

Supplementary
guidance:
collective
worship in non-
denominational
schools

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What is the purpose of this supplementary guidance?

To provide updated guidance for inspectors on evaluating collective worship when it is a line of enquiry.

For whom is it intended?

All inspectors of maintained schools.

From when should it be used?

September 2010.

Contents**Page**

What are the legal requirements for collective worship?	1
What is collective worship?	2
How do we inspect and report on collective worship?	3
Frequently asked questions	4

What are the legal requirements for collective worship?

The Education Reform Act 1988 and the Welsh Office Circular 10/94 set out the legal requirements for collective worship in schools in Wales. These requirements apply to pupils in maintained schools other than special schools. The requirements do not apply to colleges of further education or to nursery schools or nursery classes in infant or primary schools.

The Education (Special Schools) Regulations 1994 set out the requirements for collective worship in special schools.

The Education (Special Educational Needs) (Approval of Independent Schools) Regulations 1994 set out the requirements for collective worship in independent (usually special) schools for pupils who have been placed there by a local education authority.

The requirements are:

- schools must provide collective worship daily for all registered pupils,
- most acts of collective worship in each term should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. This means that they should reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination,
- collective worship can take place at any time during the school day,
- collective worship can be provided to pupils in any sized group, for example, as a class, a year group, a phase group or a whole-school community, and
- collective worship should take account of the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils involved.

There is no legal requirement to provide collective worship for pupils aged under five.

A parent can request that their child is excused from collective worship and schools must agree to such requests. Parents do not have to give reasons. Pupils who are excused must be supervised by the school. The school may, in agreement with parents, provide alternative arrangements for worship for one or more pupils that are excused, but is not obliged to do so. The school prospectus should refer to parents' right to request that their child is excused from collective worship and outline the arrangements for pupils who are excused.

The Education and Inspections Bill 2006 gives pupils in sixth forms the right to excuse themselves from collective worship. This legislation was brought into force in Wales in February 2009.

Teachers have the right to withdraw from collective worship. However, the school must ensure that collective worship is still provided daily for all pupils.

What is collective worship?

Worship is not defined in legislation. The guidance to schools in Welsh Office Circular 10/94 includes the following definition:

It must in some sense reflect something special or separate from ordinary school activities and it should be concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power.

Worship in schools will be different from worship amongst a group of people with beliefs in common. This is acknowledged in legislation through the reference to 'collective' worship rather than 'corporate' worship.

The aim of collective worship in schools is described in Welsh Office Circular 10/94:

Collective worship in schools should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider the spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to, watching and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes.

An act of collective worship is distinct from an assembly. Although they often take place during the same gathering, the difference between the two should be clear.

Collective worship in schools can take a number of forms. Pupils may take some or all of the lead. Some of the appropriate components of collective worship are outlined in the box below, but this should not be regarded as an exhaustive list. An act of collective worship may incorporate one or more of these components.

- **Reflection** – pupils may be encouraged to listen to, watch or reflect on an appropriate stimulus, such as a reading from the Bible or other religious writing, a drama sketch, a dance, a video, a song, a piece of music, an artefact, a poem, a story, a news article, a photograph, a picture, a prayer, a question, a ritual or a presentation or a talk from a member of staff or visiting speaker.
- **Prayer** – pupils may be encouraged to say a prayer aloud together or to pray individually in silence.
- **Song** – pupils may be encouraged to sing a hymn or other worship song together.
- **Reading** – pupils may be encouraged to read an extract from the Bible or other religious writing, or a 'thought for the day'.

Pupils may discuss a stimulus during collective worship, but discussion on its own must not be considered as worship. Equally, collective worship does not have to include the opportunity for discussion.

How do we inspect and report on collective worship?

Inspectors should inspect acts of collective worship in all schools that do not provide denominational education. They should consider acts of collective worship in their own right and in the context of planning over a period of time. In relation to statutory requirements for collective worship, they should only report on instances where the school does **not** comply with these.

In judging the quality indicator 2.3 ('Care, support and guidance'), inspectors will consider the quality of collective worship and whether a school meets the relevant legal requirements. Inspectors should consider the spirit of the law when inspecting collective worship as well as the letter of the law. Minor or occasional breaches should not lead to an overall judgement that a school does not comply with the legal requirements.

Although collective worship in a school may not comply with legal requirements, it may still make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Conversely, collective worship may satisfy legal requirements yet make a limited contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not sufficient for pupils to simply be present during collective worship. Inspectors must ensure that the person leading the worship at least prepares pupils appropriately and encourages them to listen to, watch or reflect on the worship offered. It can be difficult to judge whether or not pupils are listening to, watching or reflecting on worship and so inspectors may need to satisfy themselves that a reasonable attempt was made by the school to provide the opportunity for collective worship.

Inspectors:

- should not take notes during collective worship;
- should not time the length of collective worship – no minimum length is set in legislation or guidance;
- should not allow their personal views on collective worship or religion to affect their judgements; and
- are observers during collective worship and should not feel obliged to take part.

Frequently asked questions

1 Should pupils bow their heads and close their eyes during prayer?

It is their personal choice whether or not to bow their heads and close their eyes during prayer. If pupils choose not to, inspectors should not assume that they are being irreverent or disrespectful and nor should they conclude that the act of collective worship fails to meet the legal requirements because of this.

2 Should pupils say 'amen' at the end of a prayer?

It is their personal choice whether or not to agree with the prayer and whether or not to say 'amen' aloud. If pupils choose not to, inspectors should not assume that they are being irreverent or disrespectful and nor should they conclude that the act of collective worship fails to meet the legal requirements because of this.

3 Should pupils be made to sing hymns or worship songs?

It is their personal choice whether or not to sing hymns or worship songs. The law requires schools to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship. The law does not require schools to make pupils worship.

4 A whole-school act of collective worship observed during an inspection did not make any reference to the Christian faith – is this acceptable?

The law states that most acts of collective worship in each term should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian nature'. Therefore it is acceptable if occasionally an act of collective worship is not clearly linked to the Christian faith. Inspectors should check the school's record of recent themes for collective worship to ascertain whether or not the school complies with the law.

5 A primary school says it cannot provide collective worship on two days of the week as the only hall is not available. Is this acceptable?

No, this is not acceptable as the pupils do not have to congregate in a hall for collective worship. If the hall is not available on two days of the week then the school should make arrangements for collective worship to be provided in smaller groups in other rooms.

6 A teacher read a 'thought for the day' to a secondary school form group and asked the pupils to quietly reflect on it for a minute. A few pupils were playing cards whilst this was going on – is this acceptable?

No, it is not acceptable as the teacher should take reasonable action to ensure that the pupils are actively listening to the 'thought for the day' and that they are quiet and still during the time for reflection. However, inspectors would need to consider whether or not this is an isolated incident before determining whether or not the school, overall, meets the legal requirements.

7 An inspector is unsure whether the collective worship in a secondary school form group meets the legal requirements – what should the judgement be?

Unless an inspector is confident that the school is not providing pupils with the opportunity to worship then the judgement should be that the school meets the legal requirements.

8 The teacher of a form group in a secondary school does not agree with collective worship and does not give the pupils an opportunity to worship when they are not in a year or whole-school assembly. Does this mean that the school fails to meet the legal requirements?

Although teachers have the right to withdraw from collective worship, the school must still provide collective worship for pupils in this class. If the school does not usually make alternative arrangements for this class, then this would lead to a judgement that the school fails to meet the legal requirements.

9 During a secondary school inspection, a supply teacher for a form group does not provide pupils with an act of collective worship. Does this mean that the school fails to meet the legal requirements?

It may not always be possible for schools to provide a daily act of collective worship due to constraints on staff or for other reasons such as the availability of large rooms. Inspectors should therefore consider the provision over the year, not just on the day of the observation. The lack of provision for collective worship on one day should not on its own lead to a judgement that the school fails to meet the legal requirements.

10 Do schools have to provide collective worship for sixth-form pupils?

Schools must provide daily acts of collective worship for sixth-form pupils, but pupils may request to be excused from them. Under the Education and Inspections Bill 2006, sixth-form pupils have the right to excuse themselves from collective worship and schools should ensure that pupils are aware of this. Schools must not assume that sixth-form pupils wish to be excused from collective worship and therefore must have an active request from pupils to opt out. There is no requirement for pupils to put their request in writing, but schools should keep an up-to-date record of requests from pupils. Schools may usefully discuss this with pupils during their induction to the sixth form.

11 How can collective worship be 'broadly Christian' in a school that has a high proportion of Muslims?

The school should take account of the fact that it has a high proportion of Muslims. Those leading collective worship should be sensitive to the range of beliefs held by pupils in the school. Collective worship should give pupils the opportunity to worship without encouraging them to do something that is against the teachings of their religion. For example, times of prayer may be left open-ended for pupils to say their own prayers silently.

12 A school complies with the legal requirements for collective worship. Does this need to be noted in the inspection report?

No. Inspectors should only report on statutory requirements for collective worship where the school does **not** comply with these.

13 Is an assembly an act of collective worship?

The two terms are not interchangeable and mean different things. An assembly is often used to reinforce values and expectations, share news, celebrate achievement, and receive presentations from visitors, for example. An act of collective worship is a statutory requirement and may form a distinctive part of an assembly. However, a school could provide an act of collective worship separately from an assembly. When writing reports, inspectors should ensure that judgements refer appropriately to collective worship, assemblies, or both. For example, any of the judgements below could be appropriate:

- (i) 'acts of collective worship promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully';
- (ii) 'assemblies promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully';
- (iii) 'assemblies, including acts of collective worship, promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully'; or
- (iv) 'assemblies and acts of collective worship promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully'.