



[Collective Worship Policy]

[AVANTI SCHOOLS TRUST]

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Policy Author(s):	Nitesh Gor
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Under the Trust's Scheme of Delegation this policy must be approved by [NAME OF COMMITTEE OR BOARD]. Such approval was given on:	Learning, Teaching and Standards Committee
[Only if policy applicable to ASL] The Avanti Services Limited Board adopted this policy on:	N/A
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Avanti Schools Trust Collective Worship Policy

This policy sets out the Collective Worship policy for all Avanti schools and includes an Appendix that is applicable only to Avanti's Hindu faith designated schools.

1. What do we mean by Collective Worship

- a. Worship: any activity by which students engage with the divine. This includes, but is not limited to activities such as: singing the names of God, ritual worship and prayer;
- b. Collective Worship: any act of worship that is conducted collectively or as a group participating in the same activity at the same time.

2. Purposes and Provision

Collective Worship should contribute to the development of spiritual insight for both students and adults by providing:

- a. Positive and uplifting experiences of worshipping the divine;
- b. Opportunities for meaningful self-discovery and developing spiritual insight;
- c. Effective pastoral care that supports each students' personal, emotional and spiritual journey;
- d. Opportunities to explore and apply spiritual teachings and practices in their own lives, inside and outside of school;
- e. Recognition that all of the world's great spiritual traditions represent the divinity in their distinctive ways.

3. Outcomes

- a. Celebrate and embody the Avanti ethos, rooted in the 6 core principles, which will develop a tangible school-wide community spirit and positive relationship i.e.
 - *We are unique spiritual beings with incredible potential and we achieve our full potential by discovering and nurturing all parts of ourselves – intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual.*
 - *We choose how we wish to respond to life and what we nurture within us.*
 - *We care for and respect all life – human, animal and plant – and live in a way that causes the least possible harm.*
 - *We each observe the one same reality from our own unique perspective and engage in open-minded dialogue to deeply enrich our vision.*
 - *We serve a higher purpose by living a meaningful and satisfying life of contribution.*
 - *We are nourished by personal relationships that fulfil our need to love and be loved, encouraging us to be the best we can be.*

- b. Be inspired to make positive changes to themselves and the world around them based upon their developing sense of spiritual self;
- c. Understand and learn practices and techniques of engaging with and approaching the spiritual;
- d. Experience, as relevant to them, a loving and reciprocal relationship with the divine;
- e. Be able to reflect upon and apply their experience, knowledge and understanding of Collective Worship to their daily lives and spiritual growth;
- f. Take up opportunities to explore their own faith and spiritual journey and develop into individuals who are well-prepared to make up their own minds on issues of faith and belonging;
- g. Enthusiastically participate in Collective Worship;
- h. Be able to confidently consider complex spiritual and moral issues in a dialogic manner to promote honest and empathetic dialogue;
- i. Develop a broad-minded perspective to spirituality by acknowledging the key roles of free choice, fidelity to tradition and exemplary role models;
- j. Evidence a deep awareness of an essential spiritual identity that unites all living beings, transcending all designations related to age, race, gender, species, faith affiliation and ability.

4. Assessment

The assessment of Collective Worship within schools should support the Avanti ethos by promoting independent thought and personal spiritual growth.

There might be concern that any attempt to assess the value or effect of Collective Worship risks becoming judgmental or intrusive. We wish to avoid any system that might encourage labelling or stereotyping, and so Collective assessment of a class and assessment of the Collective Worship provision should be encouraged as an approach.

At a minimum, assessment and evidence of outcomes should include:

- a. S48 inspection or AST internal audit for the community schools;
- b. Quality of provision (quality of planning, resources and delivery);
- c. Quality of student reflections about Collective Worship;
- d. Quality of student work based upon Collective Worship content/themes;
- e. Student surveys evidencing their attitudes towards Collective Worship, and their assessment of their own class's happiness, behaviour and wellbeing;
- f. Feedback from parents and visitors on Collective Worship;
- g. Quality of a classroom-based area for spiritual contemplation and relevant displays.

