



Guidance for schools with Muslim pupils

(Updated May 18)

*19th century prayer rug
Northeast Caucasus*

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Introduction

Ealing Local Authority is very proud of its diverse population, and it is in this spirit that this guidance has been produced! It is neither statutory nor a rigid set of prescriptions, and we fully recognise the fact that in almost every instance,² the final decision remains in the hands of individual headteachers. Rather our aim is to suggest compromise positions and encourage dialogue between schools and their local Muslim community, at the same time as ensuring the best possible education for all of Ealing's pupils. This updated version of the guidance is being issued to take into account certain changes in child protection procedures.

According to the 2011 Census, Muslims form the second largest religious group in the UK. The³ overall percentage of Muslim pupils in Ealing schools in May 2014 was 32%. Obviously in some schools this percentage is higher, in others lower, but issues relating in particular to the month of Ramadan can affect all of Ealing's schools.

This document presents information and guidance for schools on a variety of issues that *may* come up in respect to their Muslim pupils. It should be noted right at the outset that not all Muslim pupils will adhere to the obligations mentioned in this document or even consider them as such. Certain issues will also arise in connection with pupils from other religious backgrounds (e.g. parents from the Jehovah's Witness community who might want to withdraw their children from music lessons). The information regarding female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage refer to practices which have cultural rather than religious roots, and are not problems exclusive to children from Muslim backgrounds. The guidance might also serve to advise parents of specific curriculum requirements, health and safety issues and other practical restraints to which all educational institutions must adhere.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Muslim community in Ealing itself is diverse. Muslims from Pakistan can be quite different in their observances from Somali Muslims. The largest Dawoodi Bohra⁴ mosque in Europe is in Northolt, and there are also a substantial number of pupils whose families belong to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.⁵

¹ The first (2007) version of this guidance was written in discussion with colleagues in the schools service and headteacher and Muslim representatives on SACRE; it was revised in 2009 and updated in 2014.

² Exceptions include the legal rights of parents to withdraw their children from religious education and reflection (see p 12) and relationship and sex education (RSE, see p 14), the proviso in the 1996 Education Act regarding obligatory religious observances (see p 7), and child protection laws.

³ In 2011 that amounted to 4.8% of the total UK population.

⁴ A sect of Shi'a Islam.

⁵ For more information on these distinctions, see background information, p 28.

Summary of guidance

Topic	Summary suggestions	More info
<p>Authorised absence for religious days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools with significant Muslim populations might want to schedule occasional days to coincide with the two Eid festivals, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha. As it is incredibly hard to predict the exact date of Eid in advance, schools should consult with the local Muslim community. ▪ Parents are entitled to withdraw their children for religious observance. The school attendance service encourages Muslim pupils to take off no more than one day per Eid festival, a position supported by the local mosques. In each instance parents are required to apply for time off for their children for religious observance; the amount given is up to the school. ▪ In addition to the above, Shi'a Muslim pupils are likely to request absence for the observance of Ashura (the 10th day of the month of Muharram), and it is recommended that this be granted as an authorised absence. ▪ Shi'a pupils that are members of the Dawoodi Bohra sect (the Northolt mosque) are expected to observe special educational sermons during the first ten days of Muharram leading up to Ashura. See page 8 for more information about authorised absence for this period. ▪ For staff absence for religious observance see p 8. 	<p>Pages 7, 8 and 26</p>
<p>Child protection issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the school becomes aware of the possibility of a pupil being forcibly married, they should not attempt to intervene. The correct procedures are detailed on the Ealing Grid for Learning (see link on page 9). ▪ If the school suspects that a female pupils is at risk of being subjected to any form of female genital mutilation they should act immediately by contacting the relevant body (see link on page 9). 	<p>Page 9</p>
<p>Curriculum: Art</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Muslim pupils may not feel comfortable being asked to draw or produce three-dimensional images of humans or animals, and especially any figures considered messengers in Islam (e.g. Jesus, Muhammad, Noah). ▪ There is a wealth of Islamic art forms that can be celebrated, e.g. architecture, calligraphy, geometric representations. 	<p>Page 10</p>
<p>Curriculum: Dance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It could be an issue after puberty if forms of dance such as ballet, jazz, tango and disco are performed in mixed groups. 	<p>Page 11</p>
<p>Curriculum: Drama</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role-playing as an educational exercise is fine, although some Muslim parents may not want their children to perform in nativity plays or dramatisations involving gods or figures considered as prophets. However many Muslim children will be insulted if left out of the school nativity play! 	<p>Page 11</p>

Curriculum: Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some Muslim parents will not want their children singing Christmas carols, or songs that contradict their faith (e.g. those that call Jesus 'Lord' or 'son of God'). ▪ Although music is not proscribed in the Qur'an, opinions regarding the place of music vary widely in different Islamic sects and cultures. Some parents will believe that all music is <i>haram</i> (forbidden). While affirming that they do not have the legal right to withdraw their children from this statutory subject, parents could be encouraged to sit in on a lesson, and reassured as regards the point above. 	Page 12
Curriculum: RE and collective worship (‘reflection’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Muslim pupils are allowed to visit all places of worship for educational purposes. ▪ Schools are encouraged to make their assemblies and daily acts of reflection as inclusive as possible. However schools with large percentages of non-Christian pupils should consider applying for a determination that lifts the requirement that the daily act be predominantly Christian. ▪ At present, parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from both RE and reflection. They can do this selectively (i.e. parts of the course or selective acts of reflection) but this is never the preferred solution. 	Page 12
Curriculum: Relationship and sex education (RSE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whenever possible it is preferable for male staff to teach RSE to boys, female staff for girls. ▪ If possible, avoid holding RSE classes during Ramadan. ▪ At present, parents <i>do</i> have the legal right to withdraw their children from RSE; they do not have the right to withdraw their children from aspects of the biology curriculum dealing with reproduction. 	Page 14
School uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adhering to the uniform code should not be problematic as long as girls are allowed to wear the hijab (if they so desire) and to wear long-sleeved shirt and trousers or long skirt version of the uniform. ▪ Both parents and pupils understand that the hijab must be of a reasonable length and suitably secured in relevant situations for health and safety reasons. ▪ The school is entitled to decide that the wearing of the <i>niqab</i> (full-face veil) should not be allowed on the grounds that it prevents the full exercise of the duty of care. 	Page 15
Sportswear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools are encouraged to allow Muslim children to wear tracksuits for sporting activities if they so desire. 	Page 16

