

Written Evidence: Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) would like to submit the following response to the Children and Young People Committee's Inquiry into the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill.

1. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is the leading body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK with 37,000 members, with approaching 1,600 in Wales, who work across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Of our 37,000 members, almost half say that they have an interest in working with children and young people.

BACP also has a specialist Counselling Children and Young People Division. It is the biggest, and the fastest growing Division, with currently over 3500 members across the UK

BACP has a strong public commitment to high practice standards and public protection. All BACP members are bound by the Ethical Framework for Good Practice for Counselling and Psychotherapy and within this, the Professional Conduct Procedure. These set out the basis of good practice for BACP therapists and their clients.

BACP has worked with the Welsh Government (WG) to develop a toolkit to support the development of school counselling services in Wales, as part of this project we also worked with a Welsh secondary school to develop the Masks and Mirrors short film and a follow up production.

The Welsh Government was awarded the BACP *Innovation in Counselling and Psychotherapy* award 2009 for their National School-based Counselling Strategy.

BACP was awarded a contract to provide research into WG's schools based counselling strategy looked into the impact on young people's mental health, satisfaction rates (clients and schools), perceptions, where added value could be employed, relationships between counselling services and wider support groups and cost effectiveness. This evaluation was published in November 2011.

2. Executive Summary

- BACP believes there is a need for the Bill to make provision for counselling services and maintain the current quality provision when the current School-based Counselling grant is devolved to local authorities rather than retained centrally as a specific grant.
- All children and young people should have access to professional, qualified counselling services in their school.

- Counsellors should not have a dual role in the school alongside for example, teaching. These proposals provide that important independence.
- It is crucial that young people who are not educated in mainstream school settings also have access to counselling when they need it.
- It is welcomed that the Bill places a duty for local authorities to compile information about the independent counselling services. This will enable the Welsh Government to continue to monitor the extent of counselling provision and the effectiveness of the provision.

3. What is school-based counselling?

- School-based counselling is a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties with a trusted adult, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality.

4. Why school-based counselling?

- Mental health problems obstruct many key goals for children. They disrupt learning, encourage truancy, increase school exclusion, and encourage the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Young people are increasingly turning to self-harm as a coping mechanism and at worst some commit suicide. Mental health problems can also generate many of the problems society experience from young people, including crime, teenage pregnancy, continuing mental illness and benefit dependence.
- Evidence shows that school-based counselling is associated with improvements on a range of problems: family issues, relationships bereavement, eating disorders, bullying, and anger management.
- Counselling can be an effective early intervention strategy for young people who have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Early and easy access to counselling in schools can prevent mental health problems developing or becoming more serious, and can help to build up trust and confidence to enable young people to access more specialist services if required.
- Counselling builds resilience in young people, equipping them with skills to cope with problems as they occur.

5. School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill

Q 7. Are there any other comments you wish to make about specific sections of the Bill?

P 52-53 School-based Counselling

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the specific section of the Bill related to independent counselling services for school pupils and other children. We believe there is a need for the Bill to make provision for counselling services and maintain the current quality provision when the current

School-based Counselling grant is devolved to local authorities rather than retained centrally as a specific grant.

In April 2008, the Welsh Government (WG) published the National Strategy for School-based Counselling Services (the Strategy) with the commitment that all school pupils in Wales would be able to access counselling, giving them confidence that their needs will be heard and addressed. The National Evaluation of the Strategy published November 2011 clearly demonstrated the positive impact of having accessible counselling for children and young people, with counselling being associated with significant reductions in psychological distress. Furthermore approximately 85% of respondents felt more positive about going to school and more able to cope since going to counselling. One young person in the evaluation commented that “it is easier to educate happier people”. Looking after the emotional and psychological needs of pupils will undoubtedly impact positively on academic performance.

BACP believes that the Welsh Government is leading the way in the U.K. regarding school-based counselling since the publication of the Strategy. The WG has provided direction and support throughout the implementation of the Strategy resulting in high levels of satisfaction with the school-based counselling across all stakeholders – schools, local authorities, other partners as well as children and young people (Evaluation of School-based Counselling). The establishment of counselling services in all secondary schools and the high levels of satisfaction means that there should be a smooth transition when the funding is devolved to local authorities and the duty to provide counselling is enacted. Detailed comments on the duty are included in the following:

- (1) “A local authority must secure reasonable provision for a service providing counselling in respect of health, emotional and social needs (an independent counselling service)”.

