



Collective worship guidelines

Cheshire West and
Chester SACRE

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1. Introduction

The Education Reform Act, 1996 as amended by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 says 'each pupil in attendance at a community, foundation or voluntary school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship'.

The Circular 1/94 from DfE is not itself legally binding but provides guidance on the legal requirements of collective worship.

The opportunities presented to a school through the act of collective worship are wide-ranging. Art, music, literature, dance and drama can be used to explore spiritual values. The act of collective worship can make a lively and relevant contribution to the personal growth of each individual pupil. It allows them to explore the richness and diversity of the Christian tradition whilst recognising, and becoming sensitive to, the religious and moral views of other people. Approached in this way the act of collective worship becomes a vital element in the education of the whole person.

Collective worship in a school is essentially an educational activity. It respects the personal integrity and beliefs of pupils. Some will have a religious faith, some will not. Others will be seeking a faith by which to live. For all pupils the act of collective worship should make an effective contribution to their search for meaning and to the development of their own moral and spiritual values.

The main purpose of this document is to try to identify and clarify some of the principles which underlie the circular 1/94 guidance on collective worship, and to suggest ways in which these principles can be implemented on a daily basis through collective worship in schools.



2. The Law

What does the law require?

- All pupils attending a community, foundation or voluntary school, should take part in daily collective worship. Pupils in special schools should attend 'so far as practicable'. Nursery schools and nursery classes are excluded.
- Collective worship is the responsibility of the head teacher in consultation with the governing body. (The practical co-ordination of this may be delegated to a member of staff).
- In community, Free Schools, Academies and foundation schools that do not have a religious character, teachers have the right to withdraw from attending acts or worship.
- Collective worship should include all pupils unless parents/guardians exercise a right of withdrawal.
- Parents/guardians have a right to withdraw their children from collective worship and are not obliged to state their reasons for doing so. The school must provide supervision for any withdrawn pupils and respond to parent/guardian requests.
- The act of worship may take place at any time during each school day. It may be a whole school single act of worship or separate acts for different age or school groups.
- Collective worship should take place on school premises, but on special occasions can take place elsewhere.
- Worship should be 'wholly or mainly' of a broadly Christian character reflecting the varying traditions of Christian beliefs without being of any particular Christian denomination.
- Not every act of collective worship needs to be 'broadly Christian' providing that the 'majority' of them over a term, can be described in this way.
- The Human Rights Act 1998 states that a parent's right to have their child educated in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions must be respected throughout the entire education programme.



3. Interpretations of the law that are not legally binding

(i) What is meant by worship?

- ‘Worship’ means ‘giving worth to’ usually to a divine being.
- the law can only dictate that schools must provide a daily act of collective worship. Worship is a response. The opportunity for worship is an invitation but the acceptance or rejection of that invitation is the individual’s choice.
- emphasis should be upon evoking a response from pupils which leads to reflection and thought. Central to achieving this objective is the importance of creating the right atmosphere.

(ii) What is meant by ‘collective’?

- Collective worship in schools can be understood by contrasting it with the corporate worship of a faith community.

Collective Worship in Schools	Corporate Worship of a Faith Community
- is a legal requirement	- is voluntary
- is open to staff and pupils of any or no religion	- is chosen and followed by members of a specific faith community
- staff and a parent/guardian of a child may exercise their right of withdrawal	- assumes a level of commitment of participants.

- Collective worship is a valued activity in its own right and need not be closely allied with the school’s schemes of work, although there are likely to be clear links with Religious Education, Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education.
- Collective worship is concerned with the sharing of experience and the exploration of shared values. It is an opportunity to involve pupils in a growing self-knowledge, a knowledge of others and an appreciation of the created world.



(iii) What is meant by assembly?

- An assembly is a gathering of people with a common objective and need have no religious purpose e.g. a celebration assembly. The word 'assembly' does not appear in the 1996 Education Act; instead the term 'collective worship' is used.

(iv) What is meant by 'wholly' or 'mainly'?

- Over the course of a term the majority of acts of collective worship should have a broadly Christian character. This does not mean all these acts have to include only explicitly Christian material. If, in the majority of acts of collective worship, the values explored have a broadly Christian character, the legal requirements will be met.

