

# Ponteland Community Middle School



## Granting of Religious Observance Policy

## Principles

According to the Department of Education, schools are required to treat absence as authorised when it is due to religious observance. However, “the day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong”.

Ponteland Community Middle School recognises that occasionally, religious festivals may fall outside of school holidays or weekends, which makes it necessary to consider authorised absence for religious observance.

The school will use their discretion where a parent does not belong to a religious body, and may want to celebrate an alternative festival of importance to them.

## Schools' responsibilities

- Ponteland Community Middle School will be sensitive to requests from parents/pupils for absence due to religious reasons.
- Pupils are permitted to have an authorised absence if the religious observance or festival is a compulsory part of their faith. This includes
  - 1 day for Eid ul Adha and Eid ul Fitr (Islam).
  - 1 day for Diwali (Sikhism and Hinduism).
  - 1 day for Shavuot, Passover and Rosh Hashanah (Judaism).
- Ponteland Community Middle School will not grant absence requests for days in addition to these. These requests will be treated as an ordinary absence request, and not as an absence for religious observance.
- Dr Caroline Pryer is responsible for ensuring that requests are reasonable and genuine. Dr Caroline Pryer will not doubt a request on the following grounds:
  - That other pupils of the same faith have not requested absence on the same day or time.
  - That the pupil's family is more stringent in its religious observances than other families of the same faith.
  - That the religious group to which the family belongs requires observance of religious practices that are different for members of the community. (For example, a special day to worship a saint or religious rituals related to the death anniversary of a family member).
- Ponteland Community Middle School will strive to take advice from parents' religious body on the number of days set apart for religious observances.
- Ponteland Community Middle School will seek to build positive relationships with local places of worship/religious leaders to establish the appropriate number of days required for religious festivals.

- Ponteland Community Middle School will send a newsletter to remind parents to make requests for absence for religious reasons.
- The contact person for advice on such matters is the school manager.
- Ponteland Community Middle School does not consider cultural events as a religious observances and if a pupil does not attend school, it will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

## **Parents' responsibilities**

- Parents have a duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly.
- Parents should consider whether the absence for religious purposes is necessary, or whether the religious duty may be accommodated outside of school hours.
- Parents need to be aware that the school is required to know of particular needs with regard to the religious observance of pupils. Eg: pupils who are fasting or those involved in exceptional religious activity outside of working hours.
- Parents must inform the school in advance if absence is required for days of religious observance.
- Parents must be willing to discuss with the school how the pupil can catch up on missed work.

**June 2015**

Dear Parent/Carer

We have collated a list of children undertaking Ramadan and fasting in school. We have researched the current information, practices and school policies regarding Ramadan, fasting and Eid. We are very supportive and have celebrated the children's achievements.

My staff know that children are to fast once they reach puberty or are over 12 years of age. They are not to drink or eat in daylight hours; that they would have their evening meal after dark and rise early to pray and have breakfast before sunrise. During the day the children are not to drink or eat and can rinse their mouth with water and not swallow. **I would ask that, if this was to happen, the children rinse their mouths with water in the toilets and do not spit anywhere in school.**

### **Supervision at Lunchtimes**

Every effort will be made to provide children who are fasting with a room for prayers, or a quiet area away from the dining area to rest if they wish.

I fully support that children fasting are encouraged to reflect on being well behaved, polite, friendly, kind, considerate and supportive to their friends and that they are deriving physical and moral strengths such as will-power, endurance, patience and self-control.

I understand that children are encouraged to fast and that a number of children can undertake this at weekends. Younger children can be encouraged to fast for part of the day and perhaps not on a day when they have swimming, PE or Sports activities. The school expects children not to fast on busy days.

In school we have a duty of care. We have loco parentis. Together we have a joint responsibility to ensure your child's education doesn't suffer unduly because of their involvement in fasting.

I am writing to you to express our concerns that fasting may be causing harm to the children and having an impact on school life. We feel that the children are becoming dehydrated and suffering from the heat and pace of school life.

### **Advice and Guidance**

- School respects children fasting but expect children to participate in school activities.
- Parents must contact school to say their child will be fasting.
- Schools will develop strategies for checking with parents whether the child is affected by fasting. School will help parents by discussing which days are best for 'trying out fasting' e.g. choosing days that do not clash with swimming, games or outings.
- School will inform the catering staff that numbers of children requiring lunch may be lower than normal. School will ask children entitled to a free school meal to collect their packed lunch at lunchtime.
- School will praise Muslim children who are fasting and to give them recognition in assemblies and tutor time.
- School encourages children to engage in all activities as a way of demonstrating their commitment to Ramadan.
- School will set a room aside at lunchtimes for pupils who wish to pray.
- School will consider how the particular focus on charity during Ramadan might usefully be coordinated with a school charity appeal.

We know the precise day is decided by the sighting of the new moon. Different Mosques have different mechanisms for deciding on when the new moon is visible, e.g. some Mosques have links with Saudi Arabia while others with Pakistan or India. Thus, the day

'chosen' may be different for different Mosques. Parents must write to the Headteacher requesting a day of absence for EID. This is not granted automatically as the school's activities e.g. assessment may take priority.

In the future PCMS will send out a letter prior to Ramadan to explain arrangements, expectations and to ask parents for information about when their children will be fasting. I expect parents of a child who will be fasting to inform me of dates. If a child is not managing Ramadan in school the school reserves the right to contact parents to discuss this matter.

With kind regards

*Caroline Pryer*

Dr Caroline Pryer  
Headteacher