

Religious observance – pupils and staff

Religious practice involves believers in duties such as the saying of prayers (sometimes at prescribed times), the keeping of fasts, and attendance at communal or family gatherings for worship or celebration. The current pattern of the school year already takes account of most needs for the communal religious observances of western Christians as schools are closed on Sundays, and the major Christian festivals fall within school holiday periods.

For religious believers there can be a conflict between their work or their student's education and full compliance with the needs of the faith community and individuals for religious observance. Schools therefore need to be aware of the needs of their students and adult members of the school community in regard to religious observance, and in particular any period when significant numbers are likely to be absent from school because of festivals. It would also be helpful for teachers if they knew of occasions when students are likely to be fasting or engaged in exceptional religious activity out of school hours so that internal tests, educational visits and heavy homework and coursework demands can be avoided.

Schools should consider the following points in determining their approach to the needs of schoolchildren and staff.

Key aspects should be:

- inform all parents, students and staff of their commitment to support their rights to practice their religion;
- be alert to and to deal appropriately with any harassment, bullying or prejudicial behaviour from any member of the school's community towards members of any faith or culture practicing their faith.
- be mindful when organising work functions and social events related to work, to minimise potential conflicts between religious beliefs of a parent / governor / member of staff or student and his/her ability to engage in social activities related to school.
- be aware of and sympathetic to the needs of members of any faith community in following faith requirements related to attendance at religious services during the year;
- inform parent in advance, when appropriate, that they will support students who are fasting and to inform staff, in advance, that they will support them when they are fasting;
- anticipate that fasting may make some students or adults weak or tired, and adapt the curriculum as appropriate. This could mean, for example, planning less energetic activities in P.E or reorganising evening events;