**FAITH TRAILS AND VISITS**

**GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS**

**INTRODUCTION**

Integrating visits into a programme of Religious Education provides key opportunities for compelling learning experiences that enhance pupil understanding; whether the experience is in the form of a single visit to a place of worship or a series of visits as exemplified in faith trails. Teachers are a critical in the design and development process of these educational visits. Trails or visits provide links between the various participants involved, pupils, members of faith communities and parents / carers so that all who are who are supporting and delivering the learning that pupils will experience are involved.

The following offers advice for teachers, reflecting the outcome of designing and running Faith Trails in Lambeth. More information on this project can be found on the relevant section of these Lambeth Schools Partnership web pages.

Alongside this document, the Toolkit contains relevant forms and letters that can be used in setting up either faith trails or visits and adapted for most contexts.

**Faith Trails or Visits: starting the design process**

The aforementioned Faith Trails Project provides evidence of teachers including ‘outside the classroom learning’ opportunities in Religious Education. This revealed a number of important starting points which lead to successful learning, a basic example of which is the necessity of aligning the aims and objectives of a unit of work with those proposed for any intended visit (or trail). So, the importance of having a clear and confident grasp of the aims that underwrite any intended visits to places of worship cannot be underestimated!

Five broad learning aims are important in this endeavour so that pupils can:

* Experience being in a holy place and consider what it means to a member of that faith;
* Explore each building and its features and learn interactively how it is used;
* Find out what the religious community does to help others locally and abroad;
* Reflect on what the religions have in common and respect the differences;
* Enjoy a fascinating, thought-provoking and unforgettable day out together!

**Next Steps and Strategies**

Based on experience and good practice locally and nationally, the following will help teachers to work through a coherent planning process.

**Thinking through decisions about trails or visits**

Consider:

* Which part/s of the Agreed Syllabus am I linking the trail or visit to and why (curriculum review)?
* What are my aims for a trail or visit? How will I evaluate the learning?
* Which place/s of worship do I want the pupils to visit?

An example here is to consider the Lambeth Faith Trails approach to providing compelling learning experiences suitable for Key Stage 2 pupils from Year 5 upwards. They are aimed at consolidating what pupils have learned in the primary years, widening their horizons and developing their thinking. It is hoped that, as part of their widening of experience, they will gain an initial understanding and appreciation of what is involved in inter faith engagement.

Do we want to:

* try to get a place on the dates given by existing trails or
* devise our own trail or visit?

If an existing local trail is a good match

* try to reserve a place on the dates given if there are any that suit your needs and there are spaces available.

If not, or if you want to organise a stand-alone visit, decide:

* When do I want the trail or visit to take place (e.g. at the beginning or end of a unit of work or as a significant part of the unit blocked into one half day or day)?
* How do I find out about the local places of worship in my local area (consider organisations such as local RE teacher networks, local SACRE(s) and the Inter Faith Network UK);
* Who do I contact?

**Tasks to be undertaken:**

* If individually organised contact the venue/s to agree a mutually agreeable date and time;
* For any type of Trail or visit ensure the hosts are clear about the purpose of the visit, the age, number and ability range of pupils (including any special needs to be catered for) and the number of adults attending. Follow up your contact by email to confirm details;
* Communicate with the hosts what the children know and understand and how the visit is linked to the syllabus;
* Work out journey details;
* Cover the school and LA requirements for safeguarding and risk assessments and communicate about these matters with the venue;
* Find out any dress or other requirements and sensitivities and ensure parents and pupils are clear about and comply with these;
* Ensure parents /carers are clear about the educational purpose of the visit and how pupils who are not given permission to participate will be looked after in school;
* Get signed permission slips for attendance and inclusion in photographs from parents / carers; Explain to pupils how this learning outside the classroom will enable them to find out more at first-hand about the unit/s of work they are studying; ascertain what expectations there are for social distancing during travel and in the venue/s as well as any sensitivities around any specific medical needs or use of particular protective gels, wipes, sprays or masks;
* Keep in touch with the venue to ensure both sides are aware if your arrangements have to be altered.

These essential points are here distilled into the bullet points below:

* Pre trip briefings with parents / carers, faith community hosts and pupils, ensuring parents / carers are clear about the educational purpose of the visit;
* Pre trip briefings with the faith communities ensuring they are clear and confident about the purpose of the visit, the age, number and ability range of pupils in the party including how to support pupils with additional needs. This will be helpful in order in avoiding any misunderstandings;
* Determining how those pupils, who are not given permission to participate, will be looked after in schools and communicating those provisions to parents when necessary.

Some of the support materials in the Toolkit are a product of the above strategies and include letters to parents, advice to hosts and feedback forms.

