



GUIDANCE ON COLLECTIVE WORSHIP WALES ASSOCIATION OF SACRES

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INTRODUCTION

School acts of collective worship are educationally meaningful when they provide opportunities to engage with the needs of all learners, whatever their faith or belief background. Good collective worship promotes spiritual development, contributes to personal development, benefits the whole school community, links the school community and the wider local community, and enhances awareness of global citizenship.

Some factors underpinning effective collective worship include:

- developing a coherent school policy and approach to collective worship, with active engagement from senior management;
- creating collective 'ownership' of the school's programme of collective worship on the part of staff, learners and governors;
- ensuring that there are clear expectations among staff concerning their contributions to collective worship;
- offering opportunities for learners to actively engage in collective worship;
- making collective worship an integral part of the school day by reflecting in planning its relevance to and connections with all aspects of school life;
- providing continuing professional development opportunities for staff which will allow critical reflection on and enhancement of collective worship provision in the school.

In order to develop educationally meaningful and effective collective worship, it is important to appreciate the benefits of collective worship and to be familiar with the legal requirements relating to collective worship.

APPRECIATING THE BENEFITS OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

It would be useful for schools to discuss how collective worship promotes spiritual development, contributes to personal development, benefits the whole school community, links the school community and the wider local community, and enhances awareness of global citizenship.

(a) Collective worship promotes spiritual development

Schools have a duty to promote the spiritual development of learners.¹ Effective collective worship enables a school to contribute to this statutory requirement. It is important to understand that spiritual development or spirituality is **not** the same as being religious, but it is about the process of developing learners' appreciation of the spiritual dimensions of life and the wider issues of meaning, purpose and fulfilment. Staff and learners should appreciate that acts of collective worship:

- provide a special time separate from ordinary school activities;
- support learner-centred experiences, and enable learners to develop a sense of their position within the universal picture;
- develop learners' ability to reflect on their own feelings, values and attitudes;
- develop learners' awareness of the inner life and the spiritual dimension of each person;

¹ Education Reform Act 1988, Part 1 (2)(a)(b)); Education Reform Act 2002, Section 99 (1)(a)(b))

- explore and encourage responses to fundamental questions about the meaning of life, change and death.

(b) Collective worship contributes to personal development

Schools have a duty to promote the personal development of learners.² Effective collective worship enables a school to contribute to this statutory requirement. Staff and learners should appreciate that acts of collective worship:

- contribute to health and wholeness, and emotional intelligence;
- encourage reflection on inner feelings and beliefs;
- develop beliefs and values, both personal and communal;
- encourage an understanding of the beliefs and values of others;
- increase self esteem and purpose in life;
- nurture the human ability to make moral choices for good or evil, through thinking about ‘moral codes, relationships, responsibility, respect for diversity, temptation, the power of self, sacrifice and love’.³

(c) Collective worship benefits the whole school community

Effective collective worship provides benefits for the whole school community. Staff and learners should appreciate that acts of collective worship:

- encourage shared values, meaning and purpose;
- contribute to the experience of belonging to a community;
- provide opportunities to celebrate the school’s achievements and the contribution of individuals to those achievements;
- develop understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and values of others within the school community;
- provide opportunities to reflect on and to share in the ‘happy’ and ‘sad’ events and experiences which effect the school community;
- contribute to a school ethos which supports the educational attainment of all learners, regardless of background, through developing self esteem and a sense of purpose in life.

(d) Collective worship links the school community and the wider local community

Schools are expected to consider how they support and promote community cohesion, and it should be recognised that collective worship offers a valuable contribution at both school level and wider community level. Effective collective worship makes links between the school community and the wider local community. Staff and learners should appreciate that acts of collective worship:

- draw on a range of carefully selected and appropriate representatives within the local community to contribute to collective worship;
- contribute to the experience of belonging to a wider local community;
- provide opportunities to celebrate the local community’s achievements and the contribution of groups and individuals to those achievements;
- develop understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and values of others within the local community;
- support shared understanding of how individual learners and a school may contribute positively to the wider community;
- provide opportunities to reflect on and to share in the ‘happy’ and ‘sad’ events and experiences which effect the local community.

