

Learning Outside the Classroom

Breaking down barriers

Establishing visits to the local mosque
London Road, Croydon

What were we trying to achieve?

- To reduce the number of parents/carers who withdraw their children from religious visits
- For pupils and adults in the school community to gain an increased understanding of the role of the local mosque
- To broaden and enrich pupils' understanding of Islam
- To affirm and raise the esteem of Muslim pupils within the school

Cost:

A donation of £50 to the mosque for each visit. Coach hire. The visit was part funded by the school and part by an external source. There was no cost to parents/carers.

Who went? How many?

Visit 1: teachers, classroom assistants and parents who were actively encouraged to join the visit.
Visit 2: 30 Year 5 pupils, class teachers; classroom assistants, parents/carers.

Preparation:

Preparation was the key to success. As a result of a number of withdrawals from previous trips it was decided that the headteacher would front the visit. It was included in the school's action plan and the active commitment of governors was gained. A pre-meeting at the mosque between the head, RE coordinator, parent governor and imam devised a programme for the visit for adults from the school community and a second visit for pupils. This established an understanding of the expectations and made the practical arrangements.

How did we organise the learning?

This first visit was part of a staff inset day. Governors and parents/carers - particularly those who were 'opinion formers' in the school community - were invited to accompany this visit, especially those who were reluctant for their child to participate. The visit looked at the experience that pupils would have and also allowed time for questions. Most adults had not been inside a mosque or *madrassah* before and so this preparatory occasion proved a very valuable experience and gave opportunities to defuse any misconceptions or concerns.

Several areas were highlighted that needed further planning. This included the wearing of head-coverings for females. This had emerged as an emotive issue and appeared to present a potential barrier. To counter this, the school bought *hijabs* and the significance of covering the hair was explored as part of the preparation.

What was the impact of the experience?

The visit took place and only two parents/carers withdrew their children. All staff felt empowered and confident because they were well briefed by the initial visit.

For both pupils and adults it was a significant learning experience and increased their understanding of practices at the mosque. They were confident in their explanations of practices e.g. 'Now I know why some Muslim girls have their heads covered. I used to think it was because they had to shave their hair'. One of the pupils with special needs commented 'When we were able to watch the men praying I felt all special and calm. It was so peaceful'. The visit is now an established part of the school year for Year 5s.

Follow up:

Photographs and accounts of the visit from both children and adults were displayed in the school entrance and pupils completed pamphlets about the mosque. These were given out to the next year's Year 5 pupils.