Swimming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For health and safety reasons, leggings and full leotards are not permitted in any of Ealing’s pools. However specially made full length lycra suits are available from on-line sources. ▪ Segregated swimming is rarely practicable, and parents’ expectations should not be raised in this respect. It is important to point out to parents that swimming is both a statutory curriculum subject and an important life skill, and they have no legal right to withdraw their children from swimming lessons. However compromises that can be offered include allowing Muslim children to shower in their swimming costumes, and allowing fasting pupils to remain at school during Ramadan. ▪ The availability of individual changing cubicles at Ealing’s pools can be found on page 18. 	Page 16
Prayer (<i>salah</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although not all Muslim pupils will observe this, the five daily prayers are considered obligatory for all Muslims, who are encouraged to perform <i>salah</i> from the age of seven, although they are not required to do so until puberty. ▪ Schools are encouraged to have a designated ‘quiet’ area for prayer (e.g. space in the library). If it is not possible to allow students to perform the prayers at the allotted times, it is suggested that schools allow them to do so at the beginning or the end of the lunch break. ▪ It is obligatory for post-adolescent boys to participate in communal prayer at midday on Friday, but this will most often be observed during Ramadan. If sufficient numbers warranted it, this could take place on the school premises, as long as adequate supervision is available; otherwise schools should honour a parent’s written request to take their child to the mosque for part of the afternoon, with the understanding that it is the parents’ responsibility to ensure their child return to school following these prayers. 	Page 18
Ramadan and fasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fasting is considered obligatory during the month of Ramadan for all Muslims, male and female, once they attain puberty. However many children will begin to fast before this age. ▪ For health and safety reasons schools might want to obtain parental consent from parents before their child is allowed to fast (see pages 24-25 for sample letters). 	Page 20
School meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools with a significant percentage of Muslim students are encouraged to ensure the availability of options that are not <i>haram</i> (e.g. fish, vegetarian dishes). ▪ During Ramadan schools are encouraged to provide a packed lunch for those Muslim pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM), which they can take home and eat after sunset. 	Page 24
School outings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is no valid religious reason preventing Muslim students from taking part in educational visits to other places of worship. ▪ At secondary level, it is recommended that class outings are not scheduled for Friday, when they might conflict with the needs of those students who wish to attend the midday congregational prayers. 	Page 25

Summary

- Schools with significant Muslim populations might want to try to schedule their occasional days to coincide with the two Eid festivals, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha. As it is incredibly hard to predict the exact date of Eid in advance, schools should consult with the local Muslim community.
- Parents are entitled to withdraw their children for religious observance. The school attendance service encourages Muslim pupils to take off no more than one day per Eid festival, a position supported by the local mosques.
- In addition to the above, Shi'a Muslim pupils are likely to request absence for the observance of Ashura (the 10th day of the month of Muharram), and it is recommended that this be granted as an authorised absence.
- Shi'a pupils that are members of the Dawoodi Bohra sect (the Northolt mosque) are expected to observe special educational sermons during the first ten days of Muharram. See page 8
- For staff absence for religious observance see page 8.

The 1996 Education Act asserts that:

The child shall not be taken to have failed to attend regularly at the school by reason of his absence from the school...on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs. (Chapter 56, 444 subsection 3)

Day absences for religious observation are allowed and are marked as an authorised absence. It is sometimes the case that both Eids will fall within the school term. There are three occasional days available to schools during the year, and in order to reduce the loss of curriculum delivery schools might wish to plan the use of these days to coincide with major religious festivals, particularly where there are large Hindu, Sikh and Muslim pupil populations. This also reduces the impact on the individual and overall school attendance rates. Attainment at primary school is very strongly correlated with the level of attendance; the correlation is also significant at secondary level, but slightly less so.

Unfortunately occasional days have to be planned some time in advance and setting the correct occasional days leave for Eid is often difficult. Schools have also been concerned by extended time taken off for Eid, which compounds missed curriculum and a child's attendance rate. Conversations with leaders of different nationality groups within the Muslim community seem to indicate that issues of cultural significance as well as religious obligation determine how much time is taken off from school. The school attendance service encourage Muslim pupils to take no more than the day of religious observation off during each of the Eid festivals, a position which has the support of local religious leaders.

As well as Eid festivals, Shi'a Muslim pupils may want to take the day of Ashura for religious observation.

Ashura and the Northolt Mosque

Pupils and staff that are members of the Dawoodi Bohra community (the Northolt mosque) are expected to observe educational sermons⁶ during the first ten days of Muharram to Ashura.

The period of Muharram (the 9 days leading up to Ashura) is argued to be a period of religious observation and Ealing now currently accepts that absence is allowable during this extended period.

(This replaces the previous guidance of September 2016).

Even though a parent can take time for this extended period, we request that each parent (as previously agreed) supply their child's school with a letter from the Mosque identifying the child as belonging to the Dawoodi Bohra community and, as the dates change annually, the dates of the period of Muharram to Ashura (as they fall in that school year).

For more information about these religious holidays see page 28.

Staff absence for religious observance

As mentioned above, senior management teams might want to plan their occasional days to coincide with major festivals in those schools where there is a significant population of staff and/or students belonging to minority religions. In addition, local conditions for teachers allow a special provision for release with pay for religious observance of up to three days in any academic year. For anything over that, teachers are required to apply for special leave without pay.

Local conditions for support staff are not the same as those for teachers. However there is room for discretionary granting of paid leave to support staff on a similar basis, i.e. for up to three days in any academic year.

