



# Hillingdon SACRE

## Advice for Schools – Ramadan 2021

### Introduction

This advice has been revised and updated. We hope that schools will find it helpful. For further support, please contact the Clerk to HSACRE, Steve Clarke, at [democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk).

In responding to demographic changes and increased numbers of Muslim adherents, schools continue to celebrate the diversity of Hillingdon's population. This can bring opportunities to learn from each other in many ways. In wanting to engage with local places of worship, it is worth taking into account that Hillingdon presently has six separate Islamic faith communities, along with a number of smaller groupings. Similarly to other faiths, Muslim families may have their own interpretation to that provided by their mosque or meeting place. For help in engaging with local faith leaders, schools may find it helpful to contact the SACRE. All of the Muslim leaders in the Borough were previously consulted in this advice.

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### Pre-Ramadan

In 2021, Ramadan starts around 13 April and ends around 14 May.

- Alert kitchen staff and breakfast clubs to the drop in numbers;
- Alert teaching and all support staff to be aware of students who may be tired from attending prayers; and,
- Review, as part of the risk assessment, activities like Sports Days and organised visits requiring long walks or energy.

## Attendance

Parents may request to withdraw pupils from school for a required religious observance and such absences are regarded as authorised. Although Islamic law clearly states that it is not necessary for a pupil, or adult, to be absent themselves from their normal place of work (or education), it would be wrong for a non-observer to call an observer to adhere to this, and there has to be an element of normal agreed practice.

The special celebrations of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha may lead to 1-2 days authorised absence. Schools should be aware of pupils who are attending prayers in the mosque (during Ramadan and / or on Eid Day) before attending school, and also that pupils may be attending additional night prayers during Ramadan. This could impact on energy levels and homework.

There are no reasons for anybody to leave school to attend Friday mid-day prayers, particularly if there are facilities for praying at the school – parents may be invited to lead lunchtime and Friday prayers\*.

It is suggested that it would be helpful if Infant and Junior Schools adjacent to each other were to have agreement on advice given to parents.

Parents need to understand that a one-day absence counts as two absences in school records (morning and afternoon)

\*Subject to Medical and Governmental guidelines for Covid-19 protective measures.

## Ramadan

*“...So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month [Ramadan] should spend it in fasting. But if anyone is ill, or is on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful.”*

Al-Qur’an, 2:185

*“Let there be no compulsion in religion...”*

Al-Qur’an, 2:256

In many faiths and cultures, fasting is an important part of religious, spiritual or personal discipline in the calendar year.

Fasting, for Muslims, enshrines a very high spiritual uplift, generating unparalleled enthusiasm; it is commitment from individuals that brings together whole communities in social and spiritual activities – individual acts of worship with whole-community participation. Children from the age of articulation crave and demand participation with gleeful encouragement from parents.

Fasting during Ramadan – one of the five pillars of Islam - becomes obligatory from the

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age of puberty for all who are healthy in mind and body; this excludes infants, pre-pubertal youngsters, the frail and the elderly and people on long journeys. However, there are prescribed parameters for adherence to, or non-compliance with, the command to fast. No food or drink may be taken during the daily fast - from pre-dawn till sunset; certain essential injections may be permissible according to circumstances. Staff in schools may need to be aware that the administration of medications, fainting, vomiting, or menstruation during fasting invalidates the daily fast. In these instances it would be advisable to discuss the issue with parents.

The daily fast is incomplete without the daily ritual salaah prayers/worship – however, if unavoidable, the salaah may need to be offered when opportune. People studying or at work, for example in professional, domestic or academic spheres, whether indoors or outdoors, are required not to seek particular concessions concerning their work – all activities should continue as normal. However, some adjustments to working hours, or place, or practice may prove to be helpful.

During Ramadan, the fast consists of not taking any nourishment or stimulants (gaseous, fluid or solid, including gum, toothpaste, mouthwash, tobacco etc.) at all during daylight hours, in addition to being more worshipful and considerate.

