



Islam

Muslim festivals and observances follow the Islamic calendar which has fewer days than the solar year. So, each year, the festival dates keep coming forward in relation to the school year and calendar. Most of the festivals involve religious observance, fasting, feasting or sacrifices, and are occasions for Muslims as a community to get together and strengthen their bonds of brotherhood.

Al-Hijra: remembrance of the migration of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers to Madinah in 622 c.e. and the establishment of the first Islamic state. The Muslim calendar dates from this event. This celebration marks the beginning of the Muslim New Year. No specific religious rituals are observed.

Eid-al-Adha /Id ul Adha: Feast of Sacrifice, the most important feast of Islam. It is celebration at the conclusion of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) and is a four day festival recalling Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishma'il, in obedience to Allah.

Eid al Fitr /Id ul Fitr: A three day feast marks the close of Ramadan. It is a festival of thanksgiving to Allah for the month of Ramadan. It involves prayer, giving of charity, wearing finest clothing, sharing a family feast and fostering understanding with other religions.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah on the 7th-12th days of the month of Dhu al-Hajja. Concludes with Eid / Id ul Adha when those not travelling to Makkah also take part.

Lailat-al Miraj & Israa': observance of Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Makkah to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and his ascension into heaven.

Lailat al-Qadr: Night of Power, marking the first revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Observed during the last ten days of Ramadan. Prayers are said to Allah for a good destiny.

Ramadan: The event begins when authorities in Saudi Arabia sight the new moon of the ninth month. There is strict fasting from sunrise to sunset.

Fasting in the month of Ramadan, the month of revelation of the Holy Qur'an, is an obligation for all Muslims past the age of puberty. It is the holiest period of the Islamic Year. There are exemptions from these requirements for some people, such as, those who are sick, those engaging in a long journey, menstruating women, or those who are frail in old age. Exemptions have to be made up later or compensated for, e.g. by fasting on another day or by feeding the poor. Fasting at other times is also encouraged but is non-obligatory.

Fasting is undertaken for the sake of Allah, the Creator, the Merciful, the Loving (to mention just three of His names or attributes) and it is an expiation of human failings. It cultivates virtues such as piety, love of God, brotherhood, vigilance, devotion, patience, unselfishness, moderation, thriftiness and satisfaction with what one has, discipline, self-control, and compassion for fellow human beings who might suffer hunger and deprivation unwillingly and other spiritual benefits.

Fasting in Islam is not considered to be merely denial of food and drink alone. Muslims believe they should also try to restrain their other senses, such as the eye, ears, and particularly the tongue, avoiding backbiting, scandal-mongering, obscenity, lust, confrontation and such matters.

Fasting in Ramadan is one of the main requirements of the Islamic faith. Ramadan is the name of the month of fasting when Muslims are required to abstain from all food, drink and sexual activity (where appropriate), from 1 1/2 - 2 hours before dawn to nightfall through the 30 or 29 days between one new moon and the next. The daily fast begins 15-20 minutes before the earliest time of the Fajr prayer and finishes at the time of Maghrib (sunset) prayer.

It is very important for many Muslim families that their children should begin participating in the practice of fasting at an early age. Most children of secondary school age, as they are considered adult members of their communities, will be expected to fast and many primary school children will be fasting as well. Younger pupils may fast for part of Ramadan, or only for certain days of each week.

Teachers therefore need to bear in mind that the routine of Muslim families is entirely different during Ramadan. The whole household will be awake earlier in the morning and will stay up later at night, particularly when Ramadan falls in the summer months. Young children may well become more tired or excitable in school during this time even if they are not fasting themselves.

As well as considerations outlined earlier in this document, schools should consider the following points in determining their approach to the needs of the Muslim schoolchildren in their care during Ramadan:

- explain to parents/carers any special provisions that will be made for pupils who are fasting during Ramadan
- in primary schools, to establish a register of those pupils who will be fasting, and on which days, based on parental permission, given either verbally or in writing. Pupils of secondary age are expected to fast and it would not therefore be a practical or reliable course of action to attempt to establish a register with them.
- make special provision at lunchtimes for pupils who are fasting but cannot go home. They may want to rest and be quiet or they may enjoy taking part in special activities that can be arranged for them while other pupils are having their lunch. They may wish to perform prayers at this time, or to share reading the Qur'an with other Muslim pupils.
- ensure that no pupil who is fasting is required to do anything that would make her/him break the fast. This could include swimming, cross-country running, weight-training.
- anticipate that fasting may make some pupils weak or tired, and adapt the curriculum as appropriate. This could mean, for example, planning less energetic activities in P.E
- where possible, use the fact that pupils are fasting to inform and enrich the curriculum experience both for themselves and others. It could be a starting point for discussions in a number of subjects, such as religious education, history, P.E., health education, performing arts, geography and science.

Many older Muslim pupils who are fasting may like to have the opportunity to pray at lunchtime. If schools are to meet this need they will have to:

- provide supervised rooms, one for girls and one for boys if these are not already made available for this purpose throughout the year.
- make available washing facilities and a vessel for washing. Pupils will need to wash their arms and feet which because facilities are not built for this purpose, may lead to a few puddles on the floor which will need to be cleaned up afterwards

allow pupils to bring prayer mats, and if they wish to, slippers to wear after ablution.