

Northumberland County Council

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Yet another Northumberland school visits the Islamic Society Mosque!



**Year 6 Pupil,
Three Rivers Academy, Morpeth**



RE/RS at The Duchess's Community High School is exceptional!

In the April 2014 SACRE Newsletter, an article from Louis Spence, head of RE/RS at The Duchess's High School (Alnwick), and Rachel Stephenson, Year 10 student, described a video conference with a school in The Philippines. As a friend of the school in general, and of the RE/RS department in particular, I wish to celebrate other exciting initiatives at The Duchess's School, all of which took place during school holidays.

During the February half term break, the Easter holiday and the May half term break, GCSE and A-level RE/RS students gave up half days of their precious free time to attend booster workshops led by Louis Spence and his colleague, James Thompson. On two of the three occasions, about 25 students attended, which confirms that those who came valued the workshops. I offered support during all the workshops, but, when I arrived to assist with the one during the Easter holiday, Louis had also persuaded two retired heads of RE/RS to share their wisdom! Louis: you are a most persuasive man! As for the students themselves, they were a delight. I was impressed with their perceptive analysis of the questions they had to scrutinise.

But now for the all day event arranged for the first day of the Easter holiday, a trip around multicultural and multifaith Newcastle for about 16 GCSE students and a lone A-level student (some of the students on the trip also attended the Easter holiday booster workshop). Talk about commitment! Most students arrived at the rendezvous point near Newcastle Central Station after leaving Alnwick on a bus at about 8.00am, and they did not get home until about 5.00pm. The students met all transport costs themselves and bought a lunch on the Newcastle University campus, but still made donations at the two houses of worship they visited.

The trip was book-ended by visits to the Sikh gurdwara at the Big Lamp (the relatively new, magnificent and enviably-equipped gurdwara which cannot fail to impress even before it is entered) and the Islamic Society Mosque at Newcastle University. This meant that the students met Cloud Singh and Mahmoud Kurdi who, as ever, were the hosts who made everyone feel very special and very welcome. Cloud and Mahmoud not only addressed some of the fundamentals of Sikhism and Islam respectively, but provided insights into how both faiths grapple with issues of a moral/ethical nature. The visit to the gurdwara began with drinks and something to eat (biscuits, fruit, pakoras, barfi), and the visit to the mosque, where students watched the midday prayers spellbound, concluded with more drinks and chocolates! As the students ate and drank in the mosque, Mahmoud gave everyone a leaflet containing basic information about Islam and, on the leaflet, wrote everyone's name in Arabic.

You can tell I was an extra pair of hands on the trip to Newcastle (as was a teacher from a secondary school in Peterlee who sacrificed a day of her holiday to confirm how successful days of this nature can be). The students were magnificent. They asked excellent questions of their hosts and were never less than admirably respectful and impeccably behaved. Even when we walked from one place to another during a shower, no one complained. By the end of the trip, the students were asking when a similar event could be organised. Why? Because everyone had learned so much during a day that will live long in the memory.

To confirm I am not making this up, please examine the article later in the newsletter written by two students who attended the trip. Thanks to James Thompson for forwarding the article.

Please send your contributions and photographs to:
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Farmington Fellowships for Headteachers and Teachers of RE/RS

The aim of the highly regarded Farmington Institute is to support and encourage teachers of RE/RS in schools, and headteachers working on values and standards. The Institute is financed by the Farmington Trust. The Institute awards Fellowships to UK headteachers and teachers of RE/RS in primary, secondary and special schools, publishes discussion papers and arranges conferences.

The Northumberland SACRE wonders whether headteachers and/or teachers of RE/RS would like to apply for a Fellowship.

