



Visits and Visitors as Part of Religious Education and Collective Worship

Diocese of Chichester
Education Department

Visits and Visitors as Part of Religious Education and Collective Worship

Introduction

Well conducted school visits to places of worship or visits by members of belief communities to schools should be of tremendous educational benefit to both schools and communities. Such events are also of great value in enhancing schools' SMSC provision and helping to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain, with its increasingly diverse communities. These guidelines aim to consider the thinking behind such visits; what both schools and belief communities can expect from each other, and to give some recommendations to aid the planning process.

The primary purpose of this guidance is to support schools through planning and delivering a successful and memorable experience for both their pupils and the members of the belief communities who they are partnering with.

It is emphasised throughout that:

- The purpose of all visits is **educational**, not to evangelise or proselytise
- The teacher must be present throughout all visits and should supervise and be actively involved in them, from the planning stage to the evaluation at the end;
- Members of belief communities should recognise that they are speaking as an *individual*, and that their views may be part of a spectrum of diversity within that community;
- Parents should be informed about the educational purpose of such visits but in addition should be made aware that with matters relating to Religious Education (RE) and school collective worship, parents have the right of withdrawal.

Members of belief communities taking part in the life of the school, including visits to places of worship, should:

- Be willing to share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid:
 - i. Criticising the experience and insights of others and
 - ii. Imposing their views on pupils in any way
- Be familiar with the school's aims, ethos and policies and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum of the school;
- Seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods that involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age group concerned;
- Be willing to respect and value the beliefs of any pupils and adults in the school when they are different from their own;
- Develop ways of speaking to pupils that communicate their open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to 'convert' or proselytise.

VISITS TO PLACES OF WORSHIP

A visit to a place of worship should be a hugely enriching experience as part of RE. Visits allow pupils to see that places of worship are not just a building but also a living community of believers, giving pupils a 'feel' of the faith and a sense of the 'spiritual', and ensuring that pupils take more away from the visit than just facts about beliefs, practices and artefacts. Visiting a place of worship can also be a multi – sensory experience involving sight, smell, touch, hearing and even taste. This helps pupils of all abilities to absorb and retain their learning.

A visit might include:

- Engaging activities that include a combination of listening, doing, talking, questioning and recording in age – appropriate ways
- Activities designed to enhance specific Agreed Syllabus units
- A tour of the place of worship
- Handling of special objects
- Interviews with members of the belief community

It should be made clear that the teacher remains responsible for the pupils throughout the visit and should be seen as an active participant, working in partnership with the host e.g. leading questions, intervening in behaviour management and so on. Teachers should be prepared to step in and refocus the direction of the session if it becomes inappropriate for the visiting pupils. Good communication is essential, and it should be expected that both schools and host communities are involved in agreeing the content of visits.

Handling parental concerns:

Parents have the right to know what is happening in school, and on visits. In accordance with the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act, it is the right of any parent to withdraw their child from Religious Education (either all, or part.) If a request is made concerning withdrawal from a visit, alternative provision must be made available for such children at school. This being said, it is hoped that schools will take steps to reassure parents of the educational purpose of the visit, sharing with them how it will enhance their child's learning in RE, so that parents can make informed decisions about withdrawal.

It is usually better to pre-empt any worries by letting parents know in advance exactly what is and is not going to happen, e.g.:

- Pupils will not be taking part in worship, but may be observing it;
- There will be no form of proselytising or evangelising;
- The teacher is leading the visit and working in partnership with the host community;
- Any requirements to wear a head covering or remove shoes in an outward token of respect for others' beliefs and sensitivities.

Particular care should be taken over certain elements such as 'dressing up' or 'acting out' and teachers should be made aware that for some people (pupils and/ or their parents), this may cross the line (in worship terms) between observing and participating. It may be better to ask for a volunteer to demonstrate e.g. wearing clothes, prayer positions, rather than suggesting that 'everyone does it', or at the very least, making it clear that such actions are voluntary.

If children are taking a snack or packed lunch with them, then there may be restrictions on the types of food and drink that can be taken onto the premises. Out of courtesy to the hosts, please establish during the pre-visit what these restrictions may be.

