



# Supervision in Education – Healthier Schools For All

Barnardo's Scotland report  
on the use of Professional or  
Reflective Supervision in Education

Trauma-informed schools – Paper #2  
Nicki Lawrence  
February 2020

**Believe in  
children**  
 **Barnardo's  
Scotland**

**“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet”**

Dr Naomi Rachel Remen



# Background and introduction

In June 2019 we published our discussion paper entitled “*Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of education staff through professional supervision structures*”.<sup>1</sup> In this paper we called for a national conversation about the support available for the mental health and wellbeing of teaching staff and consideration of the role of Professional or Reflective Supervision within Education. This was based on the experiences of Barnardo’s practitioners who are working with and alongside schools across Scotland.

We were overwhelmed by the positive responses we received to the paper. We have been contacted by Early Years establishments, primary schools and secondary schools in Scotland and other parts of the UK welcoming the paper and letting us know they have started work on introducing and piloting Supervision models in their departments, schools, clusters and localities. We have included case studies later in the report of some of these green shoots of practice, highlighting what people have been telling us about their initial explorations of delivering reflective spaces to support teachers.

We have also consulted with specialists and experts from across the UK where work is underway to develop models of Supervision for Education. Talking Heads are a social enterprise providing Supervision to Senior School Leaders in England,<sup>2</sup> and have recently joined up with the Carnegie Centre at Leeds Beckett University to launch a new National Hub for Supervision in Education which is the first of its kind.<sup>3</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University have also been developing and undertaking action research on a Supervision model for schools for the last 5 years,<sup>4</sup> and Place2Be continue to develop and progress their work on reflective spaces for education staff through their Place2Think model.<sup>5</sup>

We have spoken to academics, researchers, teachers, psychologists and practitioners. In November 2019 we hosted a Roundtable in partnership with Place2Be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education John Swinney which included teaching unions, local government, representative bodies and statutory organisations as well as the third sector.

The issue of teacher mental health and wellbeing is starting to crop up in much public and political discourse across the rest of the UK as well, and a lack of support and supervision in the profession is starting to be identified as one of the problems. The Centre for Mental Health and the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition published ‘*Making the Grade – How education shapes young people’s mental health*’ in November 2019 and noted that:

**“There is often little support and supervision offered to teachers for their own wellbeing and mental health. Approaches to improving mental health and wellbeing in educational settings must urgently consider support for professionals”<sup>6</sup>**

1 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/supporting-mental-health-wellbeing-education-staff-through-professional-supervision-structures.pdf>

2 <https://oakpractice.co.uk/talking-heads/>

3 <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/national-hub-for-supervision-in-education/>

4 <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/our-work/research-enterprise/supervision-service/our-service.aspx>

5 <https://www.place2be.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-schools/our-model.aspx>

6 [https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/CentreforMH\\_CYPMHC\\_MakingTheGrade\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/CentreforMH_CYPMHC_MakingTheGrade_PDF.pdf)



One of the recommendations from this report was:

***“Leaders in education must prioritise and promote the wellbeing and development of staff by having clear and dedicated strategies in place. This should be developed in partnership with staff and regularly reviewed. For example, a robust approach to staff supervision and reflective practice as recommended by Barnardo’s Scotland”***

This second paper brings together and analyses the findings and evidence we gathered through a Survey Monkey consultation we conducted with Education professionals. Additional feedback we have collected from linked stakeholders as part of our ongoing engagement is also interspersed throughout the report where relevant. It concludes with key recommendations and our suggestions for next steps based on what we’ve heard.

We hope that this report can go some way to stimulating and furthering the national conversation which has been started in Scotland around Supervision in Education as a means to ensuring that those who care for our children and young people are cared for themselves.

## **Methodologies**

Following the publication of our discussion paper we developed and published a consultation which was disseminated via a Survey Monkey questionnaire. This consultation was designed to engage those working directly in Education and find out about their experiences and views on the role of Supervision. We asked for responses from those *currently* working in Education in any Nation of the UK.

The survey was open for 6 weeks from the *22<sup>nd</sup> July to the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019* and was shared via the Barnardo’s Scotland Twitter and Facebook accounts as well as via email to various networks of

educationalists. *402 responses were received in total*, however not every respondent answered every question.

It is important to note that the responses to the survey are a self-selecting sample due to the nature of how the survey was distributed; the results are therefore not representative of all teachers or those working in Education. It is likely that those who responded to the survey are interested in, have experience of, or feel strongly about the issue. The findings should therefore be viewed with this in mind.

We included an explanation of what we mean by the term Supervision at the start of the survey to ensure respondents were clear about the terminology. This was done to be cognisant of the fact that Supervision as a term is not widely used within Education and/or might be misunderstood as a form of observation or performance management. You can see this explanation in Appendix B. As conversations progress in Scotland we are aware that this definition of Supervision is likely to change.

A presentation was also delivered by Barnardo’s Scotland to 39 Education practitioners at the Centre for Excellence for Children’s Care and Protection (CELCIS) Education Forum on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2019. The presentation was followed by individual table discussions around 3 questions, and a whole-group feedback session. A summary of responses was collated.

Further engagement with key stakeholders and desk based research lead to existing evidence, pilots and research which are cited where relevant along with case studies from those who have contacted us about their work.

# Findings and analysis from the Consultation...

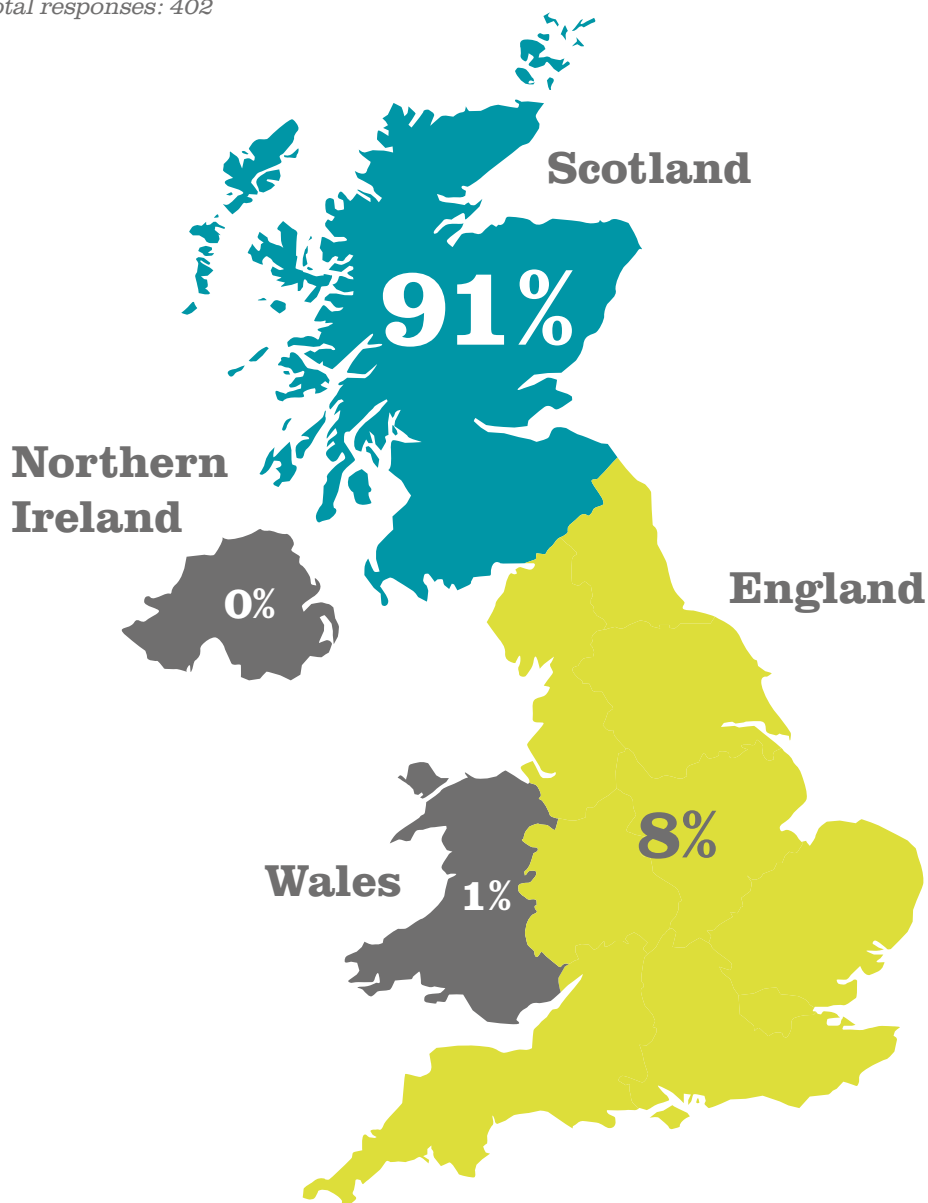


# Part 1 – About the respondents

## Question 1

In which Nation of the UK do you currently work?

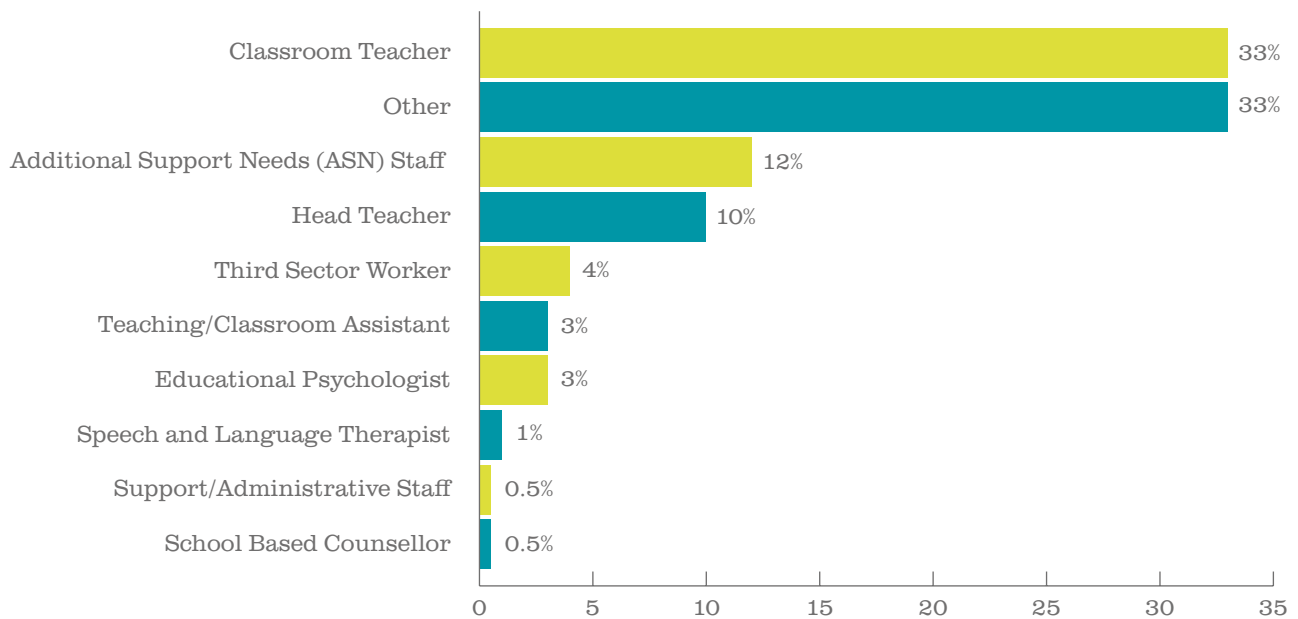
Table 1 – Total responses: 402



## Question 2

### What is your current role within Education?

**Table 2** – Total responses: 402

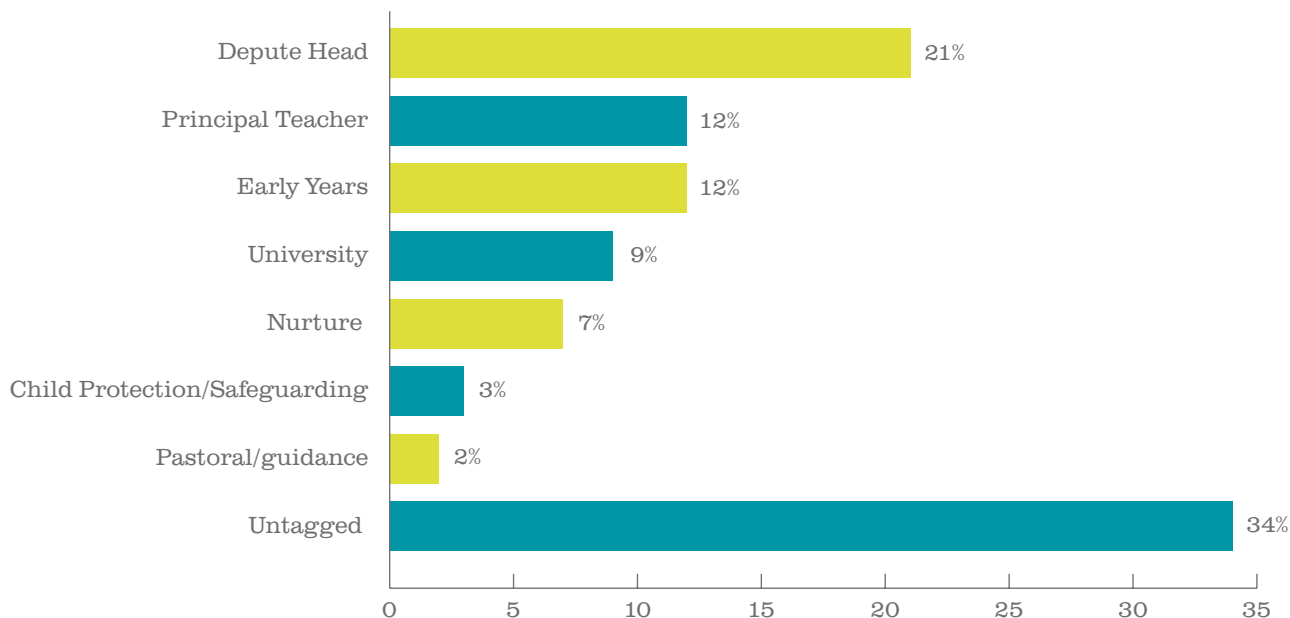


33% of respondents chose ‘Other’ when asked about their current role in Education and there was a huge range of professional roles identified, some of which are depicted in the below word cloud.

practitioner Trainer Depute Headteacher Guidance worker  
 learning Early years Lecturer school University  
 Depute Head Teacher Nursery  
 teacher Educator Principal Teacher  
 support Officer Headteacher Education Supervisor  
 Nurture teacher Educational lead primary manager

Table 3 shows a more detailed breakdown of the ‘Other’ category – Depute Head Teachers were the most prevalent followed by Principal Teachers and Early Years Staff, the untagged category contains a variety of job roles and titles which we weren’t able to categorise in a statistically significant way.

