

# Celebrating Diversity!



## Newham SACRE Prayer and Reflection Space Advice to Schools

May 2023



## Introduction

Many secondary schools in Newham already have a prayer or reflection space and have done so for many years. Some prayer spaces are primarily used by Muslim students daily, others are used by a range of students throughout the week.

Each school community has its own needs, issues and challenges. This advice aims to provide a way for schools to explore this important aspect of spiritual and cultural development in a positive and inclusive way, placing pupil and staff needs centrally. We hope this advice will support all schools to ensure they have robust systems in place around prayers and meditations taking place within their schools, ensuring that all inspections find quality practice in place.

In the 2022 Ofsted Inspection handbook it sets out in section 208:

*All schools are also required to promote the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.*

And again in section 304:

*On graded inspections, inspectors will focus on pupil development through pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, citizenship education, modern British values, the development of character and wider development.*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook#part-2>

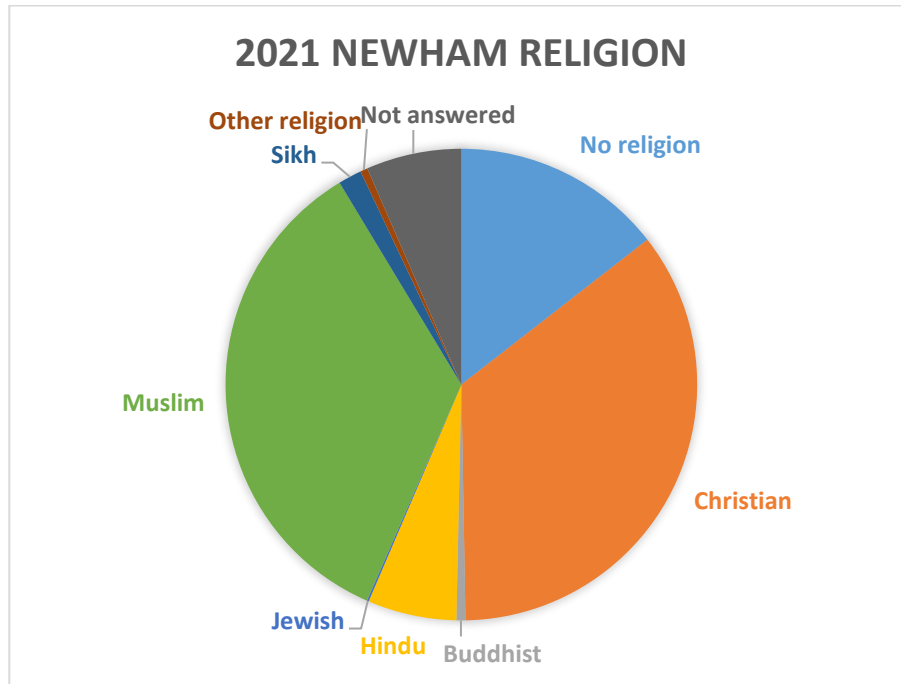
Reflection, meditation and prayer spaces provide evidence of how a school is taking spiritual and personal development of their pupils seriously.

Newham is a very pluralistic borough in terms of religions and worldviews. The recent 2021 census shows us that the vast majority of adults have a belief in God (66%). We know from Newham data that 83% of the borough believe religion shapes the nature of Newham (2018) and that the vast majority of pupils in our schools attend a place of worship weekly (80%).

No religion	50556	14.5%
Christian	123746	35.3%
Buddhist	2160	0.6%
Hindu	21405	6.1%
Jewish	448	0.1%
Muslim	122146	34.8%
Sikh	5638	1.6%
Other religion:	1765	0.5%
Religion not stated	22933	6.5%

*Within in 'no religion' there were 175 Agnostic people; 46 Atheist people and 17 Humanist people.*





## Do we need a prayer and reflection space?

This is the first question that a school must ask themselves. The question usually arises because students, parents or teachers have requested such a facility. However, there may be positive benefits of having such a space even if it is not specifically requested e.g. for encouraging peace and harmony, for promoting pupils' development, for use by small groups of students to pray, meditate or reflect in.

Schools should therefore take into account the make-up of their school community and the needs within it. It is suggested that schools review the needs of their community regularly and an audit tool is provided in Appendices 1-6, starting on page 6 of this document.

The Equality Act 2010 and schools – DfE advice for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities' states:

*1.9 It is unlawful for a school to discriminate against a pupil or prospective pupil by treating them less favourable because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity (DfE 2014 pg 8)*

*1.7 If a school treats bullying [which relates to a protected characteristic] less seriously than other forms of bullying ... then it may be guilty of unlawful discrimination (DfE 2014, pg 8)*

Schools need to be mindful of the law on equality when providing a prayer and reflection space.



