

SHEFFIELD SACRE

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP GUIDELINES 2015: “BE STILL AND SHARE WITH OPEN HEARTS”¹

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE FOR SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

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¹ Our current Sheffield SACRE Agreed Syllabus is entitled “Enquiring Minds and Open Hearts: Religious Education for All”. The working group members who have devised these guidelines, together with Sheffield SACRE, recommend the use of the Agreed Syllabus as one potential resource to inform planning for Collective Worship. See section 6 of this guidance document.

Foreword

We are delighted to write this foreword to our Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE's) Collective Worship Guidelines 2015 – “Be Still and Share with Open Hearts”. The Guidelines Document is a companion to our current Agreed Syllabus for RE in Sheffield, “Enquiring Minds and Open Hearts: Religious Education for All”, published in June 2014.

The Guidelines have been a year in the making and we are very grateful to all those who have given of their time, energy, commitment, knowledge and understanding in order to produce this document. It has been written by practitioners for practitioners and was commissioned on behalf of Sheffield SACRE by the City Wide Learning Body, our overarching strategic partnership group, which promotes high standards of achievement and attainment for all learners in the city.

We wish to thank the working group that has steered the re-writing of our Collective Worship Guidelines and to highlight the importance of having a planned and systematic approach to this aspect of a school's teaching and learning. We believe that Collective Worship can enable the ethos and personality of each and every school to come alive for everyone.

We commend the Guidelines wholeheartedly to you and wish you great success in your Collective Worship over the coming years.

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June 2015

1. Why engage in Collective Worship?

1.1 Opportunities to gather the wider school community together and to give individuals space to reflect are vital components of learning, and therefore Collective Worship sessions should not be simply transformed into information-giving opportunities. They are significant opportunities to gather the school community together and to give individuals time to reflect and ponder whilst in the presence of other school members.

1.2 The key benefits and core purpose of Collective Worship sessions are:

- Giving body, spirit and mind time to breathe
- Offering space and stillness to be oneself, to reflect, to rest at the start, during, or at the end of a busy day at school
- Helping to grow a spirit of community in a school, key stage, class, year group
- Enabling the joys and sorrows of those present and those local to the school to be reflected on and shared
- Enabling the joys and sorrows of national and international events to be reflected on and shared
- Enabling the ethos and personality of the school to come alive for everyone
- Providing an opportunity to share and reinforce the values by which the school seeks to live
- Allowing individuals and groups of pupils and staff to share their concerns, reflections, interests, values and moral compass
- Offering a time to present genuinely alternative views of life and lifestyles for all to consider
- Helping pupils to ponder on the big questions that life presents and to know that others of all ages do this as well
- Offering insights into religious and other beliefs and commitments in an open and transparent way
- Providing a time for sharing those things that unite, whilst acknowledging or celebrating the diversity of beliefs and values within and beyond the school
- Providing opportunity for pupils to respond to specific accounts of religious experience (personal, scriptural, biographical) and to engage in (or observe respectfully) religious activities such as prayer, stillness, meditation, singing
- Creating a time in which pupils can be individually thoughtful and reflect on the most important things in their lives
- Providing a sense of occasion where spiritual, moral, social and cultural values are explored and affirmed

2. What is Collective Worship?

2.1 Our Collective Worship Guidance is based on the **DfE Circular 1/94** (henceforth referred to as **C1/94** in this document) which, despite its age, is still in force as we write in 2015 (see **Appendix 1** for full copy, noting that some references in the document are anachronistic – e.g. the reference to Grant Maintained Schools). It is important to note that **Collective** Worship should be differentiated from **Corporate** Worship (that which obtains among a voluntary body with beliefs in common). Rather, **Collective** Worship is what happens when a diverse group comes together to explore and celebrate its highest common values, without violating or compromising the integrity of individuals or minorities.

