

Chaplains in State Schools 200610

2006.10. Chaplains in State Schools

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To the Federal Minister for Education we made the following main points re[garding] the proposal to install Christian chaplains in government schools:

- This political initiative violates the separation of State and religion.
- It is based on the stated belief that schools are “anti-religious” and that the Commonwealth must intervene to close the “gaping hole in religious education”. This violates the law by which State schools must provide only secular education.
- The Chaplains are to act as counsellors and crisis managers. While some chaplains may help in the absence of school Welfare Officers, this very important role demands professional impartiality and should be performed by qualified specialists.
- The Council for Christian Education in Schools, which trains chaplains, states: “A school chaplain in a state school operates as a Christian in public ministry on behalf of the Christian Community” and “it is understood that the chaplain represents the body of Christ on earth, the Church.”
- In our multicultural, multifaith society such a chaplain may not gain the necessary trust of students who follow another belief system or are secular.
- The proposal assumes that, (a) teachers in State schools are incapable of imparting ethical values and standards, and (b) that Christianity has a monopoly on proper values. We dispute both assumptions.
- Humanists advocate the teaching of comparative belief systems to engender understanding and tolerance of diversity and to prepare students for a harmonious interaction in our multicultural society. (We quoted a similar view expressed by the Rev. Dr. Bob Fraser – letter to *The Age* editor.)
- We submit that secular education of morals and ethics should be part of personal and social relationships classes as a core subject. Young people should learn to bear responsibility for their own actions rather than passing it on to a higher authority. They should learn to give meaning to their own life. Universal human values of liberty, equality, tolerance and respect for others should be taught along with personal and social obligations. Clear critical thinking should be encouraged and practiced in discussions.

This important subject should be taught by a specially trained and independent teacher and be free from sectarian dogma.