



INSTITUTE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

INSTITIÚID NA GCOMHAIRLEOIRÍ TREORACH

SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (CAMHS)

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) is the professional body that promotes quality guidance counselling in education, training, and employment settings. It represents over 1,500 guidance counsellors who work in a wide range of contexts, including second-level schools, Further Education and Training (FET), Higher Education, Public Employment Services, Prison and Probation Services, Youth services and private practice.

On behalf of its membership base of guidance counsellors, the National Executive of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors has issued this submission in response to the Mental Health Commission's public consultation on the Draft National Standards for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Mental Health Commission's public consultation on the Draft National Standards for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Mental Health Commission, 2026). The IGC's interest in the standards stems from the significant role guidance counsellors play in supporting young people experiencing mental health difficulties in schools and facilitating engagement with external services.

Guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools encompasses three interrelated areas: personal and social development, educational guidance, and career guidance (DEY, 2025). While the role is often associated with educational and career decision-making, guidance counsellors also play an important role in supporting students' personal and social development and wellbeing. Guidance is provided both developmentally and at times of personal difficulty or crisis, with guidance counsellors working directly with students through individual and group interventions and as part of the wider student support structure within schools.

Guidance counsellors work as part of a wider continuum of support through which students' needs are identified, and appropriate responses are provided (National Educational Psychological Service, 2021). School student-support systems play an important role in developing relationships and referral pathways with external agencies and services, particularly where students' needs are complex (Dempsey & McCoy, 2026).

Within this framework, guidance counsellors play a key frontline role in responding to students experiencing mental health difficulties. They identify emerging concerns, provide one-to-one counselling support, liaise with parents and relevant school personnel, support referrals to CAMHS and other external services, and often continue to support vulnerable students while they await access to specialist services.

Their role sits at an important intersection between mental health and wellbeing, educational participation and progression, and engagement with external supports. This is particularly relevant to the draft CAMHS standards, which recognise the importance of collaboration with schools and education services, early intervention, continuity of care and supporting young people to remain engaged in or return to education.

The IGC's most recent national survey demonstrates the extent to which mental health difficulties form part of guidance counsellors' day-to-day work, alongside their educational and career guidance responsibilities. Mental health concerns, including anxiety and self-harm, were encountered daily or weekly by 95.3% of members based in schools and colleges, while 80.1% reported encountering emotionally based school avoidance with the same frequency. Furthermore, 71.7% reported "holding" students for prolonged periods due to difficulties accessing appropriate referral pathways (IGC, 2025).

These findings need to be considered in the context of pressures on specialist services. At the end of April 2026, 633 children and young people had been waiting more than 12 months for an initial CAMHS assessment (Health Service Executive, 2026). During these periods of waiting, young people remain within their school communities, and guidance counsellors may continue to provide support while also responding to the educational consequences of mental health difficulties, including school avoidance, disengagement and difficulties remaining in or returning to education.

The scale of mental health need is also reflected in young people's own reported experiences. The Ombudsman for Children's 'A Piece of My Mind' report, based on a survey of 2,166 young people aged 12–17, found that 78% had experienced some mental health difficulties, while children themselves emphasised the need for appropriate mental health supports within schools (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2023).

The IGC particularly welcomes the recognition in Standards 1.10 and 4.7 of the importance of collaboration with schools and education services, including in supporting continued engagement with education and access to education, training and employment opportunities. Guidance counsellors are well placed to contribute to this work and to support effective links between young people, families, schools and relevant services.

Against this background, the IGC notes that, while the draft standards refer to schools, education services, and interagency collaboration, they do not explicitly recognise the distinct role of the guidance counsellor in supporting young people experiencing mental health difficulties. This is despite existing national policy recognising the guidance counsellor as having an important role in supporting a young person before referral to external mental health services and in providing

continuity of school-based support following referral and return to school (DES, HSE and DOH, 2013).

The IGC's detailed comments on specific themes and standards are set out in Appendix 1 (IGC Comments on Specific Draft CAMHS Standards) and focus particularly on crisis pathways, communication following unsuccessful referrals, the "no wrong door" approach, feedback mechanisms and the sharing of sensitive information with professionals outside CAMHS.

REFERENCE LIST

- Dempsey, C., & McCoy, S. (2026). *Supporting student wellbeing in school contexts: A narrative review* [Report]. ESRI. <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs223>
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- National Educational Psychological Service. (2021). *Student support teams in post primary schools: A guide to establishing a team or reviewing an existing team*. <https://assets.gov.ie/40693/a844644845444034bb6a33b2e90cb2f2.pdf>
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APPENDIX 1 IGC COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC DRAFT CAMHS STANDARDS

Relevant theme, standard, statement number, standard feature number	Page No.	IGC Comment
Theme 2: Safety and wellbeing Children and young people have access to timely crisis support	21	Consider ensuring that clear information on urgent assessment and crisis pathways is also available to relevant professionals and services supporting children and young people, including schools.
Theme 3: Accessibility and Equity 3.1.5 Where a referral is not accepted, the rationale is clearly communicated, along with information on review, appeal or complaints processes and signposting to appropriate alternative services.	23	Consider clarifying that, where appropriate, the referring agent should also be informed when a referral is not accepted, including relevant signposting to alternative supports, particularly where they continue to support the child or young person.
3.3.6 A no wrong door approach is implemented, ensuring children and young people can access appropriate supports regardless of entry point.	24	The IGC welcomes the commitment to a “no wrong door” approach. In implementing this principle, it is important that the concept of an entry point is not understood solely in terms of health services. Schools are often an important point where mental health difficulties are identified, and young people are supported to access appropriate services, with guidance counsellors and other relevant school professionals playing an important role in this process as part of a whole school approach. Implementing a “no wrong door” approach should therefore recognise and support effective pathways between schools and CAMHS. It may also be helpful to clarify how the “no wrong door” approach within these standards aligns with the Single Point of Access (SPoA) model under Sharing the Vision, to support clarity and consistency across national policy and implementation (Government of Ireland, 2026).

Theme 8: Quality Improvement and Information Governance 8.1.6 Mechanisms are in place to gather feedback from children, young people, families and relevant consulted carers, including anonymous options where appropriate.	47	Consider including relevant professionals involved in supporting the child or young person, including guidance counsellors, where appropriate. They may provide valuable feedback on access, referral pathways, communication and continuity of support.
8.2 Services maintain secure, fit-for-purpose data systems that support safe, coordinated and efficient care.	47	Consider whether this section should address the secure sharing and appropriate handling of sensitive information provided to schools and other relevant services, including clarity regarding who should receive, access and retain such information. The current standards appear to address records held within CAMHS primarily, although sensitive information may also be shared with professionals outside the service.