

Hertfordshire SACRE: Collective Worship Guidance

Introduction

Part of the role of Hertfordshire SACRE is to support, offer guidance and to monitor collective worship. We are delighted to introduce these new and updated guidelines, which are designed to support all those who have responsibility for Collective Worship in maintained schools without a religious character throughout Hertfordshire.

Who should read this document?

These guidelines will be of particular interest to governors, head teachers, those with responsibility for the delivery and co-ordination of Collective Worship, faith leaders and all who participate in daily acts of school Collective Worship. Voluntary schools, both aided and controlled might also find some aspects of the guidelines useful.

This document recognises the good practice in the delivery of collective worship already evident in many Hertfordshire schools but also recognises that there is a need to provide additional and updated guidance to support schools in their commitment to improving the quality of collective worship.

Aims of the guidelines:

- To help schools meet their statutory requirements for collective worship
- To assist schools in the development of acts of Collective Worship which are educationally worthwhile
- To promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- To aid schools in preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life as young citizens living in a multicultural and multifaith society.

1. The Legal Framework

The following is a brief summary of the legal requirements set out in the Education Reform Act 1988, together with interpretation offered in DCSF Circular 1/94 and subsequent acts. Headteachers and governors should refer to the full versions for more detailed information.

Legal Requirements

1. DFES Circular 1/94 contains the current requirement for a daily act of collective worship, the majority of which should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character that is "reflecting" the "broad traditions of Christian belief" without being denominationally biased (cf Education Reform Act 1988). However, headteachers must take into account the pupils' ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds.
2. This must be provided for all registered pupils of compulsory school age or above. The term 'registered pupils' includes those in the sixth form but not pupils in nursery schools or classes.

3. The act of collective worship can take place at any time during the school day and with any grouping of pupils the school wishes to use (though not faith groupings).
4. Parents in all schools have a legal right to withdraw their children wholly or partly from collective worship. Any such request must be complied with. (link – see Right of withdrawal, doc)
5. The Education and Inspection Act 2006 makes provision for pupils in post-16 education to exercise the right to withdraw themselves from the daily act of collective worship.
6. Teachers, including headteachers, have a contractual duty to attend assembly but they have the right to withdraw from collective worship and cannot be discriminated against for doing so.
7. If a school believes that the Christian character clause is inappropriate for the whole school or certain pupils within it, application can be made to the Hertfordshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for a determination order to have the clause lifted or modified.
8. In a County school it is the responsibility of the headteacher, in consultation with the governors, to see that these arrangements are carried out. In a Voluntary school, it is the responsibility of the governors, in consultation with the headteacher.

What should special schools do about providing Collective Worship?

DCSF Circular 1/94 Annex B expresses the law in relation to the involvement of special school pupils in collective worship. In terms of equality of opportunity for pupils in special schools, unless there are reasons relating to space or equipment that cannot be overcome, then special schools should follow the law in the same way as mainstream schools.

2. What is Worship?

Whilst there is a legal requirement for schools to conduct a 'daily act of collective worship' (The 1988 Education Act and subsequent Acts), none of this legislation actually defines what is meant by the term Collective Worship.

SACRE recognises that schools need to clearly differentiate between Corporate Worship and Collective Worship.

Corporate Worship takes place within a faith community context e.g. in Churches, Gurdwaras, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples. Corporate worship implies a community with a shared set of beliefs and values. For most faith communities worship is concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power. Few schools can expect that all their members will subscribe to a set of beliefs which enable the entire school community as such to constitute a worshipping community.

School Collective Worship should recognise that the school community is a collection of people. Thus, acts of Collective Worship should be sensitive to the collective character of individual schools and to be inclusive the term must be interpreted in a way which is meaningful to the range of communities it serves. The school community will usually include people from a variety of cultural and faith, and non-faith backgrounds.

Therefore,

- The term "collective" when used in relation to worship in schools refers to the gathering together of a school group or groups for worship; it does not in any way suggest an act of worship which involves a group meeting to subscribe to any particular faith or denomination of a faith.
- Collective worship does not pre-suppose shared beliefs, and should not seek uniform responses from pupils. Collective Worship caters for a diversity of beliefs and points of view, allowing individuals to respond as individuals.

A broad definition which has been referred to as 'worth-ship', might encompass what is offered in a spirit of admiration, celebration and respect to people of excellence, worthy of honour and by extension, to concepts, principles and conduct which are worthy of celebration, as examples of the highest achievements of the human spirit. Worship thus defined draws on literature, music, drama, art and other sources of inspiration. It can provide a focus for thought, inspiration and reflection for pupils (and staff) whose religious and cultural backgrounds are of any faith or none.

Worship of a Broadly Christian Character

The majority of acts of collective worship must be of a 'broadly Christian character', and those that must reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being denominationally biased. The interpretation of this aspect of the law in paragraphs 60-63 of DCSF Circular 1/94 presents particular problems of application. Sensitivity to the faith background of pupils is enshrined in the law requiring headteachers to have regard to family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes. Thus, when according special status to Jesus Christ, all pupils whatever their beliefs, need to be respected. For example, it may be appropriate to tell stories of the life and teachings of Jesus, but inappropriate for all pupils to be required to address Jesus directly in prayer (see Section 4).

In order to achieve an act of worship which meets legal requirements as well as educational principles, leaders may wish to concentrate on those characteristics which are shared by faiths as well as those which are specific to Christianity.

These include:

- that there is one God, a supreme spirituality, the source of all life who created the world and all that lies in and beyond it;

- that the nature of God may be found through love and selfless caring for others;
- that all relationships between human beings should be guided by love;
- that the spirit of love be used by those with power to value and care for the world and all that is in it.

In this way school acts of collective worship can become a purposeful collective spiritual experience which supports the ethos of the school.

3. Practical Considerations

The legal requirements, together with official interpretations appear to point to an intention to apply the narrow definition of worship in schools. However, schools cannot enforce what is, in essence, an inward spiritual experience. To impose an outward form of worship might be counterproductive spiritually, presenting an important religious act as meaningless and hypocritical to believing and non-believing pupils. It could also be regarded as educationally questionable, presenting prescribed answers to fundamental questions of faith and the meaning of life.

School acts of worship may, therefore, be a time of honouring excellence and exploring and sharing things of value and worth (the broader definition from section 2). But during such acts of worship pupils should be given an opportunity to worship inwardly if they wish to do so. This may be achieved through a moment or two of reflective silence during each act of collective worship. This will therefore allow a meaningful experience for all pupils whilst giving time for individuals to worship in the spiritual sense.

“A school is not a worshipping community....but rather a worship enabling Community” (B O’Keefe) date???

Heads and governors will need to consider the following when reviewing their practice:

- The Education Reform Act 1988 and subsequent Acts, DCSF guidance and Ofsted requirements;
- The logistics of providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;
- The school’s own interpretation of the term ‘collective worship’;
- The school’s own interpretation of the requirement that the majority of acts of collective worship over a term must be ‘of a broadly Christian character...must reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief’;
- Making the experience inclusive, so that all pupils can feel part of it;
- Formulating a school policy based on the above and agreed by staff, governors and in some cases other partners in the process e.g. pupils (see Appendices for examples of school policies);
- Appointing a teacher to coordinate collective worship; (NB. ultimately the responsibility for collective worship lies with the head teacher after consultation with the governing body)
- Keeping records of themes and content of collective worship;
- Governors should appoint a member of the governing body to ensure that their statutory duty with regard to collective worship is carried out.

Applying for a Determination

The requirements for acts of Collective Worship that are “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” may be lifted in respect of some or all of the pupils in a school where the requirement is deemed inappropriate. Where a headteacher deems this to be the case, application can be made to Hertfordshire SACRE for a determination order. Before making such an application, the headteacher should consult the governing body who may wish to seek the views of parents.

Headteachers may apply to the Chair SACRE requesting alternative Collective Worship arrangements for some or all pupils or apply for the requirements to be modified for some or all pupils.

SACRE may decide, following such an application, to lift or modify the requirements and request to be informed about what form the alternative arrangements will take. SACRE will then write to

the headteacher communicating the decision to accept or reject the request for a determination and state the date from which the determination should take effect. SACRE will review the determination no later than 5 years after its introduction and will consider renewal of the determination at the end of 5 years.

If a determination is accepted, it will be the headteacher's responsibility to decide what form the alternative worship will take, and inform SACRE, the Governing Body and parents. Where such a determination is made in respect to all or some of the pupils in a school, daily Collective Worship must still be provided for them.

Good Practice

Schools generally combine their acts of collective worship with an assembly helping to ensure that the act of collective worship takes place within a broad educational framework.

The following are features of good practice:

- Clear objectives
- Suitable timings at appropriate points in the schools day
- A variety of groupings over the course of the week
- Wide staff and pupil involvement no matter what their personal beliefs
- Use of visitors
- Substantial forward planning in terms of themes, leaders, curriculum connections etc.
- Appropriate resources
- Generating the right atmosphere
- A time of quiet for personal reflection/ worship
- Having guidance for visiting speakers
- A contribution to the whole school ethos
- A variety of methods

Acts of collective worship should:

- Not be over-dominated by school administration
- Not be over-moralising

Objectives and Methods

Ideally school collective worship should encompass all aspects of school life and all areas of the curriculum so that every member of staff and every pupil may feel involved. It both reflects and nurtures the whole ethos of the school. In particular, assembly (the usual context for collective worship) develops the feeling of belonging to a community which is essential for personal development and spiritual growth.

