

Inviting your MP to see RE in action

How to manage
a visit by your
local MP



A toolkit for teachers



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An overview of our Parliamentary work



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The Religious Education Council (REC) works with MPs and Peers to draw attention to the importance of RE in schools and help ensure the subject is taught to the best possible standard to every child in the country.

We do this by giving information to individuals, committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups. Through established relationships, we ask MPs and Peers to pose the Government questions about what they are doing to ensure Religious Education is given adequate provision in the curriculum.

At times, we also question what is being done when changes in law or policy could potentially impact on the subject. We do this in partnership with all the different member organisations that hold an interest in the subject.

There is an All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education which many MPs support. This is an active cross-party group that has presented reports

on subjects including the supply and support of RE teachers and the impact of RE on community cohesion.

RE teachers can get involved with our work by inviting their local MPs to see just how stimulating and challenging RE teaching is in schools today – which in turn will encourage Parliamentarians to think again about RE as a subject.

We've created this short toolkit to guide you through organising a visit from an MP to see RE teaching and learning in your school. We recognise many schools already have a strong relationship with their local MP, so please adapt it to suit the circumstances of your school and students.

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How to organise your visit



The following steps cover what you need to do to organise a visit from your MP to see RE teaching and learning in your school.

Please adapt it to suit the circumstances of your school and students. Before starting it's worth ensuring you have the full support and backing of your leadership team; as well as keeping them informed, it may enable access to greater resources and contacts.

Step 1 – Making contact

The Parliament website www.parliament.uk allows you to quickly and easily identify your school's local MP, along with their contact details. Activities in MPs' constituencies are handled by their constituency offices. If contact details are provided on the website, this is the best route. If an email address is not provided for the constituency office, contact the Parliamentary office and your email will be passed on to the right person.

Step 2 – Inviting your MP to visit

MPs thoroughly enjoy visiting schools in their local area and meeting students and teachers, so usually do not require

much persuading to come along. You can contact your local MP directly by email. The more notice you give, the greater likelihood you will have of securing your preferred date.

The main thing to be aware of when writing to invite an MP to visit is the time pressures MPs are under. Also remember that they are in Westminster from Monday to Thursday evening while the House is sitting.

The majority of MPs will spend Friday in their constituencies, so this is often the best day for a school visit, but other days may be available.

Step 3 – Setting the visit in a broader context

RE is the lesson that provides opportunities for children and young people to reflect and analyse, to discuss and debate, and to learn more about the world in which they live. RE has changed over the years and whilst many MPs will have an understanding of the school curriculum, they may not have had first-hand contact with RE teaching.

A visit is a great opportunity to show the breadth, diversity and rigour of RE and demonstrate the broader value of the subject. Depending on your lesson planning and the interests of your MP, you could include two or three issues from our messages to demonstrate the relevance and impact of RE in schools.

Key messages



Below is a summary of some of our key messages about RE in schools. These may help guide your discussion with your MP.

Religious Education

- is relevant for all children, whatever their religion or beliefs
- teaches understanding of world religions and beliefs
- shows how religion influences individuals, families, communities and cultures
- explores the political and social impact of religion
- encourages reflection on big issues of justice and truth
- provokes questions about the meaning of life
- offers opportunities for personal reflection
- develops and affirms personal identity and responsible citizenship
- prepares children for adult life
- is not about making children religious

Religious Education can help

- promote respect for self and others
- contribute to an understanding of history and culture
- enhance our understanding of global affairs
- develop personal well-being and happiness
- safeguard ethical standards in public life
- generate social and community cohesion
- tackle extremism and religious discrimination
- counter stereotypes and misunderstandings

Religious Education in British schools is

- admired across the world
- about **all** religious and non-religious beliefs
- intellectually rigorous
- up-to-date, relevant and enjoyable
- popular with students

MPs can help by

- joining or supporting the All Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Education

Steps to follow



Step 4 – Logistics

To ensure the visit is a success, it is useful to stay in contact with your MP's office. The more they know about the preparation and purpose of the visit, the better prepared they will be.

In the lead up to the visit, contact a member of the MP's office to make sure all the details are clear. This should include time, place and any logistics such as parking. If possible provide them with a number to contact or a named contact in the school office just in case there are any problems on the day.

Step 5 – Questions and preparation

If you have time, prepare for the day by thinking about the local or national issues that are relevant to the work taking place in RE lessons.

The visit will be enhanced if there are any particular faith or belief issues that a visiting MP has been involved with. If RE work has touched on something taking place in a school's own community, MPs will usually have a detailed knowledge and interest in what is taking place at this level.

As with any visit, it is always advisable to prepare students to talk about the work they've done recently and why they are enjoying it. MPs are always very happy to answer questions from students about what they do, and will take time to chat to children and teachers.

To make the most of the opportunity, ensure that one or two students are willing to speak up confidently to get everyone else joining in what is sure to be a lively discussion – it's RE after all!

Steps to follow



Step 6 – Generating positive publicity from the visit

MPs are often keen to generate their own publicity. If they visit a school, they may brief local media or issue a press release. They will almost certainly report on what they have done through their own website and newsletter. You should discuss this with your MP's office and agree the best approach. It is worth undertaking communication on behalf of the school

as well. If you need any guidance please look at our media relations toolkit (see Resources).

In organising the visit, you will have built up a good contact and this should make it straightforward to share any publicity plans for maximum impact.

Resources and useful websites

www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/educators/projects/the-re-teachers-media-toolkit

A media relations toolkit, with press release templates, to help schools highlight their RE work.

www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg

Information and updates on the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education.

www.parliament.uk

A useful starting point, with a section where you can find your MP's contact details.

www.theyworkforyou.com

A source of MPs' own activity and a useful tool to see what causes a politician is interested in