



STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL for RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Guidance on Collective Worship

A Devon SACRE Publication



Foreword

‘All pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship.’

‘Subject to the following provisions of this section, in the case of an LA school the collective worship required in the school, by section 6 of this Act, shall be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. i.e. reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief.”

It is our hope that this guidance will allay some fears, give some confidence, and help its readers see a way forward that can be positive, exciting, and educationally enriching. We recognise that only if the act of collective worship is seen in these terms can it rightfully demand a proper share of resources.

It is our belief that the daily act of collective worship can provide a focus and a unifying dimension to the whole life of the school community. Thus it is deserving our attention and commitment, and can be welcomed, especially in its contribution to both spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and community cohesion.

So we offer this report as a contribution to the thinking of staff and governors in this critical area. We trust that it will be seen and used as a helpful and timely encouragement to all concerned with providing the very best for the whole child within the community of the school.

Devon SACRE wishes to acknowledge the help of the following in writing and editing this document :-

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**THIS GUIDANCE IS DEDICATED TO THE LATE, GREAT PROFESSOR TERENCE COPLEY
WHO WAS AN INSPIRATION TO DEVON TEACHERS AND AN OUTSTANDING
PRACTITIONER AND THINKER IN COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

Legal Requirements

‘Daily flexibility in groupings and timings but must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character i.e. reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief’.



**COLLECTIVE
WORSHIP**

**The Triangle of
Tension**

Integrity of all children
and adults present

Educationally valid
and worthwhile e.g.
contributes to pupils'
SMSC, their well-
being and their sense
of belonging

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1. WORSHIP - SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 A core purpose of education is to promote pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- 1.2 Acts of worship are there first and foremost for the educational benefit of pupils. As well as enhancing the spiritual dimension of human experience, they can promote moral, aesthetic social, cultural and creative awareness and help children recognise, reflect upon and evaluate the meaning of their own existence and their relationship with others. In a busy, demanding curriculum it is important children have space and time to stop and think and be reflective.
- 1.3 It follows therefore that like any other educational activity worship needs to be effectively planned, resourced and monitored if it is to have a positive impact on children's learning. This has implications for planning, staffing and positions of responsibility.
- 1.4 The fact that the Act uses the word collective, not corporate, indicates that worship is a shared activity which allows a variety of responses. The policy of Devon LA is that worship is an inclusive not exclusive activity which has an educational rather than liturgical foundation. It seeks to build links with all dimensions of the curriculum. Acts of worship should involve activities in which the values of the school are celebrated, affirmed and reflected upon. The traditional elements of Christian worship such as prayers, bible readings and songs will be greatly enhanced where it is made clear that they are offered rather than imposed.
- 1.5 The Act does not define worship. Etymologically worship is connected with ascribing worth or recognising the worth of someone or something. It can be defined as a response to an experience where the worth of someone or something beyond *ourselves* is acknowledged. Worship will often involve celebration, thanksgiving, praise, adoration and affirmation and can be an expression of humility, awe and mystery. In schools worship is directly linked to pupils' spiritual development for worship

'can help pupils to reflect upon those aspects of human life and the natural world, which raise questions of ultimate meaning and purpose'.

(HMI: Curriculum Matters)

- 1.6 Worship therefore, in the context of school life, is a celebration of all that is of supreme worth to the school community. It can heighten the value of the curriculum and help to create a sense of purpose and direction in life. Therefore worship includes social concerns and personal development as well as exploring religious beliefs, ideas, teachings and values. While worship is usually affirmatory - in character it can often be expressed as an admission of need or cry for help. Collective acts of worship need to recognise that doubts and anxieties may be present in the hearts and minds

of pupils and staff so it is inappropriate to develop worship in a rigid 'no questions asked' manner which stifles valid response.

- 1.7 Compulsory worship is a contradiction in terms for worship is a free-will response from the heart. To impose an outward form of worship on what is an inward spiritual experience could damage the integrity of children and teachers. This could give rise to hypocrisy and ridicule. Acts of worship should provide an opportunity for those of all faiths (*and none*) to focus and reflect on stimuli which allow the human spirit to respond with integrity.

- 1.8 The traditional elements of worship such as prayers, hymns and sacred readings may have a role to play in collective worship but great care and consideration needs to be given when these stimuli are used to ensure that they are helpful in enhancing the learning experience.

'A school is not a worshipping community but rather a worship enabling community'.

