



Guidance on Collective Worship for non-denominational schools in the London Borough of Camden



Section 1: Guiding statement

Some key terms:

Worship: to take time to pay respects and give recognition to that which is of value. This is an Anglo Saxon word with the same root as the word 'worth'. The word was Commonly used in religious and other settings. In the 1944 Education Act the distinction was made between Corporate Worship which may happen in a specific setting of a religious denomination and Collective Worship which was to happen in schools.

Corporate worship: worship experienced by people who belong to the same faith or share the same belief.

Collective worship: a moment of reflection or stillness experienced by a group of people who have different beliefs and commitments.

Assembly: an assembly is when a group of people gather together. An assembly is a gathering of all or part of the school. This can be for any purpose, this in itself is not required by law. Pupils may not be withdrawn from assembly and teachers and other staff can be required to attend it.

What is meant by 'worship'?

The use of the word 'worship' can cause confusion because it is now most used in the context of a religious place of worship. The Act of Collective Worship in schools is forbidden from being from a particular denominational standpoint but it provides the opportunity for pupils to voluntarily and privately reflect on what is important to them.

The law requires collective worship to be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (1996 Education Reform Act). We consider these requirements in Section 5: Legal Requirements (p. 3) and Appendix 1 (p. 4).

Why Collective Worship?

In a speech to high school students the late American writer David Foster Wallace remarked, "There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship." That may be money, beauty, power or intellect. Wallace was not a religious person. But for him, living well was learning to worship the right things and shaping your character according to good values.

So Collective Worship is the opportunity in the day for your school to focus on what is most important. It's a time to celebrate your common life, to reflect on the values that you want to shape your school and to form the character of the staff and pupils within it.

Religious diversity

This Christian character does not and should not preclude the incorporation of other faith traditions or humanistic wisdom within the Collective Worship. It is not the "Corporate Worship" of the Church but an inclusive experience that "collects" the whole school together and imposes no beliefs or devotional practices on anyone.

Where the Headteacher, governors and parents of a school consider that they do not want to be tied to the "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" clause in the law then there is the facility for the Headteacher to apply to SACRE for a Determination. (See appendix 3). If granted this does not lift the legal requirement for a daily act of worship and requires some sensitive reflection on the character of worship that may need to engage with interfaith resources and the broader values that underpin the school.



Section 2: What is the core purpose of Collective Worship?

Collective worship is an integral part of the school life which supports the school's vision statement or aims. It provides the opportunity for pupils to reflect on the spiritual and moral aspects of their day. It must comply with the requirements of the 1996 Education Reform Act (based on the 1988 Education act)

Collective worship reinforces the sense of the school community by giving pupils the opportunity to share things of worth with each other, within a reflective space.

Meaningful collective worship enables pupils to reflect on:

- what it means to be alive.
- questions of meaning, purpose and value.
- the best that human beings can be – inspirational, exemplars (people of faith or not) who have demonstrated through their actions, lives and qualities. Examples will come from religious and non-religious sources.
- personal beliefs and values.

Be aware of the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the school by working within Equal Opportunities policies.

An act of collective worship should

- respect the integrity and dignity of pupils and staff.
- be appropriate to the needs and interests of the pupils.
- be clearly distinguished from the everyday activity of the school.
- be inclusive so that everyone can both contribute to it and gain from it and participate in it if this is appropriate.

Section 3: What are the aims of Collective Worship?

- To offer the time and opportunity for reverence, reflection, contemplation and if appropriate, prayer.
- To offer opportunities for awe and wonder.
- To offer opportunities for pupils to connect with each other and the world in which they live.
- To provide a context for a consideration of moral, ethical, social and cultural issues.
- To help pupils to develop thoughtful and extended responses to key questions eg climate change.
- To promote the spiritual growth and development of pupils.
- To foster a sense of community within the school and beyond it.
- To enable pupils to explore a variety of forms of worship - those with a religious commitment should have their experience broadened and deepened and those without should learn to appreciate what it may mean to others.
- To illuminate, celebrate and commemorate what has meaning, value and purpose for individuals, the school and the wider community.
- To celebrate difference and diversity.



Section 4: What make Collective Worship a distinctive part of the school day?

