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Collective Worship for Suffolk Primary Schools

Guidance from Suffolk SACRE



Overview

- **Every school** must by law provide daily collective worship for all children. This applies to all schools, including academies, with or without a religious designation.
- **Every child** in every school must take part in a daily act of collective worship. This is a statutory requirement.
- **Every parent** has the right to withdraw their child from collective worship.
- **The nature of worship itself is not defined in law.** Non-statutory government guidance defines collective worship as aiming to provide an opportunity for children to worship God, consider spiritual and moral issues, explore their own beliefs and develop community spirit. They should promote a common ethos, shared values and reinforce positive attitudes.
- **All, or most, collective worship** should be of a broadly Christian character, wholly or mainly so, but approached in such a way as to remain inclusive and appropriate.
- **All children** should be enabled to participate and respond, rather than remain passive.
- **All schools**, except those with a religious designation, can apply for a 'determination' from SACRE to lift the requirement for collective worship to be broadly or mainly Christian.
- **Timing and organisation** of collective worship can be flexible. Although often linked to a school 'assembly' which contains other elements e.g. sports results, the difference between this and collective worship must be clear.
- **Collective worship is not Religious Education**; the latter being a curriculum subject. Both must be offered.
- **Collective worship is inspected** by Ofsted or the relevant religious authority where a school is of a religious character.

1. The value of collective worship in schools



Collective worship is more than just a legal requirement, it is:

- A valuable part of the school day where the whole school community comes together;
- A time of spiritual development and reflection;
- An opportunity for stillness and quiet in a busy school day;
- A chance to reflect on inspirational stories and current events through which we learn something about what it means to be human;
- An opportunity to talk about and live out the shared values, expectations and vision of the school;
- A time to prepare children for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life;
- A time to help promote respect for, and understanding of, those with different beliefs and practices.

Collective worship can both reinforce and contribute to the ethos of the school, in addition to offering a unique occasion in the school day to pause and explore life beyond the curriculum.

2. The legal requirement

- **All schools** and academies are required to have **daily acts of collective worship**.
- **All pupils** (from age 5-18) are required to take part in an act of collective worship on each school day (unless they are withdrawn).
- Pupils in **special schools** should take part in an act of collective worship as far as it is practicable.
- Collective worship may be held at **any time** during the school day.
- Separate acts of collective worship may be arranged for different age or **school groupings**.
- Collective worship must take place on school **premises**, but governors of aided and religious foundation schools may, on special occasions, arrange collective worship elsewhere.
- Collective worship must be **appropriate** having regard to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils.
- All schools, except those with a religious designation, can apply for a '**determination**' from SACRE to lift the requirement for collective worship to be broadly or mainly Christian.
- Parents have the **right to withdraw** their children from collective worship.
- It is a teacher's **duty** to attend assemblies, but they are not required to lead the collective worship part of this occasion. This applies to all teachers except those in voluntary aided Church of England schools or academies and some in Church of England voluntary controlled schools or academies.

3. What should collective worship look like?

Circular 1/94 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/collective-worship-in-schools>) is a government guidance document. This document is not legislation. According to the National Association of SACRES, schools should decide for themselves whether it is helpful in delivering inclusive collective worship. Some schools will choose to apply to SACRE for a determination (see page 7).

Circular 1/94 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, through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes'.

- **Collective worship should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God.** Worship is by definition concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine power or being. However, worship in schools will be of a different character from worship in a faith group, hence 'collective worship' rather than 'corporate worship'. The opportunity to reflect or pray, whether in words or silence, should not be avoided. In today's climate,

with its increasing acceptance of the benefits of mindfulness and meditation, the inclusion of time and space for personal reflection or prayer should be seen as positive, and children helped to use this time well.

- **Collective worship must reflect something special or separate from ordinary school activities.** It should be educational but not like a lesson in class. It can, and should, be related to the day-to-day life, aspirations and concerns of the school community.
- **Collective worship is intended to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes. It should enable children to consider spiritual and moral issues and explore their own beliefs.** Whether the opportunity to worship God is taken or not, this should be a time and space which contributes something positive to school life and should be planned accordingly.
- **The delivery of collective worship should be appropriate to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils.** Children who do not have a religious background should be able to feel part of what is offered. Careful use of 'invitational' language is important, allowing children to respond meaningfully and appropriately.
- **The act of worship should be capable of eliciting a response from children and encourage participation.** This could be through active involvement in presenting worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered. Children should feel they can be more than just passive spectators.


Government guidance circular 1/94 also states:

'The majority of acts of worship must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.

However, schools with a religious designation must provide collective worship in accordance with their designation e.g. Roman Catholic or Church of England. These schools can still include elements to reflect other religions or worldviews, but these will be in the context of their own worship framework.

