

City of Bradford MDC

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Department of Children's Services

Aiming High for Children

# Ramadhan Guidance for Schools 2017

Ramadhan

Notes



# Ramadhan Guidance

**27 May to 26 June 2017\***

(\*Actual date may vary as a result of sighting of the new moon)

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## Introduction

This booklet aims to provide guidance to all local schools, especially those with Muslim pupils and/or staff. *Ramadhan* provides a good opportunity to develop closer links with Muslim parents and communities by having a good understanding of the meaning and importance of the fasting month.

### The Joys of Fasting

This year *Ramadhan*, the 9th Islamic month, is likely to begin on **27 May 2017** and *Eid-ul-Fitr*, marking the end of *Ramadhan* is likely to be celebrated on **26 June 2017**. **These dates can vary subject to sighting of the new moon and local announcements.** Fasting Timetables will be widely available from Mosques and Muslim businesses. It is important to understand the positive aspects of this month for Muslims – both children and adults. Far from being a difficult time of hardship, *Ramadhan* is anticipated with enormous excitement and the experience enjoyed by young and old. The month provides encouragement to uphold good character, to refrain from anti-social behaviour, (including being unkind to other people by telling lies, swearing etc.) and to strengthen spiritual development and one's relationship with God (Allah). Family and community togetherness is strengthened and supported through a unifying experience with Muslims all around the world. It is also a time for increased social responsibility, for empathy with, and giving to the poor and needy. In summary, ***Ramadhan* is a time for striving for the best in all aspects of life.**

### Abstinence

During *Ramadhan*, adult Muslims are required to fast during the hours of daylight, though there are some permitted exceptions. This involves abstaining from food, drink (including water), smoking and sexual activity. Fasting is an act of worship. It is a special opportunity for Muslims to reinvigorate their faith by making extra efforts towards piety and Taqwa (God-consciousness) – “to recharge their spiritual batteries”.

### Important Notice

This year the length of the fasting day is very long, lasting over 19 hours at the beginning of *Ramadhan* and future advice is available to reflect this under FAQs. Fasting will begin (sehri) about 2:30am at the start and shortly after 2:45am by the end of *Ramadhan*. The opening of the fast (*Iftar*) will be around 9.30pm at the start and 9.15pm by the end of *Ramadhan*.

Please see Frequently Asked Questions on page 9 of this Guidance.

### Examinations

Secondary schools will need to be mindful of GCSE/A level examinations falling within the month of *Ramadhan*. Additional guidance can be found on page 5.

### Eid-ul-Fitr

The month of *Ramadhan* ends with the festival of *Eid-ul-Fitr*. The month begins with the sighting of the new moon and *Eid* celebrations commence with the sighting of the next new moon one month later. Attempts to sight the new moon are observed all over the world and the exact date for the festival depends upon whether one follows local moonsighting in the UK or announcements based on moonsighting in Saudi Arabia. This is the reason why Muslim communities in West Yorkshire are not always able to agree in advance on one date for *Eid*.



## Issues relating to Muslim pupils

Parents have a responsibility to inform the school if their child/ren are fasting. Schools can help Muslim children prepare for Ramadhan by meeting with parents and local Imams to discuss arrangements for the fasting period. A letter explaining the school's approach can do much to assure families that the school acknowledges the importance of *Ramadhan* (draft letters can be found in Appendix 2). A reminder to parents to ensure that their children have a substantial *Sehri* meal (early morning meal taken before dawn to start fasting) might be emphasised. Schools may wish to consider making copies of this guidance document available to parents or by placing it on their school website.

Fasting becomes obligatory for Muslims as they approach adolescence, though many younger pupils, some as young as seven years old, will wish to participate and will try to keep at least some or part of the days as fasts. *Sawm* is the Arabic word for fasting but most local Muslim pupils will use the Urdu language term *Roza*. Pupils fasting will neither eat nor drink from dawn to sunset. They may also wish to say their midday prayers at lunchtime in school.

**Lunchtime arrangements:** Schools can support the spiritual dimension of their Muslim pupils' lives by offering them appropriate support at school during *Ramadhan*. Pupils who are fasting must not be treated differently from other pupils, unless it is clear that there is an objective and reasonable justification for different treatment. Pupils who are fasting should not be excluded from clubs or activities or be sent home or out of school at lunchtime.

In previous years, local schools have adopted a variety of approaches regarding younger pupils. The Council for Mosques advises that fasting becomes obligatory when a person reaches the age of puberty and therefore not compulsory for the majority of primary aged children. NHS Choices website advises\*, '*Fasting for children under the age of seven or eight isn't advisable*'. However, some older children in primary schools may wish to fast along with their families. Where younger pupils are undertaking the fast with parental support, schools have a legal responsibility to ensure their safety and that appropriate supervision arrangements are in place while they are on school premises. If schools experience problems in relation to younger pupils fasting they should contact their parent/guardian in the first instance. Muslim staff at the Interfaith Education Centre are always on hand to provide advice and guidance. (See page 12 for contact details)

### **Time Off for Religious and Cultural Observance**

Bradford Council recommends that schools allow no more than 3 days authorised absence in an academic year to children for religious or cultural needs. This ensures a minimum loss to their educational entitlement.

**This year Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to fall on Monday 26 June 2017. Please note the actual date depends on the sighting of the new moon.**

### **\*FAQs – NHS Choices:**

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthylamadhan/Pages/faqs.aspx>



## Issues relating to Muslim members of staff

### Fasting/Prayer Timetables

Bradford's Muslim community is diverse with people from all over the world who will belong to a range of different sects or schools of thought. It would therefore be wrong to assume that all Muslims will follow the same timings for their timetables. Schools should consult parents and their local Mosques or their Muslim staff as to which timetable may be relevant to their children.

### Staff and Governing Body Meetings

This year fasting will begin (sehri) from around 2:30am and 2:45am by the end of *Ramadhan*. The breaking of the fast (*Iftar when Muslims are able to eat and drink*) will be around 9:30pm at the start and approximately 9:15pm by the end of *Ramadhan*.

[**Note:** The timing for fasting times moves, becoming slightly earlier each day of the month at this time of the year. Times may also vary for different Muslim Sects. Most practising Muslims open their fast with dates and a drink of water. They then offer the obligatory *Maghrib* (sunset) prayer.]

### Prayers

Muslim members of staff may wish to offer their prayers during the school day, and so would appreciate time and a quiet space being made available. This facility may be provided throughout the year for those who wish to observe their prayers and maintain consistency. The midday prayer (Zuhr) is likely to fall after 1:00pm at this time of year.

### Time off for Religious and Cultural Observance

In Bradford, teachers are allowed to take a day off work with pay for religious or cultural observance and LA policy is that all other school-based staff who work term-time only should be given the same opportunity. There is no entitlement to anything in lieu where religious festivals fall during school holidays or weekends.

**This year Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to fall on Monday 26 June 2017. Please note the actual date depends on the sighting of the new moon.**



## GCSE and A Level Examinations Guidance

This year GCSE/A Level examinations will fall during the month of Ramadhan which secondary schools will need to anticipate in advance in order to offer students and their families support.

Fasting is obligatory for Muslim students in secondary school. The only dispensation are those who are ill or girls who may be menstruating. Families will make their own decision on such issues affecting their children.

Schools acknowledge the moral and spiritual values associated with fasting and the positive benefits that this has on their students. However, having to take examinations on top of long hours of fasting over the summer period will be a challenge for students.

Schools may therefore wish to offer guidance on the best way to avoid dehydration, eating nutritious food, getting appropriate rest periods, organising revision sessions etc as a run up to Ramadhan and exercising flexibility where possible.

Schools can support Muslim students who are fasting by providing a quiet room during break times where they are able to pray, rest or revise between examinations.

There will be a long gap between when school finishes and Iftar (breaking of the fast). Students can use this time to best effect by having a good rest and balancing it with revision periods.

Schools are encouraged to liaise with parents, their local Masjid or Madrassah, Muslim staff and/or their students in advance of Ramadhan to ensure those fasting are well prepared and able to achieve their best during this holy month of religious observance.

**Muslim Faith Tutors from the Interfaith Education Centre are able to provide further advice. Please see page 12 for their contact details.**



## Local examples of good practice:

- Members of staff are designated to supervise pupils who are not eating dinners (a quiet room is ideal for this).
- Parents take part in a supervision rota with staff (but they should not be given sole responsibility as proper Safeguarding arrangements must be in place).
- Many schools provide a room for prayer. This is equipped with prayer mats (*musallah*), or a large clean sheet to cover the floor. The direction of prayer (*qibla*) is clearly marked on one wall which has no pictures of people or animals displayed. Pupils may wish to bring their own prayer mats to use in school. A Muslim member of staff or senior pupils may be happy to take a lead in organising prayer sessions at lunchtime with adequate support from staff and/or parents. It is usual for males and females to pray separately, although where this is not possible they may pray together. Advice from the Council for Mosques state girls should be behind boys
- Provision for prayer should be available throughout the year for both students and adults, and requests for this may well follow the period of *Ramadhan*. It is not necessary for prayers to be led by an *Imam* from a mosque, but on Fridays the lunchtime prayer (*Jum'ah*) is a congregational prayer and includes a sermon, so it is necessary for the leader to be qualified and prepared to give this.
- School staff recognise that pupils wishing to pray will need to make their ablution (*wudhu*) which can be done in the usual washing area. Cleanliness is an important aspect of Islam, and pupils using school facilities in this way should be encouraged to take responsibility for tidiness etc.
- Lunchtime activities, such as discussion groups, are organised by staff or older pupils.
- Special assemblies can be organised involving Muslim tutors from the IEC, local community members or parents.
- Appropriate PE activities are made to suit the needs of pupils who are fasting. This will not be necessary for all Muslim pupils, but is an area where sensitivity needs to be shown.
- Ramadhan ends with the festival of *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Many school governing bodies have a policy (where there are a majority of Muslim pupils) of allocating time off through use of their occasional days for this. (See Appendix 1 for Guidance on Religious and Cultural Needs)



## Local examples of good practice:

Outlined below are examples of some discussion topics that schools have used to teach about Ramadhan.

### **Fasting as Thanksgiving**

Many Muslims regard the self-sacrifice of the fast as a way of saying "Thank-you" to Allah (God) for all the good things they have in life.

Discuss with pupils how fasting can help to cleanse and clear people's thoughts, making them feel closer to Allah. Encourage pupils to think of some of the things that they would like to say thank you for. What other ways are there of doing this?

### **Sharing Hardship**

Sharing a hardship such as fasting can often help individuals to feel closer to each other. Get pupils to talk about 'tests' and ordeals that they have been through. Did the fact of knowing that others were going through the same experience make the ordeal easier to come through successfully?

### **Fasting to Learn Self-Discipline**

Fasting is also an exercise in self-discipline, offering a difficult challenge to every individual. Discuss with pupils the differences between self-discipline and discipline imposed by others. Which is more difficult to live up to? Which is more meaningful and worthwhile? Encourage them to talk about their own experience of self-discipline and to analyse their successes and failures.

### **Group Work**

Work together in class to produce a chart big enough for the wall to show "A day in the life of a Muslim during *Ramadhan*". Remember, the representation of people is a sensitive issue and therefore the avoidance of drawing facial features is recommended. You will need symbols for dawn, daytime, sunset, night, food, mosque, Qur'an etc.



## **A Ramadhan / Eid-ul-Fitr Open Day**

The climax of a term's project work on *Ramadhan*, *Eid-ul-Fitr* and the world of Islam could be an Open Day for parents, friends and perhaps other local schools. Here are some suggestions:

Invitations – should include a brief description and explanation of what the Festival is about.

### **Wall Displays of items prepared by pupils:**

- *Eid* cards.
- Map of where Muslims live (locally, in Britain, in the world)
- The Islamic Calendar showing correlations between the Muslim and the Western calendar (e.g. the birthdays of children in the class).
- Displays to show how the class has 'gone without' to help the poor and needy.
- Muslim prayer times for the week.
- Pictures of Muslim countries, showing the global Muslim community.
- Recipes for *Eid*.
- Make a collage to show the world-wide Muslim community.

### **Pupil Participation**

- Some pupils could wait at the door to meet visitors with the greeting "*Eid Mubarak*" (meaning 'Eid Greetings').

Dates could be offered, or other foods commonly served at *Eid*.



## Frequently Asked Questions:

**Q: This year the length of the fasting day will be very long, lasting over 19 hours at the beginning of the month of *Ramadhan*. What can we do to make this a positive experience for children?**

A: Bradford Council, having consulted the Council for Mosques, provides the following advice to schools:

- Fasting helps teach Muslims self-discipline and self-restraint. As a practice, it reminds Muslims of the hardship and suffering that poor people go through. The month of *Ramadhan* offers Muslims an opportunity to experience this by abstaining from food and drink. It will be difficult for many people but enduring this hardship is part of the discipline whilst continuing with ones day to day responsibilities. It is a time for reflection to help ones spiritual and moral development.
- Schools and parents need to work together to help prepare young people for this journey to adulthood by reminding them of the purpose of their fast through support, encouragement and praise.
- Acknowledge the spirit and values of *Ramadhan* through collective worship, assemblies or 'thought for the day'. There are plenty of examples of good practice throughout sections of this guidance for schools and parents.
- Parents can support this by ensuring children are able to rest at certain times of the day. For example, Iftar (opening the fast) will not take place until approximately 9.30pm this year. This will therefore provide opportunity for children to have additional rest periods after school around 4.00pm and before they break their fast. This should be possible as most Madrassahs are closed for *Ramadhan*.
- Be sensitive to how this may impact on their energy levels due to abstaining from food and drink and therefore be mindful of how demanding physical exercise can result in dehydration.
- Remind parents to make schools aware of and when children are fasting and work with them to safeguard the children's welfare.
- Although the Council for Mosques advises that, due to the extreme length of the day for fasting this year, primary-aged children should not be encouraged to fast, there will be some young children who wish to fast, and many who wish to fast for shorter periods, perhaps breaking their fast at lunchtime. Schools should work with parents to ensure that proper arrangements are in place to support those children to have a safe and positive experience.



## Frequently Asked Questions:

**Q: What is the month of *Ramadhan*?**

A: *Ramadhan* is the ninth month of the Islamic (lunar) calendar, known as “the month of fasting”. Each Islamic month is either 29 or 30 days and therefore the year is shorter by either 10 or 11 days in comparison with the Gregorian calendar.

**Q: Why is this particular month important for Muslims?**

A: It is believed by Muslims to be the month in which the first verses of the Holy Qur’an were revealed by Allah (God) to the Prophet Muhammad (May Peace Be Upon Him) via the Angel Jibra’il (Gabriel).

**Q: What does fasting mean?**

A: To abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity during daylight hours. It is also a time to abstain from any “discouraged” or “questionable” activities (e.g. smoking—also see question concerning sport below). Fasting during *Ramadhan* is one of the five basic duties (pillars) of Islam.

**Q: At what age do children start fasting?**

A: *Shari’ah* Law (Islamic Law based on the *Qur’an* and the practice of the Prophet) states that fasting during *Ramadhan* is only obligatory from the age of puberty. However, younger children frequently wish to emulate their elders, and so Muslim children will start to observe individual days of fast from an early age. They will be proud of this and their elders will often encourage them and praise them. This practice is viewed as gradually taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. The level of observance will, of course, depend upon the particular individual, family or community. Even if children are not fasting they might be more tired because they are getting up earlier, going to bed later and participating in more family and community events.

**Q: Do all Muslims have to fast?**

A: No, there are a number of permitted exemptions, for example: Muslim Scholars advise that those who are physically or mentally ill, or travelling on long journeys; pregnant or nursing mothers (if it would be detrimental to their health); and menstruating women. Such people would be expected to make up for their missed fasts later.

**Q: Doesn’t fasting make children sleepy, tired and listless and won’t it affect their ability to work well at school?**

A: Fasting can affect children's physical stamina and concentration levels and Muslim parents greatly appreciate schools’ concern for their children during this special month. However, even if children cannot apply themselves in the same way as during the rest of the year, it is felt that the overall benefits of *Ramadhan* for the individual, the family and the community are great. It is hoped that schools will be sensitive to these views and will treat children who are fasting, and their families with respect.



# Ramadhan

**Q: What about sports and PE?**

A: There are no sporting or physical activities that are forbidden during *Ramadhan*. Teachers are advised to use their discretion regarding physical education during *Ramadhan*. Some Muslim pupils who are fasting, for example, may feel weak and teachers could decide that certain strenuous activities need to be modified for them during this period. The season of the year during which *Ramadhan* falls will have a bearing upon such decisions.

**Q: Can Muslims go swimming during *Ramadhan*?**

A: Fasting is an intentional activity designed to please Allah (God). Muslim scholars teach that the fast is not broken if someone accidentally swallows water during swimming. The fast is only broken if this is done intentionally. Pupils may need re-assurance about this. However, while fasting, many people will understandably try to avoid activities that might cause them to unintentionally break their fast, such as being immersed in water.

**Q: Can Muslims listen to music, sing, dance or watch television during *Ramadhan*?**

A: Many Muslims will particularly try to avoid such activities during this month and instead to devote time to more spiritual activities (see also the answer to a question about Sport and PE above). This practice should be respected where possible by schools. Watching “educational” television programmes is normally permitted.

**Q: What are appropriate gifts to give to children or adults for *Eid*?**

A: New clothes, money, sweets and trips are all traditional *Eid* presents.

**Q: What do the terms *Roza*, *Sehri* and *Iftar* mean?**

A: *Roza* is an Urdu word referring to fasting. *Sehri* refers to the start of the fast and *Iftar* refers to the end of the daily fast. People fasting can eat before *Sehri* and after *Iftar*. These words are therefore often used as names for these meals.



## Further information and advice

is available from Muslim staff based at the Interfaith Education Centre (IEC).

Our Muslim Faith Tutors are:

Mohammad Saleem - Muslim Team Leader Tel: 01274 439376  
Email: m.saleem@bradford.gov.uk

Fatima Ayub Tel: Tel: 01274 439377  
Email: fatima.ayub@bradford.gov.uk

Nadeem Khan Tel: 01274 439386  
Email: nadeem.khan@bradford.gov.uk

The IEC staff can also be contacted on: Tel: 01274 439379

**Bradford Council for Mosques:** Telephone: (01274) 521792

## Training and Guidance

The IEC has a wide selection of books on Ramadhan and Eid for loan or sale.

The Muslim Council of Britain also provides guidance on Ramadhan for schools. This can be downloaded from their website:

<http://www.mcb.org.uk/ramadan>

Healthy Ramadan – NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/HealthyRamadan/Pages/healthyramadhanhome.aspx>

FAQs – NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthyramadan/Pages/faqs.aspx>

Another useful resource is the BBC website for schools which can be found on:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/islam/ramadan.shtml>

## Other useful websites:

<http://www.ramadan.co.uk/>

<http://www.plainislam.com/>

<http://www.isb.org.uk/>



### Guidance on Religious and Cultural Needs

Schools will be aware that pupils and their families will wish to participate in religious and cultural celebrations. Some staff will also wish to celebrate important religious festivals. Bradford Council is keen to ensure that both children and adults from different faith backgrounds are able to celebrate religious festivals at the appropriate time they occur throughout the school year.

In the majority of cases this does not affect the normal school week. For example, Jewish children celebrating Yom Kippur or Sikh and Hindu children celebrating Diwali does not impact on the school week. This is due to the relatively small numbers of children from those faith backgrounds in any one school. However, in Bradford we have over 35,000 Muslim pupils in our schools which represent 38% of the school population. Headteachers have informed us, particularly where a large majority of children in their school are from a Muslim faith background, that the impact of taking time off for Eid has caused in some instances caused a major disruption to the school week. This results in additional days being lost due to absence that can have a detrimental impact on attendance and attainment levels.

Bradford Council have raised this issue with the Council for Mosques to seek their advice and guidance. They fully understand and support our stance which is, every school day is important and that one days leave is all that should be sanctioned where Eid falls on a weekday.

The Bradford School Calendar provides for a number of occasional days which can be used to reflect the needs of the local community. Given that the actual dates for Eid are determined at short notice, it is advisable to indicate to the school community what the likely dates are and to then confirm the actual dates once known.

Schools will be aware that there are Muslims from different sects and from different parts of the world who may celebrate Eid on different days. The exact date can only be decided on the sighting of the new moon closer to the time. It is therefore recommended that schools consult their Muslim parents and the local mosque.

Schools need to be mindful of the relevant laws in relation to this, namely:

- The Equality Act 2010; and,
- The Human Rights Act 1998

Cont.d



# Ramadhan

Schools and their governing bodies need to be particularly careful that they attach the appropriate level of importance to any request for consideration under such circumstances. Not all schools will be affected by this and therefore must use their discretion to make informed decisions about the needs of their children and staff.

A number of our schools with a majority of Muslim children have used their occasional days flexibly to enable both children and staff to celebrate religious festivals with little or no disruption at all to the school week. Bradford Council therefore advises schools with a majority of Muslim school children to consult with their parents and local school community when determining their school year.

Staff from Bradford Council's Diversity and Cohesion team can provide advice and guidance should schools require this. Please ring 01274 439379 and you will be put through to the appropriate person.

Future dates for *Ramadhan* and *Eid* are listed below to help with school planning.

## Provisional Future Dates for Ramadhan and Eid

Islamic Year	Islamic New Year	Ramadhan begins	Eid ul-Fitr (end of Ramadhan)	Eid ul-Adha
1438	02 Oct 2016	27 May 2017	26 Jun 2017	1 Sept 2017
1439	21 Sep 2017	16 May 2018	15 June 2018	21 Aug 2018
1440	11 Sep 2018	5 May 2019	5 Jun 2019	11 Aug 2019

## The Islamic Calendar

The Islamic calendar is lunar and its months are determined by the various positions of the moon. As a result of using this system, dates in the Islamic calendar have no fixed relationship to the seasons and the celebration of Muslim festivals and ceremonies passes gradually through the whole cycle of the solar year. These dates may therefore vary as they will be subject to the sighting of the new moon.



## Appendix 2

### Model Draft - Letter to Parents 1

Dear Parents/Carers

#### **Ramadhan Mubarak**

The month of Ramadhan is expected to start on 27 May this year and I want to take this opportunity to wish you Ramadan Mubarak and best wishes in all your preparations. I know this will be a very special time for many of you and your children.

As you are aware the fasts this year will be very long and can be difficult for some children. I know that you will have thought carefully about whether your child fasts and school will be respectful of your decisions. Obviously at school we would like to make appropriate arrangements for children who are fasting to be supported in their efforts. If you would like to discuss ways in which school can support you please come to speak to the class teacher or a member of the leadership team.

It would be helpful if you could tell us whether your child will be fasting by ..... so that we can ensure that proper supervision and support is in place. I understand that this can change from day to day and would ask that you simply keep in touch and let us know when you can.

Once again I wish you all a happy and productive month and wish you well in all your devotions.

Thank you

*\* The actual date may vary based on the sighting of the new moon.*



Model Draft - Letter to Parents 2

Dear Parents,

**Ramadhan 2017**

As many of you will be well aware, Ramadhan is likely to begin on 27 May this year.

At school we very much appreciate that Ramadhan is an extremely important month for Muslims and we wish to work with parents to ensure that we support children's experience in the last few weeks when this falls during term time.

Local Authority guidance states; consultation with the Council for Mosques would suggest that due to the increasing length of the day for fasting this year parents are advised that primary-aged students are not encouraged to fast. Whilst our advice is that fasting is not obligatory for those below the age of puberty, we do understand that some families may intend for their younger children to take part in the fast for some or all of the daily period.

It is vital that parents inform us if they intend their children to fast whilst at school. We are happy to support your decision and to make arrangements for the children to be supervised at the time when they would normally be having their lunch but I trust that you understand it is very difficult for us to make a decision not to feed children without express guidance from their parents. Please note that if a child states that they wish to fast without parental consent we could not agree to that.

If you are participating in the observance of Ramadhan, may I wish you a *Ramadhan Al-Mubarak*.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would wish to discuss any issues further.

Thank you

\* *The actual date may vary based on the sighting of the new moon.*



Ramadhan

Notes





# Ramadan Mubarak

