School Counselling
A GUIDE FOR
SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Director General’s Message

ACT Public Schools are committed to ensuring that all children and young people in the ACT learn and thrive, by providing positive and success orientated learning environments, engaging curriculum and quality teaching. Public Schools strive to meet each student’s academic, social, emotional and physical learning needs. Part of supporting student needs within an educational environment is the provision of school counselling.

School counselling within ACT Public Schools is provided by psychologists. School Psychologists offer a psychological and counselling service to enhance student learning and to facilitate the development of competent and resilient children and young people.

This guide provides teachers, students, parents, government and community agencies with information on the role of the School Psychologist and how they work in schools.

A significant proportion of school-aged children and young people experience social, emotional, behavioural and mental health issues. These issues are likely to have a detrimental impact on a child’s or young person’s ability to engage in learning, their relationships and their personal development, and are of direct interest to schools. An increase in reported mental health issues in children and young people, means that psychological intervention and support for children and young people within schools will play an important part in the early intervention and prevention of mental health issues of students.

Those students who experience developmental delays, disabilities and specific learning difficulties all have the potential to benefit from the input of a School Psychologist through advice and support to teachers and parents.

School Psychologists play a small but important part in supporting the diverse needs of students to ensure they learn, thrive and are equipped with the skills to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives.

*Diane Joseph*
Director-General
ACT Education and Training Directorate

This document is a guide for public school communities to understanding the role, function and requirements of School Psychologists in ACT Public Schools and the benefits they can provide to the school environment through the school counselling service.

Role of the School Psychologist

School Psychologists provide a psychological and counselling service to enhance student learning and engagement and to facilitate the development of competent and resilient children and young people. School Psychologists not only work with the student but with all parts of the student’s life to support their learning and the development of competence and resilience. School Psychologists seek to intervene early in the development of student difficulties and in doing so they draw upon educational,
community and counselling psychology approaches. They apply their psychological and educational expertise to support students to achieve academic success, psychological health, and social and emotional well-being. This is achieved through the delivery of preventative and point of need services directly to students, parents and teachers, and through consultative processes as well as program delivery in individual school and school networks.

To achieve these outcomes, School Psychologists engage in a variety of activities including:

- Collaborative development, implementation and evaluation of behaviour, social, emotional and individual learning plans
- Counselling for children and young people
- Psychological and educational assessments
- Assisting in the management of critical incidents and mental health risk assessments
- Assisting in the selection, design, implementation and evaluation of prevention programs
- Consulting with key stakeholders including teachers, parents and school administrators
- Referral to external agencies
- Providing information and psychological education to student population, school staff, parents/carers and external stakeholders
- Developing policy and processes to support the school counselling service.

### MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is involved?</th>
<th>Type of intervention</th>
<th>Level of intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entire school community</td>
<td>Create environments to provide positive wellbeing</td>
<td>Develop school wide systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>All students and teachers All parents and carers</td>
<td>Education on social and emotional skills</td>
<td>Embed in practice and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with signs of behavior, learning or mental health support needs</td>
<td>Counselling, teaching and learning adjustments targeted group/class</td>
<td>Additional strategies, consultation and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with behavior, learning, and/or mental health support needs</td>
<td>Counselling, assessment and planning</td>
<td>Individual assessment, interventions and documented plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students with high level support needs</td>
<td>Interagency case management</td>
<td>Intensive support and referral</td>
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**Accessing School Psychologists in your school**

School staff can access the support of a School Psychologist through meetings that review student progress. These meetings are often referred to as Special Needs Meetings, Student Welfare Meetings or Student Services Meetings depending on the school sector. School Psychologists are happy to talk with staff before a referral is made.

Parents/carers can access the support of a School Psychologist by talking with their child’s teacher or by contacting the School Psychologist through the school’s front office.
Students may independently access the School Psychologist through self-referral. In such cases the School Psychologist will inform the student about the service and determine whether the student has the capacity to independently provide consent.

**School Psychologist qualifications**

School Psychologists must be registered with the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA). Registration involves at least six years training and supervision. At a minimum, psychologists must complete a four-year degree in psychology and undertake a two-year internship as a provisional psychologist prior to becoming a registered psychologist.

The Directorate may employ provisional psychologists undertaking the PsyBA-approved practice program with additional requirements of supervision and training.

**School Psychologists have expertise in the following areas:**

- Identifying and assessing mental health issues and providing follow up support or referring to other mental health services
- Conducting assessments in learning, social, emotional and behavioural domains and communicating assessment results to key people, such as parents/carers, teachers and relevant professionals
- Providing expert advice and direct intervention in the management of critical incidents
- Assisting in the design and evaluation of effective prevention, intervention and support programs for individuals, groups and school populations
- Providing counselling and intervention for a range of issues affecting children and young people where appropriate, parents/carers
- Providing Professional Learning for staff on a range of topics, and conducting workshops for parents/carers and small group interventions for students
- Consulting with parents/carers, teachers, school executive, external agencies and other members of the school community in regard to interventions, services and support for students. This, at times, may take on a psycho-educational dimension and advocacy
- Understanding and conducting research in areas relating to school psychology practice.

**School Psychologists have psychological and educational knowledge in:**

- Child development, including the biological, cognitive, perceptual, social and emotional aspects of behaviour and learning
- How learning and behaviour are influenced by the school environment and by students' development, experiences, abilities, interests, language, family, culture and community
- Effective individual, group-based and whole-school prevention and intervention programs
- The social dynamics of groups and organisations
- Change management principles as applied to individuals, groups, organisations and systems
- The purpose, nature and use of a variety of assessment strategies to inform teaching, learning and behaviour programs
- Legislation, policies and procedures that define the parameters of educational programs and psychological practice
- Advocacy and consultancy to students, parents/carers and teaching staff.

**Discussing priorities for the provision of Counselling Services in your school**

In order to establish effective psychological services in schools, collaboration between the Principal and the School Psychologist regarding school priorities and service delivery needs is essential. A formal discussion and documentation of priorities is completed annually. This process occurs in every school and is called Establishing Professionalism in Counselling – (EPIC). This EPIC meeting will be attended by the School Psychologist, the Senior Psychologist and the Principal. School Psychologists operate from a service delivery model (Model for Effective Practice in Schools, pg 3) which outlines the areas in which School Psychologists can offer support. These supports range from consultation to
intensive support and can include whole school and preventative approaches through to a focus on individual intervention.

What are the ethical obligations of School Psychologists?

In order to maintain their registration, psychologists adhere to the standards and guidelines of the PsyBA and the ethical codes developed by the PsyBA and the Australian Psychological Society (APS). Ethical obligations particularly relevant to psychologists working in schools include:

**Informed and voluntary consent** — Prior to providing services, School Psychologists are required to inform clients about the nature, purpose and potential consequences of the interaction, the limits to confidentiality and right of access to files. In the case of children, informed consent is obtained from a parent or legal guardian except when there is a notifiable risk. However, a young person can independently seek psychological support in his or her own right. It is the responsibility of the School Psychologist to determine whether a young person is sufficiently competent and mature enough to give informed consent for psychological services. The exception to this is when there is a risk to the student or others. Part of a School Psychologist’s role is to educate or inform students about the voluntary nature of counselling and on their rights within a counselling relationship.

**Limits of Confidentiality** — School Psychologists are bound by law to maintain client confidentiality when collecting, recording, storing, disseminating, and disposing of information. However, a School Psychologist cannot keep confidential any information that reveals a risk of harm to the client or to any other person. Similarly, information that is requested under a court order must also be disclosed.

### UNIQUE COMBINATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work in the areas of:</th>
<th>school psychologist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior assessment and planning</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning and cognitive assessments</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling and intervention</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health assessment and support</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linking complex student issues to educational outcomes</td>
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What do School Psychologists require in order to provide effective support to schools?

**Effective referral processes** — Typically, the school will have a special needs or welfare team meeting where potential referrals are discussed with the School Psychologist. It is preferable that the parent/carer has been contacted by the school prior to making a referral to the School Psychologist. The School Psychologist will discuss interventions, ethical obligations and ensure informed parental consent when required.

Parents/carers and students can also refer directly to the School Psychologist by contacting them directly at the school site or through the school administration office.

**Adequate record keeping and file storage facilities** — School Psychologists must protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of client files in relation to access, storage and disposal. The School Psychologist's files must be stored separately from all other school or multidisciplinary team files and must be kept in a secure, locked cabinet in a locked room — usually the School Psychologist’s office. School Psychologist files will only be accessed by School Psychologists, Senior Psychologist or the Manager for the School Counselling Service.
Access to professional consultation — Regular professional supervision and peer consultation form a necessary part of maintaining registration as a psychologist and ensuring the competent delivery of psychological services in schools.

Quality professional development — To maintain registration with the PsyBA, psychologists are required to engage in a minimum of 30 hours of continuing professional development each year, of which 10 hours must be peer consultation. This is required whether they work full time or part time. This allows them to maintain their expertise, and keep up to date on new psychological research and legislation, and further develop their professional skills and knowledge.

Provision of resources — The school that has a School Psychologist working with them is responsible for providing appropriate and adequate resources, including the following:

- Access to telecommunication in a private location which includes access to STD and mobile phones and access to network computing systems, lockable filing cabinets, stationery and office furniture, such as a bookcase, table for assessments, coffee table, and whiteboard.
- A private and suitable location from which to provide professional services to the school population. The room should be accessible by those who have disabilities and provide adequate privacy, comfort and suitability for small group and individual counselling, assessment and consultation. It should be a permanent location within a school. Ideally, this room is arranged in such a way as to maximise the safety of the School Psychologist.
- A small annual budgetary allowance to purchase materials necessary to complete their work in the school, eg paint, clay, toys etc.
- Student Wellbeing and Behaviour Support is responsible for providing appropriate and adequate resources, including the following:
- Access to all current psychological and educational testing materials required to fulfill the professional role as described earlier
- Administrative processes that enable timely approval of requests for leave and professional development
- Adequate reimbursement for travel to, and from, other destinations if required
- Laptops
- Professional consultation and Line Management.

What can School Communities do if a concern is raised regarding the School Psychologists professional practice and conduct?

In the first instance, it is highly recommended that the concern is raised directly with the School Psychologist and/or the Principal of the school. If the concern is not addressed, the principal of the school will refer the concern to the supervising Senior Psychologist or the Manager, Student Wellbeing and Behaviour Support, Education and Training Directorate.

A parent/carer or student may also submit a complaint to ACT Health Services Commissioner – http://www.hrc.act.gov.au/

PsyBA functions include the registration of psychologists, developing standards, codes and guidelines for the psychology profession and to handle notifications and complaints.

Activities considered as breaches of professional conduct are categorised as professional misconduct, unprofessional conduct and notifiable conduct.

Members of the public may make a notification to the PsyBA about conduct, health or performance of a psychologist.

Practitioners and employers are mandated by law to report notifiable conduct relating to registered practitioners.

Reference documents


*Mental Health Programmes in Schools.* World Health Organization (1994)

*Guidelines for 4 +2 internship program provisional psychologists and supervisors.* Psychology Board of Australia (2010)

*School Psychologists: A Guide for school Administrators.* School Psychologists' Association of Western Australia (Inc)

For more information contact: Student Wellbeing and Behaviour Support through Canberra Connect on 13 22 81.

Guide Owner: Student Wellbeing and Behaviour Support

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