

Collective Worship

Presentation for Haringey
SACRE
Summer 2005

SACRE's role

- A SACRE has a legal responsibility to advise the LEA on issues regarding collective worship.
- From reading inspection reports it appears that collective worship is often an area where improvement is necessary and where support may prove helpful.

The Law on Collective Worship (i)

- collective worship must be provided daily (separate arrangements may be made for nurseries and special schools)
- it may take place at any time of the school day
- schools may decide on the age/ grouping of pupils and these may vary from day to day.

The Law on Collective Worship (ii)

- the time decided for the delivery of collective worship may also vary for different groups from day to day
- generally collective worship should take place on school premises

The Law on Collective Worship (iii)

- The content of the majority of acts of collective worship in a term should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, reflecting the broad traditions of the Christian belief."
- The content of collective worship should 'have regard for the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of pupils'.

The Law on Collective Worship (iv)

- Parents may withdraw their children from collective worship
- Teachers may withdraw from collective worship

The Law on Collective Worship (v)

- In a community school the responsibility for managing the provision for collective worship is with the head teacher after consultation with the governing body.
- Every maintained school is required to include in its annual prospectus information about the collective worship provided by the school and how parents may withdraw their children from it.

What is Collective Worship?

The law has never clearly defined collective worship. It is not the same as faith community worship (corporate worship) because:

- A community school is not a faith community; it contains pupils and staff from many different faith backgrounds as well as those who have no religious beliefs or no faith background;
- A school community contains a wide range of people with different views on what 'worship' might mean and what or whom may be worthy of worship.

What is Collective Worship (ii) ?

- Collective worship is not the same as an Assembly because staff and pupils do not have the right to withdraw from Assembly.
- Assembly may be taken to mean the time when members of the school are gathered together to pass on information and move forward matters of secular business (notices).

What is Worship in Schools?

- Each faith community interprets the word 'worship', and the Supreme Being or power to whom that worship is directed.
- The word worship comes from the Anglo-Saxon word - weorp (worth) scip (ship) which for schools may mean that which it is important for us to promote (e.g. values).

The Amazing fact of Quaker Worship by G H Gorman defines worship as:

- "a universal human activity which can be expressed as a growing ability to celebrate and reflect on things held to be of worth. For many people, worship involves a commitment to a belief in God.
- However, it can have a much broader and inclusive meaning; it can be a "form of human activity, when we purposely put ourselves in the position of paying particular attention to those things in life which have the greatest meaning for us".

What does 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' mean?

NB: the law does not say 'of a broadly Christian content or style'.

- It can mean incorporating elements that Christians might recognise from their worship, e.g. songs, music, stories, learning from the good example of others, readings from holy books.
- It does not mean creating a pretence of Christian worship.

What does 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' mean?

- It means promoting values that Christians believe to be important. These may be, and often are, values held to be important by other faiths as well.
- It does not need to contain any elements of Christian ritual or liturgy.

Why should collective worship 'generally' take place on the school premises?

- When pupils are on a school journey and / or are resident away from the school premises it would be unreasonable for them to be expected to return to school premises for a time of collective worship.
- On these occasions collective worship should be provided for these pupils at the alternative premises.

Positive Purposes/Aims for Collective Worship

There are many good reasons for wanting to provide collective worship apart from ensuring that the law is met.

Collective worship can add value to the education process.

Collective worship may be provided in accordance with the law to the benefit of the whole school community. Within this provision the integrity of all present should be recognised and safeguarded.

Collective worship provides an opportunity to:

- affirm and celebrate the values and ethos of the school;
- add to the pupil's development an awareness of, and a sense of belonging to, the many different dimensions of the schools' community;
- experience the sense of gathering for a special purpose;

Collective worship provides an opportunity to:

- encourage pupils to develop an awareness of the universal moral principles of right and wrong, justice and fairness and a proper concern for the fate of others and the world;
- share an experience which promotes thought and reflection;
- promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;

Collective worship provides an opportunity to:

- consider and reflect upon a variety of situations and issues and make a personal response;
- reflect quietly and make an internal response in the light of personal beliefs and background: this may include worship of God within each participant's own faith understanding.

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- Collective worship is, therefore, a means whereby the school community comes together in order to celebrate and reflect upon those values that it considers important to promote, it is not assembly.

Collective Worship and Religious Education

- Whilst collective worship should be a quality experience and pupils should learn from it, an act of collective worship is not a lesson
- RE is a subject of the curriculum and as such cannot be taught through collective worship
- RE could not be delivered in a broad, balanced and differentiated way to all pupils through collective worship.
