School Counselling Policy

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Owner	Trust CEO
Applies to	All Trust Schools, all Trust staff

Version	Date	Reason
1.0	March 2026	To establish a trust-wide policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines the framework for the provision of school-based counselling services at Initio Learning Trust. It is developed in line with the Department for Education's guidance on counselling in schools [1], The BACP School-based counselling - the essential guide for school leaders, mental health leads and commissioners[2] and the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions[3].

1.2 The policy aims to ensure that school-based counselling services achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people, promoting their mental health and wellbeing, and supporting them to overcome any issues that may be causing them difficulty, distress and/or confusion.

1.3 The school's counselling service is designed to complement the existing pastoral system and offer additional support to students who may benefit from working with a professional counsellor. It is recognised that students have the right to confidentiality in counselling, which is essential for maintaining trust; however, confidentiality is not absolute, and safeguarding students is always the priority.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 The aims of the school-based counselling service are to:

- Provide a safe, confidential, and ethically sound space for children and young people to explore their difficulties.
- Reduce psychological distress and promote emotional wellbeing.
- Support pupils who are experiencing difficulties with relationships or managing their emotions.
- Improve pupils' capacity to study and learn, and increase their motivation for school.
- Provide early intervention and support for mental health issues.
- Work as part of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- Promote student autonomy by providing them with enough guidance and information to make their own choices and decisions regarding counselling, including parental involvement, where appropriate and in the student's best interests.
- Ensure all involved adults have a shared understanding of the counselling service and respect the rights and importance of students participating in counselling on a voluntary, informed-consent basis.

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[1] Department for Education, Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future Departmental advice for school leaders and counsellors, (London, 2016)

[2] The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, School-based counselling – the essential guide for school leaders, mental health leads and commissioners, (Leicestershire, 2023)

[3] The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions, (Leicestershire, 2018)

3. Service Delivery

3.1 The school-based or contracted counselling service will be delivered by qualified counsellors who:

- Are members of a relevant professional body.
- Have an enhanced DBS check.
- Adhere to the ethical framework of their professional body (BACP Ethical Framework).
- Receive regular clinical supervision
- Engage in continuous professional development to ensure best practice.
- Have completed Level 3 Safeguarding Training
- Are either employed directly by the school or contracted through a reputable external agency.
- Named contact to meet regularly (at least bi-weekly) with counsellors
- Possess the necessary qualifications, experience, and competencies to work with children and young people, as outlined by professional standards.
- Work in a way that is consistent with the ethical principles of promoting good (beneficence), and avoiding harm (non-maleficence).
- Demonstrate personal moral qualities such as empathy, integrity, resilience, respect, and wisdom.

3.2 Counselling sessions will be offered for a defined number of sessions, which will be determined at the outset of the counselling intervention in collaboration with the student. This will be reviewed regularly in line with the contract.

3.3 The service may offer a range of delivery models to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including:

- One-to-one counselling sessions. ● Targeted group work.

3.4 Counselling will be provided in a safe, private, and welcoming environment that is free from distractions or interruptions.

4. Referrals

4.1 The referral process will be clear, accessible, and communicated to all pupils, staff, and parents/carers. A template referral form can be found in appendix 1

4.2 The referral form includes a section on Gillick competency. Gillick competency refers to the legal principle that allows children under the age of 16 to make their own decisions if they have sufficient understanding and intelligence to fully understand the implications of the decision. The counsellor will assess Gillick competency to determine if a student can consent to counselling without parental involvement.

4.3 Counselling is only likely to be effective to the extent that the child or young person wants to attend. In consultation with the student, the school will consider alternative approaches for individuals who do not want to undertake counselling.

4.4 In the situation where the counsellor has a dual role (eg. prior knowledge of the client in a different context) , the counsellor has the responsibility to explore sensitivity with the client any

conflict of interest which may arise and must seek clinical supervision before proceeding if a conflict is identified.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 The school-based counselling service will operate within agreed confidentiality guidelines and according to the client/counsellor contract. Information regarding referrals to the service is confidential and will be held on a strictly need to know basis, with explanations given to relevant staff members about the confidentiality requirements

5.2 Counsellors will explain the limits of confidentiality to children and young people at the outset of counselling. This will include explaining that while counselling sessions are confidential, there are exceptions where information may need to be shared.

