

Fasting in Ramadan

2024 / 1445

May Allah look favourably upon your fasting and answer your prayers!



Guidance for schools when
meeting the needs of Muslim pupils and staff

Advice for schools from Lewisham SACRE

RAMADAN

Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils and staff

Introduction

"Oh, you who believe! Fasting was prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become righteous."

Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow) – Holy Qur'an 2:183

Fasting in the month of Ramadan, the month of revelation of the Holy Qur'an, is an obligation for all Muslims past the age of puberty. There are exemptions from these requirements for some people, such as the sick, those engaging in a long journey, menstruating women, or those who are frail in old age. Exemptions have to be made up later or compensated for, e.g. by fasting on another day or by feeding the poor. Fasting at other times is also encouraged but is non-obligatory.

Fasting is undertaken by Muslims for the sake of Allah, the Creator, the Merciful, the Loving (to mention just three of His names or attributes) and is an important pillar in Islam. It cultivates virtues such as piety, love of God, unity, vigilance, devotion, patience, unselfishness, moderation, thriftiness and satisfaction with what one has, discipline, social belonging, self-control, and compassion for fellow human beings who might suffer hunger and deprivation unwillingly.

Fasting in Islam is not only about denial of food and drink. Muslims believe they should also try to restrain their other senses, such as the eye, ears, and particularly the tongue, avoiding backbiting, scandal-mongering, obscenity, confrontation and other such matters.

Fasting during Ramadan is one of the main requirements of the Islamic faith. Muslims are required to abstain from all food, drink (and sexual activity where appropriate), from dawn to nightfall through the 30 or 29 days between one new moon and the next. The daily fast begins before the time of the Fajr (dawn) prayer and finishes at the time of Maghrib (sunset) prayer.

It is very important for many Muslim families that their children should begin participating in the practice of fasting at an early age. Most children of secondary school age, as they are considered to be adult members of their communities, will be expected to fast. Many primary school children will be fasting as well with younger pupils fasting possibly for part of Ramadan, or only on certain days of each week.

Teachers therefore will appreciate that the routine of Muslim families is entirely different during Ramadan. Depending on the time of year, the whole household will be awake much earlier in the morning and will stay up later at night. Young children may well become more tired or excitable during school time even if they are not fasting themselves. Those students who are fasting may become very tired and thirsty during the school day.

Good Practice Guidelines

Schools are asked therefore to consider the following points in determining their approach to the needs of the Muslim schoolchildren and staff for whom they are responsible during Ramadan.

Key aspects should be:

- inform and reassure parents /carers in advance how the school will support pupils, including any special provisions that will be made for those pupils who are fasting, during Ramadan.
- in primary schools, to establish a register of those pupils who will be fasting, what their fast will involve (e.g. are they abstaining from drink as well as food?) and on which days, based on parental permission, given either verbally or in writing. Pupils of secondary age will be expected to fast and it may not therefore be a practical or reliable course of action to attempt to establish a register for them.
- Make special provision at lunchtimes for pupils who are fasting but cannot go home. They may want to rest and be quiet or they may enjoy taking part in special activities that can be arranged for them while other pupils are having their lunch. They may also wish to perform prayers at this time, or to share reading the Qur'an with other Muslim pupils or staff.
- ensure that no pupil who is fasting is required to do anything that would make her/him break the fast or become dehydrated or weak.
- anticipate that fasting may make some pupils weak or tired, and where possible adapt the curriculum as appropriate.
- where possible, use the fact that pupils are fasting to inform and enrich the curriculum experience both for themselves and others. The fast could provide a starting point for discussions in a number of subjects, such as religious education, history, P.E., health education, performing arts, geography, science and in collective worship.

Other Considerations

Prayer facilities in schools:

Many Muslim staff and older Muslim pupils who are fasting may like to have the opportunity to pray at lunchtime and/or other times during the school day. If schools are to meet this need physically they will have to:

- Consider and be aware of the daily prayer times / time periods for when pupils wish to perform these prayers. More attention and care should be provided for secondary school pupils more so primary pupils because of their age. This shouldn't affect the pupil's education during school hours and should only last approximately 10-15 mins. Whenever the month of Ramadan coincides with the winter period the prayer timings are a lot closer together with the sun setting a lot earlier. This would mean there could be a maximum of 3 prayers that could occur during the school day, depending on the time of the year.
- provide supervised, sanitised, ventilated and appropriate rooms that are sensitive to the needs of the participants, where possible one for girls and one for boys if these are not already made available for this purpose throughout the year.