Visits to places of worship may be one of the few places where children may be offered food as part of their visit so it is vital that schools talk through the issues as part of their pre-visit. Parents may also have concerns about any food offered to pupils by the host community during the visit, as it is the practice in some religions for food to be offered to their god(s) first, which is then distributed to the community. Again communication with parents is vital giving them the opportunity to opt their child out.

After the visit:

In addition to a formal letter of thanks, there should be opportunity for both schools and host communities to evaluate pupils' experiences so that consideration can be given to what might need to be adjusted for a future occasion. The host community may also be interested in mounting a display of some of the pupils' work at the place of worship, or even coming to see it at school.

WELCOMING VISITORS TO SCHOOLS

When anyone visits a school it is usual for them to be taken on a 'tour' in order to give them a feel for the school: in this context it is even more important that visitors from belief communities are shown around the educational environment which may help avoid any potential conflicts of interest. In particular, it is important to remember that:

- The purpose of all visits as part of RE or CW is educational, not to evangelise or proselytise
- A member of staff should be present with the visitor during the session
- Parents need to know what such visitors are in school for, in the hope that they will support the educational aims of the visit and appreciate the potential benefits to pupils

Schools should establish good communication with the visitor in advance and clearly identify what the focus of the session should be. Any relevant policies should also be given to visitors so that they are clear about school protocols.

The NATRE guidance document '**Religious believers visiting schools**' outlines that members of belief communities might be involved with schools in the following ways:

- **In school collective worship.** Visitors to collective worship might present ideas and experiences from their faith, making clear the value of these ideas and experiences within the belief community, and asking pupils to think about them from their own (pupils') point of view.
- **In lessons, including RE** pupils are engaged in the task of learning. Visitors from belief communities are valuable because they can really help to bring such learning to life, bringing an authentic and authoritative voice into the classroom and offering pupils opportunities to question believers directly. This may be informative, help develop understanding, and may also challenge pupils to reflect on their own commitments or perspectives.

Parents – It is particularly important that parents are made aware of any visitors to school for the purposes of RE or CW, so that their right of withdrawal is maintained. This should not necessitate a letter each time, but information might be on your school calendar or website for example. It is important to remember to include regular visitors such as your local vicar. As with any other part of school life where parents may have concerns, an 'open door' policy should be adopted and all efforts made to allay any anxieties.

Schools' code of conduct:

It is of paramount importance that visitors to school have as positive an experience as the pupils they will be engaging with, so schools should ensure that any visitor is warmly welcomed and that their visit properly prepared for. The Religious Education Council have produced a code of conduct for teachers of RE which states that they should:

- **Respect persons** : Irrespective of their religious or non-religious beliefs, everyone should be treated equally out of respect for their dignity as a human being. This is as true for visitors from belief communities as it is for pupils.
- **Value reason – giving**: Schools are places of critical engagement and respectful, vigorous debate where no belief is above the requirement of reason-giving. Pupils should be encouraged to think skilfully about, and to take responsibility for, the beliefs that shape their behaviour and attitudes so that they continue in or change their own beliefs through lifelong critical reflection.
- **Practise reciprocity**: The Golden Rule, “treat others as you wish to be treated”, is a principle which is widely shared across human communities. When handling beliefs in school, teachers should treat other religious and non-religious beliefs as they would like their own beliefs to be treated in the same circumstances.
- **Accept contestability and value self-awareness**: Beliefs are always contestable; the teacher should recognise that they may be controversial and should frame their language accordingly. This entails a willingness to be self-aware, particularly in relation to the way in which the teacher’s own beliefs impact on his or her approach to teaching and learning.
- **Be open**: Appropriate openness about what a teacher believes can be a professional asset. This means being prepared to answer questions about and talk about his or her own beliefs when that is appropriate in a way that enables pupils to develop in their own learning.
- **Promote fair and accurate representation**: Where people of diverse beliefs meet, there is opportunity for both conflict and co-operation. To promote co-operation, teachers should treat diversity as an opportunity to work with others in the shared task of achieving excellence in teaching and learning. Teachers should strive for fair and accurate representation of religious and non-religious beliefs by drawing on sound scholarship and by including a range of authentic voices.
- **Model life-long learning**: In a culture where open debate and hard questions are encouraged, teachers will often find there is much that they do not know. Professionalism in these circumstances means being open to the discussion moving into challenging territory and being willing to learn.
- **Promote balance**: The search for truth is central to education. When dealing with a controversial issue, you should encourage consideration of a balanced range of views, even if you find this uncomfortable on occasion.

