

Therapeutic Counselling at Bowden House School 2018-19

Bowden House School is a residential school that provides education and care for young students with complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It meets the student's learning requirements by providing a caring, nurturing environment with strong boundaries and a 'busy' curriculum. Students build strong attachments with staff but can be volatile and struggle with their emotions and interpersonal relationships. This is my fourth year at the school and I continue to enjoy the role immensely, knowing that every day is different. It has been an exciting year as the school comes up to capacity in student numbers.

This year for me has been about the challenge of focusing on the students while building strong working ties with professionals. The Emotional Wellbeing & Intervention Team has been a useful way of supporting nurture with our young people. We are meeting once a week to make important choices about how to pinpoint resources effectively. I am then able to see how my clients are responding in other 1:1 sessions and suggest extra help for them. I can also get an idea of how to work with new clients so I can more effectively build trust. Having a range of professionals in this group, (Learning & Mentoring specialist, SALT, CAMHS Clinical Psychologist, Educational Psychologist & the school's Student & Family Co-ordinator) means we have a wealth of experience to share and develop with the aim of supporting the academic and social learning experience of the students. It also allows us to strengthen each other, with the feel of a department, rather than lone workers.

Last year, I was involved in more family work and travelling to London where the majority of our students live. The appointment of our CAMHS Clinical Psychologist has provided the advantage of him developing this role and has allowed me to focus on individual sessions with the students in school whilst receiving feedback from his evolving relationships with families. The connection I made with CAMHS last year, has been galvanised by having a Clinical Psychologist as part of our team who has access to other external agencies and weekly contact with school and the Local Authority.

I have continued working at high frequency with some learners. This extra nurture is often part of a package from the Emotional Wellbeing & Intervention Team. I have observed that the students are more receptive to talking and the targeted support carries them through crises. It may have aided with cutting down negative behaviours in my sessions and helping to keep the student and myself safe. This year there has been more short term and drop-in work. This gives a greater responsiveness to client need, at the expense of consistency. Overall, this is necessary. Although less students get to see me long term, they have more therapeutic opportunities in the team as a whole and these are fine-tuned to represent their individual need.

I have an active role on the Anti-bullying Committee and this is an excellent opportunity to engage in group work with young people and to deal with thorny

subject matter. This student group is complex. The Committee has worked hard to educate against violence, inviting key speakers and inspiring frank conversation with learners. We have the same approach with sexualised language and behaviour, allowing students to become conscious of negative patterns of interaction and social conditioning. The work the school does to provide positive role models cannot be underestimated. It helps change our student's futures and allows them the bravery to make difficult disclosures and integrate into family and society.

I have headed one of the three reflective practice groups started this year and this has helped staff to stay mindful and active rather than simply reactive to problems. I have also delivered training to education staff on attachment and trauma, which has been a real pleasure.

Alexia McGlone
Therapeutic Counsellor

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