Cumbrian **SACRE**

Serving the schools in Cumberland and across Westmorland & Furness

Collective Worship

Advice and guidance for schools

Cumberland Council

Westmorland & Furness Council

Working for **Cumberland Council** and **Westmorland & Furness Council**

Scope of guidance

This guidance is provided to support schools in fulfilling statutory obligations and promoting good SMSC development. It applies to maintained schools. It does not apply to schools with a religious character which may have guidance from dioceses or other bodies. It does not apply to academies or free schools, where arrangements are governed by the trust deed or funding agreement. However, the basic legal requirements apply to all schools and this guidance may be useful in conjunction with any issued by other authorities.

Purposes and benefits

A creative programme of collective worship can enrich the life of a school in many ways and schools are encouraged to be creative and imaginative in organising their provision, which can:

- Offer space for the **school community** to learn, grow and celebrate together;
- Provide an opportunity for **personal reflection** on individual life or wider issues;
- Nurture all aspects of **SMSC development,** especially spiritual development;
- Offer opportunities to develop understanding of diverse faiths and cultures, so contributing to the promotion of **fundamental values;**
- Meet and engage with the **local community** through participants in assemblies;
- Respond to **topical or local issues** in a flexible and sensitive way;
- Provide chances for pupils and staff to **develop their own abilities** in preparing, presenting or evaluating assemblies.

Qualities of good collective worship

Collective worship should include opportunity for reflection. This may include the use of prayers. Sensitivity should be used to ensure that prayer or other forms of spirituality are as inclusive as possible. Assumptions or assertions about specific doctrinal beliefs may make it difficult for members of some faith communities, or pupils without religious affiliation, to participate. It may be introduced with a phrase that recognises pupils will use the words in different ways. Some may reflect the words of the prayer in their own thoughts. Others, with no specific religious faith, will be able to reflect on the theme and the aspiration of the words without necessarily implying belief in a deity or conformity to a particular religious tradition.

Quality collective worship will:

- Be inclusive of pupils of all faiths and no religious faith;
- Be planned in an organised pattern, also responsive to school, community or world-wide concerns;
- Involve all staff and pupils in planning, participation and evaluation;
- Inspire and interest pupils through engaging with meaningful issues and being delivered creatively;
- Includes time for reflection and the opportunity to worship for those who wish;
- Have educational purpose and content;
- Support SMSC development and shared humanitarian values;
- Be informed by regular evaluation by pupils and staff.

Visitors

Visitors can enrich collective worship and build partnership with the local community. Schools are encouraged to invite members of faith communities, other ethical traditions and community groups to share in the programme. As ever, heads should ensure full safeguarding procedures are in place. Regular visitors to school who have access to children should have DBS enhanced disclosure. This is not necessary for visitors who take occasional assemblies and are always accompanied by members of the school staff. Those with extremist views, of any political or religious kind, should not be allowed scope to groom young people through access in assemblies and elsewhere.

Some considerations and self-evaluation

These six words can be used to describe effective and engaging assemblies and the related questions may be useful in reflecting on a school's provision:

1. Collective: How does the assembly celebrate and promote a sense of community within the whole school (or group)?
2. Educational: Is there a clear aim and focus, with appropriate learning? Does it engage and interest pupils and staff?
3. Spiritual: How does the assembly nurture pupils' awareness of their beliefs and values - and those of others (including non-religious beliefs)? How does it develop a sense of the meaning, purpose and value in their lives?
4. Reflective: Is there space and opportunity for thoughtful reflection, in the assembly or as a follow up? If prayers are used do these allow for different approaches and responses?
5. Inclusive: How does the assembly programme develop understanding of different perspectives and cultures? How does it promote values of tolerance, diversity and equality?
6. Responsive: How did pupils respond and participate?