## ***What are the possible prayer needs of the main different religion and worldview groups?***

### **Buddhist people**

- Somewhere to meditate
- Image of Buddha as a focus (not essential)

### **Christian people**

- Somewhere to perform their prayers
- A bible, rosary beads, icons, cross, candle (not essential)

### **Hindu people**

- Somewhere to perform their prayers
- Images of deities (Murtis), Bhagavad Gita (Vedas), prayer beads (not essential)

### **Jewish people**

- Somewhere to perform their prayers
- Clothing for prayer e.g. Kippah, Talit, (these may be provided by the students)

### **Muslim people**

- Somewhere to perform prayers at set times (around lunchtime and in winter possibly at the end of the school day)
- Washing/ablution facilities nearby (this can be a normal toilet area with a low level sink if possible)
- Know the direction of Makkah
- A leader to lead Friday prayers (can be pupil or staff)
- Prayer mats or clean cloth sheets

### **Sikh/Sikhi people**

- Somewhere to perform their prayers and meditations

### **Other worldviews**

It will be an important part of any school's audit to ensure the space created is inclusive and students whether religious or not have the opportunity to use a quiet space for personal reflection. Providing this space is part of the school's wellbeing practice.

## **How can we overcome the issue of space?**

### **Case study school 1: Mixed comprehensive secondary school**

The school makes a hall available on each site that pupils can use for prayer and reflection during lunchtimes from Monday-Thursday. The hall on both sites has washing facilities nearby and there is a lunchtime supervisor situated outside of the hall listening for any disturbance. It is available to all pupils to use quietly. On a Friday, the school has a set agreed time for Jumma prayers to be held on each site, with a member of staff who has agreed to lead the prayers. In this school males and females are in the same hall praying, but not alongside each other.

### **Case study school 2: Single-sex boys' comprehensive secondary school**

The school provides a small space for prayer and reflection that is available to all but is mainly used by a few Muslim boys within the school on a daily basis. At the back of the space there are prayer mats for use. Toilets are near by the space for wudu. There are a regular number of boys and staff who use the prayer space successfully at lunchtimes and in the winter months straight after school. No other groups use it at present, but they could should the need arise.

### **Case Study school 3: Single-sex girls' comprehensive school**

The school provides a space that each year group can access at different times for prayer and reflection on a daily basis. The spaces are looked after by staff and schools prefects. Pupils come within their allotted time and make use of the space.



## Primary schools and prayer

Primary schools often provide informal spaces for staff to pray or reflect in. A school needs to ensure that they have had a conversation with their staff about what the needs are for prayer, meditation or reflection. Many primary schools find it difficult to accommodate a separate prayer and reflection space for staff. If this is the case, an ordinary classroom or office may be used.

Schools have no duty to provide a space for prayer and reflection for their pupils. However, parents and pupils may request a prayer and reflection space within the school. In these circumstances, the school will need to engage with parents and hopefully find a way forward. For example, could pupils go home at lunchtime so that they can pray with their family, such as happens in some schools during Ramadan? It is important to emphasise that nurture in a religion or worldview is the responsibility of parents and carers, not the school.

## What is the nature and function of the prayer and reflection space?

Naming is important, so the name given to the space should clearly denote its nature and function.

The term 'reflection' is more inclusive than the term 'prayer'. In addition, the nature of prayer varies among different religious traditions and could cause confusion. Therefore, if the school decides to have one space for all faiths (and those of none), this term may be more appropriate.

However, if the space is being used specifically for prayer (e.g. Muslim Salah) then using the term reflection space may be misleading. It may be more appropriate to use the term prayer space.

## How can we manage our prayer and reflection space?

- The school may consider setting down clear guidelines or rules for the use of the space e.g. times when it is available for use, behaviour and expectations in the space itself.
- The school may consider the length of lunchtimes and/or timings of the school day so that the prayer and reflection space is easily accessible to all. However, those requesting the space should be made aware of the pressures and limitations that schools face in making such changes. The school may consider the supervision of students in the space e.g. there could be a teacher/TA/lunchtime assistant available to supervise the space and make sure it is used appropriately, prefects may be used to help supervise.
- Schools come under the equalities duty and as such cannot bar either sex from using the space, these rules are not the same for places of worship and sometimes this needs explaining to pupils and parents. This does not mean that in reference to Muslim prayer that male and female mix together, but rather the space is divided into having an area for males and a separate area for females.



## What about Jummah prayers on a Friday?

Secondary schools often find a desire from Muslims within their school community to come together for Friday prayers. Schools must determine if it is possible to provide a space that is large enough for these needs to be met.

Some Newham schools, having thought about this, have decided to have longer working days between Monday and Thursday, to accommodate an earlier finish on Friday. This allows pupils and staff members who want to attend Jummah prayers to do so.

If a school decides to provide a space for Jummah prayers, it is important that leaders ensure the person who delivers the sermon links into the school's values and its collective worship theme for the week. This element of school life should resonate with the collective worship programme rather than stand on its own.

If a school cannot provide a space for Jummah prayers, it may allow parents to collect their children and attend prayers elsewhere, if this does not impact on curriculum time.

Where schools can support their pupils needs in this area it is deeply appreciated by families and the local community.

