

BUDDHIST COUNCIL OF QUEENSLAND INC. (IA29696)

An Umbrella Organization Representing Buddhists and

Buddhist Groups And Institutions In Queensland ABN 69 825 774 318

-- *Affiliated Member of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils Inc.* --

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To all Centres, Temples and Individuals in the Dharma..... greetings,

The following statements have been made by the Council in response to the Queensland Education Department's email request for comment on their proposed "Program of Chaplaincy Services" over the days of December 20 and 21, 2006 and are offered for your information. If you wish to make a comment on them, please reply to the Council's email address or postal address above.

Full details of the Program can be found at <http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/eppr/schools/scmpr012/>

BACKGROUND

The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 has introduced new initiatives that take effect in Queensland schools from next year. One of these is the Program of Chaplaincy Services.

Statement of intent

A program of chaplaincy services is an optional service introduced into many State schools to give support in religious, spiritual and/or ethical matters to student body. This is done through various models of chaplaincy services, which contribute to students' educational and spiritual welfare, provide student mentoring and allows chaplain to be an additional adult role model in schools.

Programs of chaplaincy services will be compatible with policies and practices that apply to delivery of any service in a multi-faith and multicultural state school community. A program of chaplaincy services is to be inclusive of and show respect for all religious and non-religious beliefs and other stances represented in school community. All activities and events provided within a program of chaplaincy services are to be non-discriminatory and equitably available and applied to students, of all beliefs, who choose to participate.

Chaplains contribute towards addressing religious, spiritual and ethical needs of all students. Whilst personally modelling and owning their own faith positions or belief, chaplains avoid any implications that any one religion, denomination or other set of beliefs is advantageous or superior to any other denomination, religion or belief.

The program commences with expressions of support from the school community, which then establishes a Local Chaplaincy Committee (LCC) and the process that has been graphically represented on the following page leads to the appointment of a chaplain for that particular school.

Models of Chaplaincy Services

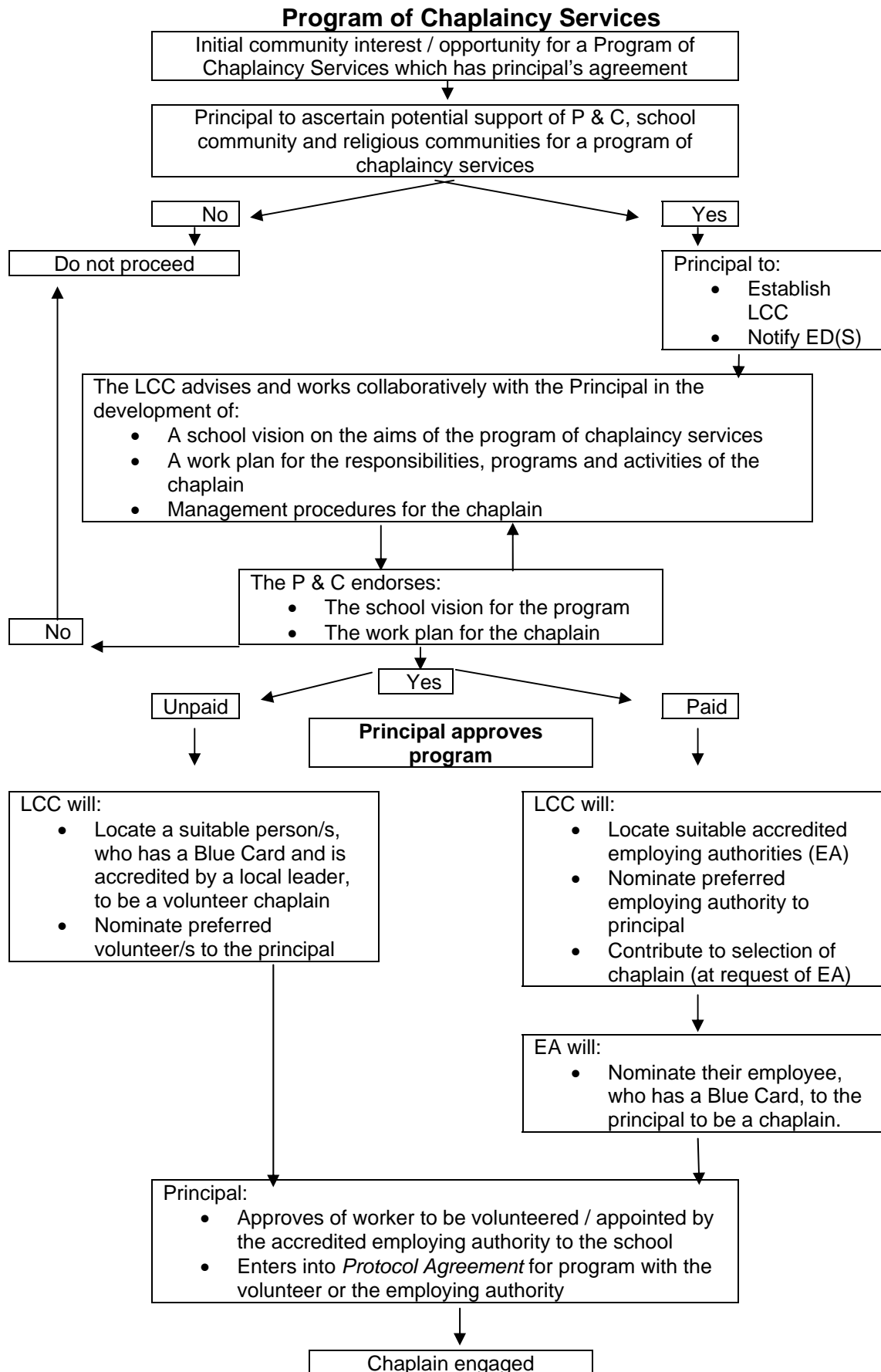
Models of chaplaincy services provide a description of the types of programs and how they operate as part of chaplaincy services delivered at a school. These models are to be sensitive to and considerate of total range of cultural, spiritual and religious backgrounds and other belief systems represented in school community.

