

**COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Mental Health is a priority of the Scottish Government and all wider wellbeing professionals who work with children and young people as outlined in the Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027. Poor mental health is associated with significantly worse educational and longer-term life outcomes which are exacerbated by social inequalities such as poverty. This is reported to be a growing concern for Scotland (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014, 2020).
- 1.2 In 2018, the Scottish Government announced an investment of over £60 million in additional school counselling services across Scotland with the aim of responding to mild and moderate emotional and mental health needs experienced by children and young people. This funding aimed to deliver counselling services to children and young people aged 10 and above. This funding has since been baselined into the Council's financial settlement from Scottish Government.
- 1.3 Within Argyll and Bute this funding was utilised to develop a counselling in schools service which was in place from January 2021 – December 2022. From January 2023, Counselling in Schools has been provided by the Therapeutic Counselling Service – The Exchange.
- 1.4 There has been a steady increase in referrals to The Exchange, which continues to evidence improvements to children and young people's wellbeing following intervention.
- 1.5 The service was expanded early 2024 to support children under 10 years (Primary 1 onwards) and in January 2025 a Parent Project has launched.

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The **Counselling in Schools Service** provides an early intervention through therapeutic counselling to school aged children and young people. This directly supports children and young people with health and wellbeing concerns. Counselling offers young people, a safe and supportive environment to talk over difficult issues in confidence. This involves listening to their views, experiences and feelings without judgement, within the context of a safe and trusting relationship characterised by empathy and respect.
- 2.2 The **Counselling in Schools Service** makes a considerable contribution towards all of the four core aims of the current Children and Young People's Service Plan 2023-2026
- **CYPSP Priority 1:** By ensuring Getting it Right for Every Child is central to our core working practice we are getting it right for our children and young people
  - **CYPSP Priority 2:** Our children and young people have access to early help and support
  - **CYPSP Priority 3:** We improve the mental health and well-being of our children and young people
  - **CYPSP Priority 4:** We ensure our children and young people's voice is heard
- 2.3 As an accessible tier 1 service, counselling can support rising mental health needs and provide an early intervention which can reduce the escalation of these needs. Over time it is expected that this will also reduce the pressures on other services including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) through prevention of escalation as a result of providing support at an earlier stage.

- 2.4 The service is provided by The Therapeutic Counselling Service (The Exchange), with the contract monitored by the Educational Psychology Service who meet regularly with The Exchange.
- 2.5 Counselling is delivered face to face across all localities in Argyll and Bute, with the option for virtual sessions where appropriate. Referrals are primarily made by schools but can also be made by parents, other professionals and the young person themselves.
- 2.6 This paper is presented to provide an update on the delivery and impact of the Counselling in Schools service from October 2023 – December 2024.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- 3.1 Note the continued positive impact Counselling in Schools has had on children and young people's wellbeing since its inception in January 2023, and support the on-going commitment to deliver this service within all schools.
- 3.2 Agree the continued need for support across the Health and Social Care Partnership and the Education Service to further embed this service within current processes, ensure a clear continuum of support and improve access for children and young people.
- 3.3 Note that a successful approach requires joint working between Education establishments and the Counselling in Schools Service as partners in co-facilitation including the use of school spaces for young people to access their counselling sessions.

### **4.0 DETAIL**

- 4.1 *Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)* is the national policy framework aimed at supporting the wellbeing of children and young in Scotland. This framework incorporates the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (*UNCRC*) into practice and promotes a rights-based approach. The Children and Young People (*Scotland*) Act (2014) reinforces the rights of children and young people.

The 8 GIRFEC wellbeing indicators provide a shared language and common understanding of wellbeing for all professionals across the HSCP, which children need to grow and develop: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included.

- 4.2 Health and wellbeing are also core components of the *Curriculum for Excellence* and *Building the Ambition*, emphasising the need to ensure that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing.
- 4.3 The Exchange have provided Counselling in Schools from January 2023. A report was provided to the Committee in November 2023.
- 4.4 The service was extended and a Parent Project was launched in January 2025. The Parent Project provides free support to parents and carers of children aged 4-18 and includes online and face-to-face workshops, wellbeing discussions, and one-to-one sessions. These services aim to address common mental health challenges such as anxiety, stress, and self-esteem issues, equipping parents with practice strategies to support their children's wellbeing. Early indications report positive uptake, with over 70 parents and carers signing up for workshops in the first few weeks, and over 100 parents and carers registering online.
- 4.5 This report provides a summary of the service from October 2023 until December 2024. During this period The Exchange have received 927 referrals. This represents an approximate increased referral rate of 34% per month in comparison to the monthly referrals reported in the previous report.
- 4.6 Of the referrals received by The Exchange:
- 664 were for secondary pupils and 263 for primary pupils.
  - Of the referrals, approximately 3.1% for Care Experienced pupils (slight increase), and 2.2% were referred onwards to CAMHS (slight reduction).
  - The most common reasons for referral in secondary schools continue to be for support with anxiety, relationship difficulties, and family difficulties. Self-harm also remains a common reason for referral. Note that more than one reason for referral can be identified.
  - In primary referrals, the most common reasons for referral were anxiety and emotional regulation. Relationships and family difficulties also feature highly in the reasons for referral.
  - As per the previous report, overwhelmingly the referrals come from school staff, although an increase in referrals from School Nurses been noted.
  - As with the previous report, referrals have been made by all secondary schools across Argyll and Bute.

