

BAYHOUSE SCHOOL GCSE STUDENTS VISIT AL MAHDI CENTRE

“Overwhelmingly kind and welcoming. An eye-opening experience, I would love to visit again”.



On Monday 3rd July, twelve Religious Studies pupils and two staff members from Bay House School had the great privilege of visiting Titchfield Al Mahdi Centre, the purpose of the trip being to enrich pupils' GCSE studies and to learn more about the Muslim community in their local area. This trip had been pupil driven, with the class specifically asking for a visit to a local mosque to be arranged as the pupils had enjoyed learning about this peaceful, loving religion.

“I was astounded by the spectrum of views within the religion, particularly when Islam can be portrayed as a strict religion with little freedom of thoughts/opinions. Thank you for allowing us to visit and for sharing said views”.

“Had a really good experience and never realised how homely and peaceful a mosque would be. I learned so much and it was really good to hear contrasting opinions. Thank you!”.

“This experience has widened my view and opinion on Muslims and the Muslim community. I felt very welcome despite not being a Muslim or sharing the same views. Thank you”.

Preparation for this trip started a few weeks prior to 3rd July, with Miss Watts meeting the Imam, Sheikh Fazle Abbas, at the centre in order to make arrangements for the pupil visit. Pupils were also asked to submit questions they wished to ask in advance, this was very beneficial to the pupils as it gave them the confidence to write many challenging and controversial questions that they may not have otherwise asked.

On the day of the visit, the staff and pupils of Bay House School were welcomed by Sheikh Fazle Abbas, Dr Muhammad Abbas Jaffer, Talaya Arifi and Ammaar Rahim. Pupils were given a tour of the site, before a group conversation took place that was mostly shaped by the questions that pupils had submitted prior to the trip. Many different topics were covered during discussions, which included Ramadan, prayer, Hajj and more controversial topics such as abortion and euthanasia.

There was not a subject that was shied away from and even when there was a diversity of opinions – all was approached through nothing less than absolute mutual respect.

Having some younger members of the community present for the visit (Dr Muhammad Abbas Jaffer, Talaya Arifi and Ammaar Rahim) was beneficial to the visiting pupils, as they were able to ask questions and relate in a way that staff could not. The pupils also appreciated the honesty that was shown.

Before and during the visit, the recent atrocities that have taken place in this country in the name of Islam were not far from the pupils' minds and they were keen to find out what the general feeling was amongst the Al Mahdi Centre community. What was discussed at this point was how important it is for the entire community to work together in order to support and care for each other – this means every person, whether religious or non-religious. Indeed, any opportunity to come together like the way that we did during the morning of our visit is a statement about how we all stand side by side.

The experience was just under three hours in length, but much was covered during this time and pupils left feeling motivated to share what they had learned with friends and family. The hospitality that was shown to both pupils and staff of Bay House School was positively overwhelming and this visit was what we hope is the start of a longstanding connection between the school and centre. How best can we summarise the visit? Surely with some more pupil feedback:

“al Mahdi Mosque is a place where you can have meaningful, in depth discussions about all topics in a relaxing and peaceful environment”.

Thank you to Sheikh Fazle Abbas, Dr Muhammad Abbas Jaffer, Talaya Arifi and Ammaar Rahim. What you provided for the Bay House pupils during this visit will stay with them and has motivated them to continue learning about religions – and to pass the positive messages of religion on to all they know.



Written by teacher Miss Watts and pupils.