

Essex Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

# **Guidance on Collective Worship in Schools**

**2013**



Essex County Council



# Introduction

Nearly 20 years ago, in January 1994, the Department for Education (DfE) published *Circular 1/94*. This set out to explain the practical implications of the law as it applied to religious education and collective worship. The parts of *Circular 1/94* that dealt specifically with religious education were replaced by new guidance published in January 2010. However the parts of *Circular 1/94* covering collective worship stayed unchanged, continuing to represent the DfE's official view. This remained the case until, in effect, the circular was withdrawn. In October 2012, the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC) released the following joint statement explaining the new position:

“Since March of this year [2012] NASACRE and AREIAC have been in contact with the Department for Education regarding the status of *Circular 1/94* with respect to what this circular says about collective worship. In the course of this correspondence **it has been made clear that *Circular 1/94* has no legal or semi legal status, nor does the circular have a quasi-legal status. It does not represent the Government's official advice on collective worship** which schools are in some sense obliged to follow. Officials state that in this area local determination is a key strength and for this reason **all schools and academies can choose whether or not to use *Circular 1/94*.**

“The view of NASACRE and AREIAC is that collective worship can and should be an inclusive experience which, when done well, can make a valuable and highly positive contribution to life in general in all schools. All schools and academies should be meeting the legal requirements for collective worship. However, we are aware that in attempting to do so many institutions experience difficulties which stem from statements which appear in *Circular 1/94*. The circular is thus often a barrier to good collective worship. For this reason NASACRE and AREIAC advise that schools and academies should not use *Circular 1/94* but that their provision for collective worship should be guided by the legal requirements as set out in the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and confirmed in the 1996 Education Act.”

Previous guidance published by Essex SACRE in 1995 and 2004 sought to help schools to provide inclusive, meaningful and relevant daily acts of collective worship that met both the letter and spirit of the law as interpreted by *Circular 1/94*. Now that schools are no longer constrained by advice contained in the circular (although they are still bound by the legal requirements), SACRE is issuing this new guidance with the intention that it will stimulate discussion, provide practical assistance and help raise the quality of collective worship in schools.

The notion of 'collective worship' was introduced by the 1944 Education Act, which stated that "the school day in every county school and every voluntary school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all the pupils in attendance". This legislation was passed at a time when England was an overtly Christian country where the great majority of the population were regular churchgoers. By 2010, the percentage of UK citizens who attended church regularly had dropped to 6%. Over the past 60 years there has also been a significant decline in Church of England baptisms. In 1950, approximately 67% of UK babies were baptised into the Church of England. By 2010 this figure had dropped to 19%<sup>1</sup>.

In view of the changes to British society (and schools) that have occurred since 1944, many people hold the view that collective worship is now an outmoded concept. Many prefer the term 'spiritual reflection', which supports the requirement for schools to promote pupils' spiritual development. The notion of spiritual reflection lends itself to the 'stimulus/response' model for collective worship which is the preferred model of Essex SACRE (see page 17 below). In providing structured time for daily spiritual reflection, schools will be providing something important for the wellbeing of pupils and other participants; something that is unique and distinctive; something that is different from but complementary to 'assembly'.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures obtained from Church Society website

# Legal requirements

All state schools must provide a daily act of collective worship for all registered pupils up to the age of 18. Whereas for maintained schools this requirement is enshrined within legislation, for academies the requirement forms part of their funding agreement. Faith schools (both maintained and academies) will provide collective worship in accordance with their trust deed, or in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

The summary below applies to maintained schools and academies without a religious character. Special schools have to meet the requirements “so far as is practicable”. The requirements fall into two categories: those relating to management and organisation and those relating to style and character.

## Requirements relating to management and organisation

- Subject to the right of withdrawal (see next bullet point), **all registered pupils must “on each school day take part in an act of collective worship”**. This applies to all pupils in Reception classes, including those below compulsory school age. It also applies to all sixth form students in schools.
- **Parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship and sixth formers have the right to withdraw themselves. Teachers also have the right not to attend.** The right of withdrawal can be exercised for any reason: it does not have to be on grounds of conscience. Teachers should not be disqualified from employment or discriminated against in terms of pay or promotion if they choose not to attend collective worship. However, both pupils and teachers may be required to attend assembly, which is distinct from collective worship.
- **Acts of collective worship can take place at any time during the school day.** Time spent on collective worship generally lies outside curricular time and cannot count as part of the taught school day.
- **For collective worship, pupils can be grouped in various ways:** as a whole school or in groups (or a combination of groups) which the school uses at other times (class groups, tutor groups, year groups, house groups, key stage groups, etc). Pupils cannot be put into special groups just for collective worship unless a ‘determination’ has been granted (see last bullet point below).
- Responsibility for ensuring that the legal requirements are met rests with the headteacher, in consultation with the governors.

