

## **What does Islam look like in Barking? The Five Pillars in Practice**

Year 8

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to challenge more able pupils to learn from what is around them, by raising awareness, developing research skills and empowering pupils to investigate their environment. The pupils involved in the project were a group of year eight students, most of whom were in the top set for humanities.

### **Main ‘Learning Outside the Classroom’ Focus**

The focus was on providing opportunities for the pupils to go outside the school into the community to meet and talk to Muslim people from a range of backgrounds.

### **Main assessment focus**

For this assessment, the focus is to develop students’ knowledge and understanding of the following key concepts:

- 1.1 Beliefs, teachings and sources
- 1.2 Practices and ways of life
- 1.4 Identity, diversity and belonging

Learning was assessed through, pupil diaries and feedback in writing and on film. They would submit written evidence of interviews with fellow pupils as well as adult Muslims known to the pupils (usually family or teachers). Students would produce written and photographic evidence of research at the Mosque

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### **School Profile**

Total number of learners	1700
Age range	11-18
Specialist status	Mathematics and Computing
Level 5 and above at keystage 3 (2007)	59%
Five A*-Cs at GCSE (2007)	41%
Special Educational Needs	3%

Eastbury is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school in Barking. It has recently achieved specialist status as a maths and computing college. The ethnic and linguistic composition of the school is changing rapidly with nearly half of the students coming from minority ethnic backgrounds and one third of students for whom English is not their first language. The number of pupils with special educational needs is above average.

The school provides Religious Education to all pupils in key stages three and four through one lesson a week, in line with the Barking & Dagenham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. All pupils follow short course GCSE in Religious Education at Key Stage Four.

Currently there is no Head of Religious Education. Religious Education is taught by a specialist newly qualified teacher, supported by a specialist supply teacher and two full time non-specialists. The key characteristics of the Barking syllabus are that it introduces pupils to all six major world faiths at the start of key stage three and sets minimum expected standards for each year group.

### **Question 1: What were we trying to achieve?**

The priorities for the project were to improve pupils' knowledge and understanding by giving them first hand experiences of the local Muslim community, in particular by providing experiences that encouraged empathy with people whose faith and culture is different from pupils' own. Another aim was to provide a challenging learning experience for higher attaining pupils that would incorporate investigative and higher order thinking skills.

### **What were our learners like at the start?**

The focus group were potentially high achievers who in general had not been challenged and stretched in Religious Education in the past and had not been provided with particularly compelling learning experiences.

The group contained some very strong minded pupils who are not afraid to express their ideas. They come from a range of religious and secular backgrounds, predominantly Christian, Muslim and secular. A number of pupils had a tendency to share their ideas in a defensive way. Many found it difficult to listen to the points of view of others, whilst others refrained from class discussions due to lack of confidence. From my own point of view as an newly qualified teacher who is new to the school, I felt some of the students were testing me as a teacher by trying to establish whether or not my classroom really was a safe place to say what they felt.

### **What differences did we want to see in our learners?**

One of our aims was to provide opportunities and experiences leading to achievement at higher levels in relation to the attainment targets. It was also important to challenge pupils' attitudes to difference. We hoped that participation would lead to the development of more tolerant attitudes towards other peoples' views and a greater readiness to listen to and show respect for the views and lifestyles of other people. Another aim was to improve motivation by getting the pupils interested in the project and engaging them by providing experiences of meeting people and visiting places in the community. Finally we hoped to challenge their thinking, expectations and attitudes and to show them that Religious Education can be enjoyable.

### **Question 2: How did we organise learning to achieve our aims?**

The key question for this unit of work was **'What is it like to be a Muslim in Barking?'**

When I explained the research project to the pupils they were keen to be involved. I chose 26 pupils out of the year group which gave these individuals a sense achievement. They were particularly excited at the thought of visiting a mosque. I wanted to provide new opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in research, reporting and recording. We had previously completed a project which involved them interviewing people and they had learned how to identify and use 'open' and 'closed' questions.

I was keen for them to develop their questioning skills. We worked together on a mind map of possible questions to ask the interviewees and we practiced following up on the answers given. I then gave them tasks related to the skills I wanted them to develop. I gave written instructions for each task and showed them examples of possible outcomes.

I emphasised that I was expecting high quality work and expected high standards from the pupils in this project. I had set a target for this group to be working at levels 5 at 6 by the end of the project. In previous lessons they had studied the life of Jesus and Christianity and the life of Muhammad and Islam. They understood the fundamental beliefs and ideas of each religion and were able to make comparisons between them. I was looking for evidence that they had met my learning objectives and that they were able to follow guidelines and organise their material. In addition I was looking for evidence of them identifying change in themselves, recognising the development of their thinking and evaluating their progress.

Apart from developing knowledge, skills and understanding, I wanted to make this an enjoyable experience and to monitor how this affected the learning outcomes. I felt it was important to recognise the student's strengths and weaknesses which is why we spent time on questioning and investigative skills. I gave them feedback questions which they had time to reflect on and we made a film where I interviewed them about their experiences.

### **Question 3: How well have we achieved our aims?**

The main evidence for this section is shown in the pupils' work and their attitudes which are recorded in written feedback and on a film where I interviewed them and asked them about their experiences.

The overwhelming impact on the pupils was positive. Their comments illustrate what powerful impact the learning outside the classroom had on them:

- 'You can really get a feel of a place when you visit, you appreciate the atmosphere and you can't get that from a book.'
- 'You can ask people to explain things, whereas when you read something you are left wondering.'
- 'We got to sing and eat, that's a good way to learn!'

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- 'When you meet people you can see what kind of person they are, they were really nice.'
- 'You can learn more outside school - I didn't know you could be Scottish and Muslim – Miss never said that!'

**What evidence did we produce?**

1. Digital video clips of students speaking about learning outside the classroom
2. Example of students' feedback
3. Students' presentations
4. Task sheet for research