Each school has to respond positively to its own particular needs but all schools should see assembly as an educational opportunity with clear objectives:

- To show interest in and concern for members of the school community
- To celebrate special occasions together
- To show concern for the daily happenings in school life, the local community and wider world

- To share appreciation of worthwhile activities undertaken by groups within the school
- To explore and review the variety of values, attitudes and standards manifested in society
- To reflect upon dimensions of human life, the wonderful, beautiful, joyful, heroic, humorous, tragic, ugly, sorrowful, solemn...

Schools may want to choose from a range of methods including:

- Pupils' contributions
- Stories/readings
- Dance/drama
- Prayer/meditation
- Songs/hymns/music
- Sacred/secular readings
- Artefacts/natural materials
- Visual aids/focal points
- Dialogue/creative silence

NB The use of some of the above means of worship may not be acceptable to some faith communities

Success Criteria

Schools will wish to evaluate their collective worship against stated criteria. Some suggested criteria are:

- Involvement, enjoyment, attention and reaction of pupils
- Respect and tolerance
- Positive response to shared experience
- A sense of challenge
- An atmosphere which matches the theme
- A contribution to individual and community sense of well-being
- A sense of occasion
- Good order
- A place in the overall plan of the school
- Staff affirmation
- Enrichment of pupils' experience

Making Collective Worship Special

Many headteachers and teachers feel that collective worship should exhibit certain characteristic elements. Generally pupils should be able to appreciate that this is a special time in the day. Providing such an atmosphere is difficult and many feel that collective worship which contains specific features, such as prayer, song and other rituals can enhance the experience. Where collective worship takes place within the context of a school assembly, pupils need to be clear about when the act of collective worship begins and ends. Some helpful strategies include:

- Use of a symbol to introduce and conclude the act of collective worship, e.g. lighting a candle, showing a special object, revealing or setting up a focal point etc
- A period of silence prior to and/or following the act of collective worship
- A short piece of music to separate the act of collective worship from other school business

Prayer/Reflection

The use of prayer leads to a great deal of debate. Whether to use prayer and the appropriateness of any prayers which are used requires the greatest care and sensitivity. Many feel that what is generally understood as a prayer is a good way of focusing thoughts, feelings and wishes. Nevertheless, pupils should not be required to say or affirm prayers which they do not believe.

In order to be sensitive when using prayers from faith traditions, some schools have developed various forms of introductions as alternatives to the traditional “let us pray” which for the most part is unsuitable for school collective worship. The Redbridge handbook on school worship gives some useful ideas such as:

“And now, in a moment of stillness, listen to the words of a well-known prayer...”

Or, if the leader has a faith commitment,

“And now, in a moment of quietness, I want you to listen whilst I say a prayer which, as a Christian (Muslim, Sikh, Jew...) is very special to me. Those of you who know the prayer and want to, might like to say the words with me...”

Or, again,

“I am going to read you the words of a Christian (Hindu, Buddhist...) prayer that was written 400 years ago. I want you to think about the words carefully. Some of you might want to make the words your own.”

In ways like these pupils are given an introduction to the notion of prayer traditions whilst not being required to respond in a hypocritical fashion. It is not always necessary to have a prayer and the use of regular moments of silence also provides opportunities for some pupils to respond in a personal way if they so wish.

Song/Music

Song, as a means of creating atmosphere which unifies and uplifts, is well recognised. The difficulty in primary schools is that children will generally sing anything that their teachers ask. The difficulty in secondary schools is getting the pupils to sing at all.

There are a large number of hymns and songs to choose from but some are more appropriate to faith worship than school collective worship. For instance some people feel that hymns such as “O Jesus I have promised” are inappropriate for all except those who believe in Jesus as the Lord. Many retain the music to such hymns, rewriting the words to make them more appropriate to school collective worship.

Many primary schools have a weekly 'singing practice', which in some cases takes the place of that day's act of collective worship. Practice is important if singing is to be whole-hearted and sympathetic to the theme chosen. The words of the hymn/song could form the focus and be reflected upon before or after singing, thereby making the time more clearly reflective.

Pupils may be introduced to hymns and songs in a variety of ways, for example by using recordings of choirs, listening to a religious group perform, the school choir etc. This may be a suitable way of using song with secondary as well as primary pupils.

Music, generally, is an ideal way of setting an atmosphere and supporting the theme of the worship. In addition it can assist pupils' personal reflection. By using both recorded and live contributions, the whole experience is enriched. Some suggestions for general music for reflection can be found in Appendix ?

