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SACREs and collective worship

Collective worship: a brief discussion

- Is collective worship appropriate in a maintained, non-faith school?
- For some people, collective worship is controversial. Has it an educational value? If so what is it?

Introduction

- The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is challenging for some schools and especially for secondary schools.
- Done well, it really can make a difference for the whole school community.
- The more support, encouragement and clarity a SACRE can provide for schools, the better able they will be to provide quality experiences for their pupils.

This training presentation examines:

- Collective worship, including its nature and purpose, the law, what good CW might include
- SACRE's responsibilities regarding collective worship

Why collective worship?

Collective worship has been a legal requirement in maintained schools since 1944 and for academies and free schools, is set out in their funding agreement.

By law it:

- is the responsibility of the head teacher (LA Maintained schools and academies) or the governors (voluntary controlled and aided schools), in consultation with each other
- must be provided for pupils every day, unless they are withdrawn by their parents

Collective worship

- must not be distinctive of any denomination, except in schools with a religious character
- is not part of the taught curriculum time of the school
- is specific in terms of content, ie: the majority of acts of collective worship in a term must be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' except in schools with a religious character
- parents/carers can withdraw their child from collective worship and 6th formers can themselves decide to withdraw from it without their parents'/carers' consent.

What does this mean?

- Every pupil registered in the school must take part in an act of collective worship on each school day.
- Taking part means more than simply attending, but sharing in some form of activity.

What is collective worship?

Collective worship:

- is an **educational** activity
- involves pupils of any faith and none as a school is a community of people holding different beliefs – it is inclusive
- is a **statutory daily** activity
- is **different** from *corporate* worship, which is the shared experience of people belonging to a particular faith or denomination

Good collective worship

- is invitational and not an imposition, e.g. *inviting* participants to pray or reflect
- offers variety
- challenges pupils
- has a reflective atmosphere and encourages the development of a reflective approach to life

How does collective worship contribute to school life?

Collective worship provides opportunities for pupils and staff in the school to reflect together on:

- What is important in life
- What it means to be human
 - exploring a range of beliefs and ideas and how the behaviour of some people gives an example of the best a human can become
- Ideas of right and wrong
 - applying these to current personal, school and external issues

How does collective worship contribute to school life?

and

- How people live and work together as communities, both in school and beyond
- Ways in which people in different places and times have experienced, responded to and expressed these issues and values

How does collective worship contribute to school life?

By providing good quality collective worship, a school can build an inclusive ethos around shared purposes and values, which contributes significantly to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of each child and to a thriving learning community.

What is the purpose of collective worship?

The DfE circular 1/94 has a useful statement in its commentary as aims. It states collective worship is to provide **opportunities** for pupils to:

- worship God (*see page 16*)
- consider spiritual and moral issues
- explore their own beliefs
- encourage participation and response
- promote community/shared values
- reinforce positive attitudes

In 2012, the DfE stated that schools are free to choose whether or not to use circular 1/94 as guidance.

Good collective worship offers school communities opportunities to:

- celebrate together
- think deeply (reflect/meditate/worship/pray) together
- build community
- affirm the individual and the community
- share and promote common values
- foster a corporate identity
- encourage a reflective approach to living
- deepen every individual's capacity for emotional responses
- look beyond the material and the physical
- share experiences and possibilities of the transcendent

Worship?

- Providing the opportunity is not the same as expecting everyone to worship and a response does not have to be a faith response.
- For pupils with a faith, it is about giving them a chance to reflect on or explore the topic being considered within the faith aspect of their lives.
- For those who are not religious believers, it is an opportunity to reflect on and develop their own beliefs and values.

This educational purpose should inform clear principles about how collective worship is provided in schools.

About prayer

There is no specification anywhere about what collective worship should include. Prayer is frequently used (and sometimes misused) and can be a difficult issue for some teachers.

- There should be no expectation that children will pray. Words introducing any prayer-like activity should be as an invitation rather than an instruction.
- Any invitation to pray is made for the benefit of those pupils for whom it is appropriate.
- The use of silence gives space for prayer or reflection.

About prayer

- The words need to be owned by the speaker (teacher, child or visitor) or grounded in a religious tradition
- Everyone can be included in a personal reflection on the theme or story or words of a prayer
- It will benefit everyone to be still and to listen to the words of someone's prayer, without expectation of participation

What is the purpose of collective worship?

In community schools, collective worship must have an educational purpose and should:

- be appropriate to the age, aptitude and family background of pupils
- contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Beyond this, schools are free to establish their own educational purposes for collective worship, linked to their aims, ethos and culture, and it is good for SACREs to encourage, enable and support them in doing this.

