

Working on Worship (2)



Refreshing the Routines

Some schools work very hard to improve the quality of the Collective Worship they provide. Often forgotten, however, in the rush to develop a good assembly programme, provide books of stories and arrange a series of visitors, are some of the practical issues surrounding the physical assembling of the school.

It is an excellent idea to revisit, or even consider for the first time, questions about the physical setting in which Collective Worship takes place, the comfort of the participants and their ability to see, the development of intriguing, easily visible points of focus, and the efficiency of entry and exit strategies. Each of these elements can have a substantial affect (positive or negative) on the quality and success of the actual act of Collective Worship, even if they can not, of themselves, produce the element of worship.

It is, therefore, worth looking through the whole experience of Collective Worship from a purely practical point of view. You may find it useful to survey pupils' own opinions or to solicit help from a group of Year 6's. This is also something to submit for debate at the School Council as Collective Worship involves and affects the whole school.

Some very simple changes to the basic routines which surround the action of assembling can make the whole experience of Collective Worship infinitely better for everyone. Such changes can enable the true activity of worship to take place.

The following table contains some of the issues raised in staff meetings and suggestions made by staff to improve things. What would your questions be and how would you 'refresh the routines' so that Collective Worship can have a greater IMPACT, and be more demonstrably INCLUSIVE, INVITATIONL and INSPIRING.



Issues & Questions	Some suggested solutions
<p>The hall is still being set up as children arrive.</p> <p><i>What kind of impression do we wish to create for the children as they enter the hall?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Y6 team to set up CW when arrive at school – each outgoing team trains the next team. • Children in team self-register and come straight to hall to set up. • Give plans for the act of worship to children setting up. • Adjustments will be needed where CW is not at the start of the day.
<p>Some children have to wait a very long time. Discipline breaks down and boredom sets in before we even begin the act of worship.</p> <p><i>How can we get children into CW as close together time-wise as possible?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at how children and teachers are summoned – one bell, two bells. • Consider how children are encouraged to walk more effectively in line to CW – maybe younger children could carry an 'assembly' rope to the hall, to keep them moving and together. • Look at the doors – two lines can use a door at a time with careful manoeuvring. • Set Y6 children / school council to decide how to improve speed and efficiency of traffic into hall. • Do NOT delay the start of assembly – let latecomers experience lateness.
<p>Children find it hard to settle on arrival.</p> <p><i>Is there a sense of anticipation? What is there to do, look at or stimulate their interest? How might behaviour be different from class and how is this expectation conveyed?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put on your educational hat – what do you want the children to learn? Ensure the focal point is intriguing / absorbing. • Play music so it can be heard as children arrive, ask for quiet as enter hall / or for singing e.g. a 'gathering song' such as 'Come all you people'. • Appoint Y6's to greet / bring in and finally sit with each class of Y4 and below. • One teacher to be in hall ready as main greeter. • Sit in family groups – a child from each year to go to a standing Y6 and sit with them. Y6 becomes responsible for their 'settling'.
<p>Children are fidgety and uncomfortable.</p> <p><i>Were they sitting too long before CW</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the first child sat down a stop watch and collect it at the start of CW – do for a week to discover how long on average they are sitting before CW starts. • Sit Y5/6 on chairs or benches. Consider the

<p><i>started? What are they sitting on and how long for?</i></p>	<p>optional use of mats / cushion pads / carpet squares, which children bring to CW or take as they enter the hall.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand till CW starts or stand for singing / praying.
<p>'Good morning everyone' is painful and gets us off to a bad start.</p> <p><i>Is a long drawn out 'good morning Mrs X, etc' necessary?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply welcome everyone and begin • Put 'good morning' or 'welcome' on the projector so it is seen as they come in and dispense with it as a spoken introduction. • Try a liturgical greeting instead e.g. 'peace be with you' or 'The Lord be with you' – choose a child to do the greeting. The reply is 'and also with you.'
<p>Behaviour is not as good as it could be.</p> <p><i>Has a code of behaviour ever been discussed for CW? Is it appropriate? How many staff are present at CW and is this a contributing factor?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space out staff seating and use Y6's to help with younger children. OR sit Y6 on benches round the outside, not just the back, and sit a Reception child with each. • Give children practice in 'silent sitting' at other times of the school day e.g. in circle time. • In circle time discuss what children enjoy in CW, what they would do to improve things, etc. • Silence and stillness are not the only options in worship, but they should play some part. • Discuss the presence of all staff at CW – in a church school the impression should not be given that we grow out of worship!
<p>The children can't all see the song words, the 'action' or the 'focal point'.</p> <p><i>Have the staff ever actively been and sat where the children sit? What would 'catch your eye'?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look carefully at the various options for seating. • Review the size of all notices e.g. the CW 'theme' for visibility and ability to 'catch the eye'. • Consider the use of a data projector and software such as 'songpro' to display words. • Think about the 'focal point' – is it big enough? • Be proactive in making the venue more attractive to the eye and more obviously the place for CW – even if it is also the gym, the dining hall and the wet play area.
<p>The behaviour of visiting parents is less than helpful!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider giving some written advice! Few schools have ever thought about this. • Offer coffee to parents waiting during registration and take them all in together at the start of CW.

<p><i>Have parents ever been informed of the purpose of CW or offered any advice? Does the format used make it more of a performance than an act of worship?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select Y6's as 'welcomers' to give out laminated cards with a simple explanation and code of practice. • Space the visitors out, possibly between staff! Colour code or label visitors' chairs. • Make acts of worship less performance-orientated and restrict clapping etc to awards. • Arrange a crèche for the younger visitors. Maybe parents could help on a rota.
<p>Dismissal isn't orderly and can affect the next lesson children are going to.</p> <p><i>How can we achieve a sense of purpose to the end of CW?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at how effective staff are in this process – ensure their presence and define their role. • Use Y6's as monitors. • Site CW up against break or lunch. • Send children out purposefully with a blessing / dismissal – a sense that they are going off to put something into practice or to achieve something. • Leave hall singing a 'workman-like' song.
<p>Visitors do not always seem to understand the parameters within which schools operate.</p> <p><i>What parameters have the head and governors established? Have visitors ever been given any advice, even if they have been coming for years?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the termly pattern of CW and what your own policy says. • Establish the ground rules with all new visitors, regular or otherwise, novice or experienced. • Invite visitors to observe before they take an act of worship – give them the school's usual monitoring sheet as a way of judging what they are watching. • Use written advice, including a standard letter for confirming bookings – on a one-off basis or termly for a regular visitor. • Make a practice of feeding back good points to your visitors; you will all benefit! • Give a child the responsibility of presenting a thank you card after CW.

