



SCHOOL COUNSELLING POLICY

Policy

Policy Title:	School Counselling Policy
Version:	1.0
Effective Date:	January 2024
Scheduled Review Date:	June 2026

1. Purpose

The school counselling program at Wesgreen International School is designed to provide comprehensive and culturally sensitive support to students, promoting their holistic development and well-being. It aims to address the diverse academic, social, emotional, and personal needs of students, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment, aligning with our wellbeing mission, vision and values.

Mission

Our mission is to ensure that emotional wellbeing and mental health is at the forefront of school community, today, tomorrow and together.

Vision

Today - We are committed to empowering our students by promoting confidence, critical thinking, self-regulation, and personal growth. We recognize that emotional wellbeing and mental health are essential components of academic success and overall happiness. Today, we inspire excellence in our students, equipping them with the skills and qualities needed to thrive in today's world.

Tomorrow - We envision a school that combines strategic planning with intellectual playfulness. Our aim is to provide our students with all the tools needed to thrive and adapt in an ever-changing world. Tomorrow, we are committed to not only preparing our students to be academically strong but also emotionally resilient and mentally agile for a future of lifelong learning and success.

Together – Inclusivity is at the heart of GEMS Wesgreen. Our school community is united in its commitment to supporting and celebrating cultural diversity. We believe that a strong sense of belonging and inclusivity is crucial for promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. Together, we recognize the importance of global citizenship and strive to create a nurturing environment where every individual feels valued and supported.

Values

We prioritize emotional wellbeing and mental health as integral components of our school community. We believe that fostering a positive environment starts with embracing and celebrating the cultural values and

aspirations of the UAE. We value respect and integrity, recognizing the importance of treating each other with dignity and honesty. Humility and tolerance are key pillars of our approach, promoting understanding and acceptance of diverse perspectives. We also value determination and character, encouraging students and staff alike to demonstrate perseverance and strong moral principles. Innovation and entrepreneurship are encouraged, inspiring creativity and a forward-thinking mindset. Finally, we prioritize intellectual and personal growth, supporting continuous learning and development for all members of our community. Our **recipe** for success is;

Realizing Goals: Encourage staff to be inspired by setting achievable and purposeful goals.

Empathetic Communication: Foster a culture of actively listening and understanding perspectives.

Creating Connections: Create opportunities for staff to build a supportive and inclusive community.

Integrating Wellbeing into Culture: Make wellbeing and mental health a core part of the school's culture.

Perseverance in Practice: Promote a mindset of learning from setbacks, fostering resilience.

Empowering Practices: Empower staff with self-care and ownership through workshops and resources.

2. Scope

This policy aims to:

Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing:

- **Teachers:** Encourage teachers to be vigilant for signs of mental health challenges and promote awareness of available counselling services.
- **Parents:** Encourage parents to engage in open communication with their children about mental health and utilize counselling services when needed.
- **Students:** Foster an understanding among students about the importance of mental health and encourage them to seek support when necessary.

Create a Safe and Confidential Space:

- **Teachers:** Support teachers in creating a classroom environment that values openness and respect, minimizing stigma around seeking counselling.
- **Parents:** Ensure parents understand the confidential nature of counselling sessions and the importance of creating a safe space at home for their children to express themselves.
- **Students:** Communicate to students the confidential nature of counselling, emphasizing that their concerns will be handled with care and privacy.

Collaborate with Stakeholders:

- **Teachers:** Encourage teachers to actively participate in collaborative efforts with the counselling team, sharing insights to support the holistic development of students.
- **Parents:** Promote regular meetings between parents and school counsellors to facilitate a collaborative approach to student well-being.
- **Students:** Encourage students to actively engage in extracurricular activities and peer support programs to enhance their social and emotional development.

Adhere to Local Laws and Cultural Sensitivities:

- **Teachers:** Ensure teachers are aware of and respect local laws and cultural sensitivities when interacting with students and families.
- **Parents:** Encourage parents to communicate any cultural considerations or preferences to the counselling team to tailor support accordingly.
- **Students:** Foster an understanding among students about the importance of respecting cultural differences and seeking support within their cultural context.

