

Duties on maintained schools with regards to collective worship

Legal requirements: All schools must provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The aim of collective worship is to develop pupils socially, morally, spiritually and culturally. The 1994 legal framework documentation regarding collective worship still stands. Added to this is the recent requirement to promote British values as part of SMSC (Ofsted, September 2014, DfE, November 2014).

Free schools and academies have the same requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship as maintained and faith schools, as part of their funding agreement.

Some schools struggle with the requirement that collective worship is broadly Christian. Some community schools will request a 'determination' if their school has a clearly defined non-Christian religious community. Maintained schools apply to their local SACRE and academies apply directly to the Secretary of State to request a change of determination. A determination can lift the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1988 that collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' and usually lasts five years.

Collective worship is about a school's duty to develop pupils spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. This may include learning about interesting cultural traditions and their meaning, listening to stories with a moral message and reflecting on themes such as strength, courage or loyalty.

Collective worship should draw pupils' attention to the values the school wishes to develop both as a body and in each individual. Collective worship is about the growth of the person, their character and social outlook, whatever their academic aptitudes.

Right of withdrawal: the right of withdrawal from collective worship stands for all parents and teachers. Some people argue that the daily act of collective worship is not an appropriate educational requirement for schools. The detail of the guidance in Circular 1/94 about the nature of such collective worship does not represent the law. However this requirement would have to be tested in law, which has not yet been done. The 2013 report by Essex SACRE explores this possibly contentious issue.