



HAMPSTEAD SCHOOL

Learning together Achieving together

May 2019

Ramadan and Examinations - Considerations

Dear Parent/ Carer of a student in Year 11, 12 or 13

As you will be aware the holy month of Ramadan has begun for our Muslim students from around 5 May 2019 until Eid al-Fitr, around 5 June 2019. Once again, this year Ramadan coincides with some of the longest hours of daylight in Britain and also the beginning period of national public KS4 & KS5 Summer examinations.

This letter is written to advise and inform both parents and students about the considerations needed in observing fasting during Ramadan for this length of day and the issues this may present to health and the pressures on our students for best performance in these examinations. It also serves to inform you about the procedures the school has to help at this time and to open a dialogue about these issues with families and the school. In so doing, the information presented draws on the advice and guidance provided by national organisations, such as the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), and regional organisations, such as the Camden Council's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (Camden SACRE). These organisations have researched these issues and consulted with many Islamic experts and scholars, imams and Muslim chaplains in the education sector, as well as other organisations, including the Muslim Council of Britain. As such, they have tried to accommodate the wide and varied range of interpretations of Islamic practice and law and this letter does not intend to endorse any particular interpretation.

As always, it will be a decision for families, parents and individual students whether they are of an age to fast, for how long they will fast and if they are legitimately exempt from fasting. Equally, the degree of observance during Ramadan will necessarily be a decision for them. There is, however, a need to **balance** the *benefits* to individuals, and our Muslim communities, of observing Ramadan and the *challenges* and potential *temporary hardship* this may cause. Individual benefits may involve a greater feeling of spirituality, better relationships/ habits, better health and self-control whereas, the challenges will be through hunger and lack of fluids during fasting and likely fatigue due to long days and disturbed sleep. This temporary hardship may impact on physical wellbeing and particularly cognitive performance during these important examinations and revision time.

Individual students will need to **balance** their usual observance and fasting for Ramadan, with their studies, the importance of these examinations to their future and their religious and moral duty in the pursuit of education. In reaching a decision of whether to fast, for example on examination days, families and students should be aware of the *flexibility* that exists within Islamic practices for students to *delay* to alternative days of the year or *exempt* themselves from fasting and/or late night prayers if it is believed performance in examinations could be adversely affected.



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Please ensure students are well prepared, ready and understand the likely effects on their bodies during fasting and that they manage these challenges well, by:

- Eating well, with a balanced meal (containing all food groups) when breaking the fast at the evening meal (iftar) and during the pre-dawn meal (suhur) and drinking plenty of re-hydrating fluids between iftar and suhur;
- Managing their sleep effectively;
- Getting plenty of rest between examinations;
- Avoiding over-exertion during the day, especially if the weather is particularly warm;
- Considering the possibility of following the dawn-to-sunset timings of Mecca and Medina (shorter, approximately 14, daylight hours) as opposed to following actual British dawn-to-sunset hours (longer, approximately, 19 daylight hours);
- Planning ahead, in terms of organising their equipment and time, to avoid rushing around, and in terms of organising their revision processes, to fit around prayers and other Ramadan specific practices, such as the Tarawih prayer or I'tikaf, if these are likely to be performed.

If managed well, a student's health should not be at risk and can be of a health benefit, as described in the Department of Health guidance, *Healthy Ramadan*. If a student is feeling unwell or is ill, then they are permitted to break the fast. In Islamic teachings, health is regarded as more important. Please make your child aware of this. If there are any specific concerns or reasons due to ill health or medical conditions that a fasting student may need to break their fast, or whether they should fast at all, parents/ carers should consult a medically qualified person for advice. Please inform the school of any relevant outcome or if any medicine is to be administered in a different way during Ramadan. In our safeguarding duty, the school will apply judgement and common sense in "taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes" as outlined in the Department for Education guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. For example, if a student is unwell and showing signs of dehydration/ exhaustion, they will be asked if they are fasting and advised to terminate the fast by drinking water, reassuring them that this is allowed in Islam and that the fast can be deferred to an alternative day.

Families should be aware that the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) has confirmed it has taken Ramadan into account, after consulting with relevant Muslim groups, in setting the external examinations timetable. This is why more large entry examinations have been set for after half-term and/ or are scheduled as morning examinations. Education is seen as a religious and moral duty for our Muslim students and, like all students, they will want to do as well as they possibly can in their examinations. Grades attained at GCSE or A-level will impact directly on their future education and careers. This will be a legitimate consideration in how they decide to observe Ramadan this year, in terms of both the physical effects of fasting (tiredness, dehydration and associated cognitive performance) and in terms of time management (performing extra devotion/ prayers, such as tarawih or I'tikaf). Islam does not require them to put their futures in jeopardy and the advice suggests families should be aware that extra devotions in Ramadan are voluntary; whereas performing well in exams, given the potential consequences, is obligatory.

During the exam period, all our usual guidance and practices are in place, however, some may be of particular relevance to our Muslim cohort. This includes:

- Provision of water beforehand for during exams – for those students not fasting, or those who need to break their fast due to dehydration
- Revision lessons before and after school – which may benefit students depending on how they are managing their time
- Lunch and free school meals are still available for those wishing to take it and who are eligible; for example students may wish to take a cold lunch home
- The dining room is available for quiet study when examinations are not taking place and attendance at lessons for which examinations have not taken place is still expected
- Our exam halls are kept as cool as possible and where possible movement from direct sunlight will be accommodated
- Invigilators are trained to keep a close eye on students and to recognise dehydration/ drowsiness and will deal sensitively regarding advice around breaking a fast with water

If there are any further queries or you would like to discuss further any aspects of this letter and advice,

please do not hesitate to contact the school or discuss with me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Hadley', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Adam Hadley
Assistant Head

Important/ useful documents:

DfE, Keeping Children Safe in Education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

NHS, Healthy Ramadan

<http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthylramadan/Pages/healthylramadhanhome.aspx>

ASCL, Ramadan: Exams and Tests, 2019: information for schools and colleges

<file:///N:/Ramadam%20Information%20paper%20%20May%202019.pdf>

NAHT, Advice: Ramadan, SATS and GCSEs in 2018

<https://www.naht.org.uk/advice-and-support/pupil-well-being/ramadan-sats-and-gcses-in-2018/>

Camden SACRE: Ramadan Guidance for Schools 2018

Camden's Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education (SACRE)

Contact available at:

<https://camdenlearning.org.uk/>