The Models of Chaplaincy Services that can be adopted by state schools may be one or a combination of:

The Pastoral Care Model - providing an additional dimension to school's care, guidance and support of students with spiritual, religious and/or ethical needs.

The Mentoring Model - acting as a role model for students and assisting in development of supportive relationships for, with and among students.

The Education Support Model - upon invitation participating as a guest presenter (along with presenters from a diversity of belief groups) when school's syllabus has content relating to study of religion or topics with religious themes.



Funding for this Program

The state government has proposed to fund this program with \$3,000,000 over three years. There are approximately 1,600 schools in Queensland, providing education to about 460,000 students in years 1 through 12. This equates with funding of about \$1,900 per school or about \$6.50 per student over 3 years, or roughly \$630 per year for each school or \$2.15 per student per year.

THE COMMUNICATIONS

From: "McNAMARA, Maureen" – Queensland Education Department
To: <jimferguson1@bigpond.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2006 12:19 PM
Subject: Chaplaincy Funding

Hi Jim,

Thanks for agreeing to assist with this project.

The election commitment was to provide funding of \$3 million over three years to provide chaplaincy services for vulnerable students in state schools.

The questions I have are:

QED> How do you think students from your faith/religion will be supported by this project?

BCQ> Buddhism supports any initiative that helps people to find direction and peace in their lives, and none more so than our youth.

There is however a bias, by default, in the delivery of religious instruction in Queensland schools, by virtue of the fact that the Qld legislation provides for Bible lessons to be available in the absence of a denominational program, and the fact that denominational RI is demand-driven by the parents, only from which is a Principal required to offer an alternative to the Christian view.

In the 2001 Census, Buddhism ranked second behind Christianity in following, and we are keen to see how support for this philosophy has grown since. The Buddhist community has, coincidentally, recently embarked on consolidating and unifying it's RI Program for schools, and one aspect of that is to ensure that prospective families and students receive information on the availability and nature of the Buddhist option, so as to properly service the needs of those for whom it is a family tradition or cultural component, as well for others who may be interested in exploring Buddhism for the first time.

The chaplaincy initiative is to be commended and were it to be available in a non-denominational format when no preferences have been indicated, then perhaps through liaison with the various faith-representing bodies, some visitor-style incorporation of views could be fostered that would also then infer support for multicultural diversity in Queensland, and as we all know, with multiculturalism, respect for their relevant faith-systems always follows.

The Buddhist Council's view is that if the proposed chaplaincy service can incorporate Buddhism through liaison with our clergy (Sangha) and Program, we feel we would be fairly engaged and enabled to support those students both entitled to and/or desirous of receiving Buddhist Religious Instruction.

You mentioned the possibility that this program could be delivered only to disadvantaged students where there is a socio-economic need or similar. Such a strategy may appear to be more effective in outcome but it is also inequitable for the remainder and the issue arises as to who determines those in need and those not, whether it is school-by-school or community based, and then, are all groups in need to be treated equally or is there then yet another dissection of need applied? \$3m disbursed

amongst 1,600 schools gives each less than \$1,900 and shared between 460,000 students equates to just \$6.50 each.

I don't know how education policy is formulated for funding of the core curriculum across the state - whether disadvantaged students received per capita more than others or not, however if this is a proven system then the same formula could be applied to this.

However, if multiculturalism is respected and society as a whole is considered equal, then funding should be distributed in the same way.

