AEU welcomes reform of chaplaincy program

The Australian Education Union has welcomed the federal government's proposal to open the National Chaplaincy Program to professionally qualified student welfare officers but much more must be done to support students who need extra help at school.

Currently, the program is only available to chaplains endorsed by a religious institution.

"Public schools are no place for religious proselytising and instruction," AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said.

"The AEU has always said that students and families who need support should be able to access evidence-based mental health, social and well-being assistance from qualified professionals. Further, this must be backed in by fully funding schools so that they have the resources necessary for teaching and learning.

"We welcome this initial step from Education Minister Jason Clare and urge the federal government to go further."

The AEU has long opposed the National Chaplaincy Program.

"The program was a stalking horse for an ideological push to get Christianity into public schools. This was demonstrated by federal government data that showed the program almost exclusively involved the use of Christian chaplains, despite the diversity of religions and cultural practices in Australia.

"We encourage the Federal Government to abolish public funding for religious involvement in public schools in favour of investments in appropriate student well-being and mental health programs, professional development for teachers and to employ qualified school counsellors in every public school across the nation," Ms Haythorpe said.

Media contact: Alys Gagnon, 0438 379 977, alys.gagnon@essentialmedia.com.au

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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