
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Acts of Collective Worship

A guide for schools in Redbridge



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Updated 2016

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Introduction

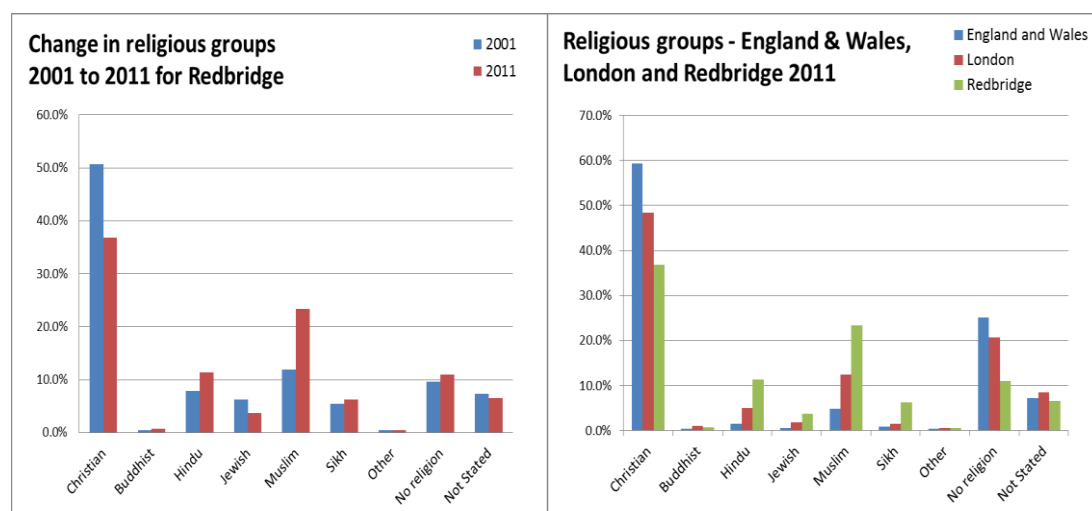
Acts of collective worship – traditionally called 'assemblies' by teachers and pupils alike – have long been a feature of British school life.

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.

This updated guidance for Redbridge Schools is therefore being issued in response to school requests for clarification about fulfilling their statutory responsibilities in a way that takes account of the modern context of Redbridge Schools.

Redbridge



What does the legislation require?

The legal requirements can be summarised as follows:

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registered pupils in state-funded schools should take part in a daily act of collective worship unless wholly or partly withdrawn by parents.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.

There can be a single whole school act of collective worship or separate acts for pupils in different age of school activity groupings.

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.

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.

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 undenominational but may be distinctive of a particular faith.

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.

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.

What is the meaning of the terminology?

Worship: SACRE members found the following definition of worship helping in their exploration of Acts of Collective worship in a school context: “Worship has to do with worth and worthiness. It is the recognition, affirmation and celebration of the ‘worship’ of certain realities and values, held to be of central importance to the community which worships. The act of worshipping renews the meaning of these realities and values for the community, helping each of its members to grasp them personally”¹

Reflection on celebration of those values that the school considers important can therefore provide a good starting point for the planning of collective worship.

The imprecise use of terms can sometimes both reveal and perpetuate imprecise understanding. It is important, then, to draw to a distinction between:

collective worship
religious education (RE)

Collective worship and RE are separate parts of school provision for which different legislative requirements apply. Time used for RE counts towards a school’s total curriculum time whilst this is not the case for collective worship.

This is not to deny, of course, that there can be a fruitful interplay between RE and collective worship – as the 2014 Redbridge Agreed Syllabus makes clear

But OFSTED reports have sometimes pointed out that, when the distinction between collective worship and RE is blurred, the quality of both aspects of school provision can be lowered. To guard against this, it is advisable for schools to have a policy on collective worship separate to that on RE. In the same way, an increasing number of schools make a clear distinction between the roles of ‘RE subject leader’ and ‘assembly leader’;

Collective worship and assembly

Though the latter term has traditionally been used in schools, drawing a formal distinction between the two terms is important because there is no legislative requirement for schools to hold assemblies

the right of withdrawal applies to collective worship but not assembly

the term ‘act of collective worship’ carries implications for practice which the term ‘assembly’ does not;

1. ¹ Paths to Understanding, Hampshire Education Authority, 1980.