- 53 primary schools have referred pupils to the service; compared to the previous report, pupils from a further 15 primary schools have received support from The Exchange.
- Group work intervention has been delivered in four primary schools.
- Data is now being collected on the numbers of pupils who have a neurodevelopmental diagnosis, or suspected neurodivergence and who access school counselling. It is estimated that around 29% of children and young people accessing counselling are neurodivergent.

#### 4.7 Efficacy of counselling (Quantitative)

- The Young Persons CORE 10 (YP CORE), a validated outcome measure, is used by The Exchange to evaluate counselling with secondary pupils.
- For young people who completed counselling there is a measured reduction in scores which represents an improvement.
- Using the YP CORE there has been an average 37% decrease in first and final scores. On average, scores have moved from a moderate/severe to mild level of distress.
- 87% of secondary pupils reported feeling less distressed following counselling.
- For primary pupils, The Exchange use two measures to evaluate counselling; Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) completed by parents and the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) completed by pupils.
- On average, 84% of children report an improvement and 81% of parents report an improvement in the scores from the beginning to the end of counselling.

#### 4.8 Efficacy of counselling (Qualitative)

The following statements were gathered from surveys completed following counselling by pupils, parents, and head teachers:

##### Feedback from Parents and Carers

- *“My child never used to talk to me about things before, and now they do. I have noticed such a positive change in them.”*
- *“Our child no longer has outbursts before school since starting sessions, these were previously a regular occurrence.”*
- *“I have noticed a big change in how my child talks about their emotions, and she can manage her anger so much better.”*

##### Feedback from Young People

- *“Before counselling I was lost. I used to try and problem solve but made it worse, the advice has helped develop skills and problem solving.”*

- *“To be honest I didn't really think counselling would help, but it's helped me a lot.' 'It's like laying everything out in front of me so I can sort it out in my head.”*
- *“I now feel excited about my future again, and realise how much talking about how I feel helps.”*

#### Feedback from Schools and Services

- *“We feel very supported by the school counselling service and have noticed some many changes in some of our most vulnerable pupils.” - **Guidance Teacher***
- *“I could not recommend this service enough. Children are getting help quickly and I see so much value in the work the exchange are doing in primary schools.” - **GP***
- *“As a school, we have been very impressed with the Exchange counselling service. The response to referrals has been quick and the sessions themselves are already having an impact on our young people.” - **Head Teacher***
- *“We continue to hear so many amazing things about your service and are really seeing a difference in the children you are working with.” - **School Nurse***
- *“I don't often tell you this, but I want you to know that I genuinely think you are remarkable. The support you offer to our young people is outstanding.” - **Deputy Head Teacher***

4.9 The Counselling in Schools Service reports regularly to Scottish Governments through the *Children and Young People's Mental Health Report (Combining School Counselling and Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services Framework)* annually.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The establishment of the Counselling in Schools Service continues to make a significant contribution towards four core aims of the current Children and Young People's Service Plan 2023-2026 and national priorities around supporting the wellbeing and mental health of our children and young people, in line with Scottish Government requirements.
- 5.2 Since the change of service provider to The Exchange, there has been an increase in referrals to school counselling and initial evidence of an increase in efficacy.
- 5.3 With the funding now baselined it will continue to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people in Argyll and Bute.

5.4 The expansion of the service to children under 10 years has been well received, and the addition of the Parent Project is expected to have a positive impact on early intervention and prevention of mental health and wellbeing concerns of our children and young people.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Policy – Policy to support service delivery is currently in place.

6.2 Financial – funding has now been base-lined.

6.3 Legal - None

6.4 HR – None

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty - None

6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics

6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty

6.5.3 Islands – service delivery is provided on an equitable basis across all areas of Argyll and Bute

6.6. Climate Change - None

6.7 Risk – None

6.8 Customer Service - None

6.8 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – school counselling relates to several sections of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 13 (freedom of expression), Article 24 (health and health services, Article 28 (education) and Article 29 (goals of education)

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