## Requirements relating to style and character

- **Most acts of collective worship in any one school term must be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”**. An act of worship is such if it “reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination”.
- **Acts of worship must be appropriate for the pupils**, in that they must take account of pupils’ ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds.
- If a school feels that the requirement for broadly Christian worship is inappropriate for some or all of the pupils, the headteacher can apply to the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for a ‘determination’ to have this requirement lifted or modified for some or all of the pupils<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Appendix (page 20) for further information on determinations and the process by which a school can apply for one.

# Two imperatives

In order to meet the legal requirements regarding the style and character of daily collective worship, schools will need to comply with the following imperatives:

1. **Collective worship must always be inclusive.**
2. **Collective worship must usually be broadly Christian.**

## Imperative 1.

### **Collective worship must always be inclusive**

The use of the term 'collective' rather than 'corporate' to describe the nature of worship in schools is significant. It is a deliberate acknowledgement of the fact that schools comprise a collection of individuals from diverse backgrounds with widely differing beliefs. Corporate worship takes place among a unified 'corpus' or body of people with shared beliefs and common forms of worship. It is what takes place in churches on Sundays, synagogues on Saturdays and mosques on Fridays. Collective worship in schools is fundamentally different from this.

**The law requires schools to ensure that acts of collective worship are appropriate for all their pupils in that they must take account of their ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds.** Every school contains pupils from religiously committed families and pupils from families with no formal religious commitments. **Christians, adherents of other religions, atheists and agnostics are all to be accommodated in daily collective worship.**

This clearly presents a challenge for schools. The 'stimulus/response' model that Essex SACRE recommends (described on page 17 below) will enable all those present to participate in a way that is personally relevant.

## Implications

- Acts of collective worship should be appropriate for all pupils (and others present), whatever their religious commitments or lack of religious commitments.
- Acts of worship should respect the wishes of religious believers by providing those who want to engage in prayer with the opportunity to do so, while giving others the opportunity to engage in meaningful personal reflection. The recommended 'stimulus/response' model (see page 17 below) explains how this can be achieved.

- Collective worship should celebrate and affirm difference and diversity.
- Pupils (and others present) should not be placed in positions where they are made to feel uneasy, or less than honest, or where their personal integrity is not respected. It is important to try and avoid the 'squirm' factor with regard to collective worship.
- Pupils (and others present) should not be asked to pay lip-service to faith statements which they may not understand or to which they do not themselves adhere.
- Hymns and prayers should be used with care and sensitivity (see page 18 below).
- Few (if any) parents, sixth formers or teachers should find it necessary to exercise their right of withdrawal.

## **Imperative 2.**

### **Collective worship must usually be 'broadly Christian'**

**The law requires that most acts of collective worship in any one school term must be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character"**. This should not be taken as meaning that pupils are compelled to receive a daily diet of Bible readings and Christian hymns and prayers. Although Bible readings, hymns and prayers, when used appropriately, have an important part to play, collective worship that places an over-reliance on these is likely to have a negative effect on young people's perception of religion in general and Christianity in particular. During the 1950s collective worship typically took the form of a Bible reading/hymn/prayer sandwich; but this model fell out of favour when research carried out in the early 1960s (notably by Harold Loukes) indicated that most young people reacted negatively to this format. If this model were to be re-introduced, it is likely that today's pupils would react in the same way as their sixties counterparts.

