



Working on Worship (3)



Welcoming Visitors to lead Collective Worship

Most schools welcome visitors to assemblies at some point. Parents and carers may come to watch their children taking part in leading the act of worship or performing in a play during assembly. Some visitors, including local clergy, governors or an 'Open the Book' team, for example, may lead part or all of the act of worship.

There are times when a visitor does an excellent job and the Headteacher can't get to the diary fast enough to ensure a return visit. Sometime a visitor seems to have it all wrong – approach, length, subject – and the Head is left wondering how to ensure they don't come back or, at least, how to improve things for next time. It is enough to make them say, 'No more visitors, thanks!'



However, it is not always the visitor's fault. It is good for a school to look at whether they have ever provided appropriate advice to visitors, even those already coming in regularly. Sometimes a school's own failure to think through its approach to Collective Worship shows up badly and it is hardly surprising when visitors seem unsure, do or say the wrong things or leave saying, 'No more schools, thanks!'

The following sections may be used and adapted as appropriate by schools to their own situation, but also as an aid to discussion as to what is appropriate in your own school.

- advice to visitors taking collective worship in a church school
- checklist for schools inviting in new visitors
- letter for new or one-off visitors to assembly

Advice for Visitors taking Collective Worship in Schools

(You will need to adapt the points below to mirror your own school context.)

1. Collective Worship is part of our pupils' *educational* entitlement. In many schools it is known as 'assembly', but we do not see it as a space to fill with notices, business, awards and visitors. It is intended to provide an opportunity to worship God so we are not inviting you just to entertain us!
2. 'Collective' worship is different from 'corporate' worship in faith communities. In all schools pupils and staff come together from various backgrounds, some Christian, some of other religions and some of none. Ask about the mix in our school if you would find this helpful.
3. In church schools, worship should be Christian but it must also be suitable for all to participate, whether actively joining in or listening reflectively. Please share something important - simple and clear - from which we can all learn, whatever our background.
4. If you are a representative of a Christian community, speak about your faith. We want to hear what is important to you and other Christians. School is an opportunity to share, not indoctrinate or evangelise, so remember to say... *Christians believe, The Bible says, In our church, Jesus taught ...* This will help everyone know whose ideas you are sharing.
5. Most of our pupils and staff have no religious background. Do not *assume* that even in a church school everyone has a great knowledge of Biblical characters and stories, Jesus, church or different Christian festivals. However, that does not mean we don't know anything!
6. Our Collective Worship follows a yearly plan. We can tell you what we are doing and offer you a subject or story on which to base your contribution, if wished. If you are a regular visitor, discuss your contribution in more detail.
7. Each act of worship in our school follows a basic shape or structure lasting c.10-15 minutes:
 - ❖ **Gathering** – maybe music, a candle, a greeting and song done by children or staff, but please feel free to greet children yourself as well
 - ❖ **Engaging** – this is your bit; it may be a story, demonstration, drama, song, pictures – whatever you feel most confident with
 - ❖ **Responding** – this can also be your bit, although the school will take responsibility for it if you prefer; it may be a time for stillness, prayers, an activity, questions and answers or singing
 - ❖ **Sending** – you may want to offer the children a blessing or to pray for them before the school is dismissed by children or staff

8. In your preparation and delivery, please do:

- ❖ think hard about the youngest children – *what is there for them to look at and enjoy?*
- ❖ make any visuals large – *will we all be able to see?*
- ❖ try to include something active e.g. hand movements or words to repeat – *we learn best by doing, not just listening*
- ❖ remember sight reading is an adult skill – *limit anything you expect children to read on the spot and do not use all capital letters*
- ❖ check songs carefully if you want to bring your own – *would it be best for the pupils to sing or just listen?*
- ❖ prepare questions carefully – *and rephrase them if there is no response or the wrong one! They may simply not have understood.*
- ❖ move on swiftly and kindly when given an inappropriate response - *small children always put their hands up!*
- ❖ remember time is limited – *if you have a lot to say, turn it into a series!*

9. Please do not:

- ❖ use sexist or racist language – *this will alienate many pupils or staff*
- ❖ be too controversial – *there is no real forum for debate in assembly*
- ❖ speak badly of other faiths – *their representatives may be present*
- ❖ disparage education, school or staff – *we do not need undermining!*
- ❖ wind children up and leave them there – *we have to teach them next!*

10. If you want helpers, let us know and we will give you an idea of how best to organise this. It can be effective, and time-saving, to ask for volunteers as children begin to arrive in the hall.

11. Introduce prayers or a quiet moment for reflection in a way which does not compromise pupils or staff. We are happy to do this for you BUT you may wish to establish your own symbol or phrase to introduce a prayer or reflection e.g. *Let's be still and quiet now / Time to pray or think / Please listen carefully while I say / read a prayer* Think about how to end this time as well as how to start it.

12. Try to visit an act of Collective Worship before you lead one. We can arrange this for you. Don't be afraid to discuss what you want to do. We will try to give feedback after your assembly. Likewise, if we could do something better, please let us know.



**We hope you enjoy joining us for
Collective Worship in our school.**

Letter for Visitors taking Collective Worship in Schools

The following letter is most suitable for the one-off visitor e.g. someone speaking on behalf of a charity but will need careful adaptation so that expectations are clear on both sides.



The letter could also be adapted as practical guidance for a regular visitor, people who are often forgotten when it comes to advice. It is recommended that you attach more detailed guidance to the letter about practical procedures in your own school:

Dear Xxxxxxxx,

We are looking forward to your visit on xxxxday, xxth xxxxxx at xx a.m. As discussed, the assembly or act of collective worship at our school generally lasts for xx minutes and your part will be approximately xx minutes. There will be about xxx pupils present between the ages of xx and xx. You will have access to sound and projection equipment if needed but please let us know and allow time to set up.

We will introduce you as:

We understand your assembly will be about:

Please allow plenty of time for reaching us. We enclose a map. If the car park is full, squeeze in and let the secretary know if you have blocked a car in! We will be happy to pay travelling expenses.

Report to reception when you arrive. You will be asked to sign in and given a badge to wear as part of the school security system. Someone will take you to the school hall and ensure you have all you need to set up. *Your preliminary visit will have helped you envisage the assembly and how to organise yourself.*

The advice attached has been written to help you deliver collective worship according to legal requirements. OR ... Your contribution will be part of our normal collective worship; we will organise the greetings, a song and prayers and look forward to your presentation in the middle of our worship.

If you have a problem that prevents you from coming, please contact us as soon as possible. We have to provide Collective Worship whether you are there or not! Ring xxxxxxxxxx (xxxx xxxxxxxx) the night before if necessary or ring the school (xxxx xxxxxxxx) by 8.20 a.m. at the latest.

Again, we are looking forward to seeing you,