

## **What does it mean to be a Muslim in Barking?**

Year 9

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to enable students to get a clear understanding and taste of what it means to be a Muslim in Barking. Activities were planned to allow students to gain hands on learning experiences outside the classroom. One of the aims was to encourage students to look at current stereotypes of Muslims and to encourage them to challenge and eliminate them by showing them what life is really like for Muslims in their Borough.

The class worked as four groups each with a different focus:

- Group 1 – Produce a film / documentary
- Group 2 – Produce a photo album of their learning journey
- Group 3 – PowerPoint presentation
- Group 4 – Show their learning through Role-Play.

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

The opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom included visits to the local mosque, to the home of a Muslim family, lunch at a local restaurant and a chance to see and meet Muslim performers at a concert in a central London venue. They travelled to the upper school site to interview staff and students.

### **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 diaries and working logs which students kept throughout the project. Evidence of learning was also demonstrated in the completed media projects.

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## School profile

Total number of learners	Approx. 1850
Age range	11-18
Specialist status	Sports and Humanities
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	78%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	69%
Special educational needs	2.8%

Barking Abbey is a mixed comprehensive school with a very large sixth form. It draws its pupils from a large number of primary and junior schools particularly from the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Newham. Just under half of the students are of white British heritage. Other groups represented include Pakistani, Indian and African heritages. Approximately one third of students have English as an additional language. The Socio-economic background of students is broadly average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average. The school, which is a specialist sports college, operates on two sites which are just under a mile apart.

Religious Education is a very strong and successful subject at all levels. Several students have achieved the highest marks in the country in GCSE Religious Studies. RE is offered at all levels throughout the school, it is compulsory at Key Stage 3 and optional at Key Stages 4 and 5. The subject is taught by three specialist Religious Education teachers following the Barking and Dagenham Agreed Syllabus. Key aims of the syllabus are to promote understanding of a religious way of life in order for pupils to appreciate a spiritual dimension to life and to develop skills in students for their personal development to help them understand their own place in the world.

### Question 1: What are we trying to achieve?

The project focused on developing and improving the learning about and from Islam already gained from the existing RE curriculum. One of the aims was to enable the students to build on this learning to investigate further what it means to be a Muslim in Barking and to provide experiential learning opportunities to enhance their understanding of Islam.

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

The group selected for this project was a mixed ability year nine group who ranged from level seven to level three, including high achievers as well as students who were underachieving and students with learning difficulties who required additional support. All the students had lively and vibrant personalities with the capabilities to be creative, imaginative experimental and focused. The first priority was to meet their

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learning needs more effectively by grouping them appropriately and giving them clear and differentiated activities to challenge and engage them.

The main aims were to enable all students to take part in the project using their range of skills and abilities in order to achieve results. The division of the four groups within the class was deliberate to focus on each individual student's strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to take part in teamwork as well as excel in independent learning. Thus students that are shy and do not engage well in vocal activities were put with peers who will help them get more involved but in a group who were to undertake a task that would be more comfortable for them such as using presentation software. Whereas the students whose strength is their confidence and great discussion and interaction skills were put with others who could balance their personality so that they would not overpower people and become a one person show. They were put into the filming group where they could positively engage their energy into more practical work.

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

The students needed to acquire knowledge about what Islam teaches about the roles of men and women, social interaction, Muslim ways of life – what they wear, eat, and how they live in a non-Muslim society. A key aim was that they should understand the differences between what Islam is and the 'stereotypical' notion of what many people 'think' Islam is. They needed to develop skills that would enable them to analyse and question issues linked to these stereotypes such as:

Are all Muslims terrorists?  
Are Muslim women oppressed?  
Do Muslims socialise?

This would inevitably lead them to evaluate and draw their own conclusions based on facts and real life examples rather than what the media may portray. We hoped that this would lead students to identify themselves with the diverse community in which they live and belong together, acknowledging common ground rather than differences within Barking.

We aimed for students to develop literacy, creative, evaluative and team working skills as well as independent learning skills which would be demonstrated through their completed projects.

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

### **How did we set about making a change?**

The key question for this project was, **'What does it mean to be a Muslim in Barking?'**

This question was posed in order to get the project started and then students developed their own area of study.

Once the students were introduced to the project and their groups they started off with a spider diagram to develop ideas. In order to engage students and motivate them the teacher used different video clips of Muslim women, comedians, and basic teachings of Islam so that all students could start with the same basic knowledge as a basis for further exploration. In order to set high standards, a common framework of questions was provided for all students as a basic structure for writing their diaries and to help formulate a good piece of assessment. The aim of this structure was to help students to produce good quality writing. The work would provide evidence to support a range of levels of attainment and this would depend on the description added to each section by each individual for their working log. The teacher also set specific objectives for each group throughout the project which helped prompt them in the right direction and kept them focused on producing high quality work.

