

# London Borough of Waltham Forest

## SACRE

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

### Guidance on Collective Worship



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## 1. Introduction

Every Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) has a legal responsibility to advise its Local Authority (LA) on issues regarding collective worship.

Waltham Forest schools serve communities with a very rich diversity of faiths and beliefs as well of those who do not formally identify with any organised belief.

This guidance has been produced by the Waltham Forest SACRE in order to support schools and academies as they seek to improve their delivery of collective worship and find a balance between the law on collective worship and the needs and identities of the young people in their care.

## 2. What is Collective Worship?

Each faith community has its own interpretation of the word '**worship**'.

The word worship comes from the Anglo-Saxon word - weorp (worth) scip (ship) which for schools may mean "that which it is important for us to promote (e.g. values)".

In 'The Amazing fact of Quaker Worship' G H Gorman defines worship as:

*... a universal human activity which can be expressed as a growing ability to celebrate and reflect on things held to be of worth. For many people, worship involves a commitment to a belief in God."*

This wider interpretation of 'worship' is usually helpful to schools and academies.

*"However, it can have a much broader and inclusive meaning; it can be a "form of human activity, when we purposely put ourselves in the position of paying particular attention to those things in life which have the greatest meaning for us".*

Whilst schools have a statutory duty to provide daily collective worship for all registered pupils the law<sup>1</sup> has never clearly defined **collective worship**. We know that it is not the same as faith community worship (corporate worship) because:

- A school or an academy is not a faith community
- A school or academy has pupils and staff from many different belief backgrounds including those who do not follow any particular tradition and those whose beliefs have no religious or faith dimension.
- A school or academy community has a wide range of people with different views on what 'worship' might mean and what or whom may be worthy of worship.

Many schools hold collective worship as element within a school assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B for an overview of the law relating to collective worship

### 3. The school assembly

The assembly is an important part of the school experience for pupils. It may be held as the whole school together, or as a year group, a class or any other configuration. It is up to each school to devise an effective pattern unique to its own needs.

In considering a school policy it is worthwhile to consider the following principles that the school assembly should be:

- **Inclusive** – an activity that everyone in the school community can contribute towards and gain from.
- **Educational** – like any other part of the curriculum it should be an intentional learning experience.
- **A time with a sense of occasion** – the value of the experience can be enhanced by careful attention to the setting and organisation.
- **Shaped to the needs of the school** – the assembly is an opportunity for the school to:
  - affirm and celebrate the values and ethos of the school;
  - add to the pupils' development of an awareness of, and a sense of belonging to, the many different dimensions of the schools' community;
  - promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
  - celebrate and affirm British values

Although many schools choose to place collective worship as an element within an assembly is important to remember that:

*“Collective worship and assembly are distinct activities. Although they may take place as part of the same gathering, the difference between the two should be clear”<sup>2</sup>*

It is common for schools to combine an assembly and collective worship. The 3 stage model below is widely used in schools and can offer an atmosphere to facilitate an assembly and collective worship experience for pupils of a high quality:

1. **Stimulus** – e.g. music, a picture, quotation, candle, flowers etc. A well-chosen piece of music can help to create an atmosphere for worship and reflection and give the pupils time to prepare.
2. **Engagement** – e.g. a story, drama or message etc. Visual aids, artefacts or illustrations of the key points help make the message memorable.
3. **Response** - Allowing the children to respond - e.g. giving the pupils an opportunity to reflect. Silence can allow time for individual thought and reflection. It may be a prayer, a poem, a reading or time to sit with one's own

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<sup>2</sup> Religious Education and Collective Worship: Circular 1/94 (para 58)

thoughts after a guided reflection etc. The response makes the activity become an act of collective worship.

It is the **Response (3<sup>rd</sup> stage)** that constitutes the act of collective worship.

When schools place collective worship in the context of an assembly, **consideration must be given** to how pupils, their parents and school staff can exercise their “**right to withdraw**”<sup>3</sup> from that part of the event. The “right to withdraw” from collective worship does not imply a right to withdraw from assembly.

#### 4. The character of collective worship

Whilst the Education Reform Act 1988 determines that the majority of acts of collective worship each term should be “*wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character*”, Circular 1/94 states:

*“The extent to which and the ways in which the broad traditions of Christian belief are to be reflected in such acts of collective worship should be appropriate to the family backgrounds of the pupils and their ages and aptitudes. It is for the head teacher to determine this after consultation with the governing body.”<sup>3</sup>*

SACRE believe that ‘broadly Christian character’ does mean:

- The promotion of values that most Christians believe to be important. These may be, and often are, values held to be important by other faiths, and belief systems.
- incorporating elements that some Christians might recognise from their worship, e.g. stories, learning from the good example of others, including readings from holy and spiritual books.

However, in the context of our diverse community it **cannot** mean:

- creating a pretence of Christian worship.

