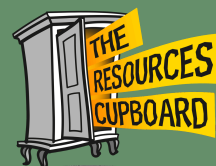


Making the most of...

A school visit to church



Introduction

School visits to church buildings are often a staple ingredient of the RE Primary curriculum and provide a rich and valuable learning experience for children to explore the building first hand, often crossing the threshold for the first time. These visits can be a very positive experience, not only for the children themselves, but also for developing the relationship between church and school and forming a good basis for future working. This short guide aims to support you to make the most of this opportunity, as you plan for and host a school visit to church.

It is very important that as churches, it is a privilege to serve our local schools, as they seek to educate and nurture the children in their care. Experiences of church-school relationships can vary enormously - whether we are working alongside a church school or community school, one where relationships are long established or just starting out, it will require us to approach our school with a servant-hearted attitude; how can we help you?

In case you are not aware, there is no national curriculum for RE; it is a required subject with the curriculum set by a local 'SACRE' group. Understanding your local curriculum will help you to see the opportunities to support your school, but it is enough to know that there will be references within this to visits to places of worship for children to encounter and explore the buildings themselves and develop an understanding of the community who gather here.

The points raised in this short guide, together with our 'visiting a church building' booklet for children will help you to make the most of these events, confidently providing a visit which not only satisfies the needs of the school but also gives you the opportunity to make a meaningful connection with the children in your community.

Your local school may make an approach to you to host a visit from a class, year group or from the whole school! If not, as part of your offer to support your local school, invite them to visit in order to satisfy those needs of the curriculum. Have a conversation with the teacher who is responsible for the visit, ensuring that you can agree expectations for the visit. You may find our checklists overleaf helpful:

Before the visit

- When will the visit happen? (date, time and duration)
- Who will be involved? (staff, children, members of the church community)
- What is the aim of the visit? (What does the curriculum require the children to get from this visit? What else would the school find helpful?)
- Who is responsible for what elements of the visit? (safeguarding, risk assessments, leading of the visit, resources needed, access, support for learners – please note; you are not expected to do all of this, but clarifying expectations with the school will prevent problems on the day!)
- What will the children do? (we recommend using copies of our ‘visiting a church’ booklet and taking these to school for them to begin before the visit, but you will need to agree a basic plan for the visit and what children will do in the time they are with you).
- Is there anything the school needs to be aware of? (particular access issues in the building for example).
- Is there anything the church need to be aware of? (particular needs of children, etc).
- Fully brief any safely recruited volunteers on their involvement in the event.



During the visit

- Arrive in good time to open up and have a last safety sweep of the building, put the heating on, if needed, and be ready to offer a warm welcome.
- Follow the plan as agreed with school and stick to the agreed remit of the visit; talking about what Christians do here is very different to expecting children to engage in an act of worship. Sticking to the plan helps to build trust with the school community
- AND be prepared for the unexpected; things happen; maintaining a calm presence will enable you to deal with any issues that arise together.
- Talk to the children in easy-to-understand language; be ready to give honest, straightforward answers to their questions and to gently engage them in the visit, talking about the things they notice which interest them. When speaking to the children as a gathered group, keep listening time short and be aware of the needs of the children in the group.
- Make the most of the features of the building that you have; is there a bell that can be rung? Stairs that can be climbed? A baptistry that can be stood in? Wherever possible, make the visit as interactive and multisensory as possible.
- Is there an event coming up at the church that you can invite children to? (Agreeing this with staff ahead of the visit is important to building trust too).
- Briefly assess the visit 'in progress' with the teacher involved; what is working, what else can you do? (There will be time for a fuller debrief after the event).



After the visit

- Thank the school for their visit.
- Thank your volunteers for their time.
- Invite feedback from the school; is it helpful to debrief from the visit together? What went well and what can you learn from this visit?
- Ask the school what more you can do to support them and look for future opportunities to build on this visit.
- Ensure that you have reset the church building as needs be.
- Share the success of your visit with your church leadership and congregation; helping them to see the importance of the relationship and the part they can play in it. Encourage them to continue to pray for this ongoing relationship.





To access more of our resources, including the ‘Visiting a church’ booklet, or to get in touch, please visit: ruralmissions.org.uk