Corporate worship and collective worship

There is an irreconcilable tension or paradox within the notion of 'school worship'. This might best be expressed as a question: how can a community which is not by nature religious (ie a school) meaningfully provide an activity called 'worship'?

It is now generally acknowledged (1) that the kind of 'worship' which a school is required to provide is not the same kind of activity as that found within a faith group. In order to stress this, the distinction is often made between

'corporate worship' (ie that kind of worship found within a religious community – a 'corpus' or body of believers – whose members meet voluntarily and for reasons of shared commitment)

and

'collective worship' (ie that kind of worship which legislation requires schools to provide, which should be consistent with educational aims, and which involves a 'collectivity' of people with a range of religious commitments and none).

Legislation requires schools to provide collective, not corporate worship.

A period of reflection

The requirement that schools offer a daily act of collective worship can be a valuable opportunity to provide the school community with a period of time for reflection or prayer at the start of or during the busy school day. The school community in a Redbridge school will almost certainly be made up of children from families with different faiths and from those with non-religious worldviews. The style of the period of reflection must therefore be inclusive of all of these groups by inviting a response but not requiring one.

An invitation to think or pray

A period of reflection can be as simple as asking children to bow their heads and think or pray for a while and following this invitation with a brief period of silence. The advantage of this method is that it gives students the chance to consider the ideas that have been explored in an assembly rather than immediately returning to class where a new learning activity begins. The invitation to think or pray may be a little more specific and include a suggestion for a focus. For example, after an assembly in a secondary school about the work of a charity working to ensure that children in different parts of the world receive an education, the invitation might be to think or pray for a while about their own educational opportunities. In a primary school, the reading of a story such as the parable of the Good Samaritan or the story about Prophet Muhammad and the woman who was planning to leave town might be followed by an

invitation to think or pray for while about how they might show kindness to someone today.

As some children may be some time to become used to the sound of silence, a period of reflection may be accompanied by some gentle music. Some teachers have found that providing a focus such as an artefact, a work of art or a large candle is helpful in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to reflection. Adults present in the room where the assembly is taking place should consider taking part in the period of reflection themselves since as with many desired behaviours, adult role models are vital.

More extended periods of reflection

With practice, teachers can learn to lead a form of breathing space meditation for classes of students. Typically, the session begins with a discussion about posture to allow the children to learn how to sit comfortably with minimal fidgeting during the period of meditation or reflection. An exercise known as a body-scan is sometimes used. You can find out more about training in this technique here <http://www.breathingspacelondon.org.uk/mindfulness-for-schools/breathing-space-in-schools/>

Labyrinths

Another form of reflection can be to offer children the opportunity to experience a Labyrinth. Traditionally, a labyrinth involves children moving between a series of stations, learning a little about a story, an event or a ritual and then contemplating on a feature linked to that story in relation to their own lives. Each station also involves a task or a creative activity. In 2011 Redbridge SACRE won a bursary to explore this technique with local clergy and lay people in a joint training event at St Mary's Church Woodford Bridge. Following the training, a number of local churches opened their Churches in the period leading up to the Christian Festival of Easter to provide children with the opportunity to experience an Easter Labyrinth. More information about this project including instructions for setting up some reflective stations of your own can be found here: <http://www.redbridgerenet.co.uk/teaching.html> Since that time, a Hajj labyrinth has also been developed and trialled in several schools. All the resources to support this activity have been published by RE Today here: <http://shop.retoday.org.uk/9781905893881>

Prayer Space in schools

Schools and their teachers can learn more about developing techniques for reflection by working with the organisation, Prayer Space in Schools. This organisation works children of all faiths and none to explore some of the fundamental questions of life in a reflective and creative way. A prayer space is usually set up in a classroom for a few days or even a week. Issues explored include subjects such as forgiveness, injustice, thankfulness, big questions,

identity and stillness. Learn more about this resource here
<http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/>

Themes for acts of worship

A series of themes might be a useful tool to help plan acts of worship.

