

Terms & Conditions of Department of Education's Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools 2023-24

Purpose of the Pilot

The Minister for Education has announced an investment of €5 million in piloting a programme of counselling supports for primary school pupils in the school year 2023-24. The pilot programme will be provided in all primary schools in Counties Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan and Tipperary.

Each school in the pilot will be given access to counselling supports (as determined by the DE) under the pilot from September 2023 to June 2024 (inclusive). The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) on behalf of the Department of Education (DE) will establish county panels of pre-approved private counsellors to provide in-person one-to-one counselling to support primary school pupils in these counties.

NEPS psychologists will be available to support participating schools in identifying the pupils who will access the counselling service (subject to parental/guardian consent). In the event that a participating school is awaiting the assignment of a NEPS psychologist, or if the assigned NEPS psychologist is on leave, NEPS will make a psychologist available for this purpose as required.

The counselling service provided under the Pilot Programme is not a substitute for services provided by HSE Primary Care Psychology and/or CAMHS, nor does it replace the role of the NEPS psychologist within a school. The Pilot Programme is an interim measure intended to supplement these services and meet current urgent needs for counselling support for primary school pupils.

How the Pilot will operate

The DE will select and recruit private counsellors for placement on a panel. Thereafter, county panels for primary schools in Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan, and Tipperary will be published on gov.ie. Participating schools will be allocated blocks of up to eight counselling sessions, and will arrange this by making direct contact with a counsellor on the panel. A link person within the participating school i.e. the principal, or a teacher designated to act on the principal's behalf, will be the point of contact for the counsellor. The link person will agree with the counsellor the days and hours they will attend the school, and will manage and arrange the parental consent and referrals to the counsellor. The link person will also provide the counsellor with relevant school policies for example, Safeguarding & Child Protection; Behaviour Policy; Anti-bullying Policy.

Counsellors will agree a number of hours per week with the school, subject to a maximum of 20 hours per week, over the course of the Pilot Programme. The counselling will be provided by the counsellor in-person in the school.

The DE will endeavour to ensure that the counselling support provided is of a high professional standard and is also in line with best practice for counselling of children of this age cohort (up to 12 years).

This document sets out the standards that must be met in the provision of counselling to primary school pupils, to ensure that the counsellor engagement is safe, congruent and responsive to needs. The standards also ensure that the counsellors have appropriate training, skills and competencies to engage ethically, professionally and effectively with this age group.

Appendix 1 contains the Agreement between the Minister for Education and an individual counsellor, which is to be completed by the counsellor once they have read and are satisfied with the Terms & Conditions of the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools 2023-24.

Appendix 2 contains the Statement of Non-Disclosure, which should also be signed by the counsellor, who thereby agrees that all of the information received in the provision of the counselling under the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools will be treated as confidential, will be stored safely and cannot be accessed by any third party.

The Panel of Counsellors

The Department of Education will compile a panel of participating counsellors for the Pilot Programme 2023/2024. Any counsellor who wishes to be considered for placement on the panel is required to submit an application form by emailing CounsellingPilot@education.gov.ie, and (ii) satisfy the following criteria:-

- currently hold a recognised qualification at Level 7 (primary degree) or higher in a relevant human science as well as an accredited qualification in counselling or psychotherapy. This qualification must be recognised by the Psychological Society of Ireland; or the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy; or the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy
AND
- have at least two years' (minimum of 150 hours), relevant supervised experience of providing counselling for children
OR
- currently hold a professional accredited qualification in the area of child and adolescent counselling

AND

- have at least one year's supervised experience of providing counselling for children

AND

- be an accredited member of one of the following professional bodies:- the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI); Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP); Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP)
- adhere to the Code of Ethics of their relevant accrediting body PSI Code of Professional Ethics (2011); IAHIP Code of Ethics & Practice for Psychotherapists; IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors / Psychotherapists
- attend professional supervision while providing counselling as part of the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools
- pass the Garda vetting process via the Department of Education
- furnish a Tax Clearance Access Number (obtainable from the Revenue Commissioners), and a PPSN
- complete the [Introduction to Children First' E-Learning Programme](#) and accept their responsibilities as a "mandated person" under the Children First Act, 2015
- hold up to-date professional indemnity insurance

The pilot will run from 1st September 2023- 30th June 2024 (inclusive).

What will be provided under this pilot:

Each block will consist of up to eight one-hour sessions overall.