## **Dates**

### **Ramadan**

The Islamic calendar is based on cycles of the moon, and, for this reason, dates change from year to year. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which commences from sunset with the sighting, or confirmation, of the first crescent moon – usually 18-20 hours or more after the astronomical New Moon – on the 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> day of Sh'abaaan, the eighth month. The Islamic day cycle commences from sunset and ends with the next day's sunset. For those parts of the world where this means that there will be very little, or no sunset during the month, there is dispensation where the adherent will follow "Makkah sunset and sunrise times", or follow timings adhered to by the nearest Muslim country, in consultation with the Imaams of the local mosque.

In 2021, Ramadan is due to start on, or near, Wednesday 13 April, and end with the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Shawwaal (10<sup>th</sup> month), on or near Friday 14 May. More precise dates will be announced by mosques nearer the time. It should be noted for ease of future timetabling, that the Islamic Lunar Calendar is 10-12 days shorter than the Gregorian Calendar.

### **Eid-al-Fitr**

The date for Eid-al-Fitr, the first day of the month that follows Ramadan, is determined based upon the sighting of the new moon, which can vary in different parts of the world. In some Muslim countries, religious councils determine the moon sighting. Some Muslims wait as the end of the month nears to hear when the Eid date will be.

## Prayer

There are five times each day when prayers are said:

- Fajr – before dawn
- Zuhr – just past noon
- Asr – mid-afternoon
- Maghrib – after sunset
- Isha – during darkness

In a mosque, there will be a leader (Imaam) who will take responsibility for leading prayers at set congregational times; at other times, and other places, individuals may pray alone or create and / or join a congregation. Meeting together as a congregation is recommended and is preferred to praying individually.

Given the current global pandemic and in particular with regards to the UK's approach to managing the crisis, it may not be possible for all schools to accommodate prayer facilities. Schools should consider that any policies guiding their classroom and other in-school interactions can be adapted for the allocation of prayer space. Schools could make some outdoor or large hall spaces available to maintain social distancing.

If it is not possible to pray at the appointed times, prayers can be offered as soon as possible afterwards. There should be no need for special timetable arrangements in school.

During the lunch break, prayers should not take the whole time. It is not usual for boys and girls to pray together – in the mosque, or at places with organised prayers, there may be a curtain separating them or girls may pray behind the boys. Although this would be an ideal, there are alternatives, such as praying in separate rooms or groups, or praying at separate times.

The requirement is for a room/space, with access to a sink close by (these are simple requirements to wash hands, feet and face before praying), for use each day. The area should be quiet, preferably not overseen by external distractions. Prayer is undertaken by facing towards Makkah and involves standing, kneeling and prostrating the body. Thus, a prayer mat is helpful, but not essential. In facing Makkah, the individual should not be expected to face any image which may be distracting. A little care from the school should assist, and will be appreciated.

In Secondary schools, it should be possible to expect older students to supervise the prayers. In the junior years, the school could consider inviting a parent or other members of the Muslim community to supervise if they have the appropriate DBS checks, or an additional member of staff to supervise if they do not. Muslim staff may well offer to take responsibility. It is recommended that such in-school sessions are also open to non-Muslims for observation and to raise awareness and understanding through discussion

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in class. These provisions should be in accordance with the correct safety guidelines for Covid-19 protection.

During Ramadan, the school should ensure that:

- All staff are aware of the importance of making a space available for prayer, subject to Covid-19 guidelines;
- That there is reasonable access to toilets / washing facilities within easy reach of the prayer space;
- Staff involved in mid-day supervision are fully briefed and know what is expected (their rights as adults to be able to intervene if they deem it important); and,
- Parents are informed, and also, preferably, the mosque attended by the pupils.

## Some Ideas for Good Practice in Schools

Engage students, Muslim and non-Muslim in discussing how to set aside a prayer space and how it can be managed.

