

Religious Diversity at Blackfen School for Girls



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Websites and books used are cited via hyperlink (blue linked words)

What do we mean by 'Religious Diversity'?

At its core, religious diversity and inclusion is about respect, valuing difference, and acknowledging, understanding, and celebrating the faith that members of our community hold dear.

It is important because at a fundamental level it allows people to feel seen and heard as individuals, recognising the multiple dimensions of their identity. It cultivates space for acceptance without judgement or ridicule.

We know that when people feel they can be open at work about their identity and feel the environment is supportive of their beliefs, they contribute more, engage in greater depth, and achieve to a higher level.

The national picture

The U.K. is very religiously diverse. Although there is an official state religion, Christian Protestantism under the Anglican Church, within the borders of this land all citizens and visitors hold the right to practice their preferred religion without fear of persecution. The census gathers information regarding the religion with which respondents connect or identify, rather than their beliefs or active religious practice. At the last census, approximately 94% of respondents answered the voluntary question on religious practises.

According to the [2021 census](#) the religious make up of England and Wales is as follows:

- 46.2% described themselves as Christian. While this is a 13.1% drop from the 2011 census, this is still the largest group represented.
- 37.2% described themselves as having no religion. This was the second largest group with an increase of 12% since 2011.
- 6.5% described themselves as Muslim
- 1.7% described themselves as Hindu
- Approximately 2% of respondents described themselves as being either Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, or of another religion, with each totalling between 0.5% and 0.9% of respondents.

405,000 (0.7% of the overall population in England and Wales, not of total respondents) chose to write-in a response through the "Any other religion" option. The religions given were as follows:

- Pagan (74,000)
- Alevi (26,000)
- Jain (25,000)
- Wicca (13,000)
- Ravidassia (10,000)
- Shamanism (8,000)
- Rastafarian (6,000)
- Zoroastrian (4,000)

The largest increase was seen in those describing their religion as "Shamanism", increasing more than tenfold to 8,000 from 650 in 2011.

Of those who wrote-in a non-religious group to "Any other religion", the largest numbers were:

- Agnostic (32,000)
- Atheist (14,000)
- Humanist (10,000)

London remained the most religiously diverse region of England and Wales, though this is hardly surprising when considering that London has been a migratory hub for over a millennium. Christianity was still the main recorded religion for London at 40.7%. The next most common religious groups in London were, Muslim at 15%, and Hindu at 5%. Overall, approximately 25% of London respondents identified as a religion other than Christian.

Religious diversity at Blackfen School for Girls

As the demographic of the school's intake area has become more diverse over recent years, so has our school population. Blackfen now has students and staff that connect with and/or practice a range of religions.

The [House of Commons library](#) website gives a comprehensive breakdown of the religious diversity of each parliamentary constituency. This can be further filtered down to polling areas.

Using this website and the school database, we can clearly see that Blackfen, both the local area and the school, are quite religiously diverse. We can also see that the school largely follows the local and national pattern, with the most movement being in the lower percentiles.

Blackfen voting area – religious breakdown	Blackfen School for Girls – religious breakdown
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Christian – 48% ➤ No religion – 38.3% ➤ Muslim – 3.3% ➤ Hindu – 2.5% ➤ Buddhist – 0.9% ➤ Sikh – 0.4% ➤ Jewish – 0.1% ➤ Other religion – 0.4% ➤ Did not answer – 6.1% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Christian – 40.83% ➤ No religion – 37.07% ➤ Muslim – 6.43% ➤ Hindu – 4.24% ➤ Sikh – 2.67% ➤ Buddhist – 1.09% ➤ Other religion – 1.09% ➤ Jewish – 0.01% ➤ Did not answer – 6.57%

What are the school's responsibilities?

Let's begin this section by stating that Blackfen School for Girls is a non-denominational school. We are not affiliated to any religion and, as such, we aim to provide an objective educational understanding of multiple religions while not offering religious practice/ceremony.

Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the [Equality Act 2010](#). As such, the school has a duty to ensure that no member of our school community, whether staff, student, or visitor, suffers discrimination at Blackfen, because of their religion or beliefs. The Act also states that all public sector bodies must comply with the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#). This aims to ensure that public bodies think about things like, how their decisions will impact their stakeholders, and the specific needs of those groups/people when creating policies and delivering services.

