

***Guidance on  
Parental Objections to Visits  
to Places of Worship  
2006***



Diversity & Cohesion - Interfaith Education Centre  
Tel: 01274 731674  
Email: [interfaith@educationbradford.com](mailto:interfaith@educationbradford.com)

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)

## Education Bradford

### Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship

#### Executive Summary:

This advice addresses the issue of objections to children being taken on visits to places of worship. It re-iterates the importance of such visits, their educational value and provides a rationale that can be shared with parents and carers. We offer suggestions on how the problem can be prevented from arising and some of the ways in which the benefits of such visits can be maximized.

Bradford's *Agreed Syllabus for RE* and the recent *Non-Statutory National Framework for RE* from QCA both emphasise the importance of first-hand experience of visiting religious communities and meeting adherents of religions – a recommendation that is fully endorsed by Education Bradford.

#### Introduction:

Education Bradford takes very seriously its role in promoting community cohesion and challenging racism, discrimination and stereotyping. Whilst we view this as a responsibility of all departments, the work of the Diversity and Cohesion team is central in taking this agenda forward within Education Bradford and our schools and other learning communities.

A number of schools have approached the team in recent months asking for advice on dealing with parental objections to the school's plans to take pupils on a visit to a place of worship. It is difficult to know if the incidence of this is increasing but we think it is important to raise it with schools and share some examples of good practice in the hope that we might be able to avert further problems. While objections are raised about visits to a number of places of worship, they are most frequently about visits to mosques, which raises the bigger issue of Islamophobia and how this can be addressed. We are working on this separately and will be issuing guidance to schools.

The reasons for parental refusal vary greatly and include the cost of the trip as well as religious (and sometimes racist) objections. **We would strongly recommend that schools always ask parents to explain their decision**, whilst remembering that parents do have the right to withdraw their children from some or all of religious education, **on grounds of conscience**. This is consistent with guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills.

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20e-portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)

## **Rationale:**

It is important to have a very clear rationale available to all parents and others about visits to places of worship. Reasons for arranging such visits include:

- Education is about extending pupils' knowledge, understanding and experience of the world and a visit to a place of worship can help do this
- Religion is a very important factor in society and it is essential that children have opportunities to explore religious practice and belief
- The experience of visiting a place of worship can help children to learn about religions but is NEVER about indoctrination or persuading children and young people to agree with the beliefs of the religion being studied.
- Educationists agree that experiential learning is more effective than simply learning from texts and electronic sources. Pupils usually enjoy their visits and learning is enhanced
- A visit to a place of worship also provides opportunity for pupils' cultural development by enabling them to experience new or different forms of art, architecture and music
- The atmosphere of many places of worship can provide an opportunity for pupils to consider questions about life, religion and spirituality in ways that are impossible in classrooms
- Visits are usually part of a planned curriculum and are integral to their learning that will take place: to miss out on the visit would seriously impact on pupils' progress and understanding
- There are always opportunities for cross-curricular learning and many aspects of the school curriculum can be studied through a religious building including the arts, literacy, history, mathematics and design
- The visit is usually led by an experienced guide who is able to answer the children's questions and thus they have the benefits of meeting an adherent of a faith that might be different from their own
- Leaders of all the main faiths in Bradford agree that visits to places of worship are educationally beneficial
- The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, the statutory document that all maintained schools must follow, requires that all pupils should visit places of worship as part of the RE curriculum.

## **Practicalities:**

Parental permission for any school trip is necessary. It may help to have a yearly 'acceptance slip' for parents to sign agreeing to allow children to take part in visits to places of worship. It is always good practice to encourage children's parents to participate and encourage them to 'help' on such excursions.

Parents can be assured that a risk assessment has been carried out prior to a visit so that, as far as is possible, pupils' safety can be guaranteed.

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20e-portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)

Visits to all places of worship can be organised through the Interfaith Education Centre ([interfaith@educationbradford.com](mailto:interfaith@educationbradford.com)). Schools with full subscriptions can have five visits: either to places of worship or a visit from one of the faith tutors to your school.

