

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy in schools has been around for hundreds of years. It exists because the Christian faith has always believed that Christians need to be with people and for people wherever they are. They believe this because they believe that God is also like this, as expressed through Jesus of Nazareth. The Church of England paper on School Chaplaincy is called 'The Public Face of God', and this is an apt summary of the church's key understanding of the nature of Chaplaincy.

What does chaplaincy actually do?

Chaplaincy can be done in many different ways according to context and personnel. However, in its broadest terms chaplaincy will normally contain three key elements and features.

- a) It will have an **UP** dimension, that is to say it will seek to create space and opportunity for people to explore, experience, name and be resourced by the spiritual or transcendent dimension of life. For some or many this might be called God, for others it will not.
- b) Chaplaincy will also have an **IN** dimension, which seeks to express the love of God through pastoral care. This might mean mentoring individuals, supporting the school's attendance or pupil behaviour policies, working with small groups or, sadly, sometimes working with serious situations of family breakdown, personal injury or bereavement.
- c) Chaplaincy will also have an **OUT** dimension. This focuses on linking the school deeply with the world beyond the school gate, whether locally, nationally or globally. This could be through involvement with community service, raising the profile of issues of national concern such as foodbanks, or keeping the school attentive to issues of global warming or social injustice.

Are chaplains trying to convert people?

The short answer is NO. They are involved in bringing attention and articulation to the spiritual dimension of life in both the ordinary aspects of daily living and in the more trying times when spiritual questions about identity, meaning and purpose often emerge explicitly. Chaplaincy should be helping people of all faiths and none to express their own ideas and answers and contribute to 'religious literacy'. Christian chaplains will, however, be happy to signpost or support a young person, parent or member of staff who is showing interest or enthusiasm for engaging with Christian faith.

Is the chaplain just a religious counsellor?

Chaplains not counsellors, but they might do some counselling style activity or mentoring. One of the distinctive features of chaplaincy is that a chaplain is around and about the school noticing and engaging with people's pastoral issues in the cut and thrust of the school day, whereas a school counsellor would tend to work on a more strict 'referral' method. Chaplains would usually be involved in signposting people with more acute needs to counsellors or other agencies.

What is distinctive about Chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy is often described as 'Spiritual Care'. This includes pastoral care, but it also has a more explicit wholistic dimension to it. Chaplains will deal not only with people's problems, but distinctively it will deal with the ultimate questions which life throws up at us. A chaplain would hope to offer nuanced, careful and open answers, and, most importantly, help individuals to find their own answers.

Another key distinctive element of chaplaincy is that, along with the headteacher (and maybe other members of the senior management) the chaplain should aim to have a complete overview of the school. In the Navy, the chaplain is the same rank as the person being spoken to, and this should be the same in schools.

Where does Chaplaincy fit in?

How should a Chaplain be line-managed?

It is crucial that a chaplain should be very clearly and closely managed by either the Head or someone at a similarly pivotal and strategic level of the school. Because the chaplain has a whole school brief and will often be involved in addressing the whole school community, it is very important that the chaplain acts as a conduit of (confidential) information and feedback to the headteacher. Crucially the chaplain should also offer pastoral support to the headteacher, which can be vital for him or her in such a pressurised role.

Where does a Chaplain sit in the structure of the school?

Daily line management would most often be offered by a pastoral deputy head, as this is generally where chaplaincy sits most comfortably.

What problems does Chaplaincy typically face?

Chaplains need to be supported themselves, as often they will be 'carrying' quite a lot on behalf of the community. Supervision of some sort, similar to that received by counsellors and psychotherapists, is therefore necessary.

The chaplain role can be quite a lonely one, so it is important that they feel part of a wider team, both within the school and beyond in the Christian community.

Chaplaincy is subtle and often works through intuitive mutual understanding between headteacher and chaplain. When there is a big shift in senior management or change of headteacher then the postholder might no longer feel so comfortable or secure. A chaplaincy team is therefore very useful in maintaining sustainable chaplaincy.

Where can chaplaincy go wrong?

Chaplaincy tends to go wrong when, like most posts, the management relationship is not working appropriately; perhaps senior management do not feel that the chaplain is on task and on message with the whole school ethos, or the chaplain does not feel that their role is valued, listened to or heard.

Why bother with chaplaincy?

What kind of impact does Chaplaincy deliver?