REC Code of conduct for teachers of RE, 2009

Schools should appropriately brief staff, pupils and any parents included in the session on the principles of this code of conduct. It is often helpful for the teacher who is present to act as a facilitator, as they will know the pupils best, and therefore be best placed to ‘interpret’ any tricky questions, encourage quieter pupils to contribute, or where necessary, ask for unfamiliar terminology to be explained.

SAMPLE AGREEMENT/ CODE OF CONDUCT

This agreement provides the basis of the partnership between members of belief communities (in their capacity as either host or visitor) and the school

The school

The member of staff responsible for the visit(s) will:

- Explain the purpose and nature of the proposed visit(s) to or by a member of a belief community
- Explain the context of the school's programme for RE, CW or SMSC
- Outline the needs of the school and negotiate the most appropriate contribution by the member of a belief community
- Set out the relevant school policies concerning health and safety, child protection and behaviour
- Liaise with the visitor prior to the visit to about the aims and content of the visit
- Ensure that visitors from belief communities are treated in accordance with the 'REC Code of conduct for teachers of RE'
- Pay any fees and other costs where formally agreed in advance

Member(s) of belief communities

Members of belief communities engaging with schools as part of a visit to a place of worship, or as visitors to school as part of RE or CW will:

- Complete the planning checklist with the school
- Be involved in the planning of the session
- Evaluate the session
- Adhere to the NATRE Code of Conduct which states that:

Members of belief communities taking part in the life of the school, including visits to places of worship should:

- Be willing to share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid:
 - i. Criticising the experience and insight of others and
 - ii. Imposing their views on pupils in any way
- Be familiar with the school's aims, ethos and policies and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum at the school
- Seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods that involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age group(s) concerned
- Be willing to respect and value the beliefs of any pupils and adults in the school when they are different from their own
- Develop ways of speaking to pupils that communicate their open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to 'convert' or proselytise
- Seek to uphold the principle of the 'Golden Rule' e.g. *'If a member of another religion or belief visited my child's school and contributes in the same way that I have done would I, as a parent, be happy with the education given?'*

Signed (teacher) **Date**.....

Signed (Host/visitor) **Date**.....

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOLS : VISITS TO PLACES OF WORSHIP

Name and address of place of worship:

Date of visit:

Contact name:

Name of host (if different):

Position:

Email:

Phone number

Have you ...	Date
Made contact with the person who will be hosting the visit and agreed the aims of the visit?	
Agreed the date, timing, duration and size and age of group?	
Agreed a date for a pre-visit to discuss the content of the visit and to conduct a risk assessment?	
Asked if the place of worship has a risk assessment for school visits?	
Completed the school risk assessment in line with your educational visits policy	
Discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking or drop-off arrangements? • Toilet facilities? • Whether a donation should be given? • Pick-up arrangements? • Whether food will be offered to pupils during the visit and discussed how this will be managed in accordance with school policies? 	
Agreed where personal belongings/ lunch may be stored safely?	
Discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any specific requirements from the host community regarding dress code (including accompanying adults) and formal greetings? • Food requirements (that might, out of respect, restrict what is packed into lunch boxes) • What pupils can and cannot do at the place of worship? • Whether photos/ video may be taken and if there are any restrictions for use? 	
Ensured that the host is aware of any special requirements about members of the school group e.g. age of pupils, mobility, SEN etc?	
Ensured that the host has other information about members of the school group e.g. cultural or religious diversity, sensitive issues such as recent bereavements etc?	

<p>Agreed the aims, objectives and contents of the session including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging activities that include a combination of listening, doing, talking, questioning and recording in age-appropriate ways? • How the visit is linked to pupils' learning in school? • How the teacher will be involved in the session? • Whether other volunteers from the host community will be involved? 	
Agreed how safety and behaviour management will be handled?	
<p>Discussed with pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the visit? • How it will help them in their learning of RE? • Things that they might look out for on their visit? • What they might do as a follow-up activity? 	
<p>Written to the parents in good time, informing them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the educational purpose of the visit, including how it fits with the RE/SMSC curriculum or CW? • Of their right of withdrawal? • That they are welcome to attend with the children? • That pupils may be observing worship but will not be participating in it? • Of the practical arrangements for the visit e.g. dress code, food etc? • What their 'voluntary contribution' covers? 	
Briefed your volunteers about the visit?	
Contacted the host to confirm the arrangements?	
Contacted the place of worship the day before to check whether there are any changes to those arrangements (for some religions funerals can take place at very short notice)	
Evaluated the impact of the visit and given appropriate feedback to the host	

