



Discussion Paper on the National School Chaplaincy Program

Submission by The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA)

About ISCA

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is the peak national body covering the independent schools sector. It comprises the eight State and Territory Associations of Independent Schools. Through these Associations, ISCA represents a sector with 1,090 schools and around 550,000 students, accounting for 15 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with larger and smaller Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Seventh Day Adventist and Presbyterian schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other risk factors.

Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered with the relevant state or territory education authority. Most independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example the Lutheran system. Systemic schools account for 16 per cent of schools in the independent sector.

Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for 10 per cent of the independent sector's enrolments. These schools have been included in the figures above.



Introduction

1. The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is pleased to have this opportunity to make a submission in response to the Discussion Paper on the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP).
2. ISCA welcomed the funding made available by the Australian Government through the establishment of the NSCP in 2007 to support the important work provided through chaplaincy and pastoral care services in schools and the role these services play in developing strong school communities.
3. The Discussion Paper notes that chaplains are provided to 467 independent schools in every state and territory in Australia under the National School Chaplaincy Program. Independent schools funded under the NSCP embrace the full diversity of the independent sector in Australia and include primary schools, combined primary/secondary schools, secondary schools, co-educational schools, single gender schools, and metropolitan, regional and remote schools.
4. The independent schools funded under the NSCP represent 45.6 per cent of independent schools in Australia. Independent schools represent 17.4 per cent of all schools funded under the NSCP nationally; an allocation that is broadly in line with the sector's enrolment share. The total funding to independent schools under the NSCP is about \$26.6 million over the funding period. This equates to an average of \$57,067 per independent school funded.
5. ISCA welcomes this significant additional government investment in Australian independent schools.

Student Wellbeing in Independent School Communities

6. Research has indicated that student wellbeing is strongly linked to student learning outcomes and that student engagement, motivation and achievement can be enhanced through school communities adopting practices that directly focus on developing and nurturing positive student wellbeing¹.
7. Understanding the importance of student wellbeing to individuals, school communities and the broader community, the independent sector strongly supports the objectives of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. The *Melbourne Declaration* which was developed by Education Ministers in collaboration with the government, independent and Catholic school sectors recognises the important and vital role that schools play in the emotional, mental, social, moral and spiritual development of students.
8. The Commonwealth's rationale for the provision of the NSCP echoes this key element in the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration* when it states,

As one of society's key institutions, schools are in a strong position to support the wellbeing, values and spirituality of young people. Chaplains already play a significant role in supporting many schools throughout Australia, including government schools, and there have been calls for their services to be more broadly available to school communities².

¹ Noble, T., H. McGrath, T. Wyatt, R. Carbines, L. Robb. *Scoping study in approaches to student wellbeing – Final Report*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra, 2008

² http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSchoolChaplaincyProgram/Pages/nscp_frequently_asked.aspx Accessed: 28 February 2011

9. Chaplains play an important role in school communities by assisting to provide a supportive environment for the wellbeing of students and their families, and by encouraging and helping students as they explore the spiritual dimension of their lives. ISCA views the provision of funding under the NSCP as making a unique contribution in assisting schools and their communities to attend to this particular aspect of the *Melbourne Declaration*.
10. ISCA research has shown that one of the most significant factors in influencing parental choice of school for their children is that the school community provide a supportive, caring and safe environment³. One important characteristic of school communities that nurture this form of environment is that they are deliberate and intentional in supporting students to develop resilience and positive mental wellbeing, and in providing help and care to students and families in need. In the experience of independent schools, the role of chaplain can be particularly well suited to developing the type of informal interactions and relationships that contribute to the building and strengthening of good mental health and facilitating the access of students and their families to supporting services both within the school and in the wider community.
11. The assistance provided by chaplains and pastoral care services in independent schools are of most value to and particularly targeted to students and families in need, such as those experiencing bereavement, family breakdown and other crisis situations. All school communities, regardless of their location or demographics, have students and families who undergo these types of experiences and are in need of pastoral care services. All school communities, therefore, would potentially benefit from funding under the NSCP.
12. As noted above, many schools in the independent sector are affiliated with a religious tradition or educational philosophy that has a particular emphasis on the spiritual growth of students as a part of their broader academic, physical, emotional, mental and social education. Through this focus, independent schools are seeking to meet the needs of the increasing number of parents who say that they are interested in an education for their children that supports the development of the whole person, including their spirituality. In many cases, independent schools prioritise resources for the provision of chaplaincy and pastoral care services out of their annual budget in support of this emphasis.

