



ERO's Evaluation of *Counselling in Schools*

Lessons Learnt About Early Implementation
in Primary Schools

For Minister Tinetti, May 2022





- Context
- ERO's evaluation
- Part 1: How is implementation going?
- Part 2: What have we learnt so far?
- Part 3: Recommendations



Context

Counselling in Schools initiative



Purpose:

- ‘increase the provision of wellbeing and mental health support to learners...in response to COVID-19’ (*Cabinet minute, 22 June 2020*) by providing greater access to guidance counsellors from the community sector to help primary and secondary school students deal with mental health and wellbeing issues (*Beehive release, briefing to Min Martin, July 2020*)

Outcome:

- ‘increase student wellbeing/hauora and reduce student mental health issues’ (*MOE RFP, 15 January 2021*)

Taking into account:

- ‘early intervention addressing needs before they become more serious’ (*MOE RFP, 15 January 2021*)
- ‘co-design of mental wellbeing supports in primary and intermediate schools’ (*Budget, 2021*).

Design features



Key features of the proposed initiative were:

Increased access	Professionally supervised, qualified, registered counsellors	Collaborative approach to design	Community provision of counselling support	Evaluation
For students and their families to access counselling support through self-referral and accessible venues for counselling	To provide 'evidence-based, developmentally appropriate and culturally sustaining counselling support' <i>(MOE RFP, 15 January 2021)</i>	Co-design between schools, providers, the Ministry, board members, whānau, hapū, iwi, other community groups and wellbeing providers delivering services to schools <i>(MOE Start-up guide, 2021)</i>	Enables flexibility to provide different approach for primary schools than existing model of guidance counsellors in secondary schools	ERO to evaluate implementation and outcomes for primary and intermediate schools involved

What do we know about what works for increasing children's access to wellbeing/hauora support?



There is a well-established literature base on the effectiveness of counselling. We know that good practice for supporting children's access to mental health and wellbeing/hauora support includes:

Support available on school site	Qualified and specialised staff/personnel	Programmes suited to school	School, whānau, and community engagement	School culture that recognises and values learner wellbeing
Being school-based reduces barriers for families (e.g. cost, time, and location), although there is some perceived stigma for children <i>(Barrett & Pahl, 2006)</i>	Programs delivered by mental health professionals associated with better outcomes than those delivered by teachers <i>(Werner-Seidler et al., 2017)</i>	Programmes being suited to schools' values, goals, and priorities <i>(Hetrick et al., 2021)</i>	Authentic, ongoing engagement between school, whānau, and broader community <i>(Hetrick et al., 2021)</i>	School-based social and emotional wellbeing promotion, support for behavioural issues <i>(Fox et al., 2015)</i>



ERO's evaluation



Q1. To what extent did the initiative increase access to counselling for primary school students? For whom? Was access equitable?

Q2. What was the impact of the initiative on families and students' wellbeing/hauora; students' engagement and learning; and school practices?

Q3. What are some lessons learnt about implementation of this initiative?

This includes insights on:

- *ensuring access for students*
- *qualified counsellors from the community*
- *providing culturally responsive approaches*
- *integrating the counselling service into school practices*
- *linking up with community networks/other wellbeing/hauora services*
- *involving whānau, hapū, iwi*
- *any enablers or barriers to implementation of the initiative*
- *informing future decision-making about sustainability or scalability.*

Evaluation timeline



This sets out our high-level evaluation timeline.

Phase	Report	Timing
1	Report 1 to Minister: Early Implementation - Based on Fieldwork 1, Term 4 2021	May 2022 (completed)
2	Publication Report 2: Implementation and early outcomes - Based on Fieldwork 2, Term 4 2022	March 2023
3	Publication Report 3: Implementation and final outcomes - Based on Fieldwork 3, Term 4 2023	May 2024



These findings were informed by fieldwork undertaken in November 2021

- Survey
 - to schools (principals, school leaders/teachers) [Responses: 38 principals, 9 teachers; total of 40 out of 112 schools]
 - to providers (managers, counsellors) [Responses: 8 managers, 10 counsellors; total of 8 out of 9 providers]
- Case studies of 6 schools
 - interviews and focus groups with principals/school leaders, provider managers and counsellors from 6 primary schools (3 self-selected) around New Zealand, ranging in size
- Document analysis
 - guiding documents
 - School Delivery Plans of case study schools
- Data shared by Ministry wellbeing/hauora advisors



Part 1: How is implementation going?

