Working on Worship 12

Valuing and Evaluating Worship

In Church of England Schools Collective Worship is inspected and judged publicly through SIAS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools). This has forced teachers and inspectors to make both formal and public decisions about the **value** of Collective Worship in a school. Both must answer the question **'What is the impact of Collective Worship on the school community?'**

The National Society's self-evaluation toolkit breaks this down into sub-questions:

1. **How positive are learners' attitudes to CW?** Schools must take into account the background of their pupils and provide opportunities for Christian worship which take these into account.

2. **To what extent do learners and staff derive inspiration, spiritual growth and affirmation from worship?** It is important to involve the whole church school community; worship is not just for the children but for everyone.

3. **How well does CW develop learners' understanding of Anglican traditions and practice?**   A C of E school should reflect something of its foundation in the worship it provides. *'Working on Worship 5' deals with this.*

4. **How effectively is the importance of worship demonstrated in the life of the school?** Money, a high profile, positive talk of CW, large and creative displays, all these will speak volumes about the importance of worship, and by inference the importance of God and Christian faith in the school.

Worship is clearly valued in a school where it is taken seriously and where steps are taken to make it the best it can be, not just for an inspector but for God himself.

In the opinion of SIAS….

SIAS provides a guide to what outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate worship is like. The two extremes are quoted below. Without such a guide it is easy to be overly subjective about the quality of worship.

1. Outstanding
Worship occupies a place of vital importance in the life of the school and is a key element in its Christian witness. Acts of worship are exceptionally well planned,

imaginative and inspiring. They involve high levels of participation by individuals and groups of learners and evoke an extremely positive response from those attending, staff and parents as well as learners. Worship is consistently and recognisably Christian and honours the Anglican tradition, making excellent use of the resources of the local Church, especially the contribution of its staff. At the same time the school is highly sensitive to the beliefs and traditions of those of other faiths and of none and takes care to ensure that acts of worship provide for their spiritual and moral development as well as that of Christian believers.

4. Inadequate

The school devotes insufficient attention to worship, which as a result is not seen as an important part of the life of the community. Acts of worship are sometimes perfunctory and uninspiring. There are few opportunities for learners to participate meaningfully and their attitudes to worship are at best neutral and frequently apathetic. Links with the local Church are unproductive; acts of worship do not convey a consistent, clear Christian message. Little account is taken of the needs of those of other faiths and acts of worship make no significant contribution to the children's spiritual development.

Using these two extremes, staff and children can begin to work on evaluating where they are as a school and what steps they might make to improve their provision.

In the opinion of the Almighty?

For people of faith, an evaluation of CW that involves 'grading' may feel at odds with the notion of worship, which in its religious sense is about 'giving worth' to God. St Paul urges Christians to 'Try to find out what pleases the Lord' (Ephesians 5:10) not the inspector! This might suggest that questions about the value or impact of worship would more rightly be addressed to God!

And, if worship is ultimately for God; it does not seem so strange to be concerned with offering God the best we can in our worship and to ask questions as to whether we can do better i.e. evaluating the worship.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, bow down before him ..

Some tried and tested ways of evaluating worship …

Here are some examples of how local heads, teachers and governors try to evaluate CW through the eyes of the different members of their school community:

- Assembly 'prefects' go round on a Friday afternoon and gather comments from children on that week's worship in a special book.

- Monitors evaluate assemblies as they end, using a really simple proforma – one good thing, one thing to improve, one thing I'll remember.

- The evaluation of CW is on the School Council agenda every half-term. Pupils feed back to SMT and governors; this counts as Pupil Voice.

- An annual survey of the whole school, including staff, asking what they enjoy, what they learn about God, how they feel worship could be improved.

- Choosing some evaluating 'guinea-pigs' from each year group who feed class perceptions back to staff.

It may also be helpful to:

- Increase the number of visits of governors and others to CW (not leading, just sharing) so a wider perspective was available.