Collective worship should build a sense of shared ethos and values. It can provide a distinctive and different part of the school day in the following ways:

- Create a calm and reflective atmosphere which is different to ordinary learning experiences.
- Enjoy silence and quiet time.
- Employ dance, movement and music where suitable; use candles, darkness, artefacts, etc to communicate a particular atmosphere.
- Avoid any sense that there is a 'right answer' to a question; collective worship is a time for curiosity and exploration.
- Create a sense of invitation rather than compulsion; pupils can think about something *if they wish*.
- Introduce pupils to a wide range of cultural, religious and linguistic forms, traditions and people for the sake of enjoyment of human diversity.
- Offer different responses to a theme from a variety of voices, especially ideas you wouldn't normally bring to class.
- Pupils' own beliefs, values, commitments and responses are very much the heart of the collective worship experience; this is not always true of ordinary learning activities.
- Don't avoid challenging, difficult or sad questions; they might not be solved but they are part of life.
- Invite local charities or activism groups (religious or otherwise) to show values in action.
- Celebrate the various successes of the school community, including attributes not measured by performance data like kindness, determination and courage.
- Invite a variety of speakers to show pupils the widest range possible of ways there are to be human!

Section 5: What are the legal requirements for Collective Worship?

The Education Act of 1996 (based on 1988 Education Act) requires that collective worship in community and foundation schools should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. This dimension is considered in Appendix 1 and 2 (p. 4 and 5)

Schools are advised to keep records of the content of collective worship, indicating elements of a broadly Christian character. Collective worship across in community and foundation schools is the broad responsibility of the local authority, with the Head of each school bearing specific responsibility. Also, to note:

- All registered pupils should take part in a daily act of collective worship. This includes children who are five years of age and sixth formers.
- The timing and organisation is flexible.



- Schools may apply to SACRE to change their Determination (religious character see Appendix 3) for Collective Worship .
- Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship and need only write to the Headteacher to request this. They are not obliged to give a reason.
- Students over the age of 16 in the 6th form can withdraw themselves from Collective Worship, or opt back in if their parents/carers withdrew them.
- The school must comply with requests to withdraw; however, it is good practice for the Headteacher to invite the parent/carer in to discuss the issue.
- The school does not have to provide an alternative activity for withdrawn pupils but does have to ensure their safety. If appropriate, a parent can keep a child outside school during collective worship.
- A parent has a right to 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 have the right not to take part in Collective Worship.
- Pupils must not feel pressured or compelled to take part in collective worship.



Appendix 1: A broadly Christian character

The requirement to offer collective worship of a broadly Christian character will dismay and confuse some schools. This might seem highly inappropriate, even inadvisable, in some school settings.

Until a change in the law, how should schools respond? The following themes could provide opportunities to look at broadly Christian values, with lots of opportunities for wider religious and ethical exploration:

Authority	Forgiveness	Imagination	Renewal
Caring	Freedom	Joy	Respect
Celebration	Friendship	Justice	Reverence
Charity	Gratitude	Kindness to others	Sacred Art
Community	Goodness	Love	Sacred Music
Compassion	Goodwill	Neighbourliness	Sacred Writings
Creation	Grace	Relationships	Selflessness
Equality	Harmony	Peace	Service
Endurance	Holiness	Perseverance	Thankfulness
Family	Hope	Praise	Trust
Faith	Humility	Prayer	Wisdom
Fellowship		Remembrance	

Useful websites to support Collective worship and reflection:

www.assemblytube.com is packed with clips and ideas to support assemblies at primary and secondary schools

<https://www.assemblies.org.uk/> Resources to assist collective worship for world religions and none.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/primary-school-assemblies-collective-worship-ks1-ks2/zmsnm39> Useful, varied and current audio resources.

<https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Prayer> Catholic ideas and resources with global themes.

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/schools> Christian Aid:

<https://www.fischy.com/> 'Songs for good times and tough times.'

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/> Good material for Holocaust Memorial Day .

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/> Very good reference for current affairs.

<https://www.picture-news.co.uk/> Picture News pulls on real life situation and up to date current affairs presented in an age-appropriate way.

[Assemblies for All](#) Humanist UK's website for FREE access to hundreds of high quality, inclusive assemblies for both primary and secondary schools.

Collective Worship and school assemblies: your rights: <https://humanists.uk/><https://prayerspacesinschools.com/> Variety of resources to help children to pray, reflect and be still in a creative and unthreatening way.

<https://www.imaginer.co.uk/roots-fruits/> a resource to support Christian worship and spiritual and moral development in schools.

Margaret Cooling: Wisdom of Worship - resource book

Margaret Cooling: Cracking assemblies – resource book



Appendix 2: Prayer

The contents and method of collective worship are not specified, including the use of prayer. Pupils will have different understanding and experience of the word “Prayer”, both positive and negative. How should teachers understand the inclusion (or omission) of prayer in collective worship? Consider the following:

- There should be no expectation that pupils will pray. Words introducing prayer-like, such as ‘quiet reflection’ or ‘thinking about’, should be couched as an invitation rather than an instruction.
- Any invitation to pray is made for the benefit of those pupils to whom it is appropriate, if it is made at all
- The use of silence can allow space for prayer or reflection, on pupils’ decision.
- It might be occasionally beneficial to explain the difference between the words ‘prayer’ and ‘personal reflection’, to ensure pupils feel able to act in a manner best suited to them.