2.2 Sheffield SACRE has discussed the notion and nature of Collective Worship as defined in **C1/94**, and would wish to acknowledge that some schools and their communities may prefer to call their Collective Worship programme more simply “assembly time”. Therefore, pragmatically, it is Sheffield SACRE’s view that the terms “collective worship” and “assembly/ assemblies” may be used interchangeably. Consequently, schools may choose which terminology they wish to use – the key point being that schools should communicate clearly their approach to and underpinning rationale for Collective Worship to all concerned – pupils, staff, governors, parents and carers. In any assembly for this purpose the Collective Worship component should be clearly and imaginatively presented, avoiding any impression of mere tokenism.

Effective Collective Worship

2.3 The following features would characterise effective assembly time:

- Sessions should be concerned with the fundamental recognition of worth and worthiness; with ultimate questions of life; with identifying, affirming and celebrating the ideas and values considered to be of central importance in the whole school community
- Encouraging reflection and response, Collective Worship should be a key contributor to pupils’ spiritual development. This spirituality may or may not be expressed by pupils through a belief in God
- Collective Worship should presume that pupils come from a variety of faiths and backgrounds and this should be reflected in the planning and delivery of assembly time. Assemblies should seek to involve all pupils, including those of different or no religious faith
- Collective Worship is not the same as Religious Education and should be differentiated clearly in school policy documents. The law requires both Religious Education and Collective Worship to take place in school, but at different times. The focus in Collective Worship is on celebration,

reflection, and sharing, whilst in Religious Education the focus is on delivering particular curricular objectives. In essence, Collective Worship should be regarded as a special and separate component within the whole school curriculum, enabling cross-curricular connections to be made

- Assemblies should be used to bring pupils together so that they can reflect on their shared human experience and such emotions as joy, sadness, gratitude, and need
- Outstanding Collective Worship will use a wide range of methods of presentation to evoke an atmosphere of worship and engage pupils' spiritual insights and aspirations, including art, music and poetry

2.4 A further consideration for effective assemblies is that they should be **wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character** for most of the time. Therefore most assemblies in a school term should be broadly Christian. However, **paragraph 36 in C1/94** reminds us that Collective Worship does not need to contain only Christian content– rather that the requirement is for the character of Christianity to be conveyed by using the teachings, beliefs and stories of Christianity, whilst also allowing scope for the beliefs, teachings and stories of other faiths to be explored.

3. The Legal Requirement for Collective Worship (referencing the Determination Process)

3.1 Collective Worship has been a statutory requirement since the Education Act of 1944. The Education Reform Act of 1988 loosened some of the prescription around assemblies but affirmed the statutory status of Collective Worship. The requirement for a daily act of Collective Worship was confirmed further in the Education Act 1996 and there has been no change since to this primary legislation.

3.2 The legislation states that all pupils on roll shall take part in an act of Collective Worship every day (**Education Reform Act 6.1**) with two exceptions:

- Those pupils whose parents have exercised their right to withdraw their child from Collective Worship
- Pupils in Year 12 and above are allowed to decide for themselves whether or not to attend Collective Worship

3.3 Assemblies may take place at any time of the school day. They should take place on school premises and must be appropriate to the age, aptitude and family background of the pupils.

3.4 The responsibility for Collective Worship lies with the Headteacher and Governors.

3.5 The legal framework applies to all Local Authority maintained schools and it is the responsibility of SACRE to advise the Local Authority on matters concerned with Collective Worship in schools.

3.6 In faith schools Collective Worship is delivered according to the trust deeds and reflects the faith or denomination of the foundation.

3.7 In academies and free schools, Collective Worship is determined by the school's funding agreement.

3.8 Teachers have the right to withdraw from Collective Worship for reasons of conscience.

3.9 If a school considers that it is not appropriate for pupils to have assemblies that are “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” (see **paragraph 2.4** above), it may apply for a **determination**. A determination lifts the requirement for Collective Worship to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”.