What then is meant by worship that is 'broadly Christian'? The law provides a partial explanation: **an act of worship is considered to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character if it (a) reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief and (b) is not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.**

With regard to (a), the law does not define the broad traditions of Christian belief nor does it explain how these traditions can, at the same time, be applied to collective worship that is to be inclusive of those of other faiths or none. Two observations might be made here. **1) Most religious or non-religious philosophies are concerned with the same ultimate questions and share many common values. 2) Each of these philosophies (or theologies) offers their own distinctive**

**answer to the questions and place their values within a different framework.**

Shared values usually embrace environmental concerns (ecology, pollution, stewardship of the earth's resources), a concern to address the human capacity for prejudice, cruelty, war and alienation and a recognition of the value of every individual (irrespective of disability, age, gender, race, economic status, etc). Also shared are concerns to promote justice, peace and harmony and explore human yearnings for the 'better' and the 'spiritual'. Collective worship offers a context in which these values (and their various philosophies and theologies) can be affirmed and explored. Within the limits of the law, this will, necessarily seek to recognise the 'broadly Christian' framework of our present society and its belief system while inviting reflection and critique and the opportunity for each individual to develop their 'own' spirituality (Christian or otherwise). As an example, the Christian faith places the above issues within the framework of its understanding of creation, fall and redemption centred in Jesus Christ. The secularist will, however, see no need for such a framework. Those participating in this form of spiritual reflection will expect to be introduced to the 'broadly Christian' perspective while encouraged to develop a personal spirituality that may or may not be Christian and to do so through being able to engage with, learn from and critique other frameworks of belief or non-belief.

Regarding (b), we learn that collective worship in non-faith schools is not permitted to be distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. This reinforces the point made earlier: that **worship in schools is not intended to replicate denominational worship in church**. It is completely legitimate for, say, Anglican or Roman Catholic schools to celebrate Eucharist or Mass; but denominational practices such as these are not appropriate in non-faith schools.

## **Implications**

- Collective worship that is 'broadly Christian' is inclusive in that it deals with universal human values and issues that concern us all, Christians and non-Christians.
- What happens in non-faith schools during collective worship must not replicate denominational church worship.
- The law allows considerable flexibility and freedom in respect of the requirement that most acts of collective worship must be broadly Christian. However, in order to show they are meeting the legal requirements, schools will need to document their daily acts of collective worship in sufficient detail to be able to demonstrate that the majority of these reflect broad Christian values and beliefs.
- By interpreting 'broadly Christian' in an inclusive way, few (if any) schools should find it necessary to apply to SACRE for a 'determination' for the requirement for 'broadly Christian' worship to be lifted or modified.

# Six principles

Essex SACRE believes that acts of collective worship or spiritual reflection should be meaningful and relevant to all those present. In order for this to be the case, SACRE has identified six principles which schools should apply with regard to daily collective worship.

## Collective worship should:

1. **promote a sense of community;**
2. **be educational;**
3. **promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development;**
4. **be a special time;**
5. **enable participants to be actively involved;**
6. **be of high quality.**

## Principle 1.

### Collective worship should promote a sense of community

It has been said that collective worship is the time when the school becomes aware of itself. It is the time when members of the school community gather together to affirm who the school is and what it stands for. For many, the most valuable feature of collective worship is that it promotes this sense of community. Regardless of the legal requirement for daily collective worship, most schools would wish to hold regular 'assemblies' to enable pupils and staff to develop a sense of belonging to a community with a shared sense of purpose.

In this connection, it is helpful to remember that the word 'worship' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'wearthscipe', which means honour. People can be honoured, but so can concepts, principles, achievements, codes of conduct, etc. The following extract is taken from a handbook for religious education produced in Hampshire over 30 years ago. The quotation may be old, but it is still very helpful for schools:

**“Worship has to do with worth and worthiness. It is the recognition, affirmation and celebration of the ‘worthship’ of certain realities and values, held to be of central importance to the community which worships. The act of worshipping renews the meaning of these realities and values for the**

**community, helping each of its members to grasp them personally”** (*Paths to Understanding*, Hampshire Education Authority, 1980).

If this broad definition of worship is accepted, **it may be argued that any formal collective activity which makes explicit and which honours and celebrates the things that the school considers to be important or of worth could be legitimately termed an act of collective worship.**

## Implications

- Collective worship can be used as a time to make explicit the values and assumptions which underpin the day to day life of the school. Notions of justice, fairness, equality of opportunity, the value and worth of each individual, mutual respect, respect for the environment, co-operation, etc can be explored and affirmed as part of collective worship.
- Collective worship can be used as a time to celebrate individual and group achievements.
- The law permits pupils to be grouped for collective worship in various ways, but if it is to develop a sense of itself as a community, **on regular occasions the school should endeavour to come together as a whole school, with all pupils, teachers and other staff present.** In many secondary schools this will not be possible because of restrictions imposed by the size of the school hall. However, for special occasions such as Christmas, some secondary schools hold acts of collective worship for the whole school in larger venues such as the local parish church.

