

## Ramadan: information and guidance for schools (updated January 2022)

This guidance is provided to enable schools to support their Muslim pupils during the month of Ramadan. In the absence of Scottish national guidance on Ramadan in schools, this guidance has been written with reference to information published by the Muslim Council of Great Britain and the Association of School and College Leaders (see Further Information).

### The Islamic Calendar and Dates for Ramadan 2022

The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar months and therefore the month of Ramadan begins 10 or 11 days earlier each year on the Gregorian calendar; hence it takes Ramadan about thirty years to move through the seasons from January to December. **In 2022, the first day of Ramadan is predicted to start around Saturday April 2<sup>nd</sup> and the last day of fasting will be around Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April/Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May.** Eid al Fitr 2022 will be around Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> / Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022. *Please note that the actual dates will be announced at the sighting of the moon, a day or two before the start of Ramadan.*

### Fasting (Saum)

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is the fourth 'Pillar' of Islam, an act of worship of great spiritual, moral and social significance for Muslims. Fasting is a well-established practice in Muslims and is practised through the world in remarkably similar ways. However, it is important to recognize that different people of one faith may practise it in slightly different ways due to regional and cultural differences. The information provided here is for general guidance.

Fasting is part of the yearly life of a Muslim and is a requirement on all those who have reached puberty and are healthy. This will directly affect many Muslim pupils in secondary schools and may affect some children below the age of 12 in primary schools as well. The physical dimension of fasting involves completely abstaining from all forms of nourishment, food, liquids (including water) and smoking from dawn to sunset for the whole month. Younger children may fast for all or part of the month but this is entirely optional.

It is accepted that the following exemptions from fasting apply:

- Those who are ill or on long-term medication
- Those who are travelling a long distance
- Girls who are on their period
- Those with mental disabilities
- The old or weak
- Breastfeeding or pregnant women

All staff need to be aware of some of the effects of prolonged dawn to dusk fasting and altered sleep schedules, for example sleepiness, mood swings and headaches.

The spiritual and moral dimension of fasting is considered to be of far greater importance than the physical one. Muslims are encouraged not to use Ramadan as an opportunity to avoid aspects of normal life but rather to cope with normal life under a different set of guidelines. During Ramadan, Muslims should focus on additional worship and God-consciousness to improve themselves in all aspects of their lives and dealings with others including their character, respect for others, kindness, forgiveness, mannerisms, avoidance of bad language and poor behaviour. In addition, having empathy with the poor and donating generously for charitable causes, sharing of food and inviting others to one's home for opening the fast are important features of Ramadan.

## **Prayer during Ramadan**

During Ramadan, a greater effort is often made by many Muslims to observe to the practice of offering the five obligatory daily prayers and other prayers too, including obligatory congregational prayers on a Friday lunch time. Before praying, Muslims are required to wash (ablutions) as a physical preparation.

The essential times of prayer are:

1. After first light and before sunrise (**Fajr**)
2. Between the sun reaching its height and mid-afternoon (**Dhuhr/Zuhar**) – this is replaced by congregational (**Jumu'ah**) prayers on a Friday
3. Between mid-afternoon and sunset (**Asr**)
4. After the sun has finished setting (**Maghrib**)
5. In the dark of the night (**Isha**)

If it is not possible to make the prayers at the appointed times they may be made as soon as possible afterwards.

During Ramadan some pupils may observe special additional prayers called **Taraweeh** which take place at the mosque every evening and last approximately an hour. These prayers are optional. They are normally performed in congregation at the mosque but can also be observed individually or as a family at home.

## **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Aspects**

Schools can develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their children and school life by recognising and building upon the essence and spirit of Ramadan. Teachers can take this opportunity to teach pupils about Ramadan in Religious Education and to invite guests from the Muslim community to take collective worship assemblies.

