

School Visits' Report

As part of the National Curriculum, primary schools (as well as secondary schools) are required to visit places of worship. We have for some years been a popular destination for local schools and we actively promote the fact that we have a school outreach programme on our website.

In addition to faith schools and secular schools visiting us, particularly the 8-11 year olds, we visit schools for assemblies, either themed for a particular festival or a general topic and also have taught year groups in the classroom.

The visits to the synagogue by children as well as adults usually follow a two hour interactive programme. We look at the synagogue as a building as well as the contents and compare this to what the visitors would expect to see in a church. Given that our building used to be a church, we encourage the children to look at what the church members would have taken away with them and what we had to do both to change the building and to add to the contents of the sanctuary to make it appropriate for Jewish worship. Each item that we have added is a point of discussion. There is an emphasis for the need to remember the past in order to bring beliefs, rituals and memories of those no longer with us to the present and in order to carry on to the future. The Tree of Life is used to illustrate this and we do a word play on tree of life, circle of life, family tree and memory tree.

Our visitors get the opportunity to discuss and try on ritual wear and photography is encouraged for projects.

The programme includes a section on Hebrew and students are given the opportunity to try writing their names phonetically in Hebrew letters. This is an important exercise before we start to look at the Torah scrolls as there is a much greater appreciation of the work that has gone into writing the scrolls and the added interest that the participants can identify various letters in the scroll. It brings it all to life.

We use one of the Czech memorial scrolls for visits and all visitors are clearly moved by the history behind them, even young children who are simply told that the synagogue buildings were destroyed rather than the congregation lost in World War II. This whole section is linked to the importance of remembering and honouring the past. The children love to spot where our *soferet* may have had to make repairs to the scroll damaged by age and in storage.

No visit is complete without a snack which includes challah, a firm favourite with the children. Virtually all thank you notes from the children mention how delicious the bread is!

Schools need to be able to tie RE with other disciplines and we include ideas for extension into math's, English, science and history. At their request, we might spend more time on a particular festival that has just been studied in class.

We encourage schools to make a donation of a minimum of £1 per child for the visit, which otherwise is free of charge.

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