

Teachers 'should tell pupils to stop fasting during Ramadan'

Some sense from a teaching union. From the [Independent](#)

Teachers should tell Muslim schoolchildren to break Ramadan fast if they fear health issues will hurt exam results, new guidance has suggested.

The intervention by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) representing head teachers and college principals comes ahead of a Ramadan month of dawn-to-sunset fasting that will clash with summer GCSE and A-Level exams in a way that has not occurred in the UK since the 1980s.

For UK Muslims, Ramadan 2016, due to last from 6-8 June to 7 July, will coincide with the summer solstice – the longest day of the year – and have the longest average fasting hours in the 33-year, lunar-based cycle that determines when the holy month occurs.

ASCL, which represents more than 18,000 head teachers and college leaders, said: "If the school notices signs of dehydration or exhaustion then the child should be asked if they are fasting and advised to terminate the fast immediately by drinking some water. . . Children and their parents or carers should be informed that extra devotions in Ramadan are voluntary; whereas for a child or young person to perform well in exams, given their consequences, is obligatory."

Despite having included a wide number of Muslim scholars, some influential members of the Muslim community disagreed with parts of the document.

'It's not up to schools to offer advice'

Dr Sheik Howjat Ramzy, director of Iqra Institute in Oxford and one of the consultees, said: "It's not up to the schools to decide the advice they give around Ramadan and I find some of it very aggressive because you cannot break the child's fast except in special situations. If you offer aggressive advice, then the parents will be very aggressive towards you.

However, he said some of the advice was reasonable. He added: "If anyone is very dehydrated, then have a glass of water and you will be forgiven. Also it isn't necessary for children to stay up late at all. It's a tradition, not compulsory."

I don't think there should have been any alteration made to the exam timetable whatsoever. A suggestion in my youth that exams be rescheduled to accommodate the hay fever season was dismissed immediately. The requirement in English Catholic schools for a short morning fast (breakfast only, not fluids) before Mass was also removed during the 1960s on the advice of medical authorities. I don't see this as any different. Other than hay fever sufferers and Roman Catholics tend not to be violent when they can't get their own way.