#### 5. Positive Purposes of Collective Worship

SACRE believes that collective worship can be provided in accordance with the law to the benefit of the whole school or academy community. It can add value to the education process, for example by providing an opportunity to:

- encourage pupils to develop awareness of the universal moral principles of right and wrong, justice and fairness and concern for the fate of others and the world;
- add to the pupils’ development of an awareness of, and a sense of belonging to, the many different dimensions of the schools’ community;
- share an experience which promotes thought and reflection;
- further promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;

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<sup>3</sup> Religious Education and Collective Worship: Circular 1/94 (para 83 - 88)

- consider and reflect upon a variety of situations and issues and make a personal response and
- reflect quietly and make an internal response in the light of personal beliefs and background

## 6. Providing a high quality experience

To ensure that a quality experience is provided, we believe that collective worship and assemblies should be well planned and effectively led, resourced and managed. The integrity of all present should be recognised and safeguarded throughout all collective worship experiences.

Each school should have a policy document<sup>4</sup> that sets out how collective worship and assembly is to be organised and delivered. Many schools plan a sequence of themes<sup>5</sup> to provide a focus and balance to the programme across the year.

Schools should consider how the selection of themes contribute towards the school aims for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education SMSC as well as the development of British values.

The policy should also determine how the programme is to be monitored and evaluated.

*“It is suggested that the head teacher ensure that the school's plans for daily collective worship, or some other record, are kept in case of queries.”<sup>6</sup>*

## 7. Being sensitive to, and respecting, all beliefs

In acts of collective worship those leading the session must to be inclusive and ensure pupils' own personal beliefs, whether religious or secular, are respected. Pupils must be allowed to respond in ways that are appropriate to them.

For example, if prayers are used a leader can say:

*‘I am going to say a prayer from the..... faith now and I want you to listen and think about our theme today.’*

## 8. Visitors to schools and collective worship

It is good practice to have visitors from a wide range of beliefs. This promotes inclusivity where a variety of beliefs are held by the children,. Where children come from only a small number of belief backgrounds, this helps them understand the variety of beliefs in our multicultural society

Visitors from the local community can enrich the children's experiences and give them different perspectives on beliefs and values.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix D for a guide to writing a school policy

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for links to resources for assembly and collective worship

<sup>6</sup> Religious Education and Collective Worship: Circular 1/94 (para 67)

Careful consideration should be given to ensure that the visitor fully understands the nature of collective worship and the ethos of the school e.g. the educational context, not an evangelistic opportunity.

Visitors<sup>7</sup> should be carefully chosen and briefed ahead of the event so that they are aware of the:

- age and aptitude of the children,
- type of content or subject matter required
- duration of the event.
- safeguarding requirements

## 9. Collective Worship and Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) is a subject of the curriculum and as such cannot be taught through collective worship. RE should not usually be taught through assemblies, however, if learning from the RE curriculum is to be used as an assembly presentation it is essential that the appropriate sensitivities related to art, music or drama are observed.

## 10. Collective worship in special schools, nursery classes and post 16

DfE circular 1/94 Annex B expresses the law in relation to the involvement of **special school pupils in collective worship**.

The law is often misunderstood to mean that special schools do not have to provide collective worship. In fact the possible disapplication of special school pupils from collective worship was included referring to a narrow interpretation of their needs and was aimed at reducing the difficulty for gathering together large numbers of pupils.

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.

Pupils in nursery classes are not required to take part in collective worship but may do so as long as there is no parental objection.

Post 16 students in school sixth form classes should be provided with collective worship but may decide to exercise a right to withdraw. There is no requirement for collective worship in Sixth Form Colleges.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C for a sample letter to send to prospective visitors

## Appendix A

### Useful links and resources

Free on-line resources:

#### **The Assemblies Website**

<https://www.assemblies.org.uk/>

The site provides quality plans and resources for assemblies. Most have a Christian focus. However, schools may find the “World religions” section helpful. Hosted by SPCK as part of its commitment to promoting the understanding of Christianity.

#### **Assemblies for All**

<https://assembliesforall.org.uk/themes/>

A really useful site giving links to third party organisations that provide materials to support school assemblies.

Hosted by Humanists UK

#### **UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools**

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/resources/teaching-resources/>

Resources for Primary and Secondary assemblies.

Hosted by UNICEF UK

#### **Return to school resources**

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/mental-health-resources-for-schools/return-to-school-resources/>

Primary and secondary assembly resources drawing on themes including hope, gratitude and connectedness,

Hosted by Place 2 Be - improving children’s mental health

#### **BBC Primary Assemblies**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/primary-school-assemblies-collective-worship-ks1-ks2/zmsnm39>

Assembly plans and 4 minute video clips for KS1 & KS2. Great resource.

