



New Academy School (NAS)

Dubai, UAE

WELL BEING COUNSELLING POLICY

Compiled by:	Social Counselor & Inclusion
Reviewed by:	Inclusion Champion (Mrs. Nazia)
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Role of Counselor

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Vision:

NAS community inspires passion for learning, where students achieve at their fullest potential to become responsible, productive global and innovative citizens and ambassadors of their own culture.

In order to accomplish this vision, a counselling programme is in place which deals with the positive and emotional wellbeing of the students.

1.2. Mission:

The Counselling Programme supports teachers, the administrative team, parents and the community in preparing all NAS students for successful grade level transitions by providing them a safe and caring environment that nurtures necessary character for lifelong learning, global workforce and responsible citizenship.

1.3. Philosophy

Each child is unique and special in their own way. As a result we believe that the goal of education is to maximise each child's full potential. Our counselling programme offers support to ALL students and their families.

2. Background to the policy

New Academy School recognises that students may face a variety of difficulties and challenges whilst at school, which has an impact on the chances of success and progression.

At NAS, students have the right to expect informed, impartial, supportive and timely guidance and counselling organised by the School, around any personal difficulties that are affecting a student's emotional health and studies.

We are committed to providing good counselling services, ensuring the wellbeing, and developing it further to ensure it is accessible and meets the needs of all.

When we look at the research into adult happiness, we find that it isn't academic results at school or university which contribute most to our sense of wellbeing, but mental and physical health, as well as the relationships we form with others. If we look at it this way, it makes sense that schools should be preparing our children to live happy and healthy lives. A strong sense of wellbeing is important for everyone in the education community. This is partly because happiness leads to more effective teaching and learning, and ultimately, an improved education sector. But happiness is also important because our intrinsic value as humans lies not just in the function we perform in society, but in how much we contribute and give to each other. (Richard Layard, 2017)

3. Definition:

3.1. Wellbeing: Well-being is a dynamic concept that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as mental health-related behaviours. It is not just the absence of illness. It is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. (American Psychological Association, 2012)

3.2. Counselling: It addresses the emotional, social, and school concerns which students have at different stages of their lives. Counsellors focus on emotional and mental health issues and to improve their sense of well-being, alleviate feelings of distress and resolve crises. They also provide assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological symptoms. (American Psychological Association, 2017)

At NAS, Counselling is an interactive learning process between counsellor and student, whether individual or group, which approaches in a holistic way, personal, social and/or academic issues.

(See the Role of Counsellor in Appendix)

3.3. Individual Counselling - is an interactive process, conducted on a one-to-one basis, with the aim to facilitate meaningful understanding of the self and environment and/or clarification of goals and values for future behaviour. The counsellor tailors the process to his/her (client) unique needs.

3.4. Group Counselling - Group session is a form of psychosocial support where a small group of students meet regularly to talk, interact and discuss problems with each other and the group leader. The counsellor will provide the necessary guidelines required to build a trusting environment in the group, among the members - promote a sense of support and safety among members.

3.5. Workshops - A seminar, discussion group or something similar that emphasises exchange of ideas and the demonstration and application of techniques or skills. Workshops will be open to all teachers and students.

3.6. Rationale behind school-based counselling programme:
NAS recognizes each child is unique and special in their own way. The school counselling programme is considered as a useful intervention in helping ALL children and young people including those who are experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as well as those with special education needs and disability (SEND).

A well-established counselling programme will work as a safe space for the above mentioned students especially with the current stressful times. A safe space to express one's concerns, feelings and emotions aids in stable mental health and development which will in-turn aid better performance (curricular and extra-curricular)

4. The Targets of Counselling Program
 - i. Academic (learning to learn)
 - ii. Personal/social (learning to live)
 - iii. Emotional (learning to feel)

4.1. The Counselling Program Will:

- Address the unique needs of all students - The counsellor will support the developmental, emotional, social and academic needs of the student body to promote wellbeing and success.
- Work hand in hand with the SEND department and class teachers, supervisors and Head of department to include structured activities based upon the needs of individual students including developmental, preventative and remedial services
- Be an integral part of the instructional program and total educational experience
- Depend upon the support and collaboration of teachers, administrators, students, parents, other school personnel and the community at large to ensure a holistic approach to meeting the needs of the students
- Include and implement appropriate professional development programs for all staff
- Provide accountability and continuous improvement through annual reviews of student progress and program and staff evaluation
- Deliver workshops for teachers related to substance abuse, child abuse and bullying.

