

Collective Worship, Inclusion and the Experience of the Child

Supporting schools to approach collective worship with inclusion, safeguarding and psychological safety in mind.

By Sarah Culkin, 8th May 2026

Collective worship remains an important and valued part of school life for many communities across England. For some schools, it provides a shared opportunity for reflection, moral development, celebration, spirituality and community cohesion. For others, particularly within diverse or rapidly changing communities, it can also present practical, pastoral and safeguarding complexities that leaders and staff are increasingly being asked to navigate carefully.

Schools today operate within environments that are more diverse, more visible and more scrutinised than ever before. Leaders are balancing statutory expectations, safeguarding responsibilities, inclusion priorities, parental confidence, pupil wellbeing, staff confidence and the practical realities of delivering meaningful collective worship within modern school communities.

For many schools, the challenge is no longer simply:

“Are we delivering collective worship?”

but increasingly:

“How do we deliver collective worship in ways that are thoughtful, inclusive, legally informed, psychologically safe and workable for the whole school community?”

That question sits at the heart of a new professional learning resource currently being developed by Three Landscapes Learning Studio.

Why We Developed This Course

This course was developed in response to growing conversations across education around:

- inclusion and belonging
- pupil voice and pupil experience
- safeguarding and psychological safety
- staff confidence and consistency
- diverse school communities
- SEND and accessibility
- parental communication and confidence
- withdrawal requests and disengagement
- defensibility of practice
- and the practical implementation of collective worship in modern schools.

In many schools, collective worship is delivered thoughtfully and positively. However, practice can vary significantly between settings — and sometimes even between classrooms, year groups or staff members within the same school.

Leaders and staff may find themselves navigating questions such as:

How do we ensure participation remains invitational rather than coercive?

How do we support pupils from diverse faith and non-faith backgrounds?

How do we ensure staff feel confident and protected when delivering worship?

How do we communicate clearly with parents?

How do we reduce unnecessary tension or misunderstanding?

How do we create consistency across staff teams?

How do we ensure pupils with SEND or additional needs can meaningfully access collective worship?

How do we balance statutory expectations with inclusion and safeguarding responsibilities?

These are not abstract questions.

They are practical leadership questions being worked through daily in schools, trusts and diocesan settings across the country.

A Practical, Balanced and Professionally Grounded Approach

The aim of this course is not to criticise collective worship.

Nor is it intended to promote a one-size-fits-all approach.

Instead, the course has been designed to support schools in developing thoughtful, defensible and inclusive practice that works within the realities of their own communities.

The course explores collective worship through a balanced professional lens, drawing together:

Safeguarding considerations	Inclusion and accessibility
Pupil experience	Psychological safety
Statutory context	Staff confidence
Practical implementation	Parental engagement
Whole-school consistency.	

Importantly, the course recognises that schools are serving increasingly diverse communities — including pupils and families from a wide range of:

- faith backgrounds
- cultural backgrounds
- family contexts
- neurodiverse profiles
- communication needs
- and lived experiences.

Schools are also increasingly aware that the experience of collective worship can vary significantly between individual pupils.

The course therefore encourages schools to consider not only the intention behind collective worship, but also the lived experience of those participating in it.

Supporting Pupils, Staff and School Communities

One of the central aims of the course is to help schools create collective worship approaches that are:

- inclusive
- invitational
- emotionally safe
- accessible
- professionally consistent
- and supportive of community cohesion.

The course explores how thoughtful collective worship practice can benefit:

Pupils By supporting:	• belonging and inclusion • respectful participation • emotional safety • accessibility for pupils with additional needs • clear expectations and routines • opportunities for reflection and spiritual development • reduced anxiety around participation • improved understanding of choice and respectful engagement • and more positive experiences for pupils from diverse backgrounds.
Staff Delivering Collective Worship By supporting:	• greater confidence • clearer boundaries and expectations • reduced uncertainty • more consistent delivery • improved understanding of inclusive practice • safeguarding awareness • and defensible professional decision-making.

School Leaders and Trusts By supporting:	• more standardised practice • consistency across schools or departments • reduced reputational risk • improved defensibility of practice • stronger parental communication • clearer guidance for staff • safeguarding alignment • and practical implementation support.
Parents and Families By supporting:	• clearer communication • greater transparency • improved confidence in school practice • more inclusive approaches • and reduced misunderstanding or conflict around participation.
Diverse School Communities By supporting:	• respectful participation • culturally sensitive practice • psychologically safe environments • and approaches that help communities feel welcomed rather than marginalised.

Reducing Withdrawal Through Thoughtful Practice

An important theme explored within the course is the relationship between inclusive practice and parental withdrawal.

While schools must always respect the legal right of withdrawal, many schools are increasingly interested in how thoughtful, invitational and well-communicated approaches may help reduce unnecessary tension, discomfort or misunderstanding around collective worship.

The course explores how:

- clarity of purpose
- accessible language
- invitational participation
- psychologically safe delivery
- staff consistency
- and strong parental communication

can help schools foster greater confidence and engagement across their communities.

A Toolkit Designed for Real School Environments

Alongside the course itself, schools will also receive access to a practical supporting toolkit. The toolkit is designed to help schools move beyond theory and into implementation. Resources include:

Reflection and review tools	Planning support materials
Staff guidance resources	Implementation prompts
Communication templates	Practice review considerations
And materials designed to support consistency and defensibility.	

The intention is not to create additional workload.

Instead, the toolkit is designed to support schools in building clearer, more confident and more consistent approaches across their settings.

Built With Real Educational Context in Mind

The course has been developed through a learning design approach grounded in:

- | |
|--------------------------------------|
| Safeguarding awareness |
| Practical school realities |
| Professional CPD principles |
| Learner experience |
| Accessibility considerations |
| And psychologically informed design. |

Significant time has been spent considering:

- tone and balance
- legal context
- practical implementation
- staff usability
- inclusivity
- visual design
- accessibility
- and how schools may engage with the material in real-world settings.

The course is intentionally designed to feel:

- practical rather than political
- reflective rather than accusatory
- supportive rather than prescriptive.

Current Development and Pilot Phase

The course is currently in an active development and pilot phase.

Three Landscapes Learning Studio is currently seeking professional feedback from:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ✓ school leaders | ✓ governance professionals |
| ✓ safeguarding professionals | ✓ RE and SMSC specialists |
| ✓ inclusion leaders | ✓ and staff involved in collective |
| ✓ diocesan education teams | worship delivery. |
| ✓ MAT leaders | |

The aim of this pilot phase is to ensure the final resource is:

- professionally useful
- practically grounded
- legally informed
- psychologically sound
- and genuinely supportive for schools.

Selected schools and organisations are currently being offered temporary pilot access in exchange for honest professional feedback.

Looking Ahead

Collective worship continues to matter deeply to many schools and communities. At the same time, the educational landscape around safeguarding, inclusion, accessibility and pupil wellbeing continues to evolve. Not through criticism or polarisation — but through practical professional learning designed to help schools navigate complexity with confidence.

If you would be interested in learning more about the course, participating in the pilot programme or providing professional feedback, Three Landscapes Learning Studio would be delighted to hear from you.

Three Landscapes Learning Studio develops practical, engaging and professionally grounded learning resources designed to support real-world challenges across education, safeguarding and professional practice.