Highclare School

**Ramadan in 2023**

 In 2023, Ramadan – a month-long period of Islamic prayer, fasting, self-control and goodwill to others – is predicted to start on the evening of Wednesday 22 March, depending on the sighting of the moon, and it will end at sundown on Friday 21 April.

**Ramadan and its relevance for School**

While bringing many benefits, strict fasting throughout Ramadan is likely to impact on pupils’ overall well-being and their cognitive performance. It is important to note that no child younger than ‘the age of puberty’ is obliged or expected to fast – there are, however, two views on this issue:

1. The ‘biological maturity’ view holds that children should begin the practice of fasting at the age of 15 (ie the age of puberty)

2. Under the ‘intellectual maturity’ view, children should begin fasting between the ages of 16 to 19 (ie the age of intellectual capacity).

However, younger children (ie those at primary or secondary schools) may practice short periods of fasting to prepare them for adulthood.

**Fasting, prayer and safe guarding**

School staff recognise that unless there are genuine safeguarding concerns, they should not interfere with how young Muslim pupils observe Ramadan. That said, Islamic law does offer children the opportunity to delay or exempt themselves from fasting and late-night prayers if they believe it may adversely impact their performance at school, especially if they are facing the prospect of taking exams.

During Ramadan, those fasting can have one meal just before sunrise and another just after sunset. While fasting may bring about many benefits, the practice of fasting may also bring about greater levels of tiredness, lower energy and dehydration, and reduced focus, memory and concentration. During Ramadan, young Muslims may also take part in prayer events, often held in mosques and that finish late at night. Parents may consider that prayer sessions could be kept short on school nights or, preferably, held on weekends when the impact of late nights or long prayer sessions on pupils could be better managed.

If there are safeguarding concerns about a pupil, schools have an overriding safeguarding duty and should apply professional judgement and common sense in each case. The Department for Education’s statutory guidance ‘Keeping children safe in education’ defines safeguarding as “protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children’s health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes”. With this overriding duty in mind, if staff notice signs of dehydration or exhaustion in a pupil, they should ask the pupil if they are fasting. If so, they will encourage them to drink some water and reassure them that, in this situation, Islamic practice allows them to break their fast and make it up later.

Muslim authorities agree that if there is a risk to a pupil’s health, pupils can break their fast and, indeed, they should do so immediately. The NHS advises the following: “If you produce very little or no urine, or feel disorientated, confused or faint due to hydration, you must stop fasting and have a drink of water or other fluid. Islam doesn’t require you to harm yourself in fulfilling the fast.”

We recommend that parents and carers to let school know if their child is fasting. This can be done via email to enquiries@highclareschool.co.uk If the pupil is presenting with poor health, it is also entirely appropriate to ask the parents and carers if their child is fasting.

Fasting pupils may need to reduce their overall levels of physical activity, say during PE lessons, and PE staff may consider alternative activities on such occasions. Pupils are, however, expected to attend all lessons and to attend with full kit.

Pupils who are fasting may choose to sit with friends having lunch/break or not go into lunch as preferred.

**Practical tips to share with your child regarding school:**

It is great that you are showing such dedication to your faith and keeping hold of a traditional practice that many other faiths also recognise.  Part of the purpose of the month is to bring people and communities together, and we hope that the month brings you much happiness, benefit and increase.  Please do remember, however, that your commitment to school and your education needs also to continue.  To help you with this, a few practical tips/reminders follow:

* The longer day fasts will require you to go without food and drink for many hours. You must be best prepared for this by making sure you take something of good nutritional value in the pre-dawn meal before you close and make the intention to fast.  Cereals, yogurt, dates, wholemeal bread, vegetables, fresh fruit are amongst some of the healthy/slow release carbohydrate foods that will keep you satisfied for longer.
* Following on from this during the school day avoid running or standing around in the sun. Try to find some shade and occupy yourself in low energy activities.
* It is very important that you continue to come to school prepared to learn. Lessons will happen as normal.  Your teachers may make slight adjustments in some of the practical subjects such as PE for you but you should come fully prepared to take part with the correct equipment/kit.
* In the same way you must also wear the correct school uniform.  The real significance of this month is about self-discipline and working on improving your character. It is not just a case of going without food for long hours.  Working on honesty, truthfulness, charity, forgiveness, respect etc… are some of the positive character traits that become the focus of this month.  This is something that Highclare School whole heartedly supports in its values, and we hope that in some way we can all benefit from this.
* With the upcoming shorter nights, longer days and late-night prayers many of you will get less sleep than usual but you will still be expected to attend school punctually as normal. Therefore, some readjustment to your routine will be needed to help with this.  You may try to catch up on some sleep after school in order to re-energise for the rest of the day/fast.  It might take a few days for this to settle but it is a sensible way forward.
* It is also the case that many of you will be taking important internal exams/tests/studies during Ramadan. While we wholeheartedly support your commitment to fasting, we also ask you to uphold the duty of taking your studies seriously – educational success is also something important to the religion of Islam.  During your school days, it is crucial that you develop a positive routine around fasting, prayers, revision and study.  Remember also if you are not feeling well then there is the chance of making up the fasts at a later date.  If you become unwell whilst you are fasting then you should end the fast by taking some water.
* In the event of hot weather, it is obviously important that you remain hydrated but without food or drink. This is a challenge which most of you will have experienced if you have fasted in previous years.  Small things like washing your hands with cold water, wiping over the face/head with cold water can help keep you cool in hot weather.  This should be done at break and lunchtimes.
* Remember also that one of the strengths of Highclare School is the broad cultures and faith groups represented in both our student and staff populations; this is something quite special for the School.  So, while those of you who fast will need time/space to practise your faith please do remember that the Refectory is open and most people will continue to eat and drink throughout the day and should go to lunch as normal. You are welcome to go with friends or stay out of the Refectory during lunch as you wish.

**If you do have any further questions or comments then you are welcome to speak to Mrs Cassell, Deputy Head: Pastoral or Mr Coles, Deputy Head: Academic.**