

Fasting in Ramadan

2014 / 1435

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



Guidance for schools when
meeting the needs of Muslim pupils

prepared by members of Lewisham SACRE

Lewisham SACRE is grateful for the invaluable assistance of the local Muslim community in producing this guidance



RAMADAN

Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils

Guidelines were originally produced to help schools to respond to the specific needs of their Muslim pupils who will be involved in the fast during Ramadan in 2002 and have been annually updated.

GUIDANCE NOTES

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 regarded as an expiation of human failings. It cultivates virtues such as piety, love of God, brotherhood, 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 considered to be merely denial of food and drink alone. 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 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 1 1/2 - 2 hours before 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 adult members of their communities, will be expected to fast. Many primary school children will be fasting as well. Younger pupils may fast for part of Ramadan, or only for certain days of each week.

Teachers therefore need to bear in mind that the routine of Muslim families is entirely different during Ramadan. The whole household will be awake earlier in the morning

and will stay up later at night, particularly when Ramadan falls in the summer months. Young children may well become more tired or excitable in school during this time even if they are not fasting themselves.

Good Practice Guidelines

Schools should consider the following points in determining their approach to the needs of the Muslim schoolchildren in their care during Ramadan.

Key aspects should be:

- to inform parents, in advance, that they will support pupils who are fasting
- to explain to parents/carers any special provisions that will be made for pupils who are fasting during Ramadan
- in primary schools, to establish a register of those pupils who will be fasting, and on which days, based on parental permission, given either verbally or in writing. Pupils of secondary age are expected to fast and it would not therefore be a practical or reliable course of action to attempt to establish a register with them.
- to 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 wish to perform prayers at this time, or to share reading the Qur'an with other Muslim pupils.
- to ensure that no pupil who is fasting is required to do anything that would make her/him break the fast. This could include swimming, cross-country running, weight-training.
- to anticipate that fasting may make some pupils weak or tired, and adapt the curriculum as appropriate. This could mean, for example, planning less energetic activities in P.E particularly as this year's Ramadan falls in the hottest time of the year with the longest days'
- where possible, use the fact that pupils are fasting to inform and enrich the curriculum experience both for themselves and others. It could be a starting point for discussions in a number of subjects, such as religious education, history, P.E., health education, performing arts, geography and science.

Other Considerations

Prayer facilities:

Many Muslim staff and older Muslim pupils who are fasting may like to have the opportunity to pray at lunchtime. If schools are to meet this need they will have to:

- provide supervised rooms, where possible one for girls and one for boys if these are not already made available for this purpose throughout the year.
- make available 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
- allow those wishing to pray to bring prayer mats, and if they wish to, slippers to wear after ablution. Sensitive 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.

After school and out of school activities:

Where schools have a high proportion of Muslim pupils, consideration may need to be given to suspending extra-curricular activities during Ramadan for practical reasons.

In other schools where the normal programme will be maintained, it is important to ensure that pupils do not suffer in any way through not being able to participate. An example of this would be where 100% attendance at lunchtime practices is required, for example by members of sporting teams.

In planning an annual calendar of out of school visits, it would be sensible to bear in mind the timing of the Ramadan so that one-off special opportunities are not denied to Muslim pupils.

With younger pupils who are not fasting every day it is usually possible to arrange with their families that they do not fast on a particular day so to participate comfortably in an outing.

Celebrating Id in school:

Id-ul-Fitr at the end of Ramadan is a great day of celebration for Muslim families and it is appropriate that schools should mark this time in a special way. Some schools may want to organise events, put up signs, decorate rooms and exchange Id cards.

Absence for Religious Observance:

Schools will 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 Id for up to three days.)*

A one day authorised absence for religious observance at Id-ul-Fitr (a 10 day holiday in some Muslim countries) and another at Id-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. It should be understood 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.

- **Staff**

Requests for leave from individual members of staff should be treated sympathetically by the headteacher and granted in line with the discretion available in each school's policy on pay.

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. 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, or a meeting in school. This communication with the home can achieve the following:

- acknowledge the importance of Ramadan and Id 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 the 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. Or give parents/carers an opportunity to come into school to discuss how best to decide on which days to allocate fasting and which to avoid.
- give details of any plans for the celebration of Id 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.

Prayer Times for Ramadan

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. Ramadan begins on June 28th or 29th in 2014. Prayer times for June and July may be found at:

<http://lewishamislamiccentre.com/plugindata/monthpptt.php> or
[http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/ramadan/ramadan-timetable/?tmad=c&tmcampid=7&tmplaceref=PLACEREF&tmclickref=\[keyword\]&gclid=C KOpl6-E9L4CFckBwwodEVQA0g](http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/ramadan/ramadan-timetable/?tmad=c&tmcampid=7&tmplaceref=PLACEREF&tmclickref=[keyword]&gclid=C KOpl6-E9L4CFckBwwodEVQA0g)

Id-ul-Fitr (the festival marking the end of Ramadan) falls on July 29th (plus or minus 1 day)