

Creating a Collective Worship Policy: Guidance for Church Schools



Creating a Church School Collective Worship Policy.

This resource gives the outline of a policy supported by notes and other material to assist you in creating a policy for your own school. As worship is an expression of each school's distinctive Christian vision each policy will be distinctive to each school. Church schools are welcome to use either of the formats included and adapt them to their own needs or to evolve a format of their own.

The worship in a church school is determined by the headteacher and governors, taking account of the trust deed, though schools will want to discuss the content and structure of worship with staff, parents and most of all pupils. It is of great importance that the approach to worship takes full account of the school's context.

A policy is a statement of the aims, intent and action of the school – it is not a list of procedures or content and should clearly indicate the impact that worship is expected to have in the school community. Procedures and patterns of or for worship can be included as additional material or an appendix.

The context of worship in school will include the character of worship found in the local Anglican Church, and may include aspects of other denominations represented in the community. The parish clergy will usually play a role in establishing the character of worship – some parishes have built up relationships which include Churchwardens, PCC members and others from the worshipping congregation. Schools will also need to consider the place of other faiths or indeed secular worldviews in collective worship

In creating a policy church schools are advised to consult the SIAMS self-evaluation documents to ensure that the expectations of the National Society are interwoven with the actions of the school. In particular schools should note the stress laid upon the inspirational, invitational and inclusive nature of worship.

Schools might find the following helpful in understanding the Anglican perspective on Church school worship - 'The Church of England is (along with many others) a liturgical tradition, and encountering its worship is essential to understanding it and the God in whom we believe. The seasons of the church year rehearse the drama of Jesus Christ in the context of the larger biblical narrative, and they offer a means through which that narrative can be grasped and inhabited. Collective worship in schools, including prayer, reading and reflecting on the Bible, liturgy, sacrament and experience of the musical and other imaginative riches of Christianity, provide a vital opportunity for this.' (*from the Church of England Vision for Education p. 10*)

There is further advice on the development of worship on the Diocese of Oxford website schools' pages. Schools might also like to look at WorshipWorkshop.org.uk and Christianvalues4schools.org when formulating policy. Your School Link Adviser is able to give more advice and support in developing policy.

This resource has 3 sections

- A skeleton Policy
- Notes on the skeleton policy
- An alternative presentation

A Skeleton Church School Worship Policy

Introduction¹

Collective worship is central to the life of our school², worship offers the pupils and others in our school an opportunity to reflect on values and issues in the context of our Christian vision and ethos. It is an expression of our vision and shapes our approach to others and to what we do in school. We warmly invite all members of our school community to join our worship

Our collective worship³ provides pupils and staff the opportunity to:

- Celebrate -
 - Christian seasons and festivals⁴;
 - school values associated with our vision;
 - Pupils' and adults' achievements;
- experience prayer, stillness, worship and reflection
- grow in understanding of and participation in prayer;
- create a reflective approach to life including the exploration of deep questions
- develop as a community centred on our clear and distinctive Christian vision
- experience a variety of styles of worship;
- participate and respond, through active involvement in the planning, leading and evaluation of worship;
- feel safe and affirmed;
- worship God on their own terms.

Worship will reflect aspects of the curriculum⁵ and in particular will:

- nurture spiritual growth;
- enable participants to consider moral questions in a Christian context;
- enhance social understanding and encourage responses to issues through courageous advocacy;
- give participants a chance to reflect on the place and importance of faith in the lives of people today;
- encourage participants to explore beliefs drawn from their own cultural heritage⁶;
- reflect the teachings of Jesus and a trinitarian theology⁷.

The Pattern of Collective Worship⁸

Collective worship takes place in a variety of groupings, in the school hall, in classrooms and on occasions outside. On occasions worship takes place in the *church*⁹. We follow the seasons of the Church year and within these significant festivals and other special days are observed. These always include Harvest, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Pentecost; other days such as Candlemas are celebrated occasionally¹⁰. Other important days in the calendar such as Remembrance and the Leavers' Service also feature in collective worship.

Whenever worship takes place it is planned to promote participants' thinking beyond the time given to worship itself.

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Leading worship

Worship has a variety of leaders¹¹ from both within school and from the local Church Community. Pupils are given opportunities to lead worship throughout the year. Visitors are welcome to contribute to collective worship from time to time and are given guidance from our worship policy¹². Leaders from faiths within the area help us to increase the pupils' awareness, promote respect and raise the esteem of the pupils who belong to these faiths¹³.

Planning Acts of Collective Worship

Our acts of worship are carefully planned to ensure a balance between content and experience.¹⁴ Leaders, including the children, plan the content and activities included in worship according to what is most appropriate to the season/theme and the needs of the pupils. The themes of worship are chosen to both express and explore our vision and the way in which this vision is experienced in school through the associated values. Throughout their time at our school children will encounter a wide variety of activities such as dance and drama alongside more traditional elements of worship such as prayer and song.¹⁵ We will also introduce pupils to a range of approaches to worship such as the modern Celtic Tradition.

Prayer is a vital part of our worship. It is introduced with a form of words that invites but does not coerce pupils to participate. Our prayers are addressed to God reflecting the traditions and practices of the Church of England. Pupils who prefer not to pray are encouraged to use these times to reflect on the important messages shared in our worship.¹⁶

Our worship is regularly reviewed through discussions with participants, observation and reflection. and our evaluations are fed into the planning for future worship.¹⁷

A legal note¹⁴

By law, Collective Worship must:

- be provided for every child every day;
- reflect the school's Trust Deed.

Our policy sets out clearly our aspiration that collective worship will be a valuable and valued experience for all members of our school community whatever their backgrounds and beliefs. It is invitational, inclusive and reflective in nature and never coercive or indoctrinatory.

Parents have a right to withdraw their children from all or any acts of worship. In the first instance, parents who may wish to exercise this right should make an appointment to speak with the headteacher.

Notes on the Skeleton Policy

- 1: Your introduction should clearly indicate how Collective Worship is driven by the school's vision and is an expression of this. The introduction may refer to the Biblical or theological basis of the vision. You may include your vision statement in the worship policy. The introduction should also give the name of the school.
- 2: SIAMS refers to worship as the 'heartbeat' of the school – this is a powerful way to understand worship. You may use the proper name of the school here.
- 3: Worship in school is known as 'collective' worship as opposed to 'corporate' worship. In collective worship the community gathers (or 'collects') and worship takes place; there is no expectation or compulsion placed on participants. What is provided is *opportunity* during which the participants, through a variety of experiences, can do the things identified in the policy. These should be adjusted according to local circumstance. In particular, schools might like to add a specific point concerning adherents of other faiths or none.
- 4: In the Church year (Christian year) the festivals *precede* the seasons. So, for instance, the season of Easter is full of stories of Jesus and the disciples as they explore the implications and consequences of the resurrection on Easter day.
- 5: The curriculum should not be divorced from worship. If the vision of the school is distinctively Christian, then the curriculum is followed in this context. Just as opportunities for spiritual reflection and prayer are sought across the curriculum so worship should link to the work that children do in lessons. The children can present work or conduct performances related to their work. These can easily be included within a structure which includes prayer and reflection.
- 6: This is a simple list which covers SMSC, when planning schools should take account of each aspect (Spiritual, Morals, Social and Cultural) *individually*. Schools are encouraged to look especially at strands 2 – 5 of the SIAMS Schedule for aspects of SMSC. This is particularly important if 'British Values' are to be exemplified appropriately in worship (See Ofsted Inspection Handbook (Section 5) para 222) it is unlikely that Church schools will have a separate assemblies and acts of worship. See below. The cultural dimension provides opportunity for worship to include stories or other material from sources other than Christianity – care should be taken that any such material is used sensitively.
- 7: Trinitarian expression needs to be handled with care especially in multi-faith contexts. It is important to note that worship is not the best context for *teaching* about the Trinity – this is the proper sphere of RE. What worship can provide is experience through song and prayer and the seasons – Harvest, Advent, Christmas, Pentecost for example.
- 8: The policy should indicate the patterns of worship found in school (weekly, termly, seasonal, annual). Specific themes or other details can be put into an appendix – see introduction.
- 9: At this point you should specify the local church, giving it its proper name.
- 10: Patterns of worship in school can become complex, with different leaders, groupings and seasons. The seasons and festivals noted are examples. Worship needs to take account of the pattern of school life too, so

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worship might focus on particular themes (see 3 above) or specific activity such as Christian Aid. In all cases the central pattern needs to be the quality and variety of experience for the participants (children). Just having 5 different leaders will not necessarily create 5 differing experiences.

11: Leadership should be distinguished from presentation. As has been noted above it is the nature of the experience (and its impact) that determines the quality of the worship. The leader might include a presentation of a story or image etc. as an 'engagement' but this is not in itself worship. It might be appropriate for the vicar or someone else from the church to be named in the policy as a visiting leader, as indeed an 'open the book' group could be named.

12: Visitors (including clergy) need to be very carefully briefed as to what the worship entails. In all acts of worship, the *school* should retain overall control. It may be appropriate to provide short notes for visitors.

13: Worship must be accessible to all pupils; the place of other faiths must be carefully considered by the school leadership. This might also include discussion with parents and staff.

14: Planning worship has two main dimensions:

- Worship needs to be planned through the year to take account of the pattern (10 above) this will include identification of themes (values), Bible stories and readings, songs and prayers;
- Individual acts of worship also need to have a 'plan'. In Church this is commonly referred to as the 'liturgy'; careful attention to the liturgies used in school will ensure that an appropriate range of experiences (6 above) is offered throughout the year. (WorshipWorkshop.org.uk has a map of worship to help create these plans/liturgies)

The policy only needs to make brief mention of planning – the detailed aspects of planning are an operational matter for the school. All planning should begin with the school vision and seek to make worship an expression of this.

15: The range of activities suitable for worship is limited only by imagination. The policy is not the place in which to make extensive lists, just to indicate that the school will seek to increase impact through a range of engagements. Schools may like to include some examples such as:

- Lighting a candle
- Reading the Bible
- Song
- Reflection
- Meditation

16: When considering prayer, schools should take account of the community served by the school. For example, prayers addressed to Jesus may cause difficulties for members of certain faith communities. There is no generic 'one-size-fits-all' solution in these circumstances, a sensitive dialogue will be needed to ensure that Worship retains its important central role in school life.

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17: The monitoring of worship needs to include a variety of approaches so that the impact of the experience(s) can be effectively ascertained. There is some supporting material on our web pages

<https://www.odbe.org.uk/schools/collective-worship/monitoring-suite/>

15: The legal aspects are important and form part of the context of school life. The right of withdrawal can be a point of contention – hence the suggestion that this be seen as the beginning of a dialogue with concerned parents. Schools should appreciate that a number of requests for withdrawal might indicate a need to amend the worship policy and practice.

An Alternative Presentation

Pupils, staff and parents of all faiths (or none) are welcome to worship which is an expression of our distinctive Christian vision. Our school is a community that celebrates religious, cultural and ethnic diversity and encourages dialogue and understanding. We believe that we can all learn from each other and that collective worship is an educational entitlement for all. In worship we create the opportunity to explore the place of faith in each of our lives, and in the communities in which we live. This worship occurs at various times of day and with a mixture of grouping of pupils. Through regular acts of worship our school has the opportunity of offering thanksgiving and praise to God through a range of liturgical patterns.

Our worship has 3 underlying principles:

1. It is inclusive and contributes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils
2. It is invitational and respects the dignity of all participants
3. It is inspiring and combines a range of experiences alongside

It is invitational

Acts of collective worship will:

- nurture and maintain the dignity of the image of God in everyone through working for social justice and encouraging pupils to consider the needs of others through charitable service and courageous advocacy;
- nurture reflection, stillness, meditation and prayer;
- provide pupils with (age appropriate) opportunities to explore the spiritual dimension of their lives through music, images and words.
- provide a sense of occasion that is separate from the rest of the school day;
- foster an appreciation of the natural world and our shared responsibilities for maintaining it;
- develop clear partnerships between worship in the school and the wider community.

It is inclusive

Our understanding of Christianity is that it is an inclusive faith which mirrors the attitude of Christ in the Gospels. Thus, we welcome children and staff of all faiths to our worship. Through their Christian character our acts of collective worship will:

- recognise and celebrate the diversity of cultures, life styles and faiths which exist in our school and local community;
- have an atmosphere in which everyone feels valued and safe;
- be appropriate for every student to attend
- focus on issues and experiences which are relevant to the pupils;
- foster active roles of pupils, parents and members of the local community – in preparation, participation and leadership.

It is inspiring

Our acts of collective worship provide wider opportunities to:

- promote wide ownership of our Christian vision;
- assist learners to have increased awareness and to reflect upon fundamental issues about life;
- enhance, complement and extend curricular work;

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- develop learners' understanding of the Christian faith and Church (Anglican) practice through appropriate Biblical and liturgical content;
 - encounter and explore Jesus' teachings and the trinitarian nature of Christian faith
 - identify opportunities for Christian celebration which can be associated with other school events;
 - Include appropriate references to and elements of other faiths and secular worldviews
 - include opportunities to celebrate the academic, social, personal and wider achievements of pupils.
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- A range of people are involved in leading worship, including learners;
 - Timetabling of acts of worship, includes the use of the local church and various groupings of pupils;
 - Worship is planned in relationship to our distinctive Christian vision and our associated values;
 - Worship is regularly evaluated by a range of members of the school community
 - Opportunities for worship/prayer throughout the day;

This list is not exhaustive and other aspects may be included at the discretion of the school.

Our acts of worship are of a clearly Christian character, recognising the diversity of our community. It provides occasions when the school community pupils gathers together in a variety of settings where a positive tone and focus for the day can be established. Pupils are given opportunities to reflect on relevant Christian, moral and spiritual issues, drawn from a variety of sources, thereby enriching their experience of life.

Worship is an expression of our Christian vision and is a means of recognising and celebrating our associated values and achievements in their broadest sense. In worship all participants are recognised for their personal achievement, both within school and in the community. Pupils are awarded, in worship, with a range of rewards, thus placing achievement and effort in the Christian context of the school.

Collective worship will:

- be acceptable to the whole community, staff and children
- include a variety of elements at different times
- involve the students
- have a dedicated focus which signifies what is being reflected upon.
- provide a dedicated opportunity for students to reflect/respond to the input

Acts of worship often include and ritual aspects these are a means of enabling worship and include:

- stories and readings
- songs, hymns and music
- dance and drama
- prayer, meditations
- creative silence
- sacred/secular readings
- artifacts and natural materials
- children's contributions

A legal note should be included.