



Collective Worship Policy

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Introduction and Rationale

Whilst there are no legal requirements for schools to hold 'assemblies', the law states clearly that all pupils [unless their parents have contacted the headteacher to withdraw their child] are required to participate in a daily act of 'collective worship'. Since the 1944 Education Act, re-enacted in all subsequent Education Acts, there has been a statutory requirement that all maintained schools must provide a daily act of collective worship for all registered pupils, unless they have been withdrawn by their parents. Collective Worship must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

The legal requirements allow for a certain degree of flexibility with regard to the nature of 'worship' and, at Monkston, our interpretation is clear.

We believe that the term 'worship' as it is commonly used and understood applies to the activities of a faith community, rather than a school. In the context of a faith community, worship is about commitment and nurture and as such militates against the open enquiry that makes up the main thrust of education in a state school; moreover, to hold an act of worship that attempts to embrace several faiths would be both contrived and offensive, demeaning to the distinctive authenticity of each faith.

Our approach to the issue of worship in an educational context is two-fold.

Firstly, we have chosen to interpret the concept of 'worship' as providing an invaluable opportunity for the school community to focus on and reaffirm those values which are considered to be of supreme worth and importance. Values which are regularly re-visited as themes for collective worship include: care, co-operation, commitment, courage, empathy, honesty, forgiveness, friendship, loyalty respect, responsibility, sacrifice and self-worth.

Secondly, we believe that our times of collective worship can play an important role in deepening the spiritual awareness of our pupils. Collective worship, at its best, provides pupils with an opportunity to reflect upon the value, purpose and meaning of things. Pupils are led into an experience of quietness to counterbalance the busy activity which generally marks the rest of the school day. Such quiet times will often lend themselves to the nurturing of a sense of awe and wonder, especially with regard to the natural world [e.g. the power of the seed to grow or a candle glowing in the darkness]. We are also able to sensitively explore issues of loss and suffering, limitation and frustration. Collective worship at Monkston Primary School gives pupils the opportunity to hear stories and words from religious and other literature which suggest that there is more to life than meets the eye. In fact, through collective worship, we encourage the children to recognise the widely-held belief in the existence of a deity. We will often consider values which are shared by different faiths. More specifically, we encourage the children to reflect on the character and achievements of Jesus, as recorded in the Christian Bible.

In addition to the above, special times of collective worship are planned in the school year to acknowledge the significance of key religious festivals from the main religions represented in the school. In line with legislation that collective worship should be "wholly

or mainly of a broadly Christian character", we place particular emphasis on the Christian festivals of Harvest, Christmas and Easter. However, it is important to note that whether we are dealing with Diwali or Eid, Pesach or Baisakhi, our concern is always to explore the reasons for celebration. Pupils are not themselves required to 'celebrate' religious beliefs which neither they nor their family adhere to.

At Monkston Primary School, we also believe that collective worship makes a vital contribution to the development of pupils in the following areas:

1. Collective worship contributes to the moral development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:
 - reflect on matters concerning right and wrong;
 - reflect on our 'Monkston Values';
 - hear about incidents in which, and people in whom, goodness or right are exemplified;
 - learn about religious and other teachings concerning right and wrong.

2. 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 sadness with others;
 - learn how to behave appropriately within a specific social setting;
 - increase self-confidence in public speaking / dramatic performance.

3. Collective worship contributes to the cultural development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:
 - hear and respond to music from a range of times, places and cultures;
 - reflect upon ideas concerning the concept of beauty;
 - appreciate the range of talents and gifts found within the school community and beyond.

4. Collective worship contributes to the intellectual development of pupils by providing them with an opportunity to:
 - learn and to engage with their minds;
 - have ideas concerning values confirmed or challenged;
 - reflect on the importance of learning in the context of our school community;
 - consider the power of words.

At Monkston Primary School, we hope that each assembly will touch on one or more of the above areas. Even when the majority of the assembly time on a given day has been devoted to a class performance or a singing practice, we are concerned to safeguard at least one of the above elements, as well as a clear focal point.

