

# Teachers' CPD day trip in Reading

On 12th November 2013, a group of 20 teachers from Reading and Wokingham enjoyed a memorable day trip to visit some of the places of worship around Reading.



We began our day at the Sikh Gurdwara on Cumberland Road in East Reading and were welcomed by Parmvir Singh, who was our guide for the morning. After removing our shoes and covering our heads, Parmvir welcomed us to the Gurdwara; we washed our hands, and were shown us upstairs to the prayer hall. There were prayers being said at the time and we listened for a short while. Then we were shown into a smaller prayer room and had the chance to ask some questions and hear more about the Guru Granth Sahib. Once back downstairs, Parmvir began his talk, delighting everyone with his humour, passion, extraordinary knowledge and enthusiasm for his religion.

**Welcoming atmosphere in all settings**

One of the outstanding aspects of our day was the hospitality of all our hosts, not least the team of volunteers who made us feel so welcome in the Gurdwara. Tea and spiced biscuits were served during the talk, before we made our way to the langar, where we enjoyed a delicious lunch of lentils, rice, yogurt and chapatti.

Fully satiated, we returned to our coach and left for the Jewish Synagogue in West Reading. In the midst of one of their popular schools' open days, we were greeted by a team of helpers, including Rabbi Zvi Solomons. Our experience started in the synagogue itself, with Rabbi donning his prayer shawl and tefillin.

We learnt about the significance of the building's structure and the many different symbolic aspects of the faith; we were shown the scrolls and the prayer books, too. Our experience continued in the attached hall, where there were five different information stations laid out with a plethora of artefacts for us to see, including a fully-laid table for Sabbath. Each group has a personal guide to the different areas, and we learnt about everything from Passover to kosher food.

**Amazing day, really good to see the different places on our doorstep**



All too soon, our visit was over and we were off to the mosque. The Abu Bakr Islamic Centre, also in West Reading, is a striking new building in the heart of the community. Our welcome by Imam Mohamed Boulaatour was exciting, as we were officially the first group ever to visit the new mosque. The building is

**Fantastic opportunity to get a window into other religions**

cavernous, with huge prayer rooms and meeting rooms and modern wudu. We had a fascinating talk from Mohamed and the group came away so much more informed about Islam; indeed, we were very happy to receive our copies of the Qur'an and enjoy the relaxed and informal atmosphere that Mohamed created.



A memorable aspect of the day was that each of our guides encouraged us to ask as many questions as we wanted, and to think about what pupils might ask too. Each of them responded with real wisdom and clarity, and this helped to create such a positive learning environment that we can easily translate to our own classrooms.

Not least of these learning environments was our final stop of the day - the Shantideva Kadampa Buddhist Centre in Central Reading. After a busy day, it was a delight to be able to sit in a beautifully peaceful room and listen to Buddhist nun Kelsang Wangmo talk about the teaching of the Buddhist religion and way of life. Although not part of the primary curriculum, this final session was an opportunity for the teachers to add to their own professional development. And we finished with a real treat: a guided meditation to calm us after a hectic but thoroughly fascinating day.

**Personally meeting the representatives of religions**

All the teachers agreed that it had been a truly memorable day and that they are already looking forward to the prospect of another! They would very much like to visit other places of worship, most notably the Hindu temple and some Christian faiths, including Quaker Meeting Houses.

## What went well...

Excellent leaders - happy, bubbly!  
Interesting speakers - down-to-earth, relaxed  
Lovely food!  
Welcoming atmosphere in all settings  
Good timings, not too long in each place

Friendliness, welcoming and generosity of all places of worship  
Food!  
Information given clearly - good to be able to compare  
Thank you for organising

Fantastic opportunity to get a window into other religions and feel for their appropriateness for a school visit

Personally meeting the representatives of religions  
Experiencing the information and place as the children would  
Knowing how everyone is working together to benefit the spiritual community

Seeing places I haven't visited before  
Enthusiastic speakers at each place  
Transport - good  
Excellent food

Pre-course information and general organisation  
Well-briefed hosts who were welcoming and knowledgeable  
A whole day to learn!

Every place we visited had a fantastic speaker - very real and honest about their faith

Learning lots of info about each religion

Good variety of places  
Good amount of time at each  
Great organisation and info beforehand

Well organised; good variety of places  
Having the mini bus!  
Welcomed by everyone - so accommodating and patient with our questions

## Even better if...

Visit Hindu temple  
Other smaller faiths - different types of churches, etc.

Visits to other faiths: Hindu temple, Christian traditions, Quaker?

Would like to visit Hindu temple  
Can't think of anything else!

Develop opportunities of asking how they would answer the religious enquiry questions regarding their faith

A trip to the Hindu temple  
Examples of trips for different ages of children  
More of a chance to stop and rest/toilet break

Start/finish earlier? Hindu temple

Possible start earlier so a shorter day?

Nothing

Slightly longer at synagogue  
Hindu temple visit  
Speakers could come into school or cluster inset to talk to whole staff and pass on their passion/knowledge with a wider audience

Hindu temple next time

Great to visit so many different places of worship. They were all so welcoming. Thank you so much!

Visit Hindu temple next time

Amazing day - really good to see the different places on our doorstep  
Meeting the various religious leaders was a great experience as we have a first-person point of view - an insider's view on their religion

...we had a really good idea of what they would do with the children  
If we had asked the enquiry questions  
Other places to visit: Hindu temple, Humanism (in line with the new curriculum)

Really interesting visiting the places of worship and getting a personal insight into the religions concerned. Excellent!

Possible places next time: Hindu temple, different Christian places i.e. Meeting House, Catholic, Salvation Army, etc.

Organisation  
Great opportunity to visit so many places in one go  
Really good, useful information  
Will feed back at our staff meeting

Maybe a little time for us to talk as a group how we could fit the info from the day into the Discovery questions  
Phone numbers of the organisations for the day  
Would like to do same with Hindu temple

Really fantastic trip  
Great to make so many contacts  
It gave greater insight into the religions

Hindu temple next time

Great speakers (particularly the Imam)  
Great opportunity to see different places of worship and to ask questions and prepare for school visits  
Organisation, communication. Thank you!

Less time at Gurdwara, more at other places (not a big EBI, really!)

Chance to ask questions to the 'experts'  
Learning the basic values of each religion  
Seeing artefacts - Jewish synagogue

Day has been brilliant! Maybe in future over 2 days? Split places as it is a lot to take in!  
More practical ideas to apply in class

VERY informative  
All places of worship very welcoming  
ALL places welcome school children  
Lovely experience - as I've never been in any other place of worship apart from a Church of England church

Hindu temple  
Perhaps start the day earlier to fit it (temple) in

Fantastic day - so interesting  
Everywhere so welcoming  
Loved sharing the langar at the Gurdwara

Cover Hinduism and Christianity as well  
Had a bit longer to take in the different Jewish [display] tables

All places were very welcoming and approachable and felt very comfortable to ask questions. The synagogue was very well done, with clear approach to how children would experience their visit

I think it would be useful to know the kinds of activities they would do with children. Also whether they would tailor talk towards RE curriculum