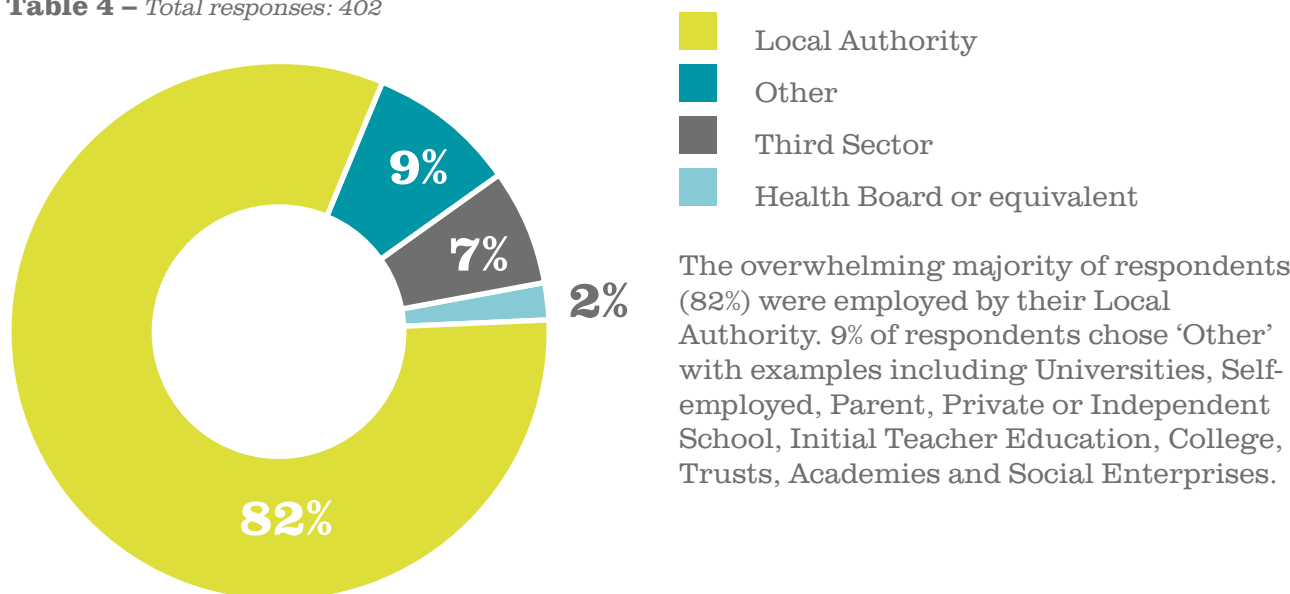
**Table 3: ‘Other’ roles within Education**



Overall we had responses from 82 Head Teachers, Depute Head Teachers and Principal Teachers – this makes up 20% of all respondents to the consultation; classroom teachers make up 33% of all respondents.

### Question 3 Who is your employer?

**Table 4 – Total responses: 402**





# Part 2 – Experiences of Supervision

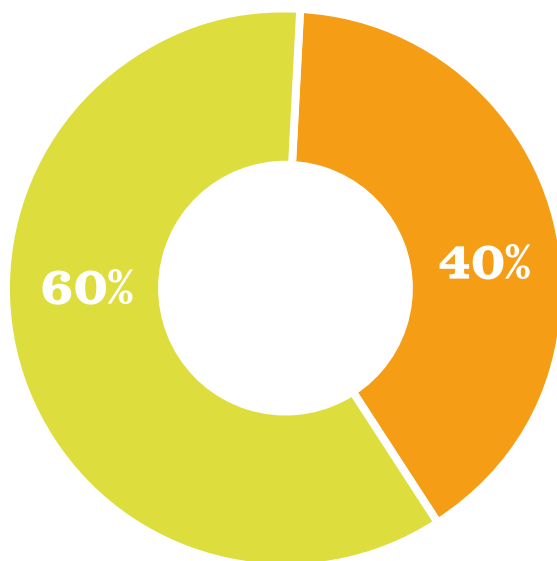
## Question 4

**Do you receive, or have you ever received Professional Supervision in any of your roles? This doesn't have to be within Education.**

## Question 5

**Was your experience of Supervision within Education or another sector? i.e. Social Work, Clinical Practice, Third Sector.**

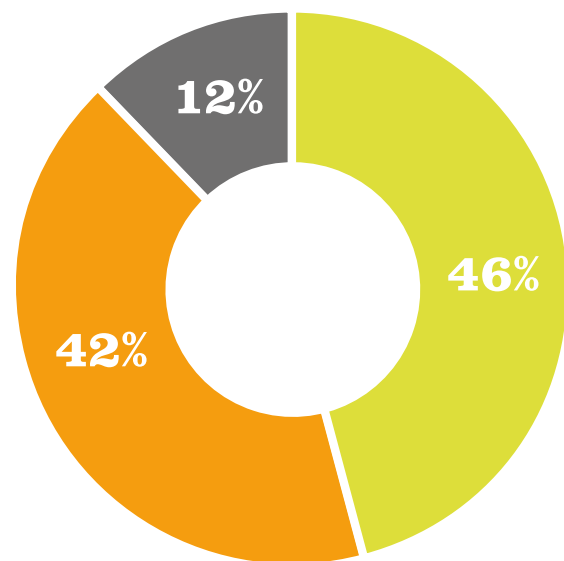
**Table 5 – Total responses: 402**



■ Yes  
■ No

Following on from Question 4 which found that out of all 402 respondents 159 (or 40%) had received Professional Supervision at some point whilst 243 (or 60%) had never received Supervision – Question 5 asked whether their experience of Supervision had been in Education, another sector or both. 154 out of the 159 (97%) respondents who had experience of Supervision answered this question, Table 6 shows the results.

**Table 6 – Total responses: 154**



■ Education  
■ Another Sector  
■ Both

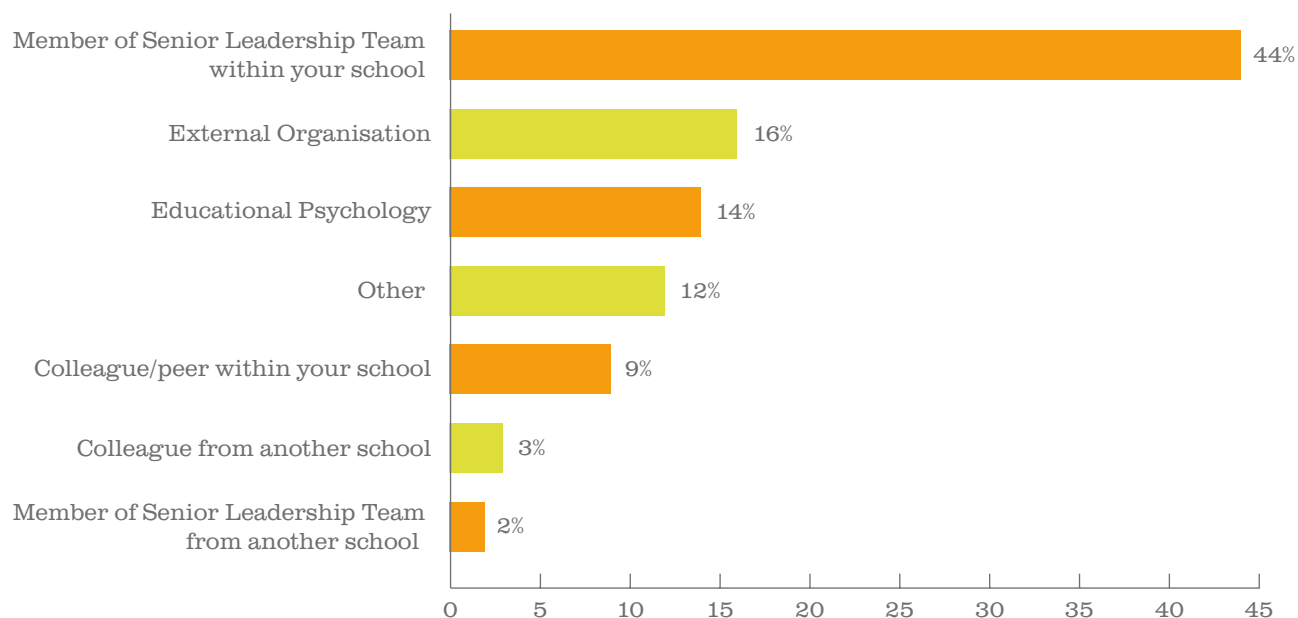
It is worth noting in relation to this question that on further breakdown it was clear that there may be some cross-over in relation to the categories. Some Educational Psychologists for example have defined their role as being Education rather than another sector so have answered within the 'Education' question, whereas some have viewed it as distinct and therefore responded in the 'another sector' question. This may have skewed the spread of responses slightly across the 3 categories.

## Experience of Supervision in Education

90 respondents said they had experienced Supervision in Education in response to Question 5, and we wanted to find out a bit more detail about what this process entailed. So we asked these respondents, who their Supervisor was; what form the Supervision took; and whether it was mandatory across the School. You can see the results of these questions in tables 7, 8 and 9 below. 57 out of the 90 (63%) respondents who had experienced Supervision in Education responded to all 3 of these questions.

### Question 6 Who was your Supervisor?

**Table 7 – Total responses: 57**





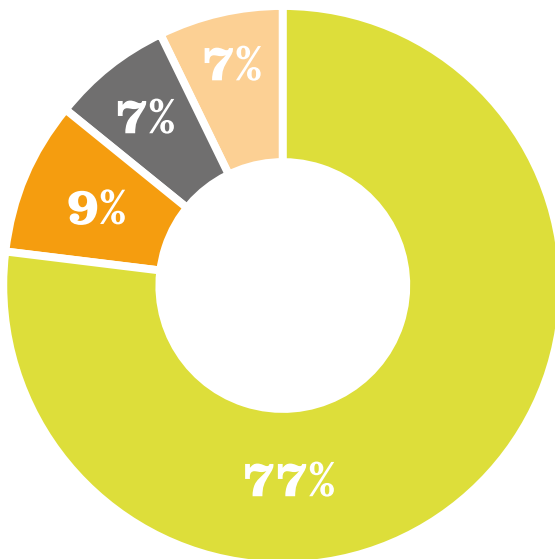
### Question 7

What form did your Supervision take?

### Question 8

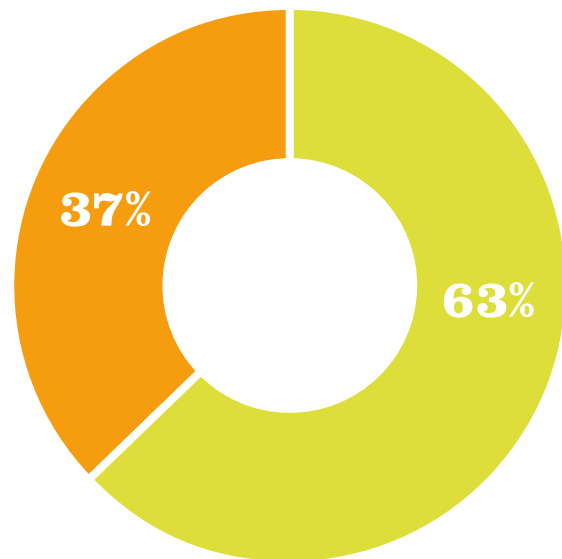
Was this Supervision mandatory across your school?

Table 8 – Total responses: 57



- 1 to 1
- Group
- Peer
- Other

Table 9 – Total responses: 57



- Mandatory/Compulsory
- Opt-in

Most participants had experience of mandatory, 1:1 Supervision. Just under half (44%) had received that directly from a member of senior leadership within their school whilst 30% of respondents had received Supervision either from Educational Psychology or from an external organisation.

## Question 9

**Please describe in as much detail as possible, your experiences of Supervision within Education – please think about the benefits as well as any difficulties you encountered.** *Total responses: 47*

47 out of a potential 90 (52%) participants who had experience of Supervision in Education responded to Question 9 which sought qualitative feedback about their experience.

Answers to this question were tagged thematically based on whether the respondents' experiences of Supervision within Education were broadly positive or negative. Over 50% of responses were from Classroom Teachers, Head Teachers and Educational Psychologists. Other respondents included Principal Teachers, Depute Head Teachers, Early Years Officers and Additional Support Needs staff.

Overall the majority of respondents had had a positive experience of Supervision in Education, although there were a few examples of where it had been implemented poorly or not been seen as beneficial by the member of staff.

