



**Authorising Pupil Absence for Religious  
Observance  
2023-24**

**SACRE GUIDANCE**



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



LONDON BOROUGH OF  
**HARROW**

## **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.

Parents<sup>1</sup> 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 member<sup>2</sup>. Schools must regard such absences as authorised as regulations specifically authorise these absences<sup>3</sup>.

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 circumstances<sup>4</sup>. 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

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<sup>1</sup> The term "parents" includes carers and guardians

<sup>2</sup> Under regulation 6 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

<sup>3</sup> See FN1

<sup>4</sup> Under regulation 7 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

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. 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 school<sup>5</sup>

## **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 circumstances<sup>6</sup> and in doing so consider whether the religious observance can be accommodated outside of school hours;

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<sup>5</sup> Under regulation 6 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

<sup>6</sup> Under regulation 7 Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

- 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.

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.<sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>7</sup> 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)

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 2023 – December 2024**

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.

The calendar below is based on the Shap calendar with input from local faith representatives in the Harrow community. Every effort is made to ensure it is as accurate as possible but it a guidance document only. Sometimes there are variations within different denominations or localities and we respectfully ask headteachers to be sensitive to these, should they occur.

	<b>Autumn Term 2023</b>	<b>Spring Term 2024</b>	<b>Summer Term 2024</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2024</b>
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	<b>Autumn Term 2023</b>	<b>Spring Term 2024</b>	<b>Summer Term 2024</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2024</b>
<b>Baha'i</b>	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: Monday 16 October <u><b>Birthday of the Báb</b></u> and Tuesday 17 October 2023 <u><b>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</b></u>	Naw-Ruz (New Year): Wednesday 20 March 2024	Ridvan: Sunday 21 April  Martyrdom of the Báb: Tuesday 9 July 2024 (commemoration of this Holy Day should be celebrated at 13:00)	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: Saturday 2 November 2024 <u><b>Birthday of the Báb</b></u> and Sunday 3 November 2024 <u><b>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</b></u>
	<p>Naw-Ruz 2015 marked the adoption of a new solar calendar which is 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 in 2023; in 2024 this festival falls on a weekend (2-3 November). Each year may have different date from the previous year as it is a solar calendar.</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 Tuesday 9 July 2024; children may require time off school on this occasion.</p> <p>Naw-Ruz (New Year) falls on Wednesday 20 March in 2024.</p> <p>There are a few other Baha'i Holy Days that are not included since the community celebrates them in the evening.</p>			

<b>Buddha Dhamma</b>			Vesakha Puja / Buddha Day Wednesday 22 May 2024	
<p>Such is the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity within the Buddha Dhamma that different denominations – for example Theravada, Mahayana - follow different religious calendars. The same festival may be celebrated on different dates and different 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 communities) and Songkran for Thai communities.</p> <p>Many Buddhist communities celebrate their religious festivals collectively on the nearest Sunday.</p>				

	<b>Autumn Term 2023</b>	<b>Spring Term 2024</b>	<b>Summer Term 2024</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2024</b>
<b>Christianity</b>		Christmas Day in the Russian orthodox tradition Sunday 7 January	Holy Friday in the Eastern orthodox church 3 May, Easter Sunday 5 May.	
<p>The following Christian holidays in the Western tradition fall at weekends or during the school holidays:</p> <p>Christmas Day: Monday 25 December 2023, Wednesday 25 December 2024.</p> <p>Good Friday: 29 March 2024 Easter Sunday: 31 March 2024</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 2024 Orthodox Easter falls on 5 May. Some parents prefer to take their children to the liturgy held on Monday morning (Bright Monday) in preference to the midnight liturgy held in the early hours of Easter Sunday morning: in 2024, Bright Monday falls on 6 May, which is a Bank Holiday.</p>				

	<b>Autumn Term 2023</b>	<b>Spring Term 2024</b>	<b>Summer Term 2024</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2024</b>
<b>Islam</b>		Ramadan: Monday 11	Hajj: Saturday 15	

		<p>March – Wednesday 10 April 2024 Ramadan ends: Thursday 11 April Eid-ul-Fitr:</p>	<p>June – Wednesday 19 June 2024  Eid-ul-Adha: Monday 17 June – Thursday 20 June 2024  Ashura*: Tuesday 16 Or Wednesday 17 July 2024</p>	
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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 and sometimes to variations in religious rulings between different sects; therefore dates might be a day early or a day later.

In 2024 Hajj, Eid-ul-Adha and Ashura fall in the summer term:

Hajj: Saturday 15 June – Wednesday 19 June: our local representative advises that many Muslims carry out prayers for the day of Arafah during the Hajj period, even if they are not performing Hajj. That day is proposed to be Sunday 16 June 2024 so should not affect school attendance unless the sighting of the moon is such that it ends up falling on the Monday.

Eid-ul-Adha: Monday 17 June – Thursday 20 June  
Ashura: Tuesday 16 or Wednesday 17 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. Also, our local representative draws attention to the fact that within the Shia sect of Islam, as well as Ashura, there is a commemoration on “Arbaeen” when it is estimated that there will be 22,019,416 people visiting Iraq this year. Such a large number indicates that it is a significant occasion so it would be beneficial to mark it, as we often see absentees around that time. In 2023 it fell on 4 September and will be on 25 August in 2024 so will not affect attendance. However, it is worth noting for when the dates fall back into term time.

\*\* 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.
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	Autumn Term 2023	Spring Term 2024	Summer Term 2024	Autumn Term 2024
<b>Jain Dharma</b>	<p>Paryushan: Monday 11 – Monday 18 September 2023</p> <p>Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness): Monday 18 September 2023</p> <p>Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Sunday 12 November 2023</p>	<p>Mahavir Jayanti Sunday 21 April 2024</p>		<p>Paryushan: Saturday 31 August – Saturday 7 September 2024</p> <p>Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness): Saturday 3 September 2024</p> <p>Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Friday 1 November 2024</p>
<p>*Jains are likely to request absence for one day at Diwali or the following day which is New Year day. In 2023 New Year Day falls on Sunday 12 November and in 2024 on Friday 1 November.</p> <p>In 2024 Mahavir Janma Kalyanak (also known as Mahavira Jayanti) falls on a Sunday 21 April). 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 2023, this falls on Monday 18 September and in 2024 on Saturday 3 September. Digamber Jains will request leave after that for the Das Lakshan festival which depends on the lunar calendar.</p>				

	Autumn Term 2023	Spring Term 2024	Summer Term 2024	Autumn Term 2024
<b>Judaism</b>	Rosh	<b>Pesach</b>		Rosh

	<p>Hashanah: Saturday 16– Sunday 17 September 2023</p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): <b><u>Monday 25 September 2023</u></b></p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation: Saturday 30 September and Sunday 1 October; Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 October 2023</p> <p>Chanukah Friday 8 –Friday 15 December 2023</p>	<p><b>(Passover) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation. <u>Tuesday 23 and Wednesday 24 April and Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 April 2024</u></b></p>	<p>Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) <b><u>Wednesday 12 – Thursday 13 June 2024</u></b></p>	<p>Hashanah: <b><u>Thursday 3 – Friday 4 October 2024</u></b></p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): <b><u>Saturday 12 October 2024</u></b></p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8 day festival, 4 days of obligation: <b><u>Thursday 17 and Friday 18 October; Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 October 2024</u></b></p> <p>Chanukah Tuesday 26 December – Thursday 2 January</p>
	<p>Days needing leave of absence are in bold and underlined. Our local Jewish representatives advise that as Rosh Hashanah and the four days of Sukkot fall on weekdays in 2024, children will need leave of absence. The days of obligation for Pesach (23-24 April and 9-30 April 2024) fall in term time and so do the first two days of obligation for Shavuot (12-13 June 2024) when observant Jews would also 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</p>			