3.10 Community schools without a religious character apply to their local SACRE for consideration of granting a determination. Academies and free schools apply to the Education Funding Agency. At the time of writing (Spring 2015), the email address for academies and free schools to contact in this regard is Academy.QUESTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk

3.11 A determination does not lift the requirement for a daily act of Collective Worship.

3.12 For more information regarding the types of determination and the process for applying for a determination, see **Appendix 6**.

4. Spiritual Development through Collective Worship (reference the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Dimensions of the Curriculum and British Values)

4.1 The key benefits and core purpose of Collective Worship sessions have already been identified and enumerated in paragraph 1.2. Implicit in this list of benefits is the opportunity that assemblies can offer pupils to develop their spirituality and their moral compass. A key set of criteria by which Ofsted judges a school's effectiveness links into not only spiritual and moral development but also social and cultural development. SACRE believes that both the spiritual and moral dimensions in particular can be nurtured through well planned and delivered assemblies.

4.2 Ofsted looks for the following characteristics in terms of pupils' spiritual development (**School Inspection Handbook, paragraph 131, January 2015**):

- The ability to be reflective about your own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform your perspective on life and your interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values
- A sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about yourself, others, and the world around you
- The use of imagination and creativity in your learning
- A willingness to reflect on your experiences

4.3 Likewise, Ofsted looks for the following characteristics in terms of pupils' moral development (**ibid, paragraph 132**):

- The ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong; to readily apply this understanding to your own life and, in so doing, to respect the civil and criminal law of England
- An understanding of the consequences of your behaviour and actions
- An interest in investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues, and being able to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues

4.4. In addition, Ofsted looks to schools to promote "fundamental British Values as part of Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural Development" ("**Promoting fundamental British Values as part of SMSC Development in Schools – Departmental Advice for Maintained Schools, November 2014**"). Schools are therefore expected to promote the following values, as defined by Ofsted: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. As a result of schools promoting these fundamental values, pupils will demonstrate the following understanding and knowledge:

- An understanding of how citizens can influence decision-making through the democratic process
- An appreciation that living under the rule of law protects individual citizens and is essential for their wellbeing and safety
- An understanding that there is a separation of power between the executive and the judiciary, and that while some public bodies such as the police and the army can be held to account through Parliament, others such as the courts maintain independence
- An understanding that the freedom to choose and hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law
- An acceptance that other people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour
- An understanding of identifying and combatting discrimination

Collective Worship sessions could offer opportunities to address all of these bullet points and, in particular, the final 3 points in the list.

5. Producing a policy for Collective Worship

5.1 In order to produce a policy for Collective Worship, schools should consult with key stakeholders – pupils, staff, governors, parents and carers. It is recommended that a draft policy document be used in order to facilitate the consultation (and a policy writing framework is to be found here at **Appendix 4**).

5.2 The draft policy should have the following features:

- A clear statement of the aims and objectives of Collective Worship at the school
- How the school meets the legal requirements, including those of the right of withdrawal and on how the assemblies will be made appropriate for all pupils and students (aiming to avoid withdrawal requests)
- How the school's programme for assemblies contributes to the pupils' spiritual and moral development, as well as to their knowledge and understanding of British Values and social and cultural dimensions
- The organisation of Collective Worship (who, when, where, how, what)
- Who has overall responsibility for Collective Worship
- How pupils are involved in planning, presentation and evaluation
- Arrangements for teaching staff attendance or withdrawal
- The date of the policy and review date

6. Planning a Collective Worship programme

6.1 SACRE recommends approaching the planning of a Collective Worship programme in three strands, namely long-term; medium-term, and short-term.