### Positive responses

Some themes came out strongly from those respondents who said they valued the Supervision they received – feeling supported but at the same time challenged; having a safe space for reflection and critical analysis; talking things through and de-briefing; exploring the emotional elements of the work; and receiving guidance, advice and reassurance from their Supervisor.



*“As a Head Teacher I sought the support of a trained supervisor to work with myself and my pastoral team. I did this because I trained as a counsellor and experienced benefits, first hand of Supervision. The benefits were; helped me tease out how the Child Protection cases I was involved in were affecting my life; brought clarity; time to reflect and solve issues in a calm and designated space; my time to ‘just be’; made me more efficient in work as it gave me more head space; explored strategies for helping others; reduced stress; increased my confidence; greater self-awareness and understanding; improved home and work life; helped me to see victims in my school of child abuse as survivors and gave me skills to deal more effectively with the children and their parents”*

Some of the things respondents identified as being necessary for good Supervision were around the need for sessions to be Supervisee led; one respondent said it **“enabled me to find my own answer”**; safe and confidential spaces; trust and a positive relationship were highlighted as essential as well as the need for Supervisors to be empathetic and skilled listeners.



*“Excellent opportunity to have a safe, confidential space to share concerns and successes and to be challenged and supported to understand my role in making progress and also how I can take next steps to success when things are confusing if less positive. This monthly Supervision has been a really essential part of my professional life and I now insist on all the people I manage having Supervision from others trained to do this effectively”*

Wider benefits respondents identified included reducing burnout and compassion fatigue; improving professional practice through self-reflection and evaluation; increased self-awareness and understanding; being better able to support children and families; and improving teacher retention.

Some of the challenges raised by this cohort of respondents were around practical issues such as difficulties finding and protecting time; staff shortages; excessive workload; finding a safe space and cost. Many of these issues will be picked up later on in this report as part of a broader question about practical barriers.

*“Only difficulty I have sometimes is getting protected time for Supervision and finding a time with busy diaries to meet”*

An additional and interesting point was raised by an Educational Psychologist who had received Supervision from someone in a different sector which comes with its own unique challenges and benefits:

*“I found it beneficial having someone from another sector who has a different knowledge-base to provide alternative thoughts and ways of thinking to the reflection and advice. The occasional difficulty would be around my supervisor not being knowledgeable of the policies and procedures within education so either they couldn’t comment or I would spend a lot of the supervision time explaining the processes to them”*

## Negative Responses

Only 3 respondents gave answers which could be clearly defined as negative, a further 3 responses described practices which wouldn’t fall within the definition and principles of the kind of Supervision we are describing; these respondents referred to **“classroom observations”** by other teachers or by a Head Teacher as well as **“annual reviews”** – both of which we would suggest are different processes to Reflective Supervision. These examples do however serve to highlight that the term Supervision may not be well understood within the Education profession and for many it may bring to mind observation, performance management or surveillance instead, one respondent noted that **“the word Supervision has negative connotations”**.

Those respondents who shared negative experiences highlighted issues around lack of clarity about what the sessions were for and mission creep away from original purpose; lack of clarity and structure within sessions; sessions not being frequent enough; lack of trust between Supervisor and Supervisee; and it being a tick-box exercise rather than something valuable.



***“It is really good when you trust the person you can talk to, but sessions are only yearly and this is not enough when supporting youngsters and families in harrowing circumstances. If you have someone you cannot trust or do not know enough then it is useless”***

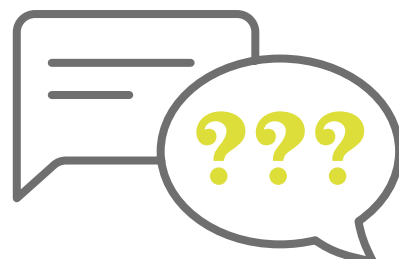
One Additional Support Needs Teacher who had received mandatory, 1:1 Supervision from a member of Senior Leadership within their school stated:

***“It is just a set template that you work through with your boss. Always feel it’s simply a paper exercise as nothing is ever actioned but they can still say it’s done”***

A Classroom Teacher who had experience of mandatory group Supervision with colleagues from another school said:

***“I am unsure that the nurture teachers and assistants are fully aware of the process for Supervision, it can get quite muddled at times with everyone talking about the issues they have. No one really sticks to an agenda and it is really just a catch up session”***

The findings from this question indicate that the nature, understanding and implementation of Supervision within Education are all key factors in whether respondents found the process beneficial and valuable. This again will be looked at in further depth later on in the report.



## Experience of Supervision in other Sectors

Question 10 sought the experiences of those currently working in Education who had experience of Supervision in another sector, for example if they had been a Social Worker or Counsellor before moving into Education. Respondents had the option to choose 'both' in Question 5 if they had experience of Supervision in Education as well as another sector. There were therefore a potential 83 respondents who could have answered this question, 73 or 88% responded.

Again, responses were categorised thematically based on whether respondents' experiences were broadly positive, negative or just a factual account. A summary is also provided below of the variety of different professions and sectors respondents identified as having had Supervision within.

### Question 10

**Please describe in as much detail as possible, your experiences of Supervision in a sector not related to Education i.e. Social Work, Clinical Practice, Third Sector – please think about the benefits as well as any difficulties you encountered.** *Total responses: 73*

A number of respondents gave a factual account of the Supervision they had experienced in another Sector without attributing a value either positive or negative to it, or stated some of the practical issues for example venue and environment and finding and sticking to time. Professions and sectors mentioned by these respondents included Social Work, Speech and Language Therapy, Third Sector, Probation, Counselling, Support Worker for adults with learning disabilities, residential childcare, secure care and fostering.

*"I receive Supervision of 1 session per term in my charity run work where I teach English and help young people regulate their emotions"*

*"Supervision is a clinical requirement for the work I undertake and I am in full agreement with the practices and principles in line with BACP"*

*"I was supervised by speech and language to ensure I was providing a rich communication and language environment"*





Other respondents noted the sector where they had received the Supervision as well as indicating why this had been beneficial to them.

***“I worked in a secure children’s unit. I received monthly Supervision from an education manager and also immediate Supervision following any ‘safe hold’ incident (generally carried out by the unit supervisor if outwith education hours) This allowed me to review the incident, talk through triggers/de-escalators and generally decompress in a safe space. For me, this meant that I wasn’t taking the secondary trauma and stress home to my own family and gave me a chance to reflect”***

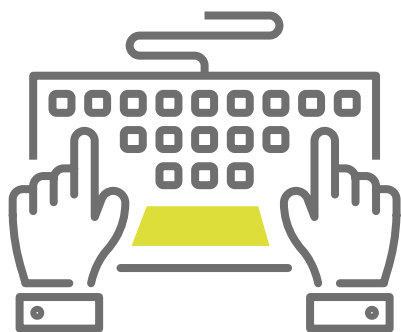
***“I experienced Supervision in my role as a volunteer Counsellor. This experience was entirely positive and absolutely crucial. I often asked for Supervision in my role as ASN class teacher but Supervision was not understood in an educational context”***

***“I receive clinical supervision in my role as a Psychotherapist. Supervision is vital to help me think through what might be going on between myself and a patient. It also provides an important place to talk about difficult material. Supervision is vital to help me prepare and monitor the progress of working with a patient. It is not a punitive process but a supportive endeavour that improves my thinking and clinical judgement”***

***“I have regular Supervision as a Health professional. It helps me if I’m stuck with a case but also to help me think about my own wellbeing. I have tried to introduce it to staff in Education I work with”***

The majority of respondents noted positive experiences of Supervision within other sectors with the general consensus being that the provision itself is very much needed and beneficial. 11 respondents who noted benefits from Supervision also expressed concerns about poor practice where Supervision had not been done well. A key theme throughout was that quality Supervision is essential and must be meaningful, it cannot be tokenistic or a tick box exercise.

Another key theme was that Supervision can be multi-faceted in terms of the benefits and its impact – some respondents focused more on the practical, professional benefits whilst others reflected more on the personal, emotional impact. It is clear that Supervision must be seen not as a blanket approach but one that must be uniquely tailored to the individual, their needs and requirements.





## What does Supervision do and what does it provide?

*“I learned that Supervision was essential to keep me going when there are risks and complex matters requiring multi-agency team work”*

Where respondents talked about receiving meaningful, quality Supervision they said it restored their ability to think clearly; it enabled them to express themselves; it encouraged constructive reflection; and it allowed for praise as well as challenge. They said it prevented them from taking secondary trauma and stress home; it prevented burnout, vicarious trauma and sickness; and it helped them understand how their client’s issues, actions and behaviours were impacting on them and vice versa.

Respondents highlighted that Supervision provides a safe space and environment; it provides emotional containment; and one respondent noted *“I found it an essential part of safe practice”*

### Practical benefits

*“I have monthly Supervision with my manager. I find it very useful to have this monthly check-in and use it as a time to problem solve with her”*

Respondents talked about the practical benefits of receiving Supervision. They talked about the importance of the time in enabling them to set clear goals and discuss the needs of service users including difficulties, challenges and concerns. Mention was made of the benefits have having someone provide a

different perspective; provide challenge and push back and help to reframe issues which they may be finding difficult. Support to problem solve and find solutions was also highlighted as well as the time to *“pause, reflect and press re-set”*. Respondents also noted that Supervision had enabled them the time and space to discuss their own professional strengths and areas for development as well as understand the needs of those they work with better.



## Emotional benefits

*“Supervision is a most valuable process that gives everyone involved a voice. A safe space to talk honestly about what is happening and how you are feeling. I found it had a unique impact on my wellbeing”*

Many respondents talked about the personal, emotional and psychological benefits to their overall wellbeing. Respondents highlighted that good Supervision helped them to feel appreciated, supported, valued, reassured and validated and they appreciated the opportunity to talk openly and honestly about how they were feeling.

The view that Supervision allows people to offload and air frustrations without being judged was also highlighted by respondents as well as supporting and developing

increased emotional intelligence and self-awareness. More broadly respondents consistently highlighted the importance of emotional support including around challenging cases or difficult behaviour; the critical role of helping professionals identify and talk through their own triggers; the separation of personal feelings from the problem situation; better understanding personal and unconscious bias and transference; and the opportunity to simply decompress.

## Challenges and barriers

However not all responses were positive and several respondents highlighted significant concerns with the practice they had experienced within their Supervision arrangements. It was clear from these responses that whilst the process of having time set aside for reflective Supervision was strongly acknowledged as being needed, when done poorly it can have a minimal or potentially negative impact and there are a range of barriers and challenges to consider.



## Relational challenges

***“When Supervision was less beneficial the supervisor has no relationship with me and took little interest in the role. It was a very difficult period which demonstrated the importance of quality Supervision on work management and health and wellbeing.”***

Respondents highlighted the critical importance of a good, trusting relationship between the Supervisor and the Supervisee and how Supervision can easily break down in its absence. They noted experiencing a lack of support and struggling to communicate with their Supervisor; feeling judged and treated harshly for poor mental health and worrying about the potential to be seen as not coping. Key relational elements were noted as absent for some respondents with examples being given of Supervisees not being made to feel a priority and of Supervisors receiving texts during sessions.

## Practical or organisational challenges

***“I guess while it is great I receive Supervision I think it is vital to really ring fence that time and make the worker feel like you are a priority and that management take your practice seriously and are invested in the Supervision experience”***

Practical issues were also highlighted by respondents such as difficulties with securing time and the relatively high costs associated with receiving external, clinical Supervision. Others noted what appeared to be more organisational or

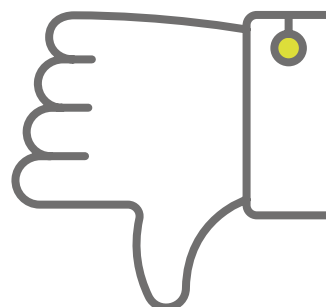
cultural challenges such as management not taking the practice seriously; and the time not being protected or ringfenced. One respondent noted an issue specifically related to receiving external Supervision around the Supervision itself having little influence over internal, organisational practice and culture.

## Poor practice

***“Supervision worked well when it was supportive and constructive reflection of my work; however I have experienced Supervision where it felt tick box and about performance management as opposed to support”***

Lastly respondents highlighted examples of poor practice from their experience of Supervision which included never receiving Supervision notes; the Supervisor using the time to give the Supervisee more work; and a lack of clear boundaries around what the time was and was not for.

A common theme was one of lack of understanding or potentially misunderstanding about what Supervision is for – respondents mentioned feeling like the time was more about performance management and less about support, and too much time being spent on practical workload issues rather than the impact this was having on them. They noted Supervisors lacking in understanding or not being sufficiently trained; and that processes felt like a tick box exercise or one in which they were being checked up on.





## Part 3 – Views on the use of Supervision in Education

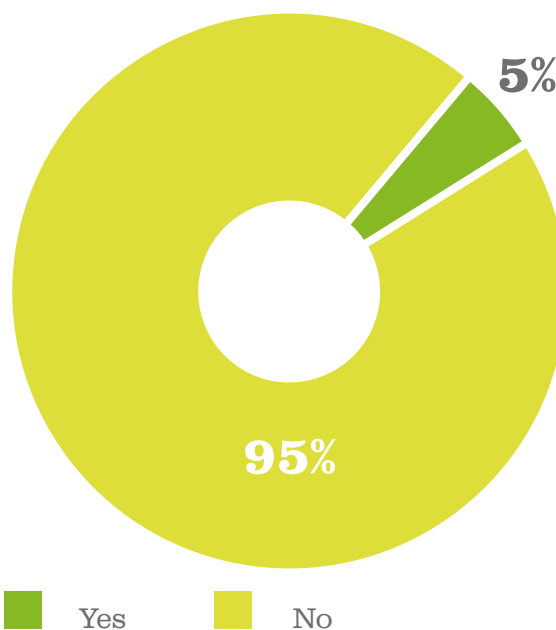
From question 11 onwards in the survey respondents were asked their specific views on the role of Supervision in Education, starting with practical issues and then seeking wider views about whether or not they believed it was necessary and why. In order to help the flow of this report we have included practical issues (originally question 11 in the survey) at the end of this section and the following questions have therefore been numbered accordingly.



### Question 11

**Setting aside any practical issues, would you support Supervision in Education as core practice in principle, in the same way it is in clinical practice and other health and social care sectors?**

Table 10 – Total responses: 252





## Question 12

**Please explain, in as much detail as possible, why you would support, in principle, the use of Supervision Education.** *Total responses: 198*

239 (or 95% of) respondents to question 11 answered ‘Yes’ when asked if they would support, in principle, the use of Supervision in Education. Of these 239, 198 answered the question asking them to explain their reasons for this choice, these answers are detailed below.

Respondents went into huge amounts of qualitative detail in their answers to this question and it was clear from these responses that people felt very passionate about their support for this issue. Broadly speaking the responses could be separated into two overarching themes – the first being ‘Why Supervision is needed’ – here respondents talked about increasing levels of stress for education staff, pressures on schools, the inclusion agenda, unmet needs of pupils and parents, dealing with increased risk and vulnerability and the emotional load of teaching as a caring profession. The second theme was ‘What difference Supervision could make’ – and here respondents talked about improved

professional practice, supporting staff mental health and wellbeing, ensuring safe practice, getting better outcomes for pupils, and allowing time and space for staff to process and reflect.

As with previous questions, responses were tagged and organised thematically, a single response could be tagged with multiple different themes in order to ensure we gathered an overall picture of the themes that were most common, the percentages mentioned will therefore not combine to make a total of 100%.

65% of responses were tagged as relating to ‘mental health and wellbeing of staff’, 42% were tagged as relating to the ‘emotional impact or load of teaching’ and 24% of responses were tagged as relating to ‘a space for discussion, processing and reflection’.

In addition, **64%** of respondents included direct reference to ‘support’ in their answer.



## Why Supervision in Education is needed

The first theme covered by respondents was around the current challenges faced by Education, in other words the rationale for why Supervision was needed. They talked about extremely high levels of stress in the profession; increasing pressures; the changing nature of the job; lack of structured support; the emotional impact of teaching and the need to ensure safe practice; and they raised the question of why Supervision was a requirement in other sectors but not Education.

These issues were also raised by members of the CELCIS Education Forum. They noted an increased pressure around attainment; pupil support workers working longer hours; and teachers experiencing vicarious trauma but that this isn't recognised as it is in other professions such as Social Work. They also noted that the focus in schools has shifted towards wellbeing and nurture, and that demand is greater than before and more visible for those children with unmet needs.

### Levels of stress

Respondents highlighted a number of reasons why staff working within Education are currently struggling, levels of stress were highlighted frequently and this is backed up by recent research by The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) which found that 76% of their members who responded to their recent survey reported that they felt stressed "frequently" or "all of the time" within their jobs.<sup>7</sup>

NASUWT's Big Question Survey of 5,500 teachers in 2019 found that 77% of teachers have experienced more workplace stress in the last 12 months. 70% believe the job has adversely affected their mental health in the last 12 months, and 86% believe that the job has impacted negatively on their wellbeing in the last 12 months.<sup>8</sup>

And as recently as November 2019 the Teacher Wellbeing Index published findings showing that 72% of all educational professionals described themselves as stressed, and this rose to 84% when it came to senior leaders. These findings also highlighted that 78% of all education professionals have experienced behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms due to their work.<sup>9</sup>

These figures are stark.

***"HTs are burning out; early career teachers are leaving in their droves"***

*"People are leaving the profession in droves. We had more teachers move out this year than I ever remember"*

*"Teaching is at an all-time stressful high. Everyone including management are under extreme pressure to deliver an overcrowded curriculum"*

*"Teachers need help!!!!"*

***"I've been working in Education without any formal support and Supervision for years; it's demoralising and deskilling, also stressful"***



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eis.org.uk/Latest-News/MemberSurvey>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/30c31a30-b070-44f1-8e9f009b650bb350.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/teacher\\_wellbeing\\_index\\_2019.pdf](https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/teacher_wellbeing_index_2019.pdf)

***“I worry about pupils a lot and feel hugely frustrated at not being able to provide the support they need. I sometimes feel very alone in this and it has impacted my own mental health and wellbeing greatly to the point of being very unsure as to whether I can continue in my job”***

Respondents highlighted the strong link between staff mental health and wellbeing and the mental health and wellbeing of pupils which is something we highlighted in our original paper. We want children to receive the best care possible but we know this is not possible when the adults caring for them aren't supported and are struggling.

***“The mental health of the adults in the school is related to the mental health of the children, stressed struggling adults lead to stressed insecure children and has a negative impact on learning”***

*“Having a healthier workforce impacts directly on the pupils we teach and support, and ultimately their wellbeing”*

*“It seems to be a no-brainer to me! Educators are constantly supporting the mental health of those they are educating (and often their colleagues too) and this can be to the detriment of their own mental health. We need to be open and upfront about this, and if we really want to support young people to normalise mental health, then we need to be able to model this ourselves”*

*“Children require regulated, reflective adults. Supporting the stress levels of teachers supports children”*

## **Increasing pressures and the changing nature of Education**

Many respondents talked about increasing pressures, both on them as individuals and on schools more broadly.

*“External political pressures to perform, succeed, and improve results year on year is an exhaustive treadmill for many experienced professionals”*

*“The demands on teachers and school staff on supporting a range of learners and families with differing needs is vast and means staff are feeling under pressure and sometimes overwhelmed”*

*“As each year passes staff are asked to do more and more, the workload increases and staff feel under so much pressure from all sides, parents, LAs, HTs, line managers”*

They also talked about additional pressures and responsibilities which may not traditionally have sat within the remit of Education.

This is supported by evidence in the recent Workload Survey 2016-2019 from the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS) which found that:

*“In 2019 the challenges schools face in meeting the needs of pupils were highlighted by more members than in any previous year – this appears to be a serious and growing challenge which is of great concern to members”<sup>10</sup>*

*“There is an expectation for educators to fix wider societal problems for children in their classroom which is often unachievable and creates pressure”*

***“The responsibility heaped on schools has become almost untenable. We are trained to educate, we are not trained social workers, health care professionals, mental health experts...”***

10 <https://www.ahds.org.uk/uploads/2016.19-Workload-National.Final.pdf>



*“Schools appear to be taking on an ever increasing role in supporting young people and their families. Teaching role is now going far beyond teaching and learning. Teachers are not trained in many of the issues that are affecting young peoples’ lives such as mental health problems, family breakdown, bereavement, and poverty related issues”*

*“There are so many demands on teachers now than ever used to be and we are less like teachers and more like parents, social workers, mediators etc. I personally feel like I never switch off from my job and this affects my family life”*

***“As a Head Teacher in a school with a high level of deprivation a lot of my time is spent at Social Work meetings, talking and supporting parents. There are often times when this can be quite overwhelming and not quite the role that I trained for”***



## **Lack of support**

Linked to the issue of increasing pressures and additional responsibilities is a lack of support felt by those working in Education.

***“Inclusion has led to school staff now having a very wide spectrum of needs in front of them with no added support or training given”***

Whilst some respondents talked about supportive peers, colleagues and leadership teams, many talked about a lack of structured support, both from within their school and from the Local Authority.

*“I receive no support from management, and there is no support available from the Local Authority. It is widely accepted as just a part of the job”*

*“Dealing with child protection issues/cases is emotionally draining. There is no opportunity to talk through the issue with anyone at present in the Education structure”*

***“There is little and ineffective support of me as a Head Teacher. I have had to deal with challenging, stressful, emotionally draining and sometimes harmful issues/events. When I have sought support I have not adequately received it, sometimes being blamed for being essentially on the receiving end as a victim”***

*“We are lucky in that we can support each other but sometimes it’s not enough. We also experienced the very sudden death of a pupil and to be honest there was no support for us dealing with the pupils’ grief, let alone our own”*

*“The only support received was from our Educational Psychologist on her infrequent visits to school. This lack of support led to burn out and ultimately my resignation”*



***“At present, it feels as though many senior managers in Education prefer to ignore the fact that regular interaction with very distressed children takes a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers”***

## **The emotional impact of being exposed to distress**

So many respondents, **over 40%**, talked about the ‘emotional load’ of being a teacher, of taking their pupils stories home with them and of the devastating impact this could have on their own mental health and wellbeing – these two issues were frequently discussed together, for example:

*“At times, I have found the stress of dealing with children’s distressed behaviour unbearable. It has impacted my mental health and wellbeing”*

*“Too often things happen which can have a real emotional impact on me and there is no one to discuss with or debrief with. This leads to things being internalised and causes a build-up of stress”*

*“All other professionals can walk away. Education is a Universal service. Teachers have to go in every day and be repeatedly exposed to distressed children, leading to vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and sometimes ill health”*

These respondents consistently talked about their experience of working with children in distress and with distressed behaviours, children experiencing trauma and adversity, and children with severe, complex and often unmet needs. They talked about these issues overwhelming them and having nowhere to go to offload, or anyone to discuss the issues with.

***“Inclusion has led to school staff now having a very wide spectrum of needs in front of them with no added support or training given”***

***“In current role I have to deal with some particularly upsetting aspects of children’s lives and there is no way to have such discussions of the effect it has had on me”***

*“Working with young people in challenging circumstances is emotionally draining. There is no space to discuss in a supportive space. I have dealt with young people who have been physically abused, had to tell kids they are in care tonight, had to tell a teen in care that there were no other options other than the police when he didn’t want to go home. I receive VPDs that detail child abuse including neglect where there is no support given. I am expected to act as a pseudo social worker yet have none of their powers to make real change in terms of home. I have been asked whether a mother should keep her child by a Hearing Panel in front of the mother. All of this with no Supervision and I consider myself lucky to work in a supportive school with an understanding and devoted Head. Supervision would allow for a structured point in the week in which to discuss decisions made”*

***“Supervision in Education is something that I have thought about for some time. As a Child Protection co-ordinator in my school, I am heavily involved in many cases with families who have experienced significant trauma. For many of the children I am one of their main supporters and provide emotional support for them on a daily basis. I often find that I can’t switch off from the issues that the kids in my care are experiencing, and I worry about them constantly”***

**“Staff within education are spending far more time each week supporting not only vulnerable children but their families. We are the first point of contact that hear traumatic stories of abuse, neglect, substance abuse, domestic violence etc.”**

“Having worked with children with adverse childhood experiences, the transference is extraordinarily high. The pressure and worry that comes with working with these children does not stay at work, as our work does not stay at work. It comes home with us in marking, planning, report writing and stays with us. There have been times when I’ve had to close my classroom door and cry for the full of break time due to what’s being disclosed”

“The emotional impact of raking in damaged and traumatised young people’s emotional load has led to many of us becoming unwell. This impacts the staff themselves, how well they do their job, absences, and has led to a few becoming emotionally detached”

**“Even though it’s Education, we are still working with vulnerable individuals and they offload to us”**

**“This year I experienced two bereavements in a week, and shortly afterwards found myself supporting a family who had a very traumatic bereavement, which exacerbated the attachment difficulties the children were already experiencing”**

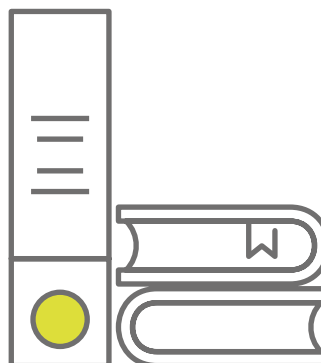
*“As a named person in a school in an area of considerable deprivation I deal with some serious and complex cases. This impacts on my own wellbeing as you take home in your head the dreadful situations you deal with on a daily basis with nobody to offload to”*

*“I have supported pupils and families through some awful situations and have had no training in how to do this or how to support myself in doing this. The upset tends to come home with me and I am left feeling like I am powerless to help which makes it even worse”*

**“As a nurture teacher I work with our most vulnerable children and families very closely every day. It can be very difficult to switch off, taking emotional work home, affecting own family. I’ve also seen compassion fatigue and perhaps secondary trauma in a teacher who wasn’t supported”**

One respondent, whilst acknowledging the emotional labour of teaching also highlighted how supportive relationships, including Supervisory relationships have the capacity to buffer some of this.

**“Teachers have to manage emotional labour – this can be offset by supportive relationships, such as a Supervisory one”**



The importance of emotional support was one of the key areas which emerged from a school supervision pilot conducted by Sturt and Rowe in England in 2016-2017 which looked at 5 schools in 2 neighbouring local authorities, they noted that:

***“The Designated Support Leads (DSLs) have also highlighted the emotional impact of being the school representative at social care meetings and being privy to information about students which can be highly distressing”<sup>11</sup>***

## Safe Practice

Linked to the issue of the emotional labour of working with distressed and vulnerable children is that of safe practice. Several respondents highlighted the dangers associated with lack of Supervision for those working directly on child protection cases in particular, both for the professional themselves but also for the children in their care. One respondent said of the purpose of Supervision –

***“To safeguard service users – To safeguard practitioners – Due to practitioners having a large amount of direct contact with children and the influence practitioners can have on children’s lives”***

***“Staff involved in child protection referrals and supporting young people who are experiencing/discussing adverse experiences currently have no formal support to allow them to manage their emotional responses and evaluate their impact/support they provide”***

Respondents talked about the importance of Supervision in ensuring that the workforce are able to do the very best for the children in their care, to protect and to safeguard them. One respondent said ***“To not offer Supervision is to put our professional colleagues, children and families in their care at risk”*** whilst another said ***“It allows for safe practice that allows practitioners to be more objective and less influenced by personal factors when making decisions (and therefore leads to improved outcomes for children)”***.

