

Education and Training Inspectorate

**Phase 3**  
**COUNSELLING SURVEY**

Inspected: February-June 2005

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The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 2001-2002 the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a Scoping Study of Counselling provision in schools. This study showed clearly that in all of the 20 schools sampled, children and young people were dealing with a range of social, personal and emotional difficulties which impacted upon their learning. All of the schools reported that a further layer of support was essential, in addition to the normal pastoral provision within the school. Such an arrangement was necessary in order to assist effectively those children and young people experiencing emotional difficulties which by their nature, required greater time commitment and expertise than that which could be provided by the teachers within the schools.
- 1.2 Following this initial survey, the Department of Education (DE) allocated funds from the Executive Programme Fund (EPF) to each Education and Library Board (ELB), for a three-year period, specifically for the purpose of providing counselling support for pupils in post-primary schools.
- 1.3 The Inspectorate carried out a second phase of work in 2003, which focused on the ELBs and their utilisation of the funding allocation. At this stage, all of the ELBs had formulated a plan for counselling and almost all had some counselling provision in place.
- 1.4 The focus of the current phase of the survey is on the progress made in providing counselling services within schools in each of the ELBs.
- 1.5 Between February and May 2005, the Inspectorate visited all of the ELBs and interviewed Senior Education Officers and other personnel involved in the provision of counselling services in schools. A wide range of supporting documentation was provided by each ELB. In one ELB, a meeting was held with a group of seven designated teachers, who had liaison responsibility for counselling services in their schools.

### 2. THE CONTEXT

- 2.1 As defined in the Inspectorate's original Scoping Study, counselling is undertaken by the professional counsellor acting in his or her specialist role, and in accordance with a strict code of ethics that requires confidentiality, accountability and supervision. Counselling is undertaken with the agreement of the client/child/young person and takes place within boundaries, such as the limits to confidentiality that both the counsellor and the client/child/young person understand, agree and accept. This service supplements and supports the pastoral care system within schools and importantly, helps identify those children and young people who may require professional support, and who would benefit from an organised period of counselling.
- 2.2 The ELBs remain committed to supporting counselling work within schools where children and young people are experiencing personal difficulties which may impinge on, or have the potential to interfere with, learning and personal development. The specific nature of the difficulties experienced is extensive and includes: family conflict, sexual and physical abuse, bereavement, bullying, examination pressures, drug or alcohol abuse, the trauma of care proceedings, teenage pregnancy or having the responsibility of caring for a disabled or sick relative.
- 2.3 The Report of the Statutory Inquiry into Child Protection Matters at Cabin Hill School, published in January 2005, made the specific recommendation that "In recognition of the difficulties children have in talking about experiences of being sexually abused, schools should give consideration to providing in-school counselling services so that pupils can bring concerns to independent counsellors in confidence."
- 2.4 A report into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland, published in 2003, while identifying children's mental health as a human rights issue, states that mental health problems of clinical severity affects up to 20% of all children aged between five and 15. The report states clearly that the availability of services has not kept pace with demand; this is supported by the waiting time of up to two

years for children in some parts of Northern Ireland to access child psychiatric services.

- 2.5 The Department of Education's School Improvement Branch, when setting out their Public Service Agreement Targets and comparing the performance of schools in Northern Ireland with those in Europe, states that the best performing countries (for example, Finland) provide schools with counselling and mentoring services. One of the School Improvement Branch's key messages is the importance of support services, namely, psychology, counselling and individual support for pupils.
- 2.6 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) describes effective counselling as "one of the important elements of support to be considered for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties." In their guidance for promoting positive mental health, DfES recognises the importance of counselling as an early intervention strategy to prevent further deterioration in accumulating stress levels and in mental health.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The survey found strengths in the provision of counselling, including:

- ▶ the strong commitment of all of the ELBs, and their schools, to providing counselling support services to children and young people;
- ▶ the provision of highly professional services within each ELB, including professionally qualified staff and appropriate clinical supervision arrangements;
- ▶ the value placed on the counselling support by schools receiving the service;
- ▶ the increasing demand for counselling support for children and young people in both primary and post-primary schools in all ELBs; and
- ▶ the effective, sensitive and confidential support given by trained personnel to those children and young people who are experiencing difficulties.

