



National
Guidance

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Places of Worship

This guidance is about visits to places of worship such as cathedrals, churches, mosques, synagogues and temples. Much of it also applies to other places regarded as sacred, such as shrines, holy sites and places of pilgrimage.

In addition to their religious functions, many places of worship are also buildings of great cultural, historic or architectural interest, and house important artefacts and art works. They are often the focal point of a community and may contain archives such as registers of births, marriages and deaths. Many of the considerations about visits to museums, galleries and heritage sites therefore apply to places of worship. See OEAP National Guidance document [7.1n "Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites"](#).

Reasons to Visit a Place of Worship

Visits to places of worship by educational establishments take place for various reasons, such as:

- Collective worship;
- Religious education;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- Promoting community cohesion by understanding other people's beliefs and traditions;
- Taking part in an event such as a celebration, memorial service or concert, which may or may not have a religious aspect;
- Viewing and experiencing buildings and artefacts of architectural, historic and artistic interest.

The atmosphere of many places of worship can provide an opportunity for young people to consider questions about life, religion and spirituality in ways that are impossible in the classroom.

Visits to places of worship can help young people to learn about different religions, but they should not be used to indoctrinate them or persuade them to agree with the beliefs of any religion.

Parents' Rights to Withdraw Children

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education and/or collective worship. From age 16, pupils can choose for themselves to opt out of collective worship. However, they may not opt out of religious education without parental consent until they are 18.

If the visit does not involve collective worship or religious education, then parents cannot legally withdraw their children from a visit to a place of worship if it takes place during the school day.

Preparing for a Visit

Religion is an emotive subject, and it is common for some parents and participants to be concerned about a visit to a place of worship, even if the purpose of the visit is not collective worship or religious education. You should therefore anticipate this when planning the visit, and not only ensure that they are fully informed about the nature of the visit and the reasons it is taking place, but be prepared to engage in discussions about their concerns.

Some participants may be familiar with the customs associated with the place of worship to be visited. However, others might never have visited the particular type of place of worship, or any place of worship at all. You should therefore ensure that they are prepared for the visit and know what to expect.

There are many ways in which parents' and young people's concerns can be addressed. For example:

- Having a clear establishment policy on which parents and young people have been consulted, which has been agreed by the governing body, and which is supported by all members of the establishment community;
- Using parents' evenings, assemblies and displays to promote understanding of religious and cultural diversity and of previous visits to places of worship;
- Having an unequivocal approach to racism, stereotyping and prejudice in the establishment;
- Involving the local community – e.g., the local church supporting a visit to a mosque, or vice versa;
- Inviting a representative of the relevant religious community to visit the establishment prior to the visit, perhaps with artefacts or photos, to speak to young people, parents, staff and/or governors and answer their questions.
- Arranging a visit to the place of worship for parents, staff and/or governors prior to the visit for young people;
- Clearly explaining the purpose of the visit, and providing reassurance that participants will not be expected to participate in worship or be persuaded into accepting others' beliefs.

During the Visit

Any visit to a place of worship should recognise that it is a sacred space, and respect the beliefs, traditions and practices of the relevant religion and its adherents. You should ensure that participants understand that other visitors to places of worship may wish to pursue quiet prayer or contemplation.

Some places, such as certain mountains, are regarded as sacred sites by indigenous people. If you are planning to visit such a place, you should be sensitive to and respect the feelings and wishes of those people who hold it sacred.

