

Chaplaincy – the facts

ACCESS ministries welcomes the current debate about the way Chaplaincy is conducted in government schools, while emphasising the importance of a constructive, well-informed debate based on facts. With these principles in mind we provide the following facts about Chaplaincy.

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About Chaplaincy

What is the National School Chaplaincy Program?

The National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) was initiated by the Federal Government in 2006 to support schools and their communities to establish school Chaplaincy services or to enhance existing Chaplaincy services. Government and non-government schools and their communities were eligible to apply for up to \$20,000 per annum to establish school Chaplaincy services or to enhance existing Chaplaincy services.

Chaplaincy assists schools and their communities to support the spiritual wellbeing of their students and can include support and guidance about ethics, values, relationships, spirituality and religious issues; the provision of pastoral care; and enhancing engagement with the broader community. The nature of Chaplaincy services and the religious affiliation of the Chaplain is a matter decided by the local school and its community. Chaplaincy is intended to complement and not replace other services already provided such as counsellors, youth workers, social workers and psychologists, while having clear differences from these services, namely a focus on spiritual and religious advice, support and guidance.

What do Chaplains do?

Key tasks vary depending on the needs of schools and their communities, but can include assisting school counsellors and staff in the delivery of student welfare services; supporting students to explore their spirituality; providing guidance about spiritual, values and ethical matters; and facilitating access to the helping agencies in the community, both religious-based and secular.

Chaplains deal with a wide range of issues and most frequently with behaviour management and social relationship issues such as anger, peer relationships, loneliness and bullying. Family relationship issues are commonly discussed with Chaplains. A second group of issues has to do with the development of the self: sense of purpose, self-esteem, and mental health. A third group of issues is the involvement of students in the community: issues of social inclusion and racism. In many places, Chaplains work to integrate Aboriginal students and immigrant groups into the school community. Many Chaplains are involved in the support of students 'at risk'.

According to an assessment 1626 schools in 2009 Chaplains divide their time as follows:

- 30% informal or structured pastoral care of students
- 19% classroom activities and needs-based programs, for example behaviour management
- 7% informal school activities such as breakfast program
- 9% the pastoral care of families and staff
- 8% school events, camps and crises
- 8% with welfare staff and connecting with agencies in the referral of students
- 6% networking and fundraising
- 11% professional development, administrative work and miscellaneous activities

The assessment also found that:

- 82% of Chaplains had run needs-based programs such as grief or behaviour management
- 79% of Chaplains said they had made off-site visits to parents and care-givers
- 73% had led in school events or special ceremonies, and
- 49% had participated in school camps.

How effective are Chaplains?

A 2009 a national study of Chaplains in government schools undertaken for the National School Chaplaincy Association by Dr Philip Hughes, Edith Cowan University and Prof Margaret Sims, University of New England, looked at 1626 school, representing 85 per cent of government schools with Chaplains.

When asked about the most important contribution Chaplains had made, most Principals wrote of how they provided pastoral care in a non-judgemental way. Secondly they spoke of modelling and teaching moral values and thirdly in creating and nurturing ties with the community.

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Principals were also asked to assess on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being excellent, how effective Chaplains were in various areas of their work. The following scores were provided:

- 8.6 for providing an opportunity for students to talk through issues
- 8.6 for offering support to students with significant problems
- 8.5 for offering support to students in special risk categories
- 8.1 for encouraging moral values and responsibility
- 8.0 for contributing to the morale of the school community
- 7.9 for improving peer relationships
- 7.8 for building social inclusion and community in the school
- 7.3 for changing behaviour in relation to bullying and harassment
- 7.1 for linking the school with the wider community
- 7.0 for improving relationships between students and their families

In many schools there had been crises such as the death of a student and in such instances the Chaplain had had a special and valued role. In 2009 Chaplains worked alongside students, staff, families and communities who suffered in the Victorian bushfires.

What guidelines do Chaplains follow?

Chaplains are required to sign a code of conduct provided by the Federal Government (see attachment A), which contains among other points:

- Respect the rights of parents/guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children is in line with their own convictions.
- While recognising that an individual Chaplain will in good faith express views and articulate values consistent with his or her denomination or religious beliefs, a Chaplain should not take advantage of his or her privileged position to proselytise for that denomination or religious belief.
- Will not perform professional or religious services for which they are not qualified.

Chaplains work as part of the school, under the direction of the Principal. The Chaplain is required to follow all school policies and procedures. **ACCESS ministries** Chaplains are reviewed annually in consultation with the Principal, and the Principal has recourse to submit a Chaplain to a review process should they not be fulfilling their duties. **ACCESS ministries** Chaplains are required to report suspected cases of child physical and sexual abuse to the Child Protection Victoria agency.

Are Chaplains trained and accredited?