Anger	God	Peace
Care for the environment	Good deeds	Prayer
Careful speech	Good thoughts	Religion and belief
Caring for others	Happiness	Self-control
Character	Humility	Self-confidence
Community	Journeys	Success
Compassion	Justice	Taking Action
Contentment	Keeping good company	Teaching
Correcting wrongs	Kindness	the mystery of life
Courage	Leadership	the value of change
Effort	Learning	the value of every individual
Equality	Love	Truth
Finding a purpose	Making good choices	Unity
Forgiveness	Modesty	Wealth
Freedom	Parenting	Wisdom
Friendship	Noticing beauty	Work
Generosity	Patience	

Styles of acts of worship

Terence Copley, in his publication, "Worship, Worries and Winners" suggests the following different types of stimulus for assemblies

The Active Assembly The "Thing of Beauty" Assembly The Anecdotal Assembly The Singing Assembly The Straight theme Assembly	The Television or Newspaper Theme The Stunt Assembly The Testimony Assembly The Dramatic Monologue The Charity Assembly
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Copley, T., (1989) *Worship Worries and Winners*. London: The National Society and Church House Publishing

Some suggested types of stimulus for acts of worship

Quotations		Interviews		Pupil performance	
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	Newspaper reports		A story		Religious text
Everyday objects		Religious artefacts		jokes	
	Audio recordings		Video clip		Prayer
Silence/reflection		Visiting speaker		Personal memorabilia	
	Classical/modern music		Pupil creative writing		Dramatic monologue
Painting/picture		Historical artefact		Literature/poetry	

Thoughts for the day

When planning a programme of daily acts of collective worship, schools may decide that a short stimulus might suit a teacher or student led act of worship in the style of 'thought for the day'. In this model, a quotation is introduced, discussed with the class and then an opportunity is provided for students to worship should they wish. This opportunity might be introduced with the words:

"Please bow your heads and think or pray for a while about what you have just heard." The following are a set of examples of how a series of 'Thoughts for the day' might be planned for a weekly theme over a complete week;

Will someone else's life be brighter tomorrow because of what you have done today?	W. A. Ward	Author	Good deeds
We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.	Mother Teresa of Calcutta	Christian	Good Deeds
Cruelty, material attachment, greed and anger are the four rivers of fire. Nanak says, one is burned by falling into them. One is saved only by holding tight to good deeds	Guru Granth Sahb Ji, 147	Sikhism	Good Deeds
Keep yourselves far from envy; it eats up and takes away good actions, just as fire eats up and burns wood	Prophet Muhammad	Islam	Good Deeds
Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions	His Holiness the Dalai Lama	Buddhist	Good deeds
True happiness consists in making others happy	Hindu proverb	Hinduism	Happiness
Greet every person with a pleasant face...Receive every person in a cheerful manner	Ethics of the Fathers 1:15; 3:16	Judaism	Happiness
Many people think excitement is happiness.... But when you are excited you are not peaceful. True happiness is based on peace.	Thich Nhat Hanh	Buddhist	Happiness
Don't trust someone who tells you all of his troubles and keeps you from all of his joys.	Jewish Proverb	Jewish	Happiness
Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared	Buddha		Happiness
"You can't win unless you know how to lose."	Kareem Abdul-Jabbar	Muslim	Humility
Never look down on anybody unless you're helping him up.	Jesse Jackson		Humility
There is nothing noble about being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.	Hindu proverb	Hinduism	Humility
The rattan basket criticizes the palm leaf basket, still both are full of holes.	Philippine Proverb		Humility
He has a right to criticize, who has a heart to help.	Abraham Lincoln		Humility

Writing a policy document

It would be advisable for schools to draw up a policy document on collective worship which, like all effective policy documents:

- serves the purpose of clarifying, informing and guiding; and
- is marked by brevity, simplicity and clarity.

