



The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP

Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth

MC11-009978

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

24 OCT 2011



Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 25 August 2011, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, concerning a petition from a group of citizens regarding the National School Chaplaincy Program.

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 at both a school and individual student level and that school communities have supported successful funding applications following broad school community consultation. 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.

The 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* states, 'Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. Schools share this responsibility with students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers.'

In supporting these goals, the Australian Government announced in November 2009, that all schools already participating in the National School Chaplaincy Program would receive further funding at maintained rates, to allow services to continue to the end of 2011. The Government confirmed in the recent 2011–2012 Federal Budget, further funding of \$222 million for the National School Chaplaincy Program. This will support up to an additional 1000 schools from 2012 and enable all eligible schools currently funded under the Program to be extended to 2014. The additional 1000 places include schools in disadvantaged, rural and remote communities.

In line with the budget announcement, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has finalised the 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.

After consideration of the review, I announced changes to the Program on 7 September 2011. The Program will be strengthened with the introduction of minimum qualifications, benchmark standards for service providers and improvements to the complaints management system and school communities will be able to choose to employ either a chaplain or 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 in 2012.

Further information on the National School Chaplaincy Program is available on the Program website at www.deewr.gov.au/schoolchaplaincy. Alternatively, my media release can be viewed at www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/garrett/media/releases/pages/article_110907_102159.aspx.

Thank you for bringing these citizens' concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Peter Garrett