

Collective Worship in Church of England Schools

Inclusive Invitational Inspiring

A Statement of Entitlement and Expectation

Church of England schools have long had a reputation for high quality collective worship. They are places that recognise and value collective worship as central to fostering a sense of community and to expressing the school's Christian vision. In practice this means that structure, planning, evaluation, participation, collaboration, and inspection of worship are all taken seriously by the school and by diocesan authorities.

This document has been produced to challenge, to guide and set expectations for Church school communities and diocesan authorities encouraging them to reflect on their practice and to ensure that collective worship remains the relevant and essential component of an education that enables all pupils to flourish and to 'live life in all its fullness' John 10:10.

In Church of England schools, collective worship is seen as more than a daily 'awe and wonder' moment it is the unique heartbeat of the school and is offered as part of a wider opportunity for pupils and adults to encounter faith by engaging in conversations about God as individuals and together.

We want pupils to leave school with a rich experience and understanding of Christianity, and we are committed to offering them an encounter with Jesus Christ and with Christian faith and practice in a way that enhances their lives...Collective worship in schools, including prayer, reading and reflecting on the Bible, liturgy, sacrament and experience of the musical and other imaginative riches of Christianity, provide a vital opportunity for this.¹

This form of encounter through worship should be truly welcoming, inclusive and exemplifying the principles of Christian hospitality. This is an approach that seeks to meet the needs of all, wherever they may be on their journey.

¹ The Church of England Education Office, *Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*. (The Church of England Education Office 2016) page 10

draft 5 January 21

Collective worship in community schools is grounded in the historical past and enshrined in educational law to be ‘*wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character*’². In Church schools the requirement instead to reflect the Anglican status of the school as expressed in school’s trust deed liberates collective worship to build on the rich, lived diversity of Anglican tradition and identity. In the same way as worship in churches is aspirational, constantly evolving and being re-imagined there is an expectation of a continuous, dynamic reimagining of what collective worship means in the Church school.

Collective Worship: Inclusive, Invitational, and Inspiring

Inclusive: Worship is collective in that it involves meeting, exploring, questioning, and responding to others and for some to God. In the Church school pupils, their families and other adults can expect to encounter worship that is inclusive of, and fully accessible to, all. Many pupils and staff in our schools will come from homes of different faith backgrounds as well as no faith background. Moreover, many pupils will naturally be at different stages of their spiritual journey during their time with us. Pupils should be given the opportunity to think and ask questions. There should be space to consent, and dissent: to participate and to stand back and to consider. It is an expectation that care will have been taken to ensure that the language used by those facilitating worship avoids assuming faith in all those participating, listening and watching.

Collective worship should not be ‘done to’ but will involve meaningful contributions from the whole school community, including pupils. It is recognised that pupils will bring their own experience to worship. Inclusion extends to pupil involvement in planning, leading and the evaluation of worship. Although part of a national legislative framework collective worship in the Church school grows out of the local context and pupil’s experience including their cultural backgrounds. It should reflect the faith, belief, and ethnic communities the school serves. Collective worship should validate, embrace and celebrate all protected characteristics.

Invitational: Parents, pupils and adults can expect to encounter worship that is consistently invitational. There should be no compulsion to ‘do anything’: worship should provide the opportunity to engage whilst allowing the freedom of those of different faiths and none to be present and to engage with integrity. The metaphor of ‘warm fires and open doors’³ captures this idea. The warmth of the fire derives from the clarity and authenticity of the Christian message at its heart. There is no value to an encounter with a watered down, lowest common denominator version of faith. Importantly the door is open, all are welcome to come in and sit as near or as far away from the fire as they feel comfortable. Pupils and adults will always only be invited to pray if they wish and invited to pray in their own way. Prayer will always be accompanied by the option to reflect.

Music used in worship will reflect the best of traditional and modern Anglican worship, it will connect with the theme and explore the sacred to educate and engage. Music used should reflect the diverse worship experience of the wider Christian community. Care will be taken to ensure that pupils and adults do not feel compelled to sing strongly confessional lyrics. There should be no assumption of

² *Education Reform Act 1988 section 7(1) and the corresponding section of the Education Act 1993*

³ Speech by David Thomson, Bishop of Huntingdon 2014 quoted in *The Fruits of the Spirit: A Church of England Discussion Paper on Character Education* (The Church of England Education Office 2015) page 13

draft 5 January 21

Christian faith in those present. All liturgies used will reflect the trust deed or be authorised by the Archbishops council⁴.

Inspiring: Pupils and adults can expect that the worship they encounter in a Church school will be inspirational. Worship should be formational and transformational: it should enable pupils and adults to ask big questions about who we are and why we do what we do. It should motivate pupils and adults into action, into thinking differently, into reflecting on their and the wider community's behaviour and actions. They should be inspired to become courageous advocates of causes. It should encourage them to think searchingly about their faith, beliefs and/or philosophical convictions.

There will always be those who are uncomfortable to enter through this open door of worship in our schools and so the Church of England recognises the right of withdrawal from collective worship for those parents or pupils⁵ who wish to exercise this option. This, and how to exercise this choice, should be explained fully in the school's collective worship policy and referenced on the school's website.

