



Empowering our unique schools to Excel

Collective Worship Guidance and Sample Policy

ODBST Level 2 Policy:	ALL ODBST <u>CofE</u> Schools require this policy, which may be adapted where identified to suit local requirements and schools may add their own branding. LGBs will note adoption of this locally adapted policy in LGB meetings. Review will take place at Trust level, and schools will be notified of updates and review dates as necessary.
Other related ODBST policies and procedures:	
Committee responsible:	AEC
Approved by:	AEC
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Collective Worship Guidance & Policy

Part One: Guidance

There has been no significant change in the law about collective worship since the Education Reform Act of 1988 or the Education Act of 1996.

It is important to note that the following explanation of the legal requirements does not apply to voluntary aided and controlled church schools. They have to provide daily worship like all other schools, but they do not come under the remit of the SACRE for collective worship advice. They should seek guidance from the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education or their linked DBE adviser.

Obligations in relation to collective worship for academies are set out in their funding agreements.

1. Collective worship: Church Schools, Free Schools and Academies:

- 1.1. There must be a daily act of worship for every pupil. This can be at any time of the day in any normal school grouping. It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher, after consultation with the governing body to ensure this happens. Except in special circumstances, and after consultation with governors, the act of worship should take place on school premises. Collective worship is distinct from assembly which can be a gathering for a wide variety of reasons.
- 1.2. The majority of worship must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, meaning it should reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief. It can contain non-Christian elements or on occasions contain no Christian elements, provided that throughout each term, the majority of the worship complies with the broad traditions of Christian belief.
- 1.3. Worship must be appropriate to the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the pupils. Worship must not be denominational.
- 1.4. The basic requirement is that there should be an act of collective worship for all registered pupils every school day. (Section 385.1 EA 1996). There are only two exceptions to this: parents have the right to withdraw their child(ren) from all or parts of collective worship and pupils in school sixth forms are permitted to decide for themselves whether to attend or not.
- 1.5. The right of withdrawal from collective worship would normally be exercised through the physical withdrawal of the pupil from the place where the act of worship is taking place. Indeed, the school could insist that this is the way the right is to be implemented. If, however, both the parent and the school agree that the pupil should be allowed to remain physically present during the collective worship but not take part in it, nothing in the law prevents this.
- 1.6. Experience suggests that, to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher will find it helpful to establish with any parent wanting to exercise the right of withdrawal:
 - the elements of worship in which the parent would object to the child taking part;
 - the practical implications of withdrawal.
- 1.7. If the parent asks that a pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attending any specific religious worship at the school, then the school must comply. This means that a parent may, for example, request their child does not take part in a carol service when otherwise the child takes part in daily collective worship.

None of this legislation applies to special schools.

2. Exceptions

2.1. In some schools, for religious reasons, collective worship that 'reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief' is deemed to be inappropriate for its pupils. In such cases it is possible for a school to apply for a determination. The procedure does not lift the duty to provide daily collective worship; it allows for the requirement that collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' to be lifted. Applications for determinations are made to the relevant body by the head teacher after consultation with parents and the school's governing body. Traditionally it has been a function of the SACRE to receive and 'determine' whether such requests are valid, either granting or refusing them and this still applies in the case of community schools without a religious character. The body now responsible for performing this function for Free Schools and Academies is the Education Funding Agency (EFA). All determinations last for five years.

3. Good practice in Collective Worship

3.1. Aims and Purpose

3.1.1. Collective worship should be beneficial to the whole school community. It should therefore aim to bring the school community together, in an attitude of reverence and reflection.

3.1.2. Creating effective and meaningful collective worship involves paying attention to:

- the importance of atmosphere
- the respect of pupil and teacher integrity
- the promotion of spiritual (not synonymous with religious), moral, social and cultural development. This may include
 - a recognition of the uniqueness of each individual
 - helping pupils to develop the capacity to transcend the limitations of the physical world
 - helping to lift the horizons of pupils beyond the materialistic
 - being creative
 - considering ultimate questions about the meaning of life in general and pupils' own lives in particular
 - developing positive attitudes and hope.