The Fellowships are divided into two types: university-based Fellowships and school/home-based Fellowships. Teachers who live within a reasonable distance of certain universities or colleges may be awarded a university-based Fellowship. The universities and colleges closest to Northumberland are:

- St. Chad's College, University of Durham

- York St. John University, York
- The School of Education, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

University-based Fellowships may be taken as a block of up to eight weeks or in the form of day release for up to 30 days. The Fellowships must be taken within university term times. The academic facilities of the university or college are available to Fellows. Teachers with school/home-based Fellowships will be appointed a Farmington Tutor. The Fellowship may be taken in the form of day release, e.g. for one day a week over a term or a year, for a continuous period up to a maximum of 30 days. The Fellowships are for RE/RS teachers in secondary schools, for RE co-ordinators and other teachers involved in RE provision in primary and special schools, and for headteachers who wish to undertake research into RE/RS or Values Education. Applicants must have at least two years' experience in their present post.

Fellows are free to study any aspect of RE/RS they wish, but preference will be given to applicants whose work will be of direct value to the teaching of RE/RS in schools.

The Fellowship will cover the cost of tuition, board and lodging where appropriate, essential local travel and, by negotiation with the school, the salary of a replacement teacher.

For more information and the application form itself, access the Farmington Institute website (www.farmington.ac.uk) and click on the link to the page about Fellowships. The page about Fellowships includes the contact details of people with whom you can have more discussion, should you so wish. What a wonderful opportunity for teachers and/or headteachers with interests in RE/RS to create the time to enhance practice in their school and, hopefully, further afield.

A Support Group for RE Teachers affiliated to the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)

Some of you may know about this already, but we thought everyone in the County should hear about this very exciting development for teachers with an interest in RE, no matter the type of school in which they work.

For teachers with an interest in RE in Northumberland and all the Tyne and Wear local authorities other than Sunderland, there is now a NATRE-supported group which meets on a regular basis. The first meeting of the group took place on 1st April 2014 at the Religious Resources Centre, Percy Main and attracted 11 RE teachers (primary and secondary) from the local authorities identified above, and a follow-up meeting in July was even more popular. If you require more information about the group, or advice about when and where the next meeting will be held, write to Angela Brady at angela.brady@kenton.sch.uk. The support group is filling a vacuum in the North-East and therefore deserves the support of as many teachers as possible. Get to the next meeting to network with colleagues facing precisely the same opportunities and challenges that you are!

Astley High School's Multicultural Experience

Astley Community High School, Seaton Deleval, held its annual Activities Week between 15th and 17th July 2014. Various activities were offered to students which ran over three days. Students signed up to the activity they wished to participate in. Miss Gannon, RE teacher, offered an activity called the Multicultural Experience. The aim of the experience was to introduce and explore different cultures and faiths from around the world and for the students to develop a greater understanding of the world they lived in. On the first day, 23 students from Years 9, 10 and 12 were taken to the Orthodox Synagogue in Gosforth. They were introduced to Deanna Van Der Velde who spoke to the students about Judaism. Nathan, the only boy on the trip, was given the privilege of opening the Ark to reveal the Torah Scrolls. A lovely Chinese buffet lunch was enjoyed and then we proceeded to the Sikh Gurdwara where our host, Cloud Singh, was most welcoming. The students were fascinated by the Gurdwara and were engaged in what they were told about Sikhism.

Day two was equally exciting. We had a visitor from Zimbabwe who came to school to show the students how to use the African drums. He spoke to the students about the varying cultures found in the different African countries and the array of languages spoken across the continent. The students were fascinated by this and were also shown how to speak using 'clicks', which they were told were used by the Zulu tribe. As part of the day students were also shown, and participated in, gumboot dancing and traditional African dancing.

On the final day of the experience, students watched "Slum Dog Millionaire" and were involved in using natural henna. They enjoyed drawing patterns on each other which were inspired by Indian culture. In the afternoon, they were introduced to food from around the world and given the opportunity to try new food which they may not have tried before. All in all, the students thoroughly enjoyed the three days and said they would definitely recommend other students to sign up for the activity next year.

Miss F. Gannon, RE Teacher, Astley High School, Seaton Delaval



Students at The Duchess's High School have an away day in multifaith Newcastle during the Easter holiday!