- **Long-term plans** should take into account specific annual calendar events, e.g. festivals, celebrations and anniversaries (in this regard, the school may wish to consider subscribing to the SHAP e-calendar: <http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/calendar.html> or other providers such as <http://www.multifaiths.com/> . Please see **Appendix 2** for further resource references to support effective Collective Worship)
- **Medium-term plans** should outline a timetable of who will lead each assembly in order to ensure any visiting leaders are invited and briefed in advance and also to make sure that resources and any equipment and artefacts are readily available
- **Short-term plans** should enable enough planning time to create effective acts of Collective Worship that take account of the pupils' contexts. An appropriate atmosphere will need to be factored into the planning also (venue, use of music, possible use of lighting). A shape or design for an assembly is similarly a useful tool to ensure effectiveness – e.g. a welcome that marks the beginning of the assembly; followed by an engagement phase where the main message of the assembly is communicated; then followed by a

response phase where pupils, staff and parents/ carers if in attendance can reflect on the meaning of the message or story; concluding with a summary and a challenge to participants to take forward the central theme of the assembly into their lives beyond

6.2 A record of the themes and the content of each act of Collective Worship should be kept and this might also be published on the school website. Furthermore, it is important for schools to evaluate the success of Collective Worship sessions as measured against the school's aims for these. This should be done by talking to pupils and staff and other stakeholders and it would be useful to have an overview of the success of each theme covered as well as evidence that the Collective Worship sessions are varied and engaging.

6.3 The Sheffield SACRE Agreed Syllabus, "Enquiring Minds and Open Hearts – Religious Education for All", whilst outlining key content for the Religious Education curriculum in school, might also be used as a valuable resource for the planning of Collective Worship sessions over the school year.

7. Themes for Collective Worship

7.1 It is recommended that Collective Worship is planned around a series of themes, further examples of which are given later, following the model that was proposed in our last set of guidelines on assemblies, published in June 2009.

7.2 "The preciousness of the world around us" might be a theme to consider. In particular: the idea of an underlying purpose to life; the consideration of human responsibility for the world (including thoughts about the environment, conservation, pollution and the importance of stewardship of the planet's resources).

7.3 Following on from this example, "humans and social responsibility" could be a linked theme for Collective Worship. This could entail consideration of: the value and uniqueness of every human being (the possibility of new beginnings and acknowledging the value of human life in a respectful and cooperative manner); responses to social issues such as prejudice, violence, cruelty, racism, tolerance and medical ethics; the example and teaching of great religious leaders and other inspirational people who have promoted the needs of others as well as demonstrating gratitude, perseverance, resilience, forgiveness and self-sacrifice for others; those who have fought against injustice, exploitation and hypocrisy.

7.4 Note that both of these suggested themes are reflected in Christian beliefs but also highlight values which are to be found in the broad moral and spiritual concerns shared by all the major religions and, indeed, by those of no faith.

7.5 Further to our advice in paragraph **6.1** with regard to short-term plans for assemblies and the “shape” or design of Collective Worship, it is also helpful to consider the overall content and presentation of each session under its thematic heading.

7.6 This means that the unifying element of each Collective Worship session will be a central theme which focuses on a single idea and which should involve actively as many staff and pupils as possible. Themes can, of course, be based on key festivals (see suggestions below under paragraph **7.7**) but also on school or community events, or on a topic that is being investigated in curriculum time, or on the lives and experiences of people past and present, or on national and international days. A variety of presentation methods can then be used to engage participants and encourage a response. Some useful methods might include:

- **Silence** (stilling, time for reflection, contemplation, meditation, prayer)
- **The spoken word** (through story, news items, poetry, personal stories and experiences, interviews, discussions, readings from a variety of texts, thoughts for the day, prayers, visualisation and guided fantasy). **NB** Pupils and students should not be **expected** to pray. They may do so if they wish but it is equally valid for them to listen with respect and reflect.
- **Music** (of all sorts, with appropriate lyrics)
- **Presentations** (for example art, posters, photos, toys, digital presentations such as PowerPoint, video clips)
- **Performance** (dance, drama, improvisation, puppets)
- **Visitors** (presenting on inspirational human qualities such as courage, forgiveness, perseverance, spreading happiness). See also **section 8** below for specific guidance on expectations of faith/ non faith visitors to school.
- **Specific “products”** (such as “Thought for the Day”)

