

Guidelines for Welcoming a Visitor

There are a number of issues you need to consider:

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Why are you Inviting a Visitor into School?

It usually helps to be as precise as possible in preparing for a visit and, subsequently, in evaluation. The following list may help your discussions and decision-making process:

- To provide personal contact between pupils and members of a faith community as “living examples of commitment”:
- To improve the image of RE and collective worship in a practical and worthwhile way:
- To offer faith community visitors a welcome and the opportunity to have a personal experience of face-to-face contact with pupils/students within a learning environment;
- To promote mutual understanding;
- To enhance home-school liaison and community involvement;
- To contribute towards pupils' spiritual and moral development.

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What Arrangements Need to be Made in School Prior to the Visit?

Consider the following:

- Check records or discuss with colleagues - has such a visit been arranged before? If so was it a success? What factors need to be considered this time?
- Find a suitable day for the visit (e.g. check it isn't a festival day);
- Consult Headteacher or senior management team;
- Book a room and equipment if necessary;
- Enter visit into school diary;
- Check the budget;
- Arrange for additional supervision of pupils if necessary.

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How do you Find a Community Representative?

- Plan well ahead of the proposed visit - you may need to contact several communities/places of worship to find a suitable visitor.
- Check out the Resource Centre website for good contacts or try your local LEA Adviser/Inspector for RE and /or SACRE.
- It is important to select a visitor who can fulfil your requirements and respond to the particular needs of the pupils. You may like to invite visitors into school before their official visit to familiarise them with the school, the class and the staff.
- Make a list of who is likely to be available and when they could come to school. Visitors should be offered expenses, or they may require a fee, so clarify the budget situation within school before you make your invitation.
- Decide what level of guidance a visitor will need in order to make an effective contribution e.g. Is s/he used to talking to children? Is s/he an effective communicator (not just a proficient and fluent English language speaker)?

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Brief Your Visitor

When you extend your invitation explain the visitor's task (preferably in writing) as clearly and as simply as possible. It is helpful wherever possible to contact the visitor beforehand to discuss the following points:

- The visitors need to provide information at an appropriate level (e.g. the school may need to provide general information on the ages, aptitude and background of pupils).
- How the visitor's input relates to the area of study being undertaken (refer to the school scheme of Work/the local Agreed Syllabus for RE).
- Whether you wish their input to:
present a personal point of view, not necessarily on behalf of the faith community to which they belong; or present an orthodox point of view; and/or clarify where they stand in relation to other members of their community. If you do not know the visitor and wish to find out the nature of their input in relationship to the mainstream faith community then the Resources Centre may be able to help you (0191 375 0586 / 0191 270 4161).
- Explain that the visitor should avoid: proselytising (seeking to convert pupils); publicising events etc; denigrating or belittling other faiths or organisations.
- Explain how you wish the visitor to work, e.g. alongside the pupils in small groups, lunchtime discussion, question and answer session, RE lesson, act of collective worship etc.
- Describe arrangements for artifacts, music, video extracts, slides or any other audio-visual aids if required.
- Inform the visitor if you have planned a visit to a place of worship before or after the visit as this may affect what the visitor says.
- If you wish to take photographs or make a tape-recording or video of the visitor, it would be polite to discuss this in advance.

- Inexperienced visitors may value and opportunity to observe one of your lessons before the visit or may wish to observe another visitor in action in your own school or elsewhere.
- It may help if you can make the visitor' tasks quite specific e.g. talk based around a theme within the faith as opposed to a talk on the faith.

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Preparing Your Students

- Plan the visit with your pupils beforehand. Share the learning objectives with the pupils - explain what you intend them to learn from the visitor.
- Inform all those who need to know about your forthcoming visitor. Often the whole school would welcome this information.
- Prepare the pupils who will be involved, especially if the visitor is from a faith community unfamiliar to them.
- You need to know where the visitor stands in relation to other members of their community so that you can explain to the pupils that the visitor is:

Someone presenting a personal point of view; or
Someone presenting an orthodox point of view.

- Pupils could be given time to prepare specific questions.
- It is vital to show sensitivity and care in establishing the pupils' relationship with the visitor in order to avoid the possibility of offensive comments or questions. An atmosphere of respect needs to be fostered and cannot just be assumed, especially if pupils are not used to having outside speakers.
- Basis courtesies need to be taught or reinforced.
- Welcome and/or departure arrangements possibly using a group of pupils should be clear.

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The Visit!

Consider the following:

- When the visitor arrives who will greet them?
- Does the school receptionist know about their appointment?
- Will you offer appropriate refreshments? (Remember any particular dietary requirements due to faith etc., and find out about any restrictions e.g. for Muslims during Ramadan).
- Point out the cloakrooms.
- Make any necessary introductions to appropriate staff, e.g. Headteacher, Head of Department etc.
- Ensure that the visitor is informed about the presence of other observers who may be present e.g. Inspectors, parents etc.

- It is essential that a member of staff remains with the visitor and the pupils at all times. Explain/re-assure that, as teacher, you are "in control" of the class and that the visitor is your guest.
- Do not interrupt the visitor, unless this is necessary in order to avoid problems, and even then do so very sensitively.
- Thank the visitor yourself and ask the pupils to do so where appropriate.
- Offer feedback where appropriate, discuss payment of expenses etc., and arrange for someone (a pupil?) to accompany your visitor to the exit.

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Giving and Receiving Feedback

Offer feedback to the visitor pointing out the strengths and maybe one or two developmental points for future visits. Be honest but sensitive. This is best done on a one-to-one basis, in confidence, and could cover the following:

- Did the visitor communicate at the right level as agreed?
- Did the pupils learn new facts or gain an insight?
- Was there enough opportunity for a two-way dialogue/discussion/ question-and-answer etc?
- Did some pupils dominate? Could you have helped here?
- What lessons can be learnt for the next time?
- Ask for observations and feedback from the visitor about the school situation. Again this is best done on a one-to-one basis, and in confidence.
- If it has not already been discussed: do not assume that the visitor will ask for, or readily accept, expenses but make sure that this possibility is dealt with.
- Follow up with a letter of thanks from both pupils and yourself.
- An example form is included below.

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Finally!

Generally speaking it is a good idea to have an alternative lesson or event prepared in case of an emergency!

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Faith Community Visitors in School Record Form

Date of Visit:

Name of visitor:

Address:

Phone:

Faith:

Name of teacher
completing this
form:

1. What did you expect from the visit?

2. Were the preparatory arrangements sufficient?

3. Were the pupils adequately prepared?
Were you satisfied with their responses?

4. Were there any aspects of the visit that you would change for another occasion?

5. Do you have any other comments to help with future visits?