

Why study Religion and Worldviews?

Audience focus: faith leaders.

Hello and thank you, respected faith leaders in the South Manchester area, for taking the time to join me on this discussion (and invited debate) on why the study of Religion and Worldviews is an important element in our schools; I welcome your thoughts and contributions on this.

Firstly, I have no doubt that many of you will have experiences of working with, speaking to as well as inviting pupils into your buildings of faith within your local area. A question: how did this feel? How did it come about, and what was the significant impact for yourselves, as well as the pupils involved?

As a lead of RE in a local Primary school, I feel the connection between the inside of the school, and the outside is an important one. Why? What we are teaching and exposing our pupils to will, hopefully, lead to a more enriched, curious and accepting approach to society and everyday life. Within RE, we are encouraging reflection as well as the curious nature we all about the world around us. Many schools work with varying demographics, from schools that have a high population of particular religious or ethnic groups, to others that do not express the same diversity. For me, this is where the relationship between yourselves and my pupils is imperative.

I must use one of my favourite examples, which holds positively in my mind. I have worked in a school that is both ethnically as well as religiously diverse, and you would think that these pupils were already coming from a background that enables for a natural curiosity and acceptance of different people and different backgrounds.

For some educators, this could be deemed a safe haven that allows for acceptance and understanding at a natural state because of the environment. However; at times, I found this a crux. Why? Too much emphasis was placed on what they already knew (from their surroundings) rather than on what they could get to know and learn. A stone's throw away from the school building (we could walk there!), inside an unassuming, old library building stands the Guang Shan temple. To the outside, it looked nothing more than a small, heritage or community group. The inside, and those working within it, told a richer story.

As part of their learning journey on the Dharmic faiths, my year 4 pupils need that next step, beyond the videos, object handling and books. Their visit to the temple not only introduced them to a world that was in their reach from their own homes, but also invited them to think differently, meet new people and continue to be inquisitive. To be able to see a gold filled room of Buddhas, to see real life meditation in practice, and also be invited with open arms into a place of worship that was not of familiarity to them was of the most rewarding experience, I believe, to both pupils and faith leaders.

And so I continue to reiterate and answer the question of: why study Religion and Worldviews? With the relationship and connection of our educators, pupils and respected faith leaders, we are able to bring the outside world from an "othered" state, into a normal, part and parcel part of learning.