Summary of legal requirements

The current law is determined by the Education Reform Act 1988, with some requirements deriving from the Education Regulations 1981. In summary the law says this:

- All pupils must attend a daily act of collective worship, except for sixth formers who are allowed to decide for themselves whether to attend;
- The legal framework outlined here applies to maintained LA schools. In schools with a religious character collective worship is governed by the trust deed. Arrangements in free schools and academies are determined by the funding agreement.
- There is no need for an act of collective worship to include the whole school all at once. It may be through year groups, classes, key stages or in any combination.
- It may take place at any time during the school day and should normally be on school premises.
- It must be appropriate to the age, aptitude and family background of pupils.
- Responsibility lies with the head and governors, though the precise duties may vary according to the type of school.
- Details of arrangements for collective worship, including the policy, must be documented and available to the public.

The Character of Collective Worship

The Education Reform Act 1988 states that collective worship must be '**wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'**. It also says that a school will be fulfilling this requirement if it 'reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief, without being distinctive of any Christian denomination'. This must be taken to mean that it should not be narrow, exclusive or sectarian but must be broad and reflect the school's context and population.

Many people think that the law should be amended to reflect the social, religious and educational changes that have taken place in the last 70 years. Nevertheless, it remains the law in England and Wales for the time being.

In practice the law's phraseology allows schools to focus on broad, universal and important themes, common to world faiths and a humanist perspective, such as compassion, forgiveness, generosity and charity. It allows schools to remember specific festivals or stories from both Christianity and all world faiths, as well as to bring secular perspectives. 'Broadly' implies that the content should be shared and inclusive rather than theologically narrow. Together with other requirements to promote tolerance of different faiths and non-religious beliefs, it is wise to interpret the instructions with sensitivity and realism, demonstrating the fundamental value of tolerance for all. The focus will vary according to the ethos, circumstances or foundation of the school. There is expectation that school leaders will ensure there is a 'rounded' programme of assemblies and this phrase was for a while part of Ofsted inspection guidelines (Sept 2014).

The term 'collective worship'

For most people the term 'worship' implies an object or deity of some kind and the phrase 'collective worship' can be unhelpful in a plural and diverse community. Although collective worship itself is a statutory requirement, schools may find it useful to refer to this colloquially using a different term, such as 'daily reflection' or 'assembly', though the term 'assembly' does not strictly define anything other than a gathering of people.

Withdrawal of pupils

Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from collective worship. Parents do not have to state a reason, but it is always good practice to arrange to discuss this with parents if a request emerges. There may be issues about a particular aspect of the programme which may be allayed after discussion. If the parent still feels they wish to withdraw their child, the request should be made in writing to the head teacher. Withdrawal may be whole or partial. A request from parents must be allowed by the school, which also needs to provide alternative activity and supervision for this pupil. However, this should not be at additional expense to the school or local authority, including SACRE. In general terms, it is always wise to have good communication with, and information available to, parents.

‘Determinations’

Collective Worship and assemblies should reflect the needs and context of the school. In most cases there is sufficient flexibility and generality in the law to meet the needs of schools with a diverse religious population. Schools which feel that their local circumstances cannot be accommodated within this broad interpretation of the law may apply for a ‘determination’ from SACRE. This does not remove the duty to provide collective worship but it allows the requirement that it should be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’ to be lifted in respect of some or all of the pupils in the school.

In maintained schools, applications for a ‘determination’ should be made to the Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE) which will decide whether or not a determination should be granted. This should be done by the head after full consultation with parents and the school’s governing body. Care must also be taken to safeguard the interests of children for whom broadly Christian worship is still appropriate. SACRE will monitor the provision of collective worship that is varied in this way at least annually. An application for a new determination must be made in writing to the Clerk for discussion at a full SACRE meeting. Applications must be made at least 42 days before the meeting. A determination must be renewed every five years.

Sources include

Collective Worship Revisited, NASACRE and AREIAC, May 2012

Religious Believers Visiting Schools: Guidance and a Code of Practice, NATRE.

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