(*'Schools for Tomorrow'* ed B O'Keefe, Falmer Press)

- 1.9 As stated in 1.4 the use of the word collective allows for a variety of responses. For some children the opportunity to worship will be seen as an expression of faith, for some an expression of the desire for faith, for some an expression for an expansion of experience and some an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life. Worship therefore can cover a spectrum of responses including:

- awareness of
- respect for
- commitment to
- appreciation of
- preference for
- dedication

2. EDUCATION REFORM ACT 1988: Legal requirements

2.1 Organisational

Collective worship must be daily for all registered pupils (including sixth form pupils in schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges but not colleges under FE regulations).

- 2.2 Acts of worship can be at any time of the school day and in whatever groupings the school wishes to use e.g. whole school year groups, tutor groups, houses etc.

- 2.3 Acts of worship must take place on school premises.

- 2.4 It is the responsibility of the LA to set up a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) which will report annually to the LA and keep the school worship under review.
- 2.5 If a school wishes it can, after consultation with governors, apply to the SACRE to alter or modify the requirements on acts of worship if it considers that the requirements conflict with the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the pupils. The application can be made on behalf of a group of pupils within the school as well as the school itself. These requests known as determinations only apply to a small number of SACREs and LAs.
- 2.6 SACRE can then make a determination order which lasts for a period of five years and is notified in writing to the headteacher. Daily collective worship must still be provided and may not be distinctive of any particular denomination or religious group but it may be distinctive of a particular faith.
- 2.7 The responsibility for ensuring that the law is fulfilled lies with the headteacher and governors. However HTs are not required to participate in worship. Both parents and sixth form students may withdraw from acts of worship, as may teachers.

STYLE AND CONTENT

- 2.8 The majority of acts each term should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' i.e. they should reflect the 'broad traditions of Christian belief'. In legal terms majority probably means more than half. This raises important questions as to what is meant by 'broadly' and 'Christian' and attempts need to be made to do justice to both words.
- 2.9 Acts of worship must not be distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.
- 2.10 Regard must be given to the ages and aptitudes of children in the school and their family background. This means that the faith background of pupils and their families should be an important consideration.

THE ROLE OF THE RE TEACHER IN WORSHIP

- 2.11 As stated in 2.7 the responsibility for the organisation of school worship rests with the head and governors. Where schools have an RE specialist available the teacher(s) concerned may wish to offer ideas and resources. It must be stressed however that the RE teachers do not automatically have any kind of responsibility for organising and conducting collection acts of worship. In the past some RE teachers have avoided involvement in collective worship as they felt collective worship and RE have conflicting aims. Linking aspects of worship with schools' RE programme can sometimes enhance both areas for both are part of the whole curriculum.

In order for effective links to be built careful planning is required. It is of paramount importance that no pressure is exerted on teachers to participate in, or contribute to, any act of worship in which they feel their integrity is compromised.

3. THE ACT INTERPRETED: SOME OBSERVATIONS

3.1 According to the ERA, worship must be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', reflecting the broad traditions of Christian belief and 'regard must be taken of pupils' ages, aptitudes and family background'.

3.2 Acts of worship in school should reflect the **broad** traditions of Christian **belief** (not the varying traditions of church worship). It is important that children are helped to become aware of the ways in which the Christian faith influences aspects of life. Within this framework certain key concepts which reflect the broadest traditions of Christian belief can be developed. First and foremost is the Christian understanding of love. Other concepts which are broadly but not exclusively Christian include:

Compassion	Humility	Justice
Trust	Courage and Integrity	Co-operation and Service
Forgiveness	Respect for life	Honesty and Truthfulness
Mercy	Value of all individuals	

3.3 Schools need to take the clauses of the Act, which relate to the pupils' ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds, seriously. Consideration must be given not just to children who come from homes where the Christian faith is practised, but also to children whose parents are adherent to other faiths) e.g. Judaism, Islam etc.) or children who are from a secular background.

3.4 Many children have little or no familiarity with religious worship either in the home or the community. This needs to be remembered when planning collective acts of worship.

3.5 Good practice in education has always considered the ages of children. Activities and stimuli in primary schools will need to be different from those in secondary schools. Schools need to consider how collective acts of worship can play a significant role in children's spiritual development and their awareness and understanding of religion and beliefs.

