



**Authorising Pupil Absence for Religious Observance
2020-2021**

SACRE GUIDANCE



**Harrow
SACRE**



Harrow Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Authorising Pupil Absence for Religious Observance: Guidance for Headteachers and Governing Bodies

This document has the status of advice and provides overarching guidelines which headteachers may use in identifying absences for religious observance for pupils that should be authorised. The advice offered by SACRE relates only to school pupils and not to staff employed in schools.

Parents¹ are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education. Parents are entitled to withdraw their child from school for religious observance where the day is exclusively set aside by the religious body to which the parents of the child are a member². Schools must regard such absences as authorised as regulations specifically authorise these absences³.

Not all religious days will be set aside for religious observance by the religious body and if a day has not exclusively set aside the day for religious observance, children will be expected to attend school on these days. If parents wish to take leave on such days, they will be expected to apply for leave under exceptional circumstances⁴. If a Headteacher grants a leave request, it will be for the headteacher to determine the length of time that the child can be away from school.

It is the Governing Body of each school that determines the school's attendance policy in light of legislation. On a day to day basis, the headteacher implements that policy and authorises leave for religious observance and considers any requests for leave in other exceptional circumstances.

The Context

In the UK, the pattern of the school year takes account of most of the western Christian festivals and holy days. Important days of religious observance in the calendars of other religious traditions and denominations, however, often fall in term time and specifically on school days.

Those parents, who are nurturing children and young people within a faith tradition, understandably want them to be able to engage in those key events which involve corporate worship and celebration and which affirm their religious beliefs. Schools recognise that a family's religious beliefs and traditions are intrinsic to their sense of identity and contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Whilst sympathetic to the need of families to remain in contact with relatives and their 'heritage' overseas, headteachers will seldom authorise exceptional leave of absence for extended visits abroad because of the consequences for pupils' attendance and learning.

SACRE has publishes an annual list of religious days which includes day that are exclusively set aside by the religious body which should be authorised by schools.

¹ The term "parents" includes carers and guardians

² Under regulation 6 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

³ See FN1

⁴ Under regulation 7 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

Harrow SACRE is aware that headteachers value this guidance so that this local understanding does not diminish robust procedures aimed at improving attendance.

The Education Act 1996

In preparing this guidance, SACRE has taken full account of current legislation in relation to attendance:

“The child shall not be taken to have failed to attend regularly at the school by reason of his absence from the school -

(c) on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs”

Education Act 1996, Part VI, Chapter II, Paragraph 444

The relevance of the “*day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs*” relates to the statutory defence in the event of a prosecution. This confirms that such absences must be authorised by the school⁵

Local Advice on Authorising Absence for Pupils

Absence from school for religious observance are allowed and should be marked as authorised where school are satisfied that the day has been set aside by the religious body and the parents of the child are members of that religious community. Schools can refer to this guidance or the relevant religious body where there is a query whether the day has been set aside by the religious body and may request parents to confirm in writing that they are members of that particular religious community.

Harrow SACRE advises that:-

- headteachers should authorise absence **only** for a date ‘*exclusively set apart by the religious body*’,
- if a date has not been ‘*exclusively set apart*’ on the SACRE list or by the relevant religious body, headteachers should consider whether to grant leave under exceptional circumstances⁶ and in doing so consider whether the religious observance can be accommodated outside of school hours;
- absence taken on a school day for a festival falling at a weekend, or in a school holiday, would not be authorised;
- additional days taken on either side of the day explicitly set aside for observance would not be authorised on the grounds of religious observance;

The Needs of Different Religious Groups

Within some religious traditions, observance varies between different denominations and communities. Ashura, for example, is a relatively minor festival for Sunni Muslims but a holy day of major significance for the Shia community.

⁵ Under regulation 6 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

⁶ Under regulation 7 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

Whilst headteachers and teachers must ensure that requests are genuine and reasonable, they are recommended not to doubt a request on grounds that other families of the same faith have not requested absence on the same day or at the same time.

It may be the case that:

- the level of observance differs amongst families within the same faith tradition;
- a particular denominational or cultural grouping observes different holy days to other groups within the same faith;
- some pupils, though growing up within a faith community, may prefer to attend school on festival days.

