

## **Mosque Visit in the wake of the Paris Attacks: The story of one Primary school**

Being a village primary school in a predominately white, middle - class area we feel it is essential to help our pupils understand that our small, rural village is not necessarily a true reflection of life in modern day Britain. As such, we are committed to teaching excellent RE which gives children opportunities to investigate other religions and cultures; ask questions; and come to their own informed conclusions about religion, beliefs and faiths.

With this in mind staff and children from year 5 were really looking forward to a trip to Birmingham Ghamkol Sharif Mosque and visiting the Islamic Experience Exhibition on November 19th. Letters for the trip were sent out with a little trepidation wondering whether we would be met with any resistance from parents due to the nature of the visit. However, we were delighted by how eager and excited our children were to take part in this trip and, although one parent had refused to let her child go due to it "being too extremist", 35 parents were happy for their child to participate.

As the trip organiser, when I woke on Saturday 13th November and heard the tragic and sickening news of the Paris terrorist attacks, I couldn't help but question what this would mean to our forthcoming visit 5 days later.

As a school we all strongly agreed that this trip must go ahead as planned and felt that it gave us a valuable opportunity for children to get a true picture of Muslim beliefs and values whilst addressing stereotypes and misconceptions. Although initially we had thought our trip was "bad timing", on reflection it couldn't have been a better time to give children this chance to learn about the Islamic faith. We did have another 4 parents say their children couldn't go, but they were all very clear that it was due to concerns about their children being in a big city during such uncertain times and not because we were visiting a Mosque and Islamic exhibition.

The trip did go ahead and staff and children had a wonderful day. The Muslims that they meet engaged and inspired our pupils and were wonderful ambassadors for their faith. I feel proud that as a school we have been able to support our childrens' education around such a controversial issue, allowing them to make their own informed opinions about the Islamic faith. It's a privilege to be in the position where we can allow children to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions and give them the knowledge and resources to come to their own educated conclusions.

Following the trip I was delighted to receive a thank you card from a parent with the following message,

*"We were so pleased this trip to the Birmingham Mosque went ahead in the wake of the devastating terrorist attacks in Paris.*

*We feel as parents it's important for our children to understand and respect different religions and try to realise that terrorists are radicalists and not religious people.*

*We feel proud that our school is really giving a broad and open education to our children. Thank you and well done."*

A school governor also accompanied the year 5 pupils on their trip;

*As a secondary RE teacher for 16 years, it has always been apparent to me how important it is for children to visit the places of worship of religions other than their own.. It helps them to contextualise their learning and iron out any misunderstandings. After taking our Yr 10s to the mosque, I*

*approached my children's school where I am a governor, suggesting that our children may benefit. I was lucky enough to be able to accompany the class of yr 5s and to see their enjoyment of the day was a delight. Their sense of awe and wonder when they saw the dome for the first time was wonderful; there was an audible 'aahh' as they walked underneath it. They asked wonderful questions and were innately respectful and inquisitive. Once at the Islamic exhibition centre, they could explore Muslim beliefs in more detail. One child exclaimed to me 'There is so much the same, so much we have in common. I mean it's completely different but totally the same!!' The children's questions gave us an insight into what they felt was important. They asked our guides 'What sport do Muslims play', "how do you decorate your house". The guides patiently and respectfully answered all of their questions, with a constant emphasis on the fact that we are all human, we just have different cultures and beliefs. We are indeed different, but all the same.*