



Collective Worship in Schools

What you need to know

What is Worship?

Worship comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning to attribute 'worth' or 'worth-ship'. It has the same root as the word 'worthy'. The most obvious meaning of the word 'worship' may initially be that of paying homage to a divine power or being: religious communities 'worship' God in whatever form their tradition demands. However, worship can also refer to the celebration of, honour paid to, or service offered to, those individuals or things people consider worthy. In our own day people have been known to 'worship' pop groups, football stars, political leaders, money, fame or power.



Worship may find expression in many different forms: in music, song, dance, drama, in words of praise, in prayers, readings and teachings, in listening, in thoughtful silence, in meditation, in contemplation of icons and symbols, in the service of others, in the passing on of one's beliefs, in the lighting of a candle and other symbolic actions. And whilst this list may originate in the actions of religious communities, they are not without parallel, for example, in the football world or other secular fields.

What is Collective Worship?



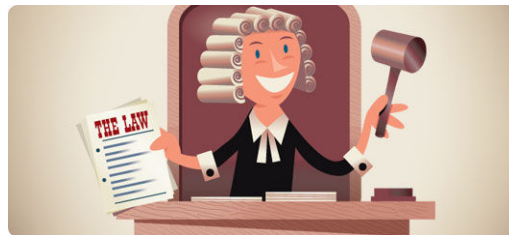
The government requires an act of Collective worship for all registered pupils in maintained schools on a daily basis. It states:

Collective worship in schools should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs, to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and re-inforce positive attitudes.

Religious Education and Collective Worship Circular 1/94 (para 50)

Worship' is not defined in the legislation and in the absence of any such definition it should be taken to have its natural and ordinary meaning. That is, it must in some sense reflect something special or separate from school activities and it should be concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power. However, worship in schools will necessarily be of a different character from worship amongst a group with beliefs in common. The legislation reflects this difference in referring to 'collective worship' rather than 'corporate worship'.
Religious Education and Collective Worship Circular 1/94 (para 57)

The Legal Requirements for Collective Worship



The 1988 Education Act stated that:

- All pupils must take part in a collective act of worship every day
- The act of collective worship may be as a whole school or in different age groupings
- It may happen at any time of the school day
- It has to take place on school premises (In an aided school the Governors can make arrangements for worship elsewhere on special occasions e.g. the local church. In a controlled school acts of worship may take place off school premises but these should be in addition to the statutory acts of collective worship on the premises).
- The head teacher is responsible for ensuring the legal requirements for Collective Worship are met. (In an aided or voluntary controlled school the responsibility for securing daily acts of worship lies with the governing body after consultation with the headteacher). The character and content of collective worship in these schools continues to be determined by governing bodies in accordance with their Trust Deeds.
- All staff, including the headteacher have the legal right to withdraw from the Act of Collective worship. The headteacher remains responsible for finding someone suitable to organise and lead the acts of worship. (The right to withdrawal does not extend to staff in Aided schools.)
- All parents have the right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship, wholly or partially. The school's responsibility for the child's health and safety is still paramount.

A school might remind parents that they naturally want to celebrate the good and worthy things achieved by individuals and groups in its community. They want to celebrate special or significant occasions within the school community and the community at large. These readily form part of a school's collective worship.



They might point out that collective worship can also be a time to reflect on the lives of people who can be said to be worthy because of their courage, compassion, or commitment to truth. It can provide an opportunity for pupils to share experiences, beliefs, values and concerns which are important to them and offer an occasion to reflect on those things which inspire us with awe, wonder, gratitude or a sense of being a part of something much greater than ourselves. Collective worship is not a series of one off events which bears no relation to school life. Instead, good collective worship is integral to the life and ethos of the school, the locality in which it is placed and from which pupils come from and to the major events/concerns of the world. In this way it can have a powerful role in preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

What is 'of a broadly Christian Character?'

Circular 1/94 (this reinforced the 1988 Education Reform Act but is not statutory in its own right) says that worship that reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief will be of a broadly Christian character.

Certainly the broad traditions include those unique to Christianity - Jesus as Son of God and God as Redeemer for instance - and these should not be ignored. The major festivals of the Church will give you an opportunity to reflect upon them. Equally, most broad traditions of Christian belief are shared by other faiths - God as creator and humankind as stewards of the earth and its resources, for example. Thus, an act of collective worship focusing on the Jewish festival of Tu B'Shevat (the New Year for Trees) would enable all those with a concern for ecology and the environment to share and be broadly Christian too. According to 1/94 acts of collective worship that are broadly Christian need not contain only Christian material. Some universal concepts like justice and respect for life are part of the broad traditions of Christian belief, and much can be made of those in collective worship.



