



The Church of Scotland  
Church and Society Council

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# The Role of the School Chaplain

## Education Representatives Handbook

A guide to good practice for  
Church of Scotland education  
representatives on local authority  
education committees





**Local Authority Representatives may choose to encourage their Council to adopt a policy on Chaplaincy in Schools. The following offers a guide to such a stated policy**

### Summary Points:

- Chaplains need to be very clearly aware of the difference between their function in school and their functions in church;
- The role may differ from authority to authority and from school to school but essentially it is to provide a resource and pastoral support to headteacher, staff and pupils in whatever way is most effective.
- The role relates also to Chaplaincy Teams in ecumenical settings;
- Chaplains and Teams have no statutory right to enter a school;
- The role requires an affinity for working with children and young adults with pastoral concern embracing the whole school;
- Responsibility for worship lies with the headteacher, as does the programme of assemblies, but both may be stimulated by the chaplain who should be part of the Religious Observance planning structures;
- The chaplain has no function in ensuring that Religious and Moral Education is being carried out but may contribute to aspects of the curriculum through conversation and agreement with staff;
- A most important function lies in contributing top links between school and community;
- In order to fulfil the role chaplains are encouraged to attend opportunities for staff development with the agreement of the headteacher.

Chaplains are firmly established by long tradition but the role of the chaplain or chaplaincy teams is far from being firmly established. There can be an important role for the chaplain in the school, but the role will vary in different situations. The more traditional role of the chaplain may not prove desirable given the nature of school education, the curriculum today and the wishes of parents and staff.

The following provides a framework for an examination of the role of the school chaplain, or chaplaincy teams, and a means for exploring ways in which the chaplain may most effectively play a part in the life of the school.

The Church of Scotland plays an important role in Scottish and international life. It is involved in a range of political, ethical and social issues which affect people's lives such as human rights, poverty, climate change health and education.

The Church responds to government consultations, engages with the media, meets with politicians and participates in a number of campaigns.

The Church of Scotland's Church and Society Council take a lead in these matters through the Standing Education Committee which has a remit to consider religious observance, religious, social and moral education and sexual health strategies. A wide range of resources are available to assist with the teaching of these matters.

There is a long tradition in non -denominational schools of chaplaincy (either as an individual or as a team) providing support for pupils, staff and parents without reference to whether or not they are people of faith, as well as a link to the community of which the school is part.

The chaplain has no statutory right to enter a school; he/she is there only through the policy of the local authority and the invitation of the headteacher. Discussions between chaplain and school on the part to be played by the chaplain in the life of the school should take place at a very early stage. The chaplain has no function to ensure that religious and moral education is being carried out. Worship as part of religious observance need not be taken by the chaplain, indeed the development of the spiritual life of the school should involve as many associated with the general life of the school as possible – co-ordinated perhaps through the role of the chaplain and chaplaincy teams.

Where team chaplaincies are in place they should be both ecumenical and interfaith. It is recognised however, that this may not be possible in many contexts. Where circumstances dictate that the chaplain(cy team) is from one denomination within a Christian community, that should not be a sign that other denominations or faiths are to be excluded, or that the school is expressing a preference for one denomination or faith group over others. The

support of school chaplaincy remains available to people of all faiths and none. Chaplains do not have to necessarily be clergy.

The chaplain's most important function lies in contributing to the link between the school community and the society around it. Knowledge of home and family contributes to the important pastoral role as and when this proves appropriate. The fostering of a

relationship that embraces pastoral concern for the staff and pupils who form that school community, needs to be discussed and expressed in a meaningful and natural way. Assisting with acts of worship and religious observance should be enriching experiences for pupils and not simply represent religious denomination.

The foundation for effectiveness does not simply mean a friendly association with the school. It means involvement in the regular life of the school and being seen as an interested and responsible friend.

Meaningful involvement could include taking part in community – wide projects, assisting in some extended curriculum activity, accompanying pupils on an excursion, sharing a meal from time to time with staff and pupils and participating in Parent Council activities. Contact needs to be on a regular basis taking time to get to know and care for staff and pupils.

While regular contact is recommended sensitivity is demanded. The chaplain should not make a habit of calling at inconvenient times. Less formal visits to share an occasional meal or encourage a sporting activity may provide useful opportunities for a good relationship to develop.

Such regular formal and informal contact with the school demands commitment and an affinity for working with children and young adults. Such a commitment, or an interest in working with children, may not be present in every parish minister. In deciding to invite a parish minister to be chaplain the most important consideration will be the ability of that minister to fulfil the role of chaplain – before any question of denominational preference. The minister may gather a small group of adults associated with local churches to form a chaplaincy team.

It may be that a minister from another denomination is more suited to working in the primary or secondary school.

The selection of chaplain and chaplaincy teams is very important as is the related training, designed by school and church, before setting out to become part of the spiritual life of the school.

A written chaplaincy agreement between the chaplain(cy team) and the Headteacher may prove helpful in providing clarity of roles and expectations. Any written agreement should reflect the priorities and local circumstances for that school, therefore should not be seen as a prioritisation of tasks for chaplaincy in every school.

Ministers may be chaplain to more than one school; they may choose not to offer a role as chaplain to the local school. It becomes important, therefore, to establish within a community how the school chaplaincies would best be delivered.

Worship through school assemblies is a delicate matter. The letter/ circular from the Scottish Government on Religious Observance provides clear guidance on this matter. An assembly arising from classroom work in which pupils actively participate will usually be more acceptable and profitable than any traditional service. While the ultimate responsibility for worship in the school rests with the headteacher, chaplains should be given opportunity to be involved in developing the programme of assemblies as described in the Religious Observance circular. The programme of assemblies will of course be stimulated through pastoral contact with all who are involved in the life of the school.

