

Guidance on Ramadan

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. It is obligatory for all males and females to fast once they attain the age of puberty (for some children this can be as young as age nine). 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.

Fasting pupils will normally get up before dawn to have their breakfast, which does interrupt their sleeping pattern. Some effects of fasting can be sleepiness, mood swings and headaches, creating the need in some pupils to reduce the physical exercise that they take. Muslims do not regard fasting as an opportunity to avoid aspects of life but rather to cope with normal life under different circumstances. If children start to feel unwell, disoriented or confused, or collapse or faint, the advice is to stop fasting and have a drink of water or other fluid. The Muslim Council of Britain has confirmed that breaking fast in such conditions is allowable under Islamic law.

Oral medicines and injections cannot be taken by fasting people.

It is possible to swim while fasting as the fast is not broken if water is swallowed inadvertently.

Whilst it is difficult to avoid all examinations during Ramadan, which moves each year, schools should consider rescheduling internal examinations.

It is difficult for Muslim parents to attend meetings in the evenings during Ramadan, so schools should be aware of the dates of Ramadan when planning its annual diary of events.

Schools will wish to reflect the importance of Ramadan in the curriculum, collective worship and in other supportive ways. Schools may wish to make a room available for prayer at lunchtime and at the end of the school day.

Primary school pupils:

Although fasting for the entire month does not become obligatory until the age of puberty, it is common practice for Muslim children to begin to fast before this age, in order to become progressively accustomed to the obligation. Most children aged 10 and 11 are likely to fast all 30 days. Children are enthusiastic and get a great sense of achievement joining their families in taking part in the spirit of Ramadan and often begin at a younger age.

The younger the child, the more difficult it tends to be for children to fast without their physical stamina and concentration levels being affected. This can be problematic for very

young children and we would advise that schools liaise with parents to encourage very young children to fast half days or to avoid fasting during school days as this can have a significant effect on their concentration levels and degree of alertness while at school. It is important to be aware that young children are more likely to fast when Ramadan falls in the winter months, when the days are shorter and the climate is cooler.

Whether a pupil decides to fast or not is a matter to be decided between the parent and child. Breaking the fast before the correct time may be regarded as being worse than not fasting at all by some pupils and parents. Schools should not encourage children to break their fast early unless it is for health and safety reasons. The overriding consideration should be that the children do not feel disadvantaged in school activities because of their religious observance.

Eid-al-Fitr

Eid-al-Fitr is a celebration held by Muslims to mark the end of Ramadan and to thank Allah for the strength he gave them to get through this traditional period of fasting. It lasts three days and is a time for fellowship and socialization. The festival begins when the first sight of the new moon is seen in the sky.