What can Schools do to meet the Needs of Families from Religious Traditions Whilst Promoting High Attendance Rates?

Harrow schools are aware of the religious communities represented within their school and are advised to take reasonable steps to ensure, whenever possible, that events in the school diary – such as parents evenings and school performances - do not clash with days of significant religious importance to pupils and their families.⁷

As part of their written communications with families, some schools send a termly or annual proforma asking for advance information of requests for absence for religious observance. However, some communities may not be able to identify dates for religious observance that far in advance. Parents should be asked to give the school as much notice of a proposed absence as is reasonably possible and be willing to discuss with the school how pupils will catch up with work missed.

For religiously observant children and young people there are expectations of religious prayer and observance throughout the year. Schools can usually make provision for pupils to fulfil these observances without the need for absence during the school day. For example, through consultation with the Muslim communities represented within the school, a prayer room and nearby facilities for washing can enable young Muslims to perform salah on the school site (see SACRE Guidance on offering a place for prayer and reflection).

SACRE Guidance: Dates ‘set apart’ for Religious Observance September 2019 – December 2020

SACRE has sought to publish an annual list of dates for religious observance. In line with robust government guidance to school leaders on school attendance, representatives of local faith communities have identified those dates which they regard as “*exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent belongs.*” These dates are recommended to headteachers as those on which they may wish to authorise absence from school.

⁷ Indirect discrimination may occur if provision is applied generally but has the effect of disadvantaging those with a particular ‘characteristic.’ (Equality Act 2010 – DfE Advice for School leaders Sept 2012)

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Baha'i	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: Sunday 18 <u>Birthday of the Báb</u> and Monday 19 <u>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</u>	Naw-Ruz (New Year): Saturday 20 March 2021	Ridvan: Tuesday 20 April 2021 Martyrdom of the Báb: Friday 9 th July – (commemoration of this Holy Day should be celebrated at 13:00)	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: Wednesday 6 <u>Birthday of the Báb</u> and Thursday 7 October 2021 <u>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</u>
	<p>Naw-Ruz 2015 marked the adoption of a new solar calendar which will be used by all Baha'is. Since 21 March 2015 the calendar is no longer linked to the Gregorian calendar and the New Year will start on the day of the vernal equinox at Tehran time. The Birthday of the Twin Manifestations is such an important commemoration for Baha'is that it is likely that the parents of Baha'i children will ask for them to be excused from school. Each year may have different date from the previous year as it is a solar calendar. There are other Baha'I Holy Days that have not been included in this list.</p> <p>In the Baha'i tradition it is recommended that, where possible, work is suspended on these days.</p> <p>There are a few Baha'I Holy Days that should be celebrated at a specific time: the martyrdom of the Báb is one of them. This celebration takes place at 1.00pm on the 9th of July 2021. Our local representative adds: in previous years the children haven't taken time off school to join the community, however, this year with the lockdown they have joined most of our Holy Days and celebrations through zoom meetings and they really enjoy feeling part of the community. I believe that the children will not be taken out of school more than 3 days, as it is advised, perhaps only 1 or 2 days. Obviously it is up to each parent.</p> <p>Naw-Ruz (New Year) falls on Sunday 20 March in 2021.</p> <p>There are a few other Baha'i Holy Days that are not included since the community celebrates them in the evening.</p>			

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Buddhism			Vesakha Puja / Buddha Day Wednesday 26 May 2021	
<p>Such is the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity within Buddhism that different Buddhist denominations – for example Theravada, Mayahana - follow different religious calendars. The same festival may be celebrated on different dates and different Buddhist communities will celebrate different festivals.</p> <p>Within those traditions that follow a lunar calendar, New Year Festivals may be religiously significant. These include Lhosar (New Year within the Tibetan and Nepalese Buddhist communities) and Songkran for Thai Buddhists.</p> <p>Many Buddhist communities celebrate their religious festivals collectively on the nearest Sunday.</p>				

