

8% of Australian schools opt for secular school support workers

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About 200 schools around Australia are planning to stop employing religious chaplains, hiring secular welfare workers instead to deliver support services to students.

The schools are taking advantage of changes to the federal government's \$222 million chaplaincy scheme, which previously stipulated that a welfare worker could only be appointed if there was proof that a chaplain was not available.

Government figures show that of 2512 schools that have reapplied for funding, 208 — or 8 per cent — have proposed to employ a welfare worker. Most of the others — 2236 or 89 per cent — indicated they wanted to stick with a chaplain or religious pastoral-care worker, while 3 per cent said they were undecided. School Education Minister Peter Garrett said the government had received strong feedback through a review last year encouraging it to extend the program to qualified secular welfare workers.

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