

**Guidance for schools to make provision for pupils of faith  
to be included in the life of the school**

**Croydon Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)**

**This guidance has been produced to help schools with regards to pupils who have requirements due to their faith.**

**For further information/advice please contact Penny Smith-Orr, Religious Education Consultant ([penny.smith-orr@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:penny.smith-orr@croydon.gov.uk))**

The purpose of this guidance is to provide practical advice and answers to questions for schools, sports providers and parents to ensure that all children and young people irrespective of race, faith and gender can take part in, and enjoy, a full range of school activities.

Current legislation allows parents to remove children from religious education lessons and collective worship 'on grounds of religious conscience'. It is important to discuss fully the concerns of parents; showing the Croydon Agreed Syllabus 2024- Religion and World Beliefs- and allowing them to attend a lesson often helps parents to understand the basis of religious education lessons in Croydon.

The school should not incur any expense i.e. a member of staff looking after the removed child. No extra work should be incurred by the teacher in terms of providing different work, the parents should be asked to send in suitable material from their own faith for the pupil to look at while missing the RE lesson.

Teachers are also allowed to withdraw from teaching religious education lessons on the same grounds although their duty is to ensure the class is taught by another member of staff.

For further advice on matters of withdrawal contact Penny Smith-Orr, Croydon SACRE Officer.

**School holidays are arranged to coincide with most Christian festivals but pupils from other faith communities should also be authorised to have time off school to celebrate their own festivals.**

**The DFS allows head teachers to allow time off for funerals and associated religious practices and for attendance at a family wedding.**

Cultural and religious diversity is regarded as positive and everyone can feel that they are able to express their viewpoints and beliefs in safety. It is necessary to foster an environment where:

- everyone is of equal importance
- diversity is celebrated
- where the needs of everyone are treated fairly and equally
- shared or common values are recognised

It is also worth mentioning here that it is good practice for schools and parent teacher's associations 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.

## **Clothing**

Schools should be sensitive to the needs of children from different faiths particularly in relation to clothing and jewellery. Schools should develop effective strategies for dealing with questions from parents particularly in relation to health and safety in physical education lessons.

Some Sikh pupils may have gone through the ceremony to become part of the Khalsa and may be wearing the 5 K's which are required of committed Sikhs. The 5 K's include the Kara (see jewellery above), the Kesh, which means not cutting the hair, Kangha, a comb to keep the hair tidy, Kachs, a special undergarment, and the Kirpan which is a dagger only used in defence. While in school it is reasonable to ask that a symbolic Kirpan on the pupil, (sometimes found on the Kangha or on a necklace) rather than an actual dagger.

## **General principles**

The school should have a clear policy on uniform requirements including specific colours for the hijab, Jewish skullcap or Rasta head covering. In physical education lessons clothing should be appropriate for the activity that the children are taking part in. It should allow for easy movement and not pose a risk of causing injury to the wearer or other participants. To encourage pupils to be comfortable in their PE lesson (e.g., body image) schools may consider allowing pupils to wear tracksuits for activities.

## **Changing**

Schools may need to consider separate changing areas for pupils due to early puberty or faith issues.

**Muslim Hijab** (head covering for Muslim girls) mainly worn from puberty onwards, however some Primary aged children are also wearing the hijab.

Ideally this should be removed during physical education lessons but where this is not possible it should be securely fastened around the head not under the chin.

### **Jewellery General Principles**

Some schools find it advisable to have a policy of no jewellery. Parents should be made aware of the potential dangers of children wearing items of jewellery. Removal of jewellery is not the responsibility of the teacher; children should be expected to do it. If children are not capable of removing their jewellery, then they should not be wearing it in school. There is also a question of the security of removed items. It is strongly advised that any type of necklace, ring or earrings should be removed during PE for health and safety reasons.

There are two exceptional circumstances where schools should be sensitive to the needs of children from different faiths.

#### **For example;**

**Hindu** Rakhi, (a cotton bracelet) this cannot be removed but being made of cotton would snap if caught in apparatus. If in doubt this should be taped to the arm during PE.

**Sikhism** Kara (metal bracelet 1 of the 5 Ks) – this is put on at a young age and it is impossible to remove. This item should be pushed up the arm and taped with masking tape.

### **Food**

Pupils from a faith community may have different food laws. Which should be taken into account during school parties and celebrations or on school journeys. Some faith followers are vegetarian, some will only eat Halal or Kosher food. There are different times of the year when a faith community might be fasting or have given up a certain food. It is recommended that teachers check this on an individual basis.

### **Swimming**

This is a compulsory activity for pupils at KS2 and an important life skill and without it pupils cannot have access to other water-based activities

**Changing** - there must be separate changing areas for boy and girls

**Muslims** Swim wear- up to puberty children should wear swimming costumes/trunks

After puberty - girls can wear swim wear that respects their wishes for modesty. This may be a cotton garment that is loose fitting.

Boys may wish to wear long Lycra swimming shorts (navel to knee). Heavy cotton track suit and sweat shirts are not appropriate as they become water logged and pose a safety hazard.

### **School and Community Events**

- Schools should make themselves aware of the dates of major religious festivals when planning parent's evenings, open evenings and school plays.
- Also check the date for suitability of school outings and visitors to schools

### **Out of School Hours Learning Activities**

Schools need to consider the needs of all children when planning their OSHL activities. At certain times of the year children may be observing a religious festival and may therefore be unable to take part in training sessions or fixtures.

