



SACRE Advice to schools on Ramadan

In order to meet the requirements of the Hackney Agreed Syllabus, schools will include teaching about sawm (fasting) and Id-ul-Fitr in their programme of religious education. This is planned for explicitly in the Hackney SACRE Scheme of Work for KS 1 and KS 2.

However, awareness of the spiritual significance of Ramadan for Muslims and of its social and physical implications is not the sole responsibility of the RE curriculum nor of the RE Department. As a reflection of their commitment to equal opportunities, Senior Management Teams will be working to ensure that all members of staff respond positively to the Muslims in the school community during Ramadan and that whole school procedures and routines are sensitive to their needs.

This briefing paper has been written in order to give guidance to schools regarding best practice. It is based on authentic guidance from Islamic educational sources.

The importance of Ramadan for Muslims

Fasting (sawm) during Ramadan is not a penance for sins, nor a means of appeasing Allah: for Muslims it is sufficient that God requires it of them.

Observing the fast is one of the highest forms of worship (ibadah). If the fast is performed with the sincere intention of pleasing God it is much more than a physical endurance test, it is a fulfilling and enriching act of spiritual dedication: “fasting is for Me [Allah] and I am sufficient for its reward” (Hadith). Muslims believe that where fasting is observed without this intention then “the person who fasts will have no more than hunger or thirst.”

Ramadan is a time when Muslims have a heightened sense of consciousness of Allah (taqwa). Throughout the hours of the fast, the practice as well as the effects of fasting make worshippers spiritually and physically conscious of Allah. This leads to further acts of worship, such as closer study of the Qur’an, prayer and special commitment to abstaining from wrongdoings and negative actions such as giving way to ill-temper.

In fasting Muslims have the opportunity to share some of the anguish of hunger and poverty experienced by the poor and destitute of the world. They are also expected to pay a welfare due (zakah): sharing their material possessions with needy people. From these experiences they learn to be increasingly grateful and generous.

In addition to the benefits of endurance, self-discipline and compassion which fasting confers on individuals, the communal fast benefits the whole Muslim community. Muslims throughout the world observe this religious duty at the same time in the Muslim calendar, in the same manner and for the same motives. So Muslims during Ramadan have a heightened sense of ‘belonging’ both within their family and within the ummah, the worldwide Muslim community.

How schools can support the needs of their Muslim pupils and parents during Ramadan

Muslims who have reached puberty are required to fast during the month of Ramadan. It is likely that Muslim pupils in secondary schools will fast and some in the upper years of the primary phase. Fasting may not be obligatory for them all, but in so doing they will receive encouragement from their family and will feel proud that they are learning to observe their religious duties. Younger children may attempt to fast for perhaps a day because they too want to express their Muslim identity and show that they are adhering to the requirements of

their faith, family and community. The level of observance will of course depend upon the individual and family.

Teachers should avoid giving the impression that fasting is 'a nuisance, disruptive to school routine and work', but should view it as something positive. Fasting is such an intensely spiritual activity in which the whole community is involved that Muslims are particularly offended when non-Muslims, however well-intentioned, seek to discourage children from fasting. Ramadan is a critical time during which to demonstrate a school's commitment to equal opportunities and to valuing children's backgrounds, beliefs and cultures.

Children who are fasting may feel weak and tired during the day, especially in the afternoon. Strenuous physical exercise may make them feel worse. Teachers ought to use their discretion regarding physical education during Ramadan by for example, re-scheduling strenuous activities/sports or by exempting Muslim pupils who are fasting.

Those children who go swimming may be concerned about swallowing water - strictly speaking this would be breaking the fast - so they will spit it out. For this reason, parents may not wish their children to swim during Ramadan.

Schools should consider making special provision during the lunch break for those who are fasting, for example making available a supervised 'quiet' room where Muslim staff and pupils may pray, rest and avoid having to watch others eat.

Other examples of good practice at this time include:

- ensuring that all staff (including lunchtime supervisors and classroom assistants) are aware that it is Ramadan and of its implications for pupils especially those who are fasting
- giving a teacher, possibly a Muslim member of staff, special responsibility for Muslim pupils during Ramadan
- awareness when planning evening meetings (such as staff meetings and parents evenings), of the need of Muslims to break their fast and perform salah (prayer)
- assemblies marking Ramadan and celebrating the commitment of the school's Muslim community
- marking Id-ul-Fitr as a school community after its celebration by the Muslim community so that Muslim pupils, parents and members of staff can contribute.

Further reading

Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils

Publisher: IQRA Trust, 24 Culross Street, London W1Y 3HE. Tel: 020 7491 1572

Fasting in Islam

Publisher: IQRA Trust

Islam: Faith and practice

Manazir Ahsan

Publisher: The Islamic Foundation (Publications Unit), Ratby Lane, Markfield, Leicestershire, LE67 9SY. Tel: 01530 249230

The Muslim Guide

Mustafa Yusuf McDermott & Muhammad Manazur Ahsan

Publisher: The Islamic Foundation