



Authorising Pupil Absence for Religious Observance

2024-2025

SACRE GUIDANCE



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. Harrow SACRE is aware that

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

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.

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.

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

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

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 2024 – December 2025

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 is 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.

We have taken this opportunity to introduce the new terminology which you may like to use in your schools:

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)

Baha'i

Buddha Dharma (the Buddhist religion)

Christianity

Humanism (the Humanist worldview)

Islam (the Muslim religion)

Jain Dharma (the Jain religion)

Judaism (the Jewish religion)

Sanatana Dharma (the Hindu religion)

Sikh Dharm (the Sikh religion) and

Zoroastrianism (the Zoroastrian religion)

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Baha'i	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: <u>Birthday of the Báb</u> and Saturday 2 November 2024 and <u>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</u> Sunday 3 November 2024	Naw-Ruz (New Year): Thursday 20 March 2025	Ridvan: Tuesday 20 - Wednesday 21 May 2025 Martyrdom of the Báb: Wednesday 9 July 2025 (commemoration of this Holy Day should be celebrated at 13:00)	Birthday of the Twin Manifestations: <u>Birthday of the Báb</u> Wednesday 22 October 2025 and <u>Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh</u> Thursday 23 October 2025

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 2024 this festival falls on a weekend (2-3 November) but in 2025 it is mid-week on Wednesday 22 -Thursday 23 October. Each year may have a different date from the previous year as it is a solar calendar.

In the Baha'i tradition it is recommended that, where possible, work is suspended on these days.

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 Wednesday 9 July 2025; children may require time off school on this occasion.

Naw-Ruz (New Year) falls on Thursday 20 March in 2025.

There are a few other Baha'i Holy Days that are not included since the community celebrates them in the evening.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Buddha Dhamma			Vesakha Puja / Buddha Day Monday 12 May 2025	

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.

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.

Many Buddhist communities celebrate their religious festivals collectively on the nearest Sunday.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Christianity		Christmas Day in the Russian orthodox tradition Tuesday 7 January	Holy Friday in the Eastern orthodox church 18 April, Easter Sunday 20 April.	

The following Christian holidays in the Western tradition fall at weekends or during the school holidays:

Christmas Day: Wednesday 25 December 2024, Thursday 25 December 2025.

Good Friday: 18 April 2025

Easter Sunday: 20 April 2025

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 2025 Orthodox Easter falls on the same date as Western Easter. 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 2025, Bright Monday falls on 21 April, which is a Bank Holiday.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Islam		Ramadan* starts: Saturday 1 March - Sunday 30 March 2025 Eid-ul-Fitr***: Sunday 30 March or Monday 31 March 2025	Hajj**: Thursday 5 June – Monday 9 June 2025 Arafat Day**: Thursday 5 June or Friday 6 June 2025	

			Eid-ul-Adha***: Friday 6 June or Saturday 7 June 2025 Ashura****: Saturday evening 5 July/Sunday 6 July 2025	
--	--	--	---	--

All Islamic dates given 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 earlier or a day later.

*Ramadan: 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. Many Muslim families attend the mosque in the evening to pray and break their fast and therefore may have a change to their home routine during this time.

**Hajj and Arafat Day: there is no religious obligation requiring pupils to be absent from school during the Hajj period unless they are travelling to Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj Pilgrimage at this time.

Hajj is most likely to take place from Thursday 5 June – Monday 9 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 and may therefore request this as a religious observance. That day is proposed to be Thursday 5 June or Friday 6 June 2025.

*** Eid ul Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha: families may request time off for the observance of Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha celebrations.

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.

****Ashura: Shia Muslims may request time off for the observance of Ashura and the day preceding Ashura.

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

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Jain Dharma	Paryushan: Saturday 31 August – Saturday 7 September 2024 Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness): Saturday 3 September 2024	Mahavir Jayanti Thursday 10 April 2024		Paryushan: Thursday 21 August – Thursday 28 August 2025 Samvatsari (Day of Forgiveness): Sunday 24 August 2025

	Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Friday 1 November 2024			Mahavir Nirvan (Diwali): Tuesday 21 October
--	---	--	--	---

*Jains are likely to request absence for one day at Diwali or the following day which is New Year day. In 2024 New Year Day falls on Friday 1 November and in 2025 on Thursday 21 October.

In 2025 Mahavir Janma Kalyanak (also known as Mahavira Jayanti) falls on Thursday 10 April, which is during the school holidays. Paryushan is the main festival for Jains and is celebrated on separate days for Svetamber and Digamber Jains.

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.

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.

Jains of the Svetambara tradition may request absence on Samvatsari (Bhadarva vad choth). In 2024, this falls on Saturday 3 September and in 2024 on a Saturday (3 September) and in 2025 in the school holidays (24 August).