3. Policy

Our school counselling policy is founded on the principle that counselling is a supportive and confidential process aimed at fostering the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of our students. It is important to emphasize that counselling is not synonymous with advice-giving, and our counsellors are committed to providing a non-directive approach. Additionally, the purpose of counselling is not disciplinary; rather, it seeks to create a safe space for students to explore their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. By adopting this holistic perspective, we aim to empower students to navigate their challenges and enhance their overall resilience.

4. Counselling Definitions

Academic Counselling:

- **Teachers:** Collaborate with academic counsellors to provide students with information on educational pathways, subject selection, and career planning
- **Parents:** Participate in academic counselling sessions to stay informed about their child's educational journey and make informed decisions
- **Students:** Actively seek academic counselling to make informed choices regarding their educational and career paths

Personal Counselling:

- **Teachers:** Encourage students to express personal challenges and emotions, referring them to personal counselling when needed
- **Parents:** Support personal counselling efforts by engaging in open and non-judgmental conversations with their children

- **Students:** Understand that personal counselling provides a safe space to discuss emotional challenges and seek support when needed

Social Counselling:

- **Teachers:** Integrate social counselling principles into classroom activities to promote positive social skills and inclusivity
- **Parents:** Reinforce social skills at home and collaborate with the school to address any social challenges their child may be facing
- **Students:** Participate in social counselling programs to enhance interpersonal skills and contribute to a positive school community.

5. Procedures

Procedures for Counselling (Appendix 1):

- Students can request counselling sessions through their class teacher, the school counsellor, or through a dedicated online platform.
- Counselling sessions will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time, ensuring minimal disruption to academic commitments.
- Counsellors will employ evidence-based therapeutic techniques tailored to individual student needs.
- Continuous communication with parents, teachers, and relevant stakeholders will be maintained to provide holistic support.

Procedures for Referral (Appendix 2):

- Referrals can be initiated by teachers, parents, or students themselves in primary to Miss Samy
- Referrals can be initiated by teachers, parents, or students themselves in secondary to Miss Rachel (Secondary Girls) or Dr. Ameen (Secondary Boys)
- A referral form, detailing the reason for referral, will be submitted to the school counselling department.
- The counselling team will assess the referral and determine the appropriate intervention, which may include external professional support if necessary.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

School Counsellors:

- **Teachers:** Collaborate with counsellors to provide insights into students' academic and social behaviours, fostering a team approach to student support
- **Parents:** Participate in meetings with counsellors, actively engaging in discussions about their child's well-being and implementing recommended strategies
- **Students:** Recognize the role of school counsellors as allies in their personal and academic growth, actively seeking their support when needed

Teachers:

- **Teachers:** Regularly observe students for any signs of distress or behavioural changes, promptly reporting concerns to the counselling team
- **Parents:** Encourage open communication between teachers and parents, fostering a supportive partnership in addressing students' academic and personal needs
- **Students:** Respect the guidance and feedback provided by teachers, recognizing their commitment to student well-being.

Parents:

- **Teachers:** Share relevant information with parents, ensuring transparency and collaboration in addressing the academic and personal needs of students.
- **Parents:** Actively participate in meetings with teachers and counsellors, supporting the implementation of strategies that enhance their child's well-being.
- **Students:** Communicate openly with parents about their experiences and challenges, fostering a supportive home environment.

7. Confidentiality

The purpose of maintaining confidentiality within the school counselling program is to create a safe and trusting space for students to discuss their concerns openly and honestly.

Scope of Confidentiality:

- All information shared during counselling sessions, whether by primary or secondary students, will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.
- Confidentiality extends to all communication, records, notes, and any other information related to the counselling process.

Exceptions to Confidentiality:

- Confidentiality may be breached in situations where there is a significant risk of harm to the student or others.
- If there is a legal requirement or obligation, the school counsellor may be required to disclose information in compliance with local laws in the United Arab Emirates.

Informed Consent:

- Prior to the commencement of counselling, explicit informed consent will be sought from the student, and where applicable, from the parent or guardian.
- Consent will include an understanding of the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances under which confidentiality may be breached.

Communication with Parents:

- While respecting the confidentiality of counselling sessions, communication with parents may occur when the counsellor deems it necessary for the well-being of the student.
- Information shared with parents will be limited to that which is relevant to the student's overall development and support.

Communication with School Staff:

- Counsellors may communicate with teachers or other school staff when necessary to provide additional support to the student within the school environment.
- Such communication will be conducted with discretion, ensuring the protection of the student's privacy.

