

2 November 2022		ITEM: 5
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education		
Collective Worship		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

One of the duties of SACRE is to monitor the provision of Acts of Collective Worship in schools in the local authority. In the past, the information that enabled a SACRE to fulfil this duty might have been provided by a specialist local adviser who worked full time in an area. Cuts in the budgets of local authorities mean that only a small number employ such an adviser. Thurrock SACRE is fortunate that the Council do fund a specialist adviser for a fixed number of days to support their work. Likewise, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) used to report on Acts of Worship but shorter inspections and a change in their focus means that inspectors do not systematically report on Acts of Collective Worship.

Thurrock SACRE reviewed the policies of a number of schools in the summer term meeting 2019 and summer term 2020 and reported to schools on their findings. This report proposes that SACRE review a third sample of policies on Acts of Collective Worship that appear on school websites to determine if anything has changed in the last year and to identify good practice. As with the 2019 and 2020 exercises, the aim of the exercise will be monitoring of provision and also for SACRE to become more informed about practice in local schools.

- 1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:**
 - 1.1 Consider a sample of policies from Thurrock schools to determine how Collective Worship is offered in local schools in the light of the legal requirements set out in section 3 below.**
 - 1.2 Consider the advice sent to schools previously (Appendix 1) and whether or not any amendments need to be made to the advice in the light of any new evidence**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Acts of collective worship – traditionally called ‘assemblies’ by teachers and pupils alike – have long been a feature of British school life. The 1944 Education Act simply stated that each school day should begin with an act of collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance at the school. The daily requirement was restated in the 1988 Education Act which also set out a series of new legislative requirements concerning the organisation and character of collective worship.
- 2.2 The government introduced guidance for schools in relation to the law of Religious Education and Collective Worship in the form of Circular 1/94. The Religious Education element of this document was updated by the publication of ‘Religious Education in English Schools’ in 2010 but no update was provided in relation to Acts of Collective Worship leaving schools with guidance that is more than 20 years old.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 What does the legislation require?

The legal requirements can be summarised as follows:

- 3.1.1. All registered pupils in state-funded schools should take part in a daily act of collective worship unless wholly or partly withdrawn by parents. The term ‘registered pupils’ includes students up to and including the age of eighteen years in a school sixth form or at a sixth form college but not pupils in nursery schools or classes. Students over the age of 18 are entitled to withdraw themselves from the Act of worship. Collective worship for special school pupils should be provided so far as practicable.
- 3.1.2 There can be a single whole school act of collective worship or separate acts for pupils in different age of school activity groupings.
- 3.1.3. Acts of collective worship can take place at any time of the school day and, with certain exceptions, should take place on the school premises.
- 3.1.4 In a community, academy or foundation schools (ie other than at voluntary-aided schools), most acts of collective worship each term should be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’, that is, ‘reflecting’ the ‘broad traditions of Christian belief’ without being denominationally biased. But acts of collective worship should also be appropriate, having regard to pupils’ ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds.
- 3.1.5 If a community, academy or foundation school believes that the Christian character clause (4 above) is inappropriate for the whole school or certain pupils within it, application can be made for a determination to have that clause lifted or modified. In the case of Academy schools, that application should be made to the Educational Funding Agency. In the case of community

or foundation school, to the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) Unless the school requests otherwise, a determination will be reviewed by the local SACRE after five years. A determination does not lift the requirement for daily collective worship. Such worship must not be denominational but may be distinctive of a particular faith.