7.7 Please refer to **Appendix 3 – “Inspiring People; Festivals; Lead Themes”** for examples of interesting content for assemblies. These are derived from those written up in our 2009 guidance. Comprehensive calendars of festivals can be found (amongst other websites) via:

www.shap.org
www.interfaithcalendar.org
www.multifaiths.com
www.ccpas.co.uk
www.csas.uk.net

8. Guidance for Faith/ Non-Faith Visitors

8.1 Visitors representing local faith and non-faith communities can make really valuable contributions to learning either by visiting school or by acting

as guides to their place of worship or community activity. In common with all organisations that work with children, churches, other places of worship, and faith-based organisations must have appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Such arrangements must include:

- Procedures for staff and others to report concerns that they may have about the children they meet
- Appropriate codes of practice for staff, particularly those working directly with children, such as those issued by the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (www.ccpas.co.uk) and the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (www.csas.uk.net) or other denomination or faith groups
- Recruitment procedures in accordance with safer recruitment guidance and also training and supervision of staff, whether paid or voluntary

8.2 For further, more in-depth guidance, please refer to the excellent document produced by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE 2007) entitled “**Religious Believers Visiting School – Guidance and a Code of Conduct**” (attached as **Appendix 5**).

8.3 Finally, here is a reprint of a summary document written by Sheffield SACRE in February 2014, following requests from schools, which seeks to encapsulate good practice on one single sheet:

“Religious and other visitors taking part in the life of a school should:

- Share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid criticising the experience and insights of others and imposing their views upon pupils in any way.
- Be familiar with the school's aims, ethos and policies, and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum at the school.
- Seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods that involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age/groups concerned.
- Make clear to pupils who they are, who they represent, and what their aims are.
- Respect and value the faith and belief of the pupils and adults in the school when it is different from their own.
- Develop ways of speaking to pupils that communicate their open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to convert or persuade.
- Work within and reflect the values of the school and work within their policies – for example safeguarding, equal opportunities etc.
- Abide by the guidance set out by SACRE.

A key question to help visitors reflect on their approach:

“If a member of another religion visited my child’s school and contributed in the same way that I have done, would I, as a parent, be happy with the education given?”

9. Headteachers’ and Governors’ Guidance on Collective Worship

9.1 Headteachers and governors have a responsibility to ensure that Collective Worship and Religious Education are being delivered effectively, so it is important that both of these areas of a school’s work are on a governing body agenda at least once a year. This might perhaps be put in the wider context of the school’s provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is recommended that a **Link Governor** is identified for Collective Worship and Religious Education.

9.2 The following questions are offered for governors to use as the basis for a discussion with the Headteacher and Collective Worship coordinator on the school’s delivery of Collective Worship and Religious Education:

- Is there a daily act of Collective Worship?
- What records do we keep of acts of Collective Worship?
- How are assemblies organised (when, where, who, what)?
- Are most assemblies “broadly Christian”?
- What are our policies on Collective Worship and spiritual development?
- How do our policies reflect the aims and ethos of our school?
- What do we mean by spiritual development in our school?
- How do assemblies contribute to the pupils’ spiritual development (as well as their moral, social, and cultural development)?
- Does our school prospectus make it clear that parents/ carers have the right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship?
- How does our school respond to parental requests to withdraw children from Collective Worship?
- How are pupils and parents involved in the programme of assemblies over the school year?
- Is the content of our assemblies suitable for pupils and students of all backgrounds, communities and beliefs?
- How do we evaluate the success of Collective Worship sessions as measured against our school’s aims for these?
- How can we improve our assemblies further?
- What resources are available and where are they stored?

Governors could keep a record of discussions based on these questions and use them on an annual review basis.

10. Acknowledgements and thanks

Sheffield SACRE would like to thank all those involved in developing these Collective Worship Guidelines for their commitment and leadership.

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