



Community Services: Education

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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Appointment and Role of school chaplains in non-denominational schools

Appointment of School Chaplains

In non-denominational schools chaplains will be appointed at the invitation of the Head Teacher/Campus Principal. It would seem appropriate, however, that when a vacancy arises, the Head Teacher/Campus Principal should consult with the parent council before issuing such an invitation. This will enable the canvassing of a range of views on the most suitable person for the post. When the person to be approached has been identified, the Head Teacher/Campus Principal should invite him/her to fill the post of school chaplain and, if the invitation is accepted, advise the Education Office in Dunoon which will issue an appropriate letter. Standard PVG procedures must be followed; see Education Management circular 1.56.

In considering the filling of a chaplain's post it is possible that schools may wish to consider a group chaplaincy encompassing religious representatives from more than one faith and/or denomination. In such circumstances the procedures outlined above should also be followed.

Head teachers of Roman Catholic schools should note that the appointment of chaplains to their schools will continue to be made directly by the church authorities.

Role of School Chaplains

The success of a chaplaincy depends on good relationships being built with the staff. The relationship between the head teacher/campus principal and the chaplain is crucial. Every aspect of the work is dependent on these relationships. Such working relationships do not simply happen. They must be worked at and developed by all concerned over a period of time.

In whatever capacity chaplains are involved with children and young people they should be made aware of the school's and Church's policy on child protection and code of good practice.

There is a real and important role for chaplains to play but no-one should minimise the difficulties facing those who try to ensure that they make a clear and positive contribution to the life of the school. Chaplains should be clear about the role they have to play and that they should play that role with understanding, conviction and commitment.

There are many different ways in which schools make arrangements for religious observance. Normally this will be at a school assembly, but not all assemblies need be occasions for religious observance. Religious observance and the assembly are the responsibility of the Head Teacher/Campus Principal and the school staff. Where this is appropriate, provision may be made for religious observance of faiths other than Christianity. Chaplains are not always necessarily involved. Where chaplains are involved the extent of their involvement varies greatly.

Everything that goes on in schools must be justified on educational grounds and the individual child's rights to an appropriate curriculum. The quantity and appropriateness of what is offered must be the subject of rigorous attention.

The main part of the chaplain's task must therefore be, not to give children and young people ready-made answers, but to discover ways of helping young people explore their own feelings and experiences, and also the feelings and experiences of others. The chaplain should seek out ways of bringing home the importance of building relationships, the importance of identifying with persons and of sharing questions and answers and encouraging people to search for appropriate answers.

Through religious observance (and possibly through the religious and moral education programme) schools should offer chaplains the opportunity to speak about their faith and the search it initiates; to speak about their own experience; to tell of other faith explorers; and to counter religious stereotypes, whether they be of Christian, Jewish or any other faith community.

Chaplains should acknowledge that religious observance should be inclusive and should safeguard at all times the freedom of conscience of pupils, parents and staff. Chaplains have the ideal opportunity to share in the school's policy of breaking down the barriers of prejudice and intolerance and of creating an ethos which fosters a community spirit and an acceptance of others.

Pastoral role of the chaplain

The chaplain's pastoral concern is for the whole school community, teaching staff, pupils and ancillary staff. The role should be developed in the light of what has already been said about the need for good working relationships with the staff.

Discussion should take place with head teachers/campus principals as to how chaplains are to be informed of particular situations where their presence might be helpful, for example in times of illness or bereavement, or in secondary schools where the guidance staff feel that the chaplain might make a useful contribution. Some schools have pigeon-holes for messages to staff and it might be a good idea to have one for contacting the chaplain. Chaplains should make it clear that they may be contacted at times other than their normal visits. On occasions it may be appropriate to ask the chaplain to talk with staff members on personal issues. By being made aware about the pace and demands of educational developments a chaplain can sometimes help staff who may be under stress. It is helpful if the chaplain is invited into staff rooms and feels at ease there rather than feeling like an intruder. Intervals may offer a chance to meet informally with staff and sometimes there are opportunities to meet teachers in the staff room or in a teaching base when they have a non-teaching period. As far as possible the chaplain should arrange to be available at times suitable to the school.

Getting to know pupils in a large secondary school is a formidable task. It is often helpful if the chaplain has already had links with the associated primary schools or is introduced to S1 pupils early in the school year.

The chaplain as a resource person

Primary schools

The chaplain is very likely to be the minister of a local church and so visits to that church can be arranged. Where there is a team of chaplains of different denominations, visits to their different places of worship might be encouraged. It would be useful if Christian chaplains could not only explain the difference among the various branches of the Church in, for example, catholic, presbyterian and orthodox traditions, but also ensure that they emphasise what is held in common. In particular they might demonstrate how Christians of different denominations can work and worship together.

Secondary schools

The role of the chaplain in the secondary sector may be quite different from that of the primary. The way the curriculum is delivered and the school is organised is quite different and the attitude of the children and young people may change as they grow older. Whereas in the primary sector all teachers have to teach religious and moral education and may also assist with religious observance and school assemblies, in secondary schools the religious education department has its own specialist teachers who may have little or no responsibility for religious observance. Unless the chaplain is a trained teacher and currently registered with the GTC, they should not be asked to teach a class without the presence of the class teacher. However, the chaplain does have a unique range of other experiences in the field of religious education which can make a positive contribution to the quality of classroom learning, so there is merit in exploring

the possibility of the chaplain sharing in the work of the class on a team teaching basis for certain units of work.

The chaplain as a representative

The chaplain enters the school as the representative of religious organisations in the area.

In certain areas where the church is strongly identified with the local community, the chaplain may also represent the community and its interest in the school.

This interest may be expressed by the school chaplain participating in events which affect both the school and the community eg prize giving, displays and ceremonies. In a different way the chaplain may also help the school with its role in the wider community.

Car allowance is payable to chaplains.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

September 2017