

North Yorkshire SACRE Guidance on organising visits to places of worship

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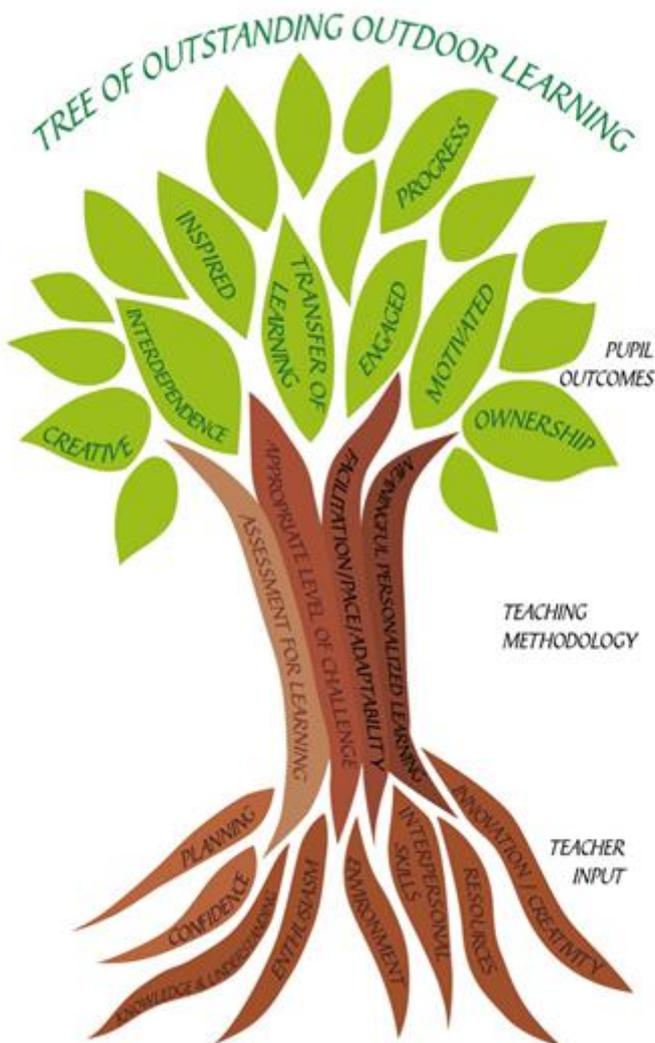
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Context

A visit to a place of worship, such as a church, mosque, gurdwara, synagogue or temple offers a multi-sensory experience for children and young people, that is very difficult to achieve within the classroom. Through touch, smell, appearance and sound, the emotional response engendered through such a visit will stay with children and young people for a long time. Visits to places of worship are an invaluable learning opportunity, but it is important to get it right, to ensure the experience is a positive one for all involved.

Some schools are experiencing an increased reluctance from parents in allowing their children to take part in visits to places of worship, particularly mosques. This guidance document seeks to support headteachers and RE subject leaders in the planning and implementation of such visits, trying to pre-empt any concerns parents might have.

The value of learning beyond the classroom



The North Yorkshire Outdoor Learning Service highlight through their 'Tree of Outstanding Learning' the pupil outcomes that can be achieved from learning beyond the classroom. Teachers should consider the teacher input and teaching methodology when planning visits to places of worship to ensure these pupil outcomes are achieved. Such visits could contribute to a school's 'Learning outside the classroom quality badge'. <http://lotcqualitybadge.org.uk/>

Safeguarding

As with any other visit, risk assessments need to be completed by the school and the visit logged on the North Yorkshire Educational Visits Notification system.

<http://visits.northyorks.gov.uk/login.html>

Sample risk assessments are available from educationalvisits@northyorks.gov.uk

The guidance to schools from North Yorkshire Education and Skills, Learning Beyond the Classroom in Jan 2015, following the Charlie Hebdo attack states that:

“ North Yorkshire County Council receives travel and security advice from central government, and whilst the threat level from a terrorist attack is severe there is no current advice suggesting that travel within this country should be limited, nor should it be to other countries unless the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Travel Advice indicates that travel should not take place to parts of or whole countries. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

North Yorkshire County Council will continue to support visits to all parts of the UK (with the proviso that all other elements are appropriate) as the risk of being caught up in a terrorist attack is very low. It is important as educators that we continue to give children and young people the opportunity to learn about different religions, faiths and cultures and engender respect and tolerance within our communities and to all go about our daily lives without fear or hindrance. “

Parents who withdraw their children from visits to mosques often cite safety as their main concern. Sharing detailed risk assessments with parents, the North Yorkshire guidance to schools and case studies of successful school visits by North Yorkshire schools to mosques, may help to alleviate their fears.