When public bodies, such as Blackfen, carry out their functions, the Equality Act says they must have **due regard** or think about the need to:

- eliminate **unlawful discrimination**
- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't
- foster or **encourage good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

Having due regard means that Blackfen must consciously consider or think about the need to do the three things set out in the public sector equality duty. Examples of this at Blackfen are; the caveats in our school uniform policy that allows for religious jewellery and head coverings to be worn, the unisex toilet facility in our 16-19 Block, Community Time activities and assemblies that explore different cultures and faiths, and the multi-faith prayer space.

Legally, schools are under no obligation to allow students and staff time away from school for religious observance. However, Blackfen approaches all requests on a case by case basis and will objectively consider all requests.

What is Atheism?



The term **Atheism** can have many different meanings. If we break down the language, it literally translates into *opposite of one who believes in God*, with theist or theism meaning a belief in God and 'A' coming from the opposite in Ancient Greek. Philosophically or religiously it means believing 'that there is no God, or that no gods exist'. However, some philosophers take that further by stating that "Atheism isn't just about denying the existence of a god, it is the strong opposition to it.". For example, in the [Concise Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy](#), William L. Rowe (also an atheist) writes, "Atheism is the position that affirms the nonexistence of God. It proposes positive disbelief rather than mere suspension of belief".

Famous atheist Richard Dawkins has categorised atheists into seven different levels. These are explained in this [video](#) which also sets out the difference between atheism and agnosticism.

Famous atheists include:

- Ricky Gervais
- Stephen Fry
- Keira Knightly
- Sarah Silverman
- Morgan Freeman
- Daniel Radcliffe

What is Buddhism?

Buddhism, one of the major world religions, began in India around the sixth century, BCE. The teachings of Buddhism spread throughout Central and Southeast Asia, through China, Korea, and Japan. Today, there are Buddhists all over the world and variations exist in practices exist. For example, Buddhists in China may practice differently to Buddhists in India.

Historians estimate that the founder of Buddhism, Sidartha Gautama, lived from c.566-c.480 BCE. Born a prince, Sidartha gave up his riches and made it his mission in life to search for a way for humans to be free from suffering and to achieve true happiness. One day, while meditating beneath a tree, he finally understood how to be free from suffering and achieve true salvation. From this day forward, he was known as 'The Buddha' or *The Enlightened One*.

Vesak Day is an important Buddhist festival commemorated by Buddhists worldwide. While it is often referred to as the "Buddha's Birthday", its actual significance is to mark the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha.

Buddhists believe that human beings have the potential to become free from suffering by practicing meditation and cultivating a lifestyle prescribed by the Buddha.

As part of the [Dharma](#) (Buddha's teachings), Buddha taught about the Four Noble Truths. These are:

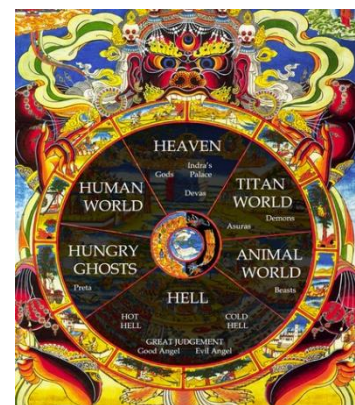
1. Life is suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by craving.
3. Suffering can have an end.
4. There is a path which leads to the end of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths form the basis of Buddhist thought. It is believed that suffering, in part, is due to the impermanence of life. Even if one is happy at a given time, this happiness is not permanent. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to end the cycle of suffering, the cycle of repeated death and rebirth. The achievement of this goal is called *nirvana*. In order to reach Nirvana, Buddhists must live in a certain way. This is called The Eightfold Path, and it consists of three categories: moral conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

The wheel is a very important symbol in Buddhism because it depicts the cycle of life and death. Buddhists believe that after beings die, they are reborn or reincarnated into a new form. It is believed that all positive thoughts and actions cause good *karma* and may direct one into being reborn in a higher form. The consequences of one's negative deeds, bad [karma](#), may result in rebirth in a lower form.

Buddhists worship at temples or monasteries, where they meditate and pray. Some also set up shrines at home to worship privately. Buddhists offer fresh flowers, lights, and lamps, or burn fragrant incense at shrines with images of the Buddha. These acts pay respect to the Buddha and make merit for the devotee.

Some Buddhists follow vegetarian diets, especially on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month, to purify themselves and gain good merit.



