



Unity College Blackpool

Collective Worship Policy

Philosophy

Unity College Blackpool is a community. Collective worship should therefore be an important part of the school day as it gives us the opportunity to come together as a community. It should be a time for participation by all students, staff and any visitors in school should be invited to join us.

At Unity College we recognise that collective worship is an important way to provide opportunities for our students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Right of Withdrawal

Parents/guardians 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.

The Nature & Character of the School

Unity College Blackpool has a population of almost exclusively white British pupils, with the majority of those children 'belonging to' – with varying levels of understanding and commitment – Christianity. It is important to understand that not all of these children will have experienced the faith or worship of these religions. For many it will be the cultural rather than the religious customs with which they will be most familiar. This has its counterpart in the rest of the school community, where many families would describe themselves as C of E without any allegiance to a worshipping community. This fact is very important when considering children as faith resources. Their perceptions may be inaccurate, uncertain or confused. Moreover, just as there are different denominations with Christianity, which emphasise different insights and traditions, so there are equally different groups and beliefs within the other religions represented within a small minority of the school. Our school community also includes children from families which could be described as practising Christians, as well as Buddhists, Jehovah Witnesses, Hindus, and Muslims. It is important to note that the majority of our parents do not regularly attend a place of worship.

In accordance with section 7 of the 1988 Education Act, we believe that integrity in collective worship is only maintained when the family backgrounds of the pupils in our school are taken into consideration.

The Role of Collective Worship

Whilst there are no legal requirements for schools to hold 'assemblies' per se, the law states clearly that all pupils (see Right of Withdrawal for exceptions) are required to participate in a daily act of collective worship. The legal requirements allow for a certain degree of flexibility with regard to the nature of 'worship' and this document

has been written largely to define our interpretation of those requirements, as well as to outline the practicalities of planning and organising collective worship.

Collective worship should occupy an important and unique place in the life of a school. It provides an opportunity for members of the school community to pause from activity, to gather together, to remind themselves of, and to reflect upon, the beliefs and values which bind the school community together.

The term 'worship' as it is commonly used and understood applies to the activities of a faith community, rather than a school. It 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.

Worship in an Educational Context

This concept of 'worship' provides an invaluable opportunity for the school community to focus on and reaffirm those values which are considered to be of supreme worth and importance. Within our community in compliance with the law, the values we should focus on are of a "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character". 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. (Father Nicolas Heale)

Secondly, 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 their 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. They are also able to reflect upon issues of loss and suffering, limitation and frustration.

In addition to the above, special times of collective worship will be planned in the school year to acknowledge the significance of key religious festivals from the main religions represented in the school. Particular emphasis should be placed on the Christian festivals; however, it is important to note that whether the focus is on Diwali, the Eids, Pesach or Baisakhi, the 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.

Pupils' personal Development.

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

- ~ reflect on issues concerning right and wrong;
- ~ hear about incidents 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:

- ~ 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;
- ~ appreciate the range of talents and gifts found within our community.

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.

Pupil led assemblies or tutor time activities should also have these ideas in focus.

Principles & Practicalities

The following principles and practical considerations apply. The main consideration is of course that an assembly is prepared, presented and evaluated.

Variety in presentation is important in both assemblies and tutor time activities. Tools to aid delivery can include: DVD material, CDs, drama (rehearsed or spontaneous), music, dance and religious or other artefacts.

Good timing for assemblies is essential, especially with the increasing demands of the curriculum.

Whilst 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 reflection, a focused silence, a piece of music, a picture or a certain ritual – e.g. lighting a candle.

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 pupils. Similarly, it is important to phrase statements carefully. Rather than "We believe" or "It is true that...", it is appropriate to say, for example, "Christians believe" or "Hindus believe".

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.

Record keeping.

Tutors should keep a planning record of their daily act of collective worship and a means of reviewing these weekly. These should be stored with the Pastoral manager who should maintain an overview. Staff delivering assemblies should also plan and record themes, activities, visitors etc. Assemblies should be monitored by the SLT member responsible for collective worship and student evaluation forms completed on a regular basis.

Visitors

If outside speakers take part in an act of collective worship, they should receive a copy of this policy. We should look for visitors who can communicate well with children. We should 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 will allow visitors the freedom to include prayers, if they are considered appropriate, but we must ask for prayers to be introduced in such a way that a response is left open. Our policy 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). 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.