(v) What is meant by 'broadly Christian'?

- If the integrity of pupils and teachers is to be respected at all times, no assumptions should be made about their personal commitment. The school is not a place of worship in the everyday sense of this term and the worship will differ from that of a faith community.
- It is possible, through careful selection of themes and approaches, to plan for collective worship which is based on the broad principles and values of Christianity and which is appropriate to pupils whatever their background or personal beliefs, whether Christian or otherwise. Therefore, exploring themes such as love, honesty, conflict and suffering, although not exclusively Christian, can be considered broadly Christian but they are also central to the teaching of a range of religious traditions. As well as providing explicitly Christian material, schools will wish to incorporate resources from a variety of religions and invite representatives of a range of faith traditions to contribute to acts of collective worship. This is both appropriate and legally acceptable.



4. Delivering Worship: suggestions that are not legally binding

a) What are the principles of worship?

There are several principles which underpin all collective worship. The following are not in any order of priority, all have equal value. You may wish to add others according to your own situation.

Collective worship should:

- **be inclusive**

- be appropriate for all pupils (and teachers), whatever their religious commitments or lack of religious commitments.
- collective worship should celebrate and affirm difference and diversity.
- pupils (and teachers) should not be placed in positions where they are made to feel uneasy or where their personal integrity is not respected.
- pupils (and teachers) should not be asked to pay lip-service to faith statements which they may not understand or to which they do not themselves adhere.

- **encounter the traditions and beliefs mainly of Christianity but also of other religions**

No one pattern of worship from a particular Christian denomination or religious faith should predominate. The law allows considerable flexibility and freedom. Good practice should include a diversity of worship forms e.g. music, meditation, silence, reflection, story, visiting speakers.

- **provide opportunities to worship**

Participants can be given the space and opportunity to worship. They may choose not to do so. This ensures that collective worship in schools is as appropriate for atheists, agnostics and those with non-religious stances as for believers.



- **establish a sense of belonging to the school community and its values and visions**

Collective worship should be an integrating and enriching element within the whole curriculum. It can be used as a time to make explicit the values and assumptions underpinning the day to day life of the school, fostering a sense of group identity. Themes of justice, tolerance, mutual respect, equality, co-operation and responsibility can be explored.

- **have a sense of occasion**

Collective worship can be a special time with its own distinct atmosphere: a time set apart from the ordinary school activities. It can provide the opportunity to celebrate achievements, festivals and community events. This may be achieved by awareness of appropriate setting, music, seating or lighting.

- **promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- Spiritual opportunities e.g. questioning, exploring the created world of beauty, time to reflect;
- Moral opportunities e.g. stories with a moral theme, discussions about right and wrong;
- Social opportunities e.g. stories about human feelings and interaction;
- Cultural opportunities e.g. stories from diverse cultures nationally and internationally.

b) What are the ingredients of worship?

The ingredients of an effective act or worship should include opportunities for:

- Exploration of a theme or focus
- Reflection
- Celebration
- Pupil participation.



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Over the course of a year this may be achieved through:

- developing a sense of awe and wonder about the world around us;
- celebrating the beauty of living things;
- searching for meaning;
- experiencing an awareness of the spiritual dimension, self/others etc;
- opportunities for prayer;
- affirming positive value (e.g. honesty, self-sacrifice, courage, human rights);
- being aware of negative behaviour (e.g. cruelty, injustice, exploitation) exploring right and wrong;
- reflecting on broader and more lasting concerns;
- valuing things of worth;
- leading towards the threshold of worship;
- creating an atmosphere of reverence and mystery;
- giving thanks;
- experiencing a caring and compassionate community;
- exploring emotions, thoughts and ideas;
- promoting a sense of friendship, acceptance and unity;
- encouraging responsibility for making personal decisions;
- celebrating achievement and special occasions;
- sharing and experiencing similarities and differences.

This may incorporate the following elements:

Adults may lead in the following ways through:	Children/young people may participate by:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying prayers • giving time for quiet reflection • offering discussion • leading into silence • introducing songs/music • incorporating drama • showing pictures • reading poetry • telling a story • showing artefacts • introducing special people/visitors • showing children's work and achievements • sharing sacred writing • showing DVD/media • evaluating worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning themes • leading the planning • acting • singing • leading • dancing • listening • thinking • praying • questioning • answering • laughing • crying • reading • leading on evaluating worship



Hymn practice alone is not an act of worship. It can become part of worship if time is given for reflection and pupils engage with the meaning of the words.

A 'thought for the day' alone, is also not an act of worship. It can become part of worship if pupils are offered a space for reflection or any other opportunity to develop spiritually.

c) How can worship be planned effectively?

Planning of collective worship across each school year should ensure coverage is broadly Christian in character and allow for a consideration of a range of themes and content.

Here is one example of a planning sheet:

Date:	Group:	Staff:
Topic/theme:		
Aim:		
Content: a) Introduction: b) Story/activity c) Prayer or reflection d) Conclusion		
Music: Resources:		
Comments:		



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Collective Worship Record Sheet

Date	Theme Reflection	Content	Music	Leader



**Exemplar of Planning Across School Year
KS1 Assembly Planning Themes Year...**

	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						

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d) What are the practical points to consider?

In organising collective worship, schools will be faced with a number of issues to consider:

- when it is held and its duration;
- who is to lead worship;
- the number of pupils and the age of pupils involved;
- the size of the room or hall;
- the atmosphere that the hall environment creates;
- the flexible grouping or seating of pupils;
- the budget available;
- the involvement of outside agencies, members of the community, and other visitors lead worship;
- how it will be monitored.

Each school will find it helpful to review and evaluate their practice and planning regularly so that freshness of approach is maintained.

5. Appendix

(i) What is the role of the collective worship co-ordinator?

The role of the collective worship co-ordinator will vary depending upon the individual needs of the school.

The collective worship co-ordinator may:-

- help the head teacher and governors to carry out their legal responsibilities with regard to collective worship;
- report to governors and head teacher on matters of concern and development;
- make sure there is a development plan for collective worship which may form part of the whole school development plan;
- develop and maintain documentation for effective planning, recording, monitoring and evaluating acts of collective worship;
- respond to the needs and views of other members of the school community;
- Enable a worship group of pupils to plan and lead collective worship;
- develop the resources available for collective worship including new and relevant books, posters, visual aids, artefacts, music, visitors and leaders.

(ii) Policy statement for worship

Elements of a policy statement should include:-

- aims of collective worship;
- information about how worship is organised in school and who is responsible for it;
- an explanation of record keeping and evaluation;
- pupil involvement in worship in terms of planning and leading;
- mention of the parental right of withdrawal;
- a statement about planning worship.

Determination to change the arrangements for collective worship

In England and Wales, the **School Standards and Framework Act 1988** states that all pupils in schools must take part in a daily act of collective worship (unless their parents have requested that they be excused from attending). The Act also states that the majority of these acts of collective worship are required to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', however there are two instances in which this does not apply.

- Religious schools, which should provide worship appropriate to the school's designated religion.
- Schools where the SACRE has determined that Christian worship would not be appropriate for part or all of the school.

Schools can request a **Determination to Change the Arrangements for Collective Worship** because the faith demographic of the pupils makes it inappropriate for collective worship to be 'broadly Christian'. If such a request is approved by SACRE, a **Determination to Change the Arrangements for Collective Worship** is granted which then applies for five years from the date of approval, after which the school must re-apply to SACRE.

The Headteacher of a school seeking a **Determination to Change the Arrangements for Collective Worship** (under section 12 of the **School Standards and Framework Act 1988**) is asked to complete this form and send it to the Clerk to the SACRE.

Application for a determination to change the arrangements for collective worship

Contact details

Name:	
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Address details

School name:	
Address:	

Age range of school:		Number on roll:	
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Date on which the governing body was consulted on this application:	
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Have the parents of children at the school been consulted and if so, what views did they express?

How many children are currently withdrawn by their parents from collective worship?

Please detail any information that you consider relevant about the domestic background of the children in question.

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Continued...

What kind of collective workshop are you seeking to provide for the children covered by this application?

Does this represent a continuation of present practice or would be an innovation?

Please add any other information you would like the SACRE to take into account?

Signature _____ (Headteacher)

Date _____