

## Advice to schools regarding enquiries from parents about withdrawal of pupils from Collective Worship

The purpose of Collective Worship in Catholic schools is to provide opportunities for all pupils and staff:

- ..... to contemplate the mystery of God*
- ..... to reflect on spiritual and moral issues*
- ..... to foster and nurture relationships*
- ..... to experience a sense of belonging and develop a sense of community*
- ..... to respond to and celebrate life*
- ..... to grow in liturgical understanding and development*
- ..... to reinforce prayers that are part of the Catholic tradition*
- ..... to develop a common ethos and shared values*
- ..... to enrich religious experience*
- ..... to seek appropriate responses to the love of God*
- ..... to take time out 'to wonder at', 'to come to terms with' and 'to celebrate'*
- ..... to recognise that prayer allows time and space for individual and collective reflection.*

When discussing the possibility of withdrawing pupils from Collective Worship in Catholic schools parents and the school should consider:

- There is a legal right for parents to withdraw their children from acts of collective worship. However, it is very rare for parents to exercise that legal right. Usually after finding out more about the rationale for collective worship, the respect shown to different religious practice and belief, and how collective worship contributes to the ethos of the school community, parents are happy for their children to attend.
- In Catholic schools prayer and worship is an integral part of the life of the school and part of the expression of being a community. This contributes significantly to the community feel that for many parents, including those of different faiths and none, is why they choose a Catholic school.

In such circumstances when parents want to discuss the possibility of withdrawing their children from Collective Worship the school should:

- Invite the parents to meet with the Headteacher. This meeting will enable the Headteacher to find out what concerns the parents may have and to set out the principles outlined above. Other people could be asked to attend, for example the Chaplain &/or a Governor.
- The Headteacher should make it clear that the school community respects the different beliefs of all pupils and staff at the school. No one would be forced to pray or participate in a way that would be uncomfortable for them.
- It may be appropriate to invite the parents to attend one of the school's liturgies Celebrations of the Word so that they can understand better how their beliefs will be respected. In many cases parents are encouraged to attend such events as a regular part of school life anyway.
- An explanation should be given on how the distribution of Communion at Mass is organised to enable pupils and staff to respond to that invitation in a manner appropriate to their individual circumstances.
- The Headteacher should also explain how prayer and liturgy, for example Mass at the beginning and end of the school year, helps build up the community and is a celebration of the school as a

community. Consequently being withdrawn from these community events can be itself divisive by highlighting differences.

- Any procedures for withdrawal from Collective Worship will need to take into account that
  - (a) pupils would need to be supervised by an appropriate adult;
  - (b) they are not given additional work, to avoid the withdrawal seeming to involve any inference of punishment;
  - (c) The school does provide an alternative form of worship.

*Information can also be found in CES guidance [Collective worship](#)*

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