



## **Bath & North East Somerset SACRE Guidance on Collective worship 2024**

### **Overview**

This guidance aims to support schools in Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES) to develop a Collective Worship Policy to ensure that pupils have effective and reflective experiences in collective worship. B&NES SACRE recognises that some schools use the term 'assemblies' to refer to collective worship. They acknowledge that what is important is what happens during this time, ensuring that it is inclusive for their particular setting and community.

The legal term used in the 1996 Act is Collective Worship and therefore this is the term that is used in this guidance.

An assembly is a gathering of part or all of the school. It is concerned with administrative matters and other announcements about school life (although it may include matters akin to collective worship as described below).

This guidance offers an explanation of the legal obligations including the right to withdrawal and explains the rich opportunities that collective worship offers students for spiritual and moral social and cultural development.

### **I. Why have Collective Worship?**

'Collective Worship' is a requirement of the Education Act 1996. In many community schools the term 'assembly' is now used to describe this activity. At its best, collective worship can achieve a great deal. It can be a daily collective activity which can recognise and emphasise common values, aspirations and commitments. Each school needs to think about what is beneficial for the whole school community in the light of the diverse faith and worldview traditions and backgrounds of its children.

Here are some reasons why, even without the legal requirement, it is good to hold collective worship in schools.

#### **School collective worship can:**

- give time to breathe, offering space and stillness before, during or at the end of a hectic and pressured day to be oneself, to reflect or just to sit at rest;

- help to foster a spirit of community in a school, year group or class;
- enable the joys and sorrows of those present, those local to the school and national and international news, to be reflected upon and shared in a way which is otherwise not possible in school;
- enable the overall personality and ethos of the school to come across to everyone;
- be an opportunity to share and reinforce the values the school seeks to live by;
- enable individuals and groups of staff and pupils to share their concerns, interests and reflections;
- help pupils ponder on the many big questions that life presents, and know that others of all ages ponder these too;
- be a time of sharing those things that unite, whilst acknowledging or celebrating the diversity of beliefs and values within and beyond school;
- provide an opportunity for pupils (and staff) to come close to God and to reflect on the most important directions and values for their lives;
- provide a time which pupils can make their own.

The content of collective worship is almost completely open. There is no National Curriculum for collective worship.

See Appendix 2 for some ideas for resources to use with collective worship.

## **2. The Legal Requirement for Collective Worship**

The legal requirement is detailed in the Education Act 1996.

1. All maintained schools and Academies, whether or not they have a religious character, are required to have daily acts of collective worship and to teach religious education as part of their curriculum. These are two distinct and separate times of the school day. Schools with a religious character provide denominational collective worship in line with their foundation and are not subject to the requirement to provide 'wholly or mainly broadly Christian' acts of collective worship.
2. All registered school pupils (5 - 18) are required to take part in an act of collective worship on each school day (unless withdrawn – see below). Pupils in special schools should take part in an act of collective worship as far as it is practicable.
3. Collective worship may be held at any time during the school day.
4. Separate collective worship may be arranged for different age or school groupings. For example, key stage or class collective worship.
5. Collective worship must take place on school premises, but governors of aided and religious foundation schools may, on special occasions, arrange collective worship elsewhere.
6. In any one term in a community or a non-religious foundation school or academy, collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. That is,

most (or all) of the acts of worship must reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any one Christian denomination. (See detailed section below)

7. Collective worship must be appropriate having regard to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils.
8. Where a collective worship which is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character is inappropriate, the Headteacher and governors may apply to the local SACRE (and in the case of Academies will need to refer to the terms of their funding agreement), for permission to arrange worship for all or some of the pupils which is not wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character (see Determinations, Appendix 1).
9. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship (see below, section 4).
10. Teachers cannot be compelled to lead or participate in a collective worship, but it is the responsibility of the Headteacher and Governing Body to ensure that it takes place.

Every school under Local Authority control must have a policy for collective worship that is drawn up in accordance with the law, and reflects as far as possible the consensus of views of the various stakeholders i.e. staff, governors and the school community.