Curriculum entitlement

A visit to a place of worship can contribute to many areas of the curriculum, including:

Religious Education

The aims of the North Yorkshire RE Agreed Syllabus include:

- Develop a positive attitude of respect towards other people who hold views and beliefs different from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions and beliefs
- Develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures.

RE has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and lifelong learning. It enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others. RE promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

There are two RE units of learning available to help deliver the Agreed Syllabus that support visits to places of worship.

Unit 1.6 for KS1: Holy places: What can we learn from visiting a religious building?

Unit 2.4 for KS2: Why do people love their sacred places? What can we learn from visiting holy buildings?

At KS3 a visit to a contrasting place of worship would link well with unit 3.5, What will make our communities more respectful? Living in multi-faith Britain.

These units of learning are available on the NYES website, under resources.

The Warwick Report found that “pupils find direct encounter with other religions through outside visits and visitors to the school (and also on videoclips) particularly helpful in their understanding” (p.213)

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC)

Schools are required to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils (Section 78 of the Education Act 2002)

As part of the final judgement on a school’s overall effectiveness, Ofsted inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The Ofsted Inspection Handbook, Jan 2015, defines spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as:

“131. The spiritual development of pupils is shown by their:

- **ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people’s faiths, feelings and values**
- **sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them**
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning

- willingness to reflect on their experiences.

132. The moral development of pupils is shown by their:

- ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong, readily apply this understanding in their own lives and, in so doing, respect the civil and criminal law of England
- understanding of the consequences of their behaviour and actions
- interest in investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues, and being able to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues.

133. The social development of pupils is shown by their:

- **use of a range of social skills in different contexts, including working and socialising with pupils from different religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds**
- willingness to participate in a variety of communities and social settings, including by volunteering, cooperating well with others and being able to resolve conflicts effectively
- **acceptance and engagement with the fundamental British values** of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and **tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs; the pupils develop and demonstrate skills and attitudes that will allow them to participate fully in and contribute positively to life in modern Britain.**

134. The cultural development of pupils is shown by their:

- **understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage and that of others**
- **understanding and appreciation of the range of different cultures within school and further afield as an essential element of their preparation for life in modern Britain**
- knowledge of Britain's democratic parliamentary system and its central role in shaping our history and values, and in continuing to develop Britain
- **willingness to participate in and respond positively to artistic, sporting and cultural opportunities**
- **interest in exploring, improving understanding of and showing respect for different faiths and cultural diversity, and the extent to which they understand, accept, respect and celebrate diversity, as shown by their tolerance and attitudes towards different religious, ethnic and socioeconomic groups in the local, national and global communities.**

(A school visit to a place of worship would contribute to the areas highlighted in bold text)

British Values and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain

DfE guidance 'Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools (November, 2104) reminds schools that they should promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. These values originated in the Prevent strategy in 2011.

"Schools should have a clear strategy for embedding fundamental British values, and be able to show how their work with pupils is effective in doing so. Actively promoting the

values also means challenging opinions or behaviours in school that are contrary to fundamental British values. Promoting views that undermine fundamental British values would be at odds with the Teacher's Standards which expect teachers to uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school.

The list below describes the understanding and knowledge expected of pupils as a result of schools meeting this part of the standard:

- “An understanding that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law;
- An acceptance that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour; and
- An understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination.”

Choosing where to visit

A database is available of places of worship to visit, recommended by other North Yorkshire schools (in the Humanities Room on Fronter). Some schools find it helpful to organise their visit through an organisation such as The Bradford Interfaith Centre:

Interfaith Education Centre
Future House
Bolling Road
Bradford

BD4 7EB

T 01274 378405

E interfaith@bradford.gov.uk

<https://bso.bradford.gov.uk/Schools/CMSPage.aspx?mid=443>

Combining a visit to a place of worship with other activities can help to avoid the issue of parents withdrawing their children from the visit and broadens the pupils experiences. Suggestions from schools visiting Bradford for example include:

Theatre visit (Alhambra, St George's Hall), cultural visit (Bombay Stores), geography fieldwork, visit to historic sites (Bradford Industrial Museum, Bolling Hall, The Peace Museum), Art Gallery (Lister Park, Cartwright Hall), Media (The National Media Museum), Sport (Valley Parade, Odsal Stadium).

A visit to place of worship could also be built into a residential visit.

Preparing for the visit

NATRE produced the following checklist to support schools addressing the question,

‘Are RE visits and visitors organised imaginatively, effectively and efficiently so that they make a significant contribution to RE's learning objectives?’

