

## Collective Worship – Inclusivity

An act of collective worship (a spiritually focussed whole school assembly) is an activity unique to schools. It is distinct from corporate worship (as practised by a self-selecting group of believers from any one faith tradition) in a number of ways; primarily in that the content is:

- a) required by law to provide pupils with an opportunity to worship God; and yet
- b) remain suitable for pupils of any faith tradition (or none) to listen to.

### Intention

A key intention of the legislation concerning acts of collective worship, is that the **whole school** community gathers together **daily**. In some circumstances, or on some occasions, this is not possible. While it is acceptable for a programme of collective worship to include acts of collective worship that only involve part of the school (eg a Key Stage, year group or class); a spiritually focussed assembly for a group of pupils selected on the basis of their religious tradition or heritage is NOT an act of collective worship.

### Three-layered Approach

The approach to acts of collective worship recommended by Birmingham City Council is that of a three-tiered approach: universal, theistic, and faith-specific.

- The universal layer is the underlying theme, suitable for every pupil. It will often be expressed as a moral imperative: eg 'be generous'; 'respect others'; or 'show moral courage'. It may equally be expressed as a value or desired attitude: eg 'forgiveness'; 'patience'; or 'equality'. All pupils may be exhorted to consider the theme and to apply their conclusions to their everyday lives.
- The theistic layer concerns the nature and/or character of God and should be presented, alongside the universal layer, as a view held by some people, but not by all. Pupils are free to consider this view and may choose to: identify with it; compare and contrast it to their own views; or completely reject it.
- The faith-specific layer concerns a distinctive belief held by people of a specified religious tradition and should be clearly presented as such. It is the faith specific layer that gives the act of collective worship it's specific religious character. Therefore, to meet the legislated requirement that "the majority of acts of collective worship" are "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" it is not acceptable to consistently avoid speaking of "the life and works of Jesus Christ, including his death and resurrection."

### Tips

- Always identify source material eg "Today's story is taken from the Christian holy book, the Bible" or "The thought for today is based on a quotation by Buddha" or " We will begin by looking at the morning prayer said by devout Sikhs each day upon waking".
- Preface theistic or faith-specific comments with phrases such as: "Most Christians believe..." or "The Qur'an says..." or "A widely held view by those who worship God is..."

- Restrict the use of pronouns. If you say 'we' 'they' or 'you' can you be sure the children will know who you mean? Much clearer to use nouns.

- Similarly, keep sentence structure short and simple to avoid misunderstandings.

### **In Practice**

In order to qualify as an act of collective worship, there must be an opportunity for those pupils who want to worship to do so. This will most likely take the form of a responsive song, a time of reflection or a prayer.

- Choosing songs that provide an opportunity to worship but do not put 'unwanted or inappropriate words' into children's mouths, can be difficult for some school communities.

- Whilst a 'time of reflection' has its place, if the device is overused, children may neither know, nor learn, how to turn the silence into a worship opportunity.

- A suitable way to include prayer is by the leader saying:

"I will end this act of collective worship by saying a prayer. If you agree with my prayer, you may say 'Amen' or 'Amin' at the end. These words mean, 'I agree'. It is a way of saying to God that you want my prayer to be your prayer too. **But (slightly slower and emphatic) you don't have to pray.** If you don't want to, or you don't think you should, it is perfectly acceptable to sit quietly and think about what you have heard this morning.

NOTE: The prayer itself should be carefully worded in order that a large percentage of the school community could 'agree' with it.