Appendix 3: Applying for a determination

Advice to Headteachers

1. Background

1.1 A determination from SACRE lifts the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1996 that Collective Worship should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".

1.2 The 1996 Act allows for applications to be made to the local SACRE "to consider whether it is appropriate for the requirement for Christian collective worship to apply in the case of that school, or in the case of any class or description of pupils at that school".

1.3 Paragraphs 68-81 of the DFE (Department for Education) Circular 1/94 summarise the position on determinations. If you consider that it is inappropriate for the school to provide collective worship "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character", you can apply to SACRE for a determination. The Act requires consultation with the governing body before an application can be made.

1.4 SACRE recommends that headteachers and governing bodies consider Camden’s Collective Worship guidance, before making an application using the proforma provided by SACRE.

2. Procedures for applying for a determination

2.1 Collect data on the percentage of pupils belonging to different faith communities and include this with your application. Evidence that the family backgrounds of pupils are from a faith other than Christian or from a variety of religious faiths and life stances would be necessary for conclusion in favour of determination to be reached.

2.2 Discuss your proposal to apply for a determination with governors drawing their attention to the relevant sections of Circular 1/94 and the SACRE collective worship policy. Record the views expressed by governors, the voting outcome if a vote was taken, and the date of the meeting. Enclose this information with your application.

2.3 Seek the views of the parent body as to whether or not an application should be made. You are advised to write to parents, informing them of your intention to apply for a determination based on your policy for Collective Worship, and inviting them to respond if they object. A copy of this letter must be enclosed with your application.



2.4 Your application should demonstrate that the 1996 Act is being complied with, that is the school must organise a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

2.5 If the school intends to adopt the SACRE policy, then the implication is that the determination will apply to the whole school. Your application should explain how all pupils would take part in acts of Collective Worship on a daily basis. Secondary Headteachers should note that the relevant requirements of the Act apply to all 11 to 19 year olds, apart from those sixth form pupils who have chosen to withdraw. Primary Headteachers should note that the requirements do not apply to nursery schools and nursery classes.

2.6 You should demonstrate that the school's approach to collective worship is in concert with the aims of school by providing a copy of the collective worship policy and programme.

2.6 You should apply using the appropriate form and sign the application, attaching all necessary additional papers:

1. Name of School
2. Name of Headteacher
3. Pupils for whom the application applies
4. Reasons for applying, including information on the percentages of different faiths (or none) in the school
5. Details of consultation with governors
6. Details of consultation with parents (include copy of letter or newsletter requesting views of parents) and any consultation with pupils.
7. Proposed organisational arrangements for collective worship
8. Proposed policy for collective worship
9. The statutory statement of the provision of collective worship intended for inclusion in the school's prospective.

3. Procedures for granting or rejecting applications

3.1 SACRE should receive applications at least eight weeks before the meeting at which the application will be considered.

3.2 Initially, the written application will be scrutinised by the Professional Adviser to SACRE.

3.3 The school will be included in the SACRE visit programme prior to the application being heard.

3.4 Headteachers will normally be notified in writing of the date of the SACRE meeting at which the application will be heard. SACRE meetings are held once a term and Headteachers are invited to attend. The headteacher will be notified in writing, normally within two weeks, of the determination made by SACRE. If the determination made is to accept the application, it shall take effect from the date of that SACRE meeting and shall have effect for five years

Camden SACRE

Collective worship: Procedure for reviewing a determination

Schools are granted a Determination by SACRE for a period of 5 years. The following procedure for reviewing a Determination has been agreed by SACRE: -

1. The Clerk to SACRE will write to a school approximately 3 months prior to the date for review, asking if it wishes to renew the Determination.
2. If a school wishes to renew a Determination, it should seek the views of parents through a letter or newsletter.
3. The governing body should formally agree to apply to renew the Determination
4. The appropriate form and supplementary papers should be sent to the Clerk of SACRE.



5. Information should be provided by the school about the representation of different faiths (or none) as well as details of the current arrangements for collective worship.
6. The school will be included in the SACRE visit programme prior to the renewal request being discussed at a meeting.
7. At the next SACRE meeting the form and supplementary papers will be presented and members asked to renew the Determination or not.
8. The school will be informed of the decision and, if successful, the Determination renewed for a further five years.
9. If a school does not respond to the request to renew its Determination, the Clerk will write to the school for clarification.

PLANNING A SCHOOL POLICY FOR COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

It is suggested that all community schools should appoint a Collective Worship Co-ordinator to lead a working party and/or the whole school staff in preparing and developing a policy document for Collective Worship

The Framework suggested below may offer some support in drawing up such a policy and could be used by a range of different schools.

