

Policy for Collective Worship



Document control			
Author	E Underwood	Approved by	Trust Board
Approved date	17 March 2022	Next Review	01 March 2024
Policy Type	Trust / Statutory		
Review Period	Biennial		
Version	Date issued	Author	Update information
v1.0	17 March 2022	E Underwood	First publication

Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust is comprised of three secondary schools and 14 primary schools of which six are Church of England schools. The Trust believes that collective acts of worship should support and strengthen what we aim to do in every aspect of school life. We value the opportunities in the school day for children to develop a reflective approach to life and their ability to express their thoughts, either as a religious belief or secular reflection.

This policy provides the guidance for our schools to encourage active participation collective worship, helping schools to implement effective practice and reflective experiences for our children and young people. In addition, our Church of England primary schools follow the Collective Worship Guidance May 2021, produced by The Church of England Education Office.

What collective worship brings to our schools

- A time when school comes together as a community
- A time to balance the 'what' of academic pursuits with the 'why' found in spiritual reflection
- A time for spirituality and stillness, connecting the inner with the outer
- A time to reflect on stories of inspiration, struggle and hope
- A time for sharing and reflection, where any prayers are *inclusive* and *invitational*
- A time when the school family gathers to support each other
- A time to communicate and live out the shared values and expectations of the school

Collective Worship and the Law

'Collective worship in schools should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes'.¹

¹ DfE Circular 1/94 (paragraph 50)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf

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‘The majority of acts of worship must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’² This means that most school worship should reflect Christian **beliefs**, not necessarily Christian **worship practices**.

An academy’s funding agreement should mirror the requirements for acts of collective worship in local authority maintained schools. This legislation is set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Section 70.

Academies should follow paragraphs 50 to 88 of the Department for Education’s guidance on collective worship in schools.

- All registered school pupils (5 - 18) must take part in a daily act of collective worship unless they have been withdrawn by their parents, or if in the sixth form they have decided to withdraw themselves. This applies to academies with and without a religious designation.
- Academies with a religious designation must provide collective worship in accordance with the tenets and practices of the academy’s designated faith. It can also choose to reflect the other principal religions and those found in the local community.
- The above also applies to former voluntary-controlled or foundation schools with a religious designation that have converted to academies. They must provide collective worship in accordance with the tenets and practices of the academy’s designated faith.
- Academies without a religious designation must provide collective worship that is ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’. A school can reflect the religious backgrounds represented in its community, as long as the majority of provision is broadly Christian in character’. That is, most (or all) of the acts of worship must reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any one Christian denomination.
- Collective worship may be held at any time during the school day.
- Separate acts of collective worship may be arranged for different age or school groupings.
- The Trust recognises the diverse composition of its Trust community (those with different faiths and worldviews) and takes care to ensure that any collective acts of worship do not act to preach to, or attempt to convert children to any faith or denomination. As such, collective worship must be appropriate, having regard to the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the children and young people.
- Where worship which is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character is inappropriate, the Principal and governors may apply to the local SACRE (and the Trust would need to refer to the terms of its funding agreement), for permission to arrange worship for all or some of the children and young people which is not wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character (see ‘Determinations’ below).
- All academies, in accordance with our funding agreements, will be inspected under Ofsted criteria which look to make judgements about spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) and so collective worship may play a part of their decisions.

Within the legal framework the responsibility for arranging collective worship rests with:

² DfE Circular 1/94 (paragraph 62)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf

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- the Principal in community (non-Church of England) schools. Teachers will not be compelled to lead or participate in collective worship, but it is the responsibility of Principal to ensure that it takes place.
- the governors of the Local Stakeholder Board in consultation with the Principal our Church of England schools.
- The Diocese of Exeter also produces guidance on planning collective worship for Church of England schools³.

The right to withdraw from collective worship

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship under the terms of The Education Reform Act 1988 S.9 (3). A request must be submitted to the Principal of the school.

Every request will be respected and the individual arrangements for the child, and how the child's withdrawal can be accommodated, will be discussed with the parents/carers.

From age 16, students can choose for themselves to opt out of collective worship if they wish. However, they cannot opt out of receiving religious education without parental consent until they are 18.

Introducing Collective Worship

The Trust hopes that all teachers, regardless of their beliefs or worldview, will feel able to participate in (and possibly take a lead in) acts of collective worship which are genuinely open and inclusive.

