Qs and As

1. **What does education law say about collective worship?**
   In every school, there should be an act of collective worship in which each pupil can participate every day.

2. **Do pupils have to attend?**
   They do, unless their parents withdraw them or unless they are sixth-formers. Parents can withdraw pupils from acts of collective worship on any or all occasions and young people in the sixth form may withdraw themselves. They must do so formally – ie it is not proper for them simply not to turn up.

3. **Presumably this is only pupils from 5 to 16?**
   No, every pupil in school, from the foundation stage through to post-16.

4. **OK in a primary school, but how can we assemble them all in a secondary school?**
   Until 1988 the law expected collective worship to take place in an assembly of the whole school at the beginning of every day. But now, it can take place in any group at any time of the day: the whole school, or house or year groups, tutor groups, form assemblies.

5. **How can it reflect the diversity of faiths in Britain?**
   The wording of the Act is that it is to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”. So it can be wholly Christian, in other words every day there would be a Christian act of worship. But it could be mainly Christian, meaning that, taken over the term as a whole, more of the acts of worship will be Christian than not. Of course that means that almost half the acts of worship could derive from the other great religious traditions.

6. **What does broadly Christian mean?**
   The Christian worship should not be distinctive of any particular denomination. So, it would be unlawful, for example, for the act of collective worship in a community school to be a Eucharist or Mattins.
7. Does the worship always have to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”?
   No. The school can seek a ‘determination’ from the Local Authority’s Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). The determination could allow the daily act of worship to reflect the predominant major world faith found in the school, or indeed the range of faiths. The determination could specify that there would be no Christian worship. The SACRE has no power to nullify the requirement in law of daily worship for all pupils.

8. Does that mean it would be possible for pupils to meet for worship in distinctive faith groups?
   Yes, provided the determination so specified.

9. Can faith schools seek such a determination?
   No. The worship in schools with a religious character is not under the control of the Local Authority, but of the governing body under the provisions (if any) of the trust deed. Note especially that this is the case for voluntary controlled schools with a religious character as well as for voluntary aided or foundation schools with a religious character.

10. Does the law about “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” apply to faith schools (schools with a religious character)?
    No, the worship in schools with a religious character is in accordance with the religious tradition of the school, and controlled by the governing body. So, for example, there could be a Eucharist in a church school — and often is.

11. Do parents have the right to withdraw their children from worship even in faith schools?
    Yes.

12. Does the act of worship have to take place in school?
    It does, if the school does not have a religious character (that is, if the school is not a faith or church school).

13. Is that true of faith / church schools as well?
    No, they can take the pupils to the church, or other place of worship with which they are linked, for the act of worship.

14. Is that true of voluntary controlled schools?
    Yes. The law was changed in 1998 to allow voluntary controlled and foundation schools with a religious character to enjoy the freedom to have the daily act of collective worship in church on any particular day. This freedom had always been enjoyed by voluntary aided schools with a religious character.

15. Don’t schools find the law difficult to apply?
    Most primary schools have a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Roughly one in four secondary schools fully complies with the law, but others do in part.

16. Would the government support a change in the law?
    No. Successive Secretaries of State for many years have indicated that they would not wish to see a change. The law is seen to be flexible and permissive.

17. What would the churches like to see happen?
    It should be part of initial teacher training and of the National College of School Leadership’s preparation for headship that teachers and headteachers are trained and encouraged to see
what can be done with the law on collective worship and what an important contribution
collective worship makes to pupils’ development as well-rounded individuals.