

ADAPTING PHYSICAL EDUCATION DURING RAMADAN

In the spring 2024 edition of *Physical Education Matters*, we shared highlights from *Ramadan Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings: Physical Education and Physical Activity*, the guide jointly published by Birmingham City University and the Association for Physical Education (afPE). Following this, Dr Irfan Khawaja, lead author of the guide, visited a couple of schools in the West Midlands to discover what they thought of the guide and how they had used it. The schools are Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School, Wednesbury, and Hall Green School, Birmingham. This article summarises their feedback.

Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School

Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School serves students aged 11-18 and offers a distinctive Catholic and inclusive education based on traditional Christian values and high expectations. The school's motto 'Tien Ta Foy' or 'Steadfast Faith' underpins a commitment to help our students grow in self-esteem and realise their full potential. Around 15 per cent of our students are Catholic, and we have a higher-than-national-average percentage of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, including those who are Muslim. We also have a higher-than-national-average percentage of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), from disadvantaged backgrounds and with English as an additional language.

How has the guidance affected PE and any other subjects in your school?

The guidance provided the PE department with a useful insight into how we can foster a more inclusive environment for Muslim students and staff who are engaging in physical education (PE) during Ramadan. It has deepened our understanding of Ramadan and how we can support students when it comes to fasting.

What are the benefits of having something like this in place?

Having this guidance means that, as a department, we know the appropriate measures to take when supporting the fasting student. It is especially beneficial when there are concerns about a student's wellbeing and if a student may need to break their fast intentionally; for example, where possible, we would now make sure that we consult parents/guardians to obtain their support. Also, as a PE department, we make sure that students feel comfortable to engage in PE by adopting a sympathetic approach in our delivery. We ensure students are not treated differently by having open conversations with them before the lesson so that the students can, themselves, advise us on what type of support they may find helpful.

Having specific support for each of the different activities has been beneficial as this has allowed us to go into lessons more prepared on how to adapt them to best support the fasting students. Guidance around invasion games and gymnastics has been particularly useful, especially about reducing the intensity of activities. For those students who are finding it difficult during their fast, we have given them a less strenuous role of being a coach or performance analyst. This has ensured that they remain an active member of the PE lesson, keeping our lessons inclusive.

How easy is it to read, follow and comprehend information in the guidance?

The way the guidance breaks down the information is effective and provides excellent detail on how to adapt lessons to support the fasting student and the fasting PE teacher.



Credit: Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School

RAMADAN

Review – Have you reviewed your curriculum plan? Consider when Ramadan falls in the academic year.

Accommodate – How have you accommodated your fasting students?

Modify your activities to make everyone feel included and comfortable

Aware – Are you aware of who is fasting? Are you aware of their daily routines?

Develop your practice. Have you updated your teaching practice to accommodate students needs?

Ask – Check in with your fasting students. How are they feeling today?

Network – inter-school collaboration. Share what Ramadan is, and how it should be considered a reason to adapt the PE curriculum plan.

To what extent does your school feel more inclusive as activities are adapted throughout Ramadan?

With the adaptation of activities, participation levels at Stuart Bathurst have been high. Students look forward to their PE lessons knowing that they are still involved in the lesson even when they are fasting. They have good relationships with their teachers and know that they can talk about their concerns when it comes to PE. They know that we will provide appropriate support for them so that they can still engage in PE.

Which part of the guidance do you feel is most important to you and your school?

The part of the guidance that has been most important to our school is the acronym RAMADAN (above).

Using this as a prompt, we can implement changes to our PE lessons by considering how we may need to adapt the curriculum, making sure we accommodate those students that are fasting, and modifying the activities so that everyone feels included and comfortable. As teachers we need to be aware of who is fasting, develop our teaching practice to meet the needs of our students, make sure that we ask the fasting students how they are feeling, and develop networks with other schools to share what we do and see how other schools adapt their PE curriculum.

"My teachers help make me feel comfortable in PE lessons by checking in with me to see how I'm doing. I know I can approach my teacher if I'm finding it difficult with my fast. They help support me by giving me coaching roles or by reducing the level of activity."