3.6 More recently schools have linked their provision with other important educational initiatives. In particular collective worship can be closely linked to Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and Community Cohesion provision (especially helping pupils develop their understanding of school, local, wider, UK and global communities) but these are not a replacement for current legislative requirements for Collective Worship

4. SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- 4.1 The limited research carried out on collective acts of worship suggests that acts of worship may need a great deal more planning, resources and evaluation than has been the case.
- 4.2 Research indicates that some schools do not give sufficient thought to the climate and environment in which worship takes place. For some children, assembly, which remains the main vehicle by which acts of worship are delivered, is an uncomfortable and tiring experience.
- 4.3 Schools do not always link their acts of worship either to the wider curriculum or areas such as SEAL and Community Cohesion.
- 4.4 The purpose of acts of worship varies considerably from school to school. Educational purposes are often intertwined with legalistic and administrative functions. Schools do consider however that acts of worship can affirm human values, develop understanding and awareness, stimulate discussion and provide a meeting point for the whole curriculum.
- 4.5 There are other functions of a school assembly. These include establishing a group identity, a platform for the discussion of moral issues, an opportunity for senior management to see children, recognition of achievements, raising the school's consciousness of community life and problems, and dealing with disciplinary questions. At times however it is unclear when the 'assembly' element ends and the 'worship' element begins.
- 4.6 There are acts of worship which are well planned and imaginatively presented in which pupils take an active role and use supportive audio-visual material but for some pupils their feelings on collective worship are rather negative indicating resignation and even resentment. It is unclear in some schools how acts of worship are increasing pupils awareness and understanding of worship. If school worship takes place in an atmosphere of indifference and boredom then its value is clearly lost.

5. EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

- 5.1 As already indicated the purpose of acts of worship vary considerably but there is a clear need for schools to give serious thought to aims and objectives. These might include the following principles.

Collective worship:

- provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on the aims of the school and celebrate the values and worth of the school community
- reflects upon the meaning and purpose of life, developing a sense of awe and wonder
- develops an understanding of the nature and language of worship
- explores and develops spirituality and fosters sensitivity to the beliefs, practices and values of others within the school and a community
- explores and evaluates children's own beliefs in relation to those of others

- celebrates special occasions and shows appreciation of the gifts and talents of the school community
- promotes good practice in community cohesion, especially in links with the school, local, wider, UK and global communities
- develops a key understanding of important Christian beliefs and teachings
- relates their experiences in social and emotional learning.
- Relates to special celebrations and festivals in religion and beliefs

5.2 **MONITORING PROVISION**

Monitoring of school worship needs to be exercised with care and discretion not just to ensure that the law is carried out but that the activities presented are educationally valid and worthwhile. In observing acts of worship some key questions need to be addressed. These include:-

- Is the collective worship appropriate to the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the children?
- How involved are pupils both in terms of active participation and opportunity for reflection and follow-up?
- Does it fulfil the requirements of the Act in being 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'?
- Does collective worship demonstrate evidence of celebration, affirmation and exploration?
- Is the climate and environment helpful in creating an atmosphere which is conducive to reflection and response?
- Does the collective worship contribute towards children's spiritual development?
- In individual acts of worship do children have something to look at, listen to, engage with, respond to and reflect on?

Are there opportunities to suggest that the act of worship is a meaningful experience for children and how are children involved in planning, delivery and reviewing collective worship?

6. **WAYS FORWARD**

The purpose of document has been to raise some issues connected with collective worship in the 1988 Education Reform Act. As stated in 1.3 the principles governing collective worship are the same as any other educational activity. The following points are recommended as suggestions for developing good practice.

- 6.1 Effective co-ordination of acts of collective worship needs to take place in order to avoid repetition both in content and methodology. In schools where it is appropriate a collective worship committee, drawn from a variety of sources (including pupils), would be helpful in terms of co-ordinating themes, speakers, ideas and activities.
- 6.2 Schools need to link their acts of worship with other aspects of the curriculum to show how they are a part of school's educational programme. A thematic approach may be a helpful contribution to the whole curriculum.
- 6.3 By their very nature acts of worship should involve the wider community. Members of the local community can share their experiences which provoke a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of worship. Visitors can provide interest, change, a different experience but schools need to provide clarity of purpose for the visit, ensure the visitor feels welcome and is aware of the current policy of collective worship in schools.
- 6.4 The roots of worship in awe, wonder, reflection and joy can be part of an assembly programme which encourages spiritual development. The traditional elements of worship such as prayers, music and sacred writings can be supported by other elements to create stimulating and imaginative assemblies. These include:

Poetry	Mime	Audio visual aids
Songs and other forms of music	Creative Silence	Pupils' contribution
Art	Stories and Readings	Interviews
Use of DVD clips	Display of Artefacts	Dance and Drama
	Use of Internet	Use of CD ROM

It is important to note that some of the above means of worship are not appropriate to all faith communities and consideration needs to be given as to whether these means will help pupils' understanding of worship.

