

WARWICKSHIRE SACRE GUIDELINES ON COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1. Why do Warwickshire schools need further guidance on collective worship?

- Although schools have been provided with copies of *A Time to Share: A Practical Guide to Worship in Warwickshire Schools* (1989) and *Collective Worship: A Teachers' Resource Book of Successful Assemblies in Primary and Secondary Schools* (1991), it was felt that a brief document such as this, highlighting some of the issues arising from the Education Reform Act 1988 and the DFE's Circular 1/94, would be helpful to headteachers and governing bodies.
- Ofsted inspectors, both nationally and locally, are concerned about schools' failure to comply with the legal requirements relating to collective worship. Ofsted's concerns are summarised in the publication *RE and Collective Worship 1992-1993*.
- In its role of supporting and monitoring provision of daily collective worship in County Schools, the Warwickshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) has recently received an increasing number of requests for advice.

2. How does collective worship differ from Religious Education?

Collective worship is the responsibility of the headteacher*, following consultation with the governing body, and should aim to provide an opportunity for worship, reflection and the exploration of belief. Ideally it should draw on the whole of the curriculum and should celebrate all aspects of life in school.

Its scope is not limited to the study of religion in relation to life experiences, which is the province of Religious Education. RE must follow the Locally Agreed Syllabus and should aim to develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and awareness of religion.

*NB. In a voluntary school, the arrangements should be made by the governing body after consultation with the headteacher. In both County and voluntary schools it is the headteacher's duty to ensure that pupils take part.

3. What is meant by 'worship'?

It is envisaged that pupils should be able to respond in some way to the opportunity offered to them in collective worship. This means that the worship should be distinct from ordinary school activities in that it reflects aspects of life that are mysterious, it will be concerned with experiences that stretch into what is not totally understood and beliefs about life that are still being thought through. Therefore, references to ultimate power and divine being should be sensitive to the fact that participants will be at many different stages in their own belief and commitments.

4. What is meant by "broadly Christian" worship?

The Education Reform Act 1988 stipulates that in County schools, most acts of collective worship in any school term must be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character". [This is taken to mean over half of the acts of worship. Circular 1/94 says "the majority".] Schools are advised to keep records of the content of collective worship, indicating which acts of worship were of a broadly Christian character. Advice in circular 1/94 suggests that to meet the "broadly Christian" requirement,

collective worship

should:

- contain some elements that relate specifically to the traditions of Christian belief and which accord a special status to Jesus Christ

should not:

- exclude or alienate pupils who do not come from Christian families
- be denominational or sectarian

may:

- contain non-Christian elements and include a minority of acts of worship within a term which do not fit this broadly Christian base
- include elements common to Christianity and one or more other religions.

Circular 1/94, like all other government circulars, is advisory. Ultimately it would be for the courts to give a definitive interpretation of the legislation.

5. What part can prayer and reflection play in the collective act of worship?

A prayer spoken by the leader of an assembly, or one of the participants, can be included as part of the collective act of worship, although it would not be considered enough to constitute the whole act of worship.

It may be preferable to offer pupils a moment of reflection on the subject of the act of worship, either in silence or listening to words which focus their attention.

In either case it is important that this activity encompasses the diversity of faiths, whilst including those who have no faith. Words such as:

“Those who wish to join in this prayer, please do so.”

or

“Please listen to what I am saying and think about...”

or

“Use this quiet moment to pray, if you have a faith, or to think carefully about what we’ve said.”

or other phrases which do not presume a faith on the part of a leader of the assembly or the pupils and adults participating in it, should be used.

Where an act of worship is led by a member of a particular faith who wishes to include a prayer, this should be undertaken in the spirit of the pupils experiencing that faith’s method of prayer, rather than presuming that pupils share the commitment of the believer.

6. When should the collective act of worship take place?

The law requires a daily collective act of worship, so it is up to a school to decide on the time of day and groupings.

Where possible it may involve the whole school, or alternatively a class, year group, department or combination of year groups. Time of day may be dependent upon the space available for this activity. Time for the collective act of worship is not curriculum time, but the rest of the assembly may be. It is important that this time be

accounted for. The collective act of worship may only take up a short time, probably between 5 and 15 minutes each day.

7. Who may withdraw from collective worship?

A parent's right to withdraw his/her child from part or all of the act of collective worship is confirmed in the Education Reform Act 1988. Collective worship, however, should provide an opportunity for worship which is appropriate to all participating pupils. Schools are, therefore, advised to communicate this intention to parents. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 allows sixth form students to withdraw themselves from the act of collective worship and teaching staff still have the right under the Education Act 1944 to withdraw from the collective worship element of an assembly. Where a headteacher wishes to exercise this right, he or she nevertheless remains responsible for ensuring that the law is complied with and collective worship provided.

8. How many schools plan their acts of collective worship?

It is helpful to have an overall plan for school worship for a term or longer. Planning which focuses on themes provides cohesion and continuity. Themes may last anything from one week to half a term. Good planning ensures that the concepts being explored in a theme can be developed and revisited over a period of time. When planning school worship which is linked to themes, care should be taken to ensure that events and religious festivals important to the school and its community, as well as work in progress in the curriculum, are entered on a yearly calendar before deciding on themes. These will provide a prompt for suggesting contexts.

If those leading school worship can agree on themes and methods of presentation they can then draw on complementary material. Methods of presentation can include the use of videos, music, visitors, artefacts, posters, interview, role-play or display. Resources to support collective worship can be built up, listed and linked to themes, care should be taken to ensure that events and religious festivals important to the school and its community, as well as work in progress in the curriculum, are entered on a yearly calendar before deciding on themes. These will provide a prompt for suggesting contexts.

9. Do special schools have to make provision for collective worship?

The Education (Special Schools) Regulations 1994 state:

'Arrangements shall be made to secure that, so far as practicable, every pupil attending the school will attend daily collective worship and receive religious education, or will be withdrawn from attendance at such worship or from receiving such education in accordance with the wishes of his parent.'

It is expected that special schools will be providing daily opportunities for collective worship. Circumstances may well prevent a school meeting on five days and in any case it would be legitimate for such a school to decide that small gatherings of pupils would provide a better educational opportunity for collective worship.

10. Should post-16 pupils participate in collective worship?

The Education Reform Act 1988 clearly states that all pupils must take part in a daily act of collective worship. This includes those in years 12 and 13 (the Sixth Form);

however, the Education and Inspections Act 2006 allows sixth form students to withdraw themselves from the act of collective worship should they wish to do so.

Further copies of *A Time to Share: A Practical Guide to Worship in Warwickshire Schools* and *Collective Worship: A Teachers' Resource Book of Successful Assemblies in primary and Secondary Schools* may be purchased from EDS Publications. The SHAP Calendar of Religious Festivals can be obtained from: The SHAP Working Party, PO Box 38580, London, SW1P 3XF.