***“Teachers have the most access to children than any other social care provider and are best placed to pick up on mental health issues, trauma, neglect, abuse and generally safeguard children. Supervision would allow a time to really think about presenting behaviours and potentially flag issues seen in a child early to allow an early intervention response. Also it is safe practice – it promotes a learning culture and prioritises staff’s wellbeing and safety. You can’t pour from an empty cup”***

Many staff also specifically talked about the sensitive and distressing information they were frequently hearing about children, young people and families, without any opportunity to debrief or process safely.

***“We also liaise with parents and carers, social work and health, all of whom share very sensitive and sometimes tragic information about the young people in our care. Where does all this information and emotion go when it comes to us?”***

11 P. Sturt and J. Rowe – Using Supervision in Schools – A guide to building safe cultures and providing emotional support in a range of school settings (2018) p. 4

***“I have been involved in some high tariff child protection issues including a significant case review. My multi-agency colleagues greatly benefited from Supervision while I only had scrutiny and deadlines for chronologies. I was so stressed I ended up on medication during my Christmas holidays”***

***“As a Head Teacher I am often in the role of “accidental counsellor” supporting staff, children and their families. I am often exposed to very harrowing information at child protection meetings and can often be affected emotionally by this”***

*“I spend a significant amount of my working week trying to help families who are mired in trauma and poverty. Their stories become my story. There is nowhere to talk it through, think about what I could have done differently or better, to ensure the best for my families and protect my emotional wellbeing”*

One response in particular really brought home the severity of what Educators have to deal with and the level of responsibility felt by Head Teachers who often have to make crucial decisions about the children in their care.

*“I have worked with and supported a number of children and their families who have been affected by or were dealing with significantly challenging issues including neglect, parental substance misuse, mental health difficulties, poverty, domestic violence and sexual abuse. Four cases stand out to me due to the horrendous circumstances the children were subjected to and at times I found it incredibly hard to remain professional when dealing with the adults responsible for the harm. Sitting through an intense meeting/*

*discussion where graphic accounts are shared and then returning to school without time to process can be exhausting and mentally draining. As a Head Teacher you are involved in making life changing decisions for young people and their families – on several occasions it was my initial intervention that led to the children being removed permanently which is a huge responsibility. At times it can be frustrating as processes can take so long and we continue to see the adverse effects at school on a daily basis”*

### **Supervision is a requirement in other sectors**

A key focus of our original discussion paper was that Supervision is an essential part of practice in other health and social care sectors. Many respondents also flagged this as an issue, with some suggesting that the nature of Education actually means Supervision should be more of a requirement than other sectors where it already exists.

***“Having worked previously in an environment where Supervision is a regular feature, and the culture of Supervision is seen as commonplace, I find it extremely odd it doesn’t exist in Education. Teachers work more independently than almost any other profession – oftentimes 7 hours a day on their own in a classroom teaching over 150 pupils a day”***

A few other respondents also noted that isolation can be a big factor for those working in Education, with one noting ***“It’s greatly needed, rural classroom teaching can be very isolating”***. Other comments included ***“Teachers work primarily in isolation in their classrooms and therefore lack the informal peer support that often occurs in other work environments”*** and ***“Feel that sometimes it feels like teachers***



***work in isolation although there are many others so close by***

This idea of isolation was also raised by members of the CELCIS Education Forum who noted that there is often an attitude of ‘just get on with it, it’s part of your job’, and that teaching can be isolating, especially for Head Teachers.

One respondent to the survey raised an interesting point about consistency across professions who are often working in partnership with each other.

*“It’s essential for every member of staff. I’ve benefited from it and it’s better for practice in the Health and Social Care Partnership to be consistent”*

Similarly another noted:

***“Partners are negatively affected as they know the Education members of the Team Around the Child are not getting the same feedback. Supervision would improve practice and ensure more consistent practice”***

Other respondents pointed out the disparity between professions, with several noting the shifting and changing nature of teaching as a profession.

*“As safeguarding lead we are dealing with the same issues that health and social workers are so surely we should be getting the same support”*

*“Other professionals who work with children get and value Supervision. Teachers spend the most time with children and, honestly, can see children at their most distressed”*

***“I have always received Supervision, some better than others but when Supervision is good, it has been so beneficial to me. I was flabbergasted to realise that Supervision does not occur within Education”***

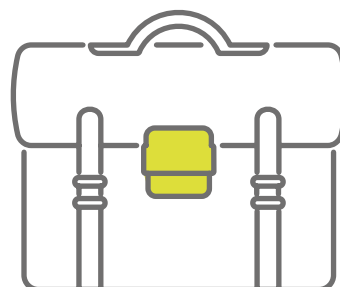
***“Teaching has changed so much over the past 15 years and the issues that we are having to deal with can leave a lasting and profound effect. Secondary trauma/stress/mental health etc. Teaching staff (including support staff) are given no initial training on this yet are expected to just get on with it. Why are we any less important than our colleagues and friends in other sectors?”***

*“We often experience similar issues to staff working in social care and have much longer daily contact with children in crisis which can have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing”*

*“Coming from a social work background I find it astonishing teachers and school staff don’t have time to talk about their work, especially pastoral care staff”*

One respondent raised an issue we flagged in our original discussion paper around mental health and trauma-informed practice within Education.

*“Teachers are increasingly being asked to deal with mental health in their classrooms in the same way that social workers/health professionals do. In fact teachers are to be trauma-informed and work through a trauma lens which I wholeheartedly agree with. However, if any professional is dealing with trauma, emotions, mental health then they need to be supported in the same way as they support the children they are working with”*





## What difference Supervision could make

The second broad theme covered by respondents was around the benefits Supervision could bring to Education. They discussed how a supportive Supervision structure could help offset some of the issues mentioned above around pressure, stress and the emotional impact of teaching. They talked about Supervision as allowing space for support, discussion, reflection and processing; improving practice and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

### **Allowing space for support, discussion, reflection and processing**

The idea that Supervision could allow for a safe and containing space for staff to receive support, discuss and unpick issues, reflect on practice, and process events was raised frequently by respondents.

Similar themes were noted by members of the CELCIS Education Forum who talked about the benefits of time to reflect on practice being built in and just being the norm. They also talked about Supervision

as a protective factor; having dedicated time to decompress in a positive way; a way to develop coping strategies; and a way to provide containment, manage stress and enhance emotional regulation.

***“If all teachers had the time to reflect on the relationships they’re building and what might be preventing those relationships from flourishing then we’d have much more skilled and fulfilled teachers”***

*“Education staff need space and time to process, map out action plans, talk to colleagues and other professionals and develop the skills to leave the stress, anxiety and responsibility at schools door so they themselves can live fulfilling lives. I feel very passionately that this should be a core provision for educational practitioners”*

*“Teaching is an emotional, tiring job and requires all staff to be mentally strong to carry out their job effectively. I feel passionately that good quality, regular Supervision would support teachers in this, giving them a chance to reflect on their practice and abilities”*

*“Healthy space to offload and discuss solutions to problems without feeling a burden or that you’re encroaching on SMT time”*

***“Supporting our most vulnerable young people can be emotionally draining. Supervision would help to reflect on the impact we are having and next steps”***

*“Supervision supports and builds the capacity of staff to contain the emotional behaviours of children and young people in their care. Supervision allows consideration of environmental factors and supports problem solving and solution focused thinking”*

*“We contain a lot of emotions from children who have distressed behaviours and we need help to contain those, reflect, move on and let go. We need to know our own triggers and how they can affect our decisions – sometimes support is needed for this and Supervision can provide that”*

One respondent reflected on how beneficial it had been when they had been able to access a Supervisory relationship with an Educational Psychologist to talk through issues.

***“I used to have an Educational Psychologist who visited the school and who was very helpful in speaking over tricky situations and cases. Now he has retired that service hasn’t resumed in the same way. It makes me reflect how helpful it was to have someone to talk things over with. In a small primary that’s not always possible”***

## Improving Practice

Many respondents noted a key function for Supervision in Education as being around improving practice, that having time and space to reflect on your practice and talk through difficulties on a consistent basis could only be beneficial to ongoing practice and development, both personal and professional.

*“Many of us are reflective practitioners anyway as an integral and valued part of our professionalism. Having a dedicated relationship in which to share thoughts intentionally and one that is systematically provided for, values those personal learning and growth practices”*

*“Supervision would be a fantastic tool to encourage staff to look at their practice and also to discuss particular pupils and plans for their support throughout the school”*

***“It is also time to reflect on the good things too. To remember the positive impact you and others are having on a child’s life”***

*“Done properly this is an excellent, personalised development opportunity. Practitioners should be reflective and supported to challenge their practice to ensure the highest possible standards of delivery”*



*“Honest, respectful Supervision would help shared thinking, problem solving, address the stress caused by being ‘the ultimate’ decision maker despite working with/leading a team. If we are allowed to share and grow together and LEARN it changes the ethos from blame to support”*

*“We acknowledge the importance of Supervision in all training and academic study but in employment this is never seen as a priority. All our training says it’s essential to good practice, why do we not take action then? Let’s practice what we preach and use Supervision effectively. Time and money needs to be spent on this”*

A few respondents who had received Supervision of some kind within Education reflected on how it had helped improve their practice.

***“I found it so useful for reassuring me that my practice was good and for talking through any difficulties. It was non-judgemental and solution focused. It helped me maintain a healthy outlook on my work, particularly when I can be quite self-critical”***

*“In one instance a Health Care Professional took on that role [Supervision] when I reflect back on it. She recognised that I didn’t have anyone to do that and the situation was almost unbearably emotional and complicated. Had I not had her I am not sure how I would have coped. She wasn’t providing advice or guidance on the practical matters which is what SLT tend towards, but was able to unpick the various issues and help me package it all. On reflection, that support made me more able to make the best decisions for the children involved in the face of extraordinary pressure”*

Members of the CELCIS Education forum agreed that Supervision could support better practice. They suggested that

Supervision could lead to a reduction in sick leave/absences and improve retention of staff, therefore improving the quality of teaching and performance. One member of the forum noted that Supervision is empowering and could help “make you a more confident practitioner” whilst another noted that Supervision could help improve the reputation of the profession.

## **Supporting staff mental health and wellbeing**

65% of responses were tagged as relating directly to the mental health and wellbeing of those working within Education. A majority of respondents highlighted that good quality Supervision could have a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing by helping reduce stress, burnout and compassion fatigue.

*“Mental and physical wellbeing is affecting all of us on a daily basis within the school setting. We need to be able to speak and be heard”*

*“I feel the lack of Supervision results in staff feeling alone. It’s become a vital part of what is failing within the profession. Huge expectations placed on the children, to support them and cater for their needs. However who looks after the staff and their needs? Mental health is an extreme recurring issue”*

***“I work in an environment that has a huge emotional toll on the staff. We regularly have staff off sick with work related stress, referrals to occupational health and I am convinced that Supervision for all staff would make a difference to our ability to understand our own mental wellbeing, take steps to protect our own mental wellbeing and be in a better place to support the children and families we work with”***



*“I have seen directly the support clinical staff are given and that it has a huge impact on professional outcomes and personal health and wellbeing”*

*“It’s essential to the wellbeing of staff to feel supported on all levels in their profession; Supervision underpins good staff morale, productivity and all round wellbeing”*

***“Jobs in Education are stressful and I think this would support mental health in all staff”***

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum highlighted that you ‘can’t pour from an empty cup’ and that all staff need support to keep their cup topped up. They noted that regular Supervision could support improved relationships and strengthen connections whilst supporting the ‘whole’ person. Compassion fatigue was also raised by members who suggested that Supervision could reduce this and allow you to “go back in and get on with the job”, whilst also allowing space for professionals to have more compassion for those they are working with, as well as increasing motivation and morale.

***“It is necessary to ensure staff are practicing good self-care skills and that their wellbeing is not becoming affected by their roles or work life balance”***

*“It’s important that as an employee you feel you have a voice and your needs are met, Supervision can support this and to get the most out of your staff you need a happy workforce”*

*“Regular timetable opportunities to discuss challenges in a solution focussed manner could reduce teacher/ support staff stress levels”*

***“I think it’s important for staff to feel supported/appreciated and dedicated time for Supervision may help staff feel valued”***

***“There are many issues, big and small, which some people keep bottled up leading to bigger (sometimes health or mental health) problems which could be resolved swiftly if there was a designated time and (unbiased) person to discuss them with”***

*“Without effective, committed and appropriate Supervision I feel staff burn out quicker, tire easier and leave sooner”*

*“Ideally to support teachers manage the stress encountered in their jobs. To provide a safe space for teachers to be listened to, as a result hopefully less absence, improved mental health”*

***“I work with many teachers and pastoral staff in school that support children with really complicated needs and who try their very best and it takes its toll on their health. Staff are showing visible signs of distress because of the pressure put on them/the responsibility they feel to help the children. Supervision is something many are asking for”***

Some respondents highlighted where Supervision had had a significant positive impact on their own mental health and wellbeing or that of a colleague:

*“It made the difference to me between being signed off with mental health issues and remaining at work able to continue in my role as a DHT and designated member of staff for child protection. The pressure of responding to reports of child abuse, suicidal ideation, self-harm and offending behaviour has an impact on teacher wellbeing and Supervision would allow staff to better manage their mental health to be more present for both their pupils and their own families”*

***“I provide joint Supervision for a Social Work colleague based in Education and I can appreciate the benefits of this supportive practice. I know that my own wellbeing could be improved by regular Supervision and also feel similarly for the wellbeing of the wider team”***

One respondent noted that a positive consequence of Supervision and improved mental health would be a reduction in the high turnover rate of teachers:

***“Would improve the mental health and stress load of those who work in Education. Furthermore, it will help the high turnover rate within Education as the impact from the high demands will not be as distressing”***

In terms of support, respondents also highlighted the need for ongoing support rather than something that is only available at crisis point.