How were schools and providers selected?



The Ministry selected schools that aligned with the purpose of the initiative

- Targeted schools are those in areas most affected by COVID-19 in 2020 and with the greatest need for counselling
 - need was assessed using a range of data (i.e. the Equity Index, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, attendance data)
- Consideration was given to whether schools had access to *Mana Ake* support
- Schools are mainly in Deciles 1-3 and in the following Education regions:

➤ Auckland	➤ Tai Tokerau
➤ Canterbury/Chatham Islands	➤ Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu
➤ Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti	➤ Waikato
➤ Otago/Southern	➤ Wellington
- Total number of schools across the initiative has increased during the initial implementation phase
- The Ministry procured provision for counselling support through an RFP process

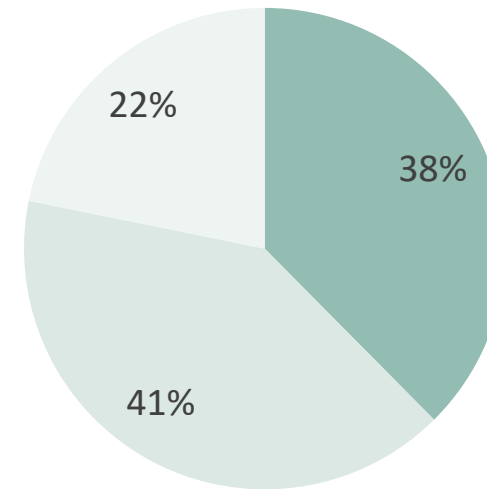
How is implementation going?



Implementation took longer than was intended

There are three groups of schools at various stages of delivering counselling support

Breakdown of all schools across initiative according to their stage of service delivery



- Schools underway (start by Term 4 2021)
- Schools about to start (start by Term 1 2022)
- Schools in early stages of set-up (start by Term 2 2022 or uncertain start date)

* numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding

How is implementation going?



For schools still in the early stages of set up, the delays in delivery were due to:

- difficulty in procuring a provider
- delays in recruitment of suitable counsellors due to
 - lack of counsellor availability in some areas
 - some providers (particularly NGOs) delaying appointment of counsellor due to lack of referrals or uncertainty of delivery onset/non-contact time over Dec/Jan
- COVID-19 regional lockdowns and restrictions in late 2021 being a competing priority
- schools coming on board late or changes to allocation of provider
- delays to the rollout phases.

“Because we’ve been in lockdown and the schools have only just gone back, and they’re now going to be ending for the year, the decision is that we’ll start in the new year.”

- Provider



Part 2:

What have we learnt so far?

1. Service delivery
 2. Ensuring access
 3. Qualified workforce
 4. Culturally responsive practice
 5. Student and whānau involvement
 6. What is helping?
 7. What is getting in the way?
-

1. Service delivery

Going
well



Even in the context of COVID-19, provision is able to be stood up quickly

The 11 survey and case study schools that had begun delivery by Term 4 2021 had:

- allocated suitable spaces for counselling
- worked in partnership with their provider and Ministry wellbeing/hauora advisors to develop School Delivery Plans
- started delivery after counsellor had been on-site building relationships, observing practice, and talking to teachers/students to assess needs
- begun with one-to-one counselling to address immediate needs
- received requests for support for Māori students/whānau reflecting their Māori student population.

Wellbeing/hauora-focused support roles at the Ministry regional level were valued by schools and providers for supporting the implementation of initiative.

“The Wellbeing Advisor role is fantastic, and having that key contact has been really valuable.”

“Honestly the Ministry of Education – the leads – have been so proactive and so supportive. They’ve...made it so much easier.”