5.3 Information will only be shared with others with the child or young person's consent, except where there are safeguarding concerns or a legal obligation to do so. Specifically, the following situations may require a breach of confidentiality:

- **Safeguarding:** If a student is at risk of harm, including physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, or self-harm, the counsellor is required to report this to the designated safeguarding lead.
- **Legal Obligations:** In some cases, counsellors may be required to disclose information by law, such as in response to a court order or subpoena.
- **Terrorism:** Counsellors have a legal duty to report any concerns related to terrorism.
- **Public Interest:** In rare cases, disclosure may be justified in the public interest, such as to prevent a serious crime.

5.4 The school acknowledges that it isn't always easy for parents/carers to understand what may be said in sessions or that they will not have access to the content unless volunteered by the client.

6. Safeguarding

6.1 The school-based counselling service will adhere to the school's safeguarding policy and procedures.

6.2 Counsellors have a responsibility to report any safeguarding concerns to the designated safeguarding lead and this will be logged on my concern.

6.3 All counsellors will have been safer recruited with an enhanced DBS check.

7. Communication

7.1 To ensure clear and professional communication between counsellors and students, a dedicated school counselling email address will be used. That is monitored during the counsellors contracted hours only, out of hours emails will receive an automatic response providing links to appropriate out of hours support. Other appropriate school communication systems may be used by the counsellor as long as this is stated within the counsellor-client

contract alongside boundaries of use. For example, to send signposting to other services or support discussed

during a counselling session or reminders about time and date of next counselling session.

7.2 Individual counsellor email addresses will not be used for communication with students.

7.3 This policy will be communicated clearly to students during their initial engagement with the counselling service.

8. Working with External Agencies

8.1 The school-based counselling service will work collaboratively with external agencies, including:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Local Authority services.
- Voluntary sector organisations.

8.2 Information sharing with external agencies will be conducted in line with confidentiality guidelines and with the consent of the child or young person and their parents/carers, where appropriate.

9. Records and Data Protection

9.1 All information related to counselling work for the school- based counselling service is stored securely and retained only in accordance with statutory data protection timelines and Trust policies. A record of the admission to, and the discharge, from the service is kept on Trust systems by the named contact.

9.2 Students will be invited to complete an evaluation form following the conclusion of their counselling sessions to support service improvement.

9.3 The counsellor will operate in strict alignment with the Trust Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, specifically regarding the limits of confidentiality and the necessity of data sharing.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

10.1 The school-based counselling service will be monitored and evaluated to ensure its effectiveness and inform ongoing development.

10.2 Feedback will be sought from pupils, staff, and parents/carers to inform service improvement.

11. Complaints

11.1 In the first instance, complaints about the counselling service will be addressed in accordance with the school's complaints policy.

11.2 Complaints about poor or unethical practice by a counsellor can also be addressed through British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

Appendix 1 - Counselling Referral Form Template (can be found in google templates)

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Counselling Referral Form

Part One - To be completed by referrer and returned to: (a copy will be kept on the child's school record)			
Code		Date of Birth	
Child's Name			
Class/Tutor group		Year	
The child lives with		Relationship to child	
Address			
Telephone Number			
Ethnic origin of child (please highlight)			
White: British/Irish/Other white background Black or Black British: Caribbean/African/Other black background Asian or Asian British: Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Other Asian background Chinese or other ethnic group: Chinese/any other Mixed: white and black Caribbean/White and black African/White and Asian/Other mixed background.			
Child's first language			
Any special educational needs			
Does the child have a final statement of SEN?			
Is the Child "looked After" by the local authority?			

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12. School Counselling background to referral

Part Two - Please do not name the child on this form, please use “he” or “she” Hand this background information to the counsellor with the referral form - **Do not retain this section on the child’s school record.**
Reason for Referral
Relevant background information (eg family background, hospitalisation, other agency involvement)
How is he/she functioning in school? (academically/socially/behaviourally)
How do you expect counselling to help this pupil?

Has the pupil been consulted? (as appropriate to their age)	
If the pupil has been consulted and is assessed as Gillick competent, have they agreed that their parents are consulted?	
Has the pupil been given a leaflet or card about counselling? Yes/No	

What is their attitude towards the suggestion of counselling?

Has the parent/carer been given a leaflet?	
Parental consent slip signed and returned? Yes/No	
Parental consent is not needed because the child is	

Please state the grounds on which the child has been assessed as Gillick competent.

Signature		Role		Date	

Appendix 2 - School Counselling Information for Parents and Carers Template - (can be found in google templates)

School Counselling - Information for Parents and Carers

As parents and carers we all know that helping our children to grow and develop can be both a wonderful experience and also a challenging one at times. Sometimes our own experience of adolescence may not have been easy, or it may feel like a long time ago, and the world has changed dramatically since. It isn't always easy to know what to say or how to help. Sometimes young people may need support with their problems and worries; no matter how well they get on with their parents, they may find it hard to share how they are feeling with them. Often having a problem or concern can affect a young person's behaviour, schoolwork, family and peer relationships; at these times talking through their worries with a school counsellor can help.