*“At Ramadan, my school did not have any special arrangements for us so we went to the deputy headteacher and asked for somewhere to pray. We were given a classroom to use at lunchtimes and a teacher made sure that we could pray without being interrupted by other students.”*

*“My class teacher also asked me to read some verses from the Qur’an in school assembly – this was so successful that I was asked to go to other year assemblies to read the Qur’an to them. We were all proud to be Muslim students at our school.”*

SACRE would be interested in hearing what your school did to help students.

## Health & Safety Issues

As with any community, it is important to recognise that, whatever religious or community leaders may advise, it is the family that will decide on what actions are proper for family members. This will mean that the observance of the fast by children may not follow any guidance from any one mosque. Although the guidance in Islamic law is that a child should begin observing Ramadan from the age of maturity, some children will want to join at an earlier age, often with their parents’ blessing. Families may well be proud of this, even if their Imaam urges caution. For this reason, it is important that everyone in school is aware of children who are fasting.

It would be good practice to ensure that all staff are aware of the health and safety issues for pupils who are fasting. Lunchtime supervisors, in particular, may find this information useful.

Whilst recognising the importance of the fast, the faith teaching is clear: health is paramount. All staff have a duty of care at all times, and may, if considered necessary in their opinion, decide that health supersedes religious observance. Parents should be advised at such times.

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Schools may wish to send a message to their local Muslim community faith leaders and parents explaining that they are following the advice of the SACRE, as well as a reminder that all precautions to protect against the spread of the virus must also be adhered to.

### Safeguarding

Staff should be aware of the potential for peer pressure amongst students to fast or not fast. There may also be additional bullying or harassment issues.

### Equal Opportunities

It is good equal opportunities practice for schools to make provision for the religious needs of their Muslim children and staff, to ensure that those wanting to observe Ramadan are supported and are enabled to carry out religious observance. Similarly, it is good practice to mark Muslim religious celebrations in the same way as many schools celebrate other religious festivals.

### National Curriculum

#### Physical Education

Parents should not expect, nor ask for their children to be totally excused physical activity during fasting; however, parents may ask that their child be excused from vigorous activity due to lower energy levels during the fast.

#### Assessments and Examinations

Since the fast is based on the lunar calendar, and the timings of Ramadan change each year, a school will not always be able to arrange for examinations to take place outside Ramadan. However, it would be helpful for schools to bear in mind the likely period of fasting when setting up the timetable for internal examinations and other major assessments. Please see **Dates for Ramadan** section for setting future timetables.

### Parents' Evening

The school calendar should ideally ensure that parents' evenings and other important evening meetings are kept to a minimum during this period. The specific times for the Maghrib (after sunset prayer) may clash with parents' evenings and should be accommodated wherever possible.

## Checklist

Some ideas to help Ramadan go smoothly:

### Annually

- Check the calendar for the likely dates for Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr
- Discuss with subject departments or class teachers how Ramadan can be incorporated into the curriculum
- Check for dates which will be more difficult for exams, extracurricular activities or evening meetings
- Involve the school council in discussing positive ways of marking Ramadan in the school
- Summarise the arrangements in the report to the Governing Body

### The Term before Ramadan

- Make sure the assemblies are organised to reflect Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr (along with important dates for other faiths)
- Check for the availability of a prayer space and the layout and aspect of the area
- Contact the local Mosque and/or HSACRE to arrange additional support / advice / visits / prayer times

### A Month before Ramadan

- Prepare a list of pupils who may be fasting
- Write to parents asking their intentions (Template / model letter attached)
- Make sure all staff are aware of what Ramadan means to the pupils / students

### Two Weeks before Ramadan

- Arrange a roster of older students, staff or helpers to look after the prayer space
- Alert support staff to individuals who may have health concerns

### Keeping the Governing Body Informed

The Headteacher might consider including the steps the school has taken to ensure a happy Ramadan for the whole school community in their report to the Governing Body. This might include:

- The number of Muslim staff and pupils offered a prayer facility
- The arrangements offered
- Copies of the communications with parents and Imaams
- Special arrangements in the school calendar
- How the school celebrates or marks Eid