⁶ These sermons cover the history, belief, practice and ethics of the Dawoodi Shi'a sect of Islam.

Summary

- If the school becomes aware of the possibility of a pupil being forcibly married, they should not attempt to intervene. The correct procedures to follow are detailed on the Ealing Grid for Learning (see link below).
- If the school suspects that a female pupils is at risk of being subjected to any form of female genital mutilation they should act immediately by contacting the relevant body (see linkbelow).

Neither forced marriage nor female genital mutilation is condoned in the Qur'an, nor are they specific to Islam. However they are issues that could possibly arise in connection with Muslim pupils, and for that reason they are mentioned in this guidance.

Forced marriage

A forced marriage is any marriage where one or both parties are made to marry against their will and where consent, if given, is only obtained through duress. Unlike an arranged marriage, a forced marriage is not justified on any religious or cultural basis.

Although schools can promote awareness of the issue, if a student confides in a member of staff that they are in danger of being forcibly married, the school should follow the guidance detailed in the child protection section of the EGfL.⁷

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is widely practiced among specific ethnic populations in Africa and parts of Asia as a complex form of social control of women's sexual and reproductive rights. In addition to causing both short- and long-term health problems, the procedure is a criminal offense in the UK; it is also illegal to take a child abroad for such a procedure. All school nurses have been briefed on how to recognise the signs that a girl has had—or is at risk of having— FGM. An action flowchart detailing how to proceed, along with other useful information, can be found on the EGfL.⁸

⁷ <http://www.egfl.org.uk/categories/pupil/safeguarding/child-protection/mariage.html>

⁸ <http://www.egfl.org.uk/categories/pupil/safeguarding/child-protection/mutilation.html>

Curriculum issues

Sensitivities regarding the teaching of certain subjects will differ from family to family, however the concerns of Muslim parents are most likely to arise in connection with art, dance, drama, music, religious education (RE) and relationship and sex education (RSE). *It should be stressed that at present parents only have the legal right to withdraw their children from RE and RSE.* However even with respect to these subjects schools might wish to engage parents in dialogue, pointing out the benefits to their children of full participation, as well as reassuring them with regard to specific concerns.

A lack of familiarity with the British education system, not to mention the English language, can cause some parents/carers to feel isolated from the education process, a situation that can also arise with parents from other communities. In this case it might be useful for the school to encourage parents to come in and view the class in question. Although negotiation about specifics is possible, limits with respect to the statutory national curriculum should be clearly established.

The following are issues that some Muslim parents might bring up with respect to specific curriculum subjects, as well as suggested points of compromise. Again it should be stressed that, apart from religious education and sex and relationship education, parents *do not* have a right to withdraw their children from these classes.

Art

Summary

- Muslim pupils may not feel comfortable being asked to draw or produce three-dimensional images of humans or animals, and especially any figures considered messengers in Islam (e.g. Jesus, Muhammad, Noah).
- There is a wealth of Islamic art forms that can be celebrated, e.g. architecture, calligraphy, geometric representations.

Within the Muslim community there is considerable difference of opinion regarding acceptable forms of art. The ban against the creation of figurative images arose from the stance taken against any form of idolatry. Nonetheless Muslim art in Persia, India, Turkey and Egypt has a tradition of figurative miniature paintings.

Most Muslims will consider the following to be acceptable art forms: calligraphy, textile arts, ceramic glass, metal/wood work, landscape drawings and paintings, architectural representations, geometric figures, photography and mosaic art. Teachers might want to avoid encouraging Muslim pupils to produce three-dimensional images of humans or animals, and whereas it would be hard to avoid figurative representations in religious education and other lessons, pupils should not

be asked to reproduce images of Jesus, Muhammad or any of the other figures in Jewish and Christian literature whom Muslims consider to be prophets. (Ironically, colouring of already-drawn images—e.g. pictures of Noah and the Ark—will be considered acceptable by many Muslim parents.)

Dance

Summary

- It could be a problem after puberty if forms of dance such as ballet, jazz, tango and disco are performed in mixed groups.

There will usually be no problem when dancing is performed in a single-sex environment as a form of exercise, as long as rules of modesty are observed— however this is rarely practical in primary schools. Folk dances taught to single sex groups are also usually acceptable, although some parents—particularly of older pupils—may prefer their children to participate in an alternate form of sporting activity. As a general rule, forms of dance such as ballet, jazz, tango and disco dancing might be considered unacceptable if performed in a mixed environment, an issue most likely to affect pupils in secondary schools.

Drama

Summary

- Role-playing as an educational exercise is fine, although some Muslim parents may not want their children to perform in nativity plays or dramatizations involving gods or figures considered as prophets. However many Muslim children will be insulted if left out of the school nativity play!

Drama or role-playing as an educational exercise is usually acceptable. However some Muslim parents may not want their children to take part in any drama that contradicts basic Islamic principles, e.g. performing in nativity plays or other dramatizations involving gods or figures from the Bible or Qur'an considered to be prophets. Reservations might also arise with performances that involve physical contact between boys and girls, or cross-dressing (i.e. boys performing as girls and vice versa). Again it should be stressed that there will be many Muslim pupils who will not want to be excluded from these activities.

Music

Summary

- Some Muslim parents will not want their children singing Christmas carols, or songs that contradict their faith (e.g. those that call Jesus 'Lord' or 'son of God').
- Although music is not proscribed in the Qur'an, opinions regarding the place of music vary widely in different Islamic sects and cultures. Some parents will believe that all music is *haram* (forbidden). While affirming that they do not have the legal right to withdraw their children from this statutory subject, parents should be encouraged to sit in on a lesson, and reassured as regards the point above.

Opinion regarding the place of music varies among different Muslim cultures. Traditionally, Islamic music has been limited to percussion instruments (i.e. drums) and the human voice. Some groups of contemporary Muslim musicians perform devotional songs they call *nasheed*. Most groups perform using only voice and percussion instruments, a type of music considered to be *halal*—i.e. permissible—by many strict Muslims. However some modern nasheed groups add other instruments.