calendar, this will amount to more than 3 days on which Jews are obliged to be absent from school, because work is forbidden.
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	<b>Autumn Term 2023</b>	<b>Spring Term 2024</b>	<b>Summer Term 2024</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2024</b>
<b>Sanatan (Sanatana) Dharma (Hindu Religion)</b>	<u>Hindu New Year</u> Tuesday 14 <sup>th</sup> November 2023  (Navratri): Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> – Monday 23 <sup>rd</sup> October 2023  Diwali festival Friday 10 <sup>th</sup> – Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> November 2023	Tamil New Year Saturday 13 <sup>th</sup> April 2024  Maha Shivratri Friday 8 <sup>th</sup> March 2024  <u>Shree</u> <u>Ramnavmi</u> <u>Wednesday</u> <u>17<sup>th</sup> April 2024</u>	Rath Yatra (Street procession) Sunday 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2024  Shree Krishna Janmastmi Monday 26 <sup>th</sup> August 2024	Hindu New Year Saturday 2 <sup>nd</sup> November 2024  (Navratri): Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> – Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> October  Diwali: Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> October – Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2024
<p>*In November 2024 there is a big pilgrimage from Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> to Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to commemorate 200 years of Shree Laxminarayandev; some members of the Swaminarayan faith may be planning to attend this pilgrimage in Gujarat, India. Some parents may request leave of absence during this time: Our local representatives have asked Head teachers to view such requests sympathetically just like last year.</p> <p>Such is the diversity within Sanatan Dharma (The Hindu religion) that almost any working day might be a festival, especially in India. 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 weekend, either before or after major festivals. However, some celebrations take place during the day like Shree Ramnavmi (Birth of Lord Ram). This festival is underlined in the table above as it takes place in the first week of the summer term. Hindu New Year is another exception; on this day almost all Hindu families make it a point to offer their prayers with all members of the family at their respective temple and other temples within the local community. This is a full day event. This festival is also underlined for 2023 where it takes place on a Tuesday. In 2024, however, it takes place on a Saturday and should not require a day off school.</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>				

	Diwali and Diwali poojan (prayers) can be celebrated from the late afternoon till late evening.
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	Autumn Term 2023	Spring Term 2024	Summer Term 2024	Autumn Term 2024
<b>Sikh Dharm</b>	Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Tuesday 24 November 2023			Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Friday 1 November 2024
	<p>In 2024 dates corresponding to the Nanakshahi calendar are:</p> <p>Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh: Wednesday 17 January 2024. Vaisakhi: Saturday 13 April 2024.</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 8 November 2023 and Friday 15 November 2024.</p>			

	Autumn Term 2023	Spring Term 2024	Summer Term 2024	Autumn Term 2024
<b>Zoroastrianism</b>		<p>Jamsheedi NoRuz (Zoroastrian New Year): Wednesday 20 March 2024 [IZ]</p> <p>Khordad Sal (Birth anniversary of prophet Zarathushtra): Monday 25 March 2024 [IZ]</p>	<p>Navrose: Tuesday 16 July [K]</p> <p>Navroze: Thursday 15 August [S]</p> <p>Kordad Sal: Tuesday 20 August [S]</p>	

<p>*IZ, K and S denote the three Zoroastrian calendars: Iranian Zoroastrianism, Kadmi and Shahenshai.</p> <p>Observance of Zoroastrian religious festivals should not require a day's absence from school.</p> <p>The following dates fall in the school holidays in 2024:</p> <p>Shahenshai Navroze (Parsee New Year) 15 August 2024.</p> <p>Shahenshai Khordad Sal on 20 August 2024.</p>
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For a full calendar of Religious Festivals in 2023-24 please see the Shap Calendar which is available on subscription at [www.shap.org](http://www.shap.org).

This publication will be reviewed and updated in September 2024. Further information regarding the Harrow SACRE and additional advice for schools can be found here:

[Please update link](#)