Peer Support Programs:

In the context of peer support programs, confidentiality will be emphasized, and participants will be educated on the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the group.

Professional Collaboration:

- Counsellors may collaborate with other mental health professionals, both within and outside the school, to ensure the comprehensive well-being of the student.
- Any information shared during such collaborations will be done with the utmost respect for confidentiality.

Records and Documentation:

- Counsellors will maintain accurate and secure records of counselling sessions, adhering to data protection and privacy regulations.
- Access to counselling records will be restricted to authorised personnel involved in the counselling process.

Student's Right to Privacy:

- Students have the right to request limits on the disclosure of information within the bounds of legal and safety considerations.
- Students are encouraged to express any concerns or preferences regarding the sharing of information during counselling sessions.

Confidentiality Education:

Counsellors will provide students with information about confidentiality at the beginning of counselling relationships, ensuring they understand its importance and limitations.

Reporting Child Protection Concerns:

In situations where there are concerns about the safety and well-being of a student, the counsellor may be obligated to report these concerns to the appropriate child protection authorities in compliance with local laws.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Effectiveness of the Counselling Program:

- **Teachers:** Provide constructive feedback on the effectiveness of the counselling program, sharing insights from the classroom perspective.
- **Parents:** Participate in feedback sessions and surveys to contribute valuable perspectives on the impact of counselling services on their child's well-being.
- **Students:** Share feedback on the counselling program through designated channels, helping shape the ongoing development of support services.

Adherence to Local Laws and Cultural Sensitivities:

- **Teachers:** Stay informed about local laws and cultural sensitivities, ensuring that interactions with students align with the legal and cultural context.
- **Parents:** Communicate any specific cultural considerations to the school, fostering an environment that respects and incorporates diverse cultural perspectives.
- **Students:** Embrace and celebrate cultural diversity, contributing to an inclusive school environment that respects local customs and traditions.

9. Student Support

At Wesgreen International School, our dedicated Student Support team comprises experienced professionals, including counsellors, special educators, and flourish teachers, working collaboratively to ensure the comprehensive well-being of our students. Our collective mission is to offer unwavering support across emotional, behavioural, and academic domains. Through personalized interventions and a student-centric approach, we strive to create a nurturing environment that fosters growth and empowers students to overcome challenges.

In addition to our robust support system, we have implemented specialized programs to further enhance the mental health and well-being of our students. At the senior level, we proudly provide Teen Mental Health First Aid to equip our students with essential skills and knowledge to address mental health challenges effectively. Furthermore, in the primary section, we have established Wellbeing Ambassadors who play a crucial role in promoting a positive and supportive atmosphere within the school. These ambassadors actively engage with their peers, fostering a sense of community and contributing to the overall well-being of our students. By addressing the diverse needs of our student body through such initiatives, we aim to cultivate a holistic educational experience that promotes not only academic success but also emotional resilience and personal development.

10. Introduction of Teen Mental Health First Aiders

Wesgreen International School recognizes the importance of fostering a supportive peer network and reducing the stigma surrounding mental health. The Teen Mental Health First Aid (TMHFA) (Appendix 3) programme empowers selected students with the skills to provide initial support to their peers facing mental health challenges.

Training of TMHFA:

- **Teachers:** Support the training of Teen Mental Health First Aiders, recognizing their role in promoting a positive and inclusive school culture.
- **Parents:** Encourage open discussions at home about the TMHFA program, emphasizing the importance of peer support in mental health.
- **Students:** Actively participate in TMHFA training, acquiring skills to provide empathetic and informed support to their peers.

Role of TMHFA:

- **Teachers:** Encourage the integration of TMHFA initiatives within the school community, fostering a culture where students feel comfortable seeking support from their peers.
- **Parents:** Support the role of TMHFA in creating a supportive peer network, understanding its contribution to a positive school environment.
- **Students:** Embrace their role as TMHFA, actively promoting mental health awareness and providing support to peers in need.

Integration with Counselling Services:

- **Teachers:** Collaborate with the counselling team to integrate TMHFA initiatives seamlessly within the broader school counselling framework.
- **Parents:** Understand the complementary nature of TMHFA and counselling services, supporting both initiatives for comprehensive student well-being.
- **Students:** Recognize that TMHFA is part of a broader support system and encourage peers to seek professional counselling when necessary.