Hosted by BBC Teach

#### **Other resources:**

An example of an assembly planner (primary)

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/assembly-themes-planner-2019-2020-12157465>

DfE Circular 1/94 “Religious Education and Collective Worship”

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/281929/Collective\\_worship\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf)

“School Worship: perspectives, principles and practice” by Bill Gent (1989)

ISBN 1 85100 006 2

## Appendix B

### The Law on Collective Worship

The delivery of collective worship is guided by the law which states that:

- ⊕ collective worship must be provided daily **for all registered pupils** (separate arrangements may be made for nurseries and special schools)
- ⊕ collective worship may take place at any time of the school day
- ⊕ schools may decide on the age/grouping of pupils and these may vary from day to day
- ⊕ the time decided for the delivery of collective worship may vary for different groups from day to day
- ⊕ generally collective worship should take place on school premises
- ⊕ the content of the majority of acts of collective worship in a term should be "wholly of mainly of a broadly Christian character, reflecting the broad traditions of the Christian belief."
- ⊕ the content should have regard for the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of pupils
- ⊕ parents may withdraw their children from collective worship
- ⊕ teachers may withdraw from collective worship
- ⊕ in a community school the responsibility for managing the provision for collective worship is with the head teacher after consultation with the governing body. In a VC or VA school collective or community worship is largely influenced by the particular faith or belief traditions represented in the school.

### What happens if you feel that you cannot provide Collective Worship in accordance with the law?

If a school feels that the provision of collective worship within the broadest interpretation of the law is still not suitable for its particular context then the Head teacher needs to investigate whether it might be appropriate to ask the SACRE to grant a "Determination" in accordance with the law. (See Circular 1/94).



## Appendix C

### Sample / example letter to visitors invited to take part in Collective Worship

Dear.....

Thank you for agreeing to come to our school on.....to talk to class...../years.....in assembly/collective worship about.....

Assembly/collective worship begins at.....and generally lasts for.....minutes. It will take place in (location) and approximately....pupils will be present from years.... (aged....)

Please arrive by.....and report to the school office, where you will be required to sign our visitors' book. For the duration of your stay at our school you will be required to wear a visitor's badge; this ensures that everyone understands that you are in the building on school business. If you have a DBS certificate and any related documents, please bring these with you.

Our school community is not a faith community and collective worship is provided for all pupils. Therefore your input should be planned to be comfortable, inclusive and sensitive to the needs of all. As part of your presentation you may wish to share your beliefs with the children. This is perfectly acceptable as long as these are put into context. Please remember it is not the place of a school to provide opportunities to convert or indoctrinate pupils. The pupils need to be reassured that all of their faith or culture backgrounds are of equal status and validity.

In our school we do not expect or invite children to pray as though they were all members of the same faith. As part of collective worship our pupils are used to having a quiet thinking/reflection time when they can consider the meaning of what they have heard and seen to their own lives. We understand that many of those who are religious believers use this time to relate the focus or theme to their personal religious beliefs and some may indeed pray or worship internally.

If you have any queries please contact.....at the school. Please also contact us if you have the need for any equipment to be made available to you.

We look forward to seeing you on.....

Yours sincerely,

## **Appendix D**

### **Writing a school policy for collective worship**

Every school should have a policy on collective worship that is regularly reviewed and updated. This policy should include:

#### **The aims of and definition of collective worship in the school**

How collective worship contributes to the school ethos or mission statement, as well as reference to spiritual, moral, social, cultural and intellectual development.

#### **The legal requirements**

A definition of collective worship. The distinction between assembly and collective worship, and that between RE and collective worship. (If the school has a determination this should be clearly stated)

#### **How collective worship is organised**

The time of day, organisation of pupils and staff responsibilities.

#### **The role of visitors**

Guidelines for the involvement of guests in assemblies and collective worship.

#### **Collective worship and inclusivity**

How to meet the needs of different ages, abilities and backgrounds. Guidance on the use of language to ensure collective worship is accessible to all faiths and none.

#### **Collective worship and the right to withdraw**

A clear statement of parents'/carers' right to withdraw and details of the process by which parents/carers can access this right.

Acknowledgement that it is the school's aim to conduct collective worship in such an inclusive manner that parents/carers will rarely if ever feel the need to exercise this right.

Details of the alternative provision for those withdrawn.

Details on how staff may exercise their "right to withdraw" from collective worship.

#### **Evaluation and monitoring of collective worship**

How collective worship is evaluated and monitored.

## Appendix E

### The role of the governing body

For community schools and foundation schools without religious character, the head teacher is responsible for arranging the daily collective worship after consulting with the governing body.

For voluntary schools and foundation schools with a religious character, the governing body is responsible for arranging daily collective worship after consulting with the head teacher.

For academies, the duties with regard to collective worship are set out in the Trust's Funding Agreement.

Governors should be confident that:

- Collective worship is inclusive and appropriate to the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of pupils in their school
- Collective worship contributes to the school's spiritual, moral, social and cultural education
- Information about the arrangements for collective worship are accessible to parents and carers.

In all schools, governors are responsible to ensure the school meets legal duties:

- All pupils at the school receive a daily act of collective worship.
- Collective worship is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. (Unless the school sought a determination to lift the requirement)
- There is a system in place for parents to be able to exercise their right to withdraw their child(ren) from collective worship.
- Teachers are not disqualified from employment or discriminated against in terms of pay or promotion on the grounds of their religious opinions or practice in participating or not participating in acts of worship