

One of the most rewarding parts of my role is the opportunity to visit schools across the country and join in inspirational and uplifting collective worship, led by children and young people, *writes the Church of England's Chief Education Officer, Revd Canon Nigel Genders.*

Nigel Genders addresses a conference

Last week, the Church of England published updated [guidance for collective worship in schools](#). This is mainly a resource for Church of England schools but one which can be helpful to all schools who want to help their children get the most from this opportunity to pause, reflect, sing and pray.

State schools in England are required to provide a daily act of collective worship which is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.

Although there is scope for schools to apply for an exemption to that depending on their particular circumstances, very few overall seem to do so.

That's perhaps not surprising as schools tell us that, whatever the legal obligations, daily collective worship has proved a powerful tool in bringing pupils together, giving them a rare opportunity to pause and reflect – to be inspired – in the midst of a busy day. For Church of England schools that means Christian worship and that will remain the case.

The guidance builds on the Church of England's Vision for Education, which is to be 'deeply Christian' while 'serving the common good.' In collective worship terms, this means opening the rich traditions and modern expressions of Christian worship to people of all faith backgrounds in a way which does not presume a particular starting point, so is invitational and inclusive as well as inspiring.

Children can expect the worship they encounter in a Church school to be formational and transformational: it should enable pupils and adults to ask big questions about who we are and why we do what we do. It should call us to action, to thinking and behaving differently. We suggested that schools take care that pupils and adults do not feel "compelled to sing strongly confessional lyrics". But it became clear that the word "confessional" had been misunderstood - one rather over-the-top newspaper column even tried to claim that this meant we were "purging" hymns of Christian content. Far from it.

"Inspirational collective worship should lead pupils to become courageous advocates of causes and encourage them to think searchingly about their faith, beliefs and/or philosophical convictions."

Christians often speak about “confessing” their personal faith in God. The use of ‘confessional’ here was simply meant to recognise that whilst most will enjoy singing their heart out, schools should not insist that everyone must join in and should take care with what is appropriate, depending on their context. So, for example, insisting all pupils sing ‘All to Jesus, I surrender” in a school where the majority of pupils are devout followers of another faith, as is the case in some of our Church school, might seem unnecessarily exclusive when there is lots of other inspirational Christian content to choose from. We have changed the wording of the guidance to make this clear.

Parents value this approach, as it encourages thinking differently, and reflecting the behaviour and actions of individuals and communities. Inspirational collective worship should lead pupils to become courageous advocates of causes and encourage them to think searchingly about their faith, beliefs and/or philosophical convictions.

We want pupils to leave school with an understanding of Christianity having encountered Jesus Christ through worship in a way that enhances their lives, whatever their faith standpoint.

Around one million children attend Church of England schools which shows that parents and pupils clearly welcome what is on offer. Collective worship is at the heart of this, and we are committed to providing this in a way which is accessible to all.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/stories-and-features/inclusive-invitational-and-inspirational-collective-worship>