All Academies, in accordance with their funding agreements, must have an act of daily worship and will be inspected under Ofsted criteria which look to make judgements about Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development and so collective worship may play a part of their decisions.

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.

DFE Circular 1/94 is not legislation but offers guidance. ([Collective\\_worship\\_in\\_schools.pdf](#))

The Diocese of Bath and Wells also produces guidance on planning collective worship for Church of England / Methodist schools (see link in Appendix 2). The Diocese of Clifton will provide guidance for Roman Catholic Schools.

### 3. B&NES SACRE Guidance for Collective Worship in Schools

#### A. How Should Schools Introduce School Collective Worship?

The B&NES Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education would hope teachers of any religious persuasion, or of none, feel able to participate in and lead acts of school collective worship.

Non-faith schools are a secular space where no one religious or non-religious world view takes precedence over another.

As a secular space, the school is a forum where expressions of religious and non-religious faith together with dialogue and discussions about and between different faiths and worldviews can take place. B&NES SACRE believes this should be encouraged – that a healthy school community includes open and humane exchanges of and about different faiths and worldviews.

We favour a **broad** approach to school collective worship which allows children to reflect upon their shared human experience and feelings of joy and sadness, thankfulness and need, their reflections on shared values and concerns and the exploration of (what some refer to as) the spiritual area of experience.

Collective worship may take place in different locations. For example, in the school hall, in a class room or an outside location within the school grounds.

As with all areas of the curriculum, school collective worship should be a valid educational experience. There is also the need for respect, understanding, compassion, attentiveness and empathy in relation to the different beliefs of teachers, parents and children. Collective worship can only be inclusive if it is defined broadly enough to include those who have no belief in divine beings or powers.

#### B. ‘Wholly or Mainly of a Broadly Christian Character’

The Education Act 1996 states that the collective worship organised by the school is to be ‘*wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character*’. We should note that this means that most school collective worship should reflect Christian **beliefs**, not necessarily Christian worship practices.

In selecting *broadly Christian* material or any other material, it is important that schools ensure that acts of worship are ‘inclusive’. It must be remembered that it is not the role of the school to nurture religious faith. Collective worship that raises the beliefs suggested provides opportunities for ‘*broadly Christian*’ collective worship as well as stimulating all young people to

reflect, to feel awe, to learn to be still and to consider the direction and meaning of their lives. Reflecting Christian **beliefs** can often mean reflecting Christian **values**, such as forgiveness, respect, responsibility, perseverance and others. These values are important to many and can provide a meaningful and inclusive focus to collective worship.

Guidance from the Church of England for 'Inclusive, Invitation, Inspiring' collective worship can be found here.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/church-england-sets-out-guidance-collective-worship>

## C. Content and Presentation

B&NES SACRE's approach should help schools to facilitate a version of school collective worship that eases and promotes a polite and vigorous expression of faiths and a dialogue between them. It should emphasise a community ethos that celebrates all that is shared.

The unifying element for each act of school collective worship will be a central theme focusing the attention of all taking part on a single idea. School or local events, a topic explored by one class, the lives and experiences of people past and present, current religious festivals, national and international days, and the school's agreed shared values, exploring big questions and current issues, for example, climate change are examples of suitable themes for collective worship.

The methods used to present particular themes may include:

- Spoken word: story, poetry, interviews, discussion, readings from the Bible and from other religious and secular literature and choral speaking;
- Music and singing - hymns popular songs, chants, or singing games;
- Visual stimuli: pictures, posters, artefacts, natural objects, religious objects, personal objects, works of art, or film clips;
- Performance: dance, music, mime, drama, role play, or puppets;
- Music: either performed or played;
- Preparing and sharing food;
- Silence: stilling, reflection, contemplation, meditation and, if appropriate, prayer.

In today's plural society a creative silence may well be considered to be more inclusive than vocalised prayer. It can give an opportunity for prayer, without insisting on it.

Some examples of ensuring inclusive practice include teaching the meaning of the word 'Amen'. Using phrases such as 'If you would like to make the prayer your own, please put your hands together. Otherwise respectfully put your hands in a basket shape.' If done well, such acts of school collective worship could encourage a less frenetic, more peaceful ethos in a school.

