

Crossing the Bridges Project

Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education)



CPD 'on location' day for teachers across Berkshire

Places of Worship in Maidenhead and Slough

On Wednesday 8th March 2017, a group of 29 people including teachers, SACRE members and RE advisors visited four places of worship in the Maidenhead and Slough area as part of the 'Crossing the Bridges' project. This project was arranged and funded through the Westhill/ NASACRE Award gained by the pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub. We were delighted that Tristram Jenkins from Westhill was able to join us for the day.

Teaching materials had already been produced as part of the project and examples of the interactive teaching/learning booklets were given to each person at the beginning of the day to familiarise them with these to encourage their use with children.

The day started at the Maidenhead Synagogue at 8.30am where we were all greeted by Sheila Veniar. We were given refreshments and then Sheila gave us a tour and talk. The synagogue is a reform synagogue and is a modern building. Sheila talked about the activities that children could do when visiting the synagogue on an RE learning trip and showed us many of the features of the synagogue, including the Ark containing the scrolls. We were shown examples of the scrolls and discussed how these are treated and why they are so significant. Sheila answered questions about how the synagogue is used and covered many of the issues that are taught in primary schools concerning Judaism, all adding to teachers' own subject knowledge and confidence.



We left the synagogue and boarded the coach which took us to the Baptist church in Slough. Here we were met by Wayne Dixon, an outreach worker who visits many schools in the area.

Wayne showed us around the community room at the back of the church first. He explained that the buildings were used by many different community groups and that a food bank operated from an adjacent building.

Wayne then took us into the main part of the church and talked about many of the resources that were available to schools as well as some of the activities schools could do when visiting. The following week a school was visiting to witness an actual baptism service.



Our third visit was to the Sikh Gurdwara in Slough. Here we were met by Nirmal Singh a volunteer who welcomed us into the building and explained how Sikhs believe that it is important to share with everyone. He explained a brief history of some key Sikh beliefs and then took us straight into the kitchen area so we could all participate in the Langar, the free vegetarian meal that is given to anyone who visits. We were all made so welcome.

After this we were taken to the main prayer room where we learned about the Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) and discussed other key Sikh beliefs. A school had just finished a visit so we could see what children would do on a visit to the Gurdwara.



Many of those present had not visited these places of worship before and were enthused by the opportunity to return with their classes. All were in agreement that we had been welcomed warmly and openly at all 4 places of worship, and the keenness to engage with schools had been a notable effect of the 'Crossing the Bridges' host training that had been completed in the run up to this event.

Finally, each person was given another of the booklets produced to help make the visits more focussed and were encouraged to download these from the Discovery RE website and use them with their classes in future visits. Once completed, some of these would be returned to us so that we could begin to build a bank of examples to share with teachers at network meetings and training events.



Our final visit was to the Stoke Poges Mosque where we were greeted by Arshad Gamiet, a member of that faith community. We were taken into the main prayer hall and Arshad explained some key beliefs of Islam stressing the belief in equality. We discovered that when schools visit, a variety of small workshops are provided including information on the five pillars, muslim dress and the mosque itself.

The tour of the Mosque ended with a question and answer opportunity and refreshments.

We then boarded the coach back to the synagogue.



During the day photographs were taken (with permission) at each of the places of worship. These will be turned into teaching resources and sent to each person who came as well as being distributed to all teachers across Berkshire (and beyond) through the relevant websites.

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