

Renfrewshire Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers

To: Renfrewshire Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers

On: 8 November 2022

Religious Observance and Special Leave

Report by
Joint Secretary (Teachers' Side)

Background

The EIS's 'Challenging Anti-Muslim Prejudice' (2008) highlights the importance of being aware of the religious needs of others to challenge prejudicial attitudes and organisational practices. Many establishments are actively promoting anti-racist approaches and addressing institutional discrimination but the Scottish school holiday calendar is based on the Christian faith, with holidays embedded for Christmas and Easter across all educational institutions. It is important that we recognise that the pillars of Islam such as charity work, family service, prayers, attending Mosque, making donations are all an equally important part of Islam as is celebrating the festival of Eid.

At the EIS AGM, 2022, the following motion was passed *nemine contradicente* :

"That this AGM call on Council to investigate and report on current practices across Local Authorities in relation to time off for religious observance and to use the findings to develop a briefing for Local Associations with recommendations to seek to remedy any issues identified, in the pursuit of equitable and fair work for all."

It is important to acknowledge that Muslim pupils in Renfrewshire are granted special leave requests for religious observance during Eid al Fitr after a long period of fasting for Ramadan. This courtesy however is currently not extended consistently across all school establishments to all Muslim teachers working in Renfrewshire.

Previously, some establishments have found it difficult to plan for Eid as it is based on a lunar cycle meaning that the date and times vary slightly each year. But notice of this important festival can be given weeks in advance and would be the same for all Muslim teachers and pupils of this faith.

Currently the Council's special leave policy (JNC 16 at 3.13) does allow for up to three days paid leave for religious festivals but the wording of the policy has caused difficulties for teachers seeking consecutive days off for the festival of Eid. The policy states:

“Teachers who are members of religious groups other than Christians should be granted up to a maximum of three separate days of leave of absence with pay, per year to participate in certain principal religious festivals which fall outwith the fixed annual leave periods.”

Despite religion being one of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act (2010) many Black Minority Ethnic Islamic teachers in Renfrewshire face a difficult situation having to consistently battle for special leave requests when the policy stipulates that the days must be “separate”.

It is important as the teaching profession aims to diversify that we welcome Islamic teachers and understand that special leave is used to recognise, celebrate and support faith-based festivals.

Action

That the JNC agrees to a minor amendment to JNC 16, to remove the word “separate” at paragraph 3.13 from the special leave policy for teachers, quality improvement officers, educational psychologists and music instructors with the aim of allowing Muslim employees in Renfrewshire to participate in religious observance for three consecutive days and to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr after fasting throughout Ramadan.

This change should take effect before Eid-Al-Fitr, 2023 which, according to astronomical projections, should mark the end of Ramadan on the evening of Friday 21st of April, 2023.