



HECKMONDWIKE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

PDR/JDN

17 March 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

As you may be aware, next week marks the start of Ramadan, which this year is likely to begin on Wednesday 22 March and finish on Friday 21 April, with Eid-al-Fitr on Saturday 22 April or Sunday 23 April. Please find attached a briefing paper for staff, parents and students of all faiths about Ramadan in 2023.

This paper has been prepared based on suitable advice and in consultation, with senior students and staff. **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.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Roberts
Headteacher

Heckmondwike Grammar School: Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr 2023

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.

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. It is likely that during the period of Ramadan, important assessments may take place. 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. 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.

- Examination invigilators will be briefed appropriately and will keep a close eye on students as required.
- 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.