**Fine Details**

Experience of organising similar visits showed that once the curriculum decisions above have been made, planning turns to more practical matters - the details of how to go from planning to execution of the visits. From the outset, it is important that teachers follow school recommendations and protocols already in place for learning outside of the classroom as used in other subject areas.

Tasks to be undertaken now involve checking on the learning aims, briefing participants, troubleshooting potential flaws in the planning and timelines to be completed.

**Briefings and other logistical stuff!**

When are the trails offered? Will they fit into the teaching schedule?

Teachers will find that even if they are considering going on a pre-organised Faith Trail, they should expect to find that in-school planning for visits takes some lead-in time which should be factored in.

**Communication is key!**

It is important to remain in contact with all who are involved with the planned visits. Reconfirming visit dates, confirming numbers attending, passing on any emergency contact details as required (just in case) are essential.

Teachers may also wish to make personal contacts with parents/carers and hosts in a briefing meeting or they may utilise / adapt the existing forms.

**Engagement and briefings with faith communities**

Although the setting up of the trail at Local Authority level will have laid the foundations for good relationships between teachers and hosts, that relationship needs to be maintained through openness, trust and transparency. Some aspects of facilitating this aim have already been mentioned. For example briefing participants and keeping in contact.

Please note that there is a document offering general advice for hosts associated with this Tool Kit.

The Streatham Faith Trails evolved from visits already taken and discussions with Faith communities. Whether you are working in that context or outside of it, it is still good practice to bear in mind the fact that whilst some members of the faith community or faith leaders will be very confident and comfortable with the educational focus and aims of the visits, others may be less so. This means sensitive enquiries may be helpful in discerning what advice and briefing they may need.

Important matters to include in the briefings will be:

* Sharing information about what topics the target class are currently engaged with or their focus questions for learning. Examples may include explaining that the class are exploring Judaism, with a focus on Sukkoth or that they have a basic knowledge of Hinduism or that they are learning about Christian baptism and its importance or Islamic prayer or funeral customs;
* Sharing the learning aims (see above) with the host communities, discussing items in the venue that would be of specific interest (a baptismal Font for example);
* Helping to assess the visits: teachers should share with hosts what kind of feedback will take place once the visits have taken place. This will include comments from the pupils. It is important to encourage and value how successful the hosts felt the visits were and what amendments they might suggest.

In particular teachers should convey to their hosts the following:

* Whilst it is a privilege for the children to be present at and to observe, prayers or other religious activities taking place in the buildings during their visit, it is important that pupils are not asked or expected to join in or take part in any kind of worship.
* A useful reference document exploring these matters is Sacred Spaces - Learning Outside the Classroom (pdf. © Crown copyright 2008) to be found at lotc.org.uk;
* It is lovely for the children to meet and listen to someone/people who are devout and enthusiastic about their religion, but it is not allowed in any way to try to persuade or convert pupils or suggest that one religion is better than another.
* Although hosts will be sharing their own beliefs, values and practices, hosts should be asked to ensure that they do not say anything derogatory about other religions. Of course, the children will naturally be noticing similarities and differences, but we want to discourage them from making negative comparisons and value judgments and to encourage them instead to understand and respect the differences.

Other sensitivities to bear in mind relate to pupils observing worship activities in any context where it might be considered that, merely by being present or observing dress sensitivities, they are taking part in that act of worship. An example can be found in the context of a visit to a Hindu temple, where it is common for hosts to offer food as Prashad to all who gather for the ceremony. Pupils should not be expected to accept this offering, except under the clear understanding that it is as a mark of respect and NOT worship.

Finally, it is important to have discussed with the host community matters of safeguarding and associated risk assessment. Consideration of and adherence to Local Authority and school policies are essential.

**Parents and Carers[[1]](#footnote-1)**

As referred to earlier, prior to the visits it is important to communicate with parents and carers as much detail as possible and this will include:

* Sharing the educational aims of the trail (see above). Religious Education in schools enables children to share their own beliefs and learn about the beliefs and experiences of others; the purpose of RE is not to challenge and remove the faith of children or to try to convert them. All of the visits must take place in this spirit;
* Briefing them on why it is important in RE for pupils to meet members of the Faith and Belief communities in person;
* Explaining that observing and exploring faiths (as in the visits planned) is an opportunity to discuss what the faiths have in common and learn about and respect the differences;
* Encouraging any concerns to be explored aired and / or negotiated in a sensitive manner;
* Explaining the importance of acquiring their views on the experience of the visits, circulating evaluation forms explaining what role they play in planning future visits in including parents and carers in future planning;
* Sharing details of dress codes required to be observed by pupils and adults attending will require a briefing on the expectations about modest dress. For example, this might include males and females attending wearing loose fitting trousers or asking girls wearing skirts to ensure their hems fall below the knee. Shoes are removed at mosques and temples. Head coverings (scarves) for women are the norm in mosques (optional for girls), Gurdwaras and may be required in some synagogues;
* Reminding parents / carers that occasionally food may not be allowed in certain venues and that pupils need to bring vegetarian packed lunches to respect Kosher and Halal traditions;
* Arranging contact details in case of changes in plans.
* Parents and carers of children withdrawn from any trip or visit, should be informed of the alternate provision that the school is making for their child while the class is off site.

