

## **SCHOOL COUNSELLING POLICY**



**Date of Review: July 2022**

**Date of Next Review: July 2024**

## **St Angela's School Counselling Service: Years 7-13**

At St Angela's we seek to meet the needs of the whole person. Our aim is to respond and recognise the talents of every student and provide the most appropriate means of developing their potential. We are mindful that some students from time to time may need additional support and would benefit from having the opportunity to work through some of their difficulties.

As part of our Mission Statement St Angela's is proud to offer a counselling service for all students between Years 7 and 13. This is provided by a qualified and experienced counsellor who belongs to a professional body. The counsellor is available throughout term time to help manage the psychological and emotional well-being of all students at St Angela's.

The school's counselling service is designed to complement the excellent pastoral system which is acknowledged as one of the strengths of the school.

### **What is counselling and how may it help?**

Counselling and Psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring effective change or enhance their well-being.

The counselling offered adheres to the Good Practice for Counselling in Schools (4<sup>th</sup> edition) produced by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

It can help us to understand our relationships better and improve them

It can help us to increase our level of self-awareness

It can help us to explore our feelings, and understand and manage them better

It can help us to recognise unhelpful thought patterns and adopt new ones

It can help us to recognise the past and current behaviours which we do not want to take in to the future

It can help us to improve our communication skills

It offers a place to reflect upon oneself and our relationship with the world

Young people face many challenges whilst growing up, and may find at times that they need someone to talk to outside of either home or school. Counselling is a process which offers support and guidance when things feel particularly difficult. The counsellor will provide a safe and confidential space for a young person to explore thoughts and feelings which perhaps are overwhelming and upsetting, in a drive to enable change.

## **Issues young people may be struggling with:**

- Peer pressure
- Academic pressure
- Parental divorce or separation
- Bullying
- Drugs and /or alcohol
- Sexual health
- Arrival of new sibling
- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Exam stress
- Bereavement
- Confusion
- Self- harm
- Eating disorders

## **Referrals**

All referrals for counselling would come via the Heads of Year.

All referrals from members of staff will have to provide a referral form for the counsellor before an appointment is made. This acts as a primary link to understanding the issues that the young person is facing and provides some useful background information.

If it is deemed that school counselling is the most appropriate course of support, students will be introduced to the school counsellor following the referral and advised that drop in sessions are available until the initial appointment can be made. Appointments will be allocated in order of priority and sessions will normally commence between 1-4 weeks after referral.

The young person may have needs that are not appropriate for counselling and require alternative intervention by specialist Psychiatric services to whom young people and their families can be referred to from school. The counsellor can assist in signposting to other relevant services.

## **Counselling Sessions**

The counselling sessions will be offered on a weekly basis for approximately 6-12 weeks, though this can vary according to need and circumstances. The actual session will last for approximately 50 minutes and the appointment times are varied so that the same subject is not missed each week. Students are seen in the counsellor's room so as to provide

continuity and facilitate a safe containing therapeutic space in which individual difficulties can be explored.

In the counselling sessions the student can discuss various aspects of their life and feelings, talking about them freely and openly in a way that is rarely possible with friends or family. Bottled up feelings such as anger, anxiety, grief and embarrassment can become very intense and counselling offers an opportunity to explore them, with the possibility of making them easier to understand. The counsellor will encourage the expression of feelings and as a result of their training will be able to reflect the client's problems without becoming burdened by them.

Students may also attend twice weekly drop in lunch time sessions where they can just turn up to maybe off load something that is worrying them or to find out more about counselling and how it may benefit them. These drop-in can sometimes lead to weekly sessions being offered in the future depending on the availability of the counsellor.

Due to the nature of counselling students are seen individually though some specific group work is offered. Although they can be encouraged or recommendations can be made to attend, ultimately the young person must have the choice as counselling is voluntary.

## **Confidentiality**

All young people are entitled to confidentiality as outlined by the BACP (British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists) Code of Ethics. This means that the information they bring to the session will be held in confidence between themselves and the counsellor.

The counsellor will however state that they may need to break confidentiality should they deem the young person to be at significant risk to themselves or others.

At this point information may need to be shared with the designated safeguarding team, who would decide whether a referral would need to be made to an outside agency.

Confidential records are kept securely by the counsellor, separate from other information held by school on the student.

Counselling records consist of notes on sessions held with students with details of the issues discussed.

## **Gillick Competence**

“As a general principle it is legal and acceptable for a young person to ask for confidential counselling without parental consent providing they are of sufficient understanding and intelligence.” ( Gillick v West Norfolk AHA, House of Lords 1985)

Since this ruling all young people are entitled to confidential counselling. Gillick competence will be assessed by the counsellor in the first session with the young person and if deemed competent the young person will be able to give consent to counselling.

Assessment of competence based on the Gillick principle depends on:

- The maturity of the young person
- The young person having sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of his or her actions
- The young person has sufficient intelligence and understanding to enable them to understand what is being proposed i.e counselling.
- As a rule most secondary school students are deemed mature and intelligent enough to understand the counselling process, but there are occasionally those who are not. It is crucial at this point that parental consent is obtained. Every effort is made to engage parents and where appropriate, young people are encouraged to inform their parents that they are receiving counselling.

For any further information about the counselling service, please contact Mrs Siaw (Deputy Head -Student Welfare) who would be happy to help.

As well as being available to individual students the counsellor is involved in other aspects of school life, contributing to the pastoral care and emotional well-being of the wider school, therefore is a member of the Pastoral team within school.

The Counsellor has delivered CPD training sessions on Counselling within schools so that all staff are aware of the available provision within schools and the ways in which it can be accessed.

The counsellor is a Mindfulness practitioner and trained to deliver Mindfulness programmes for young people in schools. These have been delivered to Year 10 and 11's and some 6<sup>th</sup> Form students.

The counsellor in accordance with BACP guidelines receives regular clinical supervision which is accommodated and paid for by school.

The counsellor ensures she undertakes relevant CPD training and keeps up to date with counselling theory to ensure best practice.