

2024 Summary advice for schools on Ramadan

by Newham SACRE for schools

The following advice is taken from 'A briefing paper on Ramadan' published January 2024

- All groups of Muslims fast during Ramadan. In Newham where we have Muslim people from a variety of continents and countries there can be differences sometimes rooted in scripture and doctrine and sometimes cultural. Understanding the heritage of a Muslim family can assist schools in comprehending the diverse ways individuals practice their religion. It is important to recognise that not all Muslims follow identical practices.
- Fasting (sawm) during the twenty-nine or thirty days of Ramadan is one of the basic duties of Islam for all Muslim people.
- In 2024 Ramadan will run between 10/11th March to 9/10th April. Fasting this year in London is approx. 4.15am – 6.30pm.
- During the daylight hours of Ramadan, adult Muslims are to refrain from eating, drinking (including water) and sexual activity. It is a time when they try to be even more aware of *Allah* (Arabic word for 'One God'). Muslims will also try to live a better life generally during Ramadan – by trying not to use bad language or think ill of others and give time to reflect on their life before Allah.
- There are variations in the starting date of Ramadan due to the sighting of the new moon which indicates the start of the month. In Newham Muslim people may follow local moon sighting or that of another country (e.g. Saudi Arabia). Timetables showing when daylight begins and ends during each day of Ramadan are published by Muslim communities and can be found on-line.
- Fasting during Ramadan binds the Muslim community (Ummah) together, both locally and world-wide.

What does the Qur'an say?

"Fasting is prescribed for you as it was for those before you, so that you may be conscious of Allah." (2:183)
"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) "Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down, as a guide to mankind. So, any [one] of you who is present (in his home) during that month should spend it in fasting." (2:185) "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)

At what age are children expected to start observing the Ramadan fast?

Shari'ah (Islamic law, based on the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet) states that fasting during Ramadan is only obligatory from the age of puberty. It is natural, however, that Muslim children will wish to emulate their elders and so, from an early age, Muslim children will often fast for one, two or more days during Ramadan. They will be proud of this and their elders will express pleasure. A competitive spirit will often develop between children in that they will compare the number of days on which they have fasted with others. The competitive spirit is encouraged at home between siblings but not against other pupils in schools so not to demean others who are not fasting. The level of observance among children, of course, will depend upon the particular individual, family or community. **Muslim parents are very mindful about**

the impact of fasting on younger children and would normally encourage weekend fasting at home, when they can rest and perform prayers with their wider family.

What is the responsibility of a school if a pupil becomes ill or suffers as a result of fasting while at school?

The responsibility which a school should exercise towards fasting pupils is no different to that applying to any pupil in the school. A school will obviously want to be sensitive towards pupils who are fasting, but Muslim scriptures are clear that if you are not able to operate normally (at school or work), you are not well enough or old enough to be fasting. Fasting is something that no-one should really know about – it should not affect your normal daily life.

Given that the obligation to fast does not override health considerations, a pupil who faints can be offered water if judged appropriate by a suitably qualified first-aider or if the pupil requests it. In the same way if a pupil cannot concentrate or becomes listless at school, a drink and food should be offered. Before any fasting starts the school should ask parents to take responsibility to inform school if the child is fasting and school can use that opportunity to inform parent that they will take actions if child is unwell, lethargic etc.

Are there any other parts of the curriculum for which Ramadan has implications?

As well as the month of Ramadan being a time of fasting, it is also a period when Muslims try to be even more conscious of God and to lead better lives. Undoubtedly, the Muslim community would appreciate and respect a sympathetic and understanding stance by schools during the month of Ramadan. In turn, most schools would have as one of their underlying values respect for the family backgrounds from which children come.

Schools should consider the needs of any Muslim teachers who might be required to teach any sex education elements of the curriculum at a time when their religion asks them not to think about such matters. Even if pupils are not fasting they might be uncomfortable with thinking about sexual matters during Ramadan, or parents may find it difficult to talk through issues with their children or come to a school meeting about these lessons, so please bear this in mind.

Should a school make special provision during Ramadan?

This is a matter for a school's discretion but the following may be considered:

- being aware of the impact of Ramadan on meetings for parents (in that Muslim parents may find attendance at such meetings difficult because of involvement in practices associated with Ramadan);
- pupils / teachers might increase their devotion to God and increase in prayer during Ramadan. How will this be accommodated for?
- dedicating specific assemblies to Ramadan so that the whole school community can learn about its place in Muslim life; as well as considering fasting in different religions.
- arranging a meeting with Muslim parents prior to Ramadan to discuss issues such as lunchtime arrangements, examinations or sporting activities, and
- writing a letter to Muslim parents prior to the month of Ramadan. So, parents can notify the school if their child will be fasting and ensure them to ensure their child eats a nutritious pre-dawn meal before commencing the fast.

For more information, please refer to SACRE's full document or email claire.clinton@rematters.co.uk



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