**Briefing pupils**

What learning activities will the pupils engage in and what are the visit protocols to be expected of the pupils?

Learning activities will have been chosen to include balance between items of specific interest to the learning aims of the visits while giving pupils the freedom to explore the buildings and take full advantage of host input in order to satisfy their own interests.

Teachers need to bear in mind that the visit is one hour in duration and, therefore, a balance between these types of activities needs to be considered.

Pupils are expected to be mindful about the way they are undertaking their enquiries in this faith-based context (more will be said about this later). They are expected to be active participants, making use of a variety of learning activities including listening, research, talking, questioning, using accurate vocabulary as appropriate to their age group. Equally, pupils should be given the opportunity to reflect and experience the atmosphere of the sacred space that they are visiting.

If photographs are to be taken, permissions should be sought of the hosts, and all who are to be included in the photograph. In order to comply with requirements of Data protection, school and or LA policy should be consulted and adhered to.

Briefing pupils before they attend the visits is equally important as that undertaken with hosts and parents/carers. Before the visit it is envisaged that teachers should:

* Explain the educational aims of the visit (see above). Here it may be interesting to find out if any of the pupils have already been to any of the places of worship before (this can be an additional source of knowledge for the whole group). It is an important opportunity to revise and develop some of the basic vocabulary that will be encountered (e.g. synagogue, mosque, church and temple, sacred books, languages etc.);
* Link the trails to the work pupils are already completing in school (linking learning objectives and anticipated outcomes of the visit);
* Explore with the pupils the ‘what do ‘we’ need to know and understand’ questions and responses, so that they can ask informed and sensible questions on the day. For example, using terms of greeting such as Shalom, Salaam Alaikum and Namaste;
* Discuss appropriate ways of behaving on the visit, encouraging questions and airing concerns pupils may have;
* Circulate evaluation forms, explaining the purpose of evaluating the visits and connecting it with learning aims and outcomes;
* Remind pupils to take materials to write with and on or tablets if this is the school’s preferred learning mode.

**Evaluation**

The final aspect of the whole process is reviewing the experience in order to inform future planning. A number of tasks are involved here and will typically involve:

* Reviewing the initial aims and objectives of the curriculum and matching with those of the unit of work or topic;
* Assessing the work produced by pupils as a result of the Faith Trails and the impact that had on their learning;
* Analysis of feedback from participants (faith participants/hosts, pupils and parents to refine the experience for future groups);
* Sharing these outcomes with participants as part of the process of refining and developing the learning experience for subsequent groups of pupils.

**The Final Countdown**

Teachers will need to reflect on what is needed to be undertaken at this point. It may be that the list will look like the following:

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| **Preliminary tasks (6 weeks from initial decision to departure)** |
| **Activity** |  **Notes** |  **Actions** |
| Curriculum review: Decision made to enhance learning opportunities Hosts contacted and diary dates confirmed  | Yes (date) | If available Check Local Authority pre-planned trails. |
| Contact lists | Hosts Parents / carers and pupils: Yes | Reconfirm later |
| **Briefings** |
| Host communities | Yes / No (date)  | Letters sent to all faith communities on the trail (including information for Hosts)Briefing meeting arranged at the school, faith venue or virtually Check parking and toilet facilities and any other issues for staff and pupils   |
| Parents and carers | Yes / No (date) | Letters sent to parentsBriefing meeting arranged at the school or virtually Ensure permission slips returned |
| Pupils  | Yes / No (date)  | Review of learning shared with pupilsAims of visits shared in class |
|   |   | Amendments /concerns of pupils noted and fed back into any on-going communication/ tasks for the visits |
| **Two weeks before departure** |
| Reconfirm with hosts | Yes / No  |   |
| Maps organised  | Yes / No |   |
| Reminders about:Packed lunch and appropriate clothing | Yes / No  | Confirmed by email and letterSpare headscarves-check! |
| Arrangements for pupils not attending | Yes / No | Reconfirm! |
| **Post Visit Tasks** |  |  |
| Thank you letters sent to Hosts plus examples of curriculum work and feedback from pupils | Yes / No |   |
| Debrief conversations with Hosts or virtually  | Yes / No |   |
| **Evaluation of the Trails:**Post event discussions and reviewWrite up with reference to Curriculum aims and objectives/feedback formsOutcomes/review of curriculum | Yes / No |   |

1. It is important that schools advise parents/carers of their legal rights to withdraw their children from Religious Education this is usually found in the school prospectus or website. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)