

Creative Art's Therapists Welcome Launch of Pilot Mental Health Counselling Service in Primary Schools

The Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists (IACAT) has warmly welcomed the launch of a 5 million euro pilot mental health counselling service in primary schools by Education Minister Norma Foley. The programme will commence in September 2023.

Angie O'Brien, IACAT Chair commented "We have been advocating for such a programme for a number of years and are delighted that the Minister has allocated funding for a pilot scheme. In our experience early intervention can be the difference between a problem becoming a crisis. Primary school based arts therapies can address a wide range of social, emotional, behavioural and mental health problems and support the emotional wellbeing of children. Mental health is an educational issue."

Professor Paul Downes, Professor of Psychology of Education DCU commented:

"This is a hugely progressive development to provide one to one specialist emotional counsellors and therapists on site in primary schools as a national pilot. This is long overdue and consistent with international best practice".

"There is no logical reason why this would not be extended to secondary schools."

"Expressive, non-verbal and sensory-based therapeutic approaches offered by Creative Arts Therapists are developmentally appropriate , child focussed and effective ways to address the mental health needs of children in primary schools."

The Minister said that she would consult with education partners, experts in the field and international best practice and would explore various models before deciding on the nature of the pilot programme. There would be further learning from the pilot which would roll out in all types and sizes of schools.

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Meeting to celebrate/ welcome Minister (for Education) Norma Foley's announcement of a national pilot counselling and therapies programme in schools:
Art Therapists Gerry Lee and Aimee O'Neill, Prof Paul Downes DCU, Children's Ombudsman Niall Muldoon, and Drama therapist Tracey Costello