² Education Reform Act 1988, Part 1 (2)(a)(b)); Education Reform Act 2002, Section 99 (1)(a)(b))

³ National Exemplar Framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales 2008, p. 10

(e) Collective worship enhances awareness of global citizenship

Effective collective worship enhances awareness of global citizenship. Staff and learners should appreciate that acts of collective worship:

- draw on a range of carefully selected material to promote global awareness;
- contribute to the experience of belonging to a global community;
- provide opportunities to celebrate global events and human achievements;
- develop an understanding of global diversity and inequality;
- offer opportunities to reflect on and share in global crises and human suffering.

The whole school has much to gain from educationally meaningful and effective acts of collective worship, and members of the school (and local community) have much to offer through presentations and contributions to acts of collective worship. In practice, schools should consider how these benefits may be incorporated into their programme for collective worship and be collectively ‘owned’ by the whole school community.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AND THE LAW

The law distinguishes between ‘schools with a religious character’ and other schools which do not have a religious character (School Standards and Framework Act 1998). ‘Schools with a religious character’ are those linked with one or more Christian denominations or a major world faith by virtue of their foundation or by a specific legally binding decision to become such a school. The DfES maintains a list of such schools in Wales.

(a) What the law really says about worship in state-maintained schools WITHOUT a religious character

- There is a statutory requirement for schools to provide a **daily** act of collective worship for all learners;
- This requirement is for **every learner** to have opportunity to participate in an act of collective worship **every day**;
- There is provision for learners to be withdrawn from acts of collective worship, at the request of parents;
- There is also provision for teachers to withdraw from conducting acts of collective worship;
- The majority of acts of collective worship in a school term and year should be ‘wholly, mainly of a broadly Christian character’, and in maintained schools, not solely of any one denomination;
- The majority of acts of collective worship should have elements in them which relate to traditions of Christian belief;
- Worship in a school context should be ‘collective’ rather than ‘corporate’;⁴
- Acts of collective worship should not be passively received – a response is required;
- For maintained schools, acts of collective worship must take place on the school premises;
- Schools have the right to a ‘Determination’ – that is, to be released from the requirements for acts of worship to be wholly, mainly of a broadly Christian character, if the school composition might require this (applications are to be made to the local SACRE);
- Acts of worship are distinct from an ‘assembly’ – which, in law, is actually any gathering of the school **apart from** collective worship;
- Since January 2009, post-16 learners may request withdrawal from collective worship for themselves.⁵

⁴ ‘Collective worship’ implies bringing together people of differing views and understandings, while ‘corporate worship’ implies bringing together those who share in a single view or understanding.

⁵ WASACRE in association with DCELLS sent guidance on this change in legislation to all schools in 2009.

(b) What the law really says about state-maintained schools WITH a religious character

- There is a statutory requirement for schools to provide a **daily** act of collective worship for all learners;
- This requirement is for **every learner** to have opportunity to participate in an act of collective worship **every day**;
- There is provision for learners to be withdrawn from acts of collective worship, at the request of parents;
- There is also provision for teachers to withdraw from conducting acts of collective worship, however, there are some limitations to this right in Voluntary Aided schools;
- The acts of worship will reflect the religious character of the school;
- The acts of worship are likely to include material drawn from the worshipping practice and traditions of the specific faith or denomination with which the school is associated;
- Worship should be ‘collective’ not ‘corporate’;
- Acts of worship should not be passively received – a response is required;
- Schools may use a local place of worship for some of its acts of worship where this is appropriate;
- Schools do not have the right to a determination;
- Acts of worship are distinct from an ‘assembly’ – which, in law, is actually any gathering of the school **apart from** collective worship;
- Since January 2009, post 16 learners may request withdrawal from collective worship for themselves.⁶

(c) What the law does not say

There is often confusion about collective worship, and it is important to know that the law does **not** require:

- the **whole school** to be together for collective worship
[The requirement is for any gathering of learners the school chooses, other than groupings based on religious affiliation]
- acts of collective worship to be **at the start of school** in the morning
[The timing of collective worship in the school day is for each school to determine]
- a stated **length of time** for acts of collective worship
[The length of acts of collective worship is a school matter, but should not reduce the expected hours of the curriculum day].

POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Schools which are serious about providing educationally meaningful and effective collective worship will:

- establish clear principles, policies and programmes to underpin acts of collective worship;
- create a collective sense of ‘ownership’ of collective worship;
- identify funding to provide training for staff or establish a professional learning community perhaps through a local consortium.

Case studies exemplifying good practice and additional useful resources are being made available on the WASACRE website: www.wasacre.org.uk

⁶ WASACRE in association with DCELLS sent guidance on this change in legislation to all schools in 2009.