- make available sanitised washing facilities and a vessel for washing. Those praying will need to wash their arms and feet which, because facilities are not built for this purpose, may lead to a few puddles on the floor which will need to be cleaned up afterwards;
- those wishing to pray should bring their own bring prayer mats during this time, and if they wish to, slippers to wear after ablution. Sensitive, sanitised storage for these items needs to be agreed with those concerned.

Assemblies/Collective Worship:

It is good practice to use collective worship / assemblies to acknowledge and explain about Ramadan. It is also helpful to check that the content of all assemblies during this time is planned sensitively towards pupils who may be feeling weak or hungry.

Celebrating Eid in school:

Eid-ul-Fitr at the end of Ramadan is a great day of celebration for Muslim families, even in this difficult time and it is appropriate that schools should mark this time in a special way. Some schools may want to encourage pupils to find creative ways to mark the event for example by exchanging electronic Eid cards.

Absence for Religious Observance:

Schools need to strike a balance between authorised absence for religious observance and excessive loss of school time and may consider the following to be reasonable:

- **Pupils** (*Please bear in mind that many Muslim families mark the occasion of Eid for up to three days.*)

A one day authorised absence for religious observance at Eid-ul-Fitr (a 10-day holiday in some Muslim countries) and another at Eid-ul-Adha, the festival at the time of the annual Hajj Pilgrimage. If parents/carers request further days, then consideration should be given to this. Each case should be considered on an individual basis, looking at patterns of absence and the impact on the overall attendance level.

Please note that the Islamic calendar is subject to the sighting of the new moon, or the news of this from recognised Islamic authorities. Therefore, there is some uncertainty in establishing the date until the last moment. It should also be understood that different Muslims in Britain might follow different days depending on their country of origin or the school of thought they follow.

The register code 'R' should be used for absence authorised when it is due to religious observance. The DfE School Attendance Guidance:

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>)

states 'The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. Where necessary, schools should seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.'

- **Staff**

Requests for leave from individual members of staff should be treated sympathetically by the Headteacher and governing body.

Communicating with Parents / Carers

It is helpful when the school's policy regarding holidays for religious observance is communicated to parents/carers and included in the school prospectus and online. Ideally, in advance of Ramadan, all parents/carers of Muslim pupils should receive information about the school's arrangements; either through a letter in English or translation where necessary, or at a meeting, virtually or in school. This communication with the home can achieve the following:

- acknowledge the importance of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr in Islam and show concern for the welfare and education of the child;
- state clearly the position with regard to authorised absence for religious observance and stress the need for parents/carers to ensure that their children are not absent for more days than are authorised;
- outline any special provisions that will be made for pupils who are fasting during Ramadan;
- request confirmation from parents/carers of primary age pupils about whether their child will be fasting during Ramadan, and if so, on which days and whether this includes having no drinks as well as food. Or give parents/carers an opportunity to discuss with school how best to decide on which days to allocate fasting and which to avoid;
- give details of any plans for the celebration / marking of Eid in schools;
- seek advance notice of when the pupil is likely to be away from school (see section above 'Absence for religious observance') whilst recognising that Muslims cannot be specific in advance of the information being given by the appropriate Islamic authorities.

Dates and Prayer Times for Ramadan 2024

The Islamic calendar is lunar and has 354 or 355 days. Therefore, precise dates cannot be forecast as they depend on the sighting of the moon.

In 2024 Ramadan begins on March 10th plus or minus a day dependent on the moon sighting. Prayer times for Ramadan may be found on many mosque websites.

Eid-ul-Fitr (the festival marking the end of Ramadan) falls on 9th April (plus or minus 1 day).

Specific prayer times and further information may be found on the Lewisham Islamic Centre website:

<https://lewishamislamiccentre.com>