To gain endorsement as an **ACCESS ministries** Chaplain applicants are required to have a Bachelor degree in Theology/Ministry, Education or Pastoral Care/Counselling, coupled with experience in one of the other applicable areas. **ACCESS ministries** Chaplains must also complete several other steps before becoming endorsed:

- Provide written endorsement from a Church Minister
- Provide a working with children check
- Provide a national police records check
- Provide two reference checks
- Provide a 500 word reflection on Chaplaincy within a school environment after meeting with two **ACCESS ministries** Chaplains
- Successfully complete an interview with an **ACCESS ministries** endorsement panel

By what process are Chaplains allowed in schools?

The following principles are applied by the Federal Government.

- Participation by schools and their communities is voluntary.
- It is not compulsory for students to participate. Schools must ensure that students and parents understand the voluntary nature of the Program and have the option of whether to utilise the services of a school Chaplain.

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- There must be extensive consultation with, and support from, the broader school community, particularly parents, about the demand for and role of a school Chaplain.
- The choice of Chaplaincy services, including the religious affiliation, is a decision for the school community.
- To receive funding, schools and their communities must engage a school Chaplain/secular Pastoral Care Worker and demonstrate how the services provided by the school Chaplain/secular Pastoral Care Worker achieve the outcomes required by the Program annually.
- Schools and their communities are expected to contribute to the costs of engaging a school Chaplain.
- Funding under this Program can only be used for expenditure that directly relates to the provision of Chaplaincy services.
- Funding will be continued until December 2011, with disbursements subject to meeting the conditions of the funding agreement.
- To facilitate access to this Program, partnerships with current arrangements for providing Chaplaincy services in state/territory and non-government schools are encouraged.

What Chaplaincy services does ACCESS ministries operate?

ACCESS ministries only operates Chaplaincy services in Victoria. It currently has 211 Chaplains placed across 281 Victorian state schools, including 168 primary school, 92 secondary schools, six specialist schools, and 15 prep-to year 12 schools.

Issues most commonly dealt with by **ACCESS ministries'** Chaplains include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • 19% Social/peer issues | • 6% Discipline issues |
| • 17% Family issues | • 4% Bullying issues |
| • 13% Study / school issues | • 1% Substance abuse issues |
| • 8% Mental health issues | • 1% Abuse issues |
| • 7% Grief loss issues | • 1% Accommodation issues |
| • 7% Self-esteem issues | • 1% General health issues |
| • 6% Anger issues | • 1% Sexuality issues |

Recent controversies

What is proselytising?

Proselytising means converting or attempting to convert someone from one religion, belief, or opinion to another. SRI forbids proselytising. SRI is teaching children the tenets and values of a religion, not seeking to convert them to believe in that religion.

Did ACCESS ministries claim it was seeking to convert children in a 2008 speech?

No. However, **ACCESS ministries** accepts that some parts of the 2008 speech could have better emphasised that **ACCESS ministries** does not and never has condoned proselytising in schools. **ACCESS ministries** understands how people may have interpreted some of the speech otherwise, creating concern around our intentions in schools. This was not our intention.

All that was meant by the speech was that **ACCESS ministries** has an opportunity to teach children what Christians believe through the SRI program and in the case of Chaplaincy, to live out the compassion and care of Jesus. It was not advocating proselytising. **ACCESS ministries** forbids proselytising within schools and we continue to respect the context in which we serve the school community and we honour the privilege that we have in being in schools.

What ensures proselytising does not occur?

There have been no reported cases of **ACCESS ministries'** Chaplains proselytising in schools. The Federal Government has a code of conduct which Chaplains must sign, which forbids proselytising by Chaplains. **ACCESS ministries** has a clear policy also forbidding proselytising in schools. **ACCESS ministries** has clear reporting structures and will immediately investigate any inappropriate activity identified by a school and will take the appropriate action. **ACCESS ministries** is reviewing its policies and processes to ensure they are operating properly. In 2011 the Federal Government conducted an investigation into **ACCESS**

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ministries and found no evidence that **ACCESS ministries** had tried to convert students in breach of government guidelines.

Is Chaplaincy being challenged in the High Court?

A parent in Queensland is challenging the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) in the High Court. The case relates to the separation of church and state in government schools especially when it applies to staffing and teaching. **ACCESS ministries** Chaplaincy program operates under the Federal Government's National Chaplaincy in Schools Program. **ACCESS ministries** always operates within the legislation and would abide by any changes to the NSCP.

Is it appropriate to have religious people providing care, advice, comfort and support?

ACCESS ministries Chaplains are trained to respond to the diverse spiritual and emotional concerns experienced by students, staff and families within the school community. **ACCESS ministries** Chaplains aim to address a person's present needs while being respectful of their unique circumstances, frameworks of meaning and spiritual expression.

Are Chaplains untrained to deal with the issues being brought to them?

ACCESS ministries Chaplains do not work as counsellors but provide pastoral care to individuals and groups by addressing the connections between physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Chaplains are trained in the provision of pastoral care through initial training upon their commencement as a Chaplain and ongoing professional development. This training stresses the importance of Chaplains referring members of their school community on to other professional assistance as appropriate.

