**COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND**

**THE ISSUE**

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s.70, places an explicit duty on state-funded schools in England to organise daily acts of collective worship. For schools of a designated religious character (which may include voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, foundations, academies and free schools), the acts of worship are typically in accordance with the religious character of a particular school. For all other schools, the majority of these acts of worship during any school term must be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’, and must be concerned with ‘reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power’. Schools in England are thus required, by law, to organise an act of collective worship. But, in reality, there are very high levels of non-compliance, particularly in secondary education. Thus, is such an obligation still appropriate in a religiously plural and secular society?

**THE CONCERNS**

In contemporary England, a nation that is (simultaneously) increasingly multi-faith yet ever-more secular in nature, the statutory obligation on state schools to provide a daily act of (often Christian) religious worship frequently generates controversy.

A number of concerns have been expressed about this current duty, particularly as it applies to schools without a designated religious character. These include concerns about the:

1. *appropriateness* of the duty in state schools – eg., whether pupils should be provided with an opportunity to *worship* God in publically funded schools;
2. *uncertain* meaning of the relevant legal provisions – eg., there is little guidance as to what ‘worship’ should mean in a contemporary school context;
3. *controversial* content and confused status of the most recent guidance of collective worship, DfE Circular 1/94;
4. *non-compliance* of the statutory duty on collective worship by some schools;
5. *eclectic* nature of collective worship, so its content tends to vary greatly, in that it often has few of the elements suggested by DfE guidance or required by law; and
6. *reinterpretation* of ‘religious’ content by teachers, who may have a limited understanding of the same.

**THE OPPORTUNITIES**

Collective Worship is an increasingly topical issue, not least because, with the recent publication of DfE guidance on promotingBritish values, it is significant that collective worship has previously been used as a vehicle for the affirmation and transmission of positive social norms. In moving forward, the following questions require reflection and investigation:

* Should the existing duty and statutory guidance remain in their current form?
* Should there be clearer guidance to enable schools to carry out their current duty more effectively?
* Should the existing duty be made voluntary?
* Should the existing duty be removed with no replacement provided?
* Should the existing duty be removed and replaced with an alternative comparable activity, albeit with fresh aims?