



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Our Ref MC11-010634

Mr Harry Gardner
72 Heathwood Street
RINGWOOD EAST VIC 3135

Dear Mr Gardner

Thank you for your email of 14 September 2011 to the Hon Peter Garrett MP, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, about the National School Chaplaincy Program. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations conducted a review which commenced in 2009, that considered how the program can best support schools and their communities in the future. The public consultation phase of this review closed on 18 March 2011 with more than 7000 responses from schools, stakeholders and the broader community.

The outcome of the review was announced by the Minister on 7 September 2011. The Program will be strengthened with the introduction of minimum qualifications, benchmark standards for service providers, improvements to the complaints management system, and school communities will be able to choose to employ either a chaplain or a secular student welfare worker. These changes, along with the re-naming of the scheme to the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program, will commence as of 2012.

In relation to the administration of the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program, schools can choose to employ a chaplain or student welfare worker directly, or they may wish to work with program providers to employ an appropriate worker. In order to assist schools who wish to work with a chaplaincy provider (such as those you have mentioned) or with a secular provider of student welfare workers, the Department will be providing information on its website about organisations who have indicated their availability to provide this service. The choice of provider is a matter for the school.

The nature of chaplaincy and student welfare services to be provided, including whether a chaplain or secular welfare worker is employed, is a matter to be decided by school communities, following broad consultation. The Australian Government believes that the Program must be flexible enough to provide support for all students, irrespective of their religious faiths and beliefs, in accordance with the wishes of an individual school.

The National School Chaplaincy Program is one of many successful initiatives that have been effective in supporting schools to provide for the wellbeing of school students. It is important to note that the Program is voluntary and school communities have supported successful applications. The purpose of the Program is to enhance students' overall wellbeing, not to impose any religious beliefs or persuade an individual toward a particular set of religious beliefs.