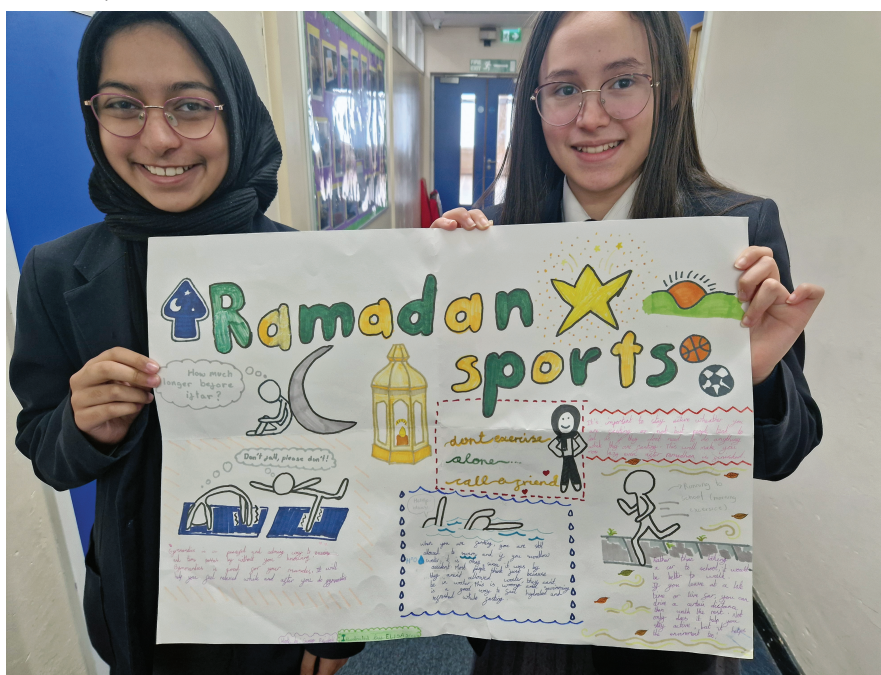
(Stuart Bathurst student)

Hall Green School

Hall Green School is an over-subscribed and academically successful 11-16 converter academy. We are a highly diverse community, ethnically and, as a fully accessible mainstream school, with students with physical disabilities from across the city. We have wonderful students who fully contribute to the school's caring, nurturing and inclusive culture. Over 83 per cent of our students, and many staff, are Muslim, so the Ramadan guidance was highly relevant to our school.

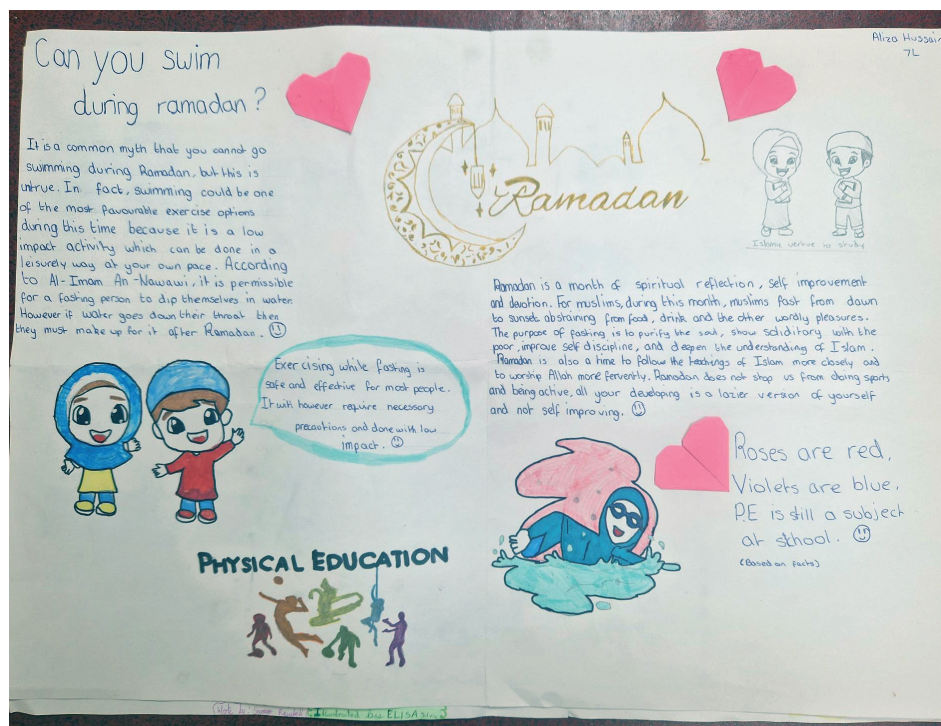
The PE department has always adopted an adaptive policy during Ramadan whereby we reduce intensity and offer more breaks to ensure our students can continue to participate safely in physical activity whilst fasting. We were thrilled when the guidance was published to see that so much of our practice was highlighted in it.

