

## **Code of Conduct for Faith Representatives Visits and Visitors**

The following code of conduct provides information for schools that they should share with visitors to the school in order to prepare them for a safe and successful visit.

### **A Code of Conduct for Representatives of Religious Communities working with Children and Young Persons**

Representatives of religious communities can make a vital contribution to learning when visiting schools or acting as guides to their place of worship or community activity. We are some of the largest providers of children and youth work, and have an important role in safeguarding children and supporting families. Religious leaders, staff and volunteers who provide services in places of worship and in faith-based organisations will have various degrees of contact with children.

Like other organisations that work with children, churches, other places of worship and faith-based organisations need to have appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

In particular, these arrangements should include:

- Procedures for staff and others to report concerns that they may have about the children they meet that are in line with your local authority guides, such as, “What to do if you are worried a child is being abused”, North Somerset Safeguarding Children’s Board (NSSCB) and South West Child Protection Procedures (SWCPP), as well as schools “Safeguarding Children Policy”;
- Appropriate codes of practice for staff, particularly those working directly with children, such as those issued by the Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), and the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS) or other denomination or faith groups; and
- Recruitment procedures in accordance with safer recruitment guidance and NSSCB procedures, alongside training and supervision of staff (paid or voluntary).

(Working Together 2010)

Spiritual and moral development and religious learning can be stimulated most effectively through encounters between people of faith and school pupils of all ages.

This code of conduct is offered to help schools and representatives of religious communities make the most of the opportunities available, and to avoid some of the pitfalls which are sometimes encountered. It is based on guidance published by the Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE) in 1997 – now known as the National Association for Teachers of RE (NATRE). The complete guide is available from:

NATRE, 1020 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LB.

Tel: 0121 472 4242.

Fax: 0121 472 7575.

E-mail: [retoday@retoday.org.uk](mailto:retoday@retoday.org.uk).

### **AWARENESS**

When working with school pupils, representatives of religious communities should be aware that:

- schools are *plural* communities: they usually include members of different faith groups, children from secular families and (within Christianity or other faiths) different denominational

allegiances, and that it is important to show sensitivity to this plurality. Each child's beliefs and experiences must be respected;

- in religious education, all community and voluntary controlled schools follow the local education authority's agreed syllabus. Church of England voluntary aided (VA) schools follow the syllabus with a few adjustments to reflect their aided status. Relevant extracts from the syllabus, such as the introductory and explanatory materials, can be requested from the school;
- This agreed syllabus, in common with most others, insists that, whilst pupils are encouraged to respect the rights of different people to hold different beliefs, it would be wrong (a) to teach a belief as if it were a fact and (b) to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils. This applies as much to adults other than teachers as to teachers themselves.

## **PREPARATION**

In order to make their presentations to school pupils effective, representatives of religious communities should:

- comply with "Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children and Young People" ethos of the school;
- be familiar with the school's aims, ethos and policies, and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum of the school;
- plan their presentation carefully. Religious visitors and schools need to be clear about the purpose of the visit and how the visitors' contribution links to:
  1. the school's provision for religious education;
  2. collective worship;
  3. more general awareness i.e., a contribution from a voluntary group.
- discuss their input with teachers in advance, and be open to teachers' suggestions;
- take account of the differing abilities of the pupils;
- where appropriate, use a variety of teaching methods and styles, including those which elicit a response from all the pupils;
- select the content of their presentation carefully, avoiding the temptation to try and get the whole of their faith across (for example, teaching six year olds all there is to know about Jesus in a 35 minute session!)

## **TALKING WITH PUPILS**

When talking with pupils, representatives of religious communities should:

- make clear to pupils who they are, who they represent, and what they are offering to the pupils;
- be willing to share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid (1) criticising the experiences and insights of others and (2) imposing their views upon pupils in any way; representatives must not take the opportunity to try to convert pupils or cast doubt on the validity of pupils' own beliefs;
- seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods which involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age group(s) concerned;
- make clear to pupils who they are, who they represent, and what they are offering to the pupils;
- be willing to respect and value the faith of pupils when it is different to their own;
- develop ways of speaking to pupils which communicate an open approach, avoiding any hidden

agenda to convert them.

This question will help representatives of religious communities to reflect on their approach: *If a member of another religion visited my child's school and contributed in the same way that I have done, would I, as a parent, be happy with the education given?*

Communications between children and adults, by whatever method must take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, emails, digital cameras, videos, web cams and blogs. Schools Communication Policy which specifies acceptable and permissible modes of communication must be adhered to and "Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People" adopted.

It should be noted therefore that these professional boundaries extend beyond a visitor's contact with pupils within the school premises and include any further contact that may be made with pupils in the wider community.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOLS**

First and foremost, responsibility for the pupils, including their health and safety rests with the teacher. It is important when engaging representatives of religious communities, therefore, that schools:

- ensure that any visitor to the school is suitable. Checks should be carried out to verify the visitor's identity and suitability. Requesting a reference of support from their religious body, checks with the Independent Safeguarding Authority and Criminal Records Bureau must be carried out in accordance with Schools Safeguarding Policy and Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (2010). No visitor should, in any case, have unsupervised access to pupils;
- ensure all visitors know the name of the Designated Teacher responsible for Child Protection and understands their responsibility to refer any concerns regarding any pupil to that person;
- ensure that all visitors engaged to work within the school are made aware of "Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People";
- ensure the visitor(s) is committed to supporting a safe environment which supports all pupils;
- notify parents in advance that religious visitor(s) will be visiting the school, the purpose of the visit and the curricular aims. It may be that parents are informed that a programme of visits will be planned over a year as part of the schools arrangements for delivering RE or providing collective worship. Parents may need to be made aware of their right to withdraw their child from RE and/or collective worship under Section 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998;
- plan and evaluate the event jointly with the contributor(s);
- meet agreed expenses;
- make visitors welcome; it is good practice to ensure any visitors are accompanied by a member of staff at all times;
- keep to agreed time schedules when making visits;
- provide opportunities for pupils to thank the hosts for their visit;
- brief pupils in advance; for example, by providing information on how the visitors' work is expected to contribute to the relevant programmes of study (or worship experience) for that group. This may include:
  - An explanation of how the event will contribute to their knowledge and understanding of religion and religious experience;

- Time to reflect on what questions they may wish to ask;
- Guidance on appropriate dress and behaviour for the event (particularly when visiting a place of worship);
- Time to reflect on and express their feelings, experiences and views after the event;
- How the work they are to undertake will be assessed and/or contribute to the pupils' programme of study.