



## **Faith Matters in Harrow**

**Guidance for school leaders: policy for physical education  
which is inclusive of families from religious backgrounds**

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**Harrow  
SACRE**



## Introduction

As the title of this SACRE Guidance suggests, Harrow's schools cherish a tradition of fostering an inclusive ethos which values and addresses the needs of the communities they serve. In seeking to be responsive to cultural and religious pluralism school leaders can also promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development: recognising how commitment to a religious tradition is shown in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Harrow has a reputation for children who are well-behaved and courteous towards others, who have extremely positive attitudes to learning and who make strong contributions to school life. Therefore when a child adheres to particular rules, governing their own behaviour and conduct, that distinguish her/him from others in the class, this might be celebrated as evidence of self-discipline and self-awareness:

- when parents from the Swaminarayan tradition, for example, explain that the Tulasi must never be removed, even for PE, this is because the sacred beads were placed around the neck at birth and symbolise that the child is tied in an eternal and intimate bond with God;
- in many religious traditions, the personal values of modesty and dignity which govern behaviour and conduct are often reflected physically in the way girls and boys dress and families from a secular background may similarly avoid dressing in a way which exploits or exposes the body unnecessarily;
- fasting is regarded as a duty for males and females, once they have reached puberty, in many of the world's religions. At these times, the spiritual and moral dimension is considered to be of greater importance than the physical restrictions. Far from being a time when individuals should avoid aspects of daily life, it is a time for greater God-consciousness and a time for self-improvement: prayerfulness, respect for others, repentance and forgiveness, self-restraint, empathy and generosity towards the poor.

Representatives of all the faith groups on SACRE were consulted in the preparation of this guidance and they agreed the following fundamental principles:

- physical education is a statutory subject of the national curriculum and SACRE endorses headteachers' commitment to ensuring this entitlement for all pupils;
- knowledge and learning, and the pursuit of these through education, are highly valued by all the faith traditions represented on SACRE and therefore full participation in the curriculum, by all pupils, is to be encouraged;
- school leaders have a duty in law to protect the health and safety of pupils in school. They are expected to implement policies and practices which reduce risks of injury. They are recommended to publish information on school policy regarding clothing, footwear and personal effects. Pupils should be regularly and consistently reminded of these requirements, compliance should be checked before the PE activity begins and adults should be good role models of health and safety expectations;
- it is an obligation upon individuals within faith communities to maintain their spiritual, mental and physical health, as a way of taking good care of that which is a sacred or precious gift. Families are encouraged to engage with schools in their work to promote healthy lifestyles and physical fitness and wellbeing;
- the ability to swim and therefore be safe in the water can save a life and therefore the national curriculum requirement to swim 25m unaided is recognised as important and a valuable skill for all;
- whether from religious or secular backgrounds, all parents and carers want to protect the modesty and dignity of their children. Requirements may differ according to religious and cultural traditions. Parents are encouraged to work together with school leaders to find acceptable ways to remove barriers so that pupils of all faiths and beliefs can participate fully in physical education.

Harrow SACRE first published its Faith Matters guidance for schools in 2007 and has published revised editions in 2009 and 2010. PE and sport audits in 20 Harrow primary schools, make clear that headteachers and PE leaders would welcome updated guidance which takes account of the religious observance of children and their families when planning and publishing the school's curriculum for PE and the policy on safe 'dress' for PE.

This SACRE document has the status of guidance only. It remains the responsibility of the Governing Body to agree the school's curriculum and the school's policy on uniform and rules relating to appearance and on health and safety and risk assessment. This guidance provides information about the ways in which school leaders may be able to remove barriers - in relation to changing for PE, PE kit / dress for PE - which might otherwise prevent some children of faith backgrounds from participating fully in the PE curriculum.

There is vast diversity of cultural and religious traditions within faith communities and the suggestions provided by Harrow SACRE members may not always address the requests of individuals or families. SACRE faith representatives are happy to be consulted and to provide advice to school leaders and to families. SACRE recommends that school leaders identify, from within the parent group or Governing Body, PE ambassadors or PE champions, from within those community groups which may perceive barriers to participation. These representatives may be valuable in championing the importance of physical fitness and in negotiating solutions.