- Have the visit's educational purposes (including links with concepts that are important in RE e.g. 'respect', 'reverence', 'special place') been set out?
- Are you sure that the destination of the visit is the right one to fulfil these educational purposes and development of RE concepts?

- Have all the school policy requirements for visits been met (e.g. costings, safeguarding, health and safety, risk assessment, notification of parents/carers, ratio of children to adults, transport)?
- Are there any special requirements/sensitivities to be borne in mind during the visit (e.g. removal of shoes, headwear, appropriate clothing, standing and sitting)?
- How will the host/s of the visit be involved in the planning process and how will they be briefed (including running through the educational purposes and RE concepts)?
- If this is the first time that the venue has been used, have you made a preliminary visit in order to check specific issues (e.g. access, toilet facilities, working facilities, opportunities to take photographs or for direct experience)?

Informing parents and parental consent

Details of a school's responsibilities are outlined in the North Yorkshire 'Handbook for Educational Off-site Visits and all Adventurous Activities Section 1 Part 10:

Parental consent for off-site visits and activities', part of which is an addition from December 2014

This document can be found as a hard copy in every North Yorkshire maintained school and at <http://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/lbtc>

Key points to note:

2.4. Schools and services must obtain written consent for every individual visit, activity or series of a similar nature which involve a higher level of risk including but not limited to longer journeys, residential visits and adventurous activities, those which fall outside of normal hours and non-routine activities which are not a normal part of educational provision.

2.7. Visits and activities which involve a charge or contribution, or that include agreement to any payment or cancellation terms will need individual consent by parents to the financial arrangement.

An issue many schools are currently facing is parents choosing to withdraw their child from a visit to a place of worship, particularly a mosque. Parents do have the right to do this if it is part of the RE curriculum, but not to other aspects of the visit if other areas of the school's curriculum are being covered.

The Handbook for Educational Off-site visits states:

“6. Withdrawal from visits and activities

6.1. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from religious education lessons [6][9] but not from the national curriculum. This means that parents do not necessarily have the right to withdraw their child from a visit to a place of worship if it forms part of the delivery of the national curriculum.

6.3. It is important for the visit leadership team to be clear about the purpose of a visit, including the wider personal, social and cultural benefits and its link to the national curriculum. “

It is good practice for headteachers to follow up a request for withdrawal with a meeting with the parents to discuss their concerns. In this way schools may be able to alleviate the fears and concerns some parents have.

A sample letter is attached.

Risk assessments: These should be proportional to the visit and identify risks and control measures which are beyond normal everyday educational hazard and risk. They should also refer to the benefits of the activity to the children and young people.

Home Office Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/threat-level-from-international-terrorism-increased>

Voluntary contributions: <http://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11314&p=0>

Preparing pupils for the visit

Some pupils may not have encountered many people from different faiths or cultures and with the negative media coverage about Muslims in particular, may feel uneasy about the visit. Teachers know their pupils and should consider how to best prepare them for the visit so they will be comfortable with any differences they see.

This could include:

- A visit to the school by a representative of that faith
- Linking with a school with a contrasting cultural and/or faith background in the UK or abroad (see additional guidance on school linking opportunities)
- A virtual tour of a place of worship via the internet
- Film clips/DVD on places of worship
- Learning before the visit about the features of the place of worship, the activities that happen there and its significance to worshippers
- Regular opportunities to discuss controversial issues in the classroom (age appropriate), such as the Charlie Hebdo attack, terrorism and the events in Syria. Philosophy for Children is a useful way in which to manage effective discussion.
- Multi-cultural play resources and reading material available to pupils from EYFS onwards.

It is good practice for a school to create multiple opportunities for pupils to meet with and work alongside people who are different to themselves. This could be a joint educational visit with a group of children with a disability, interviewing elderly people about their childhood memories, having 'global learning' days with visitors from other cultures or taking the opportunity to mix with another school on a residential visit, such as at Bewerley Park, or East Barnby (the North Yorkshire Outdoor Learning Centres).

After the visit

Celebrate and share the experiences of the visit with as many people as you can. This could include:

- Assembly to all pupils
- Presentation/report to governors
- Newsletter article for parents and pupils
- Report on the school website

- Wall display in school
- A 'Big Book' of pupils work, to share with parents
- Report for the local newspaper/Parish magazine

If the visit becomes a regular part of your annual offer to pupils, celebrating the positive impact with all parents will hopefully result in fewer requests for withdrawal.

You could also share your experiences with North Yorkshire SACRE who can then share with other schools through newsletters.