Are some Chaplains acting beyond their expertise?

ACCESS ministries Chaplains are trained to stay within their role and to respect the strength of working as part of a multi-disciplinary school wellbeing team.

Are some Chaplains failing to refer issues?

ACCESS ministries Chaplains are trained to refer situations on to more appropriate professionals when presented with issues beyond their job brief. School Principals, **ACCESS ministries** and Chaplains work together to ensure Chaplains continue working within appropriate professional boundaries.

Does ACCESS ministries dominate Chaplaincy services?

No. **ACCESS ministries** provides Chaplaincy services to school communities upon the request of the school council and leadership. Therefore, a Chaplain's presence reflects the desire of the school community for such a role to be in operation. **ACCESS ministries** is one of many providers of school Chaplaincy services, but has the longest history and the highest quality of Chaplaincy service provision within Victorian state schools.

Is ACCESS ministries inappropriately using government funding?

ACCESS ministries is only allowed to use government funding for the purposes for which it was provided – Chaplaincy or Special Religious Instruction. Government funding contributes less than half of **ACCESS ministries'** operational budget. **ACCESS ministries** receives other funding through its own commercial enterprises and fund raising activities and can use this other funding at its own discretion.

Attachment A: Chaplaincy code of conduct under the NSCP

Following is a Code of Conduct for school Chaplains engaged under the Program. This document must be signed by the school Chaplain before the school Chaplain commences any Chaplaincy services under the Program. School Chaplains who refuse to sign the code will not be permitted to be part of the Program.

Code of Conduct

For the provision of Chaplaincy services at (school name)

The school Chaplain will provide pastoral care, general religious and personal advice, and comfort and support to all students and staff, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

The school Chaplain's role is to support school students and the wider school community in a range of ways, such as assisting students in exploring their spirituality; providing guidance on religious, values and ethical matters; helping school counsellors and staff in offering welfare services and support in cases of bereavement, family breakdown or other crisis and loss situations.

In providing these services, the school Chaplain must sign and observe the following Code of Conduct.

The school Chaplain will:

1. Recognise, respect and affirm the authority of the school principal and/or school governing body, and will work in consultation with them.
2. Respect the rights of parents/guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children is in line with their own convictions.
3. Adhere to all relevant Commonwealth, state or territory policy and legislation, including that concerning privacy and confidentiality.
4. Contribute to a supportive, inclusive and caring learning environment within the school.
5. Chaplains should avoid unnecessary physical contact with a student, recognising however that there may be some circumstances where physical contact may be appropriate such as where the student is injured or distraught.
6. Not put him or herself, or allow him or herself, to be placed in a compromising situation, recognising that there are circumstances where confidentiality may be sought by the child.
7. Where information is provided about the support and services available in community groups, including religious groups and in the broader community, this information must be accurate and impartial.
8. Act as a reference point for students, staff and other members of the school community on religious, spiritual issues, values, human relationships and wellbeing issues. This includes providing support for grief, family breakdown and other crisis situations. In doing this, a school Chaplain will:
 - a) respect, accept and be sensitive to other people's views, values and beliefs that may be different from his or her own;
 - b) uphold a parent/guardian and individual's right to choose their beliefs and values;
 - c) actively discourage any form of harassment or discrimination on the grounds of religious ideology or doctrine;
 - d) under certain circumstances, refer a child to a Chaplain who is in accordance with their own beliefs and values.
9. While recognising that an individual Chaplain will in good faith express views and articulate values consistent with his or her denomination or religious beliefs, a Chaplain should not take advantage of his or her privileged position to proselytise for that denomination or religious belief.
10. Will not perform professional or religious services for which they are not qualified.
11. Adhere to the Guidelines of the National School Chaplaincy Program.

Use of Information on this form and privacy

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Information on this form is collected pursuant to the administration of the National School Chaplaincy Program. Information on this form can be disclosed to other parties without your consent where authorised or required by law.

Acknowledgement by school Chaplain

I understand and agree to the terms of this Code of Conduct.

.....
Signature of school Chaplain

.....
Witness (should be the school principal or his/her delegate)

Breaches of the Code of Conduct

As school Chaplains hold special positions of trust, they must be accountable for their actions. In addition, the funding recipient and the school principal must take all reasonable steps to ensure that school Chaplains comply with the Code of Conduct. In the funding application the school principal should outline the measures they will put in place to ensure compliance with the code by the school Chaplain.

If there is an actual or perceived breach of the Code of Conduct, the school Chaplain must immediately cease providing Chaplaincy services. The funding recipient is required to notify the Department immediately it becomes aware of such a situation. In such circumstances, school Chaplains must not continue to provide any services under the Program unless the Department gives its written agreement for the Chaplaincy services to continue.

In the event of breach of the code of conduct by the school Chaplain, the Department may require some or all of the funding provided for the Chaplaincy services to be repaid to the Commonwealth as set out in the funding agreement.