- Providers

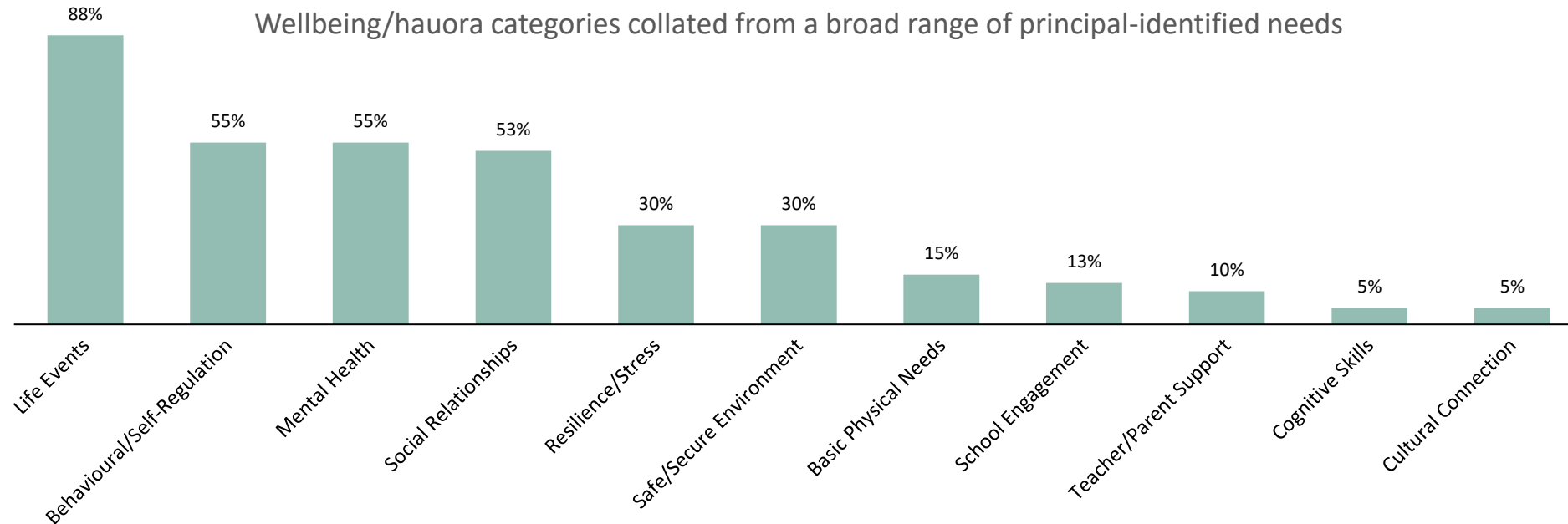
2. Ensuring access: Students' needs



Support is getting to students with wellbeing/hauora needs

- Four main types of wellbeing/hauora needs were identified by principals in the survey
 - Life Events (trauma, abuse, grief)
 - Behavioural/Self-Regulation
 - Mental Health
 - Social Relationships (peer, family)

“Ultimately they’ve identified all the children here could utilise this service! – and here’s our priority.”
- Provider



2. Ensuring access: Suitable site

Going
well



Schools have predominantly opted for suitable counselling spaces to be on-site

- Evidence shows that many students report it is socially acceptable to see a school guidance counsellor, despite there being perceived stigma (*ERO, 2013*)
- Survey responses show that finding a suitable space on-site is a major focus
 - we do not yet know if/how many schools are setting up off-site venues for counselling
- In case study interviews, participants spoke about:
 - consideration and challenges in allocating suitable space for counselling on-site
 - preference for regular availability of counsellor at the school to promote visibility and accessibility for students.

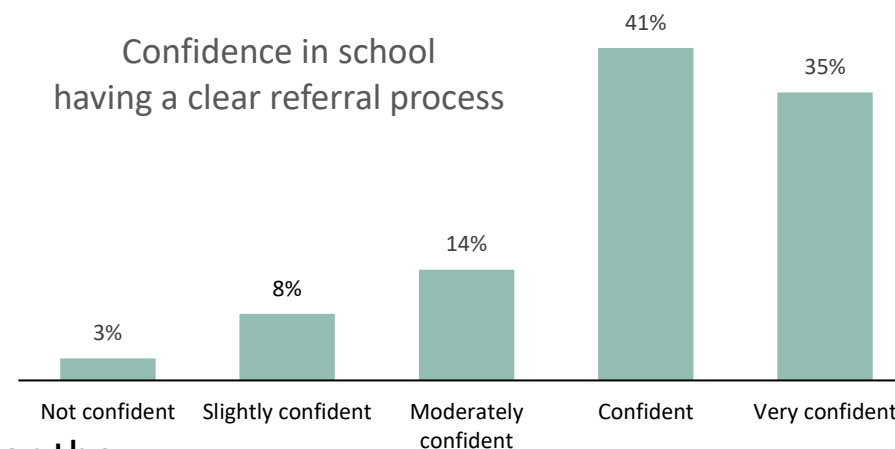
2. Ensuring access: Referral process

Needs
improv.



Schools are making referrals, rather than students or families self-referring. This does not reflect the original intent of the initiative, and provides a barrier for learners to directly access the support they need. Schools are using their existing wellbeing/hauora support systems to identify students and develop referrals.

