# **Chaplaincy and student welfare worker services**

**Guidelines for schools**

**Overview**

These guidelinesprovide schools, chaplains and student welfare workers with information regarding operational matters likely to affect the implementation of chaplaincy and student welfare worker services definitionsin Queensland Catholic schools, both funded and voluntary.

**Communication strategies**

The principal should establish communication processes to provide parents at enrolment, and/or on request, information which outlines the school’s chaplaincy or student welfare worker service (whichever service/s the school has been funded for). This supports parents to make an informed decision regarding their child/ren’s participation in activities provided by the chaplain/student welfare worker. It is useful to publish this information on the school’s website, in the parent handbook, and/or school newsletter.

website information 11/273694

The worker should observe the communication protocols established within the school to ensure a coordinated approach to the dissemination of information to the principal, leadership team, school staff, students and the wider school community.

Any communication about chaplaincy or student welfare worker events or activities in the school newsletter or on the school website should not contain any evangelisingdefinitions, proselytising or any attempt to undermine a student’s religious or other beliefsdefinitions. Content about the chaplaincy or student welfare worker service, or general information written by the chaplain or student welfare worker, should be approved by the principal before distribution. Communication to parents about activities or events organised by the chaplain or student welfare worker and approved by the principal (e.g. a camp with a religious component, or a visit from an external chaplaincy band etc.), should clearly state the facts. This includes information about the organisers and affiliates of the activity or event being offered, to ensure parents/caregivers can make informed decisions about whether their child is involved or not.

**Student referral and access**

Schools should establish a student referral and appointment process that enables safe and timely access to these services in a manner that meets the needs of both the school and students.

Access may need to occur during lesson time, or within the broader school day. Students should follow the protocols of the school regarding absence from, or late arrival to class (e.g. a late slip, appointment slip).

School staff with concerns for any student should consider the support options available at the school. Those who identify a need for the student to access the chaplain or student welfare worker should discuss this with the student concerned and, if the student wants to access the chaplain or student welfare worker, support the student in making an appointment.

The chaplain or student welfare worker should use discretion and be mindful of privacy provisions when following up with a student regarding a consultation.

The student’s independent decision to act upon the referral should be confirmed by the chaplain or student welfare worker at the initial consultation.

If the student or parent does not consent, the chaplain or student welfare worker will discontinue the consultation. Where the student has not consented and has not been seen by the chaplain or student welfare worker, the staff member may be notified that the student has elected not to have an individual consultation. This allows for other options for supporting the student to be explored.

Part of a chaplain or student welfare worker’s role is to provide information regarding the range of support options available to students for further consideration or assistance. In order to ensure coordinated case management of student support, each referral that a chaplain or student welfare worker makes to an external agency or service requires the explicit approval of the school’s principal, deputy principal or counsellor, and consent of the parent (or student if deemed competent by the principal to provide this consent).

**Induction and orientation**

The school should ensure that the chaplain/student welfare worker understands the nature of their rolefactsheet1 in the school setting and the appropriate boundaries of professional conduct and personal interaction with students. As well as the school-based inductionfact sheet 2, schools should provide the chaplain/student welfare worker with a key contact person to assist with the initial introduction to the school and its operation and to provide ongoing support as required.

The chaplain/student welfare worker should be supported to become an integral member of the school support team and opportunities for collaboration across the school should be facilitated. As part of this, the chaplain/student welfare worker should be provided with timely information about school operations and variations to school routines that may affect or inform their services, including access to staff educational activities and professional development that is relevant to their role.

**Facilities**

The recommended minimum facilities required for the chaplain or student welfare worker to perform their duties should include:

* access to Student Protection and Code of Conductinformation and training
* access to a separate room which enables the worker to conduct confidential consultations on the days that services are provided
* access to a lockable filing cabinet and other secure storage facilities to enable the worker to securely store confidential case records
* access to a desk, telephone, photocopier and computer with ready access to email facilities and relevant school-based information technology systems.

**Resources**

The school should provide appropriate materials for the preparation and delivery of approved workplandefinitions activities, as well as resources required for agreed school programs in which the chaplain or student welfare worker is involved.

All resources purchased by the school, or through school-based fundraising, remain the property of the school.