Collective worship that is intended to be of such a kind that pupils of other faiths or of no faith can take part, will be enriched by containing elements or examples from other faiths. It is deemed to be good practice to consider concentrating on the religious values faiths have in common,

thereby enlarging pupils' understanding of their own or their parents' faith and giving others an insight into religious belief.

Worship with themes such as charity or saying sorry is broadly Christian. A useful way in for your group might be to think of concepts, attitudes, values, that have general application and see how well they fit the "broad traditions of Christian belief".

The leader of collective worship can remain objective and detached from the particular faith tradition used in worship by a careful choice of words:- "*this is a Muslim / Sikh / Christian prayer you can join in or reflect on or listen to...*" You do not have to be a religious believer to lead collective worship.

Similarly, responses can vary quite legitimately from observation with a degree of detachment to sharing with total commitment. Members of a school should feel able, and be enabled, to opt out mentally and choose not to participate.



Collective Worship that is not 'broadly Christian' in character

Just under half your acts of collective worship need not be broadly Christian. Here is an opportunity to offer collective worship that is broadly of the character of another faith. If you are in a school with significant minorities from

faiths other than Christianity and have not asked SACRE for a determination, here is an opportunity to demonstrate respect for those faiths.

Similarly, collective worship that explores the values of non religious life stances such as Humanism or of individuals and groups with no religious affiliations (Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth) can enrich the experience of pupils and encourage them to think deeply about their own values and commitments.

Appropriate emphasis on this opportunity ought to enable a larger number of teachers and friends of the school to offer their services as leaders of collective worship.



Preparation

Preparation is the key to an effective assembly.

Age appropriateness

As you prepare an assembly, think about the ages of the children who will experience it. Ask yourself:

- Do the story, reflection, and song use appropriate language and concepts?

- If the assembly contains a mix of ages, is there a good balance of material to suit each group?
- Are there opportunities for older children to be involved in leading assembly for younger classes?

Curriculum relevance

Are there any possibilities for linking the assembly to appropriate curriculum areas? It should be recognised that the assembly, with its focus on a celebration and communal activity, is different from curriculum-based teaching. One useful method of integrating the assembly with the curriculum is the class assembly in which a class prepares a presentation based on work they have been doing.

Environment

As well as thinking about the content and shape of the assembly, give some thought to the environment in which it will take place.

- "Is there a visual focus appropriate to the content? This might be a picture, candles or a collection of objects.
- Will there be music playing as the children enter? If so, this can be a rich opportunity to expand the children's experience. It can also be used to allow children to participate in the assembly by having different classes choose or play pieces of music.

Time for reflection

Some time for prayer and reflection is an important part of an effective assembly. Inclusive phrases for use when introducing prayer or reflection might be: 'Now a chance to think about', 'You can use this as a time of prayer', or 'Something to think or pray about'.

Children themselves can write the reflection, and it can include responses in words and/or actions. Songs can also be used reflectively.

Checklist

A useful checklist when planning your assembly is to think through the extent to which it includes the following:

- Valuing individuals and individuality.
- Celebrating the school community.
- Inspiring through stories/examples of faith.
- Valuing and exploring faith perspectives.

- A time of quiet for prayer or reflection.
- Some joint activity such as singing, rapping or 'join-in' story.
- Inclusive use of language, particularly in relation to prayer or times of reflection.

Presentation

Exciting, lively and relevant content is a vital element of a good assembly. However, it can be wasted if the assembly is not well presented.



When preparing assemblies, think about the following.

Use of space

Consider the space in which you and others will present the assembly, and also where the children will sit.

Tailor the space to suit the theme and style of the assembly. Does the assembly include drama, dance or a music performance? If so, can everyone see and hear? Will it be easy for the performers to find their space, props and instruments? Are they too distant or too close to the rest of the children - either can be intimidating and off-putting to those unused to performance.

Think about trying some different styles - an assembly in the round or an arena (children on three sides) approach. Perhaps the 'performers' can be dotted around the space so that different voices and sounds emanate from various parts of the hall.