Digamber Jains will request leave after that for the Das Lakshan festival which depends on the lunar calendar.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Judaism	<p>Rosh Hashanah: <u>Thursday 3 – Friday 4 October 2024</u></p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): Saturday 12 October 2024</p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8-day festival, 4 days of obligation: <u>Thursday 17 and Friday 18 October; Thursday 24 and Friday 25 October 2024</u></p> <p>Chanukah Thursday 26 December –</p>	<p>Pesach (Passover) 8-day festival, 4 days of obligation. Sunday 13 and Monday 14 April and Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 April 2025</p>	<p>Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) Monday 2 – <u>Tuesday 3 June 2025</u></p>	<p>Rosh Hashanah: <u>Wednesday 24 - Thursday 25 September 2025</u></p> <p>Yom Kippur (day of Atonement): <u>Thursday 2 October 2025</u></p> <p>Sukkot (Tabernacles) 8-day festival, 4 days of obligation: <u>Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 October; Tuesday 14 and Wednesday 15 October 2024</u></p> <p>Chanukah Monday 15 - Monday 22 December</p>

	Thursday 2 January			
--	-----------------------	--	--	--

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 and 2025, children will need leave of absence. The days of obligation for Pesach (12-13 and 19-20 April in 2025) fall in the school holidays but the first two days of obligation for Shavuot (Monday 2 and Tuesday 3 June 2025) fall on weekdays in termtime when observant Jews would need to be absent from school.

Jewish festivals start the night before and end at sunset so Chanuka starts on the evening of 25 December in 2024 and 14 December in 2025 and Yom Kippur starts at sunset on 11 October 2024 in 2024 and Wednesday 1 October in 2025 and ends at sunset on October 12 2024 and 2 October 2025.

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.

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.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Sanatana Dharma (Hindu Religion)	(Navratri): Thursday 3 – Saturday 12 October 2024 New Year Saturday 2 November 2024 Diwali festival Monday 28 October – Sunday 3 November 2024	Tamil New Year Monday 14 April 2025 Maha Shivratri Wednesday 26 February 2025 Shree Ramnavmi / Shree Swaminarayan Jayanti Sunday 6 April 2025 Shree Hanuman Jayanti Saturday 12 April 2025	*Rath Yatra (Street procession) Friday 27 June 2025 Shree Krishna Janmastmi Friday 15-Saturday 16 August 2025 Shree Ganesh Choth Wednesday 27 August 2025	(Navratri): Monday 22 September – Thursday 2 October <u>New Year</u> <u>Wednesday 22</u> <u>October 2025</u> Diwali: Friday 18 October – Thursday 23 October 2025

* The actual street festival would be organized over the weekend i.e. Sunday 29th June 2025

*In November 2024 there is a big pilgrimage from Thursday 7th to Friday 15th 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.

Such is the diversity within Sanatana Dharma (the Hindu religion) that almost any working day might be a festival, especially in India. However, few of these 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. Sanatana Dharma 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). In 2025 this takes place during the school holidays but is worth noting as it can occur in term time in other years. The New Year is another exception; on this day almost all Sanatana Dharma 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 2025 where it takes place on a Wednesday. In 2024, however, it takes place on a Saturday and should not require a day off school.

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.

Diwali and Diwali poojan (prayers) can be celebrated from the late afternoon till late evening.

Religion	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Sikh Dharm	Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Friday 1 November 2024			Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): Tuesday 21 October 2025

In 2025 dates corresponding to the Nanakshahi calendar are:

Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh: Monday 6 January 2025.

Vaisakhi: Monday 14 April 2025.

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:

Guru Nanak Jayanti (Birthday of Guru Nanak): Friday 15 November 2024 and Wednesday 5 November 2025.

	Autumn Term 2024	Spring Term 2025	Summer Term 2025	Autumn Term 2025
Zoroastrianism		Jamsheedi NoRuz (Zoroastrian New Year): Friday 21 March 2025 [IZ] Khordad Sal (Birth anniversary of prophet Zarathushtra): Wednesday 26 March 2025 [IZ]	Navroze: Wednesday 16 July 2025[K] Navroze: Friday 15 August 2025 [S] Kordad Sal: Wednesday 20 August 2025 [S]	

*IZ, K and S denote the three Zoroastrian calendars: Iranian Zoroastrianism, Kadmi and Shahenshai.

Observance of Zoroastrian religious festivals should not require a day's absence from school.

For a full calendar of Religious Festivals in 2024-25 please see the Shap Calendar which is available on subscription at [The Shap Calendar Group](#)

This publication will be reviewed and updated in September 2025. Further information regarding the Harrow SACRE and additional advice for schools can be found here:

[Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education – London Borough of Harrow](#)