A policy document on collective worship might contain a number of elements.

1. A brief statement about the nature and character of the school
2. This is important in that the pattern and style of collective practice should reflect and 'speak to' the traditions and character of a particular school. Section 7 of the 1988 Act also requires that collective worship should be appropriate for the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of the pupils in the school.
3. An explanation of the role that collective worship plays within the life of the school. This can be done in a number of ways. For instance

a. by listing a central aim and then a series of objectives e.g.

“Collective worship occupies an important and unique place in the life of Nowhere Primary School. It provides an opportunity for members of the school community to pause from activity, to gather, to remind themselves of and to reflect upon the beliefs and values which bind the school community together. It also allows those with a religious commitment the possibility of entering into worship and those with no religious commitment to sense what worship is and to reflect deeply. In this way we aim both to affirm and to protect the integrity of all members of the school community. (2)

In particular, collective worship:

- provides an opportunity for all members of the school community to stop activity, to pause and to reflect on important issues;
- builds up the sense of group identity;
- gives pupils the experience of being still or silent;
- provides an opportunity for celebrating times of success or joy;
- provides an opportunity for meeting at times of sadness or sorrow;
- provides an opportunity for highlighting and reflecting upon core school values – such as striving to be honest and truthful, trying hard in all things, respecting oneself as well as other people, striving to be fair and just; and
- offers the opportunity to mark significant points in the year, such as festivals and school events.

by giving examples of how collective worship contributes to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural development of pupils (3) e.g.

Collective worship contributes to the spiritual development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:

- reflect upon the value, purpose and meaning of things;
- experience times of quiet inactivity to counterbalance the activity which generally marks the rest of the school day; and
- hear stories and words from religious and other literature which suggest that there is more to life than meets the eye

Collective worship contributes to the moral development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:

- reflect on matters concerning right and wrong;
- hear about incidents in which, and people in whom, goodness or right are exemplified; and
- learn about religious and other teachings concerning right and wrong.

Collective worship contributes to the social development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:

- gather with others for a common purpose;
- share times of joy and times of sadness with others; and
- learn how to behave appropriately within a specific social setting.

Collective worship contributes to the cultural development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:

- hear music from a range of times, places and cultures;
- reflect upon ideas concerning beauty and that which is pleasing to the eye and ear; and
- appreciate the range of talents and gifts found within the school community and beyond.

4. An outline of the pattern and structure for collective worship that has been created

This might best be shown in the form of a grid that outlines the weekly structure eg

Day	Grouping	Venue	Time	Leadership	Style/Approach	Notes
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						

5. Comment might also be made concerning other organisational aspects, such as the use made of themes and the role of the assembly coordinator.

6. A brief explanation of how key aspects of the legislative requirements are being met

The wording of key sections of the legislation demands interpretation and a school which is willing to indicate confidently its line of interpretation will be placing itself in a position of strength. Two clauses of the 1988 Act in particular call for interpretation:

A: the requirement that, over a term, the majority of acts of collective worship are of a broadly Christian character. In strict legal terms this means that more than half of Acts of worship should be 'broadly Christian'. This means that the remainder may focus on other traditions entirely should that be appropriate for the context of the school. "

It has often been noted that the requirement is not that acts of collective worship should be narrowly or exclusively Christian, and that the requirement relates to Christian character rather than Christian content. Thus, a school could say that the broad Christian character is achieved in the majority of its acts of collective worship through, for example:

- through a focus on themes that are both broadly Christian but can also be linked to other religions and beliefs. For example: encouraging a positive and responsible attitude to the environment;
- encouraging a quest for honesty, integrity, justice and truth;
- encouraging children to look beyond the obvious, the immediate and the material;
- encouraging love and respect for self and for the other person;
- encouraging service to others and to the community; and
- building Christian festivals into the yearly programme (which does not, of course preclude focusing on festivals from other traditions as well).