## Ideas for Schools

### Ramadan Ideas for Nursery & Primary Schools

Some things the school could consider:

- Writing a letter to Muslim parents (see model letter) at least two weeks in advance of Ramadan. (The dates will be different each year and will depend on the sighting of the first crescent moon. The festival of Eid-ul-Fitr can even differ by a few days, depending on which mosque the family attend).
- Preparing a list of Muslim pupils who are known to be fasting, and the level of their fast, for the class teacher and assistants, as well as the first aider.
- Making special arrangements during break and lunch for pupils to have access to a supervised, quiet room. The wall or corner of the room, which faces the south-east, should preferably be bare, or covered in plain cloth.
- Making contact with Muslim parents prior to the fast to discuss lunchtime arrangements and share any other concerns. It should be possible to invite parents to assist with some supervision and / or leading prayers / seminars.
- Involving pupils, and parents, in an act of collective worship, to allow the rest of the school to appreciate the importance of this festival.
- Invite parents, or other member of the Muslim community, to visit the school and talk to classes about their faith. This can also be undertaken via a video conference call.
- Arrange for a class visit to a local mosque, in accordance with current Covid guidelines.
- Drawing up a policy statement to discuss with the school Governing Body the issues and priorities shared by the school community. This may have a different focus for church schools.
- For very young children, discussion about the fact that older siblings are fasting in a positive manner.

HSACRE and HIFN will be happy to assist schools in this task and good ideas from Hillingdon schools are particularly welcome in this section of the guidelines.

### Ramadan Ideas for Secondary Schools

- Arrange for the acts of collective worship to include Ramadan, making sure that Ramadan is represented in a positive way, giving Muslim students the chance for input.
- Provide prayer facilities for Muslim pupils to use, which are suitable for the purpose. The room needs to be a quiet area that others cannot disrupt, with no distracting images or pictures. It is particularly helpful if the orientation towards Makkah (Mecca) in the south-east is clearly marked – the school may wish to purchase a prayer mat, which has a compass inset for this purpose.
- Alter lunchtime arrangements to accommodate students who will not want to use the canteen or sit with others who are eating and drinking.



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- Raise awareness in all departments. The curriculum should reflect, if possible, the importance of Ramadan, which encourages adherents to embark on a period of contemplation, prayer and self-denial.
- Allow students to take part in physical activity, but at reduced levels of energy expenditure from those normally expected. If active students show evident signs of tiring beyond that which is reasonable, they should be allowed to sit out and recover. This is consistent with any student who is feeling 'below par' before, or during, a physical lesson.
- If evening meetings during Ramadan are unavoidable, it would be helpful to provide a place for Muslim children to eat and drink at the end of the daily fast (avail / see Ramadan timetables).
- Remember that the end of Ramadan is marked by one of the most important celebrations in the Muslim calendar: Eid-ul-Fitr.

## Model Letter / Template

You may wish to adapt this model letter to send to all Muslim parents before the start of Ramadan. We are committed to this being a joint-venture, and it would be helpful if a copy also be sent to the mosque attended by the pupil, for information.

**(Schools have given mixed reviews, some preferring not to send a letter)**

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Dear Parents / Carer,

### Ramadan 2021

We are aware that, as a family, you may be preparing for fasting during the forthcoming month of Ramadan.

At school, so that we are fully informed, we would like to be clear on how best to support your children if they are taking part in this. So that we can be sensitive to their needs, please complete the following information for each of your children who will be taking part and return it to the school.

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

If she / he is intending to fast? Yes / No (Please delete as applicable)

If Yes, will she / he be fasting for:  The Whole Month  
 Some Days Only

So that we can contact you immediately if we have any concerns or queries, please let us know who to contact during school hours below:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship (if not parent): \_\_\_\_\_

If there is anything else related to Ramadan which the school should know, please add to the back of this form.

We wish you and your family a peaceful and blessed month and a happy Eid-ul-Fitr.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher