

Ramadan Briefing for North Yorkshire Schools, 2018

Ramadan will fall this summer in May and June, when the days are at their longest and pupils are doing public and internal exams and tests. Schools need to consider how to best support Muslim staff and pupils during this period of fasting.

The Islamic calendar is lunar and has 354 or 355 days. Therefore precise dates cannot be forecast as they depend on the sighting of the moon. **This year, 2018, Ramadan begins on May 15th or 16th. Eid Al-Fitr (the festival marking the end of Ramadan) will fall on June 14th (plus or minus 1 day).**

Schools will be aware that pupils observing the fast will have consumed their last food and drink before dawn, which could mean as early as 3:00 am. Breaking the fast for the day will be about 9:30 pm (sunset).

It is very important for many Muslim families that their children should begin participating in the practice of fasting at an early age. Most pupils of secondary school age, as they are considered adult members of their communities, will be expected to fast and many primary school pupils will be fasting as well, with younger pupils fasting possibly for part of Ramadan, or only on certain days of each week.

Teachers therefore need to bear in mind that the routine of Muslim families is entirely different during Ramadan. The whole household will be awake much earlier in the morning, around 2:00 am, to have some light food and to pray and will not be eating again until about 10pm at night. Young children may become more tired or excitable in school during this time, even if they are not fasting themselves. Those pupils who are fasting may become very tired and thirsty during the school day.

Practical advice for schools during fasting:

- Inform pupils of the allowances Islam gives for them to break the fast and make it up later if they feel fasting will in any way jeopardise their performance.
- Fasting pupils will not be in the canteen and will have plenty of spare time to pass during the lunch hour. It would be desirable to provide them with a supervised, quiet space to rest.
- Running revision lessons in cooler classrooms during hot weather will benefit all candidates.
- Discuss with pupils whether they would prefer revision lessons to be in the morning or afternoon.
- Those on free school meals are still entitled to a meal. Schools should consider putting a bag together for pupils to take home.
- Any Muslim pupils not fasting for any reason should be provided with a space or area to eat where they feel comfortable.
- Consider granting exemptions from PE and sports to pupils who are fasting.
- Show sensitivity when arranging official celebrations for leaving school or the end of exams.
- School and college leaders will also want to consider the possible impact fasting and late night prayers during Ramadan may have on Muslim pupils when setting dates for other activities, such as sports days, trips and celebrations.
- Provide a room, where appropriate, for prayers.

Exam rooms and halls

- Invigilators are advised to refrain from suggesting to pupils to have a 'tiny sip of water' for those fasting. This is not allowed unless there is concern that they may be suffering from dehydration.
- Good examination room management during hot weather will benefit all candidates; ensure that exam rooms are shaded and fans are available. If possible, provide an outside shaded area and/or a cool, quiet room for pupils to use between exams.
- If pupils are normally allowed to take food and drink into an exam room, it would be considerate where possible to allocate a separate exam room for fasting pupils, so they are not distracted by others who might have water bottles or snacks on their desks.
- If a pupil taking an exam is showing any signs that they may be dehydrated, such as a headache or drowsiness, they should be advised to terminate the fast and drink some water. They can be reassured that in this situation Islamic rulings allow them to break and make it up later. Schools may want to make this clear in their examinations policy and to consult with Muslim parents and pupils before the examination period to ensure all are in agreement with this policy.

North Yorkshire SACRE can provide advice to schools on catering for the needs of their Muslim pupils during Ramadan, so that pupils are able to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Guidance documents:

ASCL: Ramadan and Exams, 2018: information for schools and colleges

<https://www.ascl.org.uk/help-and-advice/help-and-advice.ramadan-exams-and-tests-2018.html>

A briefing paper for schools on Ramadan. Newham SACRE.

<http://www.newhamconnect.uk/Article/55436>

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