*“Teaching can be stressful and support should be a given rather than something that needs to be requested or given when a crisis point is reached”*

*“Teachers are struggling; ongoing support is a no-brainer. We have increasingly difficult challenges to face everyday”*

*“I would like to feel more supported in my work with children and think that Supervision is one way for this to happen”*



## Question 13

**Please explain, in as much detail as possible, why you wouldn't support, in principle, the use of Supervision Education.** *Total responses: 7*

13 (or 5% of) respondents answered 'No' to question 11 when asked if they would support, in principle, the use of Supervision in Education. Of these 13, 7 answered the question asking them to explain their reasons for this choice, these answers are detailed below. Responses came from 4 Classroom Teachers, 1 Nurture Teacher, 1 Social Work professional and 1 Educational Psychology professional.

### Terminology

One respondent noted **“maybe the word Supervision is wrongly used. It seems threatening in some way”** and another said **“Supervision is not a great term, support would be better terminology”**.

### Do not believe there is a need

A few respondents indicated they did not think Supervision was needed, with one highlighting that support systems are already in place within Education when required and **“there seems little value in mandatory Supervision for supervisions sake”**.

Other comments which inferred that the introduction of Supervision was not necessary or needed included:

*“Teachers constantly evaluate their teaching and impact of pupils learning”*

*“We are already inspected by HMI, local authority, SMT, peers, parents and families. This is plenty and not comparable to other professions as we are observed far more”*

*“Teacher esteem and confidence is dwindling rapidly and we do not need another initiative that ultimately will have a very low impact on practice and will feel like another tick the box”*

### Lack of capacity and expertise

One classroom teacher who had identified experience of poor practice in terms of Supervision earlier in the survey said:

**“Workload, lack of time, lack of staff to ensure time could be allocated for preparation. Not in the working time agreement. Don't believe SLT are trained enough to carry out such a role at present. Education is making everything a priority and wonders why teachers are increasingly feeling overwhelmed and undervalued”**

One respondent simply said:

*“Teachers already feel undervalued and untrusted. We need our professionalism back”*

Whilst another noted the difficulties that might be faced if using Supervisors from another sector who might not understand or have a working knowledge of Education.

Collectively these responses highlight the need to be clear about what Supervision is and what it is not. Reflective Supervision should not be a tick box or another form of observation or performance management. It should be focused on the health and wellbeing of the professional and provide protected time to reflect in a safe environment on the impact the work is having on you as an individual.

## Question 14

**What practical issues would need to be taken into consideration in providing professional Supervision in an education setting and how might these be overcome? Please think about issues like working-time agreements, directed time, workload, school environment, culture etc.** *Total responses: 220*

As noted above, this question was originally number 11 in the survey so respondents would have answered this before they provided their views on whether or not they agreed with the principle of Supervision in Education and why. This was done because we wanted respondents to think about the practical barriers first, before setting them aside and thinking about the principle of the issue. If the questions had been the other way round respondents may have been more inclined to disagree in principle because of the barriers, rather than in spite of them. However it made more sense to the flow of the report to reflect practical concerns at the end of this section.

This question received the highest number of responses in the whole survey and a number of common themes could be drawn from the 220 responses. As with previous questions, responses were tagged and organised thematically, a single response could be tagged with multiple different themes in order to ensure we gathered an overall picture of the themes that were most common, the percentages mentioned will therefore not combine to make a total of 100%.

The top four themes in terms of frequency of mentions were **Time; Workload; Culture and Ethos; and Appropriate Staff** and these have been considered under their own standalone headings. There were a further 14 issues identified and these have been grouped together for discussion.

Appendix A at the end of this report contains summary findings from doctoral research at the University of Bristol. Drawing on the experiences of teachers

from mainstream primary schools in south-west England, the study focuses on teachers' exposure to pupils experiencing trauma and adversity, its impact on their psychological wellbeing and their perceptions of support akin to Supervision. The findings from this research reflect much of what follows in this section.

### Time

**80%** of the responses highlighted time as a challenge to the successful implementation of Supervision. Overwhelmingly this was the issue raised most frequently by respondents and covered Working Time Agreements, directed time, contact time with students, timetabling issues, class cover, time to train Supervisors and more generally finding dedicated and protected time to set aside in an already busy school day. Many respondents noted that for Supervision to work it would need to be built into the working-time agreement for teachers.

***“Time would need to be allocated and ring fenced, obviously involving Unions”***

***“Working time agreements would be the main issues which includes providing protected time to carry this out when we are already struggling to support some of the highest needs we have ever seen in our department”***





*“There will be significant issues in terms of working-time agreements, which are already extremely complicated in terms of working out time for development work, departmental meetings, whole school meetings etc.”*

*“Working time agreement – ours is already so stretched that we don’t have time for weekly meetings in the agreement”*

*“Cover for your class would need to be arranged to enable teachers to access Supervision but not just in PPA time”*

Space and dedicated time were raised by members of the CELCIS Education Forum as well, particularly the time out of class which may be needed for Supervision sessions. Some members noted that Working Time Agreements (WTA) could be used to formalise Supervision structures, similar to a parent’s agreement.

***“Not enough time in the day – filled with classes, extra-curricular activities and having to prepare during remaining free periods. Realistically, it’s not possible since work is already having to be done at home”***

*“It would need to be at a designated time agreed by SMT when it would cause the least disruption to the classroom environment and support given. This would depend on your remit and level of support required. For example you may work on a one to one basis with a child and so therefore time allocated to be out of class would be harder”*

***“Teachers already work many hours over their contracted time (and this is generally just expected no matter what the Working Time Agreement says). Adding Supervision would be difficult, as in my experience, it is likely that you would be expected to do this in your own time (i.e. you would not be released from class in order to have Supervision”***

*“The hours I am paid are directly connected to a child. Therefore I don’t have any non-statement based time. I don’t feel that those that work in Education realise the impact that can be had by not having the right support! This can impact staff personally and also impact children directly”*

Despite time being identified as a challenge, many respondents also noted how important setting aside this dedicated time would be, and how it wasn't necessarily an insurmountable problem if it was prioritised properly. Some respondents talked about reviewing working-time agreements to ensure dedicated time was set aside for Supervision.

*“Time should be taken from directed time”*

*“Reducing the extensive reporting format requirements would both reduce teacher workload and stress as well as leave time for Supervision meetings in the working-time agreement”*

**“Protected time agreed in advance – Local Authority support to prioritise”**

*“Dedicated time is vital and shouldn't be postponed or rescheduled even if things are busy elsewhere in the school. It's so important that teachers get this time to reflect and it not just being an add on that can be shifted”*

*“Depending on your role within Education it could easily be incorporated into the working week. I am also almost sure that I and other colleagues would give up our own time for Supervision, particularly with the pupils we work with on a daily basis”*

**“Time and workload. These could be overcome by having well planned and local Supervision”**

In the Sturt and Rowe school supervision pilots in 2016-2017, they highlighted that although time was raised as a concern initially it was not a problem once the Senior Leadership Team committed to taking action and simply timetabled it in. They noted that:

**“Each school worked out their own solution about frequency and focus”**

And

**“Planned meetings decreased the number of meetings arranged in response to crisis, and it was possible to restructure existing meetings to fit better with a supervisory culture”<sup>12</sup>**

## Workload

27% of respondents highlighted workload as a potential barrier to effectively implementing Supervision; this included professional workload, managerial attitudes, and issues such as work/life balance. The majority didn't go into much further explanation other than to highlight workload as an issue.

Workload is clearly a key concern for teachers at the moment; this is evidenced through the current work of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) which committed in their recent Pay Agreement for:

**“All parties to work to together to reduce the workload of teachers and to undertake joint activity to assist in reducing and preventing unnecessary workload through increasing teacher agency and school empowerment”<sup>13</sup>**

The AHDS Workload Survey 2016-2019 also highlighted serious concerns with workload, noting that over 30% of their members reported working more than 60 hours per week. They also highlighted a worrying downward trend in the numbers of Deputy Head Teachers and Principal Teachers wishing to become Head Teachers, due in part to concerns about

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 4

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.snct.org.uk/library/2623/SNCT19-70.pdf>

the pressures, lack of resources and poor work/life balance.<sup>14</sup>

***“Teachers workload is highly pressured and finding or making time out for Supervision will undoubtedly be seen as not doing the job or preparing for it”***

*“All colleagues in my school are stressed and some describe finding it difficult to cope with their workload and the fact it interferes with their home life and general mental health. When speaking to school management about workload it is considered that it is ‘your fault’ if you are unable to cope or having difficulties”*

## Culture and ethos

Many respondents talked about the need for a culture shift as the starting point for beginning to embed Supervision within Education, with **25%** mentioning culture as a potential barrier. Responses under this heading covered the culture and ethos within the school, from individual staff members to Senior Leadership Teams, as well as Local Authorities and the wider culture of Education as a profession.

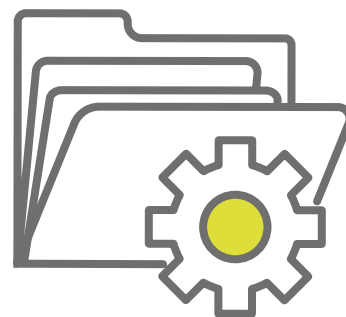
***“Culture is a big one. It needs to be part of that and not associated at all with competence or performance review. It should be an integral part of professional practice and valued by all”***

***“There needs to be a shift to providing Supervision as the norm – it should be what we do from the very start of professional training/ education. The case needs to be made about the importance of looking after the self before we can look after others”***

*“There is no culture of Supervision in Education. There isn’t a culture of everyone coming together to provide an experience for children. It is very much an individualist mentality within the profession. I think that overcoming that mentality would be significantly harder than the logistics of scheduling it”*

*“Culturally schools need to shift away from performance management and accountability especially the career threatening high stakes ultimatum driven culture we have now”*

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum raised similar points around culture. They noted that Supervision may be an alien concept to many; it could be misunderstood and seen as a burden and more work rather than the opposite; it could be perceived as punitive and a way of being checked up on; and it could also be poorly implemented if the focus is on processes and operationally driven rather than focusing on the health and wellbeing of the supervisee.



<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ahds.org.uk/uploads/2016.19-Workload-National.Final.pdf>





## Appropriate staff

23% of responses mentioned issues relating to appropriate staffing. Responses falling under this heading largely related to the training and expertise of those undertaking the role of Supervisor as well as the position of the Supervisor, for example if they should be an internal part of a Senior Management Team, an external organisation, a peer etc. Concerns were raised by some respondents that there wouldn't be enough people with the appropriate skills and expertise within Education to be Supervisors.

***“We also need to consider who would be an appropriate person to be a Supervisor. A QIO with little experience of an HT post and therefore no knowledge of the type of support required would be of no benefit. An allocate social work team leader dedicated to a cluster of schools would have far more credence”***

*“Management would have to be given training in how to deliver Supervision in a manner that didn't feel judgemental”*

*“Who is trained to provide specialist support, as SLT are not”*

*“Who would do Supervision? Worry that SLT may not have skills”*

Many respondents took the opportunity to comment on who would and wouldn't be appropriate as a Supervisor within Education, with some feeling strongly that it shouldn't be a member of their Senior Leadership Team. This chimes with what we have heard through our wider consultation with teachers, including through a straw poll at the Scottish Learning Festival in 2019, there are very clear links here to the wider culture and ethos within schools.

*“Who is providing it? It CANNOT be a member of the leadership team”*

*“I would also suggest SMT are not providing the Supervision – instead it's a ring fenced post”*

*“It would need to be someone professional who did the Supervision, not someone in school as my HT is not sympathetic and would use this to criticise staff”*



*“The person doing the Supervision was suitably qualified, more so than an experienced classroom teacher. Also would be good if the person was independent of any LA as some people may feel it could be used against them”*

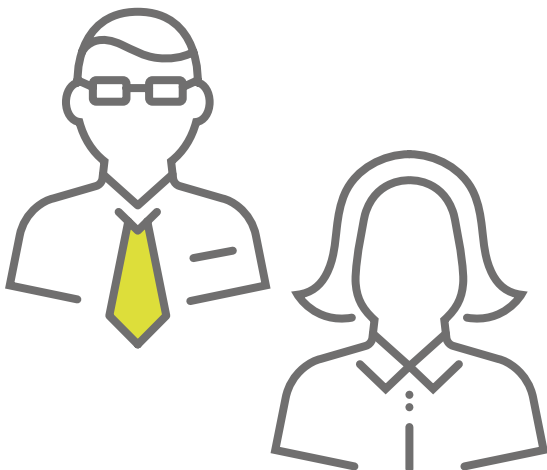
***“Who would do it? The temptation would be to make it a member of SLT but I would fear that it could become muddled by whole school priorities”***

*“Independent organisation to be used so that staff would feel confident discussing difficulties instead of in-house line manager”*

*“It would need to be with someone who wasn’t direct line manager – preferably someone neutral from outside”*

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum highlighted similar concerns during the roundtable event. They agreed that clarity would be needed about what Supervision is and what it is not, they cautioned against translating social work Supervision structures wholesale across to Education because of the very different nature of the work and the experience of staff.

Members noted the importance of having Supervisors with the skills and expertise to deliver Supervision as well as training for Supervisors and supervisees on the key principles of Supervision such as reflection, attunement and active listening.



## Practical issues

Some respondents highlighted physical space as a practical barrier such as not having a private, quiet room for the discussion and the potential need for a space outside of school. One respondent noted that:

*“some school environments can be very negative, toxic even and would not be helpful place for some staff”*

and another said:

*“The school environment wouldn’t be the place for this support as you cannot switch off”*

Cost, budgets, funding, and money were all raised by a number of respondents.