Throughout this project the teacher was able to make changes to her approaches to teaching and learning through different activities. She explored new methods of engagement but prioritised allowing students lots of freedom to develop their own learning in groups and independently in order to meet all deadlines.

There were not many changes needed to facilitate the completion of this project except for changing rooms so that the students could use the Media facilities and ICT suite to use presentation software for the project. Of the two 1 hour lessons per week; one was used for planning such as interview questions, structure of their presentations in their normal classroom, and for the other lesson was taught in the ICT suite.

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

### **What differences are evident? What impact have we made on our learners?**

The students gained the greatest amount of subject knowledge through their experiential learning outside the classroom. Their first hand experience allowed them to visualise aspects of Islam in a compelling way, ensuring that the learning will remain strongly with them throughout their lives. Through team work as well as

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independent learning, their social skills were significantly enhanced, especially by interacting with interviewees, Muslim Artists, Imams and the general public as a whole, which undoubtedly will impact on their GCSE module. The skills gained were not only creative; writing, ICT and media skills but also social skills – interacting, interviewing people in various organisations and events. The following brief descriptions of each of the experiences below illustrate the impact on the students.

### **An Evening of Inspiration at the Royal Albert Hall**

This opportunity to watch Muslim artists performing was an absolutely inspirational evening, not just because of the event but more so through watching our students enjoy an evening which they would never have experienced had it not been for this project. A group of students got to travel on the tube which was so exciting for them as many tend not to use the tube to travel to London. To see the look on many faces as they approached the Royal Albert Hall was outstanding. They had never visited such a venue and were awestruck by its magnificent design and seating layout.

I managed to obtain back stage passes for two of the students, who I left to independently organise themselves with interviews and use of video equipment and camera tripod. They used their own initiative to interview and adapt questions to suit the different Muslim artists who varied from comedians, rap artists and country singers. This was not only a great success but also led to the Muslim Artists being intrigued by our project. They were willing to help at all levels and made our students feel at ease and comfortable so that they were able to achieve the best results which can be seen through their finished film.

Although the other group of students did not get a chance to go backstage, they nevertheless enjoyed the entertainment and walked out excited and overjoyed from the experience. Some of them want this to be an annual trip for RE students as they felt they got a real chance to see that Muslims can also have fun. Most of the students, including Muslims, did not know that such events existed and that there were any Muslim artists at all. One student even admitted that she did not know that such talent existed amongst Muslims and that they worked professionally, just like any other artist!

### **Visit to Suleymaniye Mosque**

The whole class experienced a taste of Turkey through a visit to a Mosque in Hackney. The reason for not visiting a local mosque was to challenge some of the stereotyped views about Islam and show that there is greater diversity than many people suppose. The Suleymaniye Mosque allowed the students to see that there is diversity within Islam. This was demonstrated when students questioned the Imam to see whether he was really an imam as he had no beard and wore a traditional

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English suit. All the class benefited immensely from asking questions, exploring the mosque, filming and taking digital photos.

### **Interview with Muslim Convert**

This was a totally new experience. The students went to a local mosque to interview a converted Muslim woman. They were able to evaluate and understand the reasons to why she had chosen to convert from Christianity to Islam, to explore the possible problems encountered in Barking. They also discussed how her life has changed and what her life is like as a Muslim mother, wife and professional. This has impacted on their knowledge and understanding of the diversity within Islam, showing them that all Muslims are not the same and that Muslims are from different races and backgrounds. This experience enabled them to see how Muslims really live their day to day lives in Barking.

### **Lunch at the Bengal Lancer Restaurant**

This was an opportunity for the whole class to taste Muslim food and interview people at the Bengal Lancer Restaurant in Barking. All the students got a chance to taste Halal food and get first hand experience of seeing the difference in the food. Some students learnt that there were no differences and that chicken tasted like chicken and that the only differences were the spices and methods of cooking. The students also realised how much fun they could have and that these restaurants cater for Muslim dietary needs which allows them to visit restaurants socialise and eat out just like anyone else in Barking.

Overall each student has thoroughly enjoyed the project and all have expressed how much they value such an experience. This is evident in their working logs and diaries. I cannot emphasise enough how much each individual student has benefited and excelled in all areas of learning. In addition to the experiences of meeting Muslim people in a range of different contexts, the learning outside the classroom focus also gave the opportunity to many students who would not normally travel outside Barking to taste the independence of travelling on the tube and visiting different locations and venues. Each student engaged in a learning activity outside the classroom and has worked in a group to produce a finished product using ICT and media equipment.

### **What evidence did we produce?**

#### **Digital video clips:**

1. Young Muslim woman speaks about volunteers work 08.28 -09.49
2. Are women oppressed 09.50 -11.43
3. The convert who speak with her child 11.44-14.08
4. Students' responses to a visit to the Mosque 17.10 -18.28
5. Example of student review
6. Example of student evaluation