Famous Buddhists include:

- Michelle Yeoh
- Thandiwe Newton
- Tiger Woods
- Lucia Rijker
- Rosa Parks
- Suella Braverman

What is Christianity?

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with approximately 2.8 billion followers across the globe. Its largest denominations are the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the [Eastern Orthodox](#) churches, and the [Protestant](#) churches, though these also contain many [smaller](#) groups who worship in slightly different ways. The term 'Christian' derives from the Greek *christos* for the Hebrew *messiah* ("anointed one"). *Christianoī*, "followers of the Christ," became the name of a group who followed the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in 1st-century Israel and proclaimed him the predicted messiah of the prophets. Jesus himself was Jewish, but those who follow his teachings are now known as Christians. All of the Christian religions have the [Nicene Creed](#) at the core of their teachings, a document that sets out the founding principles of the Christian faith.

Christians are monotheist, they believe there is only one God, but that he is revealed in three different forms, known as the Holy Trinity:

- God the Father
- God the Son
- The Holy Spirit

Christians model themselves on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who they believe is the son of God and part of the Holy Trinity. Christians believe that God sent Jesus to live as a human being in order to save humanity from the consequences of its sins. Jesus taught people to love God and love their neighbour, he performed [miracles](#), and demonstrated the ways in which God wanted people to live. Christians believe that through the death and resurrection of Jesus their broken relationship with God was restored. This is why, unlike other religions, Christians do not centre their religious practice around performing good deeds or charitable works as they believe that Jesus died to ensure their salvation and that having a good relationship with God is enough.

The Christian holy book is the Bible. It is divided into the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament is the original Hebrew Bible which sets out the covenant made between God and Abraham. It consists of between 39 and 46 books, dependent upon which denomination's version you are reading. The most well-known book in the Old Testament is Genesis, which sets out the creation story for the 3 main Abrahamic religions. Christians have maintained the Old Testament as part of the Bible as they believe it explains the existence of Jesus Christ, acting as a narrative of the advent of Christ.

The New Testament explains how God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to restore the broken relationship between people and God which had been caused by human wrong-doing, as set out in the Old Testament. The New Testament contains 27 books written in Greek by 15 or 16 different authors between 50 CE and 120 CE. It can be divided into 4 groups: Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles, and Apocalypse. The New Testament contains 4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Many Christians worship in churches. Some groups meet in homes and other buildings. 'Church' means the gathering of Christians as well as the building in which Christians worship. Their leaders are called priests or ministers.

Many churches hold a service called [Communion, Eucharist or Mass](#), in which bread and wine are shared together, just as Jesus did with his followers before his death.

Important religious festivals for Christians include; Easter where the sacrifice that Jesus made for the salvation of mankind and his subsequent resurrection and ascension to heaven are commemorated – this usually falls in either March or April according to the lunar cycle. However, Eastern Orthodox Easter is approximately 5 weeks later. Christmas, celebrated on 25th December every year, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and is characterised by feasting, gift giving, and spending time with loved ones.

Famous Christians include:

- Viola Davis
- Tom Hanks
- Nick Jonas
- Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson
- David Oyelowo
- Selena Gomez

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism, also known as *Sanatana Dharma*, is the world's oldest living religion at over 4,000 years old.

It is made up of a variety of different religious beliefs and practices. It originated near the Indus River in India. The name 'Hindu' comes from the word Indus. Today, with more than 1 billion followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion worldwide, after Christianity and Islam. Roughly 94 percent of the world's Hindus live in India. Because the religion has no specific founder, it's difficult to trace its precise origins and history. Hinduism is unique in that it's not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies.

Central to Hinduism is the belief in a supreme God **Brahman**. Brahman is present everywhere and there is a part of Brahman in everyone.

Most forms of Hinduism are [henotheistic](#), which means they worship a single deity, Brahman, but still recognize other gods and goddesses. Followers believe there are multiple paths to reaching their god.

Brahman takes many forms. Especially three forms called the [Trimurti](#).

- **Brahma** is the **creator** of the world and all creatures. He is usually shown with four heads.
- **Vishnu** is the **preserver** of the world. His role is to return to the earth in troubled times and restore the balance of good and evil. He has blue skin and four arms.
- **Shiva** is the **destroyer** of the universe. Shiva destroys the universe in order to re-create it. Shiva has blue skin, a third eye and carries a trident.

Hindus believe that life is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They also believe that the next life depends on how the previous life was lived.