4. A range of experiences

4.1. The expectation is that school worship will be inclusive, participative, challenging and educational, drawing on a wide range of religious traditions without compromising the religious or non-religious backgrounds of pupils (and staff), whilst giving those for whom it is appropriate the opportunity to worship God.

4.2. This is possible because the legislation allows for a considerable degree of flexibility. The word collective implies something significantly different from corporate which was the word used to describe worship in schools prior to 1988. Corporate is generally understood to mean worship which is the voluntary response of a corporate body of believers. Collective worship is unique and different. It gives us the opportunity to do just that - to collect together, to meet together. **It is a collection of differences** – different faiths, different cultures, different ages and different backgrounds. It is a focal point of the day in any school community where all ages can/might meet one another, share together and establish a shared sense of identity.

4.3. The invitation to choose to provide worship which is either wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character opens up opportunities for variety and breadth which enables the inclusion of secular material and teachings and stories from other religious traditions. Reflecting the broad traditions of Christian belief suggests an approach which is not exclusive, something which reflects plurality and focuses not on doctrine or traditions of worship but on belief that is broadly Christian.

5. Planning for worship

5.1. All planning should begin with the school vision and seek to make worship an expression of this. Planning worship has two main dimensions:

5.1.1. to take account of the pattern of school life or specific events, festivals or national celebrations.

5.1.2. So that individual acts of worship have a 'plan' or pattern. In Church this is commonly referred to as 'liturgy'; careful attention to the 'liturgies' used in school will ensure that an appropriate range of experiences is offered throughout the year.

5.2. Creating an appropriate atmosphere in the space to be used for worship is important. This might be in the classroom with a single class or a larger space with more children representing a wider diversity. Sometimes when the whole school is 'assembled', staff use this as an opportunity for things other than worship – which of course means this is not 'whole school' worship. Whether in classroom or school hall the transition between other aspects of the day and the act of worship needs to be facilitated.

5.3. The themes of worship should be chosen to both express and explore the school or trust's vision and the way in which this vision is experienced in the school through the associated values. Throughout their time in a school, children will encounter a wide variety of activities such as story, song, image, dance and drama alongside more traditional elements of worship such as prayer and reflection. Children should be introduced to a range of approaches to worship.

5.4. Creative ways need to be found. Symbols and artefacts can work really well to bridge and mark the transition. Candles, music, pictures and many other things can be used to signify the beginning of worship. To light a candle for a specific person or purpose significant to the school community/key stage/year group/class on that day marks a moment of togetherness, readiness to be together in a different way, to worship. For older children known prayer or prose patterns that are communally said together can achieve the same.

6. Aspects of Worship

6.1. **Prayer** is a central part of worship. It should be introduced with a form of words that invites children to pray or reflect but does not coerce pupils to participate. Addressing prayers to God reflects 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 the act of worship. The range of resources is enormous but it's worth remembering that possibly the best resource is the children themselves when they freely write/offer their prayers in their own words.

6.2. **Singing/music:** there are amazing resources available. Kevin Mayhew (www.kevinmayhew.org.uk) is one of the top publishers of resources of music books and CDs. New songs written every year that are appropriate for collective worship. It is important never to get trapped into relying on the old ones from yester-year or deciding that all the old songs are part of the past and not relevant to the present day in school worship. Out of the ark (www.outoftheark.co.uk) music and Redhead Music (www.redheadmusic.co.uk) are both popular resources with schools – go to their websites for songs for Easter or Harvest or everyday assemblies and music for all occasions. They also publish other songwriters for both KS1 and KS2, offering rich material to facilitate excellent musical worship. Although musicians in the school are of great value in supporting worship, there are obvious benefits to using CDs: they can be used in any room or corner in which you may find

yourself whether it be the computer area, classroom carpet corner or the hall with the whole school and, of course they can be available simultaneously for different groups gathered in different parts of the school for worship. Using actions and repetitive action routines, often choreographed by pupils themselves, allows everyone, even those who cannot read the words or speak English, to join in and have fun.

