



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Department of Education to attend Mental Health in Schools Conference and Placement in UK**

A group of senior teachers from both primary and secondary schools will next week be attending a conference and a school placement in UK as part of the mental health, social and emotional wellbeing project coordinated being by the Ministry for Education's Jackie Linares and Wayne Barton.

Following the recent announcement by Minister for Education John Cortes that four school-based counsellors are to be employed, significant work has been undertaken, largely through the recently introduced Department of Education Mental Health Steering Groups. A detailed timeline and action plan prior to the recruitment of these key posts has been developed and includes an operational policy, standards matrix for counselling services, information leaflets for parents/carers, teachers and students, and referral pathways for respective facets of education.

A visit has been arranged to a comprehensive school in Richmond in order to validate the initial service concept and design, through contacts established via Dr Pooky Knightsbridge (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Specialist). Mrs Karen Cromarty, a lead advisor for the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP) has been engaged on the recommendation of Dr Knightsmith, who is well known to the Education Department through her training contributions in June and November of last year. It is anticipated that through this networking exercise senior teachers with pastoral responsibilities and as future service leads for school-based counselling, will be better placed to introduce and manage this key service in Gibraltar. The Care Agency through Mrs Natalie Tavares (CEO Ag) and Mrs Giselle Carreras (Head of Psychology and Therapeutic Services) have contributed in the on-going development of the school-counselling service providing specialist advice and guidance from their significant experience with children and young adults.

Evidence shows that a counselling service which provides support within an overall school strategy can be highly effective in promoting young people's welfare, supporting their learning achievement as well as alleviating and preventing the escalation of mental health problems. School-based Counselling can help pupils to develop skills, which make personal transitions more manageable. An



effective counselling service must form part of a whole school approach to emotional health and well-being and to this end extensive work is already being carried out in schools; awareness and promotion of mental well-being is currently being developed through a programme of advice and training provided by external experts and also internally by the department of education. Parallel to this the Department has also set up PSHE working groups to review the curriculum in this area. Counselors are in a unique position to recognise early-on, children who are at risk, in need, vulnerable or for whom there are potential serious mental health risks at an early age.

The group will also attend a Mental Health in Schools Conference in Manchester. Here they will be able to review the latest UK Green Paper on mental health in schools, gain practical guidance on implementing a whole school approach to mental health strategy together with the importance and structuring of robust multiagency partnerships. Other themes covered during the conference include staff training in the recognition of early warning signs, PSHE lesson plans and understanding the effects of social media on children and young adults.

Minister for Education John Cortes commented, “We are moving in leaps and bounds on improving the way we deal with mental health in our schools, and the community must be grateful to all the professionals involved in this, both within and outside the steering groups. Setting up a new counsellor service is more than just recruiting people, and these visits are an important part of the process. We are developing a professional and robust service that will properly serve our young people’s needs and support the teachers in their vital roles.”