- 6.5 Because of the complexities and sensitivities involved in collective acts of worship it is vital that they are led with care and understanding. There are a number of skills which both children and staff require if acts of worship are to be fulfilling and stimulating experiences. These include the ability to:-
- be still and not fear silence
 - contemplate and reflect upon that which is offered
 - use all the senses e.g. listen, see, touch, which leads to a greater awareness of the spiritual dimension to identify with others and their experiences, to respond to exposure of appropriate stimuli.
- 6.6 If these skills are to be developed it follows that consideration must be given to the actual content of the collective acts of worship and how they relate to other activities. Some skills and aspects of worship may be developed most effectively in smaller group situations e.g. through experience and learning in stilling exercises or in opportunities for quiet reflections on values and aspirations.

Many schools work out a programme for worship in which clear objectives are stated. It is important to realise that acts of worship have often been linked with other ideas for assembly e.g. opportunities for praise and sanction and the giving out of information. Some schools have used assemblies to articulate the school's values and to motivate caring action. Assemblies can provide a meeting point for the whole curriculum. Therefore it is essential that those planning assemblies bear in mind the place and time of acts of worship within them. It would be difficult for children to respond to a reflective thought if this had been accompanied by a range of administrative and disciplinary matters. Schools need to take care to see that their objectives can actually be realised.

- 6.7 Acts of worship need to be occasional matter for discussion in governing bodies, senior management and other groups in school decision making. At their best they can enrich the life of the school and the community and encourage spiritual development. They need time, energy, sensitivity and commitment but the benefits of a thoughtful, considered approach are enormous. In practical terms, a record of dates, times and content of acts of worship need to be maintained to ensure coherence and to satisfy any legal enquiries.
- 6.8 Within the wide spectrum of definition of worship there exists many different modes of expression and response. This must be reflected in school practice. In schools the aim of collective worship 'is to take the most transparent, the most symbolic of the concerns of our pupils in the hope that they will be led from the trivial and the immediate and the local to the significant, the enduring and the universal concern'
- 6.9 This policy statement is intended to help all involved in education in Devon understand and consider the implications for schools of the current legislation on collective worship.

Appendix 1 Exemplar Policy Primary
Appendix 2 Exemplar Policy Secondary
Appendix 3 A Summary of Effective Practice

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

EXEMPLAR POLICY STATEMENT

DEEP VALLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

At Deep Valley we believe that Collective Worship plays a very important role in the life of our school. It is an opportunity to celebrate all aspects of school life to support our curriculum and to provide an opportunity for stillness and reflection in what is often a very busy, active day for our children.

Aims

The central aims of Collective Worship at Deep Valley are to:

- provide our children with regular opportunities for stillness and reflection
- promote children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- celebrate the values and worth of the school community and all who belong in it, including the sharing of the gifts and talents of our children.
- help children develop and understanding both of the nature and language of worship
- help children develop respect and sensitivity to the beliefs and values of others
- support the broader curriculum through the use of art, music, dance, story, drama and other visual and oral means of communication.

The Legal Position

The 1988 Education Reform Act states that collective worship must be on a daily basis for all registered pupils. Furthermore, acts of worship "must be wholly or mainly of a broadly christian character, i.e. reflect the broad traditions of christian belief." At Deep Valley we have developed a range of themes and topics through which collective worship takes place. Key themes include love, joy, trust, forgiveness, justice and the value of all human life. We believe these themes are clearly Christian in nature but are universal in their application. We recognise that in our school we have children from a variety of faith backgrounds and that many children have no religious background at all. Great care is taken in our collective worship to ensure that all children feel valued and special and that their integrity as human beings is consistently upheld. Collective Worship at Deep Valley is an inclusive activity. Parents do have, of course, the right of withdrawal from Collective Worship. Parents who have any concerns about the provision and practice of our Collective Worship are strongly encouraged to contact the Head teacher.

Context of Collective worship

In order to promote children's learning, our acts of worship vary in size. Our pattern is set out below:

Monday	-	Whole school (introduction of special theme)
Tuesday	-	Theme developed through music
Wednesday	-	Class-based worship on theme
Thursday	-	Year group development of theme
Friday	-	Whole school (celebration / conclusion of theme involving pupil's work and outside speakers)

Visitors play an important part in the life of our school and regularly contribute to acts of worship. We record our acts of worship to inform our learning and plan for further developments. We are developing a range of resources to enhance children's learning. These include stories, music, slides, poems, pictures and posters and dvds all of which we hope contribute to a stimulating and thoughtful time for our children. We also believe collective worship makes a very important contribution to Community Cohesion in the following ways

School Community- through our key themes and children's participation in Collective worship we develop respect, sensitivity, self esteem and compassion.

