



Written Evidence: Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into the attendance and behaviour of pupils in Wales.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) would like to submit the following response to the Children and Young People Committee's consultation to help inform its inquiry into the attendance and behaviour of pupils in Wales.

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 38,000 members, with approaching 1,600 in Wales, who work across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Of our 38,000 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 BACP also worked with a Welsh secondary school to develop the Masks and Mirrors short film and a follow up production. The film tells the (fictional) stories of four young people and their experience of school counselling.

BACP was commissioned by the WG to undertake an evaluation into the WG's schools based counselling strategy looking 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.

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

2. School-based counselling in Wales

School-based counselling, as delivered in the Welsh Government's Strategy is a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality.

Counselling is one of a range of services that help to support the health, emotional and social needs of pupils. Evidence shows that a counselling service which provides support within a whole 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. Counsellors work with children and young people to help them cope with social, emotional and psychological problems. Counselling is provided by professional practitioners and aims to give young people opportunities to:

- Discuss difficulties in a confidential and non-judgemental atmosphere
- Explore the nature of their difficulties
- Increase their self-awareness
- Develop a better understanding of their difficulties
- Develop the personal resources needed to manage their problems
- Develop strategies to cope with change.

3. School-based counselling and pupils' attendance and behaviour

In 2010 the Welsh Government commissioned a research consortium led by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the University of Strathclyde to undertake an evaluation of its school-based counselling strategy. The evaluation (November 2011) was based on ten strands of data collection and analysis, including client demographic data, therapeutic outcomes evaluation, client experience questionnaires, counsellors' survey, Link teachers' survey (all secondary schools in Wales), local authority leads' survey (all local authorities) as well as case studies of four schools across Wales. The results are significant for any inquiry into behaviour and attendance in schools.

The evaluation showed that all respondent groups reported observing a positive impact of the school counselling service. Link teachers in particular reported counselling services had made a positive impact on the attainment, attendance and behaviour of clients (Figure 15 of main report). Counselling was also associated with significant reductions in psychological distress for those young people accessing counselling across all local authorities for each of the time periods examined. In the client experience questionnaire approximately 85% of respondents felt more positive about going to school and more able to cope since going to counselling. Approximately 66-70% of clients said that they had been more able to concentrate on tasks since coming to counselling and that their behaviour and their relationships with their family had improved. Around 50% indicated that their relationships with their teachers had improved since coming to counselling.

There is clear evidence from the outcome data that face-to-face school-based counselling, as implemented in the Welsh Government Strategy, is associated with significant reductions in psychological distress. The mean effect size, 0.93, indicates that this reduction in distress is a large one, and translated into everyday terms, means that around 80% of young people will be experiencing less psychological distress at endpoint than the average young person at base line. The report indicated that the most common presenting issue was 'family issues', occurring more than twice as frequently as any other issue. After family issues, the next most common issues, in descending order, were anger, behaviour related issues, bullying and bereavement. Professor Ken Reid in an update on The National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR) for the Children's Committee in the causes of non-attendance and truancy states: "*most absentee pupils manifest a combination of social (including home*

background factors), psychological and institutional reasons for missing school”, and “psychologically persistent school absentees have lower levels of self esteem...”.

The interviews carried out with school staff, parents, service users (i.e. students who have attended counselling), and student focus groups in four secondary schools across Wales as part of an in depth case study. Parents, teachers and young people reported case study evidence of the impact of the counselling service in the following areas:

1. Increased student well-being, happiness and confidence
2. Reduction in problematic behaviours such as aggression
3. Reduction in high risk behaviour such as self-harm
4. Increased ability to concentrate in class or improvements in school work
5. Reduced classroom disruption
6. Improved attendance and engagement with the school
7. Reduced risk of suspension and exclusion
8. Improved relationships at home
9. Improved relationships with friends
10. Better coping
11. Reduction in fear or acute anxiety symptoms
12. An observable impact on achievement was identified from the qualitative data.

4. Further information

The executive summary of Evaluation of the Welsh School-based Counselling Strategy: Final Report is attached with this submission.

Should the Committee be seeking further written or oral evidence, BACP would be delighted to provide additional information about school-based counselling in relation to attendance and behaviour.

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