Any gifts received by the worker during their employment must be declared to the principal.

**Delivering a service**

**Student protection**

Chaplains and student welfare workers are always bound by the school’s student protection procedures, including in the provision of services or participation in activities arising from, or associated with, their engagement with a school.

The principal must ensure all chaplains and student welfare workers undertake an appropriate form of student protection training. Principals must also keep a record of all chaplains and student welfare workers who complete the student protection training.

Should the chaplain or student welfare worker have a complaint relating to student protection matters where an employee is involved, they must follow the school’s normal processes.

**Code of Conduct**

Chaplains and student welfare workers are always bound by the school’s Code of Conduct, including when providing services or participating in activities arising from, or associated with, their engagement with a school. This includes reporting any conduct of an employee that raises suspicion of a possible breach to the principal, cooperating with any authorised officer in any investigation or other resolution strategy, and cooperating through active participation in any required training or development initiatives.

**Professional development and professional supervision**

Chaplains and student welfare workers are encouraged to participate in professional development and professional supervision to ensure that quality services are provided. Attendance and funding (if required) should be negotiated between the principal and the chaplain/student welfare worker.

Whilst every attempt should be made to conduct professional development, training and professional supervision activities outside student contact hours or in school holidays, there may be circumstances where this is not possible, and the worker may be absent from the school for this purpose.

In particular, during their first year in the service, the worker may be given additional opportunities (as required) to access self-directed or organised training programs in order to augment and build the capacity of their service delivery.

From July 2019, chaplains funded by the Australian Government’s NSCP are required to undertake professional learning in responding to and preventing bullying and cyberbullying as provided by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner. Further information on this professional learning is available on the Australian Government Department of Education [webpage](https://www.education.gov.au/national-school-chaplaincy-program).

**Media liaison and marketing**

Any public media attention relating specifically to the worker, or the chaplaincy/student welfare worker service within a school, should be subject to the approval of the principal prior to any engagement with the media and publication or broadcast.

**Confidentiality**

Chaplains and student welfare workers are bound by the confidentiality provisions as outlined in the school’s Code of Conduct.

The reason a student seeks access to, and the outcome of any consultation with, a chaplain or student welfare worker, will not be disclosed by the worker without the parent’s or student’s informed consent, unless required by law. This includes providing access to confidential case notes recorded by the chaplain or student welfare worker.

**Inviting external people onto the school premises**

The principal has the discretion to approve external individuals, groups or organisations (e.g. musicians or guest speakers) to be invited onto the school premises. Such decisions should be made in consultation with the school community. The principal should be well informed about any event, program or activity provided by an external party. Chaplains and student welfare workers must gain approval in advance from the principal.

**Changing the worker or the type of worker**

The school may reasonably seek to replace a worker at any time. A replacement may be required due to resignation, prolonged absence, or poor performance of the chaplain or student welfare worker (subject to the resolution process).

Changing the type of worker (e.g. from a chaplain to a student welfare worker) is not permitted under the NSCP. Schools participating in this program must engage a chaplain. Schools should contact chaplaincy@qcec.catholic.edu.au or welfareworker@qcec.catholic.edu.au for clarity if required.

**Reporting requirements**

Schools must report to QCEC on a six-monthly basis on the NSCP and SWW programs. A survey will be sent out in May and October, requiring the school to report on their obligations under the program.

**Managing a service**

**Managing risk**

Good communication, together with a shared understanding of the guidelines and school processes, should enable issues to be raised and addressed before they become problematic.

The principal should manage any risk and ongoing impact the risk may have on students, employees, and if necessary, the broader school community.

All activities associated with the delivery of chaplaincy or student welfare worker services should be considered in terms of their inherent level of risk.

A risk assessment should be undertaken prior to services commencing so potential risks can be identified, analysed and evaluated, and strategies to manage the risks are developed.

**Complaint management and resolution**

Wherever possible, issues, problems or conflicts related to the chaplaincy or student welfare worker service should be addressed at the school level. All complaints should be handled in a manner consistent with the school’s complaints policy.

**Contact details**

Schools are recommended to contact QCEC via chaplaincy@qcec.catholic.edu.au or welfareworker@qcec.catholic.edu.au for any further information or clarification.