**Ramadan: The Month of Fasting**

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; a month during which the Qur’an was revealed. It is commanded in the Qur’an for all healthy males and females to fast once they attain the age of puberty (for some children this can be as young as age nine). Certain circumstances and conditions in which Muslims are exempt from fasting include girls & women who are menstruating; those for whom fasting has a detrimental effect on their overall well-being; those who depend on medication or nourishment for survival; and a traveller facing serious hardship due to fasting. Any missed fasting days must be atoned by fasting or feeding the poor if one is unable to fast.

Fasting is an act of worship of great spiritual, moral and social significance for Muslims. The physical dimension of fasting involves completely abstaining from drinking, eating, smoking and sexual activity, from dawn to sunset, for the whole month. The spiritual and moral dimension of fasting involves God-consciousness, exercising self-control, having empathy towards the poor, having appropriate dealings with others, giving charity and observing additional worship such as reading the entire Qur’an within the month.

At Plumstead Manor we seek to play a part in the development of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of our students by recognising and building upon the spirit of Ramadan. We regularly demonstrate our appreciation of cultural and religious diversity and seek to promote racial equality and religious harmony. Pupils who fast and engage in extra prayers and charitable activities during Ramadan are seen positively and their achievements acknowledged and noted, for example in school assemblies.

A typical day for a fasting Muslim would be: a pre-dawn “Suhr” meal; dawn “Fajr” prayers; midday “Dhuhr” prayers; mid-afternoon “Asr” prayers; breaking the fast at sunset with an “Iftar” meal; sunset “Maghrib” prayers; night-time “Isha” prayers; extra night-time “Taraweeh” prayers. The impact of this routine on a student will be further discussed below.

**Secondary School Pupils**

As a school we will seek to support and prepare all our students to achieve their best. As this year’s GCSE/A Level examinations fall during the month of Ramadan, we are sensitive to the fact that some students will be fasting at a time of the year when they need to be fully refreshed. Fasting is obligatory for Muslim pupils in secondary school and the only dispensation are those who are ill or girls who may be menstruating. Families will normally make their own decision on such issues affecting their children. We acknowledge the moral and spiritual values associated with fasting and the positive benefits that this has for our students.

We expect all our staff to be sensitive when discussing the fast with our students during the month of Ramadan. If parents and carers wish to let us know that their daughter or son is fasting we are happy to receive that information in order to offer guidance on the best way to avoid dehydration, ensuring that they eat nutritious food, get appropriate rest periods, and have appropriate revision sessions.

Our duty of care to our students, to provide for their safety and well-being, and to prevent them from harm, does mean we will advise them to avoid dehydration, illness or injury as a result of any fast they may be undertaking and that in the event of an emergency they should eat and drink.
Prayers during Ramadan

Ramadan is a time when Muslims try to spend more time in prayer and religious contemplation, offering extra prayers every night called Taraweeh. Many Muslims, including children, will therefore stay up very late saying prayers and reading the Qur’an; parents liaising with schools to reduce the impact on their children’s academic performance in the day would be encouraged.

We seek to support our students by providing a quiet, supervised room, where they can pray and reflect. At Plumstead Manor we set aside a place acceptable for the mid-afternoon “Dhuhr” prayers during the school lunch break – this is our Room of Reflection which operates all year around. Washing facilities are available for pupils getting ready for prayers as preparation for prayer – ablution - includes washing the visible parts of the body like the face, hands and feet.

Physical Education

Whilst the discipline and the challenge of fasting is to continue with the normality of everyday life, staff should exercise a degree of understanding, by encouraging pupils to avoid excessive exertion in Physical Education to prevent dehydration. Some pupils may need to reduce physical exercises during fasting while others may wish to continue as normal without putting themselves at risk.

Strenuous activity during fasting may make some children feel tired or drowsy, or even develop headaches due to dehydration. This may necessitate some Muslim pupils reducing their physical activity during Physical Education.

Examinations during Ramadan

It is inevitable that some statutory and internal examinations may fall during Ramadan. As Ramadan is set by a Lunar calendar, its date changes by 11 days every year over the solar Gregorian calendar. This year, Ramadan will fall somewhere between 5th May and 4th June, overlapping with GCSEs and A-levels exams in May and June.

We will manage our examination rooms well during hot weather, and we will alert our exam invigilators to notice the needs of all students but particularly those who are fasting. Where necessary we will provide extra water for all pupils in the event of them being dehydrated.

In the event that the school notices indications of dehydration or fatigue in a child during statutory exams, we will ask the student if they are fasting and advise them to drink water immediately. There are times when a fast can be broken and that this period of time is made up at a later date, and breaking fast because of a public examination is a justified reason. We will reassure them that in their current situation, they are allowed to break their fast and make it up later. This allowance will be notified to students during exam briefings.

Again, our duty of care to our students, to provide for their safety and well-being, and to prevent them from harm, means we will advise them to avoid dehydration, illness or injury as a result of any fast they may be undertaking. This is particularly the case during the examination season.

Medication

No oral medication can be taken by someone who is fasting, therefore anyone needing regular medication (e.g. insulin) during fasting hours is normally exempt from fasting. Families will need to communicate with the school if they need to change any customary practices around medication. Guidance can also be sought from local Muslim organisations on specific issues if necessary. During
emergencies, where a child’s wellbeing is at risk, medicine should be administered. Routine vaccinations should be scheduled, if possible, for other times of the year.

**Absence from School due to Religious Holidays**
The month of Ramadan culminates with the festival of Eid ul-Fitr, which takes place either 29th or 30th day after the beginning of the Islamic month. It is difficult to be specific with the date beforehand as it is dependent on a visual moon sighting. The school will follow its usual policy on holidays/absence for religious and cultural needs.

This year Eid is likely to fall on 5th June which is a date of public examinations. Students taking public exams must attend school to take their exam as normal. Missing the exam will forfeit their score and will place their overall grade in serious jeopardy.