### **Context**

Every school should offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development. For pupils of compulsory school age in community schools, the National Curriculum sets out a statutory entitlement to programmes of study for core and other foundation subjects at each key stage.

*"A high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities. It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness. Opportunities to compete in sport and other activities build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect."*<sup>1</sup>

The inspection framework evaluates the extent to which schools are successfully promoting children's personal development, behaviour and welfare, including their knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy through exercise and healthy eating. This emphasis upon preparing children to choose a healthy lifestyle and to build lifelong habits of physical activity also underpins the ring-fenced funding which is allocated to primary schools for PE and sport.

Concurrent with their duties to provide a curriculum which promotes pupils' health and wellbeing, schools also have a duty, under the Equality Act 2010, to have "due regard" to equality considerations. This means that schools should consider equality implications before and at the time that they develop policy and take strategic decisions. Long standing guidance (with regard to obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998) makes it clear that schools should be sensitive to the needs of different cultures, races and religions and act reasonably in accommodating these needs, without compromising important school policies, such as school safety or discipline. It is good practice for schools to keep a written record to show that they have actively considered their equality duties and reference to SACRE's guidance in the school's PE policy would be evidence of this.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Curriculum in England: physical education programmes of study, published September 2013*

## The PE curriculum

**In the Early Years Foundation Stage**, children should have opportunities to be active and interactive and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement:

- developing co-ordination and control in both fine and gross motor activities eg balancing, hopping, skipping and jumping, climbing, swinging
- manipulating a range of tools and equipment appropriately and confidently eg bouncing and kicking a ball, riding a bicycle in a straight line, building a tower, digging a hole, making marks with a paintbrush or pencil
- developing an awareness of space and negotiating small and large spaces safely eg dodging around other children without bumping into them, changing direction, running the length of the playground

At **Key Stage 1**, pupils should be involved in:

- running, jumping, throwing and catching
- developing balance, agility and co-ordination
- participation in team games, developing simple tactics for attacking and defending
- performing dances using simple movement patterns

At **Key Stage 2**, pupils should be involved in:

- running, jumping, throwing and catching
- playing competitive games [eg badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, netball, rounders and tennis]
- developing flexibility, strength, technique, control and balance [eg through athletics and gymnastics]
- performing dances using a range of movement patterns
- taking part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team
- comparing their performances with previous ones and demonstrating improvement to achieve their personal best

All schools must provide swimming instruction either in KS 1 or KS 2. Pupils should be taught to swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25m.

At KS 3, pupils should build on and embed the physical development and skills they have learned in the primary phase, become more competent, confident and expert in their techniques, and apply them across different sports and physical activities. ....They should develop the confidence and interest to get involved in exercise, sports and activities out of school and in later life, and understand and apply the long-term health benefits of physical activity.

Information about the PE curriculum for each year group should be published on the school website. It is important that parents are well-informed about national curriculum requirements but also about school curriculum planning and pedagogy: what is taught and the sort of activities that pupils will engage in.

PE leaders may encounter some of the following barriers to full participation in PE by girls and boys