The sort of quantitative impacts that can be measured by chaplaincy are the number of interactions that take place in any day with different sectors of the workplace (expressing this wholistic dimension of the role), the number of more in-depth interventions (i.e. mentoring, anger management etc) and the number of pupils taking part voluntarily in spiritual activities such as 'Prayer Spaces'. Qualitatively, impact is usually assessed through interview with individuals and groups.

Why is the church suddenly interested in Chaplaincy now?

The church is investing in chaplaincy because there is a growing demand for it from all realms of British society from nightclubs to shopping centres. As people feel less confident crossing a threshold into church, they seem more willing to invite the church to meet them where they are.

How do we set up a Chaplaincy?

How is chaplaincy best funded?

There are many ways in which chaplaincy can be funded and it will depend on your local context as to how you approach this. You might decide to collaborate with another local secondary school and with a group of Primaries, so that you all buy into a share of chaplaincy. This model also helps to connect up Primary and Secondary schools across the 'transition gap' of primary to secondary, which can be a challenging time for young people.

This model could be adapted to include church funding, where local churches club together to mirror fund half of a chaplaincy wage. This involves deep engagement with the local church scene but does help keep the chaplaincy joined up with local community activity and support.

The Diocese of Oxford is also offering something called the Common Vision Development Fund, through which full time posts can be offered for a few years if a bid can demonstrate that it meets the criteria of being: missionally creative, carefully discerned, involves new learning and financially sustainable in the long term.

Should we have a full-time or part-time chaplain?

A Full Time Chaplain will obviously allow for much deeper relationships to be established and for a more impacting chaplaincy, however a Part Time role is perhaps more realistic given the constraints on current school budgets, and a Part Time Chaplain role can usefully and creatively sit alongside a local Youth Worker role to make a Full-Time post.

What is the relationship between a chaplaincy and the local church?

It is crucial for the chaplaincy to flourish that there is a close and anchored relationship between the chaplain and the local church. The chaplain needs the support of the church spiritually, financially, and for developing a team of volunteers to bless the schools, and the church needs the chaplaincy in order to relate creatively and meaningfully to young people who live in their communities.

Who can be a Chaplain?

Chaplain or chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy is best done by a team, but with a clear and accountable chaplaincy lead or chaplain. This is the model which is most commonly found in hospitals and prisons. A team, which can comprise both members of staff internally and/or a carefully selected, safeguarded and qualified team of trained volunteers, ensures that the chaplain has support and that chaplaincy can have greater impact in the school, and that it is connected with the broader context of the school's wider community.

Do Chaplains need specialist training?

All chaplains need training, because it is a specialist ministry, however the training need not be too onerous, and a lot of the learning happens simply through reflecting carefully on practice and talking it through with a trusted mentor.

Do Chaplains need to be ordained?

No, chaplains do not need to be ordained, and lay chaplains are often best placed to play the role. What is important, however, is that a chaplain should have some theological training in order to offer appropriate 'spiritual care' and that a chaplain should have appropriate pastoral experience or training to offer appropriate 'pastoral care',

When is Chaplaincy most valuable?

- Chaplaincy is most valuable in cultivating, curating and championing whole school ethos, but doing so from an anchored and articulated compassionate Christian viewpoint. This is done by being chaplain to all and for all in the school community: young people, parents, staff, governors, Head and SLT, and the wider local community.
- Sadly, chaplaincy is often most publicly and obviously useful in times when the whole school grieves or is traumatised by difficult events, as the whole school perspective, pastoral focus and spiritual anchorage of chaplaincy is uniquely placed and qualified to help in such situations. Equally, however, chaplaincy also comes into its own in times of whole school celebration for similar reasons.
- Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the role of chaplain, however, is in the day to day as, to quote the diocesan vision, they help schools to become more Contemplative (UP), more Compassionate (IN) and more Courageous (OUT). One gauge of a successful chaplaincy is noticing how long it takes a chaplain to walk along a busy school corridor in break; if the chaplain is engaging deeply with the school context, then this walk will be a long process as news is shared, problems hinted at, meetings established, community links made, and companionship offered.

Final words on chaplaincy's value comes from an army officer's comment about his army chaplains: **"We don't always understand what chaplains do, but oh boy do we miss them when they're not there."** And from the vice principal of a 6th form college: **"We didn't realise how much value the chaplain gave until he wasn't there."**