Collective Worship: Aims and objectives:

The aspiration to provide collective worship that is Inclusive, Invitational and Inspiring is underpinned by the following aims and objectives and will be monitored and assured through the denominational inspection process SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools).⁶

Collective worship in a Church of England school will:

- Explore the school's vision and how that underpins shared values and virtues; to reflect on moral values such as compassion, gratitude, justice, humility, forgiveness and reconciliation; and to develop what might be termed performance virtues such as resilience, determination and creativity that develop character and contribute to academic progress.
- Help pupils and adults to appreciate the relevance of faith in today's world, to encounter the teachings of Jesus and the Bible and to develop their understanding of the trinitarian language about God and the Christian belief in the trinitarian nature of God.
- Offer the opportunity, without compulsion, to all pupils and adults to grow spiritually through experiences of prayer, stillness, worship and reflection.
- Enable all pupils and adults to appreciate that Christians worship in different ways, for example using music, silence, story, prayer, reflection, the varied liturgical and other traditions of Anglican worship, festivals and, where appropriate, the Eucharist.
- Enable pupils to develop skills through engaging in the planning, leading and evaluation of collective worship in ways that lead to improving practice.

⁴ Where there are joint schools the liturgies should reflect this status where a joint trust deed or Methodist church those liturgies used must be authorised versions.

⁵ Under Section 55 of the Education and Inspections Act, it remains the case that only pupils in sixth form education or over the age of compulsory school age (Section 55. 9) may withdraw themselves from collective worship.

⁶ The Church of England Education Office, *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Evaluation Schedule* (The National Society 2018)

Collective Worship: Provision

The rhythm of daily worship allows pupils and adults to step away from the driven culture of much of education, creating a space for an encounter with faith in God and reflect on larger questions of meaning and purpose. Pupils and adults can expect that the school's routine will provide a shared set of symbols, signs, words and actions which give the community a language upon which it can draw, in times of joy and grief. Such an experience is key to fostering a sense of fellowship and cohesion within the school community. Whether in times of crisis or celebration, this time set aside in the school day provides staff and pupils with the opportunity to gather and support one another as a community.

Throughout the year, Church school communities may meet to celebrate and mark certain seasons in the Church calendar, such as Lent and Advent . Other important events in the school year such as the start and end of the academic year may be marked by formal acts of collective worship. Pupils and adults will encounter the practice of regular prayer and worship as a normal part of the life of the school. These activities will help provide a rhythm and stillness as a pattern of community life.

Parents, pupils and adults can expect that worship in a Church school will follow a recognisable structure. A structure that will help focus worship on one idea, gives organisation and clarity to the unfolding of that idea, helps the leader ensure worship is age-appropriate and moves away from making worship a performance art. This could take the form of a welcome or prayer followed by a consideration of Bible passage or story that the group can then reflect on through discussion, prayer, silent reflection or music. It will be something that pupils and adults may want to share and discuss with others both in school, in the community and at home.

Developing staff expertise and knowledge: Confidence through professionalism

Parents, pupils and adults are entitled to be led in worship by those who have a secure understanding of the nature of collective worship in a Church school context and by those who are professional in their approach to working with pupils and adults from all faiths and none. Therefore, it should be a priority to build up the expertise of staff, pupils, clergy and other adults in facilitating collective worship in Church schools. To do this the school should ensure that:

- Worship leaders, including clergy, have access to regular training, primarily through local diocesan education teams.
- Pupil worship leaders should be supported, encouraged and resourced to contribute meaningful acts of worship.
- Worship leaders, including clergy, have access to high quality and current resources.
- The governing body should have robust systems in place to monitor the impact of worship effectively; this monitoring will include and meaningfully involve pupil voice. Those facilitating worship should have the opportunity to receive feedback and the hear the outcome of evaluation.
- Those from outside agencies and church groups invited into the school to facilitate worship should be trained and properly briefed about the school, its pupil context and the school's vision. They should be supported and monitored as part of the school's systems for the evaluation of the impact of worship.

draft 5 January 21

- There should be a named member of staff responsible for collective worship with responsibility for ensuring that policy and practice are in place and publicly available.

Faith in the Nexus⁷ and Growing Faith⁸

Church schools owe their existence to the vision of Joshua Watson and the founding of the National Society, and their trust deeds to the foresight of past church communities. The local church community, through its foundation and ex officio governors, are inheritors and guardians of the school's historic trust deed. This involves honouring tradition while re-imagining how this might look today. Today for some this has found new expression in the 'Growing Faith' initiative.

'Growing Faith' promotes a partnership between the three local communities of church, school and household to provide a safe space to talk of faith & spiritual matters or ask challenging questions within and between these three communities.

Three principles exemplify this approach:

- **Connected Communities:** looking for meaningful community connections in the intersection between church, school and household.
- **Encounters with God:** encountering faith and belief by engaging in conversations about God as individuals and together.
- **Imaginative practices:** searching for 'a new way of being church' and creating new thinking and new doing in relation to children, young people and households.

This has been described as developing 'faith talk' in the 'Faith in the Nexus' report. Specifically, the Church school is a place for 'faith talk' where Encounters with God may happen. The 'Growing Faith initiative' is not part of the SIAMS schedule but the local church should normally expect to be part of a church school partnership that encourages and supports the school in effectively developing the impact of and provision for worship. Families can also expect to be partners in collective worship: involved, informed and enabled to collaborate at home if they should wish.

Derek Holloway
School Character and SIAMS Development Manager
January 2021

⁷ <https://nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus>

⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/renewal-reform/growing-faith>