B: the requirement that acts of collective worship are appropriate for the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of pupils at the school

The reference to ages and aptitudes is a reminder that acts of collective worship should be both educational and meaningful. The fundamental way in which a school might take note of the children's family backgrounds (religious and non-religious) is by seeking to make collective worship as inclusive as possible. This might mean that a school:

- recognises that there are many forms of commitment, religious and non-religious;
- recognises that there are many forms of religious commitment;
- has carefully chosen songs to use in collective worship (on the basis that some are more appropriate to the collective setting of a school);
- regards variety – in culture, religion and belief – as something to be acknowledged and explored rather than avoided and denied; and
- builds festivals from a variety of cultural and religious traditions into its yearly programme.

7. A brief exploration of the relationship between collective worship and the school curriculum

This statement might explore the idea that collective worship is in 'dialogue' with the curriculum i.e.

collective worship draws from the curriculum – by providing an opportunity to reflect on and highlight classroom work, for example; and
collective worship feeds back into the curriculum – by providing ideas and suggestions which can be followed up in the classroom, for example.

A special relationship with religious education might be noted (in that beliefs and values will often be the focus of collective worship, as will celebration and festival) but it would also be proper to point out to teachers that this should not replace religious education within the classroom, a part of the school curriculum.

8. A policy statement concerning requests for withdrawal from collective worship

This statement might simply reiterate the right of parents wholly or partly to withdraw their children from collective worship (see page 3) and the right of teachers to withdraw. The statement might continue by stating: what a member of staff should do if a parent requests withdrawal either verbally or in writing; and what a member of staff considering withdrawal should do.

9. Any other policy statements which the school feels would be helpful

These might include policy statements on such issues as:

prayer e.g.

The use of prayers from Christianity and other religious traditions has a place within school collective worship. However, leaders should be sensitive to the mixed nature of the school community and should be particularly careful with how prayers are introduced. School policy is that an 'invitation' to listen to the words of the prayer should be offered so that a variety of responses are possible – for example, "And now, in a moment of quietness, I want you to listen to some words which are very special for ... (eg Christians). Think about these words or other words which are special for you".

visitors e.g.

- The school has a long tradition of inviting visitors to contribute to or lead collective worship. However, it is important that visitors are chosen who:
- understand the nature and purpose of collective worship and who will not, therefore, use the opportunity to preach or evangelise; and
- can communicate well with children.

- In arranging for a visitor to collective worship, it is important that teachers:
- liaise with the school assembly leader;
- consider the format of the occasion (eg a talk by the visitor, interviewing the visitor);
- provide the visitor with all necessary information (the school statement about the purpose of collective worship, the relevant theme, the size and age-range of the group, timings, equipment which is available, car parking facilities); and
- write to thank the visitor (or get children to do so) after the visit.
- A small brochure has been prepared which can be sent to visitors after initial contact has been made.

Using visitors to lead or support Acts of collective worship

SACRE recommends that schools use the NATRE publication: "Voices of Faith and Belief" to help prepare visitors to support Acts of Worship.

As part of safeguarding duties and those that fall under the counter terrorism and securities act, schools must vet all visitors to the school including those who will contribute to Acts of worship.

In order to safeguard pupils from visitors who may have extreme or radical views school should:

- ensure all visitors are carefully vetted and take immediate action if any individual or group is perceived to be attempting to influence members of the School community as part of an act of worship
- consider open source checking any organisations which you might consider inviting into school for an act of worship, particularly those in the voluntary sector.