Why not create a pathway of PE mats that you can walk along during the assembly, taking you through the space in which the children are sitting - it all adds variety and can be appropriate to the theme.

Visual focus

What will the children see as they listen to the assembly? Often this is not an issue, since the assembly includes visual elements such as drama or a music performance or active storytelling. Often, though, it is appropriate to think about some form of visual focus:

- A flip-chart picture (simple happy/sad faces are used in a number of assemblies);
- Overhead projector image(s);
- A group of objects appropriate to the theme.

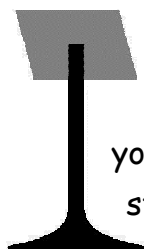
LOOK

If you do create a visual focus, think about:

- Is it large enough to be seen from the back of the space?
- Do those at the extreme edges have a clear view?
- Is it complimentary to the rest of the assembly, or distracting?
- Can you use intriguing objects that will only make sense as you refer to them during the assembly?

Use of voice

Teachers and leaders from faith communities probably know more about this than many other professions. You will probably be used to filling a space with sound when necessary, then dropping your voice to make the listeners attentive. Assemblies use all your natural classroom (or church!) management skills, but they also provide opportunities to try some different ways of doing things.



You could try a dialogue with two contrasting voices - perhaps a male and female teacher at different sides of the space. If you or another assembly leader can develop a range of voices for storytelling, this can also add variety and increase interest.

The use of children's voices can be more problematic. The easy option is to go for those with loud voices who enjoy performance, and certainly such children should be given opportunities to use their gifts. Essentially, however, assembly is about something other than performance: its focus lies in shared time and shared experience. Those children who are less at home with speaking or doing in front of a large group should be supported to do so. You could also consider using a microphone if appropriate, or (in

the case of prayers, meditations, or other prepared presentations) pre-recording individuals' contributions and playing them on cassette at the relevant moments.



Using Visitors

Using visitors in collective worship entails time and planning. In order to ensure that they are used to their best effect, follow these guidelines:

1. Make sure that the visitor is suitable. It is not advisable to invite a visitor into speak without first having met them and discussed what they plan to do. It is better still if you have seen them in action speaking to young people.

Colleagues from other schools can be a useful resource for names, as can the local adviser or inspector.

2. Brief the speaker beforehand. During this meeting discuss:

The time and duration of the act of worship;

The size and age range of pupils;

The religious / cultural mix of pupils and staff;

The subject in specific terms;

Whether they need any materials such as an OHP or Video;

If there is going to be a follow-up session, say what form this is going to take - a worksheet, questionnaire, discussion topic;

Explain the format of collective worship;

Ask how the speaker would like to be introduced;

Expenses.

3. Follow up this meeting with a written invitation confirming the date, time and contents of the collective worship. Enclose a map of the school with directions and information about car parking facilities. Make sure that you provide a contact telephone number in case of emergencies. It is advisable to provide a home telephone number where they can contact you the evening before!

4. Arrange for somebody to meet the visitor. Schools are easy places to become lost in!

5. At the beginning of the worship introduce the visitor, but don't pre-empt what they are going to say or do.

6. As already mentioned worship should not be an occasion for telling

pupils off. This is especially so in front of a visitor. It is not only off-putting for the visitor but it is also embarrassing. Guidelines for visitors can be helpful. For example:

Dear Xxxxxxxx,

We are looking forward to your visit on xday, xxth xxxxxx at xx a.m. As discussed, assembly at our school generally lasts for xx minutes and your part will be approximately xx minutes. There will be about xxx pupils present between the ages of xx and xx. You will have easy access to a cassette/ CD player and OHP should you need them.

We will introduce you as:

We understand your assembly will be about:

Please allow plenty of time for reaching us. We enclose a map for finding us. If the car park is full, squeeze in and let the secretary know which car you have blocked in! We will be happy to pay your travelling expenses.

Do report to reception when you arrive. Someone will come to meet you. You will be asked to sign in and given a badge to wear as part of the school security system.

The notes overleaf(*see section below*) have been written to help you deliver collective worship according to legal requirements.

If you have a problem that prevents you from coming, please contact us as soon as possible. We still have to provide Collective Worship whether you are there or not! Ring xxxxxxxxx the night before if necessary or ring the school (xxxx xxxxxxxxx) by 8.20 a.m. at the latest.

