

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1702](#)

Main Petitioner: Joanne Waddell

Subject: Counselling provision in all Schools

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that by 2022, all pupils will have access to trained counsellors in schools.

Background

Counselling

[The NHS defines](#) counselling as “a talking therapy that involves a trained therapist listening to you and helping you find ways to deal with emotional issues.”

Provision of counselling in Scottish schools

There are no centrally collected statistics on how many counsellors work in schools. [A 2017 BBC investigation](#) found that 14 local authorities had no in-school counselling services. TES Scotland undertook a similar exercise in August 2018 and found a mixed picture across local authorities, including some that were “sceptical about [counselling services] value”.¹

The provision of counsellors, is normally a matter for the education authority. Education authorities have a duty under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000² to ensure that their schools are health promoting, defined as the provision of activities and facilities which “promote the physical, social, mental and emotional health and well-being of pupils”.

In addition, headteachers who are in receipt of Pupil Equity Funding (“PEF”), may use this to purchase counselling provision. The degree to which PEF is being use for this purpose is not yet clear.

Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing is one of the eight “Experiences and Outcomes” of the Curriculum for Excellence (“CfE”) and, along with literacy and numeracy, it is

¹ TES Scotland, ‘*Why aren’t pupils getting counselling in schools?*’, 24 August 2018.

² as amended by the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016

intended that health and wellbeing should be a sustained focus across the curriculum.

Getting It Right for Every Child (“GIRFEC”) is the Scottish Government’s national, multi-agency approach to supporting children’s wellbeing.

[Education Scotland notes](#) that children may require additional targeted support to help them overcome barriers to learning. These barriers could be “emotional or behavioural needs, bereavement or family issues”.

Personalised Support, which includes the provision of targeted support, is an indicator of [How Good is Our School \(4th edition\)](#) (“HGIOS4”). HGIOS4 is a self-evaluation tool for schools and is also used during inspections.

Child and adolescent mental health services (“CAMHS”)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) cover the range of services across the agencies that contribute to the mental healthcare of children and young people. Services include mental health nurses, child and adolescent psychiatrists, social workers and GP’s.

There are 4 tiers of services, ranging from universal services at tier 1, up to intensive specialist care at tier 4. Much of what is delivered at tiers 1 and 2 takes place in services outwith the NHS. This includes schools, nurseries and youth centres. Tiers 3 and 4 are specialist services delivered by the NHS in either the community or in day/inpatient units.

SAMH “Going to Be” Campaign

SAMH commissioned and published a report on children’s and young people’s mental health³ which found that “young people are increasingly experiencing emotional and psychological health problems”. The report also highlighted that data from the Scottish Government’s biennial [SALSUS](#)⁴ survey of S2 and S4 pupils which shows that, although “mental wellbeing scores [...] remained fairly stable between 2010 and 2013, there has been a slight decrease in the average mental wellbeing score among 15 year old girls; the findings suggest that, on average, 15 years old girls’ wellbeing deteriorated over this time period.”

As a result of this work, [SAMH called for three actions](#):

- By 2018, create a programme to train all school staff in mental health
- By 2020, provide counselling services across Scotland’s schools
- By 2020, let children and young people stay in specialist services until age 25.

³ [Going to be...all right? – a report on the mental health of young people in Scotland](#)

⁴ The Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey

Based on costs for a similar scheme in England, SAMH estimated the initial cost of providing counselling in all secondary schools as being £9m.

Position in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

England

The UK Government's expectation is "that over time we would expect to see all schools providing access to counselling services".⁵ A [House of Commons Library briefing on Children and young people's mental health](#) reported that, "it has been estimated that 70% of secondary schools and 52% of primary schools in England offer counselling service".

Wales

Since 2010, the Welsh Government has funded local authorities to provide counselling in maintained schools. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 created a duty for local authorities to make reasonable provision for an "independent counselling service in respect of health, emotional and social needs for children and young people in their area".⁶

This statutory counselling provision is for all children at secondary school or in the final year of primary school (whether state or independent) and any child between the ages of 11 and 18 not in school education. The 2013 Act requires a counselling service in each local authority maintained secondary school.

Northern Ireland

The Department for Education in the Northern Ireland Executive has funded an independent counselling service for post-primary aged pupils in grant-aided (publicly funded) schools since 2007.⁷

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government [published its Mental Health Strategy 2017-27](#) in April 2017 which committed the Scottish Government to a number of actions including:

- Action 1: Review Personal and Social Education (PSE), the role of pastoral guidance in local authority schools, and services for counselling for children and young people.
- Action 2: Roll out mental health training for those who support young people in educational settings.

The [review of PSE](#) is due to report by the end of 2018. As part of this review, Education Scotland published a [report on personal and social education and](#)

⁵ [Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future](#) (updated in February 2016) (p4)

⁶ [Statutory guidance to Welsh local authorities on the provision of independent counselling services \(2013\)](#)

⁷ [Counselling service in schools](#)

[health and wellbeing in schools and early years centres](#) in August 2018. The report stated, “Access to specialist counselling services needs to be improved.”

Scottish Parliament Action

The Health and Sport Committee undertook a short inquiry into mental health services in 2016. While this looked at mental health services in general, it also covered CAMHS specifically. The Committee [wrote to the Minister for Mental Health](#) with recommendations for CAMHS including:

We hope, as was suggested by the Minister, those working in nurseries and schools will all have some training in mental health enabling them to recognise when children are showing signs of distress.

The Committee also asked for further information on access to counsellors in schools and nurseries. The [response from the Minister](#) indicated that data on counselling in schools is not collected centrally.

Mental health was a theme in the Education and Skills Committee’s [short inquiry on PSE](#) in spring 2017.

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27 August 2018

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