

## The Crossing the Bridges project

Post-Referendum Britain needs to find a way to build bridges between the diverse communities that make up this nation, and so the Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub, with support from the Culham St Gabriel's Trust and the benefit of a Westhill/ NASACRE Award, has launched its "Crossing the Bridges Project". This project aims to produce materials and information that will help schools to engage with the faith/belief communities in their vicinities, in a way that will enhance the educational experience gained by visiting these places and meeting the people who use them.



The SACRE joint conference (2015) began by bringing together SACRE members from the 6 local authority areas that constitute Berkshire, with a range of teachers and other faith/ belief community leaders from across the county. There were activities – including the challenge to build a bridge with the materials on the table - and presentations from the Newbury RE trail and a teacher from Windsor and Maidenhead about the challenges of organising school trips. Her report, which highlighted the advantages and the learning that could take place with such faith encounters inspired the SACRE members present to devise the current project. The first draft of the materials was shared with teachers across the whole county and feedback taken on board to improve them. Next, they were shown to groups of faith leaders



and further improvements were made. Additional meetings were held with teachers, and the materials were trialled at several places of worship. Primary newly qualified teachers in Windsor and Maidenhead and Primary School Direct trainees used them in sessions at the mosque in Maidenhead.

The materials aim to incorporate enquiry based teaching into visits to places of worship, by encouraging pupils to answer a big question such as "How do you know what Jews believe about respecting God, by what you encounter in this place of worship?" This will encourage children to look carefully at the venue and engage in meaningful conversations with the people they meet. The materials are interactive and can be filled in using an iPad or other electronic device and pupils can upload pictures as well as writing answers.

But the project does not only focus on the outcomes for the children, but aims to establish conversation between the school and the faith/belief

community. The booking forms ask teachers to give information about what pupils already know and what they want them to get out of the visit, making it clear how the trip forms part of their learning. There is also space for the teachers to include other salient information such as food allergies or other special requirements. The information sheets for the faith/belief communities also ask for relevant information such as parking availability, preferred age group and any special features the venue has to offer. Hosts are also encouraged to think about who will be meeting the children and the format of the session.

Aware that teachers are very used to picking up new resources, it has been decided to focus the first tranche of training on the venues, hosts and visitors to schools. 15 people attended the first training session



at the Synagogue in Maidenhead early in November 2016. Many faiths were represented – Sikhs, Muslims, Jews and Christians all together in the same room, some with much experience of RE, hosting and visiting, others with very little. The session began with refreshments and then after introductions where people shared a wider range of expectations, groups of three discussed the purpose of RE in schools with the aid of some prepared statements. The discussions were wide ranging, giving people a chance to get to know the others in the group as well as to consider the question. The idea that RE should aim to enable children to encounter for themselves something of the breadth of religious experience in the local area and be able to engage with it at an age appropriate level became clear – the need for increased religious literacy has been underlined recently by many reports. Encounter and relationship seem to be some of the most effective ways of combatting stereotypes and enabling children to be able to understand that others can have different opinions but still be welcoming and friendly. The Pan-Berkshire locally agreed syllabus for RE and the enquiry based method of teaching were introduced to the delegates, many of whom had little experience of school RE. And there was much discussion about how questioning and researching would make the learning more meaningful. A brief overview of the project ensured that everyone knew what was being planned and what was available. Samples of the materials were examined. Then the hosts had the opportunity to use the booklet to find out what they could learn about the Jewish view of God by looking at the synagogue and talking to the members there. The ark was opened and the scrolls shown (though not on this occasion unfurled) and the Hebrew on the cloth at the front was translated. Other artefacts were discussed and the Synagogue members talked about many different facets of life within the community that meets at the synagogue. For some of the delegates it was their first visit inside a synagogue, so in many ways they had the experience that pupils would have on their first visit. A second session was held on 23 February at Wokingham Baptist Church. This time only Christians attended but the same outline was followed with those present considering what questions they might ask and answer in this church. After this training for teachers will begin in earnest so watch out for information. But in the meantime, the other part of

the project is to gather as many Host/Venue information sheets as possible and collate them into an online directory, accessible to all Berkshire schools. Each information sheet is completed by a host community willing to be an ongoing participant in the project and in school RE.