## 4. The Right to Opt Out

We hope that our inclusive guidance will be broadly accepted by a wide variety of people. Many parents see the provision of collective worship by a school as part of its expression of care for the wellbeing of its pupils. However, there may be occasions when a parent insists on their right to withdraw their children from school collective worship.

In this case the school can offer three alternatives:

- Pupils can simply not attend collective worship and spend their time off the school premises with their parents or be under the supervision of a member of staff elsewhere in the school;
- Parents and Headteacher together can agree to make informal parallel provision for those of a different faith, provided that this does not become the school's main act of Collective Worship, and no additional costs fall on the school or the LEA;
- The Headteacher can apply to SACRE for permission to build worship around a faith other than Christianity as described in Appendix I. This may especially apply to non-Christian faith schools.

If a school believes that it is not appropriate to hold mainly Christian acts of worship it can seek a **Determination (see Appendix I)** from SACRE which will allow it to plan its acts of worship around a system of belief which is other than Christian.

For further information please contact the SACRE Adviser to discuss.

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## Appendix I

### Applying for a Determination:

1. The Headteacher consults with the governors to determine the extent to which the requirement for collective worship to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' is not appropriate for the school or groups of pupils within the school. It is also advised that the matter is brought to the attention of the school's link inspector/adviser and the adviser responsible for RE and Collective Worship: Rebekah Guy - [secretary.banessacre@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.banessacre@gmail.com)
2. The Headteacher and the governors consult with parents.
3. If a decision to seek a Determination has been reached, the Headteacher must apply to the SACRE in writing, outlining the reasons why a Determination is being sought and giving evidence to support this. In the case of Academies agreement for a Determination must be sought from the sponsors.
4. The SACRE will consider the application for a Determination and may request the Headteacher to present the application in person to clarify any issues and answer any questions.
5. In considering the application, the SACRE will take account of the views of:
  - a. the Officer representing the Director of Education;
  - b. the family background of the pupils concerned.
6. The SACRE may accept or reject an application, but cannot modify it. Each constituent group on the SACRE is allowed one vote, with the decision being reached on a majority.
7. The SACRE will notify the Headteacher and the governors of its decision in writing.
8. A Determination will last for 5 years from the date of its effect, after which time it must be reviewed.
9. If a Determination is accepted, it will be the Headteacher's responsibility to decide what form the alternative worship will take, and inform SACRE, the governors and parents. In the case of Academies the Principal will need to inform the sponsor what form the alternative worship will take.
10. Where such a Determination is made in respect of all or some of the pupils in the school, daily collective worship must still be provided for them. Where a determination has been granted in respect of a class or description of pupils of a particular faith or religion, the alternative collective worship may be provided for those pupils as a whole. It may not be distinctive of any particular denomination of any faith or religion, but may be distinctive of a particular faith or religion. Parents continue to have a right to withdraw their children from the collective worship.

## Appendix 2

Some ideas for resources to use with collective worship are listed below:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/church-england-sets-out-guidance-collective-worship>

<https://www.picture-news.co.uk/>

<https://assembliesforall.org.uk/>

<https://www.justfinancefoundation.org.uk/sample-classroom-resources>

<https://www.assemblies.org.uk/>

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/schools/re-collective-worship-and-spirituality/collective-worship/>

<https://simplycollectiveworship.co.uk/>

<https://www.imaginer.co.uk/roots-fruits/>

## Appendix 3

A link to festivals throughout the year is below. These could be incorporated into collective worship as well as enabling links to be made within and between different religions and worldviews:



[https://www.reonline.org.uk/festival-calendar/?filters=%7B%22february%22%3A%7B%22term\\_id%22%3A%2250%22%2C%22taxonomy%22%3A%22months%22%7D%7D](https://www.reonline.org.uk/festival-calendar/?filters=%7B%22february%22%3A%7B%22term_id%22%3A%2250%22%2C%22taxonomy%22%3A%22months%22%7D%7D)