### **Preventing the problem from arising:**

There are many ways in which teachers and governors can try to prevent the difficult situation in which a parent refuses to give permission to arise. These include:

- Having a clear policy on which parents and pupils have been consulted, which has been ratified by the governing body and which is supported by all members of the school community. This can be incorporated in your race equality policy or your RE policy
- Using parents' evenings, assemblies and displays to promote understanding of religious and cultural diversity and of previous visits to places of worship
- Being unequivocal in the school's approach to racism, stereotyping and prejudice
- Working with the local community to raise awareness – the local Christian church supporting the visit to the mosque, for example
- Having a period of preparation for the visit so that pupils' interest and enthusiasm are high
- Inviting a speaker from the Interfaith Education Centre to come, perhaps with artefacts or posters, to work with the children and answer their questions in lessons
- Inviting a speaker from the IEC to work with governors, parents or staff prior to arranging a visit
- Arranging a day at the IEC for parents and /or governors to meet members of faith communities and visit a place of worship
- Stressing the purpose of the visit to parents, some of whom might have a distorted view of what will happen – such as expecting participation in others' worship or being coerced or persuaded into accepting beliefs which differ from their own
- Providing parents with copies of the IEC's leaflets giving a brief introduction to specific places of worship

### **Preparing for the visit:**

Usually visits to places of worship will have specific learning linked to one of the Study Units in the Agreed Syllabus for RE and it is important for teachers to plan carefully the learning that will take place as a consequence of the visit.

There are many creative methods of teaching and learning that can be utilized to help prepare children for the visit. These include using art to explore patterns, buildings, symbols and shapes; listening to music; exploring artefacts- their use, meaning and design; studying photographs, posters or videos of places of worship to devise research questions; interviewing members of the community to understand what it means to belong to a religious community.

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20e-portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)

The IEC has produced DVDs and CD Roms entitled *Sacred Spaces* on a church, gurdwara, mandir and mosque to help schools prepare pupils (and parents/governors) for their visit (Tel 01274 731674 for details.) They also house a wide range of resources for teachers to borrow or buy to support their work in schools.

### **During the visit:**

To help pupils to realise that the building is about people in the present, as well as the past, they will have an opportunity to meet and talk to people who worship in the building.

They will spend some time sitting in silence to appreciate the atmosphere, the splendour or simplicity of the building.

The children will be encouraged to consider key questions in order to encourage respect, empathy and understanding for example:

- What interests you?
- What puzzles you?
- What questions do you want to ask?
- How does it feel to sit here?
- What helps to give it this atmosphere?
- How might this building help people worship?
- What clues are there about how people worship?
- What is similar here to other places of worship?
- What is different here?

Children may be asked to observe design, symbols, colours and objects and to consider their importance:

- Where are objects situated? Why?
- What is this for? Who uses it?
- What books are used? Why? When?
- Who uses this building? Why?
- What posters and notices are there?
- What do they tell us about this worshipping community?

They may: listen to music; listen to a speaker from the faith community; take photographs or video footage - if permission has been granted; draw things that interests them; follow a religious objects trail and make notes and sketch things of interest to them

### **After the visit:**

Follow-up activities will often be cross curricular and may involve work in English, Art, History and Geography, for example, as well as RE.

Children may discuss key questions about the place that they visited and their experiences on the visit for example:

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)

What are the essential features of the place of worship?  
Why are places of worship different - even those belonging to the same religion or denomination?  
What do you think it means to the people who come here as worshippers?  
What surprised you?  
What did you find interesting?  
Did you learn anything that links to your own life and experiences?  
If the place were to be demolished and you could take one thing from it, what would it be?

Pupils could:

- Write letters of thanks to their host highlighting the aspects of the visit that interested them – this is an excellent opportunity to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- Use books or the *Sacred Spaces* DVDs and CD-ROMs to compare with what they experienced
- Use their notes, drawings and photographs to create a display, web site or an illustrated guidebook to the building showing its importance to the worshipping community
- Place such a display in the school, in the place of worship visited or in a local library
- Use the display as the basis for assemblies with parents and other children present
- Recap the words used to describe the atmosphere inside the place of worship and write creatively or poetically about it, how they felt and what they saw
- Produce art or music to convey their thoughts and responses to the visit
- Pupils could produce models or drawings of religious objects and symbols
- Pupils could be set a design task that includes solving a problem – how to make a building accessible for the disabled, or a building to encourage use by the wider community, for example.

Further advice and support are available from Diversity and Cohesion  
01274 385619/ 20/ 23 or from the IEC 01274 731674.  
[interfaith@educationbradford.com](mailto:interfaith@educationbradford.com)

[http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item for the e-portal.EML/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance on Parental Objections to Visits to Places of Worship Final Version.doc?attach=1](http://ebwebmail.educationbradford.com/exchange/Steve.Dale/Inbox/Item%20for%20the%20portal.EML/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc/C58EA28C-18C0-4a97-9AF2-036E93DDAFB3/Guidance%20on%20Parental%20Objections%20to%20Visits%20to%20Places%20of%20Worship%20Final%20Version.doc?attach=1)