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Christianity		Christmas Day in the Russian orthodox tradition Thursday 7 January	Holy Friday in the Eastern orthodox church 30 April Easter Sunday 2 May	
<p>The following Christian holidays in the Western tradition fall at weekends or during the school holidays:</p> <p>Christmas Day: Friday 25 December 2020, Saturday 25 December 2021.</p> <p>Good Friday: 2 April 2021 Easter Sunday: 4 April 2021</p> <p>In the Orthodox tradition Easter is calculated using the Julian calendar. The beginning of the Lenten fast and the date of Easter will differ every year. In 2021 Orthodox Easter falls on 2 May. This is the May Bank Holiday weekend so parents who prefer to take their children to the morning liturgy in preference to the midnight liturgy held in the early hours of Easter Sunday morning will be able to do so without missing school.</p>				

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Hinduism	Hindu New Year: Monday 16 November Diwali: Wednesday 11 November – Monday 16 November	Tamil New Year Wednesday 14 April 2020		Hindu New Year: Friday 5 November Diwali: Monday 1 November – Saturday 6 November
<p>Such is the diversity within Hinduism that almost any working day might be a festival. However, few Hindu festivals require a day off school. In most temples, observances take place in the evenings in recognition of the need to attend work and school. Hindu communities in the UK also tend to celebrate most festivals collectively on the nearest Sunday, either before or after major festivals, for the same reason. Hindu New Year is an exception; on this day most Hindu families make it a point to offer their prayers with all members of the family at their respective temples.</p> <p>Most observances during the 5 days of Diwali take place in the evening and it is not necessary for pupils to be absent from school on each of those days.</p> <p>Our local Hindu faith representative advises: only the New Year may be taken as a holiday (Monday 16 November 2020, Friday 5 November 2021 and (for Tamils only) Wednesday 14 April 2020) Diwali can be celebrated in the evenings.</p>				

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Islam	Ashura* Saturday 29 August		Ramadan: Friday 13 April-Saturday 12 May Eid-ul-Fitr: Sunday 13 May Hajj: Sunday 18 - Thursday 22 July Eid-ul-Adha: Tuesday 20 July	Ashura* Thursday 19 August

There is no religious obligation requiring pupils to be absent from school during Ramadan. However, Muslim pupils, parents and staff will welcome the provision of a space for prayer and thoughtful arrangements at lunchtime.

The dates for Hajj, Eid-ul-Adha and Ashura are taken from an Islamic calendar and are tentative. Please also note that these dates are subject to moon sighting; therefore dates might be a day early or a day later.

In 2020, Hajj and Eid-ul-Adha fall in the summer holidays:

Hajj: Tuesday 28 July – Sunday 2 August 2020
Eid-ul-Adha** Friday 31 July – Tuesday 4 August 2020.

In 2021, they fall at the end of the summer term:

Hajj: Sunday 18 – Thursday 22 July
Eid-ul-Adha: Tuesday 20 July

* Shia Muslims might request absence on Ashura. They may also request time during lunch breaks to attend specific activities related to Ashura during other days.

* In addition to Ashura, Dawoodi Bohra Muslims may request absence during the 8 days of Muharram, which are the days immediately leading up to Ashura.

In 2020 and 2021 Ashura falls in the summer holidays on Saturday 29 August (2020) and Thursday 19 August (2021).

** A range of methods is used to determine when Eid begins. Muslim families will follow their masjid or community leaders. Therefore parents from different Muslim communities may request absence for Eid on two different dates and some may not be able to calculate the date in advance because they must sight the moon.

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Jainism	<p>Paryushan: Sunday 16- Sunday 23 August 2020</p> <p>Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness: Sunday 23 August 2020</p> <p>Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Monday 16 November 2020</p>	<p>Mahavir Jayanti Thursday 25 March 2021</p>		<p>Paryushan: Saturday 11 – Saturday 19 September 2021</p> <p>Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness: Friday 10 September 2021</p> <p>Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Friday 5 November 2021</p>
	<p>*Jains are likely to request absence for one day at Diwali or the following day which is New Year day. In 2020 New Year Day falls on a Monday (16 November). In 2021 it falls on a Friday (5 November).</p> <p>In 2021 Mahavir Janma Kalyanak (also known as Mahavira Jayanti) falls on at the end of the spring term on Thursday 25 March. Paryushan is the main festival for Jains and is celebrated on separate days for Svetamber and Digamber Jains.</p> <p>On other festival days, observance can be fulfilled in after school hours unless a family has pledged to partake in a special puja, aarti, mangal diva, or shanti kalash.</p> <p>Sometimes extended families plan a special pilgrimage. The Jain representative on SACRE urges that schools make decisions about authorising student absence for these rare pilgrimages that are consistent with decisions about authorisation of absence for Hajj.</p> <p>Jains of the Svetambara tradition may request absence on Samvatsari (Bhadarva vad choth). In 2020, this falls on at the end of the summer holidays on 23 August . In 2021 it falls on Friday 10 September. Digamber Jains will request leave after that for the Das Lakshan festival which depends on the lunar calendar.</p>			

