

Public schools do not need Christian chaplains

Maralyn Parker, Daily Telegraph, November 25, 2009

As NSW finally introduces ethics classes as an alternative to scripture classes in public schools, the federal government is headed in the opposite direction.

Kevin Rudd announced last week another \$42 million, on top of the initial \$165 million, for the national school chaplaincy program that employs religious operatives to work in public schools.

Given only 2 million of 21 million Australians are church goers this is without doubt a misuse of taxpayer money.

Worse – Rudd justified the extra spending on a deeply flawed recent study of the chaplaincy program that deviously concluded it was a good thing for public schools to have Christian religious workers on staff.

The Effectiveness of Christian Chaplaincy in Government Schools was commissioned by the **National School Chaplaincy Association**, an umbrella association for organisations, such as the **Scripture Union** and **GenR8** that supply chaplains to public schools and benefit directly from extra funding.

The study did not include one single NSW public school and one of the two researchers involved is a Uniting Church minister employed by the **Christian Research Association**

Of course it came up with the insidious recommendation that all public schools should have chaplains.

The NSW government refused permission for **Dr Philip Hughes** of Western Australian's Edith Cowan University, who works four days a week for the CRA and **Professor Margaret Sims** of the University of New England to use any NSW public school in this study.

It is very reassuring the NSW government does not allow such obviously self serving and gratuitous research to be carried out in our public schools.

Hughes and Sims went ahead anyway and sent a survey to the 1626 public schools with Christian chaplains supplied by NSCA organisations in other states and territories.

Even then only 688 principals responded - that is, 42 per cent of the schools approached.

But this did not stop the researchers from concluding "according to principals 97 per cent of chaplains have been effective..." and "the vast majority of principals who have experienced chaplaincy are highly in favour of having a chaplain and a continuation of government funding..."

Less than 100 teachers other than principals, 52 primary and 46 secondary, responded to the survey or were interviewed. Parents were even less interested. Only 41 in total bothered to be involved in the research.

However amazingly the report concluded chaplaincy in government schools "enhances the linkages between community and schools."

The Greens Dr John Kaye has **more academic criticisms of the report** including that the researchers used unsound research methods.

The study horrifyingly reported Christian chaplains were helping with sex education and leading prayer meetings for teachers in public schools. Others were working as aides in classrooms and counselling suicidal children.

This is a terrible scenario given the Christian attitude towards sex and homosexuality. Adolescents questioning their own sexuality is a major cause of suicidal thoughts in young people. Teenage males are especially vulnerable to homophobic taunting and bullying.

Religious workers should not be allowed access to children in public schools to discuss sex or sexuality for any reason, in any situation, ever.

Suicidal adolescents need help from qualified psychologists and counsellors, not Christian chaplains.

Teachers with children who have behavioural problems, learning difficulties or disabilities should be supported in their classrooms by properly trained teacher aides, not Christian chaplains.

I have no doubt many public school principals are indeed grateful for the extra staff member and use them in whatever way they can. I also have no doubt many chaplains already employed in public schools are caring and dedicated and valued.

However public schools do not need more or indeed any Christian chaplains _ the vast majority of whom are not tertiary educated _ for a few days a week. They need university educated youth workers and social workers. They need more of those qualified school counsellors and more specialist aides.

Of course such support would cost considerably more than the \$20,000 a year paid to a Christian organisation to provide a chaplain for two days a week.

In a **speech** to the **Australian Christian Lobby's** national conference last week Rudd boasted he was Director General of the Cabinet Office in Queensland 20 years ago when that state's government arranged for school chaplains to begin operating in state schools. Today nearly every public school in QLD has a Christian chaplain.

Bible lessons can be given in regular classes by regular teachers at the discretion of the principal, Christian prayers are chanted at school assemblies, Creationism and **Intelligent Design** have been taught in senior classes, Christian evangelists are used to **"motivate"** students and girls are taught to be gentle and obedient _ and it is all happening in QLD public schools.

I would hate to see any of that in NSW public schools. Kevin Rudd was very wrong to promise more tax payer money to this sly religious program.

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http://blogs.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/maralynparker/index.php/dailytelegraph/comments/public_schools_do_not_need_christian_chaplains/