What each phrase means:

<i>The majority of acts of worship</i>	Across a term, the majority of acts of collective worship should be of this character (51%), however not all individual acts of worship need to be.
<i>Be wholly or mainly</i>	The phrase ' wholly or mainly ' suggests that worship can reflect Christian belief, teachings, festivals but can also use a variety of other religious or secular stimulus for reflection.
<i>Be of a broadly Christian character</i>	Collective worship should reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief but be interpreted in an inclusive way. These broad beliefs could be summarised as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every individual human being made in God's image and therefore having infinite value and worth; • The nature of the human condition – that we are not perfect and prone to wrong thoughts and deeds; • The teachings and example of Jesus with his emphasis on the needs of the vulnerable and his teachings on justice, forgiveness and compassion;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All of us having a responsibility to look after our world as stewards of God's creation. <p>Schools have both freedom and flexibility about how to meet the requirements for broadly Christian worship. In most schools this will look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunities to reflect on key Christian beliefs by marking the major Christian festivals. ● A focus on discussion of Christian values which are also widely accepted within British society as human values and which are shared by many of the world's religions and those who hold secular worldviews e.g. hope, peace, love, courage, forgiveness. Such values would allow the opportunity to engage with spiritual and moral concerns. ● Welcoming in Christian visitors. ● Some engagement with the teachings of Jesus such as the Golden Rule. ● A focus on learning about the beauty and wonder of the natural world accompanied by ways of encouraging pupils to look after and conserve our world.
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4. Delivering broadly Christian worship - questions for reflection

During worship:

- What opportunities are included to reflect on what it means to be human and the worth of every individual?
- How many opportunities do pupils have to encounter and reflect on key Christian festivals?
- Where do pupils encounter some of the teachings of Jesus such as the golden rule?
- How does worship encourage children to take responsibility for the world in which they live and make a difference to the future?
- How do we help pupils make informed moral choices?
- How do pupils explore their place in the world and their search for meaning?

5. Principles of good collective worship

Schools should apply the following principles to ensure their collective worship is valued by all and has the maximum impact:

- Collective worship should be regarded as an **educational activity** allowing pupils to reflect on their learning and place it within the context of belief and faith, relationships and exploring what it means to be human. It can help them make sense of the world in which they are growing up.
- Collective worship should **promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development** (SMSC). Opportunities for spiritual growth are frequently found in collective worship with its emphasis on personal development through values and reflection but much is also developed in the way of moral, social and cultural development.
- Collective worship is a **special time**. It should be accompanied by a sense of anticipation and a feeling that something interesting and inspiring is about to take place, which differs from the normal day to day experience of the school.

- Collective worship is an opportunity for all to practice the skills of **stillness and quiet** in the middle of an increasingly busy school day. It should be valued by all as an 'oasis of peace' with frequent opportunities to reflect and for pupils to learn the important skills of sitting silently and centring themselves.
- Collective worship should always be **inclusive**, enabling every person to respond with integrity no matter what their own personal beliefs are.
- Collective worship should require more than just passive attendance. Instead pupils are required **to participate**. This can be interpreted as active involvement such as thinking deeply, questioning, agreeing or disagreeing to the issues or topics being shared. It is therefore important that time is built into the structure of worship for reflection and quiet time to always take place.
- If collective worship is to become a truly valued part of school life, there needs to be **investment** in it through time, effort, resources and a **commitment** to it being of a consistently high standard. It needs to be carefully managed and planned with a willingness to review and refresh routines when they become stale over time.
- 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. Careful consideration should be given to ensure that the visitor fully understands the nature of collective worship and the ethos of the school.

6. The difference between collective worship and assembly

Collective worship and assembly are distinct activities, although they may take place as part of the same gathering.

- Collective worship is a special time for pupils to reflect and, if appropriate, focus on God. It should allow pupils to make a spiritual response.
- An assembly is simply a gathering of part or all of the school which is usually concerned with administrative matters or announcements about school life.

Schools often gather for assemblies and these can be made into an act of collective worship through the addition of an opportunity for reflection or prayer at the end of these times. It is advisable to deal with administrative issues before the act of collective worship rather than after it.

Schools can achieve the distinction between the administrative affairs and collective worship by using several different devices, for example by:

- playing music and/or lighting a candle to mark the beginning of collective worship;
- changing the adult leading so that the person giving the announcements is not the same as the one leading the act of collective worship;
- putting in place a focal point for collective worship (e.g. a bowl of flowers or image);
- singing a song or a hymn;
- having a moment of silence.