- Schools that were already underway were more likely to have processes for *identifying* students with additional wellbeing/hauora support needs established
- Nearly 80% of principals in the survey were confident or very confident their school had a clear process for *referring* a student for counselling support. Confidence was higher, the further along schools were in service delivery.
- In the case studies, referrals were managed by the principal or the wellbeing/hauora teams. Schools and providers reported that not all schools are making referrals.



"All of the referrals come through me [principal]."

- School

Building in self-referral pathways for students and whānau will help ensure students who need help receive it

3. Qualified workforce

Needs
improv.



Counselling is not always being run by registered counsellors. This does not reflect the original intent of the initiative. There is currently no mechanism for monitoring of counsellor qualifications and registration within the initiative, to ensure quality provision.

- Additional recruiting has been necessary as counsellors nominated in initial contracts were not always available when counselling began
- The supply of currently registered counsellors is limited, particularly in some areas. In response, the original criteria for counsellors were expanded to include those who are receiving supervision and professionally qualified and registered with one of the following:

➤ NZ Association of Counsellors incorporated/Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa

➤ NZ Association of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapists (incorporated)

➤ NZ Association of Psychotherapists incorporated

➤ Aotearoa NZ Association of Social Workers incorporated/Tangata Whenua Takawaenga o Aotearoa

➤ NZ Association of Christian Counsellors

➤ NZ Psychological Society incorporated

➤ Australian, NZ and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association

- The range of backgrounds of ‘counsellors’ is varied (e.g. social worker, occupational therapist, educational psychologist) and now includes provisionally registered professionals from other bodies

A mechanism to monitor the progress made by non-registered counsellors towards registration will ensure that learners are seen by skilled counsellors

“In many areas, these skilled personnel are not available.”

- Ministry Wellbeing Advisor

4. Culturally responsive practice: Māori

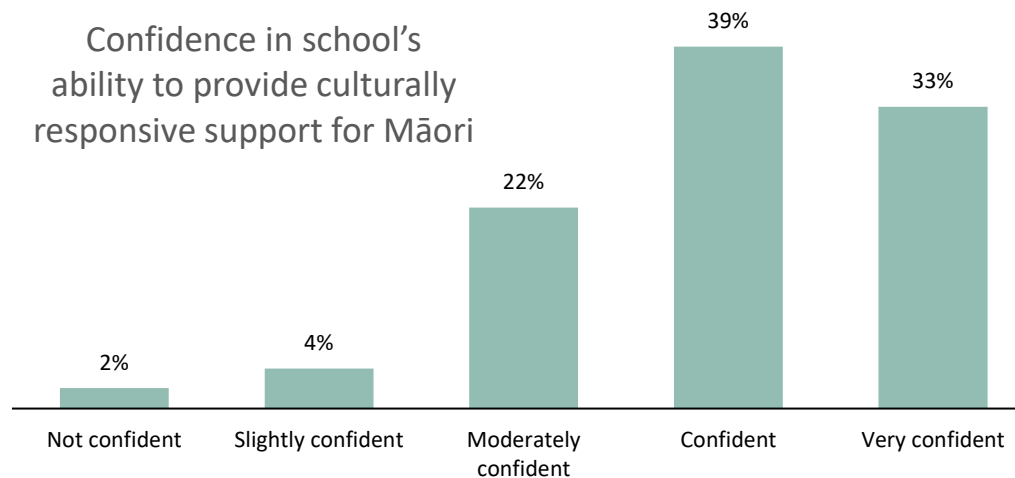
Too early to say



There are green shoots of culturally responsive practice for Māori, but further work is needed

- Documentation shows culturally responsive approaches are considered, and case studies indicated a range of frameworks, strategies, training and support for counsellors to deliver a culturally responsive approach for Māori
- To date there has been limited engagement with Māori communities
- Both providers and schools spoke about the lack of Māori counsellors (as well as male counsellors) to reflect the makeup of their school roll
- Not all survey respondents were confident their school can provide culturally responsive ways to support Māori students and whānau to access counselling

