

A Code of Conduct for Representatives of Religious Communities Working with Children and Young Persons

Representatives of religious communities can make a vital contribution to learning when visiting schools or acting as guides to their place of worship or community activity.

When schools receive offers from churches, other than Anglican churches, to lead worship, they should talk things through first with their local incumbent (The priest who is in charge of church life in a particular benefice).

Depending on the parish, his/her title may be Vicar or Rector, (Crockford's Clerical Directory), or if this is not possible, seek advice from Anglican clergy via the Diocesan Education Department.

All organisations that work with children need to have appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

In particular, these arrangements should include:

- procedures for staff and others to report concerns that they may have about the children they meet that are in line with "What to do if you are worried a child is being abused" (visitors will need to be referred to the school's safeguarding policy)
- appropriate codes of practice for staff, particularly those working directly with children, which can be found in the Church of England's Safeguarding e-manual
- recruitment procedures, in accordance with safer recruitment guidance.

Awareness

When working with school pupils, representatives of religious communities should be aware that schools are diverse communities: they usually include members of different faith groups, children from secular families and (within Christianity or other faiths) different denominational allegiances, and that it is important to show sensitivity to this plurality. Each child's beliefs and experiences must be respected.

Preparation

In order to make their presentations to school pupils effective, representatives of religious communities should:

- comply with the “Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children and Young People” ethos of the school
- be familiar with the school’s vision and policies, and plan their involvement in the light of the aims and curriculum of the school
- plan their presentation carefully - religious visitors to schools need to be in good communication with the link person in the school. They should be aware of the overall planning for the term, and clear about the purpose of the visit and how the visitors’ contribution links to the overall purpose for Collective Worship.

Visitors should:

- 1 discuss their input with teachers in advance, and be open to teachers’ suggestions
- 2 take account of the differing abilities of the pupils
- 3 where appropriate, use a variety of teaching methods and styles, including those which elicit a response from all the pupils
- 4 select the content of their presentation carefully, avoiding the temptation to try and get the whole of their faith across (for example, teaching six-year-olds all there is to know about Jesus in a 20 minute session!).

Talking with Pupils

When talking with pupils, representatives of religious communities should:

- make clear to pupils who they are, who they represent, and what they are offering to the pupils
- be willing to have an openness and humility to learn from pupils’ and staff members’ insights
- be willing to share their own experiences, beliefs and insights, but avoid criticising the experiences and insights of others

- seek to use engaging teaching and learning methods which involve the pupils actively, and to communicate at appropriate levels for the age group(s) concerned
- develop ways of speaking to pupils which communicate an open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to convert them.

This question will help representatives of religious communities to reflect on their approach: ***If a member of another religion visited my child's school and contributed in the same way that I have done, would I, as a parent, be happy with the education given?***

Communications between children and adults, by whatever method, must take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, emails, digital cameras, videos, web cams and blogs.

The School's Acceptable Use Policy that specifies acceptable and permissible modes of communication must be adhered to and *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges* adopted.

It should be noted, therefore, that these professional boundaries extend beyond a visitor's contact with pupils within the school premises and include any further contact that may be made with pupils in the wider community.

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