- 3.1.6 Teachers – including head teachers – have the right to withdraw from collective worship (though, in voluntary schools, these conditions may vary) and cannot be discriminated against for so doing. Attending ‘assemblies’, on the other hand, is part of a teacher’s contractual duty.
- 3.1.7 In a community or foundation school, it is the responsibility of a head teacher, in consultation with the governors, to see that these arrangements are carried out. In a voluntary-aided school, it is the responsibility of the governors, in consultation with the head teacher.
- 3.2 The legislation on Collective Worship requires schools to offer a daily act of collective worship that is ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’. At first reading, this language may appear to disadvantage children who come from families that do not practice a religious faith or who come from a faith other than Christianity.
 - 3.2.1 The legislation does however, permit schools to apply to SACRE for a determination to vary the character of Acts of Worship if they see fit. Alternatively, they may use flexibility present in the language i.e. wholly or mainly may be interpreted to mean 50% or more. Similarly, ‘broadly Christian’ is different from ‘distinctively Christian’ and a worship theme such as the importance of forgiveness, that is broadly Christian might also be broadly Jewish, Muslim, Sikh etc.
 - 3.2.2 Acts of worship provide an opportunity to celebrate the diversity present in their school community, locally and nationally. The way that policies are developed are therefore a useful indicator of how they engage with these issues.
 - 3.2.3 Acts of worship may help schools promote the British Value of tolerance and respect for those with different religions and beliefs.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 In the absence of information from school visits to observe collective worship, the review of websites appears to be a strategy that can be used to conduct some monitoring of collective worship.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the analysis of the data collected through this exercise will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Sarah Dawkins**
Barrister (Consultant) on behalf of the Chief Legal Officer

I confirm that this report along with the appendices referred to has been read in full. The legal functions of the SACRE are set out in section 391 of the Education Act 1996. Those functions, amongst others, includes the requirement to advise the local authority upon such matters connected with religious worship in county schools and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit. The matters referred to includes methods of teaching, the choice of materials and the provision of training for teachers. Furthermore, upon receiving written notification of any such requirement to consider a syllabus, to cause a conference constituted in accordance with paragraph 3 of Schedule 31 to the 1996 Act, to be convened for the purpose of reconsidering any agreed syllabus to which the requirement relates.

The recommendations set out within the report are therefore consistent with the functions of the SACRE, accordingly, there appears to be no adverse external legal implications arising from the recommendation.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

As mentioned in section 3.2 above, the Acts of Worship, like religious education can be a means by which schools celebrate the diversity in their school and local community. This in turn may help pupils to develop respect and tolerance for those with beliefs that are different to their own.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

- Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Report Sent to Schools After Previous Review
- Appendix 2 - Religious Education and Collective Worship Policy
- Appendix 3 - Written parliamentary question on RE and Collective Worship

Report Author:

Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix 1

Report Sent To Schools After Previous Review

Collective Worship

One of the statutory duties of a SACRE is to monitor the provision of Acts of Collective Worship in schools.

Members agreed that the most helpful policies included some or all of the following:

- A statement about the legal requirements around collective worship including the parental and teacher right of withdrawal
- The aims of collective worship in the school including links to school ethos and values, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, fundamental British Values and the taught curriculum
- Objectives or intended outcomes for the programme of collective worship
- Practical arrangements about how Collective Worship is organised in the school:
 - Groupings (e.g. year groups, classes/tutor groups, houses, whole school)
 - Timings, including links to the school timetable, calendar and local and national occasions and festivals
 - Leaders and their roles in collective worship – e.g. visitors, senior and middle leaders, individual and groups of pupils
- A clear statement about the nature of collective worship; what it is and what it is not. How collective worship:
 - may link to but is distinct from ‘assembly’
 - is different from corporate worship
 - is implemented in a way that is inclusive of those with religious and non-religious worldviews
- A statement about how the effectiveness of the policy will be reviewed, by whom and when

SACRE members also noted that although it is no longer a requirement for schools to have a policy on Collective Worship, it is important that parents are clear about how schools fulfil this statutory duty. There was a legal challenge to an Oxford school’s practice in relation to Collective Worship in 2019. SACRE concluded that although the case was settled out of court, schools would be well advised to ensure their practice was fully inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews.

Religious education and collective worship policy

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT HACH

HACH follow the locally agreed Thurrock SACRE guidance for teaching Religious Education. This includes an exploration of enquiry questions that cover the 'believe', 'expressing' and 'living' component of faith. At Key Stage 3 this includes understanding the concept of faith, its function for the individual and society as well as reflective questions such as the purpose of life, the afterlife and ethical consideration of the use of violence and medical ethical issues. Students investigate these questions through the lenses of a range of religions as well as Humanism. The aim of which is to introduce students to different ways of viewing the world and ways of living. We aim to investigate together significant human questions and be able to appreciate and appraise various responses with curiosity and care as well as developing responses of their own.