With regard to teachers leading assemblies at Monkston, we believe such activity falls under the category of 'any reasonable request of the headteacher', since we are careful to ensure

that teachers are never required to promote beliefs which they do not share by leading a direct 'act of worship' according to the common understanding of the term. Due to our approach, Monkston teachers have historically embraced the opportunity to engage with the school community by leading key stage assemblies on a rota basis, worked out as fairly as possible by the deputy headteacher.

Organisation of Assemblies

DAY	WHEN & WHO FOR?	LED BY
Monday	8.50 whole school	Headteacher, Deputy or Assistant head
Tuesday	8.50 Key Stage 2 9.55am Key Stage 1	Class teachers
Wednesday	Class based reflection time to allow for discussion	Class teachers
Thursday	8.50 whole school: achievement	Headteacher
Friday	8.50 whole school: singing assembly	Singing lead

Principles & Practicalities

When leading assemblies, teachers are asked to note the following principles and practical considerations. The main consideration is of course that an assembly is properly prepared, presented and evaluated.

1. **Variety in presentation** is important. Tools to aid delivery can include: video, PowerPoint presentations, drama (rehearsed or spontaneous), music, dance and religious or other artefacts. Stories can be told as well as read.
2. **Good timing** is essential, especially with the increasing demands of the curriculum. The entire assembly, including the focus, the supporting song and notices, should not exceed 20 minutes. This clearly has an implication for **all class teachers**, since it is important to quietly and calmly lead each class into the hall in time to start the assembly at **8.50am**, in order to finish by **9.10am**.

3. Whilst singing and notices may sometimes have to be sacrificed due to the pressures of time, the **focal point** is the one absolutely essential ingredient in every assembly. The focal point can take the form of a reading, listening to a prayer, a focused silence, a piece of music, a picture or a certain ritual – eg lighting a candle.

4. There should be **no attempt at eliciting acts of assent or corporate public response.**

Responses are private, conditional and may well be reflective in nature and are certainly open to subsequent review. Therefore it is important not to put pressure on the children. Similarly, it is important to phrase statements carefully. Rather than "We believe" or "It is true that...", it is more appropriate to say, for example, "Christians believe" or "Hindus believe". Equally appropriate is the term, "I'd like you to listen to these words."

5. **High expectations** of behaviour are expected throughout the assembly. This is made easier when class teachers bring their class into the hall promptly and in an orderly fashion, having walked down the corridor quietly and calmly. It is the school's expectation that children will sit quietly and wait for the assembly to begin, listening to the music being played. This preliminary 'quiet space' is an important aspect of preparing for collective worship. Inappropriate behaviour during an assembly should not be allowed to detract from the content. Offending pupils are to be immediately moved to sit next to a member of staff and then sent, either directly after the assembly or at playtime, to apologise to the assembly leader.

Visitors (including the role of prayer)

If outside speakers take part in an act of collective worship, we ensure that they are carefully briefed about the school's policy. We endeavour to choose visitors who can communicate well to children. We also aim to invite visitors who understand the nature and purpose of collective worship in schools and who will not, therefore, use the opportunity to seek converts. Having made that clear, we do allow visitors the freedom to include prayers, if they are considered appropriate, but we ask for prayers to be introduced in such a way that a response is left open. Our policy is that an 'invitation' to listen to the words of the prayer should be offered, so that a variety of responses is possible – for example, there is value in using phrases such as "I would like you to listen to some words which are very special for ... (eg Christians)." We do not believe that the expression "Let us pray" is an appropriate introduction to a prayer in the context of state school collective worship. Visitors are provided with all necessary practical information (with regard to timing, age range of children, parking arrangements etc.) and publicly thanked for their contribution.

Right of Withdrawal

Parents/carers have the legal right to withdraw their child from collective worship, provided they give written notification to the school. Teachers can also exercise their right to withdraw from leading or attending acts of collective worship, but attending 'assemblies' is part of a teacher's contractual duty.

At Monkston Primary School, we are confident that our approach to collective worship is educationally sound and crucial to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and intellectual development of our pupils. We believe that our collective worship policy embodies an integrity which parents and teachers alike will be pleased to acknowledge.