

East Sussex SACRE

Including pupils of faith in school life

November 2024



East Sussex
County Council



Advice for Schools

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to help schools include pupils in everyday school life who may require reasonable adjustments due to their faith.

This guidance aims to provide practical advice and answers to questions for schools, sports providers and parents to ensure all children and young people irrespective of race, faith and gender can take part in, and enjoy, the full range of school activities.

Cultural and religious diversity is regarded as positive. For everyone to feel they are able to express their viewpoints and beliefs in safety, it is necessary to foster an environment where:

- Everyone is of equal importance.
- Diversity is celebrated.
- Where the needs of everyone are treated fairly and equally.
- Shared or common values are recognised.

Attendance and religious observance

DFE's 'Working together to improve school attendance' states that a pupil may be absent from school on a day that is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body the parent(s) belong to and not the parents themselves.

As a general rule, "a day exclusively set apart for religious observance" is a day when the pupil's parents would be expected by the religious body to which they belong to stay away from their employment in order to mark the occasion. If in doubt, schools should seek advice from the parent's religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

Schools and local authorities may seek to minimise the adverse effects of religious observance on a pupil's attendance and attainment by considering approaches such as:

- Setting term dates around days for religious observance.
- Working with local faith groups to develop guidance on absence for religious observance.
- Taking INSET days that coincide with religious observance days.
- Providing individual support for pupils who miss sessions on days exclusively set apart for religious observance.

Religious observance is classified for statistical purposes as authorised absence.

Parents may request that their children have specific festival days off according to their faith. The following is a brief list of the most common festivals:

Buddhist Community

Pupils may be involved in **Buddha day** (full moon in May) and **Sangha day** (full moon in November).

Christian Community

Some Christian pupils may want to fast on days of obligation particularly Ash Wednesday. Easter is the most important festival in the Christian year and includes **Maundy Thursday**, **Good Friday**, Saturday and **Easter Sunday**. Some Roman Catholic pupils may request time to attend morning **Mass** on Holy days of obligation.

Coptic and Greek Orthodox Community

Christmas is celebrated on 6th & 7th January. Sometimes Easter is celebrated by some of the Orthodox community at a different time to the rest of the Christian community.

Hindu Community

Children may be involved in celebrations at Diwali. There are also a number of other Hindu festivals, depending on the deity of the household, which may require a day off.

Jehovah Witness Community

Parents of these pupils may not wish them to take part in activities which have pagan associations, even though the festival is apparently Christian. Pupils are often removed from RE lessons and collective worship. Parents should be encouraged to discuss issues so as to find ways to resolve any problems.

Jehovah's Witnesses will not swear allegiance to anyone but God and therefore cannot take part in elections. Jehovah Witnesses do not vote.

Jewish Community

Pupils may be involved in celebrations at **Rosh Ha Shanah**, which is the Jewish New Year, **Pesach**, **Shavuot** and **Succoth** and may be fasting for one day at **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement.

Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish festival of **Rosh Ha Shanah** occurs in September or October, depending on the lunar calendar that is followed by Jews. It is a time for Jews to reflect on their year, including their good deeds and their bad deeds.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. It is also called the Day of Atonement. Jews focus on asking God for forgiveness as it is believed that he will make his final judgement on the day of Yom Kippur sometime in the future.

Jews spend a lot of time at the synagogue and undertake a 25-hour fast. They wear white as a symbol of purity and do not bathe, wear leather shoes or have sex.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews' offers a free, digital resource for secondary schools that covers the origins of Judaism, kosher food, the calendar of festival,

Shabbat, lifecycle events, streams of Judaism, ethics, Torah, text and the synagogue at www.jlo.org.uk (Jewish Living Online). Further insights into the Jewish way of life can be found at www.myjewishlearning.com.

Muslim Community

There are two festivals in the year **Eid ul Fitr** and **Eid ul Adhur**.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the month of fasting from dawn to sunset. To a Muslim, fasting means abstaining from all food and drink during daylight hours. All Islamic dates and festivals are subject to the sighting of the new moon, **Sunni** and **Shia** Muslims may celebrate on slightly different days. The start date for Ramadan changes every year, moving back by 10 or 11 days every year. **Lailat-UI- Qadr** takes place a few days before the end. Many Muslims spend the night praying and studying the **Qur'an**. **Eid-UI-Fitr** is the major festival of the breaking of the fast when there are many family celebrations.

Pupils could take some part in the observance of the Ramadan from the age of 5 years onwards. The mosque does not require primary-aged children to fast completely although some may want to if older siblings are fasting. It is important that parents and teachers communicate with each other over possible implications of pupils' actions. There are two broad areas to be aware of – fasting and prayer.

Fasting

This means complete abstinence from food, including liquids, from sunrise until the specified time of the break of fast evening meal.

Further information can be found in [SACRE Fasting in Ramadan Guidance](#).

Prayer

Where possible, the five prayer times during the day should be observed. These vary with the hours of daylight. Pupils may want to pray for some time between midday and 1.30pm and again about 3.00pm. Specific prayer times for each year are published online.

During Ramadan schools are requested to set aside a prayer room, if possible, during lunch time break for midday prayers, which can be observed anytime between 11.45am and 1.30pm. Preparation for prayer would include washing of hands and feet. Older pupils are required to pray every Friday or may want to pray regularly each day. Friday prayers could be organised by the pupils themselves in a classroom or library. A Muslim member of staff could help with this.

- Ramadan is a time for reinforcing religious commitment and for family reunion. Pupils are likely to be experiencing a heightened emotional environment throughout the period.
- Pupils who are fasting are more likely to feel the effects in the afternoon and, possibly, after the weekend, on a Monday. Indications of this are likely to be seen in levels of irritability at the end of the day. There are possible limitations on pupils' ability to participate fully in more strenuous physical activity, especially towards the end of the school day.

- Swimming is not possible for pupils observing a strict fast as it contravenes the “nothing by mouth” requirement.
- The observance of Ramadan takes second place to medical requirements: children can still use inhalers and take medicine where prescribed by a doctor.
- When Ramadan is observed during British Summer time, pupils may be going to bed late and rising early to fit their meals in during the hours of darkness.
- If Ramadan is observed during the winter months, the timing of break of fast may curtail after school activities for some pupils and parents may wish to collect their children early to be able to better prepare the family meal. Other parents may require their children to leave school earlier to reach home in time for the family meal.
- Pupils may request leave of absence on the specific holy days of **Lailat ul Qadr** and **Eid Ul Fitr**. Parents will need to request absence for their children in writing to the school. Schools should remember to try and avoid running extra-curricular or other special activities on these days.

Sikh Community

Children may be involved in celebration during **Diwali** and the birthday of **Guru Nanak**.

Clothing

Schools should be sensitive to the needs of pupils from different faiths particularly in relation to clothing and jewellery. Schools should develop effective approaches for dealing with questions from parents particularly in relation to health and safety in Physical Education lessons.

Some Sikh pupils may have gone through the ceremony to become part of the **Khalsa** and may be wearing the 5 K’s which are required of committed Sikhs. The 5 K’s include the **Kara** (see ‘Jewellery’); the **Kesh**, which means not cutting the hair; **Kangha**, a comb to keep the hair tidy; **Kachs**, a special undergarment; and the **Kirpan** which is a dagger only used in defence. While in school, it is reasonable to ask for a symbolic Kirpan be worn by the pupil, sometimes found on the Kangha or on a necklace, rather than an actual dagger.

General principles

The school should have a clear policy on uniform requirements including specific colours for the **hijab**, Jewish **skullcap** or **Rasta** head covering. In Physical Education lessons, clothing should be appropriate for the activity in which pupils are being asked to take part. It should allow for ease of movement and not pose a risk of causing injury to the wearer or other participants. To encourage pupils to be comfortable in their Physical Education lesson (e.g., body image), schools may consider allowing pupils to wear tracksuits for activities.

Changing

Schools may need to consider separate changing areas for pupils because of early puberty or faith issues. The Muslim hijab – a head covering for girls – is mainly worn from puberty onwards however some primary-aged pupils also wear the hijab.

Ideally this should be removed during Physical Education lessons but where this is not possible it should be securely fastened around the head not under the chin.

Jewellery

Some schools find a no jewellery policy beneficial. Parents should be made aware of the potential risks of pupils wearing items of jewellery. Removal of jewellery is not the responsibility of the teacher: pupils should be expected to do it. If pupils are not capable of removing their jewellery, it should be discouraged. There is also a question of the security of removed items. It is strongly advised that any type of necklace, ring or earrings should be removed during Physical Education lessons for health and safety reasons.

There are two exceptional circumstances where schools should be sensitive to the needs of children from different faiths:

- Hindu **Rakhi** (a cotton bracelet) cannot be removed but being made of cotton would snap if caught in apparatus. If in doubt this should be taped to the arm during Physical Education lessons.
- Sikh **Kara** (a metal bracelet) is put on at a young age and it is impossible to remove. This item should be pushed up the arm and taped.

Extra-curricular Activities

Schools should consider the needs of all pupils when planning their extra-curricular activities. At certain times of the year pupils may be observing a religious festival and may therefore be unable to take part in training sessions or fixtures. Schools should consider:

- Single sex activities to encourage participation particularly for Muslim girls.
- Clubs during the school day for those pupils who attend faith schools at the end of the day.
- Some Jewish and Seventh Day Adventist pupils must return home before sunset on a Friday.
- Some Jehovah Witness pupils may not take part in after school clubs or activities.

Food

Pupils from a faith community may have different food laws which should be observed during school parties, celebrations or on school journeys. Some faith followers are vegetarian, some will only eat Halal or Kosher food. There are different times of the year when a faith community might be fasting or have given up a certain food. It is recommended that teachers check this on an individual basis.

Music

Schools with Muslim pupils may find that their parents give conflicting advice on the use of music in schools. Some parents will be happy for their children to study music. Some parents will be happy with certain aspects of music and unhappy about

others. Some may be totally unhappy and ask for their children to be withdrawn from music as they regard it as 'haram', a forbidden activity. However, the only subject that parents can withdraw from is Religious Education. Therefore, pupils cannot be withdrawn from music or dancing, and it is suggested that the school act sensitively in such cases and do not make the pupil take part while attending the lesson and explain to parents that it is part of the National Curriculum.

School and community events

Schools should be aware of the dates of major religious festivals when planning parent evenings, open evenings and school plays. Schools should also check dates for the suitability of school outings and visiting speakers.

Similarly, it is good practice for schools and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) to consider the appropriateness of certain school social events that might inadvertently exclude families from some faith or cultural groups. Alcohol is prohibited within Islam, and its presence at a function may make it impossible for some families to attend.

School Journeys

When planning your school journey, try to avoid major festivals and particular days of worship. Make provision for those pupils who may want to pray i.e. Muslim pupils on a Friday.

Swimming

Swimming is a compulsory activity in KS2, an important life skill and, without it, pupils cannot access other water-based activities.

There must be separate changing areas for boy and girls.

For Muslims, up to puberty, pupils should wear swimming costumes or trunks. After puberty, girls can wear swimwear that respects their wishes for modesty. This may be a cotton garment that is loose fitting. Boys may wish to wear long Lycra swimming shorts (navel to knee). Heavy cotton track suits and sweat shirts are not appropriate as they become water logged and pose a safety hazard.

Visiting Places of Worship

When visiting a place of worship, it is important that teachers make themselves aware of respectful dress codes and behaviour required by different faiths both for pupils and adults.

Acknowledgements:

This document is based on 'Guidance for schools to make provision for pupils of faith to be included in the life of the school' written by Penny Smith-Orr, SACRE Officer, and Members of Croydon SACRE.