As students' progress to KS4 they explore the Beliefs and Practices of both Christianity and Buddhism. They also apply these teachings to four ethical/philosophical themes: Social Justice, Equality, Human Relationships and Religion and Life (AQA specification).

The Religious Education provided allows students to make reasoned and informed choices about key ethical dilemmas which may be presented to students throughout their lives; as they learn both about and from religion. It is also a method of delivering key fundamental British Values and promoting religious tolerance in the community. Embedded within our curriculum are the principles of promoting positive well-being and belonging, community cohesion as well as the moral and spiritual development of our students.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Students are all given the opportunity to develop socially, morally, spiritually and culturally in an activity or experience that is separate from normal academic school activities. At HACH, these activities also draw students' attention to the values that we hold as important to develop within each student. These values include achieving one's personal best, developing an appreciation of others and enabling students to grow up into responsible members of our community. As a non-faith/non-denominational school we do not lead any formal collective worship, but we do embrace students that chose to do so and join in celebrations throughout the year. Students and staff both have access to our multi-prayer room if they wish to use this facility for worship. We also open our doors to the local community as the local Christian church use our facility on Sundays for worshipping.

STRATEGY

Religious Studies within HACH focuses on the need to prepare our students to play a full and active role in society, with a thorough understanding of religious and cultural difference in a pluralistic society. This is accomplished through quality teaching of the history of religions, differing theologies and their social presence in the public sphere. Religious Studies in HACH also compliments our SMSC and PSHE offer to develop our students' understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism, discrimination and extremism. We also focus on the impact of religion and religious ethics on our local communities. Students at HACH are able to tackle these topics in a reasoned, nonprejudicial manner, and are enabled through quality teaching to critically analyse sources of authority and religious teachings and philosophies. We pride ourselves on ensuring that our students leave our school as well rounded citizens. They have a holistic understanding of British Values related to (particularly) Abrahamic faiths ethics, as well as knowledge of all other major world faiths and humanism increasing an awareness and appreciation of the changing face of British society (as per section 375 (3) of the Education Act 1996). Religious Education is mapped against the Thurrock agreed SACRE syllabus.

OUR STRUCTURE

Religious Studies is compulsory for all Key Stage 3 students.
Year 7 – 9 classes, 2 contact hours per fortnight
Year 10 – 11, 4 contact hours per fortnight if it was a selected option
Year 12-13, 10 contact hours per fortnight if it was a selected option

Author: Francis Sanni Principal: Heather Stannard Chair of governors: Mr P Udrzal
Date of policy: Sept 2021

Review of policy: June 2022

Please also see the attached Adobe Acrobat documents containing the policies of St Thomas of Canterbury Primary and Thameside Primary

Appendix 3

Written parliamentary question on RE and Collective Worship – 20th September 2022



Beth Winter Labour, Cynon Valley

To ask the [Secretary of State](#) for Education, whether he plans to conduct a review of the statutory requirements for daily collective worship in schools.

- [Hansard source](#)(Citation: HC Deb, 20 September 2022, cW)



Beth Winter Labour, Cynon Valley

To ask the [Secretary of State](#) for Education, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his Department's policies on (a) the teaching arrangements for religious education and (b) collective worship in primary schools of the judgment of Mr Justice Colton of the [Northern Ireland](#) High Court handed down on 5 July 2022 relating to Christian-focused education in primary schools in Northern Ireland.

- [Hansard source](#)(Citation: HC Deb, 20 September 2022, cW)



Jonathan Gullis The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education

Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The Department has read and considered the legislative framework for teaching religious education in [Northern Ireland](#) and is of the view that it is not authoritative on the teaching of religious education or delivery of collective worship in England.

The Department currently has no plans to amend or repeal the legal duty on schools to provide a daily act of collective worship. The Government believes that the law in England is both inclusive and flexible in allowing all schools to tailor their provision to suit their pupils' needs and it provides a unique opportunity for schools to develop and celebrate their ethos and values. [Collective worship](#) also allows schools the opportunity to promote the moral and social development of their pupils in a way that best suits the needs of the community.