Independent School Communities and National School Chaplaincy Program Funding

13. Feedback provided to ISCA has clearly indicated that the NSCP has been of particular benefit in supporting independent schools to provide or expand chaplaincy and pastoral care services. Some statements from a range of schools include:

The current (NSCP) funding enabled our College to get a chaplaincy program up and running...it remains adequate to provide a basic level of service...

Our school will unlikely ever have sufficient support staff...to meet the demand. However, the current funding model provides significant enough help to make a big difference.

Before the NSCP a lot of (pastoral care) issues could not have been given the focus, attention and time that they needed.

(The NSCP) dramatically increased the level of pastoral care able to be provided to students...

14. Many schools indicated that, despite the services being highly valued and beneficial, the viability of the chaplaincy and pastoral care services that they have been able to provide with funding under the

³ Independent Schools Council of Australia. *Factors Affecting School Choice*. Independent Schools Council of Australia: Canberra, 2008

NSCP would be jeopardised without the support provided through the NSCP. Degradation of services may also occur without the indexation of NSCP funding to meet cost increases, such as wages, that may be associated with the long term provision of the service.

15. Schools in the independent sector have particularly welcomed the Australian Government's commitments to ensure funding certainty to schools benefiting from the services of a chaplain until the end of 2014 and the commitment to extend the NSCP to ensure that an additional 1000 schools would benefit from school chaplains.
16. As noted above, almost half of independent schools nationally have received funding under the NSCP. The strong take-up of the NSCP in independent schools is an indication that the program is highly valued by many schools. State and Territory Associations of Independent Schools indicate that a significant number of independent schools have informally indicated that, while they may not have previously applied for funding, they would certainly do so if the opportunity to apply for further funding rounds became available.
17. Within the sector there is strong support for the continuation and expansion of the NSCP due to the extremely positive outcomes that can be seen to come from the program. If the NSCP were to be continued, or even expanded, ISCA would encourage that the opportunity to apply for funding is also made available to schools that were not in a position to apply for, or missed out on, funding in the initial rounds.

Independent School Communities and Building Social Capital

18. Independent schools have highly valued the benefits provided through the NSCP for chaplains to engage with the whole school community and with the wider community. Funding for chaplains provided through the NSCP has provided independent schools with resources to be able to nurture the growth of social capital which contributes to bonding relationships within the school community and bridging relationships between the school and other groups and organisations in the community.
19. As noted above, independent schools are usually established and developed through community groups in order to meet particular local schooling needs. Most often these communities have their basis in a particular religious or faith tradition. Other school communities are formed around a common education philosophy or to meet the social or learning needs of students. Examples include independent community schools for Indigenous students in remote areas, special schools for students with disabilities, schools providing boarding facilities to rural and remote students and schools committed to alternative learning environments.
20. Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions that have been set up and are governed independently on an individual school basis. Many independent schools have governance and management arrangements which delegate the day to day responsibilities of the school's education program and staffing to the school's management team, and longer term planning and supervision to Boards of governance. These arrangements mean that school governors and educational management teams are accountable directly to their parent and school communities.
21. Given that independent schools report to and are responsible to their community, an emphasis on fostering a sense of belonging, and listening and responding to the community in order to meet the needs of the community is at the very core of independent schools. Independent schools build this social capital within their own communities through the development of networks among families and organizations within the local and international communities, and through the values that underpin the formal curriculum.