- This will include six one-to-one counselling sessions with the pupil. Short follow-up consultation with parents and school staff member, note-taking and/or preparatory/follow-up actions, may be part of this hour.
- Two of the sessions will be with parents/guardians and school staff:
 - The first will be the initial session to ensure that consent is fully informed, to discuss background information, gather information and to clarify referral issues, as appropriate.
 - The second will be the last session to provide verbal feedback to parents/guardians and school staff on the process and suggested next steps, to ensure that recommended strategies are integrated and reinforced in the child's home and school life and therefore ensure ongoing support for the child.

Procedures to be followed by Counsellors in Implementing the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools

Counsellors are required to adhere to the following procedures, as laid out by the Department of Education:

- Ensure they are registered on the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools Panel 2023 prior to engaging with a participating school
- Produce a form of photographic identification (e.g. Driving license, passport) upon attending the participating school

In providing counselling under the pilot, counsellors are required to:

- In advance of meeting a pupil, ensure that the **Consent and Referral Form**, has been duly completed and signed by the parents/guardians and the school principal (or the person authorised on their behalf)
- In advance of meeting the pupil, meet with the parents/guardians for a session, to ensure that consent is fully informed, to discuss background information, gather information and to clarify referral issues, as appropriate.
- The DE are allowing that it will take an hour for each of the sessions under this pilot, this allows for preparation time, meeting with the child, meeting with parents and school staff and the counsellors own professional record keeping.
- Meet in-person with each individual pupil for up to 6 sessions in a secure and confidential space within the school (location to be arranged by the school). In some instances the counsellor may wish to meet with parents and or school staff member following each or some of the sessions with the child. This will be decided at a local level on a case by case basis.
- Following completion of up to 6 counselling sessions with each individual pupil, meet with the pupil's parents/guardians and teachers for a session, to provide verbal feedback on the process and suggested next steps. This will also ensure that the therapeutic interventions and strategies from the counselling sessions can be integrated in the pupil's home and school life, ensure ongoing support for the child.
- Ensure that the counselling sessions remain confidential as between the pupil, the counsellor and the parent(s)/guardian(s), with the exception of a disclosure for the purpose of a child safeguarding or child protection concern. In such a case, the agreed procedures for Safeguarding and Child Protection must be followed. See [here](#)
- Ensure that notes taken during or following each counselling session are stored securely by the counsellor, and remain confidential at all times.
- Submit a completed and signed original copy of a **Certificate of Completion of Counselling Sessions Form** to the link person in the school, for review by the school principal. If satisfied, the school principal will certify that the work has been fully completed and will make the submission for payment to the Department at CounsellingPilot@education.gov.ie
- Ensure that any document(s) containing personal information of a pupil are never sent electronically or by email.

- If a counsellor wishes to withdraw from the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel, the counsellor should inform the DE in advance, so that arrangements can be made to notify relevant school(s), and secure a replacement.

Terms and Conditions of the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools

The following terms and conditions apply to all counsellors who provide counselling under the pilot during the 2023 school year:

- The counselling sessions must be conducted between the 1st of September 2023-30th June 2024 in the school premises, and only during school hours.
- Each counselling session must be solely carried out by the counsellor whose name is on the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel and who has been commissioned for the sessions.
- Counselling sessions and interactions with parents and school staff will be carried out in a professional manner,
- It is expected that each counsellor will provide no more than 20 hours per week, subject to a maximum of 5 sessions per school day, as part of this pilot.
- Each counselling session must be provided in person within the school premises during school hours. Online counselling sessions and/or office-based sessions are strictly prohibited.
- It is the responsibility of the school to provide a suitable space for the counselling sessions. This space should be warm and welcoming, have comfortable seats at the same level and be situated where there are no distractions and where the session can proceed uninterrupted.
- Over the course of the counselling sessions it may be evident to the counsellor that the pupil requires referral to a specialist service. The counsellor will consult with the school and the parents/guardians prior to taking any actions regarding the referral.
- Counsellors on the pilot must attend regular supervision in line with the recommendations of their accrediting body.
- Payment for sessions carried out under the pilot will be discharged from funding made available by the Department of Education to the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools. Counsellors who accept commissions under the pilot may not seek or accept payment from any other source, and will be required to certify that they have not done so, as a condition of receiving payment. Seeking or accepting payment from any other source in respect of counselling sessions under the pilot will constitute grounds for removal from the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel.
- It is strictly prohibited to contract privately to work with pupils accessing the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools clients. Any queries on this clause can be referred directly to the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools Manager by email at CounsellingPilot@education.gov.ie

Counsellor Fees

- From 1st of September 2023, the fee payable by the DE to a counsellor is €80 per session, subject to withholding tax @ 20%, resulting in a net fee of €64.
- Counsellors are required to meet any other expenses (including travel and subsistence) from the counselling session fee.
- The counsellor will be responsible for the payment of any additional tax due.