## Principle 2.

### **Collective worship should be educational**

Schools are first and foremost educational establishments. The core business of schools is teaching and learning. Members of SACRE believe that **collective worship should be regarded as an educational activity, a learning experience for the pupils.**

## Implications

- The word ‘education’ derives from the Latin ‘educere’, which means to lead out. Collective worship is to do with opening up rather than closing down. It is to do with the exploration of a range of possibilities. It does not seek to bring pupils to a particular point of view; rather it seeks to enable each participant to come to a more mature stance in respect of her or his own developing viewpoint.

- Collective worship should be used as a time to inform, to develop and deepen understanding and to promote the acquisition of skills. The knowledge and understanding that is developed will be dependent on the content of the act of worship. Among the many skills that collective worship helps to develop are included a range of interpersonal and social skills, listening skills and importantly the ability to be still, to be quiet and to reflect inwardly.
- The contribution of collective worship to pupils' personal development merits separate consideration, and this is explored in Principle 3. below.
- Collective worship also provides an obvious but often overlooked forum for learning about the nature of worship:
  - learning about religious worship: why people worship, how people worship and who or what is being worshipped
  - learning that many Christians and adherents of other faiths find fulfilment, meaning and purpose in worship
  - learning that many people do not feel the need to worship
  - learning about the inclusive way in which collective worship at the school is conducted, why those present are explicitly invited either to reflect or pray, why the particular forms of words that are used to introduce hymns and prayers are deployed (see page 18 below).

### **Principle 3.**

#### **Collective worship should promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development**

Collective worship or spiritual reflection has much to contribute to the SMSC development of children and young people. OFSTED has always recognised this and in forming judgements about SMSC development in schools, inspectors take account of collective worship.

Members of SACRE believe that **collective worship has an important and distinctive contribution to make to the spiritual development of children and young people**. Worship is by definition a spiritual activity: the response of human beings to what is perceived as holy, sacred or divine. The following passage is adapted from a newspaper article written by Dr W.R. Matthews. He was actually writing about religious education, but his words are just as applicable to collective worship. The article was published in *The Daily Telegraph* over 30 years ago, but it remains as relevant and fresh as when it first appeared.

**“Collective worship can do us the service of reminding us of the dimension of mystery underlying all human experience – the sheer miracle that we exist, that we have so many capacities and gifts, that we care about truth and beauty**

**and goodness and love, that other people matter to us, sometimes intensely, and that we have ‘eternity in our hearts’ and long for a life not subject to the limitations of time and space. Collective worship can keep alive this sense of wonder and mystery implicit in everyday experiences. It can explore the big questions which rise in young people’s minds. Is there meaning and purpose in life? Why is our human existence such a mixture of marvel and tragedy, of injustice and hope for the future? What are the beliefs and values by which I want to live?”**

Collective worship also has much to contribute to moral, social and cultural development. It provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on issues of morality and ethics, justice and fairness, good and evil, right and wrong. ‘Collective’ worship is by definition an inclusive, social activity: one that promotes a sense of community (see Principle 1. above). Collective worship can help to develop pupils’ awareness of beauty and heighten aesthetic and intercultural awareness.

## **Implications**

- Collective worship should sensitise pupils to the spiritual dimension of existence: to feelings of awe and wonder, to the fact that life is ultimately mysterious and that there is perhaps more to it than the day-to-day, the here and now, the immediately apparent.
- Collective worship should ‘feed the spirit’ by enabling pupils to reflect in an appropriate atmosphere upon the beauty, intricacy and grandeur of the natural world and upon a range of inspirational writings, music and works of art drawn from a variety of cultures. Many of these will be derived from the world’s great religious traditions, which are obvious repositories of profound spiritual insights. Collective worship can be used to enable pupils to appreciate that spiritual experiences, feelings and responses are often expressed through an evocative language of symbol and suggestion.
- Collective worship should enable pupils to explore moral issues and questions about meaning and purpose. It should help pupils to develop their own beliefs, values, attitudes and moral codes. It should enable pupils to appreciate and respect the beliefs, life-stances and religious practices of others.

## **Principle 4.**

### **Collective worship should be a special time**

**Collective worship should be a special time with its own distinctive atmosphere, one that is conducive to spiritual activities such as contemplation, quiet reflection and, for those for whom it is appropriate, prayer.** Collective worship should be seen as providing an oasis of calm, a breathing

space in the busy whirl of school activity. It is a time to gather, to be still and to reflect in an atmosphere of peacefulness and quietness.

