

Ramadan – Guidance for Schools to support their Muslim Pupils

from Wandsworth SACRE

Ramadan 2023

Wednesday 22nd March – Friday
21st April

Eid ul-Fitr Saturday 22nd April

Introduction

Fasting (sawm) during the twenty-nine or thirty days of Ramadan, between one new moon and the next, is one of the five pillars of Islam. The other pillars are: the declaration of faith, prayer/worship five times daily, paying a portion of wealth to charitable causes and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Fasting is the fourth pillar and is seen as an act of worship. Quotes from the Qu'ran follow in italics.

“Ramadan is the month in which the Qur’an was sent down, as a guide to mankind. So any of you who is present (in his home) during that month should spend it in fasting.”

(2:185)

Muslims use a lunar calendar which creates a year eleven days shorter than the solar year. This means that Ramadan begins eleven days earlier each year according to the non-Muslim calendar and so gradually moves back through all the seasons. This has implications for fasting in that, when Ramadan occurs in the summer, as currently, fasting is more demanding because there are more daylight hours and it is hotter. Ramadan is followed by Eid ul-Fitr (the festival of breaking the fast). This is a joyous occasion. After prayers people give presents, wear new clothes and visit relatives. The greeting is *Eid Mubarak*, ‘happy eid’, which is also printed on greetings cards exchanged at this time. Just before Eid ul-Fitr, Muslims must give money (*fitrana*) so that those who cannot afford to do so are also able to celebrate the festival.

This academic year, Ramadan begins near the end of the spring term and falls mainly within the school holidays. Eid ul-Fitr falls on the first weekend after the start of the summer term.

In Ramadan, fasting is undertaken by Muslims for the sake of Allah (the requirement to fast is stated in the Qur’an, see quotes above and below) and is regarded as an atonement for human failings. Muslims believe that fasting has many benefits. It strengthens self-discipline, creates empathy for the poor and the destitute and reminds them that they belong to a larger Muslim community.

“Fasting is prescribed for you as it was for those before you, so that you may be conscious of Allah.”

(2:183)

During daylight hours of Ramadan, Muslims should refrain from eating, drinking (including water) and sexual activity. The daily fast begins before the time of the Fajr (dawn) prayer and finishes at the time of Maghrib (sunset) prayer.

“Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread, then complete your fast until the night appears.”
(2:187)

It is also a time when Muslims try to be even more aware of Allah and try to live a better life generally, for example by refraining from the use of bad language or thinking ill of others.

Fasting during Ramadan, is an obligation for all Muslims past the age of puberty. There are exemptions to the Ramadan fast for those who are ill, frail in old age, travelling or menstruating. Pregnant or nursing women need not fast if it would be harmful to their health. Such people will be expected to make up for days missed later, however. Those who accidentally break their fast should also fast an equivalent number of days later.

“But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. Allah desires your well-being, not your discomfort.”
(2:185)

As fasting is a requirement from puberty, it follows that most Muslim students in secondary schools would be expected to fast. However, many Muslim families like to introduce the practice of fasting from an earlier age, and therefore some primary school pupils may fast for part of Ramadan, perhaps just on certain days of the week.

The daily routine of Muslim families is therefore different during Ramadan than at other times, particularly when this falls during the summer, with longer daylight hours. It is the practice for Muslims to rise before dawn and to share a light meal (sahur or sehri) with the family. Fasting then takes place during daylight hours. Just before the end of the fast at dusk, many Muslims will gather at the mosque and, immediately after the end of the fasting day, share a light snack. After prayer, people will return home in order to share an evening meal (iftar).

The impact of this longer day may well impact on school life; younger pupils may become more tired even if not fasting and older students may become tired and thirsty during the day.

Guidance on Best Practice for Schools during Ramadan

- Make sure that all staff are aware that it is Ramadan and its implications on school life.
- Explain to parents /carers in advance how pupils who are fasting will be supported during Ramadan, by holding a meeting, sending a letter or both.
- Make special provision at lunchtimes for pupils who are fasting but cannot go home. This could involve setting up a space or room where they can rest, pray or read the Qur'an with other Muslim pupils or staff.
- Compile a list of those pupils who will be fasting. In primary schools, bearing in mind that a fast may be partial, it should include what their fast will involve (eg drink as well as food, which day or part of day). Parental permission should be given either verbally or in writing. It would be expected that all pupils of secondary age would be fasting.
- Take care in the timetabling of activities that no pupil who is fasting is required to do anything that would make her/him break the fast or become dehydrated or weak. This could include swimming, strenuous physical exercise or tasting food in food technology/cooking sessions.
- Try to avoid holding special events, the dates of which are within the school's control, during Ramadan.
- Be aware that some pupils may become more irritable or short tempered as a result of feeling hungry.
- Use Ramadan positively as an educational experience for all pupils, by holding assemblies about it so that the whole school community can learn about its place in Muslim life; by discussions in history or religious education lessons; looking at Islamic art etc.
- Be aware of the timing of evening events such as parents' meetings, so that staff and pupils either have time to return home to break their fast or are given earlier times before the end of fast.

Other Practicalities

- If facilitating a space for pupils to pray, washing facilities will also need to be provided. Pupils may also wish to bring prayer mats.
- For extra curricular activities, try not to exclude Muslim pupils from taking part, being sensitive to the timing of trips or visits.
- Be ready to celebrate Eid in school. Some schools may want to organise events, hold a special assembly, make or exchange Eid cards to celebrate with their Muslim families. Note that some pupils may be absent for Eid celebrations with their families and may be allowed a day's authorised absence for religious purposes. The register code 'R' should be used for absence authorised when it is due to religious observance. The DfE School Attendance Guidance (Oct 2014) stated '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.'

- Requests for leave from individual members of staff should be considered by the Headteacher and governing body.
- While seeking advance notice of when the pupil is likely to be away from school, be aware that the Islamic calendar is lunar and has 354 or 355 days and so precise dates of Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr may vary by a day.

The guidance given in this booklet is that of the LA to its schools. It has endeavoured to be factual and is not necessarily in all places the view of individual Muslim people or mosques. We would also like to acknowledge the help of other SACRE briefing papers that have been shared nationally, especially those of Newham and Lewisham.