Contact SMT ensures that

- parents are advised annually about the service and a generalised consent sought.
- pupils can access counselling without parental consent as it is considered that all pupils have sufficient maturity and understanding of what is involved to be regarded as "Gillick" competent.
- the decision about 'Gillick competence' is made after an initial session to determine if counselling is an appropriate response for the young person and their circumstances.
- parents are made aware that pupils can self-refer or that staff or parents can make a referral to the service on the pupil's behalf. All referrals must go through the Key Contact.
- the Board of Governors are aware that pupils have access to counselling and how the service operates. A copy of the ICSS Information Sheet is made available to members.
- counsellor is provided annually with copies of relevant school policies such as child protection, discipline including anti-bullying measures, use of the internet, use of mobile phones and parental consent. Details of school's staff with pastoral care responsibilities, school holidays and planned closure days should also be provided.
- pupils are introduced to the counsellor at a special Whole School Assembly (CR and LR campus)
- new staff are made aware of the personnel involved in ICSS including the Headmaster, the Key Contact, Deputy Key Contact, Designated Teacher for Child Protection and the Counsellor.

**A room suitable for counselling** young people which meets the need for confidentiality and acknowledges safeguarding requirements is designated for use by the counsellor. As far as possible the same room is available every week for continuity of service. The counsellor has access to a power source, a secure lockable cabinet and an external telephone line.

**A 'drop box' is provided**, discretely placed, on each campus to allow pupils to self-refer. A box is available in the School Office (CR) and VP Office (LR) for the Key Contact and the Counsellor to aid communication and pass information. The Key Contact and Counsellor should meet each week when the counsellor is in school. Contact is also maintained by telephone (call and text message) and email during the week.

**The counselling service within the school is reviewed annually.** SMT liaises with the Key Contact and the Counsellor to carry this out and any necessary improvements made.

The process is initiated following receipt of the annual report from the school's counselling provider.

## **THE KEY CONTACT**

The Key Contact is appointed by the school's Senior Management Team and is a member of the Pastoral Care Team. The Key Contact is the main contact point for the ICSS within the school

The Key Contact should

### **Act as the link with the school community**

- All contact with the counsellor for staff, pupils or parents should be arranged through the Key Contact.
- There is a good working relationship between the counsellor and the Key Contact.
- This is essential if counselling support is to meet the needs of pupils and be regarded as an integral part of the school's pastoral care provision.

**Promote awareness of counselling with parents**

- The Key Contact will work with the counsellor to promote an awareness of the service with parents and how it can benefit pupils.
- The Key Contact will deal with any specific issues parents raise regarding consent for counselling.

**Manage the waiting list of referred pupils**

- Referrals to counselling from staff, parents or self-referrals are placed on the waiting list.
- New referrals should be shared with the counsellor each week and the waiting list reviewed.
- The priority for each pupil awaiting counselling is re-assessed and if there is any new relevant information about a pupil, who is engaged in counselling or on the waiting list, this is shared.

**Seek approval to accept referrals from external agencies**

- External agencies should not make referrals to the school based counselling service.
- Where such a referral has been received the Key Contact should seek approval from the Regional Co-ordinator before placing the pupil on the waiting list.

**Schedule counselling sessions for pupils**

- The Key Contact manages the schedule of counselling sessions for pupils and liaises with the counsellor to ensure that a pupil does not regularly miss the same lesson.
- If it is known in advance that pupils will be absent from school, the Key Contact discusses this with the Counsellor and reallocates sessions to other pupils.

**Inform counsellor if no sessions are required**

- If the school will be closed or no pupils are likely to require counselling, the Key Contact will notify the counsellor in advance.

**Meet with the counsellor at an agreed time each week**

- This will normally be face to face when the counsellor is in the school.
- At the meeting the Key Contact and Counsellor will review the waiting list and deal with any other issues or concerns.
- If a meeting in the school is not possible, contact will be made either by telephone, by text or e-mail to provide an update. Where e-communication is used a young person is not named.

**Maintain a record of pupils referred**

The Key Contact should keep an individual record for referred pupils. The file will contain

- the referral form,
- the parental consent details,
- the number of sessions attended and
- a note of any follow up action required or agreed by the counsellor, school, young person or other agencies.

The records are held securely and retained until the pupil leaves the school.

**Take appropriate action on child protection referrals**

- The content of a counselling session remains “confidential” unless a disclosure is made of child abuse or if a pupil’s safety or welfare is considered at risk.
- In such circumstances the school’s child protection procedures will be used.
- The counsellor will advise the Key Contact of a disclosure or any ‘at risk’ concerns and this information should be passed immediately to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection.
- The Key Contact will tell the counsellor when a referral is made to social services or PSNI or if other action is taken.

### **Keep the Senior Management Team briefed on progress**

- The Key Contact should receive a report (termly) from the counsellor detailing the number of sessions provided, key issues arising and identifying any recurring themes. This is used as a basis to brief the Senior management team about counselling provision in the school.

### **Participate in the annual review of the service provision**

- At the end of the school year the provider will present a report to the Headmaster detailing the number of sessions provided, key issues arising and identifying any recurring themes. This is used as a basis for reviewing service provision.