Hindus believe in the doctrines of samsara (the continuous cycle of life, death, and reincarnation) and karma (the universal law of cause and effect). One of the key thoughts of Hinduism is “atman,” or the belief in soul. This philosophy holds that living creatures have a soul, and they’re all part of the supreme soul. The goal is to achieve “[moksha](#),” or salvation, which ends the cycle of rebirths to become part of the absolute soul.

One fundamental principle of the religion is the idea that people’s actions and thoughts directly determine their current life and future lives. Hindus strive to achieve dharma, which is a code of living that emphasizes good conduct and morality.

Hindus revere all living creatures and consider the cow a sacred animal. Food is an important part of life for Hindus. Most don’t eat beef or pork, and many are vegetarians.

Hindu worship, which is known as “puja,” typically takes place in the [Mandir](#) (temple). Followers of Hinduism can visit the Mandir any time they please. Hindus can also worship at home, and many have a special shrine dedicated to certain gods and goddesses. The giving of offerings is an important part of Hindu worship. It’s a common practice to present gifts, such as flowers or oils, to a god or goddess. Additionally, many Hindus take pilgrimages to temples and other sacred sites in India.

Hindus observe numerous sacred days, holidays and festivals.

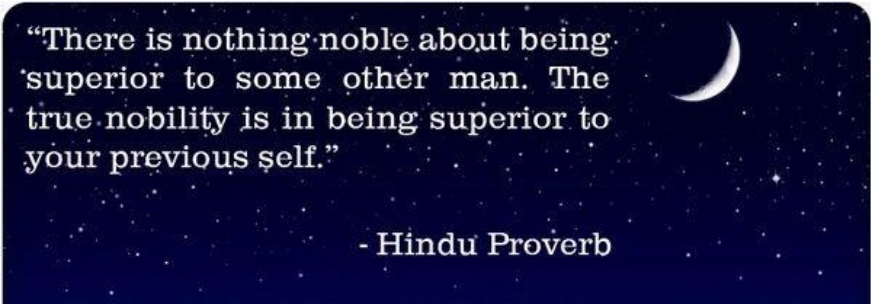
Some of the most well-known include:

- [Diwali](#): the festival of lights
- Navaratri: a celebration of fertility and harvest
- Holi: a spring festival
- Krishna Janmashtami: a tribute to Krishna’s birthday
- Raksha Bandhan: a celebration of the bond between brother and sister
- Maha Shivaratri: the great festival of Shiva

Hinduism is closely related to other Indian religions, including Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.

Famous Hindus include:

- Julia Roberts
- Mahatma Ghandi
- Annie Besant
- Kalpana Chawla
- Miley Cyrus
- MIA



“There is nothing noble about being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.”

- Hindu Proverb

What is Islam?

The word 'Islam' means 'submission to God' in Arabic. Followers of Islam are called Muslims.

Muslims are monotheist, meaning that they believe in one God, Allah (God in Arabic).

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, with about 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. It is one of the three Abrahamic religions—the others being Judaism and Christianity.

Although its roots go back further in time, scholars typically date the creation of Islam to the 7th century, making it the youngest of the major world religions. Islam started in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, during the time of the prophet Muhammad. Today, the faith is spreading rapidly throughout the world. Widely practiced in the Middle East and North Africa, it is also has many adherents in South Asia. Indonesia, in fact, has the largest number of followers of the Islamic faith.

Muslims believe that several prophets were sent to spread the word of God Allah, and they respect many of the same prophets as the other Abrahamic religions. For example, Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Isa) are all in the Quran. However, Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet sent by Allah to teach mankind how to live by His ways. Because of this Muhammad is the most revered of the prophets and whenever Muslims mention his name they also say, 'peace be upon him' (PBUH) as a sign of their deep and abiding respect.

The prophet Muhammad, was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 C.E. According to Islamic texts and tradition, an angel named Gabriel visited Muhammad in 610 while he was meditating in a cave. The angel ordered Muhammad to recite the words of Allah. Muslims believe that Muhammad continued to receive revelations from Allah throughout the rest of his life. Starting in about 613, Muhammad began preaching throughout Mecca the messages he received. He taught that there was no other God but Allah and that Muslims should devote their lives to this God.

In 622, Muhammad travelled from Mecca to Medina with his supporters. This journey became known as the Hijra (also spelled Hegira or Hijrah) and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Some seven years later, Muhammad and his many followers returned to Mecca and conquered the region. He continued to preach until his death in 632.

