



## Chaplains 'will not force religion on kids'

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**A NEW chaplaincy program would not force religion on children but would give them more choices, federal Education Minister Julie Bishop said today.**

Under the initiative, all schools will be able to apply for a subsidy of up to \$20,000 a year to employ a chaplain.

The chaplains will not be expected to have a religious background but will be required to provide spiritual guidance to students.

Ms Bishop said the program would not force any religion on children, but would teach appropriate values.

"Parents are looking for values in their children's schooling - schools already have extensive counselling arrangements - we're providing more choice so that if parents and the school community want a chaplaincy service ... then we're providing that opportunity," Ms Bishop said on ABC radio.

Ms Bishop said it did not matter if there were a number of different faiths within one school.

"This is a voluntary program. It's up to the school community to determine if they want the chaplaincy services and if they do, what sort of services they want," she said.

"What we're seeking to do is ensure that this is in the hands of the school community but if there were an aberrant decision, for example, the Government would reserve the right to withhold funding until the community was able to sort it out."

Ms Bishop said the school would appoint the chaplains. However, if a dispute arose, she would step in.

"The school community will make the decision but in the event of controversy, for example, then the government would reserve the right."

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