Again, we are looking forward to seeing you,

Yours sincerely,

Advice for Visitors taking Collective Worship in Schools

1. School 'collective' worship is different from 'corporate' worship in faith communities. Pupils and staff come from various backgrounds. Be aware you will be speaking to people of different religions and none.

2. As many pupils and staff have no religious background, take care not to assume great knowledge of the Bible or other religious stories, church, Jesus, festivals. This does not mean they will know nothing!



3. Do speak about your religious faith if that is why you are there, we want to know what is important to you. However, when expressing personal beliefs, make it clear this is what 'you' believe. School is an opportunity to share, not indoctrinate or evangelise.

4. Collective worship is part of our pupils' educational entitlement. Don't just entertain us. Share something important - one simple and clear point from which we can all learn, whatever our background.

5. Please do not:

Use sexist or racist language - this will alienate many pupils or staff

Be highly controversial - there is no forum for debate in the assembly situation

Speak badly about other faiths - you may have their representatives present

Be disparaging about education, school or teachers

6. Please do:

Make any visuals large - we all need to see

Remember sight reading is an adult skill - capital letters are worst to read

Check on hymns or songs - are they suitable for pupils to sing or just hear?

Remember you have limited time - we have to go to lessons!

7. If you want helpers, let us know when you arrive and we will give you an idea of how best to organise this. Selecting from the audience can be very time consuming, unless done as pupils come in.

8. Introduce prayers or thoughts in a way that does not compromise pupils or staff but offers time to think OR pray e.g. Let's be still and quiet. Time to pray or think. Please listen carefully while I say / read a prayer

9. Don't be afraid to discuss with us what you want to do. We will try to give you feedback on what you do. If we get something wrong, please let us know too.

10. If you have not been to an assembly at our school before and want to come on a visit, please ask and we will arrange this for you.

Collective Worship: Some guiding principles

Bill Gent in "School Worship" (CEM 1989) lists six guiding principles. Collective Worship should be:



- i. Inclusive. All must be able to contribute; all can gain from it. Collective worship must recognise the integrity and dignity of all members of the school community.
- ii. Curricular. As part of the curriculum it should be integrated, not just tacked on. It requires planning, monitoring, evaluating. It needs resourcing, and those leading it may require training.
- iii. Educational. It has to be a learning experience for all members of the school community. It should be enquiry based, exploratory, equipping those engaged in it to make connections, to relate what they are doing to other experiences. It should foster positive attitudes.
- iv. Contributory to the spiritual and religious education of all. It ought to be an open ended reflective experience, providing opportunities to explore and appreciate what faith communities do and feel when they worship. It should encourage pupils and staff to acknowledge or recognise that there is a spiritual dimension to their lives.
- v. A sense of occasion, offering something that usual classroom activity cannot; offering "depth time."
- vi. Shaped to the needs of the particular school and the social and moral values it upholds.

Collective Worship Can:



Geoff Teece (op. cit.) suggests that collective worship can:

- o Foster a sense of fellowship by bringing pupils together to celebrate the shared values of the school and of the community.
- o Foster a sense of wonder and awe at the beauty, mystery and power of the world.

- Allow reflection on the fundamental questions of life and move attention away from the concerns of the moment to those things which are of eternal concern to human beings.
- Provide an opportunity for celebration and thanksgiving and the sharing of emotions such as love, joy, hope, friendship, acceptance, anguish, fear, reverence, forgiveness, etc.
- Foster a concern for the needs of other people.
- Provide a time for sharing successes and failures in personal, school and community life.
- Provide the experience of being part of a caring supportive community.
- Foster new insights about life.
- Foster empathy with others.

You cannot compel people to worship or to respond to worship; but you can make worship possible and enable pupils to respond, silently and reflectively or more exuberantly. In the 1970s giving pupils the opportunity to worship was described as bringing them to the threshold of worship. Whether or not they crossed this threshold was up to them. The same principles apply today.

At the centre should be the source of the values being celebrated or affirmed. Collective worship is not just about caring and sharing for example, but rather about why humankind should care or share - because of its common humanity, or because God requires it.

In brief, keep it simple and concentrate on the four big questions:

- Who am I?
- Where do I fit into the scheme of things?
- Why should I?
- Why shouldn't I?

In essence collective worship is:

- Active rather than passive
- Directed towards something/someone. It has a focus/object
- Personal

Bear all this in mind and you won't go far wrong!