Monday 7th of April was a day highly anticipated by a very large handful of students from The Duchess's Community High School, Alnwick. Of course, the day couldn't have happened without generous help from our dedicated tutors, James Thompson, Lauren Chadwick, Louis Spence and Phil André; (this last person being a university lecturer and part-time RE consultant for Northumberland County Council). We visited a gurdwara and a mosque in Newcastle to broaden our knowledge of the religions on our doorstep.

The day started with a walk to the gurdwara during which Phil pointed out various places of worship, some of which we'd never seen before. There was one place where we stopped and we could identify five different "places of worship" in our view: an Anglo-Catholic Church, the old gurdwara neighbouring the new gurdwara, the Hare Krishna Centre, and St. James' Park where many people go to worship their love of football! We were met in the entrance to the shining new gurdwara by Cloud, a Sikh who kindly gave up his time to show us around.

We were led into the building where we all had to take off our shoes, wash our hands and cover our heads as a sign of respect. In a communal room we sat on the same small carpets, were given the same cups and offered exactly the same food and drink, which

Cloud explained was a key part of Sikhism: equality and the joy of serving others. He also outlined the constant care Sikhs give to anyone who walks through their doors regarding food and housing. We saw some of the rooms that the gurdwara sets aside for anyone in need of them.

We then proceeded into a large open room covered in white sheets; there were also fresh flowers and weapons on display, which we questioned Cloud about. He made it clear that the weapons were solely for defensive purposes, and amongst the swords were no guns as this reminds Sikhs that you must look your enemy in the eye before you kill them to ensure you are making the right decision. Despite the array of weaponry, we all got the impression that Sikhism is a caring and non-violent religion.

We took time for a group discussion. Cloud encouraged us to ask lots of questions in which he was incredibly open, which made us feel comfortable to query his faith. One group member asked about the 5Ks. Cloud was glad we had a little knowledge of this aspect of his religion because he could inform us correctly. There are very few rules in Sikhism and, as an individual, Cloud's motto is: "Give me a rule, I'll find you a loophole." We found that, unlike other religions, the rules in Sikhism are relaxed. However, there are five things all Sikhs abide with; obeying these things shows their devotion and dedication to Sikhism and the Guru. The Kanga is a small wooden comb, the Kara is a silver-coloured metal wristlet, and the

Kirpan is a steel sword, and these are to be kept on the person. Also, all Sikhs are encouraged to keep their hair uncut (Kesh) and wear cotton underwear, which is ideally white (Kaccha).

On our way out one of the students took an interest in the tabla, the traditional Indian drums, and, whilst a regular worshipper taught her the basics, the rest of the group listened to one of the volunteers at the gurdwara read a section of the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy text), which is done on a daily basis. As we put our shoes back on and took our headscarves off, we felt our unawareness of the Sikh religion had been mended.

After lunch, it was time for our visit to the mosque at Newcastle University. We were greeted by Mahmoud as we entered and took off our shoes, and the girls again put on their headscarves. Luckily, we managed to catch one of the five daily prayers, the midday one. We watched the rows of men as they took part in their daily rituals. We observed the sequence they perform facing Makkah and listened to the chants of the imam. This was both interesting and enlightening to watch as it was the first time many of us had seen such prayers. We wondered why the men and women were separated in the mosque when praying, and, when we asked, Mahmoud told us it was to ensure the men were not distracted by the women's beauty! We agreed that it was fascinating to see the range of people from all walks of life because this contradicted the stereotypical Muslim image that

is portrayed negatively in the media.

After studying the Qur'an, we were informed by Mahmoud about the Five Pillars of Islam, a central feature of the faith. We reviewed our knowledge of the subject listing what we knew: Shahadah, the profession of faith, believing there is one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger. Salah, praying five times each day. Sawm, fasting. Zakat, giving 2.5% of your earnings to charity. Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah.