The three "Models of Chaplaincy Services" described - Pastoral Care, Mentoring and Education Support - for me personally, should only be two - Pastoral Care/ Mentoring and Education Support, since "acting as a role model" cannot be separate from Pastoral Care! Any person engaged in this field of influence should either live and wholly represent their faith system or simply not be doing it for we all should "lead by example". Children especially know when they are being "conned" and if there is a genuine expression of belief.

Therefore the decision as to the preferred model by which Buddhism could be represented is the Education Support model whereby visiting faith representatives can provide informed advice, support and guidance to students who seek Buddhist-focused help. By then applying a *pro rata* commitment of funding, etc based on the in-school ratio of faiths, a truly representative application of chaplaincy services can then be delivered to that schools student population.

QED> What programs or activities would you like to see introduced through this funding which will enhance the current program (be creative)?

BCQ> The Queensland Buddhist community, represented by many centres and temples, and the Buddhist Council of Queensland, have now established the Buddhist Education in Queensland [BEQ] Program that will be seeking formal recognition by the QED in the coming weeks. By unifying the teaching program across the state and defining relevant standards, benchmarks and milestones in the program, it is envisaged that the Program will be both informative and interesting and will equip students with an adequate comprehension of Buddhism for their age as they progress through the school system. The accreditation of this program, its teachers and content, will do much to improve the current situation, which presently is more *ad hoc* than unified.

By opening access to funding and/or Departmental resources to our Program, the logistical and financial demands involved in delivering the program will be reduced to some degree and thereby provide an opportunity to either expand the program regionally more quickly, or elevate the quality and/or quantity of resources that can be delivered, or both.

Therefore direct financial subsidization for our Program and/or by direct assistance with pedagogy and access to physical resources, e.g. photocopying, printing, audio/visual resources, and this proposal would help the delivery of our BEQ Program.

Differentiating Chaplaincy Services from Religious Instruction, from the information I have reviewed, is very subtle, suggesting that chaplaincy is more closely aligned with individual's personal concerns (hence the pastoral care/mentoring function already canvassed) and to be successful at that level relies strongly on the chaplain attaining a level of trust with the student and therefore requires a significant set of skills and personal qualities and an implied acceptance by a student of one faith in the person who might be identified with a different faith as being able to provide correct advice and support.

However, the process of election of a chaplain to a particular school, via a Local Chaplaincy Committee, assembled from the "interested" parents of students who are themselves engaged in a faith observance, seems to be less focused on the personal suitability of a chaplain designate, and what is albeit a counseling role, but more towards ensuring ecumenical representation, which then enjoins the RI practices in the school.

Therefore funding for and the introduction of this program should be more specifically directed towards enhancing the elected chaplain's performance in the counseling role, which might also include a requisite for competency assessment and regular participation in multi-faith awareness sessions that introduce representatives of the various faiths, who can provide expert information on their faith's attitudes to day-to-day issues and raise awareness to relevant cultural issues that may come into play in giving the "correct" advice to a student.

QED> What would you hope to see as an (overall) outcome of this program in schools?

BCQ> The direct observations of our existing teachers suggest that the students receiving Buddhist RI clearly derive benefit from their classes. When viewed as the very small component of their weekly timetable, it provides both a period of respite and of support, since it contributes to a better perception of life's values and respect for both themselves and others.

Expanding their opportunities to connect with people who can offer appropriate support and guidance must assist them in their daily activities overall. Therefore the financial investment that is offered must, by its very application, generate a compounding benefit in excess of that initially invested.

Simple skills like meditation and learning patience and respect for others, builds a valuable foundation that these future citizens will carry with them all their lives.

With a properly implemented Chaplaincy Program, that integrates and supports the RI in place in a school, it should serve as an additional "layer of the cake" that leads to instilling in students those crucial ingredients which will result in a more wholesome and useful member of society, carrying with them all the values that are so important for our country's future.

QED> Other comments

BCQ>With an ever-shrinking global community, combined with Australia's present immigration policies and declarations of multiculturalism blending with Australian values, it is incumbent upon all parties, governments, departments, corporations and individuals to not only tolerate other's beliefs and customs, but to fully appreciate and respect them, since it is the whole person, including their beliefs, that constitute the evolving Australian culture *per se*.

Education is the key to the success of this vision and embraces not only the physical and natural sciences, the arts and history, but must also include the moral, ethical and spiritual foundations for our future generations as well. The Buddhist community of Queensland is available to help realize this vision.

This program once again, is based on an opt-in model coming from the parent-base of a given school, and is centered on that school's community. This demands that the local faith communities be informed as to the processes for both this and RI in general , and then secondly, to hopefully to find within their community, their supporters who are satisfactorily equipped to both nominate and participate in the process for that community. If there is insufficient base-line support for any faith, it will automatically preclude that faith from any later representation during the year.