“Most counsellors are Pākehā women.”
- Ministry Wellbeing Advisor



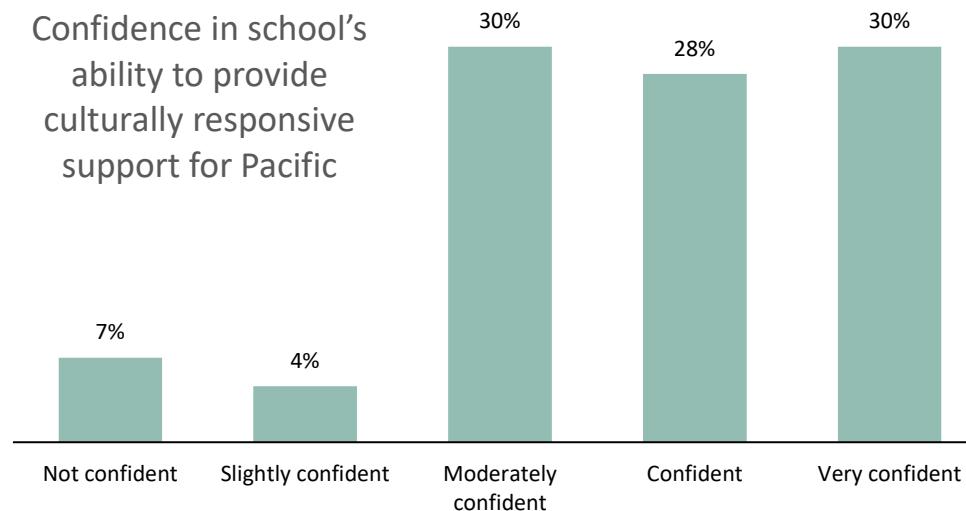
4. Culturally responsive practice: Pacific

Too early to say



There is minimal evidence of culturally responsive practice for Pacific

- Across this group of schools, there are relatively low Pacific student populations, who are more likely to be in schools participating in *Mana Ake*
- Not all survey respondents were confident their school can provide culturally responsive ways to support Pacific students and families to access counselling
- There were few examples shared about specific strategies for supporting Pacific students and families



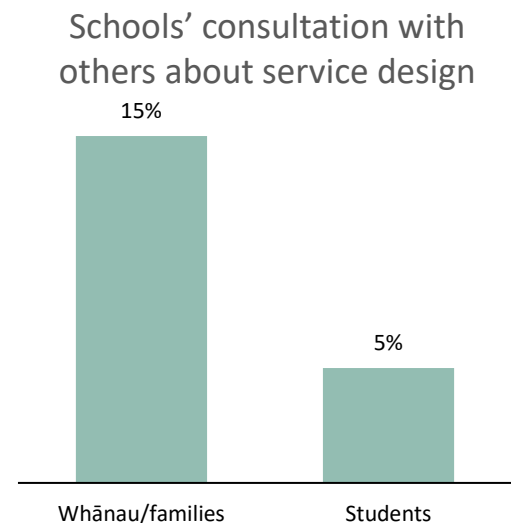
5. Student and whānau involvement

Needs
improv.



Communication and involvement with whānau and students is minimal. Involving whānau and students would increase the success of the initiative. While consulting with whānau has been more challenging due to the pandemic:

- Only 15% of survey schools have consulted with whānau and 5% with students in the design of the service, through involvement in the School Delivery Plan
- Schools have not shared information about the initiative to their community (as of November 2021) except in the schools already delivering
- Only 20% of survey schools reported they were supporting students and whānau to access the initiative.



"I believe we'll be successful when communities are engaged in a preventative focus with us as an organisation alongside them with schools, whānau, tamariki, rangatahi, in the community."

- Provider

6. What is helping?



When asked what the **enablers** were in helping participants get going, they mentioned the following at least four times:

1. Positive engagement of schools and commitment from providers in setting up support
2. Communication and partnership between providers, schools and the Ministry, particularly the regional advisors
3. Good match between what the school wanted and the provider offered, at times coming from an existing relationship between provider and school
4. Opportunities for counsellors to
 - understand school contexts
 - build relationships with students and teachers
 - be part of school community
5. Ability for schools to contribute to design or selection of provider (in cases where direct sourcing occurred)
6. When whānau were involved counsellors and whānau could work together to meet the child's needs

“Schools have approached MOE wanting to be involved. One school said: ‘this feels like the magic wand that we’ve been waiting for.’”

- Ministry Wellbeing Advisor

“It’s not us and the schools, or the schools and the Ministry, it’s you know – a three-way partnership.”

- Provider

“We talked about the importance of building relationships and having that presence and familiarity with the school systems.”