### Participation in all elements of the PE curriculum

	What might be the barriers preventing pupils of faith backgrounds from participating in PE?	What are the solutions?
<b>Families within the Hindu, Jewish and Muslim communities</b>	Physical contact between girls and boys, for example in supporting balance in gymnastics or in contact sports such as basketball or football.	Where activities might involve physical contact, arranging groupings within lessons by gender
<b>Ultra Orthodox Jewish</b>	From KS 2 onwards, mixed gender PE lessons	If this becomes a barrier and might impact upon a large proportion of girls, for example in Y5 and 6, arrange PE jointly with a parallel class so that boys and girls can be taught separately
<b>Families within the Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities,</b>	<p><b>Swimming</b></p> <p>Religious concepts of modesty and decency may prohibit exposure to the nakedness of others, even of the same gender, and pupils will therefore need privacy when they change. They may need to cover their bodies fully, even in single gender swimming lessons.</p> <p>Barriers which may prevent pupils from participating in swimming, particularly from Y5 &amp; 6 onwards, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mixed gender swimming lessons</li> <li>• communal changing arrangements</li> <li>• gender of accompanying teacher and pool attendants/safety guards</li> <li>• changing rooms &amp; showering areas adjacent to/used by members of the public*</li> <li>• mixed gender public swimming at the same time as school swimming lessons*</li> <li>• clothing expectations</li> </ul> <p>* NB Some of these barriers are consonant with schools' safeguarding requirements.</p>	<p>It is recommended that schools and the managers of swimming pools used by schools, work collaboratively to find solutions eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single gender swimming lessons</li> <li>• same gender adults accompany, supervise and teach</li> <li>• no public access to the pool, viewing area or changing areas during school swimming lessons</li> <li>• individual changing and shower cubicles</li> <li>• permitting swimwear that complies with religious requirements for modesty eg full coverage of legs and arms</li> <li>• permitting children to delay showering until they reach home</li> </ul> <p>NB: Some schools have arranged swimming in Y3 and Y4 and this seems to remove barriers that prevented Y5 and Y6 girls from swimming. This is a good example of schools finding solutions in order to deliver curriculum entitlement inclusively</p>
<b>Muslim families, ultra-Orthodox Jewish families</b>	<p><b>Dance</b></p> <p>Parents may find dance acceptable in EYFS, KS 1 and lower KS 2, when it is expressive of simple emotions and reflective of the natural world.</p> <p>However in upper KS 2 and after puberty, families may consider that dance activities are not consistent with religious requirements for modesty. Particular barriers are posed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dance lessons in mixed gender classes</li> <li>• performances in front of a mixed</li> </ul>	<p>To ensure that dance is acceptable in KS 2, solutions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gender groupings</li> <li>• clarity about the educational objectives of dance lessons</li> <li>• using dance movements which are traditional in a variety of cultures rather than contemporary</li> <li>• avoiding performances in front of mixed audiences</li> </ul> <p>Many Muslim girls will dance at Eid and</p>

	<p>audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• popular dance styles and popular music in which movements of the body may be interpreted as sexually expressive or seductive in nature</li></ul> <p>NB during the three weeks that culminate in the public fast day of Tisha B'Av, many Orthodox Jews observe a period of mourning to mark the destruction of the Temple and other calamities that have befallen their people. During this time they are prohibited from listening to music.</p>	<p>building on this cultural attitude to dance can help schools to find solutions.</p>
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## Changing for PE and suitable clothing for PE lessons

	<b>What might be the barriers preventing pupils of faith backgrounds from participating in PE?</b>	<b>What are the solutions?</b>
<b>Families within the Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities</b>	<p>For reasons of modesty and decency, families may want girls and boys, when nearing or at puberty, to change separately. Ultra Orthodox Jewish families may expect children of any age to change privately and individually.</p>	<p>In Y5 and Y6, at least and possibly throughout KS 2, arrangements for single gender changing might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using mobile screens to divide the class into separate areas</li> <li>• girls and boys changing separately eg one group in the corridor or toilets</li> <li>• supervision by same gender adult</li> </ul> <p>NB School safeguarding and health and safety policies will require all groups of pupils to be supervised when they change for PE</p>
<b>Families within the Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities</b>	<p>For reasons of modesty and decency, families may request the covering of legs and arms.</p> <p>NB for safety in gymnastics, Jewish families do permit the removal of the kippah and the tzitzit.</p>	<p>A safe and modest code of dress for PE (including gymnastics) might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• close fitting track suit bottoms</li> <li>• close fitting long sleeved T shirt, perhaps left un-tucked so that it covers bottom and thighs</li> </ul>
<b>Muslim families</b>	<p>The requirement for girls' heads to be covered</p>	<p>A loose headcovering is not safe in gymnastics. But girls should tie up their hair and wear a tight headcovering such as female Muslim athletes wear.</p> <p>In the swimming pool a simple swimming hat will cover the hair.</p>
<b>Hindu and Sikh families</b>	<p><b>Sacred symbols and religious artefacts</b> Some Hindu (particularly those from the Swaminarayan tradition and Hare Krishna/ISKCON movement) children, will wear a sacred thread of beads around their necks which should not be removed. This symbolises the eternal bond between an individual and God and is a constant reminder to Hindus of their divine nature.</p> <p>For certain festivals a sacred thread of beads may have been given to wear on the wrist.</p> <p>At the festival of Raksha Bandhan, girls will give their brothers a rakhi which is tied around the wrist with soft string or thread and which may have a decorative, foil centre.</p>	<p>Earlier advice has been that if the beads are threaded on a plastic string, which are only wound around the neck once, the thread will break if pulled. However, SACRE has been advised that the plastic threads do not easily break and therefore present a risk to health and safety (risk of strangulation). The proposed solution is that parents are advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pupils may wear the close-fitting beads under a polo shirt which is then buttoned to the neck, completely obscuring the beads (the solution recommended by SACRE's ISKCON representative);</li> <li>• or (where Hindu families are comfortable with this solution) before school, on PE days, parents or older children themselves should take the thread of beads from the neck and wear it instead on their wrist where it can be safely covered by a sweatband</li> <li>• for swimming, wear the sacred thread</li> </ul>

