

5 June 2019		ITEM: 6
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: Rory Patterson, 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.

This report proposes that SACRE review a sample of policies on Acts of Collective Worship that appear on school websites. 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:

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.

The policies of the following 5 schools are attached in Appendix 1

- 1. Harris Aspire**
- 2. Bonnygate**
- 3. Horndon on the Hill**
- 4. Kenningtons**
- 5. St Clere's**

2. Introduction and Background

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.

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 still be un-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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5. Acts of worship may help schools promote the British Value of tolerance and respect for those with different religions and beliefs.
- 3.6 A review of policies may help SACREs to assess how schools have responded to the issues set out above.

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 elements of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance Corporate 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: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal Social Care & Education

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in section 391 Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools which do not have a religious character and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Strategic Lead Community Development & Equalities

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, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Collective Worship of Five local schools.

Report Author:

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