5. ONE-TO-ONE Counselling

- The counselling service currently offers an ‘open-ended’ provision.
- The counselling service will be delivered in a private, comfortable and welcoming environment.
- Each counselling session are usually between 20-55 minutes depending on age of the student
- When the student comes to a counselling session through referral by a teacher, the counsellor will take the lead in the conversation
- The counselling service is student-led and the counsellors will not be directive with regard to topics for discussion in the event that it is a self-referral. Students will have the opportunity to express themselves through their preferred media i.e. art, poetry, music, drama.
- The information exchanged between the student and the counsellor will be kept confidential unless there is a question of harm caused by the student to self or others and if there is a possibility of the student being in danger from someone else and when informed consent is obtained to reveal certain information.

- Counselling session reports will be maintained by the counsellor in soft and hard copies for documentation purposes in confidentiality.
- In situations where the students' issues are related to other external parties (parents/teachers/school/friends etc.), the counsellor can get in touch with the concerned persons if absolutely necessary (with permission of the inclusion head/inclusion champion)

5.1. Data Protection and Confidentiality

All sessions with a counsellor are confidential. Information will only be shared with explicit and informed consent from the student. The only time the counselling service will share information without consent is if it is felt that a student is at risk of self-harm or causing harm to others. In these circumstances, the procedures within the Child Protection Policy will be followed. The service will usually (but not always) discuss with a student what will be shared and will seek to obtain the student's consent where possible.

All information about students, both paper-based and electronic, is held securely. Electronic information is held on a secure database.

Soft and hard copies kept of the following information:

- Referral forms, including student name and contact details.
- Counselling consent form of Student and Parents.

Session notes:

This information allows the service to maintain contact with the student and work within ethical and professional guidelines. Session notes ensure that counsellors are able to develop their sessions to meet the needs of the individual student.

Counselling is confidential, unless safeguarding concerns are raised. The Inclusion Head, heads of primary, secondary, middle and high sections will be aware of the names of students accessing the service but will not have access to any detail of presenting difficulties or session content. The Inclusion Head will only get detailed information during weekly debrief sessions to discuss issues of concern.

Parents/guardians, tutors, teachers or support staff do not have access to information about students receiving counselling and may not be informed that students are accessing the service if the session is student initiated.

All information is stored until the student leaves or graduates. If a student wishes for their information to be destroyed before this deadline, they should speak to their counsellor.

6. Procedure

6.1. Entitlement to counselling

This service is available to all currently enrolled students of NAS who may be experiencing emotional, academic or psychological challenges that could inhibit their personal development and/or chances of success and progression. The service aims to promote and contribute to the holistic well-being and achievement of all students.

Students can access the service through the following mechanisms:

- Direct contact with Social Counsellor by email/self referral form/oral request
- Referral by Coordinator or other member of staff.
- Referral by the parent(s) through the coordinator/supervisor/VP

7. REFERRALS:

7.1. Referral Procedures

7.1.1. Self-referral:

A pupil can refer themselves for counselling in any of the following ways:

- Ask a teacher to organise an appointment with the counsellor. This request goes to the Head of section who then makes the referral to the counsellor.
- The student may ask a parent to make the referral to the counsellor.
- Alternatively, the student can go directly to the Counsellor or Inclusion Head but during break time.

7.1.2. Teacher referral

- All referrals should be passed on to the counsellor.
- A teacher can ask a student if they would like counselling.
- The student must agree to the referral before their name is passed to the counsellor.
- In case of younger students (behavioural/learning concerns), a referral form can be filled in by the teacher/supervisor/VP and an observation and other required steps according to protocol will be carried out.

7.1.3. Parent referral

- A parent can contact the school and ask for a counselling appointment to be made for their child.
- It is essential that the student referred for counselling has decided that they want to see the counsellor themselves. An appointment with the counsellor will be made on this understanding.