	<p>Sikh children may wear a steel kara on the right wrist. The kara reminds Sikhs to think twice before doing something which may bring shame or disgrace. It is a familiar sign of Sikh identity and of the strength of the khalsa (Sikh community)</p> <p>Amrit-dhari (initiated) Sikhs are required to wear the kirpan: an emblem of courage and of the duty to fight against oppression, defend truth and prevent injustice. Few pupils in Harrow schools will be amrit-dhari.</p> <p>Initiated Sikhs will not cut their hair and they and other Sikhs will keep their hair clean and tidy covered by a turban.</p>	<p>around the wrist and covered by a sweat band or wear a swim suit that fits around the neck, so that the thread is safely covered.</p> <p>Rakhis should be covered by a sweat band. Rakhis with a foil centre should not be worn to school because these could cause harm.</p> <p>Sikh families may agree that the kara may be removed for PE and stored in a special box until the lesson is over. Otherwise, it should be moved further up the arm and covered by a sweatband - this will be more effective and less of a risk if the kara is close fitting and not large and loose on the wrist.</p> <p>Teachers could request that for PE the kirpan is removed, as it would be at airport security.</p> <p>Young men often replace their turbans for sporting activities with a rumal or patka, which young boys would wear until they can tie a turban.</p>
<p><b>Not a religious requirement</b></p>	<p><b>Earrings</b></p>	<p>Newly pierced ears can take up to 6 weeks to heal and before earrings can be removed. School leaders can recommend that ears should be pierced at the beginning of the school summer holidays so that there is sufficient time for them to have healed before the start of the autumn term.</p> <p>It is not considered safe, in any lesson where there may be physical contact, to cover earrings with tape. Therefore children will not be able to participate in PE lessons until earrings can be safely removed. School leaders can request that on PE days, children do not come to school wearing earrings because class teachers cannot be expected to remove them or to look after them hygienically.</p>



## PE lessons during religious fasting and religious observance

	What might be the barriers preventing pupils of faith backgrounds from participating in PE?	What are the solutions?
Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish and Muslim families	<p>Fasting has a spiritual, moral and social significance in all religious communities. The age at which young people are deemed to have reached puberty, and are therefore required to fast, differs between and within faith communities. However, children often choose to begin fasting before it is a requirement because they want to join with their family and community in this exercise of self-discipline and to experience the celebration of achievement at a communal breaking of the fast or a festival meal.</p>	<p><b>Fasting at Ramadan:</b> Muslim SACRE representatives recommend that children, who are not required to fast, should only fast one or 2 days each week in order to become progressively accustomed to the obligation. They recommend that parents are reminded not to encourage children to fast on PE days.</p> <p>Those young people who have reached puberty, and keep the fast for the entire month, should be able to participate in most sporting activities during Ramadan without putting themselves at risk. But schools might consider the timing and content of PE lessons during Ramadan, particularly when it falls during the long days of the summer.</p> <p>Fasting within Hinduism and Jainism is not obligatory. Some young people may observe a partial fast, for example restricting their diet to fruit and water and avoiding grain-based foods, others will have no food or water. Whilst this should not affect their ability to engage in PE lessons, Hindu SACRE representatives confirm that, if parents are familiar with the class timetable, pupils could avoid fasting on PE days.</p> <p>Fasting within Judaism is not obligatory before the age of religious majority (12 for girls and 13 for boys). Children who have not yet attained their majority can be instructed to drink water if they are required to participate in PE or games activities.</p>