

From R.E. today: Spring 2016.



Karen Jones is the RE
Co-ordinator at Selby
Community Primary School.

Contact Imran Kotwal
via the website
www.muslimlearnerservices.org.
It provides a full range of
training packages, including CPD
for teachers and support staff.

A Muslim visitor making a difference

Imran Kotwal is the founder of Muslim Learner Services, an agency that visits schools to build an understanding of Islamic faith and life. Previously he was a classroom teacher. He is qualified to lead Muslims in prayers, and has extensive experience of teaching Islam to young people of all faiths and none. Imran also served as head of a very successful multi-faith chaplaincy team, as well as being the imam and Muslim chaplain at Salford City College.

Staff at Selby Community Primary School wanted to deepen their pupils' understanding of Islam, so they invited Imran to come and run some workshops there. We asked how it went.

What did the children like about the Islam workshops?

The Year 5 and 6 children Imran worked with were unanimous that it was much more 'interesting and real' to learn about Islam from an actual Muslim visitor, rather than from their teacher. They revisited the five pillars of Islam, and the role of Muhammad as a prophet, which they had studied the previous year, and some misconceptions were addressed, so that was useful. Principally, though, Imran told them about the Muslim tradition of *Zakat*, or charitable giving. He made this engaging, age-appropriate and cross-curricular by introducing maths challenges along the way, which the children loved. The children found him very approachable and felt comfortable asking him questions.

What RE aims were met through the workshop?

Our 9–11s were studying a unit from the agreed syllabus here in North Yorkshire during our Spirituality Week, called 'Christian Aid and Islamic Relief: Can they

change the world?' Although the children are familiar with regular collections for charities through the school year, they were introduced to the concept of automatic donation of a proportion of salary, as practised by many Muslims. They were genuinely astonished to hear about this, but as they learned more through talking with Imran, they increasingly felt that it made a great deal of sense – in fact, it was an admirable way of life. Since they were also learning about the real improvements to people's lives that charities such as Christian Aid and Islamic Relief can make, as a year group they came to the conclusion that charities can indeed change the world. This was not an opinion that anyone had held at the start of the unit, or a change that we had predicted or encouraged. Imran made a significant contribution to the deep thinking that went on, and the genuinely huge change in our pupils' attitudes, towards both Islam and charitable giving.

Did the work engender any conversations with parents? What about, and how did they go?

Parents did not approach the school or class teachers about the workshop with either questions or comments. However, 30 per cent of children reported that they talked at home about meeting a Muslim imam at school and learning about charitable giving, and parents expressed surprise and interest. Certainly no negative attitudes were reported.



Imran Kotwal's work gave hundreds of pupils an encounter with living Islam in Britain today

What pleased you about the event?

The whole morning that Imran was with us was a very important and positive one for our school. Selby is not a multicultural town, though we now welcome an increasing number of Polish and Eastern European families into school. We do not have a single Muslim pupil, and the chances of our children meeting a Muslim in their daily lives are very low. This is also true for staff.

Imran made a considerable impact during the workshops with 9–11s, and also with our 6–9s through his genuinely stimulating and humorous assembly. The events worked so well because he was so easy to talk to. I would have no hesitation at all in recommending him to other schools.