## Appendix 1

### Suggested Audit

There are a number of ways in which schools may undertake an audit:

- Through a questionnaire (on-line via Google or Microsoft forms) given to all students and staff.
- Through the school council and staff meetings.
- Through representatives of different faith groups within the school.

The aim of undertaking an audit is to gauge the school community's need for a prayer and reflection space. The school should consider that the audit:

- might indicate that there is no requirement at the present time for a prayer and reflection space. In this case the school may decide not to provide one or they may choose to provide one for a short time and monitor its use to see if it is needed.
- might indicate that the needs of the school community are greater than the facilities that the school can provide. In this case, the school may need to discuss with students and staff a compromise e.g. one space that can be shared, if spaces for different faiths is requested but is impractical. Or in the case of post-16 education, working with local religious communities and other safe spaces to see whether the need can be accommodated in another way.

The following questions may be used in a school questionnaire or in discussions with students or children. They are based on those devised by the Student SACRE in one of their meetings.



## Appendix 2

### Student Questionnaire

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Year Group: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you belong to a particular religion or worldview group? Click on the choice below
2. Is taking time to prayer or reflect during the school day important to the practice of your religion or worldview? Yes/No
3. If you do not have a religious faith, would you like to have a space available in school for quiet reflection? Yes/No
4. Would the use of a prayer and reflection space in school be helpful to you?
5. Would you need any special facilities in the prayer and reflection space?
6. If we had a prayer and reflection space available are you happy with this as its aim? *“This space aims to provide a way for our school to explore this important aspect of spiritual and cultural development in a positive and inclusive way, placing pupil and staff needs centrally.”* Yes/No
6. Are there any other comments you would like to add about prayer and reflection spaces.

We have created a template google form with the above questions. You can create a copy and then save the form in your own school area for use if helpful.

<https://forms.gle/gzxx4vtUPvC3qSJQA>

## Appendix 3

### Staff Questionnaire

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

1. Should the school provide a prayer and reflection space for use for pupils only or for pupils and staff? Please explain your answer.
2. If we had a prayer and reflection space available are you happy with this as its aim? *“This space aims to provide a way for our school to explore this important aspect of spiritual and cultural development in a positive and inclusive way, placing pupil and staff needs centrally.”* Yes/No
3. Would you be willing to supervise students in such a space on a rota basis during lunchtime?
4. Are there any issues you can see if the school was to set up a prayer and reflection space?
5. Are there any further comments you want to make?

We have created a template google form with the above questions. You can create a copy and then save the form in your own school area for use if helpful.

<https://forms.gle/tYZnBHHvpmDmwiVu5>



# Appendix 4

## School Information Gathering

The school may also find collation of the following information helpful to compare against our Newham census 2021 data. The information is already gathered via your school office.

### 1. Family religious/worldview background of pupils:

RELIGION	NO. OF PUPILS	% PUPILS
Buddhist		
Christian		
Hindu		
Humanist		
Jewish		
Muslim		
Sikh		
None		
Not known		
Others (specify if known)		

### 2. Spaces that could be used as a prayer and reflection space

### 3. Staff willing to supervise students

### 4. Member(s) of staff who is willing to oversee the prayer and reflection space





# Appendix 5

## Consultation with other stakeholders

### A. Consultation with parents

The following paragraph could be used in a school newsletter or used as part of a more formal letter to parents.

At \_\_\_\_\_ school we are currently seeking student and staff opinions on the possibility of creating a prayer and reflection space in our school.

We would value parent's views on this subject so that we can best meet the needs of our diverse community. If you would like to discuss the matter further or have any comments you would like to make please use the link below.

### B. Consultation with governors

It is often through governing bodies that the issue of providing a prayer and reflection space is raised. Governors may be made aware of the school audit as well as the practical implications of providing a space. Governors have an important role to play in expressing the wider community's perspective on the nature and purpose of such a space. They may also have received requests from parents about creating a prayer and reflection space. They could also be part of the consultation process, but should definitely be reported to about findings from the consultation process the schools carries out around creating & reviewing its prayer and reflection space.

### C. Consultation with faith communities

The school may wish to talk to local faith communities, particularly to find out specific requirements for prayer. In addition, this may foster very positive links with the school and encourage dialogue.



# Appendix 6

## Planning for a Prayer and Reflection Space Checklist

1. Consultation (tick as appropriate)

Governing body

Teachers

Parents

Faith communities

Pupils

Non-teaching staff

2. Aims of the prayer and reflection space agreed by all parties: *“This space aims to provide a way for our school to explore this important aspect of spiritual and cultural development in a positive and inclusive way, placing pupil and staff needs centrally.”*

3. Space to be used:

4. Space to be called:

5. Space to be used by (e.g. name particular religions/worldviews, all faiths etc.):

6. Facilities in the space to be provided (e.g. mats, cushions, books etc.):

7. Setting up costs (if appropriate, further details on a separate sheet): £

8. Person responsible for the prayer and reflection space:

9. Supervisors

10. Signature of Headteacher:

11. Signature of Chair of Governors:

12. Date:



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