Schools without a religious character are secular spaces, but this does not mean they are non-religious spaces. A secular space is where all beliefs are given respect, where no single religious or non-religious worldview takes precedence over another.

As a secular space, the school is a forum where expressions of religious and non-religious beliefs, together with dialogue and discussions about and between different faiths and worldviews, can take place. Devon SACRE encourages open and respectful exchanges about different religions and worldviews.

We favour a **broad** definition of worship which allows our children and young people to reflect upon their shared human experience and feelings of joy and sadness, thankfulness and need, their reflections on shared values and concerns and the exploration of the spiritual area of experience.

As with all areas of the curriculum, collective worship should provide a valid educational experience. There is also the need to respect the different beliefs of teachers, parents and children. Worship can only be inclusive if it has a broad definition to include those who both do, and don't have a belief in divine beings or powers.

What does 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' mean?

The Act states that the Collective Worship organised by the school is to be '*wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character*'. This means that most school worship should reflect Christian **beliefs**, not necessarily Christian **worship practices**.

³ <https://exeter.anglican.org/schools/christian-ethos-siams/collective-worship/>

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These Christian beliefs are reflected in the life and teaching of Jesus, but also give rise to values which are in harmony with the broad spiritual and moral concerns that are shared by the world's religions and other worldviews.

In selecting *broadly Christian* material or any other material, it is important that schools ensure that acts of worship are 'inclusive'. It must be remembered that it is not the role of the school to nurture religious faith. Assemblies that raise the beliefs suggested, provide opportunities for '*broadly Christian*' collective worship, as well as stimulating all young people to reflect, to feel awe, to learn to be still and to consider the direction and meaning of their lives.

Aims of Collective Worship

Collective worship in our Trust should ease and promote a polite and vigorous expression of beliefs and a dialogue between them. It should emphasise a community ethos that celebrates all that is shared.

The unifying element for each act of collective worship will be a central theme focusing the attention of all taking part on a single idea. Examples of suitable themes for collective worship are: the school's agreed shared vision and values, school or local events, a topic explored by one class, the lives and experiences of people past and present, current religious festivals, national and international days etc.

We aim for children to:

- Gain insights into the ways in which they and others express themselves according to the tenets of their faith.
- Increase awareness of themselves as individuals and groups within the school community.
- Promote respect and sensitivity for the beliefs and values of others
- Acknowledge diversity.
- Celebrate the values and worth of their whole school community and all who belong in it, including the sharing of the gifts and talents of all children.
- Understand the feelings of others in everyday situations.
- Explore the language used to express feelings.
- Deepen their sense of wonder about the world around them.
- Grow in the confidence to express their thoughts.
- Respond to spiritual stimulus

The methods used to present particular themes may include:

- Spoken word: story, poetry, interviews, discussion, readings from the Bible and from other religious and secular literature and choral speaking
- Music and singing: hymns, popular songs, chants, or singing games
- Visual stimuli: pictures, posters, artefacts, natural objects, religious objects, personal objects, works of art, or film clips
- Performance: dance, music, mime, drama, role play, or puppets
- Music: either performed or played
- Preparing and sharing food
- Silence: stilling, reflection, contemplation, meditation and, if appropriate, prayer

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In today's plural society a creative silence may well be more inclusive than vocalised prayer. It can give an opportunity for prayer⁴, without insisting on it. People can be guided to be still, to quieten their mental chatter and to discover their deeper self, the ground of their being, that place which some spiritual writers identify as the dwelling of God. If done well, such acts of collective worship could encourage a less frenetic, more peaceful ethos in a school.

Reflection Room

Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust recognises that, if requested by children, families or staff, that it is good practice, where practicable, to provide a facility that permits worship of religions and beliefs. Therefore, the policy of the Trust is, if requested, to take an inclusive approach towards providing, where practicable, a quiet room for use by any member of the school community. Such a room could be for prayer or personal reflection. If requested and practicable, the school will consult with pupils to ensure availability of the room in order to meet their needs.

Policy Circulation and Review

This policy will be published on the Trust's website with links to it from all Trust schools. It will be reviewed at least bi-annually and in accordance with guidance from the DfE and Church of England.

⁴ All prayers should be inclusive and invitational, not instructional