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# RAMADAN 2019

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## A Simple Guide for Schools



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## Overview

This simple guide for schools during the month of Ramadan has been produced by **Al-Emaan Centre (Keston Mosque)** in collaboration with **Bromley SACRE** in order for schools to recognise and build upon the essence of Ramadan without compromising the normality of everyday school life. Bromley SACRE plays a pivotal role in promoting the understanding of different faiths in schools by monitoring the content of Religious Education and its delivery. This guide seeks to encourage schools to utilise this opportunity in teaching pupils about Ramadan and inviting guest speakers to shed light on the subject, in a bid to foster diversity and engagement.

This year, Ramadan ran between May 17<sup>th</sup> 2018 to June 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 resulting in an overlap with the traditional exam season in May and June. Since Ramadan continues to fall during the peak periods of exams and the summer months, acknowledging pupils' needs may contribute to fostering good relations, and promoting understanding between different groups.

This Guide outlines considerations that schools may take with regards to the month of Ramadan, along with suggestions at the end on what features may constitute best practice in schools.

## **Ramadan: The Month of Fasting**

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; a month during which the Qur'an was first revealed. Fasting is prescribed for all healthy males and females once they attain the age of puberty (this is relative based on the physiological and psychological make-up of each individual). Certain circumstances and conditions in which Muslims are exempt from fasting include menstruating women, those pregnant or breast-feeding, those for whom fasting has a detrimental effect on their overall well-being, those who depend on medication for their health, and a traveller facing hardship due to fasting. Any missed fasting days are made up by fasting on days outside of Ramadan, or feeding the poor if one is unable to fast.

Fasting is an act of worship of great spiritual, moral and social significance to Muslims. The physical dimension of fasting involves completely abstaining from drinking, eating, smoking and sexual activity; from dawn to sunset - for the whole month. The spiritual and moral dimension of fasting involves God-consciousness, exercising self-control, patience, appreciation of food & drink, empathy towards the poor, having appropriate dealings with others, giving charity and observing additional worship.

Schools can play a pivotal part in the development of the spiritual, moral and social aspects of their pupils by recognising and building upon the spirit of Ramadan. Schools may wish to consider inviting pupils or guest speakers to share their knowledge and experience in fasting Ramadan during classes and assemblies. This will in turn boost pupil confidence and positive self-image, while also nurturing mutual understanding and respect amongst one another. Al-Emaan Centre has collaborated with several schools throughout the Borough in providing speakers for workshops and talks, along with welcoming several schools to visit the mosque. If you would like to arrange a talk or visit to the mosque please email on [info@al-emaan.org.uk](mailto:info@al-emaan.org.uk)

## **Primary School Pupils**

It is a common practice for Muslim children to begin fasting before they attain puberty, to become progressively accustomed to the act. Although fasting for the entire month is not prescribed until the age of puberty, many children aged 10 and 11 (years 5 & 6) may be seen observing the daily fast for the entire month. Some children may be encouraged by their parents to fast only on certain days of the week, especially the weekends. It is also 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.

## **Secondary School Pupils**

As this year's GCSE/A Level examinations fall during the month of Ramadhan, secondary schools may need to anticipate in advance to prepare the pupils in achieving their best.

Having to take examinations on top of long hours of fasting over the summer period may be a challenge for some students. Schools may need to know which pupils are fasting or not through liaising with parents and carers to offer guidance on the best way to avoid dehydration, eating nutritious food, getting appropriate rest periods, organising revision sessions, and extra-curricular activities. Families and students will normally look to make a decision thereafter on whether fasting would be manageable in such circumstances.

Since fasting pupils have plenty of spare time during lunch break, schools can support Muslim students by providing a quiet room during break times where they can pray, rest or revise between examinations and classes. In addition, fasting pupils can also utilise the long gap between the end of the school day and *Iftar* (breaking of the fast), by having a good rest and balancing it with revision periods.

In the event that the school notices any indications of dehydration or fatigue in a child during statutory exams, the child should be asked if they are fasting and advised to drink water immediately. The child should be reassured that in their current situation, they can break their fast and make it up later. Schools may need to notify the pupils of this allowance during exams briefing or incorporate it into their exams instructions.

## **Prayers during Ramadan**

Ramadan is a time when Muslims try to spend more time in prayer and religious contemplation.

Schools are encouraged to set aside a quiet room for prayers, particularly for mid-afternoon 'Dhuhr' prayers (during lunch break). This prayer changes its time to reflect different seasons. In winter time this is likely to be between 12.00pm - 1.00 pm, whilst in summer it is likely to be between 1.00 pm - 2.00 pm. Students will also typically need to use washing facilities to prepare for the prayer, known as ablution. This includes washing the visible parts of the body like the face, hands and feet.

Schools should be sympathetic to pupils' desire to offer prayers at prescribed times. This opportunity for offering prayers during school time is encouraged to be available throughout the year. A full prayer timetable for the year outlining timings for a Muslim's 5 daily prayers can be found at [www.al-emaan.org.uk](http://www.al-emaan.org.uk)

Muslims also regularly offer extra prayers every night during the month of Ramadan, called Taraweeh prayers. Many Muslims, including some children, will stay up late saying prayers and reading the Quran. Schools are encouraged to liaise with parents to reduce any subsequent impact on their children's academic performance during the day.

## **Celebrating Ramadan**

Muslims approach Ramadan with enthusiasm and it is customary for Muslims to congratulate one another on its arrival. Schools can value and build on this spirit by having themes based on Ramadan at collective worship or assemblies, and by organising communal *Iftar*, where pupils, parents, community members and teachers join in breaking of the fast and eating together. While a communal *Iftar* in summer is not possible within school hours due to the long fasting hours, Al-Emaan Centre regularly opens its doors to the local public to share in the *Iftar* experience in the evening. Those interested in attending are encouraged to email the mosque on [info@al-emaan.org.uk](mailto:info@al-emaan.org.uk)

Teachers can also take the opportunity of Ramadan by teaching the pupils about the month and inviting guest speakers from the Muslim community to explain the subject or encourage mosque visits – **Al-Emaan Centre** would be happy to be a liaison. This will help in promoting diversity, and in enhancing mutual understanding on respective faiths.

Pupils who fast and engage in extra charitable activities during Ramadan may be seen positively and their achievements acknowledged for their efforts. Schools may consider incorporating Ramadan into the Religious Education Programme, encouraging teachers to utilise opportunities across the curriculum to develop knowledge and understanding of the basic tenets of Islam.

## **Physical Education**

Whilst the discipline and the challenge of fasting is to continue with the normality of everyday life, staff should exercise a degree of understanding, by encouraging pupils to avoid excessive exertion in Physical Education to prevent dehydration. Strenuous activity during fasting may make some children feel tired or drowsy, or possibly develop headaches

due to dehydration. Some pupils may need to reduce physical exercises during fasting while others may wish to continue as normal, according to their tolerance levels.

## **Swimming during Ramadan**

Participation in swimming is an acceptable activity whilst fasting. The potential for swallowing water may be an issue for some, while others will deem accidental water as acceptable. It is advised that schools should take an understanding approach where an activity might be construed by the pupil or their parents as breaking the fast.

## **Medication**

Anyone needing regular medication during fasting hours is exempt from fasting. Guidance should be sought from local Muslim organisations on specific issues where necessary.

## **Absence from School due to Religious Holidays**

The day after the month of Ramadan marks the celebration of the Islamic holiday of *Eid ul-Fitr*. Muslims cannot be specific in advance regarding its date - as it is generally dependent on visual moon sighting. It is advised that schools follow their own policies on holidays for religious and cultural needs, and at the same time consider those parents/carers who request further days. Al-Emaan Centre customarily provides updates on its website regarding the days of Ramadan and Eid, found at [www.al-emaan.org.uk](http://www.al-emaan.org.uk)

## Features of good practice in schools

- ✓ Staff awareness of the key points in this guide to help build upon the essence of Ramadan, and to help foster good relations and engagement.
- ✓ Acknowledgment and celebration of the spirit and values of Ramadan through collective worship, assembly themes and communal breaking of the fast.
- ✓ Schools may wish to consider inviting guest speakers to share their knowledge and experience in fasting Ramadan during workshops and assemblies. If you would like to arrange a talk or visit to the mosque, please email on [info@al-emaan.org.uk](mailto:info@al-emaan.org.uk)
- ✓ Pupils who fast and engage in extra charitable activities during Ramadan should be seen positively and their achievements acknowledged.
- ✓ The provision of prayer facilities during the month of Ramadan and beyond.
- ✓ Cohesion and clear communication between the school, parents and students, particularly in anticipation of the exam period to help enhance academic performance while fasting.
- ✓ The school is mindful of requests by fasting pupils to be exempt from particular physical activities.
- ✓ Schools have in place guidance on holidays for religious and cultural needs.

## **References**

1. <http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/MCBSchoolsreport07.pdf> (Accessed 17/10/2018)