Local Community- we encourage a range of regular visitors from our local community to enrich collective worship and support our children's understanding of faith and beliefs

UK Community- we use powerpoints, dvds, stories and other resources in our acts of worship to reflect the diversity of life and faiths in the UK as well as utilising our links with other schools in the UK

Global Community- we use stories, music and dvds to enrich children's understanding of faiths and cultures around the world and, at times, focus on giving to specific causes. While the charitable aspect of the school life is important we stress the educational importance of learning about other faiths, cultures and lifestyles

Conclusion

Collective Worship plays a very important role in our school as we seek to develop our children in the skills of reflection and empathy, to encourage and celebrate their talents and to promote their spiritual and moral development.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

EXEMPLAR POLICY STATEMENT

TALL MOUNTAIN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Introduction

At Tall Mountain we believe that Collective Worship plays a very important role in the life of our school. It is an opportunity to celebrate all aspects of school life to support our curriculum and to provide an opportunity for stillness and reflection in what is often a very busy, active day for our pupils.

Aims

The central aims of Collective Worship at Tall Mountain are to:

- provide our pupils with regular opportunities for stillness and reflection
- promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- celebrate the values and worth of the school community and all who belong in it, including the sharing of the gifts and talents of our pupils.
- help pupils develop and understanding both of the nature and language of worship
- help pupils develop respect and sensitivity to the beliefs and values of others
- support the broader curriculum through the use of art, music, dance, story, drama and other visual and oral means of communication.

The Legal Position

The 1988 Education Reform Act states that collective worship must be on a daily basis for all registered pupils. Furthermore, acts of worship "must be wholly or mainly of a broadly christian character, i.e. reflect the broad traditions of christian belief." At Tall Mountain we have developed a range of themes and topics through which collective worship takes place. Key themes include love, joy, trust, forgiveness, justice and the value of all human life. We believe these themes are clearly Christian in nature but are universal in their application. We recognise that in our school we have pupils from a variety of faith backgrounds and that many pupils have no religious background at all. Great care is taken in our collective worship to ensure that all pupils feel valued and special and that their integrity as human beings is consistently upheld. Collective Worship at Tall Mountain is an inclusive activity. Parents do have, of course, the right of withdrawal from Collective Worship. Parents who have any concerns about the provision and practice of our Collective Worship are strongly encouraged to contact the Head teacher.

Context of Collective Worship

Collective Worship at Tall Mountain takes place in a range of settings (the school has no individual building large enough to accommodate the whole school), in order to provide different learning experiences for pupils. Acts of Worship take place in the broader framework of school assemblies and are planned thematically. The usual pattern is outlined below:

Monday	-	Combined Year Groups	Introduction to the theme
Tuesday	-	Tutor Groups	Reflection on the theme
Wednesday	-	Year Group	Development of the theme (active involvement from pupils)
Thursday	-	Tutor Group	Further reflection / discussion of the theme
Friday	-	Combined Year Groups	Celebration / summary of the theme.

This pattern enables our pupils to learn in different settings and to make an active contribution to our acts of worship. The school frequently invites visitors to play an active role in our acts of worship and we are currently developing a resource bank (based on our themes), which includes stories, poems, music and other support materials to enable our pupils to learn more effectively. We do keep a record of our acts of Worship.

Conclusion

Collective Worship plays a very important role in our school as we seek to develop our pupils in the skills of reflection and empathy, to encourage and celebrate their talents and to promote their spiritual and moral development.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

Effective practice includes

- Children participating/leading
- Elements of genuine reflection
- Using feedback from children
- Creative use of music both in terms of atmosphere and exploring lyrics
- Creating a stimulating, reflective environment
- Developing lively, thought-provoking visual aids
- Using story in an inter-active engaging way.

Follow-up Activities

- Developing a thematic approach to collective worship
- Using school council and other groups to develop children's feedback on the purpose and quality of collective worship
- Develop a team approach to collective worship
- Create more opportunities for stillness and reflection in collective worship
- Make greater use of music in collective worship
- Develop a wider range of resources (linked to the key themes) for collective worship.