Will this project every be fully finished? Probably not, as the directory will need to be kept up to date, the requirements for RE are bound to change, teachers will come and go as will faith and belief community leaders and visitors, but if along the way, we can facilitate genuine positive encounters between children and young people, and people of faith and belief then it will have been worthwhile.

## RE resources



UNDERSTANDING HUMANISM  
Resources for Education

**Understanding Humanism** is a website packed full of teaching resources about Humanism, featuring lesson plans, presentations, classroom activities, videos, and information on CPD opportunities. Teachers can also [book a free visit](#) from a humanist school speaker. Teachers can find new lesson plans, activities, and humanist perspectives on a wide variety of themes, topics, and debates. **Visit Understanding Humanism:** [understandinghumanism.org.uk](http://understandinghumanism.org.uk) For more information, please email [education@humanism.org.uk](mailto:education@humanism.org.uk).

Schools across the United Kingdom will soon begin receiving free copies of Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young's book *What is Humanism?* courtesy of the British Humanist Association.

The book will enable young people, whatever their background, to learn what Humanism is, and discover how many non-religious people try to answer life's big questions, and live happy, ethical, and fulfilling lives in the here and now.

This new website is ideal to support any schools/teachers who are using the Baha'i appendix in the Pan Berkshire RE syllabus. It includes basic information about the faith as well as free downloadable lesson resources. There are also links so teachers can arrange for visits from local Baha'is.



This a comprehensive resource which offers a clear and coherent approach to exploring Christianity from Reception to Year 9. It is packed with ideas for lessons that develop skills of evaluation, interpretation and reflection, to name but three, through engaging tasks. To obtain a copy it is necessary to attend a training course. For details click [here](#)



[Interact with Judaism](#) is a new digital resource about Judaism. It is the result of a collaboration between Jewish Interactive and [RE:ONLINE](#). Jewish Interactive have designed interactive apps and programs about Judaism that are used around the world. Now all the educator guides have been adapted and designed specifically so teachers and pupils in non-Jewish settings can access their products. Some of the digital versions have also been adapted for this project. To see their interactive games, please visit the [Jewish Interactive website](#).

## NATRE Spirited Arts Competition 2017

This competition is in its 14th year and has attracted over 300,000 participants averaging 2,000 entrants per year since 2004. Hundreds of UK schools get involved. This year's themes are:



- Big, big questions
- Standing up for good
- 'The Word of God'
- Where is God?
- Belief in action

All entries must be submitted by 31 July 2017.

Checkout the [website](#) for details. <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/>

## Secondary focus

### Exam marking:

Pearson have vacancies of examination markers at both GCSE and A level. This is a good way both to earn some extra money and also to be fully aware of what is expected of your students.

### Non – Compliance in RE:

NATRE has recently highlighted the inclusion of references to RE in some OFSTED reports. In one school in particular, the absence of RE from the curriculum was given as a reason for the curriculum being inadequate. See the full article: <http://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/concerns-over-non-compliance-in-re/>

This is not yet a regular part of the inspection regime, but with the emphasis on the Prevent agenda, British values and preparing pupils for life in a multi-cultural society, it is likely that this will take on a higher profile. Will that lead to comments about collective worship? Ensure everyone in your school is aware of the possible implications of non-compliance.

Tell SACRE about the exciting things that your pupils are involved in in their RE lessons, collective worship or other projects that promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Do you have contacts with schools in other cultural or religious environments?

Send SACRE a report, with pictures if possible and we will include it in the next edition of RELIGIOUS EDUCATION News.

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU!**