- Counsellor

7. What is getting in the way?



When asked what the **inhibitors** were that got in the way of getting going, participants mentioned the following at least four times:

1. Difficulty with procurement of suitable providers and counsellors in some areas
2. Schools' expectations
 - allocated a maximum allowance of hours, but this shifted to being seen as a target depending on schools' need
 - a single counsellor who is regularly on-site, which differs in some cases from what the provider is offering
3. Lack of clarity
 - minimal information and inconsistent communications in the early stage
 - registration criteria for counsellors
 - how to integrate counselling with other roles, e.g. RTLB, SWiS (103/112 schools have SWiS)

“The counsellor who...had been appointed to that school could not get on-site to be welcomed, or meet face-to-face with the principal, the team, and meet the students.”

- Provider

“There’s been real confusion about roles: what is the expectation for who, and how do they align if you’ve got a counsellor and a SWiS? What about the schools that don’t have a SWiS – so we are unsure how it’s going to progress.”

- School

Summary: Going well



Even in the context of COVID-19, provision is able to be stood up quickly. In particular, in the early days of implementation, the Ministry regional wellbeing/hauora advisor role was very helpful in supporting schools and providers.

ERO's assessment for each of the implementation components in our evaluation question found the implementation is going well in these areas:

- Schools are **identifying students' needs**
- Counsellors are finding **suitable sites** for counselling on the school site, which is consistent with good practice in school counselling.

Summary: Too early to say



ERO's assessment for each of the implementation components in our evaluation question found it is too early to comment on these areas:

- While there are green shoots of **culturally responsive practice for Māori**, further work is needed
 - Providers had a range of frameworks, strategies, training and support for counsellors to deliver a culturally responsive approach for Māori
 - However, providers and schools spoke about a lack of Māori counsellors
- There is minimal evidence of **culturally responsive practice for Pacific**, though Pacific students are more likely to be in schools participating in *Mana Ake*
- Counsellors are often part of school wellbeing/hauora teams, but there is some confusion about role clarity between counsellors and other roles (e.g. SWiS), so it is too soon to assess how well **counselling services are being integrated** into school practice
- There is not yet enough evidence to assess the level of **linking up with community networks/other wellbeing/hauora services**.

Summary: Noted for improvement



ERO's assessment for each of the implementation components in our evaluation question found improvements could be made in these areas:

- Schools have done well to get the initiative up and running, and to set up referral processes through the schools. The next step for schools is to put in processes that allow for **self-referral** for students and their whānau, to increase student access to the service.
- The lack of supply of **counsellors** means that the counsellors **are not always registered**.
 - Given that the supply of currently registered counsellors is limited, to ensure service the original criteria for counsellors were expanded to include those who are professionally qualified and receiving supervision
 - A mechanism to monitor the progress made by non-registered counsellors towards registration is important to ensure that learners are seen by skilled counsellors
- COVID-19 may have been a barrier to **communication and involvement with whānau and community**. As the initiative is further refined, involving whānau and the community will help to ensure that the design of the service meets the needs of the students and their community.



Part 3: Recommendations

Recommendations for *Counselling in Schools*



For the *Counselling in Schools* initiative we recommend that:

1. Counsellor qualifications, supervision, registration and progress towards registration are actively recorded and monitored to ensure counsellors are qualified, and students are receiving quality counselling services
2. Student and whānau input regarding counselling delivery be supported by schools and providers, with the aim of increasing involvement
3. Referral through avenues other than school/principal be encouraged, through strengthening opportunities for self-referral and whānau referral

“I think the need for that clinical and cultural supervision is going to be really important.”
- Counsellor

“I would hope that we might start to see that the whole whānau is more engaged in the school environment and the community.”
- Provider



Based on our findings to date, our evaluation will further investigate the following items (in Phase 2 and 3):

- the criteria, tools, and processes for identifying student needs and making referrals and the impact this has on student outcomes
- the impact of counselling venues being on or off the school site on access on students using the service
- how decisions are made about which types of counselling interventions to use
- how counsellors and schools interface with other allied professional supports (e.g. SWiS, RTLB, HCN, etc.).

“What the counsellors have said...was: ‘we’ve worked in this area for so long, we wanted to be able to get in early, we wanted it to be free in schools, we wanted this to you know be something that’s happening in schools and it’s finally here’.”

- Provider

Next steps



- We will share the findings from the slide pack with those involved in the research, including schools and providers
- We will collect outcome data over the rest of the year, and carry out further fieldwork in Term 4
- Our next report will come to you in March 2023, which will include early outcome impact findings and more detailed implementation findings

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