After Muhammad's passing, Islam began to spread rapidly. However, there was debate over who should replace him as leader. This led to a schism in Islam, and two major sects emerged: the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Sunnis make up nearly 90 percent of Muslims worldwide. They accept that the first four [caliphs](#) were the true successors to Muhammad. Shiite Muslims believe that only the caliph Ali and his descendants are the real successors to Muhammad. They deny the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. Today, Shiite Muslims have a considerable presence in Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The Muslim holy book is called the Quran (sometimes spelled Qur'an or Koran). Muslims believe this to be the word of Allah as dictated to Muhammad and then relayed by him to scribes. The book is written with Allah as the first person, speaking through Gabriel to Muhammad. It contains 114 chapters, which are called surahs. Every Muslim household will have a copy of the Quran. As the book is the word of Allah as dictated to and then by Muhammad (PBUH), it must be kept very safe and should be placed higher up than other books in the house. The Quran contains some passages that can also be found the holy books of the other two Abrahamic religions – Judaism and

Christianity. Another important book is the **Sunnah**, which Muslims believe to be the practical example of Prophet Muhammad.



Muslims worship in a building called a **mosque**. On Friday at noon, the most important of the weekly services is held.

When Muslims [pray](#), they must always face **Mecca** in Saudi Arabia, this is where Muhammad (PBUH) was born and is the centre of the Islamic world. The prophet Muhammad is credited with building the first mosque in the courtyard of his house in Medina. Mosques today follow some of the same principles he established in A.D 622. Many Muslim men will wear a small cap called a **taqiyah** when they pray. Men and women pray

separately in a mosque. Some mosques will partition the main prayer space, while others will have separate rooms. Before prayer can take place, all worshipers must remove their shoes to maintain the sacred cleanliness of the mosque. Worshipers must also perform '[wudu](#)' which is ceremonial cleansing of their hands, feet, and face.

Muslims follow the 5 pillars of Islam to live a good and responsible life. They are:

- The **declaration of faith** (Shahada)
- **Praying** five times a day ([Salat](#))
- Giving money to **charity** (Zakah)
- **Fasting** during the month of Ramadan (Sawm)
- A pilgrimage to **Mecca** at least once in a lifetime ([Haji](#))

The two major Muslim holidays are:

[Eid al-Adha](#): celebrates the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah.

[Eid al-Fitr](#): marks the end of [Ramadan](#)—the Islamic holy month of fasting.

Muslims also celebrate other holidays, such as the Islamic New Year and the birth of Muhammad.

Muslims must also follow a diet that means any meat must be '[halal](#)' for it to be consumed. Halal meats are slaughtered according to Islamic laws.

Famous Muslims include:

- Bella Hadid
- Zayn Malik
- Sadiq Khan
- Malala Yousafzai
- DJ Khaled
- Nadiyah Hussain

What is Judaism?

Judaism is a [monotheistic](#) religion that emerged with the Israelites in the Eastern Mediterranean (Southern Levant). Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, dating back nearly 4,000 years, and is the original Abrahamic faith (which include Islam and Christianity). Today, there are about 14 million Jews worldwide. Most of them live in the United States and [Israel](#). Traditionally, a person is considered Jewish if his or her mother is Jewish.

Followers of Judaism believe in one God who revealed himself through ancient prophets, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Solomon and others.

The origins of Jewish faith are explained throughout the Torah (part of the Jewish religious text the Tanakh – the Torah is the 5 books of Moses). According to the text, God first revealed himself to a Hebrew man named Abraham, who became known as the founder of Judaism. Jews believe that God made a special covenant with Abraham and that he and his descendants were chosen people who would create a great nation. Abraham's son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob, also became central figures in ancient Jewish history. Jacob took the name Israel, and his children and future generations became known as Israelites.

Around 1000 B.C.E, King David ruled the Jewish people. His son Solomon built the first holy Temple in [Jerusalem](#), which became the central place of worship for Jews. The kingdom fell apart around 931 B.C.E, and the Jewish people split into two groups: Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Sometime around 587 B.C.E, the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple and sent many Jews into exile. A second Temple was built in about 516 B.C.E. but was eventually destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

The destruction of the second Temple was significant because Jewish people no longer had a primary place to gather, so they shifted their focus to worshipping in local synagogues.

