

SACRE Guidance on Collective Worship for non-denominational schools

Why Collective Worship?

In a speech to high school students the late American writer David Foster Wallace remarked, "There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship." That may be money, beauty, power or intellect. Wallace was not a religious person. But for him, living well was learning to worship the right things and shaping your character according to good values.

So Collective Worship is the opportunity in the day for your school to focus on what is most important. It's a time to celebrate your common life, to reflect on the values that you want to shape your school and to form the character of the staff and pupils within it.

Why worship "of a broadly Christian character"?

The majority of people in this country believe in God and 55% self-identified as Christian in the 2011 census. Christian history, culture and values continue to shape our national life well beyond those who regularly attend church. So the law continues to stipulate that Collective Worship should reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief, being shaped by Christian stories, prayers and songs.

Religious diversity

This Christian character does not and should not preclude the incorporation of other faith traditions or humanistic wisdom within the Collective Worship. It is not the "corporate worship" of a church congregation but an inclusive experience that "collects" the whole school together and imposes no beliefs or devotional practices on anyone.

Where Collective Worship of a broadly Christian character is strongly at odds with the makeup of the school community, the Head Teacher can apply to SACRE for a Determination. If granted this does not remove the legal requirement for a daily act of worship and requires some sensitive reflection on the character of worship that may need to engage with interfaith resources and the broader values that underpin the school.

What should Collective Worship include?

Collective Worship is part of the educational experience of the school day and should contribute to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). Teachers can make use of religious material drawn from a variety of traditions, including prayers. These should give those pupils

who wish to the opportunity to worship God while offering to all a profound reflective experience.

Practical issues

- ⤴ Collective Worship can be offered at any time of the day in any school grouping
- ⤴ Attendance at a daily act of Collective Worship is required by the 1988 Education Act as compulsory for all pupils aged 5 to 18 unless they are withdrawn by parents
- ⤴ Parents have the right to withdraw their child from Collective Worship, but not from SMSC
- ⤴ Teachers also have the right not to take part in Collective Worship
- ⤴ Collective Worship is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and the Governing Body