



HECKMONDWIKE
GRAMMAR SCHOOL

NDB/JDN

April 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

We are not far away from Ramadan, which this year begins on the evening of 15th May and ends around 14th June. Please find attached a briefing paper for staff, parents and students of all faiths about Ramadan in 2018.

This paper has been prepared based on suitable advice and in consultation, last year, with senior students, who have discussed its contents with some of their local religious leaders. **I would like to stress that the school does not seek to direct students as to how they choose to observe Ramadan.**

The purposes of this paper are:

- To inform all members of the school community about the obligations and choices before Muslim students during Ramadan;
- To foster understanding among us all about the challenges and requirements affecting Muslim students who are fasting;
- To make explicit what the school can and will do during Ramadan;
- To encourage each Muslim student to seek advice and make their own decisions about how they will observe Ramadan.

I would be grateful therefore if you would read the briefing, which is attached.

Please note that the briefing ends with a reply slip that you can use if necessary to indicate any intended absence for Eid.

Yours faithfully

N D Bulley

Headteacher

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Heckmondwike Grammar School: Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr 2018

The school recognises and acknowledges that Ramadan and Eid are special and important times for Muslim students, and that fasting presents a challenge to students in conjunction with their studies. This is especially true in the summer months at northerly latitudes when days are long, and when Ramadan coincides with the public examinations season and preparation time for examinations.

This briefing note is intended to help students, parents and staff understand what they and the school can do to minimise any risk to health or achievement during Ramadan. The school hopes to help Muslim students understand how they can best fulfil their Islamic obligations during Ramadan, including the obligation to perform well in their examinations.

The school has drawn its advice from guidance issued by the Association of School and College Leaders, which in turn followed extensive consultation with imams, Islamic Scholars, experts and Muslim chaplains in the education sector. In forming this briefing note the school has held discussions with senior Muslim students who, in turn, have discussed the school's approach with their religious leaders in local mosques.

Overview

The school understands that Islam has a pluralist tradition, composed of a range of interpretations, so reasoning is encouraged and there is scope for differing interpretations of exactly what Islam requires. This can be in terms of the age from which Muslims are required to fast, how long they should fast for and what constitutes an appropriate exemption. For example, advice on the time of day at which fasting begins can vary by as much as 1.5 hours, even at the same latitude. Each student, in discussion with their own family and other guiding adults, will need to decide for themselves how they will fulfil their obligations most appropriately, and they will need to balance a number of considerations. The school will therefore not seek to dictate or instruct students as to when they are old enough to fast, or how many hours per day they should fast, etc.

Observing Ramadan can bring benefits to individuals and communities but also has the potential to cause the individual hardship through hunger and dehydration during fasting hours, which may impact on physical well-being and cognitive performance. Students should consider on an individual basis the flexibility to delay or exempt themselves from fasting and late night prayers if they believe their physical health or examination performance may be affected.

Ramadan

The school is advised that Ramadan this year begins around on the evening of 15th May and ends around 14th June. This means there is potential for high temperatures for many of the days. The clash with the summer examinations season is likely to last until 2020. These factors have the potential to place additional pressure upon Muslim students and they should take care to decide what allowances can be made to allow them to perform to the best of their ability in their important examinations.

- **Safeguarding issues**

Safeguarding is paramount and safeguarding concerns override all others. Therefore if the school notices signs of dehydration or exhaustion the student will be asked if they are fasting and will be advised to terminate the fast immediately by drinking water. The school staff will reassure them that Islamic rulings allow them to break the fast in such circumstances and make it up later. They should not risk their health in these situations and should not feel guilty if this happens. The school is advised that generally Muslim scholars agree that if there is danger to health it is permitted to break the fast and indeed this should happen immediately.

- **The importance of education**

The pursuit of education is a religious and moral duty for all Muslim students and they are urged to seek and gain knowledge. Also, the attainment of certain grades can have a significant impact on possible future pathways and prospects for young people. This means that students will need to think carefully about their future hopes, together with their previous experience of fasting during Ramadan and how they were affected, when they decide how they will observe Ramadan this year. They should be aware that Islam does not require them to put their futures in jeopardy.