BACP’s position is that ‘all children and young people in secondary schools should have access to professional, qualified counselling services in their school’. This Bill places a duty on local authorities to enable this to happen. Throughout the past few years the WG in partnership with the BACP has provided standards and guidance to ensure high quality provision across all local authority areas through the publication of the School-based Operating Toolkit. To ensure continuance of such a high quality service this Bill would place a Duty on local authorities to secure reasonable provision for all children and young people 11-18 to include children in their final academic year of primary education.

- (2) “In securing the provision of an independent counselling service under this section, a local authority must have regard to the principle that the service is to be independent of the governing body....and the management of a school....”

This would ensure that while the counselling service would be a normal part of school provision which is integrated into the school community, the model of a counselling service which is not directly employed by schools is the best model in terms of demonstrating independence. The most important factor is that children and young people have confidence that their problems will not be shared with others without their knowledge and agreement. It is also BACP’s position that counsellors should not have a

dual role in the school alongside for example teaching. A counsellor who has another role on school may have difficulties in gaining the trust of young people in their counselling role and may have conflicting interests. The WG proposals would ensure independence.

- (3) “A local authority must secure that an independent counselling service is provided on the site of each school maintained by the local authority that provides secondary education....”

During the implementation of the Strategy, this was reached ahead of the target timescale; therefore there should be a smooth transition when the funding is delegated. Every school in Wales could continue to expect the same level of support for pupils.

- (4) “A local authority may secure the provision of an independent counselling service at other locations”.

BACP’s position is also that children and young people who are not in mainstream education should also be able to access counselling in settings such as the community/youth settings. It is therefore welcomed that within the duty a local authority may secure the provision of an independent counselling service at other locations. It is crucial that young people who are not educated in mainstream school settings also have access to counselling when they need it. Indeed the additional funding provided by the WG in 2010-2012 enabled local authorities to expand provision to other settings to ensure that all young people should also be able to access counselling services.

Information about independent counselling services

- (1) “A local authority must Compile information about the independent counselling service and provide information about that service to Welsh Ministers”.

The WG has led the way on national monitoring and evaluation of school-based counselling through the termly collection of anonymised statistics over the past few years. It is therefore welcomed that the Bill places a duty for local authorities to compile information about the independent counselling services it secures and to provide that information to the Welsh Ministers. This will enable the WG to continue to monitor the extent of counselling provision and the effectiveness of the provision. It will also give valuable information regarding need when planning services for children and young people on a National as well as a local basis.

- (2) “A direction ... may include instructions to compile or provide information in a way and at a time specified...”

BACP’s position is that the ‘effectiveness of school based counselling services should be monitored and evaluated by individuals or an agency... with experience in this specialised area of work’. The WG has required regular provision of information, and local authorities have established a pattern of uploading the anonymised information regularly. Any instructions would therefore not place any further burden on local authority officers, as this is now well established.

- (3) “A direction ... may not require a local authority to provide information about an identified individual or provide information That ... identifies any individual to whom it relates or enables that individual to be identified”.

Counselling is essentially a confidential activity. Young people need to trust counsellors, not only as individuals, but also the service that they provide. Counsellors work in such a way that encourages and builds a trusting, confidential relationship with young people within the usual limits of necessary child protection/safeguarding disclosures. It is therefore important that within the monitoring procedures no young person could be identified.

- (4) “If the person providing an independent counselling service is not the local authority”

It is important that the counselling service whether provided by the local authority or commissioned by the local authority to another agency such as occurs in some local authorities adheres to the same standards and guidance in the provision of the service and the monitoring and evaluation of the service, including the provision of monitoring information.

The duty to the provision of counselling services to children and young people in Wales would set an excellent example to the other UK Nations. Counselling is one of a range of services that help to support the health, emotional and social needs of pupils and lead to a healthy school culture. Counselling, delivered by a professionally trained workforce, is increasingly seen as an effective early intervention tool for young people who have emotional, behavioural or social problems. Counselling is seen as a way that young people can address their problems with a trusted adult. Evidence shows that a counselling service which provides support within an overall school strategy can be highly effective in promoting young people’s welfare, supporting their learning and alleviating and preventing the escalation of mental health problems. The Welsh Government is therefore to be congratulated on ensuring through this duty the continuance of this highly effective intervention.

6. Further information

Should the Committee be seeking further oral evidence, BACP would be delighted to provide additional information about school-based counselling within the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill.

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