5. Expectations of Staff and Training

- a. Each school must have an identified lead for Collective Worship. This person might be the same as the PRE lead. The Collective Worship

- lead will be responsible for all aspects of Collective Worship, including the quality of provision across all classes;
- b. All staff should attend Collective Worship and be given the opportunity to participate. However, if they do not wish to actively participate, they should be allowed to respectfully and attentively observe. In all circumstances, their behaviour should be positive and an example for students;
 - c. All staff should be provided support, training and encouragement for their own spiritual development;
 - d. Staff induction should include significant time allocation for understanding the Collective Worship provision and understanding its role in supporting Avanti's core principles and contributing to Avanti's pathway of spiritual insight;
 - e. Staff meetings should begin with an inclusive spiritual reflection;
 - f. All senior members of staff have an important role in modelling a good understanding of Avanti's ethos, engagement with Collective Worship and enthusiasm for driving the ethos forward.
 - g. The school should provide all students with a copy of the Trust's Collective Worship book, either on or before their first day at school.

6. Time Allocation and Format of Collective Worship

Collective worship should be at least 20 minutes per morning. This does not include any time dedicated to "assembly" matters, including announcements, which are different from Collective Worship. Collective Worship time can be in whole school, Key Stage or individual class groupings. There are three meditations per day (before lessons starts, before lunch and at the end of the day). These meditations will be different for the faith schools and the community schools.

7. Withdrawal

Collective Worship at Avanti schools forms a core part of the educational, character and spiritual experience. Collective Worship is inclusive and we encourage all students and staff to attend. Students and staff do have a right to withdraw from Collective Worship and we suggest that any such withdrawal take place after understanding the nature of Collective Worship and working with the school to see if/how the Collective Worship provision might be adapted to enable their participation, or at least their non-participatory observation. If the right to withdraw is exercised by a student, the school must make alternative provision for them that is linked with the Avanti Way and core principles.

Appendix 1 - Aspects of Collective Worship that are applicable only for Hindu faith schools

Daily Prayers

The daily prayers which will be sung daily during Collective Worship drawn from the Chaitanya Vaishnava tradition are:

- a. Govindam prayers
- b. Pranam Mantras
- c. Hare Krsna maha mantra
- d. Narasimhadev prayers

The three Avanti Prayers will be recited at respective times of the day (start of the day, before lunch, end of the day).

Translations for the above do not have to be read daily but the meanings of the above prayers must be discussed in class so that correct pronunciation and understanding can be ensured. Students can share different understandings of the translations and ways to connect and remember their meaning.

Festivals

Since festival days are known well in advance, festivals should be celebrated on the actual day of the religious festival unless these days fall outside of term-time. The following indicates the level of observation expected for the different festivals.

Level 1: Govardhan-puja, Gaura Purnima and Ratha Yatra.

There should be 3 drop-down days throughout the year, one day per term. The usual curriculum will be either themed on these festivals or suspended in order to engage in festival activities.

Level 2: Janmashtami, Radhashtami, Srila Prabhupada's birthday, Kartik Purnima, Christmas (Christian), Gita Jayanti, Lord Nityananda's birthday, Siva Ratri, Ramnavami, Easter (Christian), Lord Nrsimhadeva's birthday, Snan Yatra and Guru Purnima.

These 9-12 festivals per year will be celebrated through an extended Collective Worship of 40 minutes, incorporating engaging activities such as drama and song. These will typically be whole school or KS gatherings and hosted in the temple area if possible. These festivals will be supported by in-class activities.

Level 3: Ekadashi, Appearance/Disappearance days of the 6 Goswamis and the principal acharyas, Yom Kippur (Jewish) and Eid (Muslim).

These festivals will be celebrated through a slightly extended Collective Worship to be able to reference something about the festival focus.

Level 4: Any other religious days e.g. Vasant Pancami.

Mentioned immediately before or after Collective Worship and/or assembly.

A comprehensive curriculum for each festival, differentiated by Key Stage or year group, will be developed for implementation. Differentiation will be possible through different festive activities and learning/meaning of festival specific songs and prayers.

It is important that schools consider creative, fun and engaging ways to celebrate the festivals, for example:

Kirtan

Drama

Dramatised textual readings

Dance

Abhisheka

Special altar decorations

Cooking

Specific bhajans/songs

Yajnas

Festival specific (e.g. cart procession for Ratha-yatra)

The parents and the wider community may be invited in to participate in different festivals if the school wishes.

Appendix 2 – Avanti Schools shrine standards applicable only for Hindu faith schools

The worship of deities in all Avanti schools is to inspire a personal relationship with Krishna. The shrine offers a sacred space for the school community to gather for prayer, kirtan, and offerings. Coming before the deity of Krishna and offering service to Him is an important aspect of spiritual life. The aim of setting out these standards is to ensure access to the shrine is open and inclusive as well as maintaining the sanctity of the space. Anyone entering the altar area should adhere to the following standards.