Procedure for Payment under the Pilot

The Department of Education will initiate payment on receipt a **Certificate of Completion of Counselling Sessions Form** completed and signed by both the counsellor and by the school principal. The principal is required to submit the original Form (not a copy) to NEPS within three calendar months of the date of completion of the sessions.

Payment may be withheld or refused until the Department of Education is satisfied that the terms and conditions of the pilot have been complied with. Once satisfied in this regard, the DE will arrange for payment to be made directly to the counsellor.

Audit & Quality Assurance

The Department is obliged to complete a quality assurance exercise on the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools. This will involve NEPS contacting a number of schools and counsellors participating in the Pilot programme, for a general update and the completion of a short survey on how the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools is operating.

Complaints

In accordance with the *Pilot Programme of Counselling Supports in Primary Schools 2023-24 Complaints Procedure for Schools and Parents/Guardians* any complaint made regarding the provision of counselling by a counsellor, should aim to be resolved informally in the first instance, that is, between the school principal/parent/guardian, and the counsellor. Where the informal resolution proves unsuccessful it is hoped that the formal resolution process will resolve the matter satisfactorily via the *Pilot Programme of Counselling Supports in Primary Schools 2023-24 Complaints Procedure for Schools and Parents/Guardians*.

Evaluation

The DE will be commissioning an evaluation of the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools once it concludes, and in this regard, will be

seeking feedback from the participating counsellors, who will be required to fully participate in the Evaluation process, including paper based and/or via web based systems.

Grounds for Removal from Panel

The grounds upon which a counsellor may be removed/suspended (pending investigation) from the panel, include the following:

- Failure to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the Pilot Programme
- Failure to provide the counselling sessions and/or consultation sessions with school staff parents/guardians in a professional manner, with reasonable care and diligence
- Failure to provide sufficient time to the pupil in the counselling session, and/or teacher/parent consultations
- Engaging in conduct that falls short of what would be expected from a professional counsellor
- Seeking and/or accepting payment from a source other than from funding provided by the Department of Education, in respect of counselling sessions conducted under the Pilot Programme
- Failure to provide the agreed number of sessions (save where consent is withdrawn, or the individual pupil refuses to participate, or if a professional judgment is made in relation to the inappropriateness of the sessions for the child, which are explained to parents/guardians and school staff)
- Provision of false or misleading information in the **Certificate of Completion of Counselling Sessions Form**
- Provision of false or misleading information in an Application for Acceptance to the panel
- Conviction of a criminal offence
- Representing themselves in an inaccurate or inappropriate manner

Queries

Any queries should be submitted by e-mail to CounsellingPilot@education.gov.ie.

The DE administration will make every effort to respond to queries as soon as possible.

Disclaimers

The Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel is not a register of counsellors. Membership of the panel does not constitute eligibility for statutory registration of counsellors.

Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools counsellors are not employees of the Department of Education.

Placement upon the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel, shall not be interpreted or construed as granting a counsellor any right or entitlement to participation in the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools.

Subject to the Department of Education's right of removal/discontinuance of the Pilot Programme (at the discretion of the Minister), placement upon the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools panel is valid from the date of appointment until June 2024 only.

Appendix 1

Agreement between Minister for Education and the Participating Counsellor

I have read, understand and agree to be bound by the Terms & Conditions of the *Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools 2023-24*,

Signed _____

Counsellor

Print Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Signed _____

On behalf of The Minister for Education

Print Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Appendix 2

Statement of Non-Disclosure

I _____ the undersigned, understand that all of the information received by me in the provision of a counselling service under the Pilot Programme of Counselling for Primary Schools is confidential and is disclosed to me for the purpose of completing such work, and I undertake to use/process it solely for that purpose.

I understand that the information is of a confidential nature and undertake to treat it as such, and hereby confirm that I will not disclose it to any third party.

I undertake to store it in a secure environment that cannot be accessed by any third party.

Signed _____ Counsellor

Print Name: _____

Date: _____ / _____ / _____