While schools may use the language of 'assembly' to refer to meeting together for worship, they need to be clear that the legal requirement is for an act of collective worship, not a general

gathering, and that this is only fulfilled through the inclusion of an opportunity for reflection or prayer.

7. Who is responsible for collective worship?

Headteachers and governors should be aware of their legal responsibilities with regard to collective worship and discharge their function of ensuring compliance and quality across the school. Within the legal framework the responsibility for arranging collective worship rests with:

- the headteacher after consultation with the governing body in community schools
- the governing body in consultation with the headteacher in VC and VA schools

The headteacher may delegate the day-to-day management of acts of collective worship to a collective worship coordinator. It is good practice to ensure that the collective worship policy is reviewed periodically (every 2-3 years) and received by the governing body.

8. The parental right to withdrawals

- Parents have the right in law to withdraw their children from collective worship. They are not obliged to state their reasons for this although it is good practice for schools to meet with the parents/carers to discuss their concerns. On some occasions it is through a lack of understanding that withdrawal is requested, and discussion allows fears to be addressed. Schools will need to consider how children should be supervised; they are not obliged to provide additional work. Parents should provide something appropriate for their children to do.
- Governing bodies and head teachers should seek to respond positively to requests from parents who have withdrawn their children from statutory provision, to have worship according to a particular faith or denomination, providing it meets suitable criteria, including it being at no additional cost to the school.
- If parents and the school agree that the pupil should be allowed to remain physically present during the collective worship, but not take part in it, nothing in the law prevents this.

9. Inspection of Collective Worship

- In schools, including academies, without a religious character, collective worship is inspected by Ofsted under Section 5.
- In schools, including academies, of a religious designation, worship is inspected by the relevant religious authority.
- In schools of a religious character, Ofsted inspectors may still gather evidence from collective worship, in order to evaluate pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, personal development and/or behaviour and attitudes.



10. Determinations

Collective worship should be appropriate to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of pupils within the school. The legal requirement for collective worship to be 'wholly, or mainly of a broadly Christian character' is appropriate for most pupils across the country and the county.

If, in the opinion of the Headteacher, the requirements for 'broadly Christian' worship is inappropriate for the whole school, or a group within the school, an application may be made to the SACRE for a 'determination'. This will allow for acts of collective worship according to a religion other than Christianity where this is more appropriate.

Where a determination is granted by the SACRE, the requirement for the school to provide daily collective worship remains; it is only the 'broadly Christian' nature of this worship which is 'lifted' or 'modified'.

By interpreting 'broadly Christian' in an inclusive way, few (if any) schools should find it necessary to apply to SACRE for a 'determination' for the requirement for 'broadly Christian' worship to be lifted or modified.

11. Planning for Collective Worship

The systematic planning of collective worship is essential if a school is to ensure that across a term the acts of collective worship are wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

Themes can be used to create long term plans for worship. These could arrive from:

- The school's vision or associated values;
- Themes to mark times of year e.g. new beginnings;
- Environmental concerns such as recycling or pollution;
- Focus weeks such as anti-bullying week;
- Marking the lives of significant people from the past or present;
- Marking important local events;
- Current religious festivals;
- National and international days.

These themes could be for a week, half term or whole term using festival dates, important events or celebrations. The collective worship leader in school can then produce medium term plans which indicate where worship leaders find the content for that day.

Many schools use values such as:

Acceptance	Community	Compassion	Courage	Creativity
Endurance	Forgiveness	Friendships	Generosity	Gratitude

Hope	Integrity	Justice	Kindness	Love
Peace	Respect	Service	Truth	Wisdom

Many schools use themes such as:

Anti-bullying	Careers	Challenges	Change	Charity	Conflict
Discovery	Discovering differences	Dreams	Environment	Family	Famous People
Feelings	Festivals (from all faiths)	Finance	Getting on and falling out	Gifts and talents	Happiness
Harvest	Heroes and Heroines	Hobbies	Holidays	Homelessness	Human rights
Injustice	Journeys	Leaders	Light	Memories	Mental Health
Music	Nature	Neighbourhood	New life	Obstacles	Ourselves
Patterns	Poetry	Politics	Poverty	Promises	Proverbs
Relationships	Refugees	Rewards	Safety	Self esteem	Special people
Special places	Sport and achievement	Staying healthy	Surprises	Symbols	Thoughtfulness
Tolerance	Turning points	Ultimate questions	Victories	Virtues	Water
Wealth	Wonders of the World	Words	Work	World culture	You and Me

Dates for festivals annually are found at: www.reonline.org.uk/supporting/festivals-calendar

12. Structure of collective worship

Each collective worship session can be delivered using the structure:

Gather – Engage -Respond - Send

Gather - Everybody gathers together as a community.	A variety of relatively simple adjustments to the hall / classroom can be a huge help in enabling children and adults to sense the 'otherness' of worship and establish the right atmosphere for this part of the day. Whether you set up a permanent focal point such as a mural or one which can be simply moved into place each day, for example, a screen on wheels or a banner which can be tied to the wall bars, the effort will be worth it. This will give everyone a focal point on which to concentrate.
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<p>Engage – what are we learning about?</p>	<p>The key message could be introduced through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sharing a story or poem ● reading a Bible story or other religious story ● Showing visual images or pieces of art ● Drama presentations or role play ● Interesting objects ● Film clips or music ● Newspapers or news headlines <p>It is a good idea to use a variety of approaches and resources in collective worship as well as involving different people while ensuring something is appealing and relevant to everyone present no matter their age or background.</p> <p>The content of the engage should be introduced with words which clearly identify the tradition from which it comes so that a safe boundary is created from which all can freely respond to it. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 'I am sharing this reading from the Gospel of Mark in the Bible. While this has special meaning for Christians, we can all listen and respond in the way which is right for each of us.' ● 'I am sharing this reading from the Gospel of Mark in the Bible. While this has special meaning for me as a Christian, I hope you will hear something in it which is helpful to you.' ● 'I am sharing this hadith which is important for many Muslims so that we can understand what it says and let it affect us in the way that is right for each one of us.'
<p>Respond – what does this mean to me?</p>	<p>During worship, there must be an opportunity for pupils to reflect upon the question, theme or message from their own perspective and if appropriate for them, to think about God. It may be a short reading, prayer, poem or guided reflection. This part must take place for it to be collective worship.</p> <p>Prayers should be used with care and sensitivity and always be inclusive and invitational, never instructional.</p> <p>The following phrases may be useful for teachers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Now is the time where we stop. It is our time to think or our time to pray.' 2. 'We are now going to have a moment of silence. You may want to use this time to pray or think about God, or you may want to focus on today's theme or message.' 3. 'I'm going to say a prayer; if you would like to pray please say the words with me in your head. If you do not want to pray,

	<p>please think carefully about today's message and what it means for you.'</p> <p>4. 'If you pray, please listen to this prayer. If you don't pray, think about today's theme carefully'.</p> <p>5. 'Christians have a special prayer about today's theme. Please listen to it and make it your prayer if you want to.'</p> <p>6. 'Now we can use this quiet that we have made to reflect, meditate or pray according to our own beliefs.'</p> <p>It may be appropriate to use the words 'in Jesus' name' as long as it is made clear that this is something Christians say.</p> <p>(Phrases with thanks to Newham SACRE)</p>
Send – what am I going to do about it?	As the collective worship ends, pupils should leave with a sense of purpose. This may be through the strength of the question posed to them in reflection or their personal response towards the message shared. Ideally the content from worship should have an impact on how they think or feel over the course of the day or week.

16. Websites to support collective worship

Resource	Audience
http://www.assemblies.org.uk	Primary and secondary assemblies for use in all schools.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/primary-school-assemblies-collective-worship-ks1-ks2/zmsnm39	The BBC offers extensive high-quality resources and ideas.
http://myschoolassembly.co.uk/	A subscription site, popular with teachers and with a wide range of resources
https://bigstartassemblies.org/	Free initial resources then requires a paid subscription.
https://assemblytube.com/primary-school-assembly-ideas/	Clips to support assemblies (not all are free).
www.reonline.org.uk/supporting/festivals-calendar	Shows all major and minor festivals going on annually for each year.
www.teachersdozen.co.uk	Collective worship resources.
www.fischy.com	Music resources for all schools.
www.imaginer.co.uk	Collective worship resources specifically for Church of England schools.
https://www.spinnaker.org.uk/	A Christian organisation that seeks to support primary schools in the delivery of Christian religious education and collective worship.
https://www.tentenresources.co.uk/	Collective worship resources for Catholic and Church of England primary schools.
https://assembliesforall.org.uk/themes/	Collective worship plans from the Humanist society.

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

Right Respecting school assemblies.

The information in this document has been extracted from:

- Religious education (RE) and collective worship in academies and free schools
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools>
- Religious Education and collective worship circular 1/94
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf
- Ofsted School inspection Handbook
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843108/School_inspection_handbook_-_section_5.pdf
- Collective worship Sacre guidelines for schools in Newham – Sensitivity to Language
<https://www.newham.gov.uk/schools-education/school-curriculum/6>

Suffolk SACRE is a statutory body with a responsibility locally to support and advise the Local authority on both RE and collective worship.

If you have any queries about your school's delivery of collective worship or would value support in ensuring you are meeting the legal requirements, you can contact Suffolk SACRE through Linden.Pitcher@suffolk.gov.uk