***“there is no money for resources to support young people so money being put into supporting staff seems a pipe dream”***

A few respondents also noted that there would be financial implications to providing supply cover for the staff being supervised. One respondent stated:

*“time restrictions and workload are already massive issues, so any commitment to proper Supervision is going to be costly. All the more reason why this is needed though”*

Other practical issues noted by respondents were the lack of any internal policies around staff wellbeing; it not being built into School Improvement Plans and the need for extra time after Supervision to ensure sufficient follow up on any actions or issues that needed further work to resolve.

## Personal issues

A number of respondents flagged issues which were more personal as potential barriers, such as the process adding additional stress or teachers being too stressed to engage with the process in the first place.

The issue of fear and stigma was also raised frequently by respondents which has strong links into culture and ethos as discussed earlier in this section. Respondents talked about the fear of appearing weak in the eyes of management and peers, or seeming unable to do the job with one saying **“would this be seen as managerial weakness by superiors? Some may say no but think yes”**.

Another talked about the **“culture of the autonomous professional who doesn’t need ‘help’”** and that teachers may find this a barrier to accepting support in a culture where acknowledgment of problems or issues can be seen as weakness.

**“Staff may be concerned about being seen as weak or emotional”**

**“Need work to help staff understand what it is so shared understanding and not seen as something you get if weak and struggling - needs to be seen as normal part of working processes”**

Stigma was mentioned in relation to peers and colleagues attitudes; and personal guilt in putting time aside for yourself was also noted by one respondent.

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum noted that teaching staff can sometimes feel uncomfortable approaching Senior Management Teams with issues as they may be viewed as not delivering or failing. They noted there is still a

huge stigma within Education around this; that mandatory Supervision, such as in Social Work could go some way to removing this stigma; but that historically Supervision just isn’t part of Education culture or structures.

The theme of relationships was raised frequently, both the need for good, nurturing, trusting relationships between Supervisor and Supervisee but also the danger of existing professional relationships actually creating barriers for example, not wanting someone internal to be your Supervisor. Respondents talked about the need to feel comfortable with their Supervisor and the need for their Supervisor to be non-threatening – one respondent suggested people should have a choice of who their Supervisor should be.

**“The relationship between the people involved in Supervision needs to be considered. Perhaps people having a choice of who they wish to meet with”**

Linked to the importance of trusting relationships was the idea of safety and confidentiality which are both issues that would need to be considered in the wider context of implementing a Supervision structure within a school environment.

## The nature of Supervision

Some points raised by respondents related to the nature of Supervision itself, mainly around clarity and understanding of purpose as well as the potentially differing priorities of all those involved. In terms of clarity and understanding of purpose this was highlighted both in terms of the Supervisor/Supervisee relationship as well as at a Senior Management and Trade Union level, for example one respondent said:

**“There will also be a hurdle to overcome with trade unions understanding the purpose of Supervision is not to assess teacher performance, but to**

*ensure the correct supports are in place for teachers. I can already see it being misunderstood by those who haven't worked in an environment (e.g. social work) where Supervision is commonplace and seen as a useful tool"*

*"Supervision needs to be seen as an essential element of the job with support from senior leaders in order for time to be allocated and protected. All staff need a clear understanding of the purpose of Supervision, and of what it is not"*

Many respondents noted the importance of buy in at a senior level for Supervision and the need for it to be made a strategic priority by Senior Leadership Teams and at a Local Authority level. Respondents noted how important it was that the benefits were understood at all levels in order to ensure the process was supported and truly valued.

*"Senior management would need to value this as current experiences of mine show that they just want the job done regardless of the negative impact on health and wellbeing"*

*"Time for professional Supervision has to be protected and completely backed and endorsed by the Head Teacher"*

This reflects the work of Sturt and Rowe who highlight in their book that:

***"For Supervision to be taken seriously there has to be an agreement within the school about the importance of Supervision and how it will be given priority over other demands"***<sup>15</sup>

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum also agreed and noted that Supervision would need to be embedded in school policies and for Heads of service to be aware and have a good understanding of the benefits.

## Optimism

One respondent stated that there were no barriers and that this should be offered as part of support. Another noted that they didn't recognise any of the barriers suggested due to the fact that their school already had a transparent focus on the mental health of staff and pupils. This respondent noted that Supervision would allow staff to better balance work and home and the financial implications would be offset by fewer days lost to teachers' poor mental health.

***"I cannot see any real barriers to this provision being available. All teachers can attend training and courses and Supervision could be classed as CPD"***

Another respondent, whilst noting that time would be a factor stated that ***"as this is so badly needed in Education today I'm sure any issues would be overcome due to the support from teaching staff, support staff, SMT etc."***

Members of the CELCIS Education Forum argued ***"where there is a will there is a way"*** and there was an overall feeling of optimism within the group that although there would be challenges they were not insurmountable.

Interestingly the issues raised by respondents in this section relating to potential barriers within Education almost exactly mirror the problems identified by respondents who had experienced Supervision in another sector, key themes to be found in both sets of responses were around protected time; Supervisee/Supervisor relationships; and understanding of the purpose of Supervision.

15 Ibid p. 21



# Case studies







## Case Study 1 – Clare

This case study is from the Support and Supervision team at Canterbury Christ Church University who have been developing and undertaking action research on a Supervision model for schools for the last 5 years.<sup>16</sup>

Clare had been a Head Teacher for about three years when we started working together. Six sessions of supervision, lasting up to two hours each, over a school year were provided by the academy trust. We met on the school site just after morning assembly in the ‘meeting room’ next to the school offices, with only one session being missed due to a sudden emergency. During the period of supervision Clare had a number of extremely difficult circumstances to manage that although internal school matters, also had the potential to become more publically known. In response to these extra demands on Clare, additional ‘on demand’ supervision sessions were offered and even though not used, the offer of this extra support was appreciated. Clare found that supervision helped her to step out of the role of being the ‘fixer’ and into a more thoughtful position, particularly one that had time to consider what the impact of her actions on others might be.

Supervision provided a safe and confidential space for Clare to be able to speak out without fear of being judged, or for her to feel that her staff would question her position and ability as Head Teacher. I saw my role as supervisor, not to offer solutions, or placate worries but to help Clare stay with these anxieties and to think about the situation she had brought to supervision. She recognised this process as taking her out of her comfort-zone and as someone who liked to be in control, described this as ‘massive’ and consequently encouraged

her staff to do like-wise. Hence, Clare was able to transfer what she had learnt in supervision to her staff, she emboldened them to think difficult thoughts, provide their own solutions and begun to set up more participatory systems of appraisal that would lead to more autonomous staff development.

One regular focus during Clare’s supervision was questioning whether she wanted to be a Head Teacher at all, and wondered perhaps if she would be better off returning to the classroom. Supervision gave Clare the opportunity to deal with this tension and although teaching Year 5’s was not perceived by others as the job of a Head Teacher, she later describing her decision to play in the sand with the Reception Class every Friday morning as one of the most satisfying benefits.

Additionally, the opportunity for Clare to ‘dig deeper’ during supervision reduced her levels of stress and anxiety, claiming that she slept better and acknowledged wider benefits:

*‘I would say the benefit in my private life – because I am able to talk about things and then leave them at school, whereas before I was coming home and saying to my partner ‘what do you think about this? I’ve done this’*

Clare regarded the impact of supervision to ‘be huge’ both at school and at home. Significantly, particularly since the academy trust paid for the provision, supervision provided the feeling of being valued and not judged.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/our-work/research-enterprise/supervision-service/supervision-service.aspx>



## Case Study 2 – With Kids

This case study has been shared by With Kids – a third sector organisation based in Glasgow and Edinburgh who provide Play Therapy in schools across the central belt.<sup>17</sup>

### Background

Working as a child therapist for With Kids at a primary school in Glasgow I started up monthly staff support groups following feedback from teaching staff that they were often “worried sick all weekend”, had regular sleepless nights and genuine anxiety in relation to the safety of vulnerable children in their classes. These groups were set up creatively and were viewed as an opportunity to support school staff who often felt abandoned in a very stressful, fast and chaotic job.

### Structure

The sessions are divided into two parts. The first being about self-reflection: creative activities to explore teaching staff’s own ways of working, dealing with stress, school, education, childhoods and relationships. Using the arts in this way gives the group an insight into how the creative therapies work, sparks an interest, and is a less-threatening and exposing approach, based on an awareness that teachers may feel exposed and vulnerable in this setting.

Reflecting on personal life stories supports staff to be vulnerable in a supportive environment, which in turn enabled other members to empathise, show compassion, support and advise. This enables the strengthening of relationships within the school – having the time and space to communicate

effectively and to feel that one’s voice is being heard, respected and supported.

The second half of the session provides a space to discuss and think about a particular child or incident. This is also explored creatively using props and role play. Some theories are touched upon, but this is not the focus – this is not to be a “teaching” or “training” space. Every group member has a wealth of knowledge and experience which is important to draw on.

These sessions give an opportunity for staff members to gain an insight into the difficulties they are faced with. There is a sense of respect and equality and a growing awareness of all the different roles and pressures different people have within the complex framework of the school environment.

The groups include between 4 – 12 people. It is an ‘open group’ in that it is a different mix of staff each month. This includes support staff, class teachers, probationers, principal teachers, head and depute and admin. The sessions are held once a month for an hour and a half. Nobody has to commit; it is a very relaxed approach.



<sup>17</sup> <http://www.withkids.org.uk/>



### **Complications**

The issue of confidentiality and emotional safety are consistently discussed at the start of each session. However, due to the group being “open” and a different mix of people each session, it is important to be mindful of the lines being blurred between a therapy group (which it isn’t) and a staff support / reflective group. Also, it is worth noting that none of the staff were accustomed initially to using the arts or engaging in creative activities and were often taken by surprise at the intensity this could evoke. There is no judgement and no pressure to return to the sessions, but hopefully feelings of acceptance, care and containment are experienced.

### **Conclusion**

The content of sessions and responses of teaching staff give a clear indication of the amount of stress school staff are under. The opportunity for the staff to STOP is key. A space to acknowledge feelings worries and concerns, the impact on physical well-being, and for this to be witnessed, accepted and held, prove a valuable process for staff.

The sessions provide an opportunity for the staff to feel less isolated, to feel supported, respected and valued, and to be provided with alternative ways to see things, some insights into child development, trauma and healthy attachments.







# Conclusion

Although this report only reflects a small snapshot of the views of Education staff in relation to Supervision, we believe that the findings highlighted here are reflective of the broader feeling within Education across Scotland, that structured support for the mental health and wellbeing of Education staff is lacking.

The findings show that many of those working in Education can at times find they are struggling to deal with the complexity of their pupils' lives, alongside the requirement to achieve the required academic outcomes and the subsequent workload and associated stress that comes with that.

We heard that Head Teachers are dealing with extremely high level child protection cases, cases that social workers find difficult. Yet they have no formal structure of support to help them process and deal with these cases; no-one to support them with the decisions they have to make; decisions which weigh heavy on their minds even when they leave the school gates.

We heard that teaching assistants, pupil support assistants, nurture teachers and guidance teachers are often the ones at the forefront of supporting the most vulnerable pupils, pupils with complex and often unmet needs. We also heard about the isolation which can come with being a classroom teacher in some areas, a feeling of having to go it alone and the fear and stigma associated with showing weakness or that you are struggling and need support.

**65% of respondents** talked about the mental health and wellbeing of staff in response to why they would support Supervision in Education in principle. They highlighted current levels of stress within the profession, workload and the emotional impact of working with vulnerable children and young people.

In relation to the practical issues associated with implementing Supervision,

respondents highlighted Time; Workload; Culture and Ethos; and Appropriate Staff as issues that would need to be considered and thought through.

We hope this report can go some way in shifting the conversation in Scotland about how we can strengthen support for the mental health and wellbeing of Education staff and the potential role that Professional or Reflective Supervision can contribute to this.

We want to thank everyone who responded to and got involved in the survey, thank you for sharing your experiences so candidly and truthfully.



# Our suggestions for what next

It is clear from the responses to this consultation that there is a place for Reflective or Professional Supervision within Education and the need is evident.

Ultimately, in the long run, we believe Supervision should be an entitlement within Education, universally available for those who wish to access it. This would appear to be similar to the provision available to newly qualified teachers in their probation year.

***“As a classroom teacher, Supervision is given when in your probation year through the medium of a mentor. It is an entitlement that must be met by the school, but sadly, after the probation year is over, this support is very often removed”***

For this to happen, support from the Teaching Unions would be required in order to reassess Working Time Agreements and ensure that time can be set aside so that all Education staff are able to access their entitlement. Pilots or small tests of change could establish what works, and for whom which would allow for the principles of Supervision to be embedded across Education.

Further development work will be required to formulate a Framework for Supervision in Education to ensure consistency; this should include key principles and clearly set out the parameters of the Supervision arrangement and relationship. In their book Sturt and Rowe suggest 5 steps to developing a culture of Supervision in settings where this is an unfamiliar concept – starting with Management ownership of a Supervision strategy; leading on to the development of a Supervision Policy; and

culminating in training, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>18</sup>

Further consideration of who is best placed to provide Supervision will also be required; this may look different in different schools and for different roles within the school. For example external Supervision may be required for Senior Leadership Teams but a train the trainer model might be appropriate to allow for Supervision of classroom teachers, teaching assistants etc. to be undertaken by peers, in group Supervision, by someone in another school, by a trusted manager within the school for example.

