



HECKMONDWIKE
GRAMMAR SCHOOL

PDR/JDN

26 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

As you may be aware, we are not far away from Ramadan, which this year begins on the 12 April and likely ends on 11 May, with Eid-ul-Fitr on the 12 May. Please find attached a briefing paper for staff, parents and students of all faiths about Ramadan in 2021.

This paper has been prepared based on suitable advice and in consultation, 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 for 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-ul-Fitr.

Yours faithfully

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Heckmondwike Grammar School: Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr 2021

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 formal assessments.

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 assessments.

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 assessment performance may be affected.

Ramadan

The school is advised that Ramadan this year begins on the 12 April ends around the 11 May, which means the period coincides with the formal assessments for years 11 and 13. This factor has 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 assessments.

- 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 assessments, 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:

- 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.
- Any celebrations for year 11 and 13 students, (if permitted due to covid restrictions) will be 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.
- 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.

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 will be 12 May 2021. In line with guidance to schools on attendance, the school allows one days absence for Eid-ul-Fitr for religious observance. The school 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 following link to indicate if their child is to be absent from school for Eid, and to indicate the day when they will be absent.

The form should ideally be completed before or in the week beginning 3 May.

<https://forms.office.com/r/c1bQs2VgwJ>