

Brisbane Grammar School Student Counselling Practices

The past twelve years have been characterised by the ongoing review and continuous quality improvement of counselling procedures and practices to ensure both quality of service provision and the minimisation of risk to both students and staff.

Such review and quality improvement has been manifested in the following ways:

1. Staff recruitment and retention

Brisbane Grammar school has been committed to employing professional staff in counselling roles, who have formal counselling and mental health qualifications and well documented experience. There are currently three counsellors employed at the school – one a registered APS psychologist (Mr Mark Tyszkiewicz) the other a Medicare accredited mental health social worker (Ms Anne Crossan) who are led by the Director of Student Services (Ms Dale Nicholas), a registered teacher and member of the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association. Both Mark Tyszkiewicz and Anne Crossan are required to have “Blue Cards” issued by the Commission for Children and Young People.

Staff turnover in the counselling area has been very low. Mr Tyszkiewicz has been with the school for 12 years. Ms Crossan has been with the school for one year, replacing the previous counsellor (Dr Kerry Hurd) who had been at the school for approximately 15 years. This high level of retention has helped to ensure that counselling is provided by staff who are well trained and well known to the school community.

The Student Counsellor Duty statement is attached for reference.

2. Policy development

Over the past decade, the school has developed a comprehensive counselling policy that is available to all stakeholders. This policy details such matters as referral procedures, accepted interventions, confidentiality, accountability, and record keeping. The policy is regularly reviewed. There exists a very clear expectation that all counselling staff will abide by the policy. The department also abides by all other relevant policies including the Child Protection Policy.

The Counselling Policy is attached for reference.

3. Record keeping

The school counsellors, pursuant to regulatory, professional and school policy requirements, maintain comprehensive documentation on all therapeutic interactions with both students and parents. This includes clinical notes on all counselling sessions as well as the maintenance of schedules as to which students have been seen. Until 2009 these schedules were maintained in hand written or typed form, but are now available for extraction from electronic diary records. Detailed, confidential notes on individual clients were previously maintained on hand written cards but are now kept as electronic folders.

Examples of prior written records and current electronic extraction records are attached for reference.

4. Reporting and review

The school counselling team, together with the Director of Student Services, meet on a weekly basis for “case review”. The purpose of this case review is twofold – to provide collegiate/professional support in relation to clinical practice and to provide oversight of clinical caseloads and their manageability. This meeting, together with on-going day-to-day collegiate interaction, does help to ensure proper oversight of practice. It also provides a mechanism for staff support, and hence enhance employment retention. Members of the team are also part of a broader peer mentoring network with other schools in the GPS system.

5. Physical counselling infrastructure

The school counsellors operate from a purpose built counselling facility (Student Services), located on the top floor of the School’s most recent building addition – the Lilley Centre. The Student Services facility is framed by glass walls, and adjoins high traffic areas such as the Seniors Room and informal student study spaces. As the school counsellors also provide careers and tertiary study advice, the area has a continual flow-through of students and staff. Individual counselling rooms have a least one wall constructed of clear glass, with retractable blinds installed for confidentiality. However, all blinds have an approximately four centimetre gap between them, allowing for visual inspection of activity within any room. This physical set-up is considered significant from a risk management perspective, as it greatly reduces the likelihood of any unprofessional conduct.

6. Peer supervision/professional development

As a registered psychologist, Mr Tyszkiewicz is required to undertake a specified amount of professional development each year (as mandated by both the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the Australian Psychological Society). This includes at least 10 hours of professional peer supervision with a registered psychologist external to the school.

Likewise, Ms Crossan is required to undertake professional development (including peer supervision) to maintain accreditation with the Australian Association of Social Workers and Ms Nicholas has similar professional development obligations to the Queensland College of Teachers, the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association and the Career Development Association of Australia.

In addition to the above, as noted in Point 4, there is on-going collegiate interaction in relation to case management.

7. Electronic and Social Media Environment

Being no different to the rest of the modern world, the school counsellors now function in an environment of social media and the almost instantaneous upload of data, including photos, personal blogs and general commentary. This environment, by default, produces its own extremely thorough regulatory framework. It is extremely unlikely that any unprofessional behaviour by a counsellor would go unrecognised by, and unreported to, senior management and the wider school community.



Dale Nicholas

Director of Student Services

1 May 2014