

Students need school counsellors, not disciple makers

By admin

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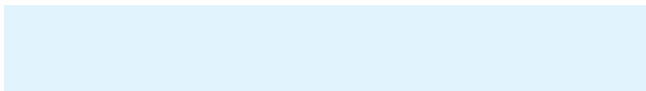


Kelly Hockley[/caption]

Despite cuts in other areas, the Federal Government has announced a \$222 million increase in funding for the controversial National School Chaplaincy Programme. [Kelly Hockley](#) says this money should have gone to qualified school counsellors, especially after Access Ministries Dr Evonne Paddison's comment about this giving them an open door to go into schools and "make disciples".

In 2006, The Howard Government announced The [National School Chaplaincy Programme](#). Howard claimed that it would fill a significant gap in the services available to school students. The programme was introduced as voluntary and aimed at assisting schools and their communities to support the spiritual well being of students. Howard's Government provided \$90 million of funding initially into the programme and successively gave it another huge boost of \$165 million.

Mr Howard told John Laws in an interview in 2006:



"I am not on some crusade...Religion is a personal thing...I don't ram it down people's throats."

When the Rudd Government came into power, it vowed to honour the programmes funding and declared that it would be revised and expanded to include secular counsellors but only if suitable religious chaplains could not be attained by schools.

In Australia's recent budget, Treasurer Wayne Swan announced a massive \$222 million of tax payers' money would be allocated to the programme. The minister for Education, Peter Garrett, said the funding would provide for the 2,700 schools that already have access to a school chaplain and will make room for 1,000 more schools to gain access to the programme.

He claims the "...funding will target schools in regional, remote and disadvantaged locations". He goes on to say that the assistance included support and guidance about ethics, values, relationships, and spirituality and religious issues.

Unlike teachers and school counsellors, there are no compulsory educational qualifications that need to be met by chaplains that wish to work in schools. Before filling the position, school chaplains are required to sign a code of conduct. They are not allowed to push religion in Australian schools.

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Access Ministries Evonne Paddison next to some potential disciples[/caption]

Questions have been raised to why Australian schools need this programme at all and, in many people's eyes, it is seen as a waste of taxpayer's money. Critics have claimed that chaplains have no place in public schools and that qualified school counsellors are better equipped to address the issues facing our students, rather than just trained religious volunteers.

It could be argued that a Chaplaincy programme which is faith based on ideas from over 2,000 years ago, would be out of touch with the youth of today.

How can it be possible that religious chaplains can keep open minded when students and parents come from such a diverse range of backgrounds? How are they expected to stay objective when confronted with such issues such as suicide and sexuality without being tempted to transfer their own beliefs and values onto the students?

We have seen over many years in Australia how unprincipled religious organisations can be and how children have been at risk to some individuals who have abused their positions of trust.

It has also been said that the programme could divide school communities and lead to anti-discrimination actions.

Even Australia's Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, has admitted that she doesn't believe in God,

yet her Government continues to fund hundreds of millions of dollars into this religious programme for our schools instead of using qualified counsellors.

We only have to look at the recent events in Victoria to see that this programme is flawed.

The religious organisation, Access Ministries, provide Chaplains to 280 of Victoria's school's and 96 per cent of special religious education classes. The organisation has been accused of breaching Federal Guidelines which forbid it trying to convert children to their religious ways. Access Ministries chief executive, Dr Evonne Paddison, [spoke at](#) The Anglican Evangelical Conference in 2008.

She said:

"We have a god given open door to children and young people with the gospel. Our Federal and state Governments allow us to take the Christian faith into our schools, we need to go and make disciples."

Federal Education minister, Peter Garrett has hit back promising that the matter will be investigated by his department.

How can we be sure that what Evonne Paddison preached at the conference is not what is happening in our schools? Can we feel confident that the school chaplains are sticking to the code of conduct and Federal Guidelines and not turning our children into one of their "disciples"?

This is a very touchy topic, but in light of recent incidents it needs to be thoroughly looked into and investigated by our Government or there could be negative outcomes for many of Australia's next generation.