- Single sex activities to encourage participation particularly for Muslim girls
- Clubs during school time to enable those pupils who attend faith schools at the end of the day
- Some Jewish and Seventh Day Adventist pupils must return home before sunset on a Friday.
- Some Jehovah Witness pupils may not take part in after school clubs or activities

### **School Journeys**

Try to avoid major festivals /particular days of worship and make provision for those children who may want to pray i.e. Muslim pupils on a Friday

**Parents may request that their children have specific festival days off according to their faith. The following is a brief list of the most common festivals;**

#### **Christian Community**

Some Christian pupils may want to fast on days of obligation particularly Ash Wednesday. Easter is the most important festival in the Christian year and includes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday and Easter Sunday. Some Roman Catholic pupils may request time to attend morning Mass on Holy days of obligation.

#### **Coptic and Greek Orthodox Community**

Christmas is celebrated on 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> January. Sometimes Easter is celebrated by some of the Orthodox community at a different time to the rest of the Christian community.

**Buddhist Community**

Pupils may be involved in Buddha day (full moon in May) and Sangha day (full moon in November)

**Hindu Community**

Children may be involved in celebrations at Diwali. There are also a number of other Hindu festivals, depending on the deity of the household, which may require a day off

**Jehovah Witness Community**

Parents of these pupils may not wish them to take part in activities which have pagan associations, even though the festival is apparently Christian. Pupils are often removed from RE lessons and collective worship. Parents should be encouraged to discuss issues to find ways to resolve any problems.

Jehovah's Witnesses will not swear allegiance to anyone but god and therefore cannot take part in elections.

**Jewish Community**

Children may be involved in celebrations at Rosh Ha Shanah (Jewish New Year), Pesach, Shavuot and Succoth and may be fasting for one day at Yom Kippur.

**Muslim Community**

There are two festivals in the year Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adhur

**Ramadan**

Ramadan is the month of fasting from dawn to sunset. To a Muslim, fasting means abstaining from all food and drink during daylight hours. All Islamic dates and festivals are subject to the sighting of the new moon, Sunni and Shia Muslims may celebrate on slightly different days. The start date for Ramadan changes every year, moving back by 10 or 11 days every year. Lailat-UI- Qadr takes place a few days before the end. Many Muslims spend the night praying and studying the Qur'an. Eid-UI-Fitr is the major festival of the breaking of the fast when there are many family celebrations.

We are advised that pupils could be taking some part in the observance of the Ramadan from the age of 5 years onwards. The Mosque does not require primary children to fast completely although some may want to if older siblings are fasting. It will be important that teachers and parents communicate with each other over the possible implications of pupils' actions. There are two broad areas to be aware of: fasting and prayer.

Fasting. This means complete abstinence from food, including liquids, from sunrise until the specified time of the break of fast evening meal.

Prayer. Where possible, the five prayer times during the day should be observed. These vary with the hours of daylight. Children may want to pray for some time between the 12.00 and 1.30pm and again at about 3.00pm. The specific prayer times for each year will be available from the Mosque web site, **croydonmosque.org**

During Ramadan schools are requested to set aside a prayer room, if possible, during lunch time break for midday prayers, which can be observed anytime between 11.45 and 1.30pm. Preparation for prayer would include washing of hands and feet. Older pupils are required to pray every Friday or may want to pray regularly each day. Friday prayers could be organised by the pupils themselves in a classroom or library. A Muslim member of staff could help with this.

- ◆ Ramadan is a time for reinforcing religious commitment and for family reunion. Children are likely to be experiencing a heightened emotional environment throughout the period.
- ◆ Children who are fasting are more likely to feel the effects in the afternoon and, possibly, after the weekend, on a Monday. Indications of this are likely to be seen in irritability levels at the end of the day. There are possible limitations on their ability to participate fully in more strenuous physical activity, especially towards the end of the school day.
- ◆ Swimming is not possible for pupils observing a strict fast as it contravenes the “nothing by mouth” requirement.
- ◆ The observance of Ramadan takes second place to medical requirements: children can still use inhalers and take medicine where prescribed by a doctor. Croydon Commissioning Group has a leaflet for individuals with diabetes who are fasting.
- ◆ If Ramadan falls during British Summer time it means that pupils may be going to bed late and rising early in order to fit their meals in during the hours of darkness.
- ◆ If Ramadan is observed during the winter months, the timing of break of fast may curtail after school activities for some pupils and parents may wish to collect their children early in order to be able to better prepare the family meal. Other parents may require their children to leave school earlier in order to reach home in time for the family meal. During the month there will be no classes held at the Mosque school or any of the Azhar Academies.
- ◆ Pupils may request leave of absence on the specific holy days of Lailat ul Qadr and Eid-UI-Fitr. Parents will need to request absence for their children in writing to the school. Teachers must remember that they should try to avoid running extra curricular or other special activities on these days.

### **Music**

Schools with Muslim pupils may find that their parents give conflicting advice on the use of music in schools. Some parents will be happy for their children to study music. Some parents will be happy with certain aspects of music and unhappy about others. Some may be totally unhappy and ask for their children to be withdrawn from music as they regard it as 'haram', a forbidden activity. However, the only subject that parents can withdraw from is religious education (see above) and therefore pupils cannot be withdrawn from music or dancing and it is suggested that the school act sensitively in this case and do not make the pupil take part while attending the lesson and explain to parents that it is part of the education curriculum of the school.

### **Sikhism**

Children may be involved in celebration during Diwali and the birthday of Guru Nanak.

### **Visiting Places of Worship**

Visits to places of worship are statutory within the Croydon Agreed Syllabus 2024. Information on planning visits can be found in the syllabus.

When visiting a place of worship, it is important that teachers make themselves aware of respectful dress codes and behaviour required by different faiths both for pupils and adults.

**This document was updated in June 2025**

**Acknowledgements;**

**Penny Smith-Orr SACRE Officer and Members of Croydon SACRE**