

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2008-09 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome 2

DEEWR Question No. EW673_09

Senator Allison asked on 4 June 2008, EEWL Hansard page 62.

Question

Chaplaincy Program

Is the *Shine* program appropriate for chaplains or schools to deliver as part of NSCP funded activity?

Answer

Section 5.7 of the *National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP)* guidelines states:

"Funds are provided for activities aimed at achieving the Programme objectives. Funding can only be used for purposes that are directly related to the provision of chaplaincy services in the school for which funds are provided."

The objectives of the program, as stated at 1.3 are:

"The objectives of the National School Chaplaincy Program are to assist schools and their communities to provide greater pastoral care, general religious and personal advice and comfort to all students and staff."

The range of activities which are appropriate for a chaplain include:

- general religious and personal advice, and providing comfort and support to students and staff;
- assisting the school to create an environment of cooperation and respect, and promoting diversity including the range of religious affiliations;
- 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.

The NSCP does not prescribe specific activities that a chaplain can or cannot undertake while undertaking the role of chaplain. Each chaplain must, however, sign a Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct covers behaviours and aspects of the chaplain's role and indicates the standards expected of the chaplain in delivering services funded under the program.

Programs such as *Shine*, which are aimed at supporting students and their wellbeing, can form an appropriate element of the delivery of chaplaincy services. As far as the Department has been able to ascertain, no NSCP funding is, or has been, used to directly purchase the program for delivery in government schools. We have found, however, that some NSCP funded chaplains are involved in the delivery of this program.

Monitoring visits undertaken by NSCP staff have indicated that schools use their chaplains in a variety of roles. The activities include, but are not limited to:

- participating in breakfast clubs;

- assisting with, or facilitating, the delivery of externally developed programs;
- arranging food packages for needy children;
- helping children adjust to school;
- dealing with troubled students; and
- providing support to the school wellbeing team.

A number of Queensland state schools conduct the *Shine* Program, usually through the school's chaplaincy services. There are no state government education funds provided to this organisation. State schools may, however, allocate individual school funds to support the delivery of programs such as *Shine*.

Students in Queensland State schools must have parental permission to be involved in any program run through chaplaincy services.

Education Queensland has examined the program and did not find any specific issues relating to content or delivery. They believe the program content contributes to the building of self confidence, self esteem and basic decision making skills in vulnerable girls.

Like Education Queensland, this Department does not specifically endorse externally developed programs such as *Shine*. However, we do not consider that any breach of the NSCP guidelines would arise from the delivery of *Shine* in schools by NSCP funded chaplains, nor any other reason why the Department would wish to discourage or proscribe the program.

While the program is designed to be delivered by a person with connections to a church, the program has no content directed at proselytising or evangelising.

The Department believes that school principals, schools and their communities are best placed to determine if *Shine*, or any other program, would be of benefit to their students. It is a matter for the principal and local school community to make judgements on such matters. We believe that any potential risks are managed effectively through existing controls, which include the school processes for introducing optional/external programs, and the chaplaincy Code of Conduct.