11. Wellbeing Champions

In our primary school, we are proud to introduce a unique initiative that fosters a culture of well-being and peer support – Wellbeing Champions (Appendix 4). In this innovative program, one student from each class from Year 2 to Year 6 is selected as Wellbeing Champion. These young leaders play a vital role in promoting positive mental health and a supportive atmosphere within their classrooms and the school community. Through activities, discussions, and acts of kindness, our Wellbeing Champions contribute to creating an inclusive and empathetic environment. By involving students in championing well-being, we not only empower them to be compassionate leaders but also encourage a sense of responsibility for the collective happiness and mental health of their peers.

This initiative is a testament to our commitment to nurturing not just academic excellence but also the social and emotional development of our primary school students.

12. We Care

One of our community outreach programmes is the "We Care" Initiative (Appendix 5) which is aimed at providing additional support and understanding to our students who may be facing challenges outside of the school environment. The "We Care" initiative is a school-wide effort to offer compassion to our students during any tough times that they may be facing at home or outside of school.

Parents now have the option to use the "We Care" initiative by scanning the QR codes found in the reception, which will then notify our counselling department that their child needs to be "Handled with Care." The counselling department will discreetly share this information with the Heads of Years, who will, in turn, communicate it to the subject teachers. While the "We Care" initiative provides additional support, it is not a replacement for counselling sessions. The aim is to create a network of understanding and compassion within our school community, and we believe that the "We Care" initiative will help us to foster a supportive environment for our students, demonstrating our commitment to their well-being.

13. Career and Academic Counselling

Our Career and Guidance Counselling Policy at GEMS Wesgreen International School is committed to providing tangible and proactive support for our students' career development (Appendix 6). This involves conducting regular one-on-one counselling sessions, ensuring personalized attention to address individual aspirations and concerns. We organize a range of impactful events, including career workshops, seminars, and fairs, to expose students to diverse career paths and industry insights. Additionally, our policy incorporates the administration of comprehensive career assessments and aptitude tests, aiding students in understanding their strengths and aligning them with suitable career options. To streamline the transition to higher education, our dedicated team facilitates college and university application processes, offering guidance and support at every step. Through these practices, we aim to equip our students with the tools and knowledge necessary to make informed decisions and embark on successful career paths.

We prioritize career exploration and goal setting, guiding students through a self-discovery process that aligns their passions with meaningful career paths. Academic planning and course selection assistance are provided to ensure students make informed decisions about their educational journey. Emphasizing study skills and time management, we equip students with essential tools for academic success. Furthermore, our policy extends support to streamline college and university applications, offering guidance on the intricate processes involved. In recognizing the importance of practical experience, we provide internship and job placement assistance, facilitating a seamless transition from academia to the professional realm. Through these areas of support, our aim is to empower students to navigate their educational and career landscapes with confidence and purpose. We have several different events and platforms made available to our students to support them.

GEMS Education as part of GEMS for Life has collaborated with various universities and organizations around the world which offers unique opportunities to families in terms of applications and scholarships. The list keeps updating so it is advised to refer to the GEMS for life website <https://www.gemsforlife.net/> for the up-to-date details.