Some Muslims are very reserved in their attitude towards music and may not wish for their children to participate in any kind of music lesson. The school needs to deal sensitively with their concerns, at the same time as reinforcing the fact that music lessons are a required part of the national curriculum. It might be helpful to reassure these parents that their children will not be forced to join in with songs that contradict Islamic belief (e.g. Christmas carols or hymns—although there will be many Muslim pupils who will be happy to join in!) or perform music that could be considered haram. Again, schools could allay such worries by inviting parents to sit in on a typical music lesson.

Religious education and reflection

Summary

- Muslim pupils are allowed to visit all places of worship for educational purposes.
- Schools are encouraged to make their assemblies and daily acts of reflection as inclusive as possible. However schools with large percentages of non-Christian pupils should consider applying for a determination that lifts the requirement that the daily act be predominantly Christian.
- Parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from both RE and reflection. They can do this selectively (i.e. parts of the course or selective acts of reflection) but this is never the preferred solution.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 stipulates that each state school should provide a daily act of 'collective worship'. Since September 2007, schools have been under a duty to promote community cohesion, with a particular focus on achieving cohesion "across different cultures, ethnic, religious or non-religious and socio-economic

groups.”⁹ Ealing SACRE has prepared guidance (*Reflection: some guidance for schools*) to help schools develop policies that encourage the participation of all pupils and staff.

If a parent does ask for their child to be wholly or partly excused from attending any RE or reflection at the school, the school must comply unless the request is withdrawn. Good practice is to use gentle persuasion to point out the benefits of religious education/communal reflection, which exposes children to a variety of viewpoints, thus preparing them for life in our modern society.

A school remains responsible for the supervision of any child withdrawn from RE or reflection, unless the child is lawfully receiving RE or taking part in worship elsewhere. Parents do not need to explain their reasons for seeking withdrawal. Nonetheless the DfES (now DoE) recommends that to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher may wish to clarify with any parent wanting to withdraw:

- the religious issues about which the parent would object their child being taught
- the practical implications of withdrawal
- the circumstances in which it would be reasonable to accommodate parents’ wishes
- if a parent will require any advanced notice of such issue in the future and if so, how much

The right of withdrawal was established in the Education Act 1944, re-enacted in the Education Reform Act 1988 s9 (3). It should be pointed out that the main mosques in Ealing all provide classes for students, *but that these take place either at the weekend or after school hours*. There is no reason a Muslim child need be absent from class for Islamic instruction during normal school hours.¹⁰

It is also important to note that school staff have the right to withdraw from either participating in or leading reflection, although the aim should be to make it so inclusive that this would never become an issue.

⁹ *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*, DCSF-00598-2007. Available online from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00598-2007.pdf>

¹⁰ An exception to this is the sermons at the Dawoodi Bohra mosque in Northolt during the first ten days of the Muslim month of Muharram, considered by this Shi’a sect to be important aspects of their religious education.

Relationship and sex education (RSE)

Summary

- Whenever possible it is preferable for male staff to teach RSE to boys, female staff for girls.
- If possible, avoid holding RSE classes during Ramadan.
- Parents *do* have the legal right to withdraw their children from RSE; they *do not* have a legal right to withdraw their children from lessons on reproduction in the biology national curriculum.

In general, the concern of Muslim parents is not whether there should be sex education but rather how it is taught and the resources used. Although the subject is approached in a non-religious context, it is useful for teachers to know that Islam prohibits pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex and same sex relationships. Sex education in general is acceptable, as are the following topics: abstinence until marriage, teenage pregnancy and the repercussions of such, and the dangers of STDs, HIV, etc. Most Muslim parents would prefer that, whenever possible, a male member of staff teach RSE to boys and a female staff member present the subject to girls.

Relevant legislation and guidance:

“The local education authority...and the governing body and head teacher of the school, shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where sex education is given to any registered pupils at the school it is given in such a manner as to encourage those pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life.” (*Section 46 of the Education Act 1986*)

“The teaching of some aspects of sex and relationship education might be of concern to teachers and parents. Sensitive issues should be covered by the school’s policy and in consultation with parents. Schools of a particular religious ethos may choose to reflect that in their sex and education policy...” (*DfEE circular 0116/2000*)

“If the parent of any pupil in attendance at a maintained school requests that [they] may be wholly or partly excused from receiving sex education at the school, the pupil shall, except so far as such education is compromised in the National Curriculum, be so excused accordingly until the request is withdrawn.” (*Section 405 of the Education Act 1996*)

¹¹ Muslim parents may ask to see any visual resources used, e.g. videos or anatomical drawings.

Dress requirements

Islamic dress code

Muslims are expected to adhere to Islamic dress codes from the time they reach puberty, which in general requires them to dress modestly. In practice this means that clothing should be neither transparent nor tight fitting; in addition, boys are explicitly required to be covered from navel to knee, whereas post-pubertal girls are expected to only expose their face and hands in public.

Religious symbols and jewellery

Health and safety concerns regarding religious jewellery are similar to those related to the *hijab*, although, as evidenced by the case of a Roman Catholic girl forbidden to wear the crucifix, these are not restricted to Muslim pupils. Some Muslim children wear Qur'anic verses around the neck, upper arm or pinned inside clothes, either wrapped in cloth or contained in lockets worn on a chain. As with the Christian cross or crucifix, the Hindu Aum symbol, or the small symbolic kirpan worn on a chain by some Sikh pupils, safety issues can be addressed and accidents avoided by taping the jewellery to the skin, rather than forcing the child to remove the item.

School uniforms

Summary

- Adhering to the uniform code should not be problematic as long as girls are allowed to wear the hijab (if they so desire) and to wear long-sleeved shirt and trousers or long skirt version of the uniform.
- Both parents and pupils understand that the hijab must be of a reasonable length and suitably secured in relevant situations for health and safety reasons.
- The wearing of the *niqab* (full-face veil) should not be allowed on the grounds that it prevents the school from exercising their duty of care.