- Create an 'Evaluation and Suggestion Box' with one child in each class to put things in each half-term on a definite occasion.

- Evaluate different aspects of CW – themes, songs, prayers, leadership style.

- Involve children more in planning, leading and participating in CW as this would provide more feedback and more accurate evaluation.

One very simple strategy is an exit poll; this should be used sparingly but will give an instant idea. Children have a single question to answer e.g.

- Would you like quieter songs or more action songs?
- Do you prefer a spoken prayer or a moment of silence for reflection?
- Should we have one song or two songs?

They register their opinion by placing a voting counter in the correctly labelled tub on the way out of assembly.

In the children's opinion ….

Good teachers ask open-ended questions. Evaluating worship by asking whether children enjoy it or not is not necessarily a true measure of its quality as worship and will give only an insubstantial answer to the question of impact.

Ask more open-ended questions such as those below and use them regularly in relation to individual acts of worship rather than asking generally about CW.

- How did it make you feel?
- What did it make you think about?
- What has it helped you understand about God?
- Have you learnt anything new about yourself?
- Do you think you will behave differently?
- Did it give you things to think about?

- Did it give you a chance to pray if you wanted?
- Do you want to ask anything about what you heard / saw / thought?
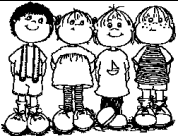- Did you enjoy it? Why?

Answers to these will give an indication of the impact worship is having on children.

Teachers will also find that Improved evaluations result when.

…. teachers share objectives with pupils! To evaluate effectively, children need to know what CW is for i.e. to give them an opportunity to celebrate, to be reflective, to pray to God and so on. They should know something about what worship is for Christians but also what time spent in CW can mean for those with no particular faith.

….. teachers deepen and broaden children's experience of worship styles e.g. silence, reflection, singing, dance, liturgical action, clapping, raising hands, kneeling and bowing, reading the scriptures, 'offering' of money or goods, are all mentioned as forms of worship in the Bible. Where children have limited experience of worship, they may have little idea how things might be different or improved.

In your opinion ….

How would you rate your worship against these elements of Collective Worship?	
Does it have a feel of **Gathering?**	e.g. silence ~ calm excitement ~ intrigue
Does it contain something **Engaging**	e.g. story ~ song visitor ~ questions
Does it have space for **Responding?**	e.g. singing ~ praying discussion ~ action
Does it end with a sense of **Sending?**	e.g. purpose ~ challenge resolve ~ blessing

In my opinion …

**Collective Worship always has an impact.
It is never neutral. If not positive, it will be negative.**

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP ON THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY?

Within the context of a distinctively Christian character:

Prompts	Provision	Impact of provision	Evidence of impact
2a How positive are learners' attitudes to collective worship?			
Learners' • response • participation • leadership Evaluations from learners Parents' feedback			
2b To what extent do learners and staff derive inspiration, spiritual growth and affirmation from worship?			
Refer to evidence from those of Christian faith, other faiths and no faith Impact on beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, etc			
2c How well does collective worship develop learners' understanding of Anglican traditions and practice?			
Learners' familiarity with and (as appropriate) use of a wide variety of Anglican forms of worship: • **Biblical** – stories, key words of Jesus, famous passages • **Liturgical** – set prayers, the Lord's Prayer, responses, silence,			

• **Eucharistic** – for special festival or as part of RE? • **Seasonal**, festivals & saints' days on church calendar • **Symbolic** – candles, cross, seasonal colours, silence Worldwide Anglican communion Other Christian traditions Respect for other faith traditions Involvement in life of parish			
2d How effectively is the importance of worship demonstrated in the life of the school?			
Place of worship in school development plan/improvement planning/budget INSET opportunities Policies and documentation Planning, recording and evaluation Compliance with legislation Timetabling / Resources Adult attendance: • all staff • parents • governors • visitors • church community			
Identified areas for development:			