## **Implications**

- Schools should give consideration to using a simple ritual to mark the transition from assembly or other activity to collective worship. There should be a change in mood and atmosphere. Playing quiet, calming background music and lighting a candle helps to create a suitable ambience.
- The setting should be made as attractive as possible: a vase of flowers can make a tremendous difference. It helps if there is a visual focus, either an image projected onto a screen or a real object related to the theme of the act of worship: a loaf of bread, a glass of water, a lump of rock, a piece of wood, a mobile phone, a teddy bear, etc.
- The pupils should be seated comfortably, even if this means going through the effort of putting out chairs for older pupils. Seating can be used in a variety of creative and imaginative ways. The seating arrangements should be flexible: different seating arrangements are appropriate for different styles of collective worship. Some primary schools have experimented with allowing pupils to sit where they want: friends, brothers and sisters from different classes are able to sit side-by-side during this special time.
- The distinctive atmosphere of collective worship should not be disturbed by distractions such as the giving out of notices or reprimands, or the clatter from the kitchens.

## **Principle 5.**

### **Collective worship should enable participants to be actively involved**

The law requires that all pupils should 'take part' in collective worship rather than simply attend. This should not be taken as meaning that all pupils, regardless of their own beliefs, should join in with the singing of hymns and saying of prayers. If the requirement were to be interpreted in this way, it would be counter to the spirit of statements made earlier in this document such as the following (see page 7 above):

- Pupils (and others present) should not be placed in positions where they are made to feel uneasy, or less than honest, or where their personal integrity is not respected. It is important to try and avoid the 'squirm' factor with regard to collective worship.
- Pupils (and others present) should not be asked to pay lip-service to faith statements which they may not understand or to which they do not themselves adhere.

This is not to say that hymns and prayers should not be used in collective worship; rather that they should only be used with care and sensitivity. Further advice on this is given later (see page 18 below).

What then is meant by 'taking part'? Members of SACRE believe that taking part implies active involvement. **Pupils should not be passive recipients of an accepted wisdom or orthodoxy; rather they should be encouraged to use collective worship as a time during which they can reflect upon, question, weigh up, accept or reject the beliefs and spiritual and moral issues that are being raised.**

## **Implications**

- Built into the structure of each act of collective worship, there needs to be the opportunity for the pupils to respond to whatever is presented. Providing a time of silence during which pupils can respond in ways that are appropriate to each individual (through prayer or reflection) is one way that this might be achieved (see page 17 below). Depending on practicalities, pupils can also be given the opportunity to respond through answering questions, discussion, writing or drawing.
- Pupils themselves should be given opportunities to participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation of collective worship.

## **Principle 6.**

### **Collective worship should be of high quality**

If the aspirations identified earlier in this document are to be met and **if collective worship is to be a high quality experience for pupils, then time, effort and resources will need to be devoted to it.**

## **Implications**

- Every school should have an agreed policy for collective worship, showing how it intends to provide high quality daily collective worship that meets the legal requirements and the principles identified in this document. This policy should be reviewed regularly.
- Each act of collective worship should be carefully planned and, in order to avoid duplication and repetition, briefly documented. A further reason for keeping a short written record of each act of worship is to be able to demonstrate to OFSTED that most acts of worship in any one term are "broadly Christian in character" (see Imperative 2. above).

- High quality acts of worship require appropriate resources. The school will need to build up a suitable collection of readings, inspirational and thought-provoking quotations, poems, prayers, songs, sound recordings, film extracts, images, etc. Many excellent suggestions for assemblies and collective worship may be found on the internet. The school will also need appropriate equipment: computer, CD player, DVD player, multimedia projector, blackout, screen, etc
- Collective worship can often be enhanced by inviting visitors to contribute. Many schools in Essex make excellent use of a variety of visitors in order to enrich their provision. However, schools need to be aware of possible difficulties that may arise when visitors are not fully appreciative of the particular context in which they are operating. Some groups, for example, have conducted collective worship in Essex schools in ways that are not appropriate for non-faith schools. Visitors leading assemblies and collective need to remember that schools are essentially inclusive places of education rather than places of worship associated with a particular religion. Essex SACRE has published guidance on this entitled *Getting Value from Visitors*. This document may be found on the Essex grid for learning website. Locate the home page by entering 'Essex grid for learning' into a search engine such as Google. On the home page, click on 'Curriculum resources'. Click on 'RE' (under the heading 'Learning tools'). Scroll down to 'Religious education' and click on 'Getting value from visitors'.
- The quality of collective worship ultimately depends on the people who are responsible for its co-ordination and delivery. All schools should have a designated co-ordinator of collective worship. The planning, delivery, evaluation and documentation of daily collective worship should be rigorously carried out and it should be recognised that whoever is responsible for its co-ordination has a demanding and time-consuming task to perform.
- In order to ensure that acts of collective worship are meeting the needs of pupils, children and young people should be key participants in the evaluation of collective worship.