### **Liaise with the Counsellor to assist with critical incidents as required**

- The Key contact will liaise with the counsellor in the event of a critical incident.

## **PRACTICE AND PROCEDURES**

### **Initial Referral**

Referrals for counselling sessions may be made by the pupil, parents or school personnel. User-friendly information will be displayed and distributed to inform the school community of the service.

A Pupil referral form must be completed before the first session with the counsellor.

### **Self-Referral**

A drop-box or other referral system should be used as agreed by the school. Both the counsellor and the Key Contact will hold a key to allow access in the event of a critical incident or unplanned event involving a pupil when the counsellor is not on the premises.

### **Referral by Parents**

A parent who wishes to make a referral should seek an appointment through the Key Contact. The procedure is set out in an annual letter for parents including the need for the pupil's prior consent to engage in the counselling process explained.

### **Referral by School Staff**

A member of staff who wishes to make a referral must discuss it first with the pupil and seek their agreement. This approach values the pupil and respects his/her right to be involved in decisions. Counselling is not compulsory and a pupil may choose whether or not to attend. School Counselling is **not a disciplinary measure** and must not be used as such. Staff can encourage a self-referral or, with the pupil's permission seek an appointment via the Key Contact.

### **Counselling Sessions**

The counsellor is in school once per week at an agreed time. (Usually Wednesday a.m. LR campus, Monday a.m. CR campus). A session is usually about 50-55 minutes or the length of a normal class period. Sessions should not be interrupted unless there is an emergency.

The number of sessions offered is based on the need and agreed with the young person as part of the review process. A review of the counselling intervention will take place after 6 sessions and a decision made on whether it should continue. The Key Contact is an important contributor to this decision as is the counsellor's line manager and clinical supervisor. This review will involve an assessment of the pupil's progress, motivation to continue and whether there is useful work still to be done.

### **Referral to Other Services**

After the initial assessment, or indeed during any counselling session, it may become apparent that the pupil requires referral to specialist services. When a referral is required the counsellor should keep the young person informed and seek permission to share information at all stages. No onward referrals should take place without the Key Contact's involvement or prior knowledge.

Once an initial assessment has taken place and therapy has started with an external agency, e.g. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), pupil engagement with the ISC will stop. In the case of a request for

referral to the ISC when a young person is already engaging with external support (e.g. CAMHS), a ISC referral cannot be actioned during external agency therapy.

### **Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

At the beginning of a counselling relationship the counsellor must explain confidentiality and its limitations to the pupil. This should clearly identify what confidentiality means in a way that is relevant to the pupil's maturity and level of understanding. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed - the welfare of the pupil will, at all times, take precedence over confidentiality.

### **Disclosure of Information with Consent**

The counsellor must seek a pupil's consent in advance of any disclosure of information, which could be construed as a breach of confidentiality. Any disclosure of information will be made in the pupil's best interest.

The counsellor should only disclose confidential information obtained from the counselling relationship in the following exceptional circumstances:

- The pupil requests, and feels that it is within his/her best interest, that certain information is passed on;
- Circumstances exist where the counsellor has sufficient grounds to believe that the pupil is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm;
- The pupil discloses that they are aware of significant harm of another person;
- Suicidal ideation and or self-harm are being disclosed.

A permission form signed by the pupil and setting out what information can be shared and with whom, must be prepared for all instances of disclosure by consent by the counsellor.

### **Disclosure without Consent / Breach of Confidentiality**

Before confidentiality is breached without the pupil's consent, a Counsellor may discuss the reasons for this action with their line manager/ Clinical Supervisor within the service providing organisation. The Counsellor will give the Key Contact the relevant information. Any breach of confidentiality should be about the immediate situation and information should only be shared with those services that can provide appropriate and timely support to the pupil. The counsellor will follow the school's child protection procedure and will remain at the school as long as necessary to support the pupil through the disclosure process.

The Key Contact must be an active partner in any decision making where a pupil's safety or welfare is considered at risk, this includes acts of self-harm or expression of suicidal thoughts / ideologies.

### **Counselling Records – Individual Pupil**

Pupil files must be treated as confidential. Any disclosure of a safeguarding nature will be recorded on the pupil's file together with details of the parties with whom information was shared and any other action taken.

Information provided about any relevant change in the pupil's circumstances between sessions, any telephone calls made on behalf of the pupil or other action taken should be recorded. The file should also contain a record of attendance at sessions, record of any sessions missed and a copy of the pupil's agreement to engage in the process.

Pupils' files are given a unique identification number and filed in numeric order in a secure locked cabinet on the school premises. An alphabetical list with the pupil identification number is held separately. The counsellor and Key Contact have a key to the cabinet. Counsellors must remember at all times that a pupil can request to see his or her case records but cannot see any information from a third party without their permission.

The pupil's file is the property of the service provider and it is the provider's responsibility to ensure that it is stored securely until it is destroyed. The individual pupil file is removed from the school to the provider's premises at the end of the counselling intervention. Files must be retained in line with the providers' policy on record retention.

### **Complaints Procedure.**

This should be carried out in line with the advice provided in the ICSS Handbook.