

Need for social workers

S The Federal coalition's austerity Budget has found an extra \$245.3 million over the next four years to fund a National School Chaplaincy Program. This has strings attached.

of The existing scheme, the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program, will close next month. It will be replaced by the National School Chaplaincy Program for schools to access services of a chaplain. Under the old program, all these were of Christian faiths.

S In the new program, schools will no longer be able to fund a non-religious welfare worker as an alternative to a chaplain.

Education Minister Christopher Pyne says the refocused program will allow schools, especially those with higher levels of disadvantage, to provide much-needed chaplaincy services.

It is a fallacy to conclude that such student-centred programs should be exclusively provided by chaplains.

Unlike the refocused program, there is already a body of research pointing to effective support of the emotional and social wellbeing of vulnerable students.

More is required than one chaplain per school, who may have minimal training in complex areas like mental health and child safety.

There is a need for skilled professionals such as school social workers and psychologists who are equipped to work with children at risk within the context of their families and communities.

Sabina Leitmann, president, WA branch, Australian Association of Social Workers

Understanding debt