



The National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) plays a valuable role in supporting the wellbeing of students and the school community.

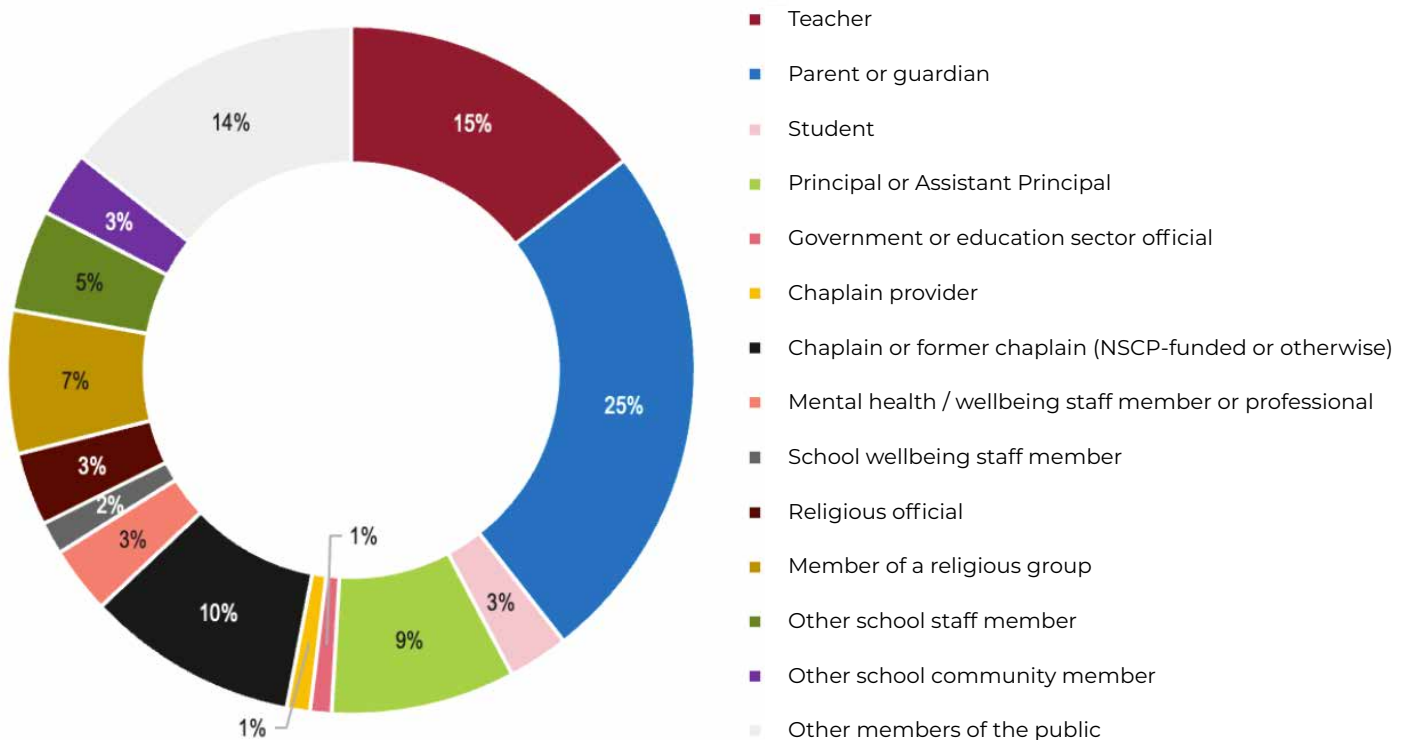
The need for continued and ever-sharpening focus on Australia’s children and young people, as rates of social isolation and rising mental health and wellbeing challenges increase, is clear. Amid a backdrop of bushfires, COVID-19 related disruptions, flooding and falling participation rates in community organisations and associations, schools are increasingly playing a role in wellbeing.

The Australian Government engaged dandolopartners to undertake an independent evaluation of the NSCP, to assess the:

- ◆ **The delivery of the program.** This includes:
 - Who the program supports.
 - What types of services Chaplains provide in schools.
 - How the program is organised and managed.
- ◆ **The effectiveness of the program.** This includes:
 - Whether it effectively supports the wellbeing of students and school communities.
 - The effectiveness of the e-Safety training provided to Chaplains.
 - The impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on the delivery of the program.
- ◆ **The place of the program** – how it fits alongside other, more recent, investments by state and territory governments aimed at supporting the wellbeing of students and school communities.
- ◆ **Any possible evidence-based improvements** to the program for the Australian Government’s consideration, in addition to the changes already announced by the federal Minister for Education in mid-2022.

There was an overwhelming response to the evaluation.

- ◆ **11,963** submissions in 10 days from a wide range of community members.
- ◆ **3,000** schools engaged chaplaincy services each year between 2019 and 2022.



Chaplains play a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and school communities.

It was found that Chaplains provide a wide range of different services to a diverse range of students, including:

Direct support for students

This includes services delivered directly to students. For example structured programs delivered to students (such as breakfast clubs) and informal support provided to students (such as checking in with students during lunchtime).

Indirect support for students and direct support for the school community

This includes services delivered to the school community, which indirectly support or contribute to student wellbeing. For example, supporting teachers and other school staff and providing support to parents and families.

Support for the community more broadly, which contributes to student wellbeing on a macro scale

This includes services delivered that contribute to the broader wellbeing of the local community, which in turn indirectly contributes to the wellbeing of students. For example promoting social connection and cohesion through attending and promoting community events and programs.

The report further found that:

- ◆ direct supports for students are the most consistently delivered across schools,
- ◆ informal supports were considered most effective or valuable.
- ◆ Chaplains simply 'being present' is critical because they can:
 - Create a more safe and supportive school environment.
 - Identify and respond to wellbeing issues early (for example, identifying behavioural or social issues and helping students with strategies).
 - Empower students by providing them with encouragement, advice and strategies.
 - Build relationships with students and provide a stable, consistent adult figure or role model.
 - Be available for students, acting as an approachable 'go-to' person that is viewed as separate from other school staff.

The flexible and generalised nature of the Chaplain role provides benefits because it:

Allows a holistic approach to wellbeing

Meaning Chaplains can work alongside students and other services to identify and respond to different wellbeing needs. This means Chaplains can identify and respond to all wellbeing needs: mental, physical, social, spiritual, intellectual, economic and environmental. For example, providing one student with breakfast before school and connecting another student with a mental health practitioner.

Enables the school and Chaplain to work together

To tailor and adapt the program. Several stakeholders, particularly school principals, identified the flexibility of the program as a key strength as it means they can work with Chaplains to agree the supports and services that will be most appropriate to meet the school's needs.

Alleviates pressure on other school staff

Several school-based stakeholders, particularly teachers and other student wellbeing staff, expressed the value of Chaplains being available to support them in managing their workload and competing pressures.

Considerations by the reports authors included:

- ◆ Further definition and guidance around ensuring proselytising does not occur.
- ◆ Scope of activities.
- ◆ Clarification around the funding and employment model.

The final dandolopartners report was publicly released on the 27th January 2023.

The full report can be accessed at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/national-student-wellbeing-program-nswp/resources/2022-national-school-chaplaincy-programme-evaluation-report>



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