- School counsellors use external referral sources to address concerns such as abuse, depression, anxiety, and family difficulties.
- Parents can refer their children for counselling by contacting the school counsellor, class teacher or form tutor.
- The student must be in agreement with this referral before the counselling process can begin.

7.2.External Referral

- An important aspect of the counsellor's work is to recognise the onset of serious physical and emotional disturbances and refer appropriately. This may be to a General Practitioner, psychologist or psychiatrist or other medical consultant for expert opinion. The referral will usually take place in consultation and consent from the parents and student. Sessions can continue with the counsellor if agreed by the referral agency.

8. Assessment of Student Needs

The counselling service aims to provide a non-directive counselling experience.

All members of the team will complete formal and informal assessment i.e., interview, behavioural observation, subjective rating and psychometric tests with each student at the first appointment. It will help to focus the pastoral system on the areas that matter both in school and outside the school ground. This will ensure the wellbeing of the students. All the information is then held confidentially in a secure location.

8.1. Komodo Wellbeing Program Wellbeing Programs

NAS values and prioritises the wellbeing of students and understands its influence on their learning. The school utilises a variety of wellbeing activities and events targeted at promoting students' wellbeing, which in turn enhance their engagement and readiness to learn. In addition, the school utilises a real-time data tool, KOMODO, to measure and understand the state of the students' wellbeing. Students needing psycho-social support are identified and early wellbeing interventions and support is given. Through the wellbeing support program students are empowered to have a voice on their wellbeing matters. This in turn enables them to be effective learners, become more resilient, cope with day to day challenges and lead happy and fulfilling lives.

8.3. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Requirements

NEASC policies and standards that are in place for child protection and wellbeing. The school ensures that:

- All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.
- Foundational Element - The school has intervention strategies designed to support students.
- All students receive counselling services that meet their personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counselling needs from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

9. Reviewing and monitoring

- A review discussion will take place at least every six weeks between the student and the counsellor to ascertain how beneficial the sessions are. This is to ensure that the student's needs are being met.
- At the end of each term, and at the last session, students will be asked to complete a feedback (See Appendix D) form as well as parents (See Appendix E). These forms are collated and are used to improve the counselling service.
- If students have concerns about the service they are receiving, they are strongly encouraged to speak to their counsellor.
- Information on who is accessing the service is analysed confidentially in order to measure the impact of the service and identify areas for improvement.
- This policy and the effectiveness of the service is monitored through student feedback.
- If a student accesses the service for longer than twelve weeks, a review will take place between the counsellor and the team supervisor to ensure that the needs of the student are being met. No confidential information will be shared at this meeting.

10. Promotion of the Counselling Services:

10.1. Raising awareness with pupils through:

- Assemblies where the counselling service is explained and pupils are introduced to the counsellor.
- Pupil information leaflets distributed in form time and during guidance classes.
- Counselling services information posters displayed on the reception notice board and in the libraries.
- Information posted on the school website.
- Staff discussing the counselling service to individual pupils whenever it is deemed necessary.

10.2. Raising awareness with staff through:

- The introduction of the counsellors to staff

- Discussion of the counselling service at staff briefings, including appointment allocations, referral procedures and any updates relating to the service
- Distribution of a staff information leaflet.

11. Counselling Policy for Teachers

- The counsellor will address the unique needs of teachers i.e., when teachers notice behavioural issues for their students, the counsellor will help teachers gain a more complete understanding of the issue behind the actions.
- The teachers could consult the counsellor for professional advice. When teachers find themselves stuck with strategies that are not working with a particular student.
- The teachers can approach the counsellor via email and can come directly to the Inclusion room.

COVID-19 Guidelines

Stress Management sessions will be conducted for the whole staff. Workshops to be conducted on 'dealing with students' anxiety' for the whole staff. Surveys would be administered upon students' arrival to school after vacations.

Teachers, Parents and Supervisors would be encouraged to refer the students for any anxiety or stress related problems.