Education encourages a search for truth, meaning in life, and values. Since religion, in its widest sense, has figured largely in the search for truth, meaning and values pupils merit help towards a rational and sensitive understanding of religion and spirituality, how this has shaped and influenced society and how they may interpret their own experiences.

The school chaplain has a key role to play.

## Section 9.1

### A Sample Template

- To support the Head teacher, staff and pupils in the delivery of the curriculum in the widest sense.
- To provide pastoral support for pupils, staff and parents in whatever way is most effective given the school community and setting. This can be achieved through chaplain(s) being involved in the formal support structures and/or by information about how to access the chaplain(cy team) being available through the schools communication networks.
- To be available to provide appropriate support in a crisis situation; e.g. death of staff member or pupil, either on a one to one basis or where the whole or sections of the school needs to reflect and/or respond together.
- To support the delivery of RO within the school in accordance with the school policy on RO. Chaplain(s) would normally be part of the RO planning structures.
- To contribute to other aspects of the curriculum as required through conversation and agreement with staff.
- To contribute to wider opportunities for pupils with the informal curriculum (for e.g. community action, participation in the life of the community, informal worship opportunities) by agreement with the Head Teacher.
- Where appropriate participation in special events in the school in ways agreed with the Head Teacher.
- To attend regular evaluation and planning discussions with the head teacher/designated member of management to plan and develop the best use of the resource of the chaplain(cy team).
- To attend CPD and other training, (e.g. as provided by faith communities or associated bodies), on the recommendation of, or by agreement with, the Head Teacher. Head teachers should consider the option of paying for this training as budgets allow as an investment in the support of the school community that chaplain (cy team)s.

## Section 9.2

### Monifieth High School Chaplaincy Policy

The following is an example of a school policy on chaplaincy

#### Role & Purpose of Chaplains in Monifieth High School

This policy outlines the role of school chaplains at Monifieth High School and the purpose of their involvement as part of our school's ongoing partnership with the wider community. Community partnership is a key element in the development of school within Curriculum for Excellence. The aim of the chaplaincy team is to make significant contributions towards the development of all pupils as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

#### 1. Chaplaincy for the whole school

Chaplains are concerned with care for all involved with the school community, regardless of individuals' personal faith positions. In order to be effective chaplains need good contact and liaison with Senior Management, and Pupil Care and Support staff, and need to build positive relationships with staff, pupils and parents.

Chaplains in Monifieth High School are committed to:

- raising and maintaining their profile in order to increase their opportunity to help members of the school community when required
- being sensitive and responsive to any situations of tragedy, illness or other difficult circumstances experienced by members of the school community
- building positive relationships with pupils and staff
- developing availability within the school
- helping to develop an ethos and culture where the services of chaplains are sought out and accessed by members of the school community

#### 2. Chaplains facilitate links between the community and the school

Monifieth High School is committed to community involvement and to developing strong values of caring

and positive citizenship in all pupils. As the leader of a local faith community, a Chaplain may be able to facilitate opportunities for community service by appropriate pupils of the school. Examples might include helping with a crèche or toddlers group, assisting with a group for the elderly etc.

Equally, the school has numerous opportunities for members of the community to help pupils on a regular basis (eg scribing for those with learning difficulties, participating in environmental projects, etc). A Chaplain who is the leader of a faith community may well be able to locate volunteers who can help in school. Examples might include scribing for pupils with specific needs, working alongside young people on a horticulture course, or assisting with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

### 3. Facilitating Religious Observance

This happens in line with Scottish Government Circular I/2005 'Provision of Religious Observance in Scottish Schools'. Religious Observance is defined as: 'Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community'.

The circular emphasises the important and varied contributions that can be made by chaplains in many aspects of school life, including Religious Observance. The aims of Religious Observance are defined as: *'to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community'*.

It is recognised that shared values give a sense of belonging and aid positive ethos.

Monifieth High School emphasises an approach to Religious Observance that is accessible and highly relevant to pupils, and is wherever possible led by pupils themselves. Chaplains can facilitate this by working with small groups of pupils to help develop fresh ideas, by locating IT resources, by suggesting specialist speakers, and by themselves on occasion leading religious observance. Their role in training pupils to deliver 'high impact' Religious Observance experiences is

particularly important, and is the sharing of good practice from other schools.

## 4. Involvement with the Curriculum

Chaplains can provide valuable support to both the formal and out-of-class curriculum. This can include, as appropriate,

- Visiting RME classes, as invited (for example, 'Meet the Chaplains' for S1 pupils)
- Supporting Personal Search Conferences, 'Make a Difference Morning' and other interdisciplinary programmes
- Locating resources (especially specialist speakers & participants) to assist with various educational programmes
- Assisting with school clubs (particularly the Christian Union) and, where appropriate, field trips
- Developing knowledge and continuing to keep abreast of relevant educational developments (especially Curriculum for Excellence)

To sum up, Chaplains are much-valued members of the wider school community and key helpers in the development of effective contributors, responsible citizens, successful learners and confident individuals.

## Chaplaincy Committee:

Our Chaplaincy Committee supports the various roles of our chaplains as outlined above.

Chaplaincy Committee members include:

- Our chaplains
- Pupils
- Members of staff

All committee members contribute their views on the further development of spiritual awareness and of community service and involvement. The committee also initiates and supports a range of appropriate related activities.

The Chaplaincy Committee has access to the Head Teacher for advice and support, and meets formally with him regularly to review progress and impact.