Assembly Themes

When planning school worship headteachers should consider grouping some of the times together under a theme. This gives opportunities for teachers to plan well ahead and provides a coherent framework for the year. By setting themes in advance genuine links can be made with religious festivals, school events, national and international occasions, social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and the whole curriculum. Knowing themes in advance gives staff and pupils alike the opportunity to participate more fully in both planning and presentation.

The following list, originally published in 'School Worship Perspectives, Principles and Practice' by Bill Gent, can be used when undertaking planning over a year or a term.

Achievement and talent	Good and Evil
Age	Guilt and Suffering
Aggression and Hate	
The Arts	Harvest and Thankfulness
Autumn and Harvest	Health
	Heroes and Heroines
Barriers	Humour
Beginnings	
Blindness and Sight	I believe...
Bridges	In the news
Care and caring	Jesus
A celebration of talent	Journeys
Change and decay	Joy and sorrow
Choice and Decision	
Christmas stories	Key People
Courage	
	Leaders and Leadership
Day and Night	Lenten thoughts

Desert Island Disc

Discovery

Dreams

The Easter Experience

Education and learning

Exploring the Future

Exploring the Past

Fashion and Trends

Finding Your Way

Food for Thought

Forgiveness

Freedom and Responsibility

The Global Village

God and Gods

Proverbs and Sayings

Peace and tranquillity

A Person who has influenced me

Pride and Prejudice

Rebirth

Red Letter Days

Rewards and Punishments

Risk

Roots

School and Community

School and Tradition

School Life

The Sciences

Seeing the Light

Special Books

Life and Death

Light and darkness

Love and Hate

The Message

Mysteries and Puzzles

The Natural World

A New School Year

New Years Resolutions

One World

Old and New

Opportunities

Parents and Children

Prayer and Meditation

War and peace

Ways of Seeing

Wealth and Riches

What's it worth?

Why are we here?

Wonder and Awe

The Word

Winter and Spring

Work and Play

The World About Us

The Writing on the Wall

Youth and Old Age

Stepping Stones and Stumbling Blocks

Strengths and Weaknesses

Success and Failure

Summing Up

Taking Risks

Time and Tide

Turning Points

The Unexpected

Us and Them

Victory and defeat

Voices

Voices from the past

Some suggestions for general music for reflection can be found on page 12

Useful websites for collective worship

<http://www.schoolassemblies.btinternet.co.uk/calendar.htm> - a useful month-by-month calendar of festivals from many different faiths with links to other useful information.

<http://www.assemblies.org.uk> - a great source of ideas for themes and activities for primary and secondary assemblies.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/assemblies> - you can search for assemblies by theme, school type or year group.

<http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk> - themed assemblies with Christian content.

<http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/more/assemblies/contents.htm> - suggestions from teachers on how to deliver creative and imaginative assemblies.

http://www.natsoc.org.uk/index_fsn.html - a regularly updated resource with assemblies on a Christian theme from the Culham Institute.

<http://www.reep.org/cw/index.php> - a website containing collective worship resources promoting the links between religion and environment.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/collectiveworship> - homepage of the collective worship resources from BBC radio.

http://www.primaryideas.co.uk/index_files/assemblies.html - scripts for individual year and whole school assemblies.

<http://www.teachingpets.co.uk/Assemblies/Contents.htm> - teaching ideas for primary assemblies.

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1341> - ideas for inclusive assemblies from the British Humanist Association

Some Suggestions For Music For Reflection

Beethoven	“Pastoral” Symphony No.6	2nd Movement
	“Moonlight” Sonata in G Minor	
	9th Symphony	Last Movement
Mozart	Piano Concerto No.21 in C Major	2nd Movement
Dvorjak	New World Symphony No.9	2nd Movement
Bruch	Violin Concerto No.1 in G Minor	2nd Movement
Elgar	Enigma Variations	Nimrod
Holst	Planet Suite	
Mahler	Symphony No.5 in C sharp minor	4th Movement

More Examples of Themes for a School Year (Secondary)

Autumn Term

Start as you mean to go on
Succeeding against the Odds
Seize the Day
Grandparents' Day
Heroes
Being Organised
World Food Day
Diwali
Sharing
Remembrance
Positive Thinking
Eid Ul Fitr
World Aids Day
Human Rights
Christmas

Spring Term

New Year's Resolutions
Don't judge by appearances
Martin Luther King Day
Holocaust Memorial Day
Being Nervous
Friendship and Love
Ambition
Making Mistakes
International Women's Day
St Patrick's Day
Fighting Racism
Easter

Summer Term

The Importance of Community
Communication
Living in a Democracy
Caring for Others
Keeping Focused
World Environment Day
Teamwork
Money
Independence
Dreams, Visions and Premonitions
Achievement



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Enhancing collective worship and RE