Some of the students made a donation in three charity boxes provided within the mosque. Each box was allocated to a different charity. We found it extraordinarily kind of each Muslim to donate into these boxes on a regular basis, on top of following Zakat. One inspiring story Mahmoud shared with us was about his pilgrimage to Makkah. Each Muslim is encouraged to travel to Makkah at least once in their life. Another aspect we admired was that, on the pilgrimage, all Muslims dress in the same white robes. Mahmoud told us he could not distinguish a rich man from a poor man, which sums up the core values taught in everyday Islam.

Looking back on the trip, we realised just how inexperienced we were of the multicultural society we lived in until we met and heard the stories of two amazing people. Many people see religion through negative viewpoints, but, now we have seen it through the eyes of Cloud and Mahmoud, we do not have to rely on the opinions of those who have not experienced what we have.

**Pip Terry and Finn Horgan, students
The Duchess's Community High School, Alnwick**

National Interfaith Week: raise the profile of RE/RS within the school!

This year, National Interfaith Week runs from 16th to 22nd November and, as in years past, we are confident that many Northumberland schools will use the opportunity to examine religion and belief within the wider community, thereby raising the profile of RE/RS within our schools. As you probably already know, National Interfaith Week:

- highlights the good work done by local faith, interfaith and faith-based groups and organisations
- draws new people into interfaith learning and cooperation
- enables greater interaction between people of different backgrounds
- helps develop integrated and neighbourly communities
- celebrates diversity and commonality, and
- opens new possibilities for partnership.

Building good relationships and working partnerships between people of different faiths and beliefs is part of the year-round work of many people and organisations across the UK. Having National Interfaith Week provides a focal point, helping to open interfaith activity up to a wider audience so that more and more people are made aware of the importance of this vital work and are able to participate in it.

The three aims of the Week are:

- strengthening good interfaith relations at all levels
- increasing awareness of the different and distinct faith and belief communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society, and
- increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

Good luck in planning events. Do not forget that the Agreed Syllabus for RE has information about people who, and places which, can help to make National Interfaith Week a great success. And do access the National Interfaith Week website (www.interfaithweek.co.uk/) for information about what is going on in our region and further afield. You never know: information about an event posted on the website might provide a springboard for one of your own events.

If you hold an event for National Interfaith Week, why not tell a wider audience about it by drafting an article and taking some photos for publication on the next SACRE Newsletter. Why not flaunt your success....

Some Forthcoming Festivals/Commemorations

11th September	Ethiopian New Year Rastafarian
21st September	International Day of Peace
25th - 26th September	Rosh Hashanah Jewish
25th Sept - 2nd October	Navaratri/Durga Puja Hindu
September or October	Harvest Christian
October	Black History Month
1st October	International Day of Older Persons
2nd October	Chung Yuan Chinese
4th - 5th October	Yom Kippur Jewish
5th October	Eid-ul-Adha Muslim
9th - 16th October	Sukkot Jewish
13th - 19th October	Interfaith Week of Prayer for World Peace
17th - 18th October	Simchat Torah Jewish
20th October	Guru Granth Sahib Ji given the Eternal Guruship Sikh (Nanakshahi calendar)
20th October	Anniversary of the Birth of the Bab Bahai
23rd October	Divali Hindu
23rd October	Divali Sikh
24th October	United Nations Day
25th October	Al-Hijrah Muslim
1st November	All Saints Day Christian
3rd November	Ashura Shia Muslim
5th November	Anniversary of Guy Fawkes' Gunpowder Plot
6th November	Birthday of Guru Nanak Sikh (lunar calendar)
9th November	Remembrance Sunday
11th November	Armistice Day
12th November	Anniversary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah Bahai
16th November	International Day for Tolerance
16th - 22nd November	National Interfaith Week
17th - 21st November	Anti-Bullying Week
24th November	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sikh (Nanakshahi calendar)
30th November	St. Andrew's Day
30th November	Advent Sunday Christian
10th December	Human Rights Day
17th - 24th December	Hanukah Jewish
25th December	Christmas Day Christian
31st December	Hogmanay

Please send your contributions and photographs to;
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