HOW CAN A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR HELP?

Counsellors are trained in listening without judging, and can help people sort out their thoughts and feelings about what is worrying them. In normal circumstances I work from an office on the school site, with counselling sessions held during the school day. The sessions last approximately 50 minutes and the number of sessions is based on each student's need. What is discussed in counselling is confidential – this is a really important aspect of counselling which enables the young person to build trust with their Counsellor, but students are told from the outset that I can't keep their confidentiality if I think they are at risk or in danger. In some cases it may be that the young person may need more specialist support. I work with the school and seek family support when additional help is needed to refer a young person on to other agencies who can give more help.

WHO AM I?

My name is Emma Worster – I'm a qualified Integrative Counsellor and a member of the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) and I work within the BACP's recognised code of ethics and practice. I over 10 years of experience as a Counsellor at The Sir John Colfox Academy as well as in two other Dorset secondary schools. I am independent from the school staff but understand the school and work with teachers and other staff to help students, while at the same time keeping confidentiality. All my counselling work is professionally and independently supervised and insured. I have also undergone the appropriate police checks to be able to work in school.

WHAT ISSUES CAN SCHOOL COUNSELLING HELP WITH?

There are more pressures than ever on young people growing up in a digital world where comparisons with others are hard to avoid. Commonly presenting issues arise around friendships, relationships and bullying, academic pressures, body image issues, family relationships, separations and changes; and

managing anger, illness, loss and bereavement. Young people also have to cope with adolescence and the strong feelings and
physical changes that go with it. The time and space they get from counselling can help them feel better and cope better at home and in school.

HOW CAN A PARENT OR CARER SUPPORT THE COUNSELLING?

It will help your child if you accept counselling as a normal and useful activity, and show an interest if they want to talk to you about it, without pushing it if they prefer not to discuss it. Counselling can be a very helpful process. The counsellor will work with your child to achieve the best possible outcome.

Appendix 3 - School Counselling Information for Students Template - (can be found in google templates)

School Counselling - Information for Students

Sometimes life can be tough, and people growing up can be under pressure. Having someone you can really talk to may be a help – perhaps a friend, a teacher, your parents, or someone in the family. At times, everyone feels worried or has problems that may be hard to talk about with the people close to you. You may worry about whether they will understand, whether you can
trust them, whether they will blame you, or ignore your feelings. That is when you may think about talking to the school counsellor.

HOW ARE COUNSELLORS DIFFERENT?

- We don't blame you
- We don't tell you what to do
- We will be there for you – whatever the problem
- We are good at listening carefully
- We can see you in school time
- We can help you sort things out in a way which suits you
- We understand how your school works and can get you more help and information if you need it.
- We have training to help us do our job well.

WILL THE COUNSELLOR TELL ANYONE ABOUT WHAT I SAY?

Counsellors don't ordinarily tell other people about you or your situation without your permission. But if we think that you or someone else may be at risk or in danger, there may be a need to get help from others to keep you safe. We will talk with you about this and together we will try to find the best thing to do for you.

WHAT KIND OF THINGS CAN I TELL THE COUNSELLOR ABOUT?

Whatever is on your mind, problems, decisions, worries and changes. It could be lots of different things – making friends and relationships, parents separating, losing your temper and getting into trouble at home and at school, teasing and bullying, losing someone special, mixed-up feelings, health worries, exams and coursework. All these things can affect how you feel and
how you behave. Talking with you about your worries and problems is the start of helping you sort them out.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Seeing a counsellor might be your idea, or your parents or a teacher might suggest it. You don't have to decide straight away. You can meet the counsellor first to ask questions and find out more. Counselling is voluntary – it's your choice, and whatever you decide is OK. You are likely to be offered appointments for regular sessions for several weeks at a room in school where you won't be disturbed. The school would like to contact your parents/carers to ask their permission for you to see the counsellor, but will not go into details.

WHAT HAVE OTHER STUDENTS SAID ABOUT COUNSELLING?

"It was good to talk to someone I didn't already know."
"It's helped a lot…discussing my problems instead of locking them away"
"I like the person I am now more than the one who first came to you".

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE OR ASK TO SEE THE COUNSELLOR?

Ask a teacher or head of year.