3.2 The survey identified areas for improvement in provision, including:

- ▶ the inability of counselling services across all ELBs to respond to all requests for support and the ongoing need to prioritise services;
- ▶ the difficulties caused in all ELBs in attempting to sustain a growing service with increased demands, with no increase in funding;
- ▶ the escalating complexity of personal problems and issues, being experienced by children and young people in schools in Northern Ireland;

- ▶ the range of models of provision across the ELBs, and the lack of consistency in services to schools. For example, in three ELBs, schools have to contribute, from their Local Management of Schools (LMS) financial allocation, to the funding of their counselling service from voluntary agencies, while those who receive a direct ELB service are not required to make a contribution towards funding. In addition, a small number of schools have employed a dedicated school counsellor on either a part- or full-time basis (Appendix);
- ▶ the inequalities for children and young people in gaining access to counselling services due to funding issues both within ELBs and individual schools. For example, schools who cannot afford to contribute part funding in some areas do not receive the service;
- ▶ the severe pressures on Health and Social Services Trusts across the ELBs, leading to an inability to respond to referrals other than those prioritised within the child protection area. This causes considerable stress on teachers who initiate the referral process and who receive a limited response;
- ▶ the lack of clear definition of what constitutes a counselling service, and the role of the counsellor across the ELBs, including the level and type of qualification deemed appropriate for the role;
- ▶ the lack of clarity in all ELBs, in respect of the interface between counselling and other support services such as educational psychology, behaviour support, and education welfare; and
- ▶ the financial insecurity in all of the ELBs, caused by the short-term nature of funding leading to an inability to plan for services in other than a fragmented manner. For example, in all of the ELBs, contracts with voluntary agencies are short-term, and in two of the ELBs, staff are employed on yearly contracts.

## 4. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This survey has identified the following key priorities for development:

- ▶ the promotion of the mental and emotional health of children and young people through the availability of effective counselling services in all schools;
- ▶ the development of a greater strategic and corporate view of counselling support and provision;
- ▶ the provision of recurrent funding to facilitate longer term planning; and
- ▶ the consideration and exploration of possible joined up funding from DE, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) Youth Justice Sector.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 All of the ELBs demonstrate a clear need for counselling support and services in schools within their area. At present, access to counselling, when required, is not available to all pupils in all schools.
- 5.2 It has now become widely accepted within educational circles that counselling support in schools has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for children and young people. Consequently, sustained access to such positive and beneficial services should be made available, as a matter of priority, for all pupils within schools in Northern Ireland.



## APPENDIX

### BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD PROVISION

#### Counselling Services:

- ▶ Decipher (5 Educational Psychologists - 40% of workload)
- ▶ Contact Youth (10 post-primary schools - part year only)
- ▶ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (14 primary schools in North Belfast)
- ▶ An individual school with a dedicated full-time counsellor

### NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD PROVISION

#### Counselling Services:

- ▶ 3 full-time and 1 part-time Counsellor - based in geographical areas across the North-Eastern Education and Library Board

### SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD PROVISION

#### Counselling Services:

- ▶ Crisis and Bereavement Service across a range of schools provided through the Educational Psychology Department
- ▶ An individual school with a dedicated part-time counsellor

## **SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD PROVISION**

### **Counselling Services:**

- ▶ Contact Youth (14 post-primary schools)
- ▶ Funds to schools
- ▶ Funded social worker in one school

## **WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD PROVISION**

### **Counselling Services:**

- ▶ NSPCC (26 schools - post-primary, special and two primary schools)

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