As Head of PE, I attended the conference to launch the guidance in January 2024, and was both gratified and inspired by the content. The blend of religious context and health



Credit: Hall Green School

and safety in PE provides clear guidelines that can be shared with our stakeholders – students, parents and staff – regarding the delivery of PE and physical activity during Ramadan. Following the conference, I wrote a bespoke policy for the PE department to apply during Ramadan, using information from the guidance and input from Muslim staff. This, plus the guidance document, was shared with parents and staff. Feedback from staff was very positive and many commented on how thoughtful the guidance was. One member of staff said she wished her son's school would do something like this as she felt very reassured by it. Feedback from trustees and parents/carers was equally effusive; they are grateful for the thoughtful and sensitive approach taken to meet Muslim students' needs.



Credit: Hall Green School

Shortly before Ramadan began, Sky News came into our school to film and interview Irfan and some of our students about the guidance. This was broadcast on Sunday, 10th March 2024. The students really enjoyed the filming process and several of them spoke on camera.

"The teachers take it easy on us; they lower the intensity so we don't get too tired."
(Khalid, Year 10 student)

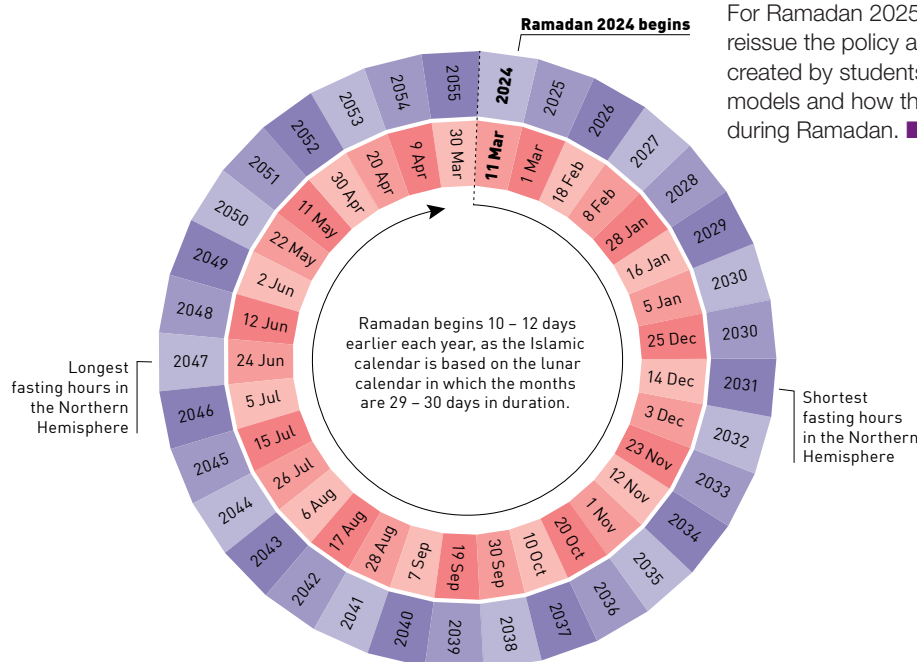
"We still do our PE as normal but we are allowed to take a few breaks here and there."
(Abdullah, Year 10 student)

School was in session for the first two weeks of Ramadan and all students continued to participate in PE, following the new

policy. Fasting students were reassured and appreciative of the opportunity to engage in conversations about Ramadan and its wider impact on them during school. We had a dance club running during Ramadan and some students chose not to participate but still wanted to engage with PE, so they spent their lunchtimes creating fantastic posters for us to display, echoing the guidance.

The guidance also contains lots of information that will be useful to us in the years to come. One particular section is the 33-year Ramadan cycle (below). This will help us to plan the timetable so that we avoid putting on dance or the more strenuous parts of our curriculum during Ramadan. Other departments can also refer to it when planning trips and visits or activities in school.

For Ramadan 2025 we will begin preparations early and reissue the policy and guidance. We also hope to have displays created by students that feature famous Muslim sporting role models and how they cope with the demands of their sport during Ramadan. ■



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