As long as Muslim girls are allowed to cover their hair (e.g. with a *hijab* or headscarf) and to wear a long-sleeved shirt and trousers—or, alternatively, a long, loose version of the school skirt—there should be no problem complying with school uniform requirements. It is recognised that, to ensure that their safety is not endangered, girls wearing the *hijab* are required to have it suitably secured for work in laboratories, domestic science classes or other relevant situations. In practice, this would involve tucking such items inside lab coats, or, in the case of PE, tucking loose ends inside tops to ensure there is no risk of them getting caught inside sports equipment or accidentally pulled in any way. For the same reason, pupils should be discouraged from wearing the type of hijab that reaches the waist; it should be tactfully pointed out that they are already ensuring their arms are covered by wearing long-sleeved shirts, and that the long hijabs are too much of a safety risk.

Current government guidance on school uniforms explains that:

It is for the governing body of a school to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy and if so what that should be. This flows from the duties placed upon all governing bodies by statute to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline amongst the pupil body.¹²

It goes on to state that:

Where a school has good reason for restricting an individual's freedoms, for example, the promotion of cohesion and good order in the school, or genuine health and safety or security considerations, the restriction of an individual's rights to manifest their religion or belief may be justified. The school must balance the rights of individual pupils against the best interests of the school community as a whole. Nevertheless, it should be possible for most religious requirements to be met within a school uniform policy and a governing body should act reasonably through consultation and dialogue in accommodating these.¹³

Sportswear

Although many schools also have a uniform for sporting activities, Muslim parents might consider the most suitable sportswear for their children to be a tracksuit. Muslim girls should not be required to wear short tennis or netball style skirts.

Swimming

Summary

- For health and safety reasons, leggings and full leotards are not permitted in any of Ealing's pools. However specially made full length lycra suits are available on-line sources.
- Segregated swimming is rarely practicable, and parents' expectations should not be raised in this respect. It is important to point out that swimming is both a statutory curriculum subject and an important life skill. Parents have no legal right to withdraw their children from swimming lessons, however compromises that can be offered include allowing Muslim children to shower in their swimming costumes, and allowing fasting pupils to remain at school during Ramadan.
- The availability of individual changing cubicles at Ealing's pools can be found below.

Communal showering is an area that might be resisted by many Muslim children. Therefore in the absence of individual shower cubicles, those Muslim children who are worried about this could be allowed to shower in their swimming costume or bathe when they go home.

¹² *School uniform: guidance for governing bodies, school leaders, school staff and local authorities*, DfE publication, September 2013, page 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, page 6.

Swimming facilities in the borough do not allow girls to wear full leotards and leggings in the pool for health and safety reasons, however swimming costumes with legs and sleeves made of lycra (the ‘burqini’) are allowed.¹⁴

Segregated swimming is not practicable, nor is it always possible to ensure a female attendant during swim classes, and parents should not have their expectations raised in this regard. However good practice would be to compromise on the issue of swimming during Ramadan, when those fasting might wish to abstain due to the danger of swallowing water; as pools in Ealing do not allow students to observe from the side lines, in practice this means that fasting pupils will have to remain at school.

Individual changing cubicles are available as follows:

Pool	Available changing facilities
<p><i>Acton Centre</i> High Street Acton, W3 6NE Tel: 020 8825 9001 Email: actoncentreinfo@everyoneactive.com</p>	<p>There are no group changing rooms. Both the small and large pools have individual changing cubicles, 27-29 for each pool.</p>
<p><i>Dormers Wells Leisure Centre</i> Dormers Wells End Southall, UB1 3HX Tel: 020 8571 7207 Email: dormerswells@gll.org</p>	<p>There are two large group-changing rooms for boys and girls, with about 10 individual cubicles in each.</p>
<p><i>Gurnell Leisure Centre</i> Ruislip Road East Ealing, W13 0AL Tel: 020 8998 3241 Email: gurnell@gll.org</p>	<p>There are nine individual cubicles in the women’s changing room, and five in the men’s changing room. If schools want their pupils to have access to the individual cubicles they should arrange this with the school co-ordinator, Valerie Ramsay (020 8998 3241).</p>
<p><i>Northolt Leisure Centre</i> Eastcote Lane North Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4AB Tel: 020 8423 7436 Email: northoltinfo@everyoneactive.com</p>	<p>Northolt has 19 individual changing cubicles that either boys or girls can use. They also have four group changing rooms usually used by schools (for 15-20 children each). These group changing rooms do not have cubicles in them.</p>

¹⁴Burqinis can be ordered on-line from a variety of sources (e.g. <https://www.burqini.co.uk/>).

Prayer (*salah*)

Summary

- Although not all Muslim pupils will observe this, the five daily prayers are considered obligatory for all Muslims, who are encouraged to perform *salah* from the age of seven, although they are not required to do so until puberty.
- Schools are encouraged to have a designated 'quiet' area for prayer (e.g. space in the library). If it is not possible to allow students to perform the prayers at the allotted times, it is suggested that schools allow them to do so at the beginning or the end of the lunchbreak.
- It is considered obligatory for post-adolescent boys to participate in communal prayer at midday on Friday, but this will most often be observed during Ramadan. If sufficient numbers warranted it, this could take place on the school premises, as long as adequate supervision is available; otherwise schools should honour a parent's written request to take their child to the mosque for part of the afternoon, with the understanding that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure their child return to school following these prayers.

Of the five pillars of the Islamic faith, the most likely to impinge on school life are the obligatory five daily prayers and the dawn to sunset fast during the holy month of Ramadan (see next section).

