

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP
Federal Member for Wannon



26 October 2009

SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM IN PERIL UNDER LABOR

Despite extensive positive feedback from local school communities and research to suggest the school chaplaincy program has had a major impact for good in the life of Western Victorian students, the Rudd Government has refused to commit to continue the program past the life of the current contracts, according to Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker.

“Under questioning in Senate Estimates hearings the Minister representing the Minister for Education has refused to guarantee that the chaplaincy program will continue beyond this financial year,” Mr Hawker said.

“Sadly, it looks likely that this very worthwhile and successful program will come to an end in the middle of next year.”

The National School Chaplaincy Program was an initiative of the former Coalition Government who recognised the valuable role chaplains play supporting students and school communities by offering pastoral care and guidance across religious denominations and beliefs.

Mr Hawker said that research conducted into the program has shown that 97% of principals think the program is a good thing and want it to continue. However, true to form for the Rudd government, it doesn't matter what the schools think, the government will only listen when it suits them.

“Despite the fact local school chaplains and school communities want this program to stay, it looks as though chaplains will be shown the door in a few months,” Mr Hawker said.

“Even the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations admit they have received very positive feedback about the program.

“The Department has acknowledged that the feedback from this program has been resoundingly positive and schools think it is a wonderful initiative, and yet, despite all this, the Rudd government is hell-bent on killing one of the most successful programs ever run in schools by the Federal government.”

Mr Hawker said school chaplains help local students in ways that teachers or other school staff cannot.

“The chaplaincy program has been particularly successful in helping students with behaviour management issues and those that may have difficulties in their social relationships,” Mr Hawker said.

“This decision will most disadvantage those local students that battle with loneliness or bullying at school and students who have difficulties in their families.

“Sadly, the Labor Party was always opposed to this very successful initiative and couldn't wait to kill it off as soon as they could,” he said.

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