Involvement with the Main Shrine

There are 3 broad categories of involvement with the main shrine:

- A. Shrine access (e.g. opening the curtains) and assistance (e.g. helping assemble arati tray before worship)
- B. Shrine worship (act of offering arati, offering food or waking the deities and putting them to rest)
- C. Deity dressing (once a week dressing of the deities)

For anyone who is involved in any of the above activities:

- Should have showered and not evacuated since showering.
- Achaman should be performed as soon as one enters the altar area.
- Must have been inducted and trained into the activity they are to perform.

In **addition** to the above, those who are performing arati or waking the deities:

- Should wear only freshly washed clothes.
- Should have taken at least first initiation within ISKCON, unless they are: a pupil of the school and have been chosen by the school (at the school's discretion) to perform worship; the Principal; or another member of staff who is following initiation standards (chanting 16 rounds daily and following the regulative principles) but may not be formally initiated.

In **addition** to the above, those who are dressing the deity once a week (typically on a group of volunteers on the weekend):

- Should not have eaten or drunk anything except water, since showering, before dressing the deity.
- Should have taken at least first initiation within ISKCON.

If students are chosen by the school to be involved in Main Shrine worship:

- They must be supervised by an adult at all times and the supervising adult must be trained to do the activity that the student will perform.
- Should have showered at home on the morning of performing the worship.

- Should be dressed in freshly washed school uniform (or traditional dress if the child and school wishes).
- Must have completed some training on deity worship, including how to offer the arati, the different mantras needed for the worship, cleanliness and personal hygiene requirements prior to going on the altar.
- Both girls and boys should be encouraged to participate.
- Each article can be offered 7 times around each deity (and Srila Prabhupada) to simplify worship for students.
- If the child wishes, they can help prepare the fruit offering (under supervision of an adult priest) and offer it to the Lord on the altar.
- If the child wishes, they can also help to prepare the arati tray prior to the beginning of the ceremony on their day of worship.
- To ensure an appropriate level of gravity, only children from year 5 and above should be allowed.

Cleaning the Main Shrine area:

Daily:

- Wiping of altar tables.
- Cleaning of any paraphernalia used.
- Removing all fresh flowers from the shrine at the end of each day.
- Cleaning any additional areas that may need attention as and when necessary.
- Sweeping and mopping the floor.

Weekly or monthly (typically by those dressing the deity):

- Cleaning the shrine thoroughly including areas that may not have been cleaned during the week, including the domes.

Minimum standards for the Main Shrine when the school is open:

- A detailed daily schedule should be in place for taking care of the deities. This should be agreed with the Trust and should include details of arati formats, mantras being used, worship protocols etc., none of which should contradict what is in this document.
- There should be a daily offering of arati at a time agreed with the school.
- There should be a daily offering of food.
- The deities should be woken and put to rest on a daily basis according to an agreed schedule and format.
- If the deities are woken on any day when the school may be closed, arati and a food offering must also take place.
- The above can be exceeded (e.g. two offerings of food per day) but a new minimum standard should not be set.

Important additional points:

- There should be a school-appointed person who has overall responsibility for the deities and shrine care. This person may often be a member of the kitchen team. This person will also report to the Trust's lead volunteer for deity and shrine standards.
- The shrine should be open as much of the school day as possible. This includes during lunch hours.
- There are no strict times for when the shrine has to be open or closed.
- The shrine hall may be decorated by the work of the children.
- Restrictions for ladies during their monthly menstrual cycle pertains to shrine access, shrine worship and deity dressing. It does *not* pertain to *darshan* (viewing the deities).

Classroom deities and small classroom shrines:

- Each classroom should have a shrine with the deities of Gaura-Nitai (as supplied by the Trust) and a small photo of Srila Prabhupada. Other photos or deities should not be placed inside the shrine.
- Students are allowed to offer worship and articles such as flowers, food, fan etc.
- Students are allowed to dress the deity with care and supervision.
- The altar can be decorated by the work of the children to encourage awareness of Lord Krishna in their classrooms and encourage interaction with the deities.
- If the deities are moved from the altar this must be done with due reverence and care and under adult supervision.
- There are no other rules around conditions for the worship which takes place at the classroom shrine.