Keeping a record

- It is advisable for schools to keep a brief record of what takes place in its collective worship programme for a number of reasons. For example, records can:
 - in the short term, be a ready source of reference to ensure continuity and variety;
 - in the long term, provide a focus for review and development.
- In addition, they can:
 - be a source of reference should a parent or other person raise a question about practice; and
 - provide material to show to and discuss with OFSTED inspectors.
- experience shows that effective records are simple and accessible. As such, many schools:
 - o use a published grid for each week of the term, for example below:

Date	Leader	Content/Focus/Message	Song/Hymn Used	Comments

- keep the grids in a shared area on the school computer network where staff can both complete details of acts of collective worship for which they have

been responsible and glance at the structure and content of those led by others.

Planning

In planning Acts of worship in different groupings, schools are advised to consider to what extent:

- an appropriate atmosphere (conducive to worship, albeit in an educational sense) is being created
- means of doing this might include: using appropriate seating arrangements, subtly marking the transition into and out of the activity (eg by changing the tone and volume of the voice), using a visual focal point, playing music;
- pupils are being given the opportunity to reflect and to think at depth
- means of doing this might include: encouraging response and the asking of questions, using stories which have depth, using silence and quietness, reading out words which invite reflection (poems, prayers etc), encouraging response but not necessarily discussion; and
- pupils and teacher adopt an appropriate bearing towards the activity
- this might include: quietening down, being prepared to listen to other people's responses, acknowledging 'deep' questions without necessarily attempting to answer them, accepting both religious and non-religious responses.
- a key question to ask would be, "Have children been provided with the opportunity to worship in their own way should they wish?"

Acts of worship and fundamental British Values

Acts of worship that promote the Fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs can help schools to demonstrate how they are meeting the requirements of section 78 of the Education Act 2002, in their provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Acts of worship and OFSTED inspections

A school might wish to address and consider the following questions prior to an OFSTED inspection.

1. In what ways is the school seeking to meet legal requirements relating to frequency and character?
2. What documentation do we aim to make available to the inspectors should they ask to see it?
3. Who will be the best person within the school to meet with the inspector dealing with the section relating to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development? How should this person prepare for the meeting?
4. Are we aware of what OFSTED documentation says about assembly and collective worship? (9)
5. Are we sufficiently clear about the distinction between 'assembly' and 'collective worship'?
6. What acts of collective worship will take place during the week of the inspection?
7. What is our thinking about how collective worship contributes to pupils' spiritual and moral development in particular? What is the evidence for this in practice?
8. To what extent are pupils involved in the assembly life of the school? Should their involvement be greater? Should the involvement of others (staff, visitors etc) be greater?
9. How many pupils (if any) are withdrawn from collective worship by parents? Have we formalised what they should be doing during collective worship time?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of current practice? How are we seeking to address weaknesses and to build on strengths?

Notes & References

1. NB DFE Circular 1/94 (January 1994), Religious Education & Collective Worship, para 58: 'Collective worship and assembly are distinct activities. Although they may take place as part of the same gathering, the difference between the two should be clear. Collective worship can, nevertheless, be related to the day-to-day life, aspirations and concerns of the school'.
2. NB DFE Circular 1/94 (January 1994), Religious Education & Collective Worship, para 57: '... worship in schools will necessarily be of a different character from worship amongst a group with beliefs in common. The legislation reflects this difference in referring to 'collective worship' rather than 'corporate worship'.
3. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
4. NB 'The challenge ... consists in creating an experience: which neither imposes nor compromises belief or unbelief but rather recognises the integrity and dignity of all members of the school community; which is essentially educational and stimulates the possibility of reflecting inwardly, sharing outwardly and living upwardly.'
(Angela Wood, Assembly Kit (BBC/Longman, 1991), p8)
5. NB 'Our fragmented society needs a whole series of 'reflective pools', places where the very deepest issues of life and death may be explored and understood away from the cut and thrust of the market-place.'
(Terry Waite, Taken on Trust (Coronet, 1994), p460)
6. Schools are advised to familiarise themselves with references to collective worship in the school inspection handbooks published by OFSTED; in particular the passages relating to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and also the inspection of religious education and collective worship.