CHECKLIST FOR HOSTS: SCHOOL VISIT TO YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP

Name of school:

Date of visit:

Contact name at school:

Position:

Email:

Phone number

Before the visit, in consultation with the school, you should:	Date
Agree the date, timing, duration and size and age of group	
Arrange a date for a pre-visit by the teacher to discuss the content of the visit and to conduct a risk assessment	
Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking or drop-off arrangements • Toilet facilities • Whether a donation should be given • Pick-up arrangements • Whether food will be offered to pupils during the visit, and how this will be managed in accordance with school policies 	
Agree where personal belongings/ lunch may be safely stored	
Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any specific requirements regarding dress code (including accompanying adults) and formal greetings? • Food requirements (that might, out of respect, restrict what is packed into lunch boxes) • What pupils can and cannot do at the place of worship • Whether photos/ video may be taken and if there are any restrictions for use 	
Ensure that you as the host community are aware of any special requirements of members of the school group e.g. age of pupils, mobility etc	
Ensure that you have other appropriate information about members of the school group e.g. cultural or religious diversity, sensitive issues such as recent bereavements	
Agree the aims, objectives and content of the session, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educational context of the visit • What activities will be available for pupils, and that they are age appropriate • How the teacher will support you in the session • The role of any of your volunteers in the session 	
Agree how safety and behaviour management will be handled during the visit	
Have had contact with the school to confirm the arrangements	
Contact the school immediately if you are aware of any changes to the arrangements (e.g. a funeral)	
Evaluate the impact of the visit and give appropriate feedback to the school from your perspective	

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Note to schools: You will need to insert all the usual information about date, time, travel arrangements etc into this proforma, but also insert specific visit details into the spaces provided, and remove any elements that you do not need e.g. food requirements. You may wish to consider using this letter for all visits as part of RE, including local churches.

Dear Parents,

As you are well aware, we are always trying to provide more opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning across the curriculum. In the past pupils have enjoyed visits which have often been linked to their learning in history or geography, but we are aware that there are many opportunities to visit places linked with other subjects. Such visits are also of tremendous value in enhancing our school's SMSC provision and in preparing pupils for life in modern Britain, with its increasingly diverse communities.

The pupils in Year are currently studying (name of religion) in Religious Education as part of the locally Agreed Syllabus. A visit to a local (place of Worship) is a fascinating opportunity for the pupils to get a real insight into a modern (Christian/ Muslim/ Hindu/ Jewish/ Buddhist/ Sikh) community and meet some of the lovely people who live and work there, including (names of hosts) who will be showing us round. We hope it will bring pupils' learning to life and allow them to be curious about the faith and its practices.

Religious Education is an academic subject. It is taught as an understanding of different religions, from an unbiased perspective. It is – in our view – an essential part of the curriculum which is becoming more and more important as British society becomes more diverse. We feel strongly that pupils need a good understanding of different cultures, in order to learn respect for others and practise the values of acceptance, tolerance and unity. We would like to emphasise that as part of this visit pupils will not be asked to participate in worship but might watch any worship or prayer that is happening during the visit. This visit has been planned by your child's teacher, who is leading the visit and working in partnership with (names of hosts) from the host community.

This visit will include:

(insert details, especially referencing any voluntary elements)

For this visit pupils will need to wear (insert dress code)

For this visit pupils will need to avoid bringing In their packed lunch or snack. These particular dress/ food requirements are an outward token of respect for others' beliefs and sensitivities and do not signify participation in worship.

For this visit your child will also need:

(insert details especially referencing any 'voluntary' contribution and what it covers)

As with any school visit we will need parent helpers to ensure adequate pupil : adult ratios. Please speak to your child's class teacher if you can help.

We do, of course, fully respect the wishes of parents with regards to participation in this visit as part of your child's learning in RE. If you would like to discuss any concerns that you may have regarding this visit with your child's class teacher. If you do decide to withdraw your child, please could I respectfully ask that you think carefully about how you explain this to them and are considerate of pupils and families at our school who practise (name of religion)

We are really looking forward to this visit, and have been working closely with to plan an enriching and enjoyable experience.