Some things for students to consider:

As stated above, the school will not seek to dictate what students should do in meeting their obligations. However each student might consider some or all of the following points, where appropriate.

Late night prayers and readings of the Qur'an may be considered additional devotions and whilst desirable, are not a compulsory requirement. In the tiring period of Ramadan and examinations, any further loss of sleep could deepen the impact on well-being and performance. Local scholars have advised the school that a student may choose, for example, to keep the fast and obligatory five daily prayers whilst omitting the optional Nafil.

Scholars are said to be unanimous on certain exemptions from fasting, including:

- Those who are ill or on long-term medication;
- Those who are travelling long distances;
- Girls on their period;
- Those with mental disabilities;
- The old or weak;
- Breastfeeding or pregnant women.

Hardship is an established principle that allows fasting to be omitted or deferred. Those who are unable to fast may feed the poor instead, and this is often considered a suitable way to observe Ramadan legitimately, where appropriate. Some, though not all, of the religious leaders consulted felt that sitting important examinations can be an exemption from fasting if the student believes it will affect their performance adversely. This for some is an appropriate interpretation of 'hardship'.

Some practical steps the school will take:

No school has the scope to vary the dates, lengths or start times of GCSE, AS or A level examinations over and above a very modest amount of allowable adjustment to start times. The joint council for qualifications has already engaged in consultation with faith groups and other stakeholders prior to setting the examinations timetable for 2018, and did take Ramadan into account. One consequence of this is that more of the large-entry examinations will take place before half term, and more will be held in the morning, than otherwise would have been the case.

- First aid and teaching staff will be made aware of the need to ask students if they are fasting if they show signs of physical distress, and to advise them to break the fast if their health is at risk.
- PE staff will expect all students to participate but will be especially vigilant for the signs of exhaustion or dehydration and they have a policy of modifying activities to enable participation as much as possible. Some guidance on their policy and practices will be published on the school web site in advance of and during Ramadan.
- A quiet revision or rest room will be identified and made available for any student to visit during the lunch break.
- A quiet revision or rest room will be identified on examination days where any year 11, 12 or 13 student can go between their exams. Every reasonable effort will be made to prioritise cooler rooms over other spaces for this purpose, where weather conditions and other scheduling considerations permit.
- The year 11 Prom and year 13 leavers' ball have already been arranged so as not to coincide with Ramadan or Eid.
- Examination invigilators will be briefed appropriately and will keep a close eye on students as required.
- The usual prayer arrangements will remain in place, including the opportunity for congregational prayers on Friday lunchtimes.
- Any sixth form students who wish to sign out during private study time or between examinations in order to visit a local mosque will be allowed to do so.
- Any student eligible for free school meals will be offered the opportunity to collect a food bag that they can take home and eat later, as an alternative to the standard free school lunch. Eligible students will receive a separate letter giving details.
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The school wishes to stress that it does not seek to direct, it can only offer broad guidance. Each student is urged to discuss their own approach to Ramadan with family members and the religious leaders whom they trust, and make their decisions in light of the relevant guidance.

Eid-ul-Fitr

The school is advised that the likely date for Eid-ul-Fitr is 15th June 2018. In line with guidance to schools on attendance, the school allows for up to two days' absence for Eid-ul-Fitr for religious observance for non-exam students. Parents and students should note that, unfortunately, under no circumstances are schools allowed to change the date or time of the external examinations scheduled on these dates. This means that attendance at these examinations must be compulsory despite religious observance. However, for those not affected by these examinations, the school also needs to fulfil its safeguarding duty and needs to know which students will be absent and for what reason. We hope parents will understand that the school must never make assumptions about the reason for an absence and will always require notification from parents, including for Eid.

For this reason we ask that parents use the reply slip below to indicate if their child is to be absent from school for Eid, and to indicate the dates when they will be absent.

The reply slip should be returned to the form tutor, ideally in the week beginning 4th June.

Eid reply slip

Name of Student Form.....

Will be absent from school for religious observance on the following date(s) (Maximum two dates):

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Parent or carer signature