



# Guide to collective worship in Suffolk Secondary Schools

*Briefing paper from Suffolk SACRE*

## Overview

- **Every school** must by law provide daily collective worship for all students, including sixth formers; this applies to all schools, including academies, with or without a religious designation.
- **Every student** in every school must take part in a daily act of collective worship. This is a statutory requirement.
- **Every parent** has the right to withdraw their child from collective worship. Students aged 16 and above can opt out themselves.
- **All acts of collective worship** should provide an opportunity for students to worship God, consider spiritual and moral issues, explore their own beliefs and develop community spirit. They should promote a common ethos, shared values and reinforce positive attitudes.
- **All, or most, collective worship** should be of a broadly Christian character, wholly or mainly so, but approached in such a way as to remain inclusive and appropriate to the student body.
- **All students** should be enabled to participate and respond, rather than remain passive.
- **All schools**, except those with a religious designation, can apply for a 'determination' from SACRE to lift the requirement for CW to be broadly or mainly Christian.
- **Timing and organisation** of CW can be flexible. Although often linked to a school 'assembly' which contains other elements e.g. sports results, the difference between this and CW must be clear.
- 1. **Collective worship is not Religious Education**; the latter being a curriculum subject. Both must be offered.
- **Collective worship is inspected** by Ofsted or the relevant religious authority where a school is of a religious character.

## 1. What does collective worship offer schools? *Collective worship should not be seen as the worship of a homogenous group, but as:*

- Contributing to students' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development, and to preparation for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

- Offering explicit opportunities for students to consider responses to fundamental questions about the purpose of being, morality and ethical standards, and to develop their own response to such matters.
- Helping promote respect for, and understanding of, those with different beliefs and practices.
- Providing a key opportunity for promoting the school's shared values as a community, reflecting on and celebrating them together.

*Carefully planned over time, CW can develop a powerful sense of being part of a wider community than just the student's class or tutor group, and of reflecting and responding to broader events than the school curriculum.*

## **2. Who is responsible for collective worship?**

- School governors, headteachers and local education authorities are expected by the Government to apply collective worship legislation in full.
- Within the school, the leading of collective worship can be delegated as appropriate, but ensuring its provision is the responsibility of the headteacher in schools without religious designation and the governors/ trustees in those with a religious designation.

## **3. What should collective worship look like?**

- Collective worship should aim to provide the opportunity for students to worship God ..... *Worship by definition is concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine power or being. However, worship in schools will be of a different character from worship in a faith group, hence 'collective worship' not 'corporate worship'. The opportunity to pray or reflect, whether in words or silence, should not be avoided. In today's climate, with its increasing acceptance of the benefits of mindfulness and meditation, the inclusion of time and space for prayer or personal reflection should be seen as positive, and students helped to use this time well.*
- Collective worship must reflect something special or separate from ordinary school activities. *It should be educational but not just like lessons in class. It can, and should, be related to the day to day life, aspirations and concerns of the school community but it should come at them differently.*
- Collective worship is intended to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes. It should enable students to consider spiritual and moral issues and explore their own beliefs. *Whether the opportunity to worship God is taken or not, this should be a time and space which contributes something positive to school life and should be planned accordingly.*
- Collective worship should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character - unless a determination has been given by the local SACRE to alter its nature

in schools with no religious designation. **'Wholly or mainly'** may include the celebration or acknowledgement of some Christian teachings, festivals or stories, using them as a starting point for prayer or reflection. **'Mainly'** suggests almost half of all CW can use a variety of other sources and viewpoints, religious and secular, as a stimulus for reflection. **'Broadly Christian character'** suggests discussion of Christian values, widely shared within British society, and enabling students to share a variety of perspectives, including Christian ones, on values such as compassion, hope or perseverance.

- Schools with a religious designation must provide collective worship in accordance with their designation e.g. Roman Catholic. *These schools can still include elements to reflect other religions or worldviews but these will be in the context of their own worship framework.*
- The delivery of collective worship should be appropriate to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the students. *Students who do not have a Christian background should be able to feel part of what is offered. Careful use of 'invitational' language is important, allowing students to respond meaningfully and appropriately.*
- The act of worship should be capable of eliciting a response from students and encourage participation e.g. through active involvement in presenting worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered. *Students should feel they can be more than passive spectators.*
- The timing and organisation of daily collective worship can be flexible e.g. a single act of worship for all students, separate acts for different year groups, houses or tutor groups. *Some experience of being in a larger school grouping brings benefits, but it is recognised that many large schools do not have a big enough space for the whole school to gather at one time, especially on a regular basis. Virtual gatherings of the whole school could be tried.*
- Acts of collective worship should take place on school premises but can be organised elsewhere on occasions too. *For some secondary schools, occasional acts of collective worship in a large space off-site is worth the effort e.g. in a theatre, or cathedral.*

#### **4. Inspection of Collective Worship**

- In schools, including academies, without a religious character, collective worship is inspected by Ofsted under Section 5.
- In schools, including academies, of a religious designation, worship is inspected by the relevant religious authority.
- In schools of a religious character, Ofsted inspectors may still gather evidence from collective worship, in order to evaluate students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, personal development and/or behaviour and attitudes.

## 5. The right to withdraw

- Parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship. They are not obliged to state their reasons for this. *They should provide something appropriate for their children to do; this is not the school's responsibility.*
  - Governing bodies and head teachers should seek to respond positively to requests from parents who have withdrawn their children from statutory provision, to have worship according to a particular faith or denomination, providing it meets suitable criteria, including it being at no additional cost to the school.
  - From age 16, students can choose for themselves to opt out of collective worship if they wish. *Schools will need to consider how students should be supervised; they are not obliged to provide additional work.*
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### The information in this document has been extracted from:

- Religious education (RE) and collective worship in academies and free schools  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools>
- Religious Education and collective worship  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/281929/Collective\\_worship\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf)
- Ofsted School inspection Handbook  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/843108/School\\_inspection\\_handbook\\_-\\_section\\_5.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843108/School_inspection_handbook_-_section_5.pdf)

Commentary has been provided in italics from members of Suffolk SACRE. Suffolk SACRE is a statutory body with a responsibility locally to support and advise the Local authority on both RE and collective worship.

If you have any queries about your school's delivery of collective worship or would value support in ensuring you are meeting the legal requirements, you can contact Suffolk SACRE through [Linden.Pitcher@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Linden.Pitcher@suffolk.gov.uk)