



# **Fasting During the Month of Ramadan**

**Guidance for School Leaders**

**March 2018**



[www.harrow.gov.uk/SACRE](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/SACRE)

## **Introduction**

The Harrow SACRE does not intend to advise students how they should address the question of fasting during Ramadan. That is a matter for parents, carers and faith leaders. However, in order to assist schools to support students at this time SACRE is providing this guidance. This guidance may also be useful to support school students of any age who are fasting.

Families will make their own decision on such issues affecting their children. Those who have a medical condition, physical or mental, or who are travelling are exempt from fasting. If fasting is causing hardship to the child, the child or the child's parent may decide to end the fast.

Public or school examinations may coincide with the month of Ramadan from time to time; for example as in 2016 and again in 2018. Young Muslims, therefore, may need to include the preparation for examinations into everyday activities during Ramadan. Schools will wish to prepare for this in advance in order to offer support to students and their families.

Having to take examinations on top of long hours of fasting over the summer period will be a challenge for students. Schools may therefore wish to point students and families to guidance on the best way to avoid dehydration, eating nutritious food, getting appropriate rest periods and on organising of revision. Schools are encouraged to liaise with parents and students in advance of Ramadan to ensure those fasting are well prepared and able to achieve their best during this month of religious observance. Advice on the dates of Ramadan can be found in SACRE's annual guidance on authorising pupil absence for religious observance.

## **Advice from Harrow's Muslim Faith Leaders**

SACRE has sought the advice of Muslim leaders in the local community. They have advised that:

- a) there is no dispensation from fasting for young Muslims who are taking public examinations and all Muslims who are physically mature and healthy and for whom it is not unsafe must fast during the daylight hours.
- b) if a child does not feel well or becomes anxious due to fasting, they should stop fasting, as the child's health takes precedence. Individuals will differ in the extent to which they do, or do not, experience difficulties in relation to fasting and examinations
- c) fasting cannot be deferred. In Islam timing is critical; as with other rites. Fasting in Ramadan and praying five times a day cannot be done at a later time. Therefore, the students should fast the month of Ramadan in the prescribed time, except if there is an acceptable reason, as stated above

Muslim members of the Harrow SACRE and local faith leaders would be happy to speak to the headteachers, teachers, parents and students regarding this topic, and are able to communicate with parents and carers directly on these matters to support the work of schools.

## **What happens during Ramadan?**

Fasting in Ramadan is an important event in the Islamic calendar and an integral part of the Muslim faith. For Muslims, the month of Ramadan changes the daily routine significantly. Physically, this means that from the very start of dawn until the sun has set, secondary age students must abstain, amongst other things, from eating, drinking and chewing. Muslims in Britain, although fasting, will still carry on with life in as normal a way as possible. Students involved in the fast will neither eat nor drink from dawn to sunset. They may also wish to say their midday prayers at lunchtime in school.

## **Available Guidance on Health and Fasting during Ramadan**

A number of guidance documents have been developed in order to assist Muslim students and their families who are fasting during Ramadan to stay healthy during this period. Headteachers may wish to draw the following link to the attention of parents and carers and their students.

### **NHS Ramadan Health Guide**

<http://www.communitiesinaction.org/Ramadan%20Health%20and%20Spirituality%20Guide.pdf>

## **Supporting Students and their Families**

Students who are fasting must not be treated differently from other students, unless it is clear that there is an objective and reasonable justification for different treatment. Students who are fasting should not be excluded from clubs or activities or be sent home or out of school at lunchtime.

Where possible, every effort should be made to provide students who are fasting with access to rooms set aside for prayers or a quiet area away from the dining room to rest if they wish.

Fasting is difficult for both adults and young people and the time of the fast, from dawn to dusk, means that all food preparation and consumption must take place over a few hours every evening and very early each morning. This makes it difficult for parents to attend meetings or other functions in the evenings during Ramadan. Schools should consequently seek to avoid parents' meetings during Ramadan, but continue to provide close and effective contact between the school and home.

School staff will also need to be aware that some students may find the rigour of preparing for an examination difficult whilst fasting, and be sensitive to the fact that other students sitting exams and studying will be able to eat and drink during this time.

Students who are observing the fast may be made aware of the importance of healthy eating and good hydration during Ramadan so that they function as well as they can.

### **Swimming**

Swimming is not forbidden during Ramadan but some parents and young people may be concerned about breaking the fast through swallowing water. If swimming lessons are scheduled and cannot be avoided, it would be a good idea to speak to Muslim parents of primary children to find out if their children are fasting. If they are fasting, parents and carers may seek permission for the children not to swim.

## **Some Approaches to support Good Practice in Schools**

### **A) Before Ramadan Begins**

- Consult with parents and carers in a positive and supportive manner before the start of Ramadan.
- Invite parents and carers and local community representatives to discuss preparing for this important time.
- Ensure that governors and staff are conscious of the implications of fasting for young people at this time.
- Ensure that the wider school community understands that some children may be fasting and this may affect what activities they are able to do.

- Identify and discuss with staff and or parents and carers the possible effects of fasting on young students. Ensure that members of staff know the implications and where advice can be sought. The links in this guidance may be helpful.

## **B) During Ramadan**

- Students in **Key Stages 3, 4 and 5** should be encouraged to inform the school when they are fasting. This will avoid making assumptions about who may be observing the fast
- Students who are fasting may benefit from a personalised revision timetable to take account of the requirements of each day.
- Parents and carers may be asked to inform the school if their child will be fasting and taking no school lunch
- Provide support/supervision for students withdrawn from activities.
- Ensure that catering services are aware of the numbers of students who will not require their usual school lunch. For students on free school meals check out if students would prefer to take a sandwich home
- If students are fasting, provide opportunities for them to stay in school and, where appropriate, offer activities to engage their interests
- Be supportive if a student has to break the fast and exercise the normal duty of care towards him/her.

## **Eid-ul-Fitr**

The end of Ramadan is marked by the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr. Traditionally this is a family orientated day, when people visit their relatives and friends. Muslims go to special Eid prayers at the mosque in the morning to worship and give thanks. Muslims who can afford it give a special Eid day alms that go to the poor, and may also give to other charitable causes. The yearly alms, known as Zakat, is often given on this day.

## **Extenuating Circumstances**

The event of Ramadan is not generally counted as an extenuating circumstance or reason for claiming mitigating circumstances for examinations unless fasting significantly affects a young person's health and/or they have a medical condition which may impair performance or prevent attendance at an examination. In such cases a young person will need to provide documentary evidence to support a claim for extenuating circumstances to be accepted.

## **Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)**

The JCQ consults on the common provisional examination timetable every year, and considers comments from a wide range of stakeholders including religious groups, schools and colleges. Each year the timetable for public examinations takes into account religious events such as Ramadan, Easter and Passover.