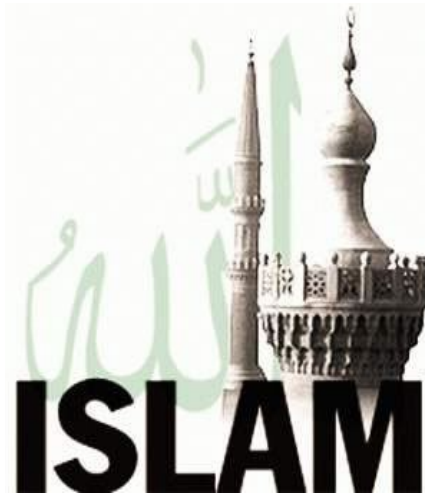

Information on Islam for schools with Muslim pupils



Children and young people from minority communities must not be stopped from enjoying their own culture, religion and language.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30

This leaflet is for schools. It was written to provide some basic information about Islam to help schools make appropriate provision for their Muslim pupils/students and families.

Muslim Families in Hampshire Schools

Many of Hampshire's Muslim families originate from different countries including Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt and Iran. Others may belong to a more settled, established community with several generations born in the UK.

Many of these families have a home language other than English. For these families, English is an additional language. Because the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, is written in Arabic, most Muslims will also be learning this language, sometimes purely by rote, in order to recite the Sura (verses of the Qur'an).

The Five Pillars of Islam

Within Islam, the five pillars are the key practices that are required of all Muslims. They are:

Shahadha (profession of faith)

Salat (prayer rituals, to be performed 5 times a day)

Zakat (charity or alms tax)

Sawm (fasting)

Hajj (pilgrimage)

Important dates

There are two key festivals in Islam, Eid-ul-Fitr (celebration that takes place at the end of Ramadan, the period of fasting) and Eid-ul-Adha (festival of sacrifice). The dates of these key events are set according to the Islamic calendar. Muslim families may want to take time off work and school to celebrate these important festivals and most will request just one day for each festival. Absences may be recorded as "R" (Authorised: Religious Observance) for the day of the festival only i.e. not for travel time or for time with family in country of origin. Approval of any additional days requested, including any requested in relation to fasting, is at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Ramadan: general information

Throughout the month of Ramadan, all adult Muslims, unless ill, elderly, menstruating or pregnant, are required to fast during the hours of daylight. Note that Muslims do not all observe the fast in exactly the same way; some are more strict in their observance of it than others, for example not even swallowing their own saliva.

Ramadan: implications for schools

Many Muslim children will want to observe a partial fast as they prepare for adulthood and the full fast. Young children may fast for the morning only and as they get older extend the length of time they spend fasting each day during Ramadan. Some choose to fast only at weekends and some do not fast at all. So there is no one way in which children prepare themselves for Sawm. After puberty, the full fast becomes obligatory for all practising Muslims so secondary-aged Muslim pupils are likely to be observing the full fast. Sometimes, Ramadan coincides with exams so this can be an additional challenge for Muslim pupils.

When Ramadan falls during the summer in the UK, daylight hours are longer and therefore the period of time spent fasting is more protracted. Muslims may feel more tired as the month progresses, especially as their sleep is often disturbed by the practice of waking to eat during the night.

To support Muslim pupils and their families appropriately, schools should discuss what each individual's requirements are. The following concessions may be welcomed by families:

- Quiet, private room with access to running water for prayer ritual.
- Place where pupils may rest during lunch break, away from the canteen where other pupils will be eating.
- Flexibility re participation in physical activities eg PE

Schools may want to urge parents to ensure that their children remember to drink plenty of fluids as well as to eat during non-fasting periods.

Dress Codes

In order to support Muslim pupils to demonstrate modesty and respect, girls and boys should be offered separate places to get changed for PE. Many Muslim girls, especially as they approach puberty, will want to adopt a more modest dress code. They may want to wear long sleeves, long skirts and a headscarf, sometimes called Hijab. For PE, a track suit is often acceptable.

Dietary Requirements

Muslims eat Halal food; pork and its by-products are Haram (forbidden) including gelatin, which is found in many children's sweets. If a pupil is having a school lunch, the vegetarian option is usually acceptable.

Note that pigs are generally considered unclean and some parents may object to the use of stories such as "The Three Little Pigs" or "Lord of the Flies".

Relationships & Sex Education (RSE)

Where possible, it is preferable for boys to be taught this by a male teacher and girls by a female. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from sex education until up to two terms before their child's 16th birthday, but relationships education is statutory.

Art and Music

Some Muslim pupils may feel uncomfortable if asked to draw human or animal forms or to engage in music-related activities.

It is recommended that schools check with families as individual views on any of these aspects may vary.