The five daily prayers	
Fajr	Before sunrise
Zuhr	Between sun reaching its full height and mid-afternoon
Asr	Between mid-afternoon and sunset
Maghrib	Just after sunset
Eesha	Late evening

Each of the five daily prayers (apart from the Friday congregational prayer) can be completed within a space of ten minutes. During summer periods, the only prayer likely to fall during school hours is Zuhr, whereas during the winter months Zuhr, Asr and Maghrib are all likely to occur during school hours. If it is not possible to perform the prayers at the appointed time schools could make other periods available, e.g. 10 minutes either at the beginning or the end of the lunch break. Muslim children are asked to perform *salah* from the age of seven, although they are not *required* to do so before puberty.

It would be helpful for schools with significant numbers of Muslim pupils to designate a clean room or quiet area (e.g. part of the school library) as a reflection room, where Muslim students could perform their prayers, but which could also be available for other students who wished to use it for prayer or reflection. It is recommended that all staff members be briefed regarding the arrangements, and that schools seek advice and support from the local Muslim community (e.g. in the absence of available staff, a Muslim parent might provide any necessary

supervision). It would also be helpful if individual schools knew the direction of the *qiblah*, i.e. the direction of prayer: when praying in England, Makkah is found in a south-easterly direction, which can easily be determined using a simple compass.

Ablution (wudu)

Muslims are required to wash their face, arms, forehead and feet before praying: a washbasin connected to running water would suffice for this purpose.

Friday congregational prayer (Jumu'ah)

It is considered obligatory for post-adolescent boys—and recommended for girls of the same age—to participate in communal prayer at midday on Friday. Under the terms of the 1988 Education Reform Act, children are allowed to leave school premises to receive religious education, therefore schools should honour a parent's written request to take their child to the mosque for part of the afternoon, as long as the time they are away is reasonable. Jumu'ah lasts for approximately thirty minutes, so children may be able to use part of their lunch hour to attend. Parents have the responsibility of ensuring that their children return to school following these prayers.

It is also suggested that schools with significant Muslim populations might not want to schedule any important classes or activities during the time of the congregational prayer. Again it is worth noting that although not all Muslim pupils will want to attend Jumu'ah, the numbers that do are likely to increase during Ramadan.

As an alternative to students leaving the school, the Jumu'ah prayer could take place on school grounds, led by a suitable external visitor, teacher or older student.

Ramadan and fasting (sawm)

Summary

- Fasting is considered obligatory during the month of Ramadan for all Muslims, male and female, once they attain puberty. However many children will begin to fast before this age.
- For health and safety reasons schools should obtain parental consent from parents before their child is allowed to fast (see pages 24-25 for some sample letters).

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of the faith, considered obligatory for all Muslims, male and female, once they attain the age of puberty. However many children will begin to fast before this age to progressively get accustomed to the practice, and it is concerns around the fasting of these younger children that are most likely to arise in schools. It is impossible to predict the actual moment of the sighting of the new moon that initiates the fast, but the approximate start date can be determined in plenty of time to make appropriate arrangements.

The Arabic word *sawm* means 'to abstain', and during Ramadan most Muslims are expected to abstain completely from both food and liquid—including water—from dawn until sunset. As the Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle, the month of Ramadan begins 10 or 11 days earlier each year: in Britain this means that the hours of fasting vary from year to year. However the intention behind the fast is not that Muslims are meant to avoid aspects of everyday life, but rather that they learn to cope under a set of conditions that increase the importance of the spiritual dimension.

As mentioned previously, although fasting for the entire month does not become obligatory until a child has reached the age of puberty, it is common for children to begin to fast before this age. This may prove of concern for primary schools, for health and safety reasons. It may also become a problem for older children, especially during the summer months.

Dehydration is a common occurrence during a fast. The body continues to lose water and salts through breathing, sweat and urine; the quantity of water loss will vary depending on the weather, how much one had to drink before one's fast, the degree of physical exertion and the ability of the kidney to retain water and salts. Prevention is always better than cure. However, if one does not adequately re-hydrate oneself before a fast, one's risk of dehydration is increased. This risk is higher in the elderly, and in those taking tablets such as diuretics. Depending on the severity of the dehydration, one may experience a general feeling of being unwell, lethargy, muscle cramps, dizziness, disorientation and even collapse or faint. If one is unable to stand-up due to dizziness, or is disorientated, one should urgently re-hydrate with regular moderate

quantities of water, ideally with sugar and salt, such as Dioralyte or Lucozade. If one faints due to dehydration, one's legs should be raised above the head by others, and when awake, urgently re-hydrated as outlined above.¹⁵

Children are required to fast from the age of puberty, and this is not harmful. Fasting prior to this age is tolerated differently depending on the children's general health, nutrition and attitude. Fasting prior to the age of 7 or 8 years is not advisable, although it is a good idea to make young children aware of the practice of fasting in the community around them, and to give them a "taste" of fasting, e.g. for a few hours at a time. It is narrated that the companions would distract young children with toys if they were hungry near the time of iftar, so that they would become accustomed to joining the rest of the community in eating at sunset, rather than eating just before sunset during Ramadan. (Sahih al-Bukhari).¹⁶

Schools should consider obtaining signed parental consent forms for all pupils who intend to fast, and there are example letters that schools might wish to adapt at the end of this section. As the Department of Health Guidance suggests, if a pupil faints due to dehydration, they should be re-hydrated as described above.

It should not be forgotten that it is part of the religious discipline of Ramadan that fasting takes place in the presence of 'business as usual': that it is not intended to take Muslims out of the everyday world, but rather to bring a heightened spiritual awareness into their world. Although it is helpful for schools to make certain allowances and special arrangements (e.g. for prayer) during Ramadan, it is also an opportunity for the whole school to honour spiritual discipline and consider similar examples from other traditions.

Following are two sample letters that schools can adapt as necessary.

¹⁵ *Ramadan Health and Spirituality Guide*, produced by the Department of Health and Communities in Action, p 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 24.

To all Muslim parents of children ages 7-11

Ramadan

I am aware that you and your family are preparing to celebrate Ramadan, the month of fasting, and therefore am writing to clarify our arrangements. We have health and safety concerns regarding children younger than age 12 undertaking a fast. However we understand that Muslim children learn to fast incrementally, and are prepared to allow fasting for up to half a day, assuming that it is not so hot that dehydration becomes a serious risk.

Please complete and return the form below to your child's class teacher before [date]. *Please note that if a child faints due to dehydration they will be given water. For health and safety reasons no child will be allowed to fast unless we have their parent's written consent.*

Our Eid assembly, taken by Year 5, will be on [date] at [time]. We do hope you will be able to join us.

Yours sincerely,

=====

Name of child

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ON EACH LINE	Yes	No
I have agreed with my child that they be allowed to fast for up to three hours on the following days during Ramadan (Please note which days here):		
If your child is taken ill at school or faints due to fasting would you like us to call you?		
If your child is taken ill at school or faints due to fasting would you like us to give them food?		

Signed Parent / guardian

Date

To be returned to the class teacher by [date].

To all Muslim parents of children in Y5 and Y6

Ramadan

I am aware that you and your family are preparing to celebrate Ramadan, the month of fasting, and therefore am writing to clarify our arrangements. If you feel that your child is able to fast and you would like them to do so, we can arrange for them to sit quietly and reflect on their fast in the library from 12.20 - 12.45 pm. After 12.45 they will be able to join their friends in the playground, as long as they conserve their energy by taking part in less boisterous activities.

Please complete and return the form below to your child's class teacher before Monday. *Please note that if a child faints due to dehydration they will be given water. For health and safety reasons no child will be allowed to fast unless we have their parent's written consent.*

Our Eid assembly, taken by Year 5, will be on [date] at [time]. We do hope you will be able to join us.

Yours sincerely,

=====

Name of child

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ON EACH LINE	Yes	No
My child is not yet ready to fast at school during Ramadan		
My child will fast in school on the following days during Ramadan (Please note which days here):		
My child will fast every day at school during Ramadan		
If your child is taken ill at school or faints due to fasting would you like us to call you?		
If your child is taken ill at school or faints due to fasting would you like us to give them food?		

Signed Parent / guardian

Date

To be returned to the class teacher by [date].

School meals

Summary

- Schools with a significant percentage of Muslim students are encouraged to ensure the availability of options that are not *haram* (e.g. fish, vegetarian dishes).
- During Ramadan schools are encouraged to provide a packed lunch for those Muslim pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM), which they can take home and eat after sunset.

Muslims are allowed to eat meat as long as it is halal, i.e. slaughtered in a specific way. They are prohibited from eating pork (i.e. sausages, bacon, pork, ham or food containing gelatine derived from pigs) or food prepared with alcohol. Another area of concern to Muslims is where utensils used in the preparation of non-halal items are also used in the preparation of food to be served to Muslim pupils.

Acceptable meals for Muslim pupils include: vegetarian options, seafood and those prepared with halal red meat and chicken. Harrison Catering Service, used by many of Ealing schools, can provide a halal option if requested, although this is at extra cost to the school. As providing halal options can be problematic (e.g. Sikh pupils will not eat halal meat), it is perhaps a better compromise for schools with a significant population of Muslim pupils to provide options that are *not* haram ('forbidden'), e.g. fish and vegetarian items.

During Ramadan, schools are encouraged to provide a packed lunch for those of their Muslim pupils who are entitled to free school meals (FSM) and who are participating in the fast. These lunches can be taken home by the pupil to eat after sundown.

It is also worth mentioning here that schools and parent/ teachers associations might want to consider the appropriateness of certain social events, such as wine and cheese evenings or fashion shows that might inadvertently exclude parents/carers from some faith or cultural groups. Alcohol is prohibited within Islam, and its presence at a function may make it impossible for some parents/carers to attend.

Summary

- There is no valid religious reason preventing Muslim students from taking part in educational visits to other places of worship.
- At secondary level, it is recommended that class outings are not scheduled for Friday, when they will conflict with the needs of those pupils who wish to attend the midday congregational prayers.

There is no valid religious reason preventing Muslim students from taking part in educational visits to other places of worship such as churches, synagogues, temples or gurdwaras. Parents of pupils from any background—religious or non-religious—might object to such visits, however every effort should be made to reassure them by making them aware of the educational rewards of such exposure.

At secondary school level schools might wish to avoid organising class outings on a Friday, which might conflict with attendance at the congregational prayers, an observance that is expected of post-adolescent boys. It is also not advisable to organise outings during the month of Ramadan, unless adequate facilities for prayer can be ensured.

For trips that involve overnight stays:

- Parents should be provided with a detailed explanation of the objectives behind the trip and the format it will take, recognising that Muslims might find some venues unacceptable (e.g. brewery).
- There should be segregated washing and sleeping facilities for boys and girls.
- Non-haram food, e.g. vegetarian or seafood alternatives, should be available.
- Suitable facilities for prayer should be available.
- A compass to determine the Qiblah should be provided.
- There should be adequate adult supervision.
- Teachers should be aware that most Muslim parents would not find attendance at a disco acceptable.

Significant Muslim religious observances

The following are days on which Muslim pupils are likely to request permission to be absent from school in part or entirely.

Eid-ul-Fitr

Eid is an Arabic word meaning a recurring event, and in Islam it denotes the religious festivals. *Fitr* means “to break” and this particular festival signals the breaking of the fasting period of Ramadan. This Eid is known as the ‘small’ festival, *al-Eid al Saghir*, as the entire festival period lasts only three days compared with the four days of *Eid-ul-Adha*, the festival of sacrifice.

For a Muslim, it is a day of thanksgiving. Fasting is forbidden and in the morning, Muslims are encouraged to enjoy a sweet snack such as dates. Other practices include bathing and wearing one’s best or new clothes. Thanks to Allah are expressed by distributing alms among the poor and needy and offering special prayers. On this day, gifts are also given to children and loved ones, but it is also a time of forgiveness, and for making amends.

Eid-ul-Adha

The festival of *Eid-ul-Adha*, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice, is observed at the end of the *hajj* or yearly pilgrimage to Makkah approximately two months and ten days after the end of Ramadan. The village of Mina, a few miles from Makkah, is the site of three pillars that are stoned in a symbolic rejection of the devil, one of the rituals of the *hajj*. This village also plays host to scores of butchers who arrange for the halal slaughter of the sacrificial animals on the pilgrims’ behalf. However it is celebrated by all Muslims, not only those performing the *hajj*, and each Muslim uses the occasion to remind themselves of their own submission to Allah, and their willingness to sacrifice.

On both of the above Eids, Muslims are expected to attend the mosque in the morning for the Eid prayer, and the days are meant to be times of relaxation, celebration and for visiting friends and relations.

Ashura

The festival of *Ashura*, which takes place during the month of Muharram, is observed by both Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, but in different contexts. The Sunni community fast on this day, seeing it as an occasion to remember several events: e.g. Nuh (Noah) leaving the Ark and Allah saving Musa (Moses) from the Egyptians.

Shi'a, the only major schism in Islam, has a history nearly as long as the religion itself. According to Shi'a historians it began shortly after the death of Muhammad, when the Caliphate—the secular leadership of Islam—was passed to the prophet's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, rather than to 'Ali, Muhammad's chosen successor. (Note: Western and Sunni historians date Shi'ism to the death of Husayn (680 CE)—son of 'Ali and Fatima, grandson of Muhammad—in the battle of Karbala on the banks of the river Euphrates.) For the Shi'a community, Ashura is held to be the most significant day of the forty-day mourning period for Husayn during the month of Muharram. The battle of Karbala is re-enacted and believers hold processions as a communal expression of grief.

Shi'a pupils that are members of the Dawoodi Bohra sect (the Northolt mosque) are expected to observe special sermons during ten days of Muharram leading to and including Ashura. These sermons focus on important aspects of Shi'a history, belief and practice,

Eid al-Ghadeer

Eid al-Ghadeer is the day when Shi'a Muslims celebrate the appointment of Imam Ali as the first leader and spiritual guide of the Shi'a branch of Islam. It occurs each year eight days after Eid al-Adha. Shi'a students would not expect to be absent from school to attend the mosque, but schools might like to take the opportunity on this day to allow them to speak about their faith.

Background information on Islamic diversity

There are more than a thousand million Muslims in the world and each is an individual with their own unique and personal view of the world. Some commonalities may exist on the basis of nationality, age, education and allegiance to specific schools of law or movements within Islam, but we should beware making generalisations about Islam and Muslims. It may however be worth thinking in terms of distinctively Islamic worldviews that are very different from both secular western ways of seeing things and religious worldviews that are possibly more familiar to some of us.

Sunni The largest denomination of Islam. The word comes from *sunnah*, which means the words and actions or example of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Islam is the branch that accepted the caliphate or leadership of Abu Bakr following the death of Muhammad.

Shi'a The second largest denomination of Islam, also known as Shi'ite. The word is a short form of an Arabic phrase that means "followers of Ali." Shi'a Muslims believe that the descendants from Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his son-in-law Ali were the best source of knowledge of Muhammad's *sunnah* (traditions). They believe that Ali was appointed successor by Muhammad's direct order and that he was therefore the rightful leader of the Muslims, as opposed to the caliphate recognized by Sunni Muslims. This difference has shaped Shi'a views on sections of the Qur'an, the *hadith* (traditions) and other areas of Islam. For instance, the collection of hadith venerated by Shi'a Muslims is centred around narrations by members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (direct descendants of Muhammad), while some hadith accepted by Sunni Muslims are not recognised. Ali was the third successor to Abu Bakr and, for the Shi'a, the first divinely sanctioned *imam*. The seminal event in Shi'a history is the martyrdom in 680 CE of Ali's son Hussein, who led an uprising against the man they considered the 'illegitimate' caliph. For the Shia, Hussein came to symbolize resistance to tyranny.

Ahmadiyya, Ahmadis (Urdu, *Ahmadiyya*) is the collective name given to the two distinct groups—the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement—comprised of followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), a Muslim from the Punjab who proclaimed himself *Mujaddid* (reformer/renewer), asserting that he fulfilled Christian and Islamic prophecies regarding a promised Messiah (in Islam, the Mahdi). Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad termed his movement the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat (*jamaat*, 'community'). The original Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat split into two separate groups after his death, known respectively as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the propagation of Islam. These groups vary in

their interpretations of Ahmad's teachings and claims; they also differ as regards who should have succeeded Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and how such a successor should be chosen.

The Ahmadi version of Islam has been controversial to mainstream Muslims since its birth. Most Muslims have not accepted Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claims and some do not consider Ahmadis to be Muslims at all, citing, in particular, their view on the finality of Muhammad, ascension and return of Jesus, and concept of jihad. The Ahmadis however argue that their beliefs *are* in accordance with Islam, and use arguments to support them from the Qur'an, Hadith and opinion of Islamic jurists.

Dawoodi Bohras The Dawoodi (alternatively 'Daudi') Bohras are a (mainly) Gujarati-speaking Shi'a Muslim sect that traces its ancestry to the Shi'a sect known as the Ismailis. Their allegiance is to the leadership of the 53rd Dai, or leader of the sect, Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin (born August 1946). The Dawoodi Bohras are a very closely-knit community who seek advice from the Dai on spiritual and temporal matters. They are encouraged to educate themselves in both religious and secular knowledge, and believe that the education of women is equally important to that of men. Today there are approximately one million Dawoodi Bohras, the majority residing in India and Pakistan; however there is also a significant diaspora across the world, and the largest Dawoodi Bohra mosque in Europe is in Northolt.

¹⁷ They believe that, contrary to mainstream Islamic belief, Jesus *was* crucified, but that he survived the cross and was later revived in the tomb. He is said to have gone to Kashmir in search of the lost tribes of Israel, where he eventually died of old age

¹⁸ Ahmadis believe that *jihad* can only be used to protect against extreme religious persecution, and that historically Muslims have used *jihad* as a tool for political opportunism.