1. BACKGROUND

a) The school's current policy

- Is there an existing policy in school?
- What is the current practice in Collective Worship in the school?

b) The legal requirements

- What are the legal requirements for pupils in your school?
- Does your school meet these legal requirements
- What and where are the gaps?

Refer to "*Collective Worship - The Legal Position*", section 4

2. THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN THE SCHOOL

- The policy should include a rationale describing the contribution made by Collective Worship to the life of the school.

3. PLANNING ISSUES

- Some information should be given to explain the way in which Collective Worship is organised within the school, with reference to groupings, locations, times, leaders etc.



- Example of the proforma used for planning and details of where planning/record sheets are stored in the school.

4. THE ROLE OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

- Name the person responsible for Collective Worship in the school.
- What are her/his responsibilities?

N. B. Refer to her/his job description

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- What issues need to be considered in connection with Collective Worship?

6. RESOURCING

- What resources already exist and where?
- What are the priorities for future resourcing for inclusion in the School Improvement Plan?

7. SACRE DETERMINATION

- Does the school have a Determination? (details should be given)
- Is the school planning to apply for a Determination?

Appendix 4: Camden SACRE Collective Worship Camden criteria

These descriptors have been written and curated by Newham SACRE over the last eight years. There are at present no national descriptors for schools, but we feel these provide schools in Camden clear descriptors they can identify progress in this area against.

Exceptional

- The school shares its exceptional practice beyond the school and has impact evidence of how it has led to positive impact.
- Themes are sharply sequenced and aspirational, consistently deepening pupils' SMSC reflection and inspiring moral action and reflection on beliefs (religious or otherwise).
- Pupils show exceptional independence in prayer and reflection and actively seek opportunities beyond planned CW.
- Pupils make high-quality, independent contributions, including planning, leading and evaluating worship.
- CW is fully inclusive, with thoughtful adaptations ensuring meaningful participation and high expectations for all pupils, including those with SEND.

Strong Standard

- CW is consistently strong and well embedded, making a clear positive difference to pupils' SMSC development.
- Pupils confidently understand the purpose of prayer and reflection and can explain its value to their personal development.
- Resources from different religious traditions and worldviews are used well, helping pupils link CW to school values and their own lives.
- Learners regularly make high quality contributions to CW and can take responsibility for particular aspects independently.
- Monitoring and evaluation have a clear purpose and are managed efficiently. Feedback gathered from a range of stakeholders provides insight into how worship influences the life of the community and leads directly to significant ongoing improvement of CW.



Expected Standard

- Collective worship meets all statutory and local expectations for supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- Themes are relevant and appropriately planned, enabling pupils to reflect on values, behaviour and beliefs (religious or otherwise).
- CW includes suitable references to moral values and to different religious traditions and worldviews, supporting developing respect for difference.
- Learners enjoy contributing within CW and are increasingly taking responsibility for particular aspects.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation identifies where improvement is needed and clearly informs development planning. Stakeholders are consulted and their contributions and feedback are used to inform the development of CW.

Needs Attention

- CW partially meets expectations; themes support school values but lack consistency or depth, limiting SMSC impact.
- Learners experience opportunities for prayer and reflection but not enough opportunities are available to describe or evaluate its value and relevance to everyday life.
- CW sometimes uses stories with morals but the relation to learners' lives and the school's core values is not always explicit. Different religious and worldview traditions are acknowledged and may be explored, but this lacks depth and rigour in some cases.
- Learners behave well when taking part in CW, are attentive and respond to the different elements. However, they are often passive and do not yet take responsibility for aspects of worship.
- Some feedback on CW is gathered that prompts small changes to the arrangements although there is limited analysis of its impact on the school community.

Urgent Improvement

- CW does not meet expectations; planning is weak and SMSC impact is minimal.
- CW does little to raise learners' spiritual awareness or directly to inspire them in the service of others. Prayer and reflection play a limited role in the pattern of school life, so learners derive little spiritual benefit.
- CW inconsistently uses resources with morals and the relation to learners' lives and the school's core values are not always explicit enough.
- Learners have limited awareness of different religious traditions and gain little understanding of how to apply these to their own lives.
- Learners display poor behaviours and attitudes and are frequently not given opportunities to engage fully in CW.
- Little monitoring and evaluation of CW occurs, and no account is taken of learners' views. There is insufficient impact from acts of CW on pupils' understanding.

Schools which have completed a policy document for Collective Worship are invited to send a copy to Camden SACRE for reference.

If your school needs more specific advice than is in this advice document please do contact SACRE via Camden LA SACRE clerk or via Camden Learning.

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