12. Annexure Update April 2020: Distance Learning Wellbeing and Mental Health Procedures

Priority protection of PreCovid19 identified i.e. continued support during summer of those already with psychosocial challenges prior to COVID 19:

- Students of Determination
- Students who were receiving counselling
- Medical Students

Hangout or Zoom meetings with or debriefing of parents, students in these special categories to find out current scenarios and or the support they would need during reintegration

- Continued discussion on recommended support or measures- LSA support/Doctors /Parent /Relative Support
- Whether other coping measures evolved or were used over the period - measures that the parents put in place during quarantine- If prior counselled reflection whether this require to be reduced or increased or seized
- How resultant measures or coping mechanisms are impacting the students- did the lack of shadow support strengthen or weaken the student

- How experiences and measures are impacting the prior routines- e.g if child is coping with parent support will such type require to be carried on in the school
- Wellbeing Policies are in place and familiarised with school community
- Identifying possibility and contacts specialist to liaise with The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC) for high risk cases
- Surveys are ready with the teachers for students to complete before schools open
- Risk assessment form template to be finalised collaboratively with Wellbeing officer, Health Officer and Inclusion person
- Professional Development of Staff: Topics identifying and Slides Prep: Wellbeing concerns and students reintegrating procedures

13. Annexure Update August 2020: School Reintegration To On Campus

Wellbeing and Mental Health Procedures

Wellbeing Support for Student

Procedures will be in place to support students already known who would have suffered as a result of:

- Bereavement issues - Loss of loved ones
 - o In school Counselling
 - o Reporting, Engaging the DWC Gvt child protection agency
 - o Referral to external psychotherapist
- Infected by the COVID virus
 - o Informing others they have been in contact with
- Financial hardships due to parents losing jobs
 - o Staggering payments and or discount of fees
 - o Helping students understand the changes of accommodation home etc

Mechanisms in place to mitigate any potential challenges which can be brought about by reintegrating into the school building

- Fear of coming back to school building
 - Assuring and reassuring the students to ensure that the school has taken care of health issues and telling them the school is following the guidelines given by school hence they would be safe.
- School refusal or separation anxieties after a long time with parents
 - Debriefing and sharing and welcoming positive talks of experiences during assembly /homeroom time
- Change of learning routines
 - Highlighting the major changes to the students' i.e weekly rotations and explain the rationale behind the changes
 - Encouraging the students to come forward and ask for help on how to adapt to the changes / Counseling can be given for student to cope with the setting restrictions enforced procedures and code of conduct
- Being too suspicious of or fearing getting in school with other peers
 - Reassuring students of COVID 19 detection procedures
 - Trusting that their peers would submit for testing and report exposure to others who are infected and full confidentiality will be maintained in handling
- Building rapport and confidence that was prior COVID 19 period
 - Debriefing sessions on challenges and opportunities brought about the period
 - Partnering with parents
 - Increased use of technology
 - Enhanced self-learning which is good for those preparing for University
 - Enhanced sustainability issues reduced paper usage and more drive to go green initiative
 - Increased personal and environmental hygiene
 - Reinforcing Positive Psychology
 - Encouraging growth mindsets, resilience, through daily checklist students' journals and mindful exercises

14. Annexure update September 2021: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at NAS

SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

At NAS, SEL compliments and reinforces positive education, Positive Behaviour

Intervention, character building and compliments the pillar of character and morality taught in the Moral, Social and Cultural Curriculum (MSC).

The procedures involved are monitored and resources are used effectively. NAS decides on activities that align with the KHDA Wellbeing Agenda and those that integrate with the subject and MSC lessons.

Thus, through SEL, the NAS community envisions the development of a passion for learning among its students so that they achieve at their fullest potential to become responsible, productive and innovative global citizens who are ambassadors of their own culture.

Implementation:

- Formulating the SEL policy framework from a researched philosophical framework that encompasses fundamental themes such as self awareness, social awareness, relationship building, decision making, problem solving and making staff conscientious of it.
- Formulation of SEL committee for SEL planning
- Implementing of the framework during assembly, homeroom
- Integrating social, emotional, and academic learning across all subjects in-school and out-of-school time
- Aligning SEL with UAE country 's philosophies and UAE/ founding fathers values and global/national observance events/days.