

Establishing a Chaplaincy

If you are considering offering a chaplain to a school or college this is most likely because you already have a relationship there, possibly through some other involvement as a member of staff or as a visitor. This is usually the best starting point, but the guidance here begins from a position of assuming no prior involvement with a school or college.

1. Do some research

Check the school or college website to see if there is reference to chaplaincy or other types of pastoral or spiritual input.

Check any literature published by or about the school or college, including the latest Ofsted report.

Talk to anyone you know who attends or is a member of staff or governor of the school or college.

It is particularly useful to establish what the chaplaincy situation is. Is there currently one or has there been one? If there has been one, how successful was it? Some schools or colleges may have local clergy or other faith leaders as nominated chaplains, but this can sometimes be little more than an honorary position.

Establish if any Christian youth or school workers currently go into the school or college.

2. Identify the right person to contact.

In a school this could be:

- The Head
- The Deputy Head
- A Pastoral Head
- The Head of the RE Department

In a college it could be one of the following

- The Principal (or as some are known, the Director or Chief Executive Officer).
- The manager in charge of Learner Services. They usually oversee tutorial, enrichment and any chaplaincy services.
- The manager with overall responsibility for Equality and Diversity may also be a good person to speak with.

If in doubt though, check the website for any pointers, or ring the school or college and ask who has responsibility for these areas.

3. How to explain to schools and colleges what you are offering and how this will help.

The information in the 'What is a chaplaincy?' and 'Why do schools and colleges need chaplains?' sections contain useful ideas on this.

4. Policies and procedures

It is vital that the chaplain adheres to all safeguarding policies within the school or college, including enhanced DBS disclosure. It would be helpful, especially for voluntary chaplains, for the school or college to know the church or organisation to which the chaplain is attached and to be assured of the accountability structure in place there.

Safeguarding is such a vital area that chaplains should make it their business to be completely up to date with requirements at national and local level and to inform their head teacher or principal of their training record in this area.

Contact should be made at the first opportunity with the Safeguarding Officer and the chaplain should be clear as to what areas of disclosure need to be shared with them.

5. Schools and Colleges expectations of chaplains

Schools and colleges will expect chaplains to be professional in their approach and conduct. It is important that the person chosen for this role has the appropriate personality and gifting. They need to be someone who will be readily accepted and respected by the school community. They will also be expected to fit in with the school or college's ways of doing things.

6. The difference between faith schools and non faith schools.

All schools and colleges have a faith basis, whether that is acknowledged or not. Secularism and humanism are just as much faith positions as Christianity or Islam. Forming a relationship with the school or college will soon reveal its faith basis and the chaplain can work within the limits imposed.

Work in Christian schools is likely to include teaching, responsibility for liturgy, overseeing worship and preparing students for baptism and confirmation as well as being the spiritual head of the school with all the pastoral duties that entails. It is likely that the chaplain will be able to be, even encouraged to be, more overt about their faith.

In so called non-faith schools, the work is as varied as there are chaplains but can include contributing to the teaching of RE where the curriculum invites a Christian perspective, running Christian clubs, taking assemblies and being involved in the pastoral work of the school or college and contributing to spiritual development in its broadest sense..

7. Guidance on what chaplains can and can not do

It is good to remember that the unpaid chaplain is a guest of the school or college. Good guests don't make demands or try to push in where they are not invited! What the chaplain will do needs to be governed by what the school or college has invited them to do – this is why a role description agreed upon by the Principal and the chaplain is a good idea. An employed chaplain should have a comprehensive job description.

Opportunities to talk about faith will often present themselves and chaplain must use wisdom and sensitivity at such times. It is important to remember that chaplains are not there to proselytise but to serve the community. An offer to pray with or for somebody is often enough. However, a direct question deserves a direct answer – always given with gentleness and respect (1Peter 3:15).

8. Developing the chaplaincy role

The role of chaplain takes time to develop and building relationships is key. Time needs to be invested in this, initially perhaps with very little to show by way of results. Here are some tips.

- ◆ Spend time out and about getting to know people where they are.
- ◆ Work to your strengths, using your gifting imaginatively.
- ◆ Get involved in practical ways outside the chaplaincy role to get yourself known and accepted, e.g. offer to help with a lunchtime club, an educational visit, charity event or open evening. If you have a skill, e.g. art, could you do a demo to students in class?
- ◆ Make your base welcoming and non-threatening, e.g. coffee machine (smell those beans), no commitment chill-out space, etc.

9. Some thoughts on how the whole church community can relate to the school or college community.

- ◆ Praying for them in your church services and meetings. It is also really important to let them know you are doing this and to ask them for any prayer requests.
- ◆ Provide support, resources, volunteers, etc for school or college events.
- ◆ Where feasible, hold some church activities (e.g. services, confirmation classes, etc) in the school or college.
- ◆ Open up your church for harvest festival, Christmas carol services, etc.



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