***“In my school we are working on upskilling Principal Teachers and interested staff in communication skills to support each other until we can implement a Supervision strategy. We are keen to trial group Supervision as the culture in the school might suggest this would be suitable to begin with”***

*“Some roles, such as safeguarding leads/deputies, special needs staff are likely to regularly encounter incidents of high emotional impact. These roles are perhaps suited to individual Supervision. Other roles may be better suited to group/peer Supervision as an effective use of resources”*

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18 Ibid p. 95

Lastly, a critical conversation needs to be had about the terminology of Supervision and how to avoid it being met with resistance within Education due to its unfamiliarity. As noted by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families in their booklet *‘Supporting staff wellbeing in schools’*:

**“Supervision is a core element of health service practice but has been less widely developed in schools. Pastoral care teams and specialist staff working with pupil behaviour may have established methods of providing staff with supervision, but the idea of supervision may be unfamiliar for some teachers and school staff”<sup>19</sup>**

It is Barnardo’s Scotland’s view that the term ‘Supervision’ is an established, embedded and understood process within other sectors. However, alternative terms which reflect the experience of being listened to and supported such as ‘Support and Supervision’ ‘Reflective Supervision’ or ‘Reflective Dialogue’ may be more appropriate or applicable within an Education context. It will be important that whatever terminology is used is developed and agreed by the Education profession.

As one respondent said:

**“I support a process of change, which will take a long time, as there has to be equity. Teachers are vulnerable right now so careful handling is needed to slowly lift them, and scaffold with a Supervision approach”**

A strong case was made throughout the responses for Supervision as essential for Education staff in pastoral; safeguarding and child protection roles with some arguing this should be made a priority in terms of any roll out of provision. The



National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014) already states that:

**“Practitioners from all agencies involved in child protection require high quality, consistent and accessible support and supervision. Each agency should have formal procedures in place that promote good standards of practice and support individual staff members and effective prioritisation of workloads. Senior managers should ensure supervision procedures are implemented and that staff feel supported”<sup>20</sup>**

However it does not appear that this is happening consistently across Scotland for those involved in Child Protection within Education.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.annafreud.org/media/7653/3rdanna-freud-booklet-staff-wellbeing-web-pdf-21-june.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/\(38\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/(38))



These professionals are dealing with increased levels of risk and there are serious issues around safe practice to be considered for those dealing with child protection issues who do not currently receive Supervision, this may require a more immediate response from employers in order to comply with the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014) which we are aware is currently under review.

However, it is still our view that Supervision should be available to all those working directly with children and young people within Education. Section 173 of the current National Guidance for Child Protection for Scotland 2014 states that:

***“All staff at all levels in all services, including third and private sector services, should have appropriate supervision and support, and opportunities for reflective practice from managers when they are concerned about a child or when they are involved in child protection processes”<sup>21</sup>***



All those working in Education will, in the course of their work, find themselves in situations where they are concerned about a child; this is clear from the evidence presented in this report.

***“From a pastoral perspective my team and I are dealing with disclosures of abuse, substance use, domestic violence, sexting, CSE and CCE on a frequent basis. Unlike my other frontline work I am technically responsible for 1100 children so have a massive ‘caseload’ and deal with social work issues all of the day. This is common throughout pastoral roles and therefore Supervision is vital in my view”***

We firmly believe that children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing could be vastly improved if the right support was available for the adults who care for them every day. Levels of stress within the teaching profession mean children and young people are marinating in these stressful environments when they come to school. It’s not enough to have staff trained in mental health; if their own cup is empty how can we expect them to fill up their pupils’? Happy, healthy, regulated children and young people require happy, healthy, regulated adults around them.

That is why we believe that Reflective or Professional Supervision is crucial for Education, first and foremost for the staff themselves but ultimately for the children and young people in their care.

The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, and their educational attainment, could therefore be enhanced by taking forward the following recommendations:

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21 Ibid P. 48



# Recommendations



**Supervision structures should be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency for all practitioners involved in child protection within Education in line with the National Guidance for Child Protection for Scotland 2014.**

**Consideration should be given to the development of a National Framework for Supervision in Education. Any framework should set out key principles but allow for local flexibility in terms of implementation so individual schools, clusters, or Local Authorities can allow their structures to develop based on local need and context.**



**Local and National Government and Education bodies should consider the development of Supervision structures for Education staff as part of the wider commitment within the recent Pay Deal to support and improve teacher health and wellbeing.**



# Appendix A –

## Additional research by Rachel Briggs of the University of Bristol, drawing on her Doctor of Education studies<sup>22</sup>

‘What About Me?’ Exploring Teachers’ Psychological Wellbeing and Perceptions of Using Dialogic Social Support to Enhance It When Teaching Pupils Experiencing Vulnerability and/or Trauma.

### Introduction

Having spent many years as a primary school teacher, leader and trainer, I firmly believe that dialogic support, akin to supervision, has the potential to support teachers’ psychological wellbeing (PW) and continuing professional development when teaching pupils experiencing vulnerabilities and/or trauma (PEV&T). Although in principle, supervision should be transferrable from one sector to another, interventions may fail, if, for example, they are not understood, not needed or wanted, not implemented appropriately or if there are strong indicators that contextual factors are likely to undermine their chances of success. My research therefore had three main aims:

- 1) To explore teachers’ exposure to PEV&T and the impact this had on their PW
- 2) To gain information on perceptions of accessing dialogic support (supervision or restorative coaching) to enhance PW and to understand potential barriers to implementation
- 3) To make recommendations related to improving teachers’ PW when teaching PEV&T.

My research involved teachers (n=10) with and without additional safeguarding and/or inclusion responsibilities from

mainstream, state primary schools in south-west England. I used questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather data.

### Summary of key findings:

- All participants had considerable exposure to PEV&T and heard about their pupils’ situations from multiple sources (including the pupils). Most disclosures were not ‘made by appointment’ but came at unpredictable times. This created many practical difficulties as participants were likely to be involved in another task as their primary focus, often involving the learning needs of a whole class, which left them with no recovery or processing time.
- Those with specific safeguarding/inclusion roles often heard the most explicit details. However, class teachers were more consistently immersed in witnessing their pupils’ suffering or vulnerabilities. All participants, regardless of role, were experiencing symptoms associated with ‘compassion stress injury’<sup>23</sup> (CSI, an umbrella term for the concepts of stress from indirect trauma, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma). The most prevalent symptoms were: negative emotions,

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<sup>22</sup> Email contact: [rb16454@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:rb16454@bristol.ac.uk)

<sup>23</sup> Russell, M and Cowan, J. (2018) The Making of Compassion Stress Injury. <https://www.mdpi.com/2078-1547/9/1/7>

particularly sadness, frustration, anger and guilt; intrusive thoughts and dreams; hypervigilance and depletion of personal resources. Although CSI was a concept that most were previously unaware of, all felt it applied to teachers and that associated emotional demands should be acknowledged and risks reduced

- Participants also experienced reduced PW as PEV&T often exhibited challenging behaviour which decreased feelings of competence and control. Such behaviour increased demands on their time and emotions, as for example, they had to fill out behaviour logs or spend break or lunchtime dealing with incidents. Physical safety was also an issue and some participants reported being hit, kicked, bitten or punched, while others had been threatened or had chairs thrown at them. They were also distressed, frustrated or angry when PEV&T spoiled lessons and disrupted the learning of others, or were unkind to them.
- Despite having a desire to support their PEV&T, participants often felt unable to do so. Reasons included: lack of relevant knowledge, skills, training and/or resources; reduction of external services to refer to; excessive workload and conflicting demands, specifically related to a performative culture which values attainment of academic targets above welfare needs
- The performative culture was a key factor impacting on teachers' PW as they were concerned that failure to meet targets would lead to punitive action, regardless of context. Some participants had seen colleagues or peers in other schools lose their jobs as a result which contributed to a 'culture of fear'. This left them looking over their shoulders, wondering when it would be their turn. As progress towards targets was monitored and involved regular scrutiny of their practice, to avoid negative consequences, they felt compelled to focus on academic outcomes, often involving meaningless tasks that were of no benefit to pupils' holistic development. This was not aligned with the reasons they went into teaching and for some this caused moral stress as they were acting against their values
- Perceptions of a supportive headteacher/principal reduced feelings associated with a culture of fear. However, most participants did not feel this support and a lack of trust meant that they hid their negative emotions and did not want to disclose any difficulties or struggles for fear of further scrutiny or consequences. For some, this resulted in isolation, a lack of collegiality and reduced feelings of belonging or worth. For some though, collegiality at peer level increased as they were united in fear against their senior leader(s) which created a sense of 'them and us'. Participants in this situation presented as being the most stressed
- Whilst working with PEV&T was mostly reported as decreasing participant's PW in the current climate, all had experienced compassion satisfaction at times, but this was often on reflection and in the longer term; however, time for reflection and focusing on positives was not a priority. This is unfortunate as reflection was repeatedly raised as beneficial and helped with seeing things from a different perspective; spotting patterns in their own and/or pupils' behaviour and actions and realising that they could not solve every problem alone
- Only two participants received support with reflection through formal supervision but once all others understood what it was, they thought teachers would benefit from, and should receive such support (although they did not like the term as it conjured up thoughts of surveillance)
- All but one felt that the supervisor should not be a colleague and definitely not a line manager. Reasons were given for this and whilst for many it was a trust issue related to the



performative culture, a couple were keen to stress that for them, this was not a factor. Most did not want to burden colleagues or take up their time. Participants also commented that colleagues may not have the requisite skills and some felt that a colleague would not maintain confidentiality (although for some, this was also a concern with an external supervisor)

- Almost all felt it would be more beneficial to have a supervisor from a teaching background as they would understand the education system, its pressures and the challenges of being in a classroom. They did however note that any such supervisor would need additional skills, knowledge and training. If not from a teaching background, they felt that a supervisor from another sector would be preferable to having no supervision. However, they were very clear that this person must have a good understanding of the impact of PEV&T in the classroom and the pressures of the education system. They wanted supervision to be restorative but also developmental and relevant to their context and multi-faceted roles and responsibilities
- Many other practical issues, such as when and where supervision would take place were raised. The most significant factors however, were expense and purse-string holders not recognising the need for, or benefits of supervision. There was also discussion, but no agreement, as to whether supervision should be compulsory or voluntary. Some felt that without endorsement or support at government level, the use of supervision would not become widespread. Others felt that anything that was imposed from above (whether it be government, trust/local authority or senior leader level) might be viewed with suspicion and would be another way of monitoring them, which they felt there was already too much of.

## Conclusion

There is a growing body of research which positively correlates pupil health and educational outcomes with teacher wellbeing and competence. As supervision has developmental and restorative functions, it was seen by my participants as a highly desirable method for supporting them when working with PEV&T. Although supervision may appear to be an expensive intervention, it could help existing teachers to stay well and in the profession. Costs would therefore be offset by reduced recruitment, training and sickness absence costs, which are particularly impacting on areas serving communities with society's most vulnerable populations. Although problems with implementing supervision have been identified, these should not be insurmountable and it must be remembered that whilst teachers have a duty of care to their pupils, teachers must also be cared for when they are doing so.

## Main recommendations:

- The culture in education needs to change from one of blame and fear to one of collegiality, where teachers can be open and honest about their development and support needs.
- Greater recognition and esteem should be given to the 'caring' work that teachers do. They should not just be judged on academic outcomes which fail to account for context, or held responsible for societal issues that are beyond their control.
- In line with the Health and Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards<sup>24</sup>, the term 'workload', which is usually measured in hours, should be replaced with 'demands' as this can more readily include the emotional weight and context of teachers' work. 'Compassion stress injury' and associated concepts should also be recognised as relevant to teachers' PW

24 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>



- Teachers should have regular access to supervision which is appropriate to the multi-faceted nature of their roles and responsibilities. As teachers, including leaders may not be familiar with supervision, information on its purpose and how to be a supervisee is likely to be needed. A new definition of supervision appropriate for educators which clearly distinguishes it from performance management style appraisal might also be helpful. My working definition is:

***“Supervision in education is a non-judgemental, collaborative process where education practitioners are supported to reflect on their practice, relationships, the emotional demands of their work and the impact of these and the wider education system on their psychological wellbeing. Through dialogue, new meaning emerges and learning is co-created, forming new pathways for action which can contribute to best practice, effective relationships, enhanced wellbeing and professional and personal development”***

- When providing supervision for educators, it is important to remember that teachers are not clinicians or social workers and whilst supervision should have therapeutic benefits, it is not the same as counselling. Suitable training needs to be available so that, in time, those from a teaching background can develop supervisory skills. Supervisors from other sectors may also benefit from additional training to increase their knowledge of the education system
- More research is needed on the relationship between occupational stress, CSI and compassion satisfaction and the use of supervision for all education practitioners, regardless of role.

# Appendix B –

## Blurb from the beginning of the Survey

### What do we mean by Supervision?

At Barnardo's Scotland we are committed to improving the lives of the children and young people we work with. Central to this work is ensuring children, young people and those who work with them are supported with their mental health and wellbeing. We are currently interested in the role that Professional Supervision could have in Education to support the mental health of Education staff. We recently published a discussion paper which you [can read here](#).

Over the next few months we are consulting more widely to see what others working within Education think about this issue.

All information you provide will remain anonymous and be used to help compile a follow up paper as part of our influencing work in Scotland. This survey will take around 5-10 minutes to complete and you can exit the survey at any time. If you would like to contact us about this survey, you can do so at [SCPpolicy@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:SCPpolicy@barnardos.org.uk)

### Thank you for your support!

Throughout this survey, when we reference Supervision we mean dedicated time, set aside regularly, for critical reflection where you can discuss and talk through the impact your work is having on you – this should be separate to anything related to performance management. These kinds of practices are used within Social Work, Clinical Practice and the Third Sector.

Supervision is a two-way process which is defined as “a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker(s) in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives” (Tony Morrison, 2001).

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This paper is the second in a suite of materials highlighting key issues relating to the core principles of trauma-informed practice in an education context.





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