14. Monitoring and review

Signed.....
Head of Inclusion

Date: 19/01/2024

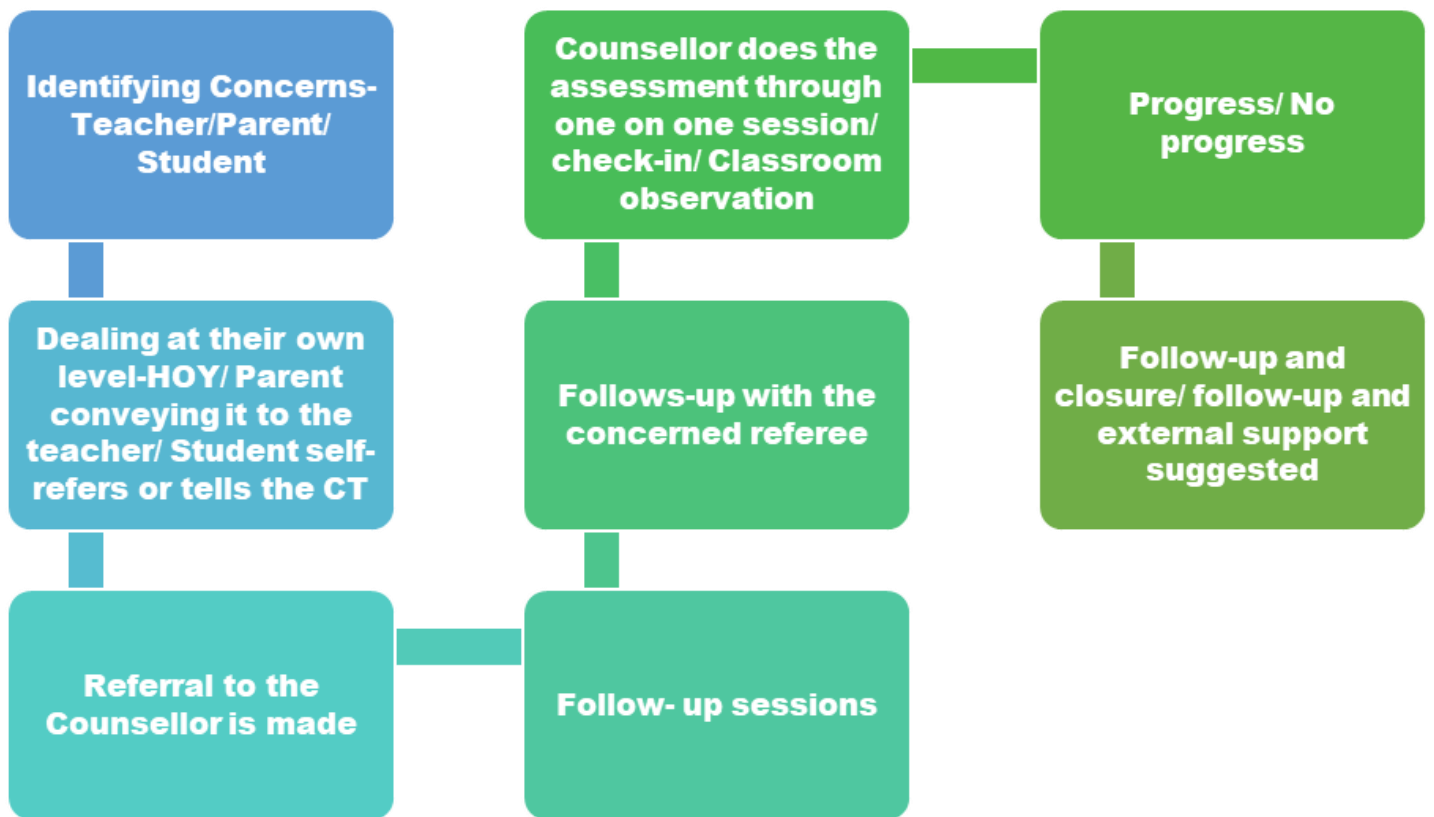
Signed.....
Executive Vice Principal

Date: 19/01/2024

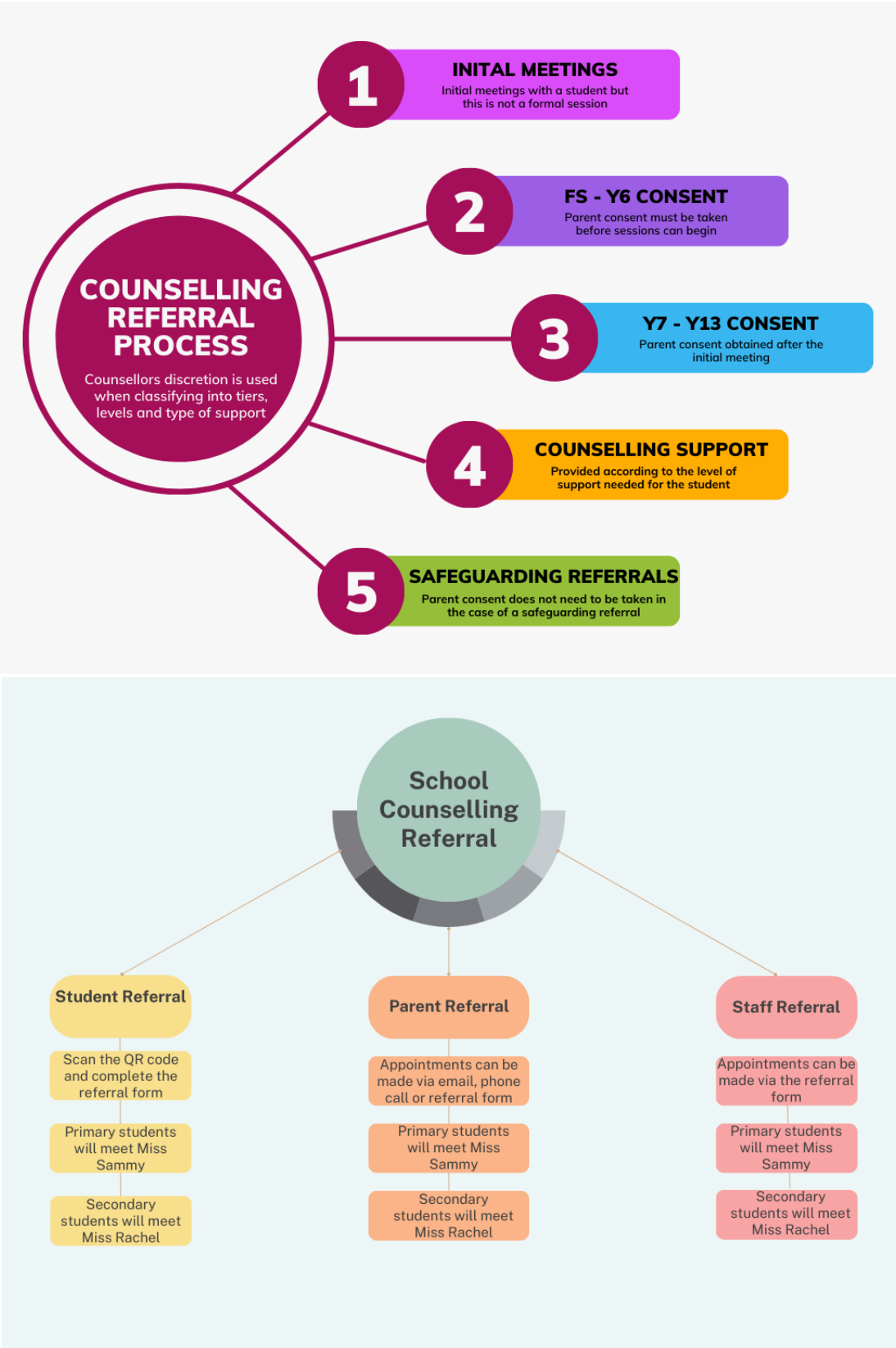
Signed.....
Principal / CEO

Date: 19/01/2024

Appendix 1: Procedures for Counselling



Appendix 2: Procedures for Referral





Introduction



tMHFA is an **evidence-based training** program for teens who wish to better **understand** mental health and how to **support** a friend who may be struggling

The role of a tMHFA:

- Informal first responder
- Identify and respond to a friend or peer who:
 - is struggling with their mental health
 - showing signs of becoming unwell

The training consists of two age groups:

- 13 – 15 years old
- 16 – 18 years old

The following topics are covered in the training:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| • Depression | • Impact of social media |
| • Anxiety | • Suicidal thoughts |
| • Eating Disorders | • Self-harm |
| • Addiction | • Panic attacks |
| | • Bullying |



WELLBEING CHAMPIONS

The Roles and Responsibilities



Wellbeing champions in primary schools are like friendly helpers who want to make sure everyone feels happy and safe. They give advice and support to friends, listen without judging, and can guide them to the right places if they need extra help with their feelings.

Appendix 5: “We Care” Initiative



WE CARE

If your family is facing challenges at home, I'm here to offer extra support for your child at school. I respect the privacy of personal details, and it's completely okay if you choose not to share them. If your child is arriving at school after a tough night, morning, or weekend, kindly send me an email with the message **“Handle with Care”**. No further inquiries will be made. This will indicate that your child may benefit from additional time, patience, assistance, and plenty of compassion throughout the day.

We are a **TEAM**, and my goal is to assist your child in thriving at school!

Primary Counsellor - Miss Samy s.shankar_wgp@gemsedu.com

Secondary Counsellor - Miss Rachel r.long_wgp@gemsedu.com

Navigating Your Career Journey

Exploring Options

Discover your interests, passions and potential options pathway