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Judaism	<p>Rosh Hashanah: Saturday 19 – Sunday 20 September 2020</p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): <u>Monday 28 September 2020</u></p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation: Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 October; Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 October 2020</p> <p>Chanukah Friday 11- Friday 18 December 2020</p>	<p>Pesach (Passover) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation. <u>Sunday 28 and Monday 29 March</u> and Saturday 3- Sunday 4 April 2021</p>	<p>Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) <u>Monday 17 – Tuesday 18 May 2021.</u></p>	<p>Rosh Hashanah: Tuesday 7 – Wednesday 8 September 2021</p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): <u>Thursday 16 September 2021</u></p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation: Tuesday 21 and Wednesday 22 September; Monday 27 and Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 September 2021</p> <p>Chanukah Monday 29 November - Monday 6 December 2021</p>
	<p>Our local Jewish representatives advise that only Yom Kippur (28 September 2020, 16 September 2021), Pesach (28-29 March 2021) and Shavuot (17-18 May 2021) are festivals when observant Jews would need to be absent from school.</p> <p>Jewish law prohibits work on the Sabbath and certain festivals. The traditional Jewish interpretation of work includes any kind of creative activity, such as writing, operating equipment, such as computers and telephones, and traveling, other than on foot. Attending classes and taking examinations are classified as work. There is no provision in Jewish law for a dispensation to be given from these religious obligations. However, levels of observance vary between families.</p>			

	<p>The Board of Deputies of British Jews publishes a Jewish Holiday Calendar indicating those days on which obligations and restrictions similar to Shabbat apply. In some years of the Jewish calendar, this will amount to more than 3 days on which Jews are obliged to be absent from school, because work is forbidden.</p>
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	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021 1	Autumn Term 2021
Sikhism	Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Saturday 14 November 2020			Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Thursday 4 November 2021
<p>In 2021 dates corresponding to the Nanakshahi calendar are:</p> <p>Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh: Tuesday 5 January 2021. Vaisakhi: 13 April 2021 (Easter holidays).</p> <p>Other key Sikh festivals, although falling on school days, would not require pupils to be absent for a whole school day, because they can perform their religious observance before or after school:</p> <p>Guru Nanak Jayanti (Birthday of Guru Nanak): Wednesday 30 November 2020 and Friday 19 November 2021</p>				

	Autumn Term 2020	Spring Term 2021	Summer Term 2021	Autumn Term 2021
Zoroastrianism		<p>Jamsheedi NoRuz (Zoroastrian New Year): Sunday 21 March</p> <p>Khordad Sal (Birth anniversary of prophet Zarathushtra): Friday 26 March</p>		

	<p>Observance of Zoroastrian religious festivals should not require a day's absence from school.</p>
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The following dates fall in the school holidays in 2021:

Shahenshai Navroze (Parsee New Year) 16 August 2021.

Shahenshai Khordad Sal on 21 August 2021.

For a full calendar of Religious Festivals in 2020-21 please see the Shap Calendar which is available on subscription at www.shap.org. The Shap Working Party celebrated its 50th Jubilee in 2020. But now the Working Party no longer exists as such but the Calendar will continue, on line and by post, along with the Shap website and Shap Audio-Glossary, available on the Shap website and the Shap Archive in the Bodleian Library in the centre of Oxford.

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This publication will be reviewed and updated in September 2021. Further information regarding the Harrow SACRE and additional advice for schools can be found here:

<https://www.harrow.gov.uk/schools-learning/standing-advisory-council-religious-education?documentId=12704&categoryId=210281>