

Governors' Position Statement 2020/21

Personal Prayer and Reflection

**Last reviewed:
18th November 2020**

**Previously reviewed:
4th December 2019**

Pastoral Committee on behalf of the Governing Board

University of Birmingham School is an 11-18 secondary phase free school serving diverse communities from across the city. We aim to be an inclusive school, representative of the City of Birmingham. This notwithstanding, we are a secular school, welcoming pupils and families of all faiths, and those of none. Families, should be clear in understanding and accepting this in seeking admission to University of Birmingham School.

Through our PLAD (personal learning and development) programme, and more widely, we promote tolerance and understanding of others, including but not limited to, faith. We emphasise and value broad based virtues – developed and supported through a blend of taught curriculum and caught approaches.

University of Birmingham School opened in September 2015 with approximately 300 pupils and students in total. From September 2020 the school roll is approximately 1100 with pupils and students in all year cohorts (years 7 to 13). Returning in September 2020 from national lockdown arising from Covid-19, the School has in place amended routines and control measures to restrict pupil mixing and promote a Covid-Secure workplace for all. There are two lunch sittings in 2020/21 (unlike the three sittings in 2019/20). During each lunch sitting teaching and learning for other pupils occurs simultaneously. This detail is provided to outline operational contexts and constraints.

In all but the most exceptional circumstances, it is not possible to facilitate personal prayer or individual, quiet reflection, whilst on site at University of Birmingham School during the working day, for the following reasons:

- The physical space available within the site and facilities is fully deployed for teaching, or administration, and it is not possible to routinely rearrange spaces or rooms to accommodate prayer and reflection on a discrete basis.

- It is not prudent to organise prayer and reflection for larger groups of pupils and students due to supervision constraints within staffing resources – with teachers and professional services staff fully deployed in respect of teaching and learning or the fulfilment of their roles. For safety reasons, it would not be permissible for larger groups of pupils and students to occupy a room on an unsupervised basis. For the school to do so would be irresponsible.
- As a secular school it would not be fair or equal that we facilitate or condone led prayer of one faith without considering that we do so for all faiths. Logistically to operate in such a manner would fall outside of the resources available to the school.

For pupils and students of most devout faith, Governors seek to have regard for and an understanding of individual requests in recognising that for some the fulfilment of prayer and reflection during the day is of utmost personal significance. In these circumstances we encourage parents and carers to approach the School to seek consent for their child to leave the school site during their lunch period (accompanied by an adult family member for pupils, optionally so for sixth form students) to attend a place of worship most local to the School.

Governors of the School also recognise that whilst, at this time, this is contrary to Covid-Secure risk assessment measures in place by school leaders which seek to restrict contact with persons outside of school, on a case by case basis and upon request this affords an appropriate reasonable adjustment in matters of individual importance.

Where individual pupils or students adopt this flexible option during the school day, they are required to return promptly to the school site in time to commence afternoon learning and the School will work in partnership with families should this present any sustained concerns.

Families should outline their request by contacting the Head of School (pupils in years 7-11) or the Assistant Vice-Principal (Sixth Form – years 12 and 13) at the school.

Members of teaching staff of University of Birmingham School should feel able to use their classroom for individual personal prayer and reflection during non-teaching time, but are asked to do so in a considerate and discreet manner – not involving and, for the sole reason of sensitivity towards pupils and students who themselves might otherwise wish to pray, out of sight of pupils and students.

It may, alternatively, be possible to accommodate a prayer and reflection request from a small number of staff, including professional services staff not typically based in a classroom, within scarce space availability usually reserved for small meetings. In such circumstances the staff member should liaise with their line manager in the first instance.