22. Independent school communities also contribute to the growth of social capital in the wider community. Schools encourage engagement of students in the local community. On a larger scale students are involved in community services at a local, state and international level. It is the experience of schools in the sector that families are seeking out independent schools because of their focus on building community, creating a sense of belonging and engaging with the wider community, locally, nationally and internationally.
23. The emphasis of independent schools on fostering a community environment has meant that schools in the sector have been especially well placed to meet the NSCP's requirements that there be extensive consultation with the broader school community, particularly parents, in choice and design of chaplaincy and pastoral care services, and for the school community as a whole to demonstrate their support for those services through contributing financial and/or in-kind support.
24. Given the diversity of context within which independent schools operate, the independent sector believes that the services provided by a chaplain should be appropriate to the school and student context in which he or she will operate. The flexibility that has been built into the guidelines for the NSCP has been highly valued by independent schools. This flexibility has allowed independent schools to respond to the needs in their community when looking to appoint a chaplain.
25. That the program guidelines have provided a general description of the types of activities a chaplain may undertake but have allowed schools to develop a position description and duty statement that has been tailored to its particular community needs has worked particularly well in independent schools. The flexibility to design the role of chaplain to the school community's needs and the flexibility for the school to appoint a person with the most appropriate qualifications to meet those needs has been an important strength of the NSCP.

Independent School Communities in Regional and Remote Areas

26. There are a significant number of independent schools outside of the cities and larger regional centres. While 69 per cent of independent schools in Australia are located in metropolitan areas, 28 per cent are in regional areas and 3 per cent are in remote areas. Often the students in these schools do not have the same level of access to pastoral care services as students in metropolitan schools.
27. The independent schools sector provides a significant contribution to educating students from Australia's regional and remote areas, where the high costs of schooling provision poses a major challenge for governments and parents.
28. The independent sector supports choice in school education and the right of parents to choose the type of education that best suits the needs of their child. This includes the right of rural and regional families to have equitable access to school educational opportunities.
29. The high financial and human potential costs of service provision in regional and remote locations have had an effect on independent schools in these areas who have received funding under the NSCP.
30. The expense of attracting and recruiting quality candidates for the position of chaplain, and providing chaplains with high quality professional learning opportunities and networks, frequently requires major financial and time resources. Additionally, often the financial and time costs incurred by chaplains for travel are extensive and far greater than that for chaplains in metropolitan areas. These additional costs either need to be borne by extra contributions by the school community or by reducing the level of chaplaincy or pastoral care services that can be provided by the school.

31. The independent sector values the contribution of government support to addressing the educational disadvantage of regional and remote school communities. The sector strongly believes that the social, emotional, mental and spiritual educational needs of students are central and that students in regional and remote school communities should have equitable access to services to support their needs so that students may be assisted to reach their potential.
32. The independent sector acknowledges the importance of the government's 2010 commitment to providing additional funding in future rounds to schools in regional and remote areas to ensure that these school communities are able to benefit from chaplaincy and pastoral care services.
33. In addition to the additional funding in future rounds, ISCA would support NSCP funding to be supplemented to schools in regional and remote locations in recognition of the greater costs that these communities may need to bear in order to provide a similar level of chaplaincy or pastoral care services to school communities in metropolitan areas.

Conclusion

34. The establishment of the National School Chaplaincy Program was strongly welcomed by the independent sector as a distinctive program to provide pastoral care and support to students, staff and families in school communities.
35. The strong take-up of the National Schools Chaplaincy Program in independent schools is an indication that the NSCP is valued by many schools in the independent sector and their broader communities.
36. The aim of the National School Chaplaincy Program to assist "school communities to support the wellbeing of their students, including strengthening values, providing greater pastoral care and enhancing engagement with the broader community"⁴ is being met through the NSCP in independent schools. The flexibility of the NSCP to allow school communities to appoint a chaplain who is appropriate to the school and student context in which he or she operates is particularly helpful in meeting this aim.
37. The independent sector supports funding certainty into the foreseeable future for schools that have received funding under the NSCP and that NSCP funding be indexed to meet increases in the cost of service provision.
38. Within the independent sector there is strong support, both from schools that have received funding under the National School Chaplaincy Program and from those that have not, for the NSCP to be continued and expanded.
39. If the National School Chaplaincy Program is to be continued and, if possible expanded, ISCA strongly encourages that the NSCP would need to involve new rounds of funding and application and should be opened to all schools including those who did not apply or were not successful in previous rounds.

Bill Daniels
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⁴ <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSchoolChaplaincyProgram/Pages/home.aspx> Accessed: 28 February 2011