- 6.3. **Story telling:** Schools are good at selecting stories from a wide range of sources, including religious texts, to use in collective worship. It is important to remember that stories specifically from religious traditions are used within faith communities not just to teach moral messages but to communicate something of beliefs about God. When used in inclusive collective worship, their origin should be made clear and that they are sharing the perspective of a particular religious group. That doesn't devalue their use because children and adults who do not share the particular religious faith can still find something of value in a good story. The Bible, for example, can be a rich resource for collective worship. There are so many different children's or youth versions of the Bible appropriate for use in collective worship for all different ages. The Street Bible by Rob Lacey is an example which brings the Bible alive with prose that conveys the meaning with an approach that will resonate with children who want to be surprised by the Bible making such sense and impact rather than old language and irrelevance to life. The Bible offers stories of adventure, journey, poetry or songs of lament, creation, friendship, parables and miracles, fights and famines.
- 6.4. **Art:** art, religious paintings and pictures offer a rich resource for collective worship, particularly with the ease of access we enjoy through the internet. There is an example of a school which used the painting of I stand at the door and knock to great effect to get children to ponder what it was they would allow into their lives and what it was they would keep out and to which the door would be kept shut. This was a secondary school act of collective worship and it resonated with so many of them as they later discussed what it was that they needed to allow in and keep out.
- 6.5. **Visitors** provide information on causes and organisations, personal testimony and interview opportunities. They can be an enriching source of ideas. It is wise to brief them carefully and share the school's understanding of collective worship. Some visitors might lead an act of worship; others will contribute to worship which is being led by someone else.
- 6.6. **Stillness/Silence:** there are few, if any, moments in which complete stillness can descend on a school community without a test or exam being in progress. In collective worship silence and stillness create powerful moments for thinking and listening. 'Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease' is a truth to be experienced by the whole school community as they face the usual busy, urgent, rolling programme of learning and achieving. The gift of silence is a gift that can be learnt and practised in any school and collective worship. It is best learnt when it is not the predictable pattern of every assembly but skillfully used with symbols such as light or water or candle flames and a guided intention of how to use the time of stillness.
- 6.7. **Celebrations/Remembrances:** Collective worship provides opportunities to celebrate the key festivals that are part of the cyclical yearly pattern of worship. Harvest, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Eid, Divali, Vaisakhi or Passover – celebrations are all important, and so much of living faith is about celebration and fun. Collective worship must represent the fun as well as the stillness and reflection.
- 6.8. **Ritual but not habitual:** the best collective worship is where there are repetitive symbols, songs or signs (liturgy) that single out the time of collective worship as a special recognisable time for the school community but it should never become so repetitive that it becomes predictable and boring. There is a necessary tension between predictability and creativity, between safeness and adventure during the times that the school sets aside for collective worship each day.
- 6.9. **Other activities** can legitimately be called worship. Amongst these are:

- reflection on the meaning of life
- pondering ultimate questions
- developing a sense of transcendence
- responding to a challenge
- learning from the experience of others

What follows is a sample collective worship policy. It includes a wide range of ideas that schools might want to include in such a document. It needs to be personalised and not all the elements included here will be found in all such policy statements.

Part 2: Policy

The collective worship policy at Woodside School pays due regard to statutory requirements and has taken account of the guidance offered by the board of trustees of ODBST.

Collective worship is a valued and valuable part of school life and is taken seriously, because it shapes our approach to others and to what we do in school.

Aims of collective worship

Collective worship in Woodside School aims to provide the opportunity for pupils and staff to:

- experience a variety of styles of worship
- celebrate together e.g. festivals, school values, individual achievements
- build a sense of community/foster corporate identity;
- develop a reflective approach to living which sometimes encourages understanding of and invitation to prayer;
- look beyond the physical, material and measurable
- worship God or reflect on human values;
- consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs;
- participate and respond, through active involvement in the planning, leading, presentation and evaluation of worship
- feel safe and affirmed in doing any of the above

Statutory requirements

Through its funding agreement with the DfE, Collective Worship must

- take place for every child not withdrawn by their parents (post 16 students can withdraw themselves) every day
- be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.
- take account of the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the pupils
- take place on the school premises, except on occasions, with agreement of governors

Therefore, at Woodside our collective worship reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. Not every act of collective worship must comply with this; just the majority so we can include material from other religions and non-religious world views.

Collective Worship and the Curriculum

Collective worship time is distinct from curriculum time given to any subject including religious education. However, in Woodside School, we aim to enable collective worship and aspects of children's classroom learning to be mutually supportive.

Collective worship provides opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in line with school policy. To achieve this it addresses a wide variety of themes and topics, uses diverse stimuli and resources and provides pupils with opportunities to 'respond' at their own level.

The Management of Collective Worship

The Headteacher is responsible for the provision of collective worship, supported by and after consultation with the governing body. The following arrangements exist to co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate collective worship:

1. HT/DHT/delegated teacher draws up a rota for leading collective worship and themes for each week.

2. HT/DHT/delegated teacher observes at least 6 acts of collective worship (from a range of formats) per term to ensure that they comply with school policy and the law. Governors may also attend collective worship to monitor their policy.

(Schools may wish to include a 'job description' for the collective worship co-ordinator/team in an appendix to their collective worship policy. Ideally this should not be the same person as the RE subject leader)

The Organisation of Collective Worship

Collective worship takes place in a variety of groupings in the school hall, or one of the multi-purpose rooms, or the classroom.

Acts of worship usually last for approximately 15 minutes, although it is recognized that this time will be shortened or lengthened when it is appropriate.

Leadership

Every member of the school staff, pupils and occasional visitors will be involved in leading acts of worship at some point in the school year. (The appendix might include details such as a weekly leadership pattern)

Planning Acts of Collective Worship

The content of all acts of collective worship is considered carefully to ensure relevance and suitability for the ages, aptitudes and backgrounds of all pupils, as well as the balance between Christianity and other faiths.

Termly planning sheets (could be included in the appendix) list themes, special occasions and events, but there is flexibility to allow the inclusion of current and topical issues. Weekly planning and recording sheets (could be included in the appendix), enable the monitoring and evaluation of acts of worship.

Visitors are welcomed to lead collective worship from time to time and are given guidance on our worship policy. 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 faiths.

The Act of Collective Worship

We use a variety of styles, active and interactive methods and a range of resources in our acts of collective worship. Leaders make decisions about these elements according to what is most appropriate to the content, the ages, aptitudes and the backgrounds of the pupils.

Where prayer is included in our acts of worship it is introduced with a form of words that invites but does not coerce pupils to participate. Our prayers are addressed to 'God' rather than Jesus as this is inclusive of the beliefs of our non-Christian religious pupils. We hope that pupils who prefer not to pray will use these moments to reflect on the important messages shared in our worship.

Collective worship should not be confused with assembly. We often take the opportunity of pupils gathered together to share announcements and notices. Using a variety of strategies e.g. music, silence etc. we indicate clearly to all present when worship begins and ends.

Withdrawal

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 and reflective in nature and never coercive or indoctrinatory.

Parents have a right to withdraw their children from all or any acts of worship and staff (and students in the sixth form) are also free to withdraw from involvement in this aspect of school life. We request that those who wish to exercise this right inform the Head Teacher in writing so that school records are accurate. We also appreciate opportunities to speak with parents and staff who have concerns about collective worship, always keen to develop our understanding of sensitivities and to overcome difficulties where possible. Those pupils who are withdrawn from worship are cared for by a member of the school's staff; parents may provide suitable activities for children so withdrawn.