## **Attendance and Religious Observance**

Parents/carers may withdraw pupils from school for required religious observance and these absences are regarded as authorised for the purpose of registration. This might include, for example, Eid-ul-Fitr (celebration at the end of Ramadan, in 2022 around 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> May). Some pupils will attend school after observing prayer in the mosque. *Please see separate guidance regarding recording absence for pilgrimage and other heritage visits.*

## **Parents' Evenings and School Functions during Ramadan**

Fasting is difficult for both adults and young people and the timing 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 morning. This makes it difficult for parents/carers to attend meetings or other functions in the evenings during Ramadan. If it is possible to avoid parents' meetings during Ramadan, while continuing to provide close and effective home-school contact, the benefits are considerable.

## **Pupils with health issues or a medical condition**

Pupils with health issues or a medical condition (especially one that requires regular medication) and their parents are advised to consult their GP before Ramadan begins to discuss treatment options that allow them to control the medical condition whilst completing a fast safely. Anyone needing regular medication during fasting hours is normally exempt from fasting. During emergencies where a child's life is at risk or severe illness is diagnosed, then medicine should be administered.

## **Assessments during Ramadan**

In 2022, Ramadan coincides with the weeks leading up to examinations and overlaps with the exam period by a week. Please consider how Ramadan may impact on young Muslims in the senior phase, however they choose to observe the fast, for example in planning revision and completion of coursework.

Young Muslims and their families will need to take into consideration the impact on their studies and the importance of the work or assessments for their future, as well as any other relevant factors (such as health considerations), when deciding how they will observe Ramadan. Ramadan falling during the run-up to exams will put extra pressure on young Muslims, whatever decision they make, especially with the length of the fast.

Some Muslim parents may advise their children not to fast when they are completing coursework or preparing for exams but those children who normally fast are quite likely to fast regardless. Other students may modify their original decision to fast. Schools will wish to support families of fasting pupils by reinforcing messages about staying fit and healthy during Ramadan. ***It is not for schools or individual members of staff to try to influence students to fast or not, since this is matter of personal choice and conscience.***

### **PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS**

- Provide information or awareness training for staff about factors affecting Muslim pupils during Ramadan.
- If possible consult with parents/carers prior to the start of Ramadan to discuss the implications on young people and to advise parents/carers on what support is on offer, and how they can support their children and the school during Ramadan. Consider asking parents/carers to let the school know if their child is fasting – see template letter [Parent Letter Ramadan 2022](#)
- Provide a room for Muslim pupils observing Ramadan to pray at designated times. Provide a separate washroom nearby. (It is not necessary for shower rooms to be provided as Wudu (ablution) applies only to prescribed parts of the body, including the feet, but running water must be available.) Publicise these arrangements with pupils and parents/carers.
- Provide a quiet place for young people who are fasting to spend the lunch hour. Some schools provide quiet, supervised activities in the Library. Publicise these arrangements amongst pupils and parents.
- Where possible, avoid scheduling the following activities during the month of Ramadan:
  - ❖ Internal examinations
  - ❖ Sex and Relationship Education (while fasting, Muslims are not permitted to engage in sexual relations and are expected to avoid sexual thoughts and discourse)
  - ❖ Parents' meetings or school functions in the evening
  - ❖ Sports' Day
  - ❖ Swimming (the potential for swallowing water accidentally is high; this would constitute breaking the fast)
- Ensure that fasting children do not engage in over-demanding exercise, as this may result in dehydration.
- *If a child is showing signs of distress, including dehydration, hunger pains or an uncharacteristic lack of concentration, offer water and food and medical attention if this is deemed necessary. Islamic teaching allows, where necessary, for the fast to be broken and made up later.*
- For pupils who receive free school meals, offer a bag for them to take home.

### **For consideration**

- A written policy for the requirements and implications of religious observance and celebration by pupils and families, including Ramadan for Muslim pupils.

### **Further Information/Resources**

Edinburgh Learns Equalities Tile:

<https://cityofedinburgheducation.sharepoint.com/sites/EdinburghLearns/Equalities/ReligionandBelief>