

## **Connect**

### **Additional Evidence on Counsellors in School Education, 3 September 2020**

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' group and a registered charity which provides support to parents and carers all over Scotland. We provide membership services to individual Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents who have concerns about any aspect of the education of their child, or the wider education system. We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community.

Connect welcomes the opportunity to provide an update to our written evidence submitted in January, ahead of the Committee's evidence session on school counseling.

### **Impact of Covid-19**

The past six months has been a period of great upheaval and uncertainty for families. They have had to deal a wide range of challenges: lockdown; school closures; supporting their children's learning at home full time; working from home or dealing with the stresses of being a key worker; financial uncertainty on furlough; concern over or reality of the health impact of the virus. More resources for supporting young people's mental health have always been a high priority, but now even more children and families, including those who were managing before the pandemic, will be in need of help.

Progress on the promise to provide all children with access to school counsellors has been slow, and we welcome the Scottish Government's statement in the 2020-21 Programme for Government that these are now expected to be in place by the end of October.

While it is important that young people get the support they need in school, the wellbeing of the entire family unit must also be considered. Consistent information needs to be shared with families so parents know where to get support for their children everyone supports children and young people with the same messaging.

The provision of school counsellors can only be one element of the support package required. Health and wellbeing education for young people, school staff, and families is also important: the key messages of this must be shared with parents so they can help support their child's mental health. Positive mental health for young people requires everyone to work together, to prevent mental health distress and crisis.

### **Connect's lockdown survey**

In our [lockdown survey of parents and carers](#) which ran from 27 May to 30 June 2020, we asked what most concerned parents. Concern about their child's health and

wellbeing was the second highest concern at **57% (4509)**. **39% (3002)** of parents also expressed concern about their own health and wellbeing.

A brief sample of parent comments:

'I feel that the social aspect of school is something my daughter is really missing and believe that if this continues for too long her mental health and confidence will be affected.'

'I have seen the videos from the Scottish Government about mental health and worrying about coming out of lockdown. I worry particularly about my P2 regarding this and how she will cope with going back to school.'

'Overall though the major worry is my child's mental health, which has seriously deteriorated during lockdown (a pre-existing condition). She is very suicidal and at high risk. So every day is just about getting by and doing what we can.'

'After such a long period away from school I think full time in school in August is a huge change for young children and feel it could have a very negative impact in their mental health.'

'I would like to see what plans the government are putting in place to support the mental health of children on return to lessen the impact of what's happened.'

'Children of poorer families have simply been forgotten about, they cannot join in with school friends, teachers or the community through no fault of their own and this in itself will be having a negative effect on their mental health.'