‘wholly or mainly of a *broadly Christian character*’

- The majority of collective worship experiences that count as ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’, can be entirely ‘broadly Christian’ or partly so
- ‘Broadly Christian’ means reflecting the broad traditions of Christian beliefs, without being distinctively of any particular denomination.
- Schools with a religious character are the only schools permitted to offer corporate ‘faith’ worship, although the majority also offer an educational experience which makes a contribution to pupils’ SMSC development.

Best practice for quality collective worship includes:

- a commitment from senior leaders to the value of collective worship
- allocation of an appropriate budget for resources and training
- thorough planning to meet the needs of the particular school and its pupils and community
- educational use of religious and other material, ensuring variety in its form and presentation

Best practice for quality collective worship includes:

- an open approach that gives pupils opportunities to respond without compromising them in any way
- taking advantage of the freedom to provide collective worship at any time of day and in any school group
- taking every opportunity to interest and inspire pupils

Collective worship and assembly

- Collective worship is **not** the same as an assembly, though they may take place in the same gathering.
- A school may hold any number of assemblies each week, but **must** have a daily act of collective worship.
- An assembly could be whole school, by key stage, or year group.
- Collective worship could additionally be held in class or tutor groups for a shorter period of time.

Collective worship and assembly

Example:

A school holds one main assembly each week with a collective worship element.

For the remaining days it has acts of collective worship in tutor or form time.

Schools will generally have at least one assembly to develop the school community.

Managing the right to withdraw

- **Parents and carers** have the right to withdraw their child(ren) from collective worship and need only write to the headteacher to request this. They do not have to give a reason.
- **Students in the 6th form** can withdraw themselves.
- The school must comply with the request. The parent/carer is not obliged to provide a reason. It is good practice for the headteacher to invite the parent/carer in to discuss arrangements and the policy of the school.

Managing the right to withdraw

- The school does not have to provide an alternative activity for children who have been withdrawn but does have to ensure their safety. If the timing is convenient, a parent can bring a child to school after CW or take him/her home beforehand, provided this is agreed at the outset.
- A parent has a right to have alternative worship on the school site, at another school or at another site at no cost to the school or local authority, which must be at the beginning or end of a school day and must not interfere with the pupil's curriculum entitlement.
- **Teachers** also have the right not to take part in collective worship.

What are SACRE's responsibilities in collective worship?

To:

- receive inspection reports, noting any references to the quality of collective worship in the context of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- monitor the quality of provision where possible and share good practice
- offer advice to headteachers and governing bodies, including where there may be difficulties

What are SACRE's responsibilities in collective worship?

- The SACRE has the **statutory duty** to 'grant a determination' to a community school where it is felt that the proportion of acts of collective worship of 'a broadly Christian character' as described by law is not appropriate for all or some pupils.
- If a school feels that the requirement for broadly Christian worship is inappropriate for some or all of the pupils usually because of their family or faith background, the headteacher can apply to the local SACRE for a 'determination' to have this requirement lifted or modified for some or all of the pupils.
- SACREs should have a clear process for applying for a determination. It may be sensible to get the SACRE's process approved by the LA's legal department.

What is a determination?

- The technical term ‘granting a determination’ is so called because SACRE ‘*determines*’ whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for pupils in a school is appropriate.
- A determination only affects the character of collective worship. It does not affect the requirement for all pupils (apart from those withdrawn by their parents/carers) to take part in an act of collective worship on each school day.
- A determination lasts for a period of five years.

Under what circumstances should a school apply for a determination?

- Usually schools will apply for a determination where significant numbers of parents/carers of pupils express concerns about 'broadly Christian' worship, possibly leading to numerous requests to withdraw their children from collective worship.

What should schools include in an application for a determination?

- The Headteacher must consult the governing body
- There should be a consultation with parents
- In key stage 2 and secondary schools, some form of pupil participation in the consultation process may be appropriate
- It should be clear whether the application is for the whole school or for a particular group or groups within the school
- A description of the proposed alternative collective worship to be planned and provided

What should a SACRE consider before granting a determination?

- Ensure that the proposed determination is justified by the evidence the school provides in its application, such as number of requests to withdraw from collective worship or the backgrounds of the pupils.
- Evidence of all consultations, including clear evidence that the governing body has been consulted, and the findings of those consultations
- Clear planning for how the school will provide alternative collective worship so SACRE can decide whether that this meets the needs of the pupils and the requirement for a daily act of collective worship

Discussion and thinking activity

“All pupils in attendance at a maintained school other than a maintained special school, shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship”

Education Act 1996 par 385.

- What does this statement mean?
- What are your reactions to the statement: emotional, intellectual and spiritual? What value might there be in participating in collective worship? What concerns might there be? What questions does it raise?
- What precisely is required of schools?
- What can SACRE do to support schools?
- What can **you** do to help?