Synagogue means 'bringing together' or 'assembly'. A synagogue is a place of worship, gathering and education about the Jewish faith. On the outside of the building there is a *Star of David* and often a menorah.

The main prayers happen in the prayer hall, which is usually rectangular with seats on three sides facing inwards. There are certain features that appear in all synagogues, regardless of whether they are [Orthodox](#) or [Reform](#).

All synagogues have a large cupboard facing Jerusalem called the 'aron hakodesh'. It is the holiest place in the synagogue. It is the centrepiece of the synagogue and holds the Torah. It symbolises the ark that held the tablets given to Moses.

The Sefer Torah is a scroll kept inside the aron hakodesh. Handwritten by a scribe, it is covered with a mantle or cloth that is ornately decorated.

The ner tamid is a light above the aron hakodesh that never goes out. "Keep the lamps burning before the Lord." (**Exodus 27:21**)

There are no images of God or people in a synagogue, as the Ten Commandments forbid worshipping idols.

Men and women sit in separate sections in Orthodox Jewish synagogues, while Reform Jews of different genders sit together to worship.

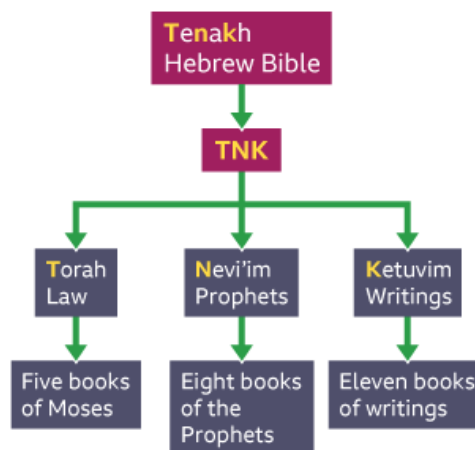


Orthodox Jews often refer to a synagogue as '*shul*', which means school, and Reform Jews sometimes call it a '*temple*'.

The weekly observance of the Sabbath, commencing on Friday evening at sundown and concluding 25 hours later, is a cornerstone of Jewish religious practice. The Sabbath is a time for slowing down, spending time with friends and family and at synagogue, and disconnecting from the daily demands on our time. Once the sun has set on the Friday, Orthodox Jews are not allowed to complete any tasks that might be considered 'work' until the Sabbath is over. Therefore, all Shabbat meals are cooked in advance of sundown so that they can be shared together, in accordance with the rules of the Sabbath.

Food is a big part of the Jewish religion and culture. Jews follow a '[kosher](#)' diet which means that they are unable to consume any pork products. Kosher rules also dictate that certain foods cannot be mixed. The rules are collectively called 'kashrut'.

The Jewish holy book is called the Tanakh:



The Old Testament in the Christian Bible is made up of the books of the Tanakh, although they appear in a different order.

The Torah is absolute and everlasting. However, as the world changes, some Jews look for new interpretations of its words. Another book called The [Talmud](#) helps with this as it interprets the laws of the Torah and relates them to modern issues.

The Talmud is a collection of teachings and discussions from early rabbis about the Torah.

Some important festivals in the Jewish calendar are:

- [Rosh Hashanah](#) – Jewish new year, and the start of the ten 'holy days'
- Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement, the end of the ten holy days
- [Pesach](#) – Passover, a celebration of the escape of the Jews from Egypt
- Sukkot – Remembering the trek through the desert to the promised land
- Chanukah – A celebration of the triumph of Judah and The Maccabees

Famous Jews include:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| ➤ Charlie Chaplin | ➤ Amy Winehouse |
| ➤ Benjamin Disraeli | ➤ Timothee Chalamet |
| ➤ Daniel Radcliffe | ➤ Anne Frank |

What is Sikhism?



Sikhism is the youngest of the major world religions. It was founded by Guru Nanak around 500 years ago in the [Punjab](#). This is an area which spans part of India and Pakistan in South Asia today. There are more than 25 million Sikhs around the world, making Sikhism the world's fifth largest religion.

The Sikh Gurus, known as spiritual guides or teachers, established the religion. Guru Nanak was the first Guru and was born in the 15th century in the Punjab region of India. Sikhs believe in the oneness of all beings and the equality of everyone.

The Sikh faith is a monotheistic religion, meaning Sikhs worship one God. Guru Nanak taught that one must honour God by honouring