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Report to SACRE on Collective Worship. J. Boden AST.

Collective Worship is the correct and legal term for what many schools call 'Assembly'. More and more schools now use the term 'collective worship' though others refer to it as 'our service' or 'our act of worship' or 'school worship'.

Some History

Whatever it is called, there has been worship in schools of all types since local churches and local people set up the first schools for their own children some 300 years ago. When the 'state' later started similar schools some form of Christian worship took place in these schools, too. Independent and grammar schools also had worship as part of their school day from their own foundation four to five hundred years ago. The 1944 Education Act formalised all this requiring every school to have a daily act of collective worship.

Legal Matters

The Education Reform Act 1988 reaffirmed the place of a daily act of collective worship for all schools, strengthened some provisions and gave greater flexibility in others. More recent Education Acts have made no further changes but Department for Education Circular 1/94, published in 1994, gives both general and particular guidance to schools and SACREs.

The law requires:

- o That schools provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students up to the age of 19. (This is their entitlement.)
- o That all community schools provide collective worship which 'is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
- o The precise nature of the collective worship and religious education at a foundation or voluntary school will depend on the religious character of the school. Whether a foundation or voluntary school has a religious character and the particular religion or religious denomination concerned is set out in The Designation of Schools Having a Religious Character (England) Order 1999 (HMSO 1999 No. 2432). ISBN 0 11 085189 7.

Aims of Collective Worship

The DFE paper 1/94 suggests collective worship should aim:

- o To provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God
- o To consider spiritual and moral issues
- o To enable pupils/students to explore their own beliefs
- o To encourage participation and response
- o To develop community spirit
- o To promote a common ethos and shared values
- o To reinforce positive attitudes

Who is responsible?

The head teacher is responsible for arranging the daily collective worship in consultation with the school governing body. The precise nature of this collective worship will depend on the family background, ages and abilities of the pupils.

Most schools should be able to include all pupils in their act of collective worship. There may be exceptional cases, however, where, in view of the family background of some or all pupils, the head teacher and governing body feel that a broadly Christian act of worship is not suitable. In these circumstances, the head teacher can apply to the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to have the Christian content requirement lifted. Before doing so, the governing body should consult the parents of pupils at the school.

Education Act 1996.

This document made no major changes to arrangements for Collective Worship. It clarified that:

- Schools are to provide collective worship in appropriate groupings within the school. The whole school does not have to meet together.
- Schools to provide collective worship at any suitable time during the school day. It does not have to be first thing in the morning.
- Schools to hold collective worship in places other than school e.g. a local church, in the open air, at a school camp/residential centre.
- Full details are available at: www.dfes.gov.uk

The role of the school:

The main purpose of collective worship in schools is to foster the spiritual growth of both the individual and community. A school's collective worship allows participants, in an inclusive manner, to encounter and reflect upon a variety of important and widely held values, attitudes and beliefs. Schools, therefore, need to give extremely careful consideration to both the content and presentation of their collective worship, including such matters as timing, location, use of symbols and the value of silence.

Resources:

The following are links to just some of the current websites containing material for Collective Worship:

www.re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk
www.culham.info/cw
www.bathwells.anglican.org/education
www.assemblies.org.uk

For the annual national analysis of local SACRE reports on Religious Education and Collective Worship, visit the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority site.
www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/re/sacre.asp

Useful guidance for visitors can be found at: www.culham.ac.uk/care/ this guidance is part of the 'Clergy and RE Project' managed at Culham Institute. It includes information of value to all visitors in school who lead worship. There is a useful section with references to print materials for Collective Worship.

The National Society has a number of publications on Collective Worship. Details can be found at: www.natsoc.org.uk (Search for "Collective Worship Publications").

RE Today' annually publishes a booklet on resources and ideas for collective worship. Details for obtaining paper publications can be found at: www.retoday.org.uk/catalogue.htm

For a termly update on RE and Collective Worship visit website www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/religiouseducation or receive a termly update by e-mail by contacting religiouseducation@qca.org.uk

OFSTED's view

Each year OFSTED produces an Annual Report based on inspection evidence. The latest Report on RE had this to say:

a. Primary Schools:

33 *Provision to promote pupils' spiritual development is judged to be good in over half of schools. It is mainly fostered, however, through acts of collective worship and RE lessons, rather than through the curriculum more widely. The vast majority of schools provide a daily act of collective worship, mainly of a Christian nature. Assemblies frequently deal with aspects of personal relationships and the central themes of Christianity and other major world religions.* Provision for moral development is good in nine in ten schools. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the difference between right and wrong. Social development is also effectively promoted in a large majority of schools. Pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities which increase as they get older. They help with tasks around the school and increasingly act as mentors for younger or new pupils. Pupils respond very well to such opportunities and take part enthusiastically in activities such as school councils or fund-raising for charity.

b. Secondary Schools:

90 Provision for pupils' personal development continues to improve and is good or better in seven in ten schools. Pupils' social development in part depends upon the extent to which schools recognise and provide opportunities for the pupils to play an active role in the life of the school. Such experiences often continue to be confined to older pupils. The majority of schools make a significant contribution to pupils' moral development. Subjects such as PSHE and religious education give pupils good opportunities to consider moral and ethical issues. *Spiritual aspects of the curriculum are not covered adequately in a minority of schools, especially where RE has insufficient curriculum time to cover the agreed syllabus.* The majority of schools provide a good range of opportunities for cultural development. A minority of schools, including some with multicultural populations of their own, do not do enough to build an appreciation of cultural diversity.

QCA's View

QCA has produced a useful annual document analysing RE and SACRE Reports. This includes a report on Collective Worship.

Some of the points highlighted include:

- It is the quality of the experience rather than its daily occurrence which is important... Members generally support the continuation of some form of collective worship which affirms and supports the spiritual dimension...

- They also expressed concern that any dilution of the present arrangements which were still referred to as 'worship' might undermine the value and understanding of what worship really is within a faith community...
- Best practice was characterised by thorough planning, the use of themes over a term or half term, the evaluation of collective worship, and the use of outside speakers who were able to bring insights directly from their own faith and cultural traditions. Collective worship often allowed for the clearest expression of the school's ethos, affirming the importance of relationships and the sharing collectively of both joy and sadness...
- Where there was weakness it was frequently that insufficient time was allowed for the children to reflect on their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs...
- In the secondary schools inspectors found collective worship to be well planned, orderly and contributing to a sense of community in the school. It made a significant contribution to pupils' social and moral development but often failed to make a contribution to the pupils spiritual and in some cases, cultural development. This was particularly the case during "tutor time assemblies"...
- Collective worship is also an important vehicle for pupils to explore and share beliefs, consider the importance of prayer, meditation and silence, the relevance of ideas and beliefs to their own lives, think about the needs of others and develop a sense of community.

For SACREs to bear in mind when discussing Collective Worship in their schools.

To provide the most effective collective worship, a school will need:

- A policy appropriate to its own circumstances
- A person to coordinate its collective worship programme
- Leaders who are trained and willing to lead (from within the school, the local community and beyond)
- The supervised contribution of pupils/students
- A calendar of themes for each week of the year
- A variety of resources (including specialist advice)
- A budget
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of its worship by staff, pupils/students, governors and visitors/advisers.

Questions SACRE might wish to ask schools about Collective worship:

- Is collective worship allowed adequate time?
- Do you create a time / sense of occasion for worship?
- Does the worship have a clear beginning and ending?
- Do you ensure the act of worship is separated from administration?
- Do you link worship to the life of the school?
- Do you/your visitors use the right language and resources for the age group concerned?
- Is the 'theology' (what is being said about God, His people and His world) transparent
- Do you use different approaches - involving people and providing a variety of worship experience? E.g. telling a story, describing a situation / event, drama, 'part' speaking, using visual aids / artefacts, music, silence, involving pupils / students, using visitors

SACRE are asked to consider the following document when considering its role regarding Collective Worship in Walsall.

Staff and agencies
Wednesday April 21, 2004
The Guardian

Schools should no longer be required by law to hold a daily act of worship, England's chief education inspector said today.

Religious assemblies might become more "meaningful" if schools were required to hold them on a weekly or even monthly basis, said Ofsted chief David Bell.

And instead of the law requiring that the worship be wholly or mainly Christian, it should be left to schools to decide the content of these sessions, he indicated - a move that could prove controversial with Christian traditionalists.

Mr Bell's call for a review of religious assemblies in schools came in a speech to mark the 60th anniversary of the 1944 Education Act.

At the time of the act, drawn up by the Conservative minister RA Butler, people probably thought Christianity would be "synonymous" with the daily act of worship, said Mr Bell at the House of Commons.

But British society has changed radically and become multicultural, with more faiths being followed, over the past 60 years, he added.

Fewer and fewer schools are holding religious assemblies once a day. Some 76% of secondary schools are breaking the law by not holding a daily act of worship, Mr Bell said.

It is time for society to debate the issues and decide what it wants in the way of education to enhance pupils' "spiritual" development, he declared.

The 1988 Education Reform Act made things even more complicated because it said religious assemblies should be mainly or wholly Christian.

Mr Bell asked: "How many people in this country, apart from schoolchildren, are required to attend daily worship?"

"Are we right to be requiring from our young people levels of observance that are not matched even by the Christian faithful?"

"Would it be perhaps better to encourage an interest in matters of a spiritual and religious nature, which fitted better into the society of which the schools and the pupils are a part?"

"An opportunity to debate, discuss and learn as well as to worship?"

Mr Bells' comments were welcomed.

John Dunford, general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said: "At last someone has recognised that compulsory collective worship is a contradiction in terms and places on secondary schools an obligation that most cannot fulfil.

"We strongly support the chief inspector's call for abolition in the knowledge that schools will continue to take very seriously their responsibility for the spiritual development of young people."

A Department for Education and Skills spokesman said: "Ministers agree that religious education and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is important - hence the moves we are making towards a national framework for RE. That is our priority at the moment, focusing on making sure that pupils get a really good understanding of a range of faiths.

"At the secretary of state's request the QCA is working with all the major faith groups and Ofsted on developing a national framework for religious education, which will be out for consultation later this term.

"We know that Ofsted have identified good examples of schools that use collective worship effectively to reinforce pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and we encourage all schools to follow this lead."

Mr Bell also hailed the Commission for Racial Equality's chairman, Trevor Phillips, for making his controversial speech about the problems associated with multiculturalism and the need to foster a sense of Britishness.

Mr Bell said: "Would we weaken that strengthening of Britishness if we no longer required children and young people to worship daily in the Christian tradition, which is so bound up with our history and heritage?

"Might we strengthen it, and pupils' understanding of Christianity and other religions, by being more honest about the fact that the majority of people nowadays do not attend church, although, intriguingly, observance of other faiths seems to be stronger?"

Mr Bell acknowledged the issues were "serious, complex and sensitive" and of interest to secular as well as religious people.

RE as a subject would continue to be important in schools because "young people must never be denied access to that crucial body of knowledge which is encompassed in religious education", he said.

"But I would like to make two further suggestions if we are to retain and value collective worship.

"Firstly, we cannot ignore the fact that 76% of our secondary schools are breaking the law.

"I do not think they do so lightly, so we should ask what is motivating them to behave in this way.

"I believe that by retaining the act of collective worship, but making it less frequent, we would immediately and significantly reduce the current levels of non-compliance.

"In the process, I also believe that we would encourage all of those who participate to do so in a more meaningful way.

"So, perhaps consideration should now be given to making the requirement for collective worship weekly, or even monthly, rather than daily."

It was also time to revise guidance to schools on what the worship sessions should contain.

Mr Bell added: "Now is a good time to revisit that guidance and see whether we can combine the 1988 requirements with some of the flexibility of the 1944 act, and leave more room to schools in determining what that worship should involve."