Yours sincerely

SUGGESTED PLACES OF WORSHIP TO VISIT

Place of Worship	Address	Contact details
Mid Sussex Islamic Centre and Masjid (Mosque)	19 Wivelsfield Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. RH16 4EF	Mohammad Bashir on 07809 233 863
Worthing Masjid (Mosque)	Ivy Arch Road, Worthing. BN14 8BX	www.worthingmasjid.co.uk
East Sussex Islamic Association (Hastings Mosque)	The Mosque, 12 Mercatoria Street, St Leonards on Sea. TN38 0EB	01424 426232
Crawley Mosque	Broadwood Rise, Broadwood, Crawley. RH11 9SE	www.crawleymasjid.co.uk
Islamic Information Centre (Introduction of Islam to non - Muslims)	38 Little Ridge Avenue, St Leonards on Sea, TN37 7LS.	01424 755355/ 812727
Crawley Hindu temple (Mandir)	Apple Tree Centre, Ifield Avenue, Crawley. RH11 0AF	01293 530105
Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue	6 Lansdowne Road, Hove. BN3 1FF.	www.bhps-online.org
Brighton and Hove Reform Synagogue	Palmeira Avenue, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 3GE	01273 735343
Eastbourne Hebrew Congregation	Synagogue, 22 Susans Road, Eastbourne, BN21 3TJ.	01323 484135
Maitreya Buddhist Centre	13 Sea Road, Bexhill, TN40 1EE.	01424 733761
Bodhisattya Buddhist Centre	Kelsang Mondrul, 3 Lansdowne Road. Hove. BN3 1DN	
Cittaviveka, Chithurst Buddhist Monastery	Chithurst, Petersfield GU31 5EU	01730 814986
Beulah Baptist Church	Buckhurst Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex. TN40 1QA.	01424 730001
Chichester Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends	Priory Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1NX	www.chichesterquakers.org.uk

SUGGESTED VISITORS OR GROUPS FOR SCHOOLS

Name of Organisation	Information	Details
Bible Explorer		www.bible.org.uk
Fun learning workshops	Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism – interactive workshops	www.funlearningworkshops.com
Bob Hartman – storyteller	Author of Lion Storyteller Bible	
Barnabas in Schools	Barnabas RE Days for pupils and Staff INSET	www.barnabasinschools.org.uk
Salt mine theatre group		www.saltminetrust.org.uk
Three Faiths Forum	Sessions with visiting speakers	www.3ff.org.uk
Brighton and Hove City Mission	Prayer Spaces and interactive Collective Worship	
Rabbi Vivian Silverman		01273 206335
Imam Sajid		imamsajid@gmail.com

PUPIL EVALUATION FORM

Name:

Class:

	Yes	No	Not Sure?	Comments
Did you enjoy the visit?				
Did this visit help in your learning?				
Write 3 things you have learned from the visit:	1. 2. 3.			
What more would you like to learn?				
Is there anything else you would like to say?				

Thank you!

SCHOOL EVALUATION FORM

A copy should be given to the host community or visitor to school after completion

Name of school:

Date of visit:

Name of host / visitor:

	Yes / No	Comments
1. Were the agreed aims and objectives of the visit met?		
2. Was the session effectively delivered?		Which parts worked really well and why?
3. Were pupils engaged during the session?		How?
4. What went well?		
5. It would have been even better if....		
6. Next time we would....		

Thank you!

HOST COMMUNITY EVALUATION FORM

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your community for our visit. We would be very grateful if you could make a few comments about the session so that we can plan an even better visit in the future.

Name of host / visitor:

Date of visit:

Name of school:

	Yes / No	Comments
1. Were the agreed aims and objectives of the visit met?		
2. Did the school prepare the pupils for their visit?		
3. Were pupils engaged during the session?		
4. What went well?		
5. It would have been even better if....		
6. Next time we would....		
Is there anything else you would like to add? Please continue on the reverse if needed.		

Thank you! Please return this form to...

RE Visits and Visitors Guidance was put together by Kelly Dillon in 2016 for use in the Diocese of Chichester. We are grateful to Shaun Burns and Diocese of Southwark Education for the use of the original materials upon which this document has been based.