## Meeting the two imperatives and the six principles through the stimulus/response model

There is a model for collective worship that meets the two imperatives and six principles explained above. It is SACRE's preferred model and is already widely used in schools. **The model consists of presenting those present with a thought-provoking stimulus and then providing a few moments of quietness in which the participants are given the opportunity to reflect on what they have just seen and heard or, if they wish, to offer their own private prayer.**

The stimulus will need to be something with which the pupils will connect, and it will probably be more effective if it is something short and pithy. It will need to be well-presented and to hold the pupils' attention. Hopefully it will be something that triggers the imagination and which prompts further thought. At best it will inspire and open the door to a world of spiritual possibilities.

Examples of suitable stimuli include music, stories, poems, a 'thought for the day', film extracts, PowerPoint presentations, pictures, objects (such as a 'thing of beauty'), drama, dance, mime, simulation and personal anecdotes. The stimulus may be overtly religious: for instance, the words of a hymn or prayer, a passage from a sacred text or a religious artefact or work of art.

Having been presented with the stimulus, each person present is then given the opportunity to respond in her/his own way during a few moments of quietness. This special time can be marked by the simple ritual of lighting of a candle and playing some calming music softly in the background. Words such as the following could be used to introduce this time of silent reflection: "Now let us share a few moments of quietness in which we can think about what we have just seen and heard. You may like to use this time to say your own quiet prayer".

## Hymns and prayers

Pupils can be compelled into joining in the outward forms of worship, such as singing a hymn or saying a prayer; but no one can be compelled to actually worship. Genuine worship is an inward, heartfelt response, freely given.

There is no requirement for schools to use hymns and prayers as part of their collective worship, but many schools choose to do so. This is completely acceptable provided the hymns and prayers are not distinctive of any particular religious denomination and they are used in a way that is sensitive to the views of those who do not adhere to the expressions of belief and faith contained in them.

**Schools using hymns and prayers must take care to ensure that the way in which they are used is appropriate for all pupils.** One way in which hymns and prayers can legitimately be used in collective worship is to read out the words and allow pupils to reflect upon their meaning.

One former headteacher in a primary school in Essex used the following words to introduce prayers: "I would like you to listen to this prayer; and if you would like to make the prayer your own, you can do so by saying 'Amen' at the end". It is interesting to note that she was an atheist, but she felt comfortable using this form of words.

In expecting pupils to participate in the singing of hymns ("We will now sing ...") and the saying of prayers ("Hands together, eyes closed ..."), it must be recognised that many of them will not share the faith sentiments (often articulated in adult and archaic language) that they are being asked to express. **It is important, therefore, to select hymns and prayers with care and to introduce them with a form of words that is sensitive to, and indeed explicitly acknowledges the different faith standpoints of the pupils.**

Is it right to expect pupils to join in with hymns and prayers if they do not believe the words that they are being asked to sing or say? In schools where hymns and prayers are used, this is a question upon which teachers, governors and parents need to reflect. A view often expressed is that it is important for schools to provide pupils who do not regularly experience these formal forms of worship to have opportunities to do so. Participation in hymns and prayers may be viewed as a valid educational activity for all if it is treated as an empathetic exercise, the purpose of which is to enable pupils with little experience of hymns or prayers to feel for themselves something of what it means for others to engage in these particular forms of worship.

With this in mind, an introduction to the well-known hymn *Morning has broken* might be framed as follows: "Eleanor Farjeon was a Christian. She wrote many poems

expressing her belief that Jesus was very special to her. In the hymn that we are about to sing, she praises God for the beauty of the morning. Some of you may believe in God and some of you may not, but aren't there times when we all feel that we live in a beautiful world? Let's sing this hymn together, and try to imagine how Eleanor Farjeon felt as a new day dawned ...".

To avoid these sensitive and difficult issues, many schools prefer to use modern songs which share many of the characteristics and sentiments of traditional hymns but which do not contain any overt references to God, Jesus, etc.

Many teachers will feel that much of what has been suggested above is not appropriate for infants. At Key Stage 1, many children will be too young to fully understand the alternatives that are being put to them: alternatives such as saying 'Amen' at the end of a prayer or not; such as using a few moments of silence as a time for either thinking or for saying a quiet prayer. For infants required to 'take part' in daily collective worship, the expectation that everyone will join together in the outward forms of worship offered may not be inappropriate. However, it becomes inappropriate as soon as pupils realise that they are expected to join in with worship with which they are not themselves in accord.

# APPENDIX

## Applying for a determination

### What is a determination?

SACRE has legal powers to allow certain schools to lift the requirement for all pupils to take part in broadly Christian worship. The technical term for this is 'granting a determination'. It is called this because SACRE 'determines' whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for pupils in a school is appropriate.

### To which schools does this guidance apply?

All non-faith maintained schools, excluding academies.

### Under what circumstances should a school apply for a determination?

In the schools referred to above, most acts of worship in a term are required by law to be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character". If it is felt that participation in broadly Christian worship is inappropriate for certain pupils by virtue of their family backgrounds (in particular their faith backgrounds), the headteacher (after consulting the governing body) can apply to SACRE for a determination to lift the requirement for some or all pupils.

Schools will typically apply for a determination where concerns are raised about non-Christian pupils participating in broadly Christian worship, possibly leading to parents and carers exercising their right to withdraw their children from collective worship.

A determination only affects the **character** of collective worship. It does not affect the requirement for all pupils (apart from those withdrawn by their parents/carers) to take part in an act of collective worship on each school day.

### What is meant by worship of a 'broadly Christian character'?

According to the law: "Collective worship is of a broadly Christian character if it reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular religious denomination".

Guidance on collective worship produced by Essex SACRE shows that broadly Christian worship can be highly inclusive, accommodating a wide range of religious and non-religious standpoints: "Collective worship that is 'broadly Christian' is inclusive in that it deals with universal human values and issues that concern us all, Christians and non-Christians".

## **What does the law say about determinations?**

- In deciding whether to grant a determination, SACRE must have regard to any circumstances relating to the family and faith background of the pupils which are relevant for deciding what character of collective worship is appropriate.
- If SACRE grants a determination, the alternative act of worship may be distinctive of a particular religion, but it is not permitted to be distinctive of any particular denomination within a religion.
- If SACRE grants a determination for a whole school, it is not permissible for pupils to be divided into separate faith groups for worship. However, where a determination is granted in respect of a group of pupils defined in terms of faith background, then religious worship may be provided for those pupils.
- SACRE can only accept or reject an application for a determination. It cannot modify the request.
- SACRE must write to the headteacher informing her/him of the decision. If a determination is granted, SACRE must state in writing the date from which it will take effect.
- A determination lasts for 5 years, unless renewed by SACRE. There must be a review by SACRE within 5 years of the introduction of a determination, and subsequently within 5 years of each review. The headteacher may request an earlier review at any time, after consulting the governing body. The headteacher must be given the opportunity to make representations in any review.
- It is for SACRE to decide how applications should be made and the process by which they are to be considered.

## **What are SACRE's procedures for considering applications for determinations?**

Initially it is the Determinations Sub-Committee that considers applications for determinations. The Determinations Sub-Committee comprises the Chairpersons of the four groups on SACRE. Meetings of the Determinations Sub-Committee are chaired by the Chairperson of SACRE. A member of the Determinations Sub-Committee may be substituted by another member of the same SACRE group where necessary. The Determinations Sub-Committee is assisted by the LA lead officer for Religious Education and the Clerk to SACRE. At the SACRE meeting following the meeting of the Determinations Sub-Committee, the application is discussed and put to a formal vote.

All proceedings and papers related to applications for determinations are confidential.

## What process is followed by SACRE?

Headteacher's application for a determination received by SACRE Chairperson, who writes to headteacher acknowledging receipt.



Through Clerk, Chairperson convenes meeting of Determinations Sub-Committee. Members of Determinations Sub-Committee are sent completed application form and accompanying papers.



Determinations Sub-Committee meets to discuss the application and arrive at a decision.



If necessary, a further meeting of Determinations Sub-Committee is held to which the headteacher is invited solely for the purpose of clarifying any matters relating to the request.



At next full SACRE meeting, the Determinations Sub-Committee makes a report, with a recommendation that SACRE should grant or decline the application. If the Determinations Sub-Committee favours acceptance, it recommends from when and for how long (up to a maximum 5 years) the determination is to be effective. SACRE decides whether to reject grant or decline the application by means of a formal group vote.



The Chairperson of SACRE writes to the headteacher informing her/him of SACRE's decision. If the application is declined, the reasons are explained.



When the determination ceases to be effective (usually after 5 years), the headteacher is reminded by the Chairperson of SACRE that if a new determination is to be granted, she/he needs to submit a new application.

## **What factors will influence SACRE's decision?**

As is explained in its guidance on collective worship, SACRE takes the view that collective worship in schools should be an inclusive and educational activity concerned with the recognition, affirmation and celebration of the worth of the values held to be of central importance to the school community. The essential purpose of acts of collective worship is to establish and renew the meaning of these values for the whole school community, helping each of its members to grasp them personally.

SACRE is firmly of the view that applications for determinations should only be made as a last resort when all other attempts to keep the school as a single worshipping community have failed or proved completely impractical.

SACRE will wish to be satisfied that any proposed alternative acts of worship will be inclusive for those attending and undenominational in nature. Alternative acts of worship must not attempt to indoctrinate or proselytise.

## **How does a headteacher apply for a determination?**

Having fully explored the implications for the school and the community it serves, and having consulted with all appropriate stakeholders, if a headteacher considers the only course of action is to apply for a determination, she/he should do so using the accompanying application form supported by additional documentation where necessary.

The completed application form and supporting documentation should be sent to:

Chairperson of SACRE  
c/o Clerk to SACRE  
Essex County Council  
County Hall  
Market Road  
Chelmsford CM1 1QH



Essex County Council

# Essex Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

## APPLICATION FORM FOR A DETERMINATION

*Application form to be completed by headteacher and sent with supporting documentation to:*

*Chairperson of SACRE  
c/o Clerk to SACRE  
Essex County Council  
County Hall  
Market Road  
Chelmsford CM1 1QH*

### 1. Details about school

1.1 Name of school

1.2 Type of school *(please tick appropriate boxes)*

Special  Infant  Junior  Primary   
Secondary, 11-16  Secondary, 11-18

1.3 Number of pupils on roll

## 2. Context in which application is being made

### 2.1 Family religious background of pupils in school

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number of pupils</b>	<b>% pupils</b>
Buddhist		
Christian		
Hindu		
Jewish		
Muslim		
Sikh		
No religious affiliation		
Not known		
Others (specify if known)		

### 2.2 (a) Current number of pupils withdrawn from collective worship

#### (b) Family religious background of pupils who are withdrawn

#### (c) What happens currently to pupils who are withdrawn?

### 2.3 Please tick appropriate box

(a) Determination being requested for **all** pupils

Determination being requested for **some** pupils

(b) If 'for some pupils', actual number of pupils for whom alternative worship is being requested

If 'for some pupils', percentage of pupils for whom alternative worship is being requested

Does this group include pupils already referred to in 2.2?

If 'yes', please provide details:

### 2.4 For how many years do you want the determination to apply (up to a maximum of 5)?

### **3. Reasons for applying for a determination**

Please provide full details of the reasons for your application. You will need to include an explanation of why collective worship that is 'broadly Christian' is inappropriate in respect of the family backgrounds of the pupils for whom alternative worship is being sought. If there is insufficient space below, please attach further information.

## 4. Evidence of consultation

4.1 People consulted (*please tick appropriate boxes*)

Governors	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2 Please provide details of the consultation process and outcome:

4.3 Please attach documentation providing evidence of consultation process, e.g relevant extracts from minutes of governing body, school council, etc

## 5. Plans for alternative acts of worship

5.1 What will be the religious character of the alternative acts of worship?

5.2 (a) Please attach the school's broad plans for the alternative acts of worship over the course of a year, in terms of:

- (i) style and character
- (ii) management and organisation

(b) Please attach detailed plans for the alternative acts of worship over the course of a term, to include information about:

Content	<input type="checkbox"/>
Style and character	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriateness of alternative worship for pupils participating	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management and organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting pupils' entitlement for daily worship	<input type="checkbox"/>
Those willing and able to lead alternative acts of worship	<input type="checkbox"/>

This application is submitted by .....(Headteacher)                      Date

This application is supported by .....(Chair of Governors)                      Date