



Information Note TC 0008/2023

To: The Managerial Authorities and Principal Teachers of Recognised Community and Comprehensive Schools

Information Note for Schools in relation to personal and social guidance counselling

1. Introduction

In early 2023, the Department of Education (DoE) carried out a national consultation on lifelong guidance to ascertain the views of stakeholders in relation to Guidance in all sectors. This consultation yielded significant data through a mixed-methods approach and provided the DoE with a clear view of key messages relating to Guidance. Following this national consultation, the DoE has composed this Information Note to clarify the role of the guidance counsellor regarding personal and social guidance counselling.

The purpose of this Information Note is to provide post-primary schools with clear information and support regarding the provision of personal and social guidance counselling in post-primary schools.

2. Role of guidance counsellor in post-primary schools

Guidance “encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance”. (Department of Education and Science; 2005, pg. 4).

The Whole School Guidance plan should include specified time allocation for guidance counsellors to be available for one-to-one guidance counselling and time allocation for the role in supporting the organisation and work of the [Student Support Team](#). The Student Support Team is the overarching team concerned with co-ordinating, planning and providing for the wellbeing of all students. The guidance counsellor may co-ordinate and support numerous other teams or initiatives in the school also, as appropriate to the needs of the school community.

Guidance counsellors work within a continuum of support model (NEPS, 2010), and are part of a whole-school approach to supporting Wellbeing in schools (NEPS, 2013). Through implementing the [continuum of support](#), the Student Support Team provides for the educational, social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of All, Some and a Few students to ensure their ongoing wellbeing. The school guidance plan sets out the components of this system.



Guidance counsellors are often the only member of a Student Support Team who are required to hold a postgraduate-level qualification to include counselling skills. A Whole School Guidance plan should outline the range of competencies available within the school to support students and describe the internal support structures and how referrals to the Student Support Team are made.

3. Social and personal counselling

Counselling is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process, at moments of personal crisis and at key transition points, such as transitioning to further education or employment. Guidance counsellors may work with students on a wide range of developmental issues that some students find difficult to manage. Counselling has as its objective, the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. The guidance counsellor also provides a referral of students to external counselling agencies and professionals. Where required, the guidance counsellor creates and maintains a 'safe space' for the student while they wait on community supports to start. In all personal and social guidance counselling, the guidance counsellor operates within professional guidelines including [child protection procedures](#).

Guidance counsellors meet with students on a daily basis and provide support in relation to a broad range of personal and social issues. Students may also attend a guidance counsellor to disclose serious issues. Guidance counsellors are trained to respond appropriately to situations along a broad continuum and refer students on to other supports services and agencies as appropriate.

The overall NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications) level for a post-primary guidance-counselling qualification is level 9 and all modules within the training are delivered at level 9. Counselling skills in a guidance context is a key competence for a guidance counsellor as outlined in the programme-recognition framework ([DES, 2016](#)). However, it does not confer a psychotherapy qualification.

4. Wellbeing policy

The Department's [Wellbeing Policy and Practice Framework \(2018\)](#) has given recognition to the importance of promoting wellbeing in education. Schools promote wellbeing through a range of activities and approaches to support the academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of all children and young people. The guidance counsellor is key in developing and implementing innovative approaches to wellbeing promotion on a whole-school basis through the guidance plan.

5. Limits and boundaries

It is crucial that guidance counsellors recognise the limits of, and take care not to exceed, their education, training and experience and recognise they do not possess a psychotherapy qualification. A Whole School Guidance plan will also document when and how external referral to health services and/or advising parents on the need to consider



referral to a medical professional will be managed. In addition, the [Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers in post-primary schools \(Teaching Council, 2016\)](#) applies.

6. Guidance counsellor supervision

In recognition of the personal and social counselling aspect of the role, the DoE fund a guidance-counselling supervision scheme. This scheme facilitates all guidance counsellors working in second-level schools and colleges of further education in undertaking professional supervision of their guidance-counselling work and particularly their one-to-one guidance counselling with students.

A series of five two-hour sessions of counselling supervision support is provided to guidance counsellors in each academic year. Guidance counsellors receive a certificate of attendance at year-end.

Additional supports are also available for guidance counsellors if required. For example, guidance counsellors may avail of extra supervision sessions in the event of a critical incident taking place in the school community. Guidance counsellors also have access to a range of supports including one-to-one sessions with a psychotherapist through the [Employee Assistance Service](#) contracted by the DoE.

Guidance Unit August 2023