Policy: Counselling

The term 'counselling' used in this policy refers to the counselling provided for students by the designated staff employed by the school. It is recognised that a huge amount of listening and supporting also happens between staff and students on a daily basis and in particular the school nurses provide a critical listening ear for many of our students.

In line with Department of Education guidance, West Buckland School is committed to promoting protective factors such as resilience, confidence and a sense of belonging. Counselling is offered to pupils as part of the school's commitment to improving mental health and wellbeing.

Louise White is the counsellors at West Buckland School. She is professionally trained and qualified, and experienced in working with young people. She is not a member of the teaching staff. She is level 2 CACHE trained and hugely experienced in supporting young people.

1. Why do we have a counsellor?

Counselling is provided by the school as one of the means by which to safeguard our students; to provide them with someone who can help them find different strategies to cope with the challenges in their lives. This counselling service is only offered to students; to avoid a potential conflict of interests, this counselling service is not available to members of staff.

Counselling is an intervention that children, or young people, can voluntarily enter into if they want to explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives which may be causing them difficulty, distress and or confusion. PSHE is a vehicle for teaching young people about mental health and wellbeing.

The aims of counselling are to assist the child or young person to achieve a greater understanding of themselves and their relationship to their world, to create a greater awareness and utilisation of their personal resources, to build their resilience, and to support their ability to address problems and pursue meaningful goals.

2. What sorts of problems can a counsellor help with?

Students can see the counsellor about anything that is worrying them, for example:

- friendship problems
- bullying
- something you're worried about at home
- worries about work or exams
- confusion about something
- drinking, smoking or drug issues
- worries/problems to do with your health

- relationship problems
- self-harm
- feeling angry, unhappy or lonely
- anxiety/depression
- low self-esteem
- bereavement
- eating issues
- sexuality

3. How is counselling arranged?

Counselling is organised by the Safeguarding Officer on a weekly basis.

Counselling is available to all students who ask for such help from a member of staff (including the School Nurse) or who are referred through pastoral staff to the Assistant Head, Pastoral and DSL. This may be with or without the knowledge of the student's parents. When the issues affecting the student's welfare concern his/her relationship with parents, the Assistant Head, Pastoral and DSL may decide to allow counselling to start without the knowledge or agreement of the parents. It would be hoped that the issues raised through counselling might be raised with the parents eventually, either by the student or by staff. A student would normally receive a block of six sessions. If further counselling is indicated we would discuss securing external support, where appropriate.

In line with Fraser Guidelines, if students are under 16, but are considered Gillick competent they may access counselling without parental consent. Where they are not, and this will apply to most primary age children as well as to some of secondary age, parents' or carers' consent will need to be given before they access counselling.

If a student would like to organise an initial session with the counsellor they can:

- Speak to their tutor/ Housemaster/ mistress to request an appointment
- Request an appointment through the school nurse or Assistant Head, Pastoral and DSL
- Send an email to lzw@westbuckland.com

4. Organisation and communication

The Safeguarding Officer will organise appointments for the students. These normally last 35 - 45 minutes. This is done in such a way as to minimise the disruption regular counselling might have on their academic lessons, so appointments are rotated (much like music lessons) and lunchtimes are used to also minimise disruption. The class teacher of any lesson that might be missed is contacted by email to notify them that the pupil will be absent from their lesson, so that the student can access this service quite independently and the class teacher allows them to be absent from a lesson without asking awkward questions as they leave or return. This is done to keep the

counselling confidential if possible, although some students are happy about others knowing they are going to see the counsellor.

During periods of school closure or isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions, counselling provision may be offered via telephone.

5. Confidentiality

The matters discussed during counselling are confidential, between the student and the counsellor, unless there is a child protection disclosure or if the counsellor feels she must pass on the issues raised to the Designated Safeguarding Lead because she is concerned for the child's immediate welfare. In such circumstances the counsellor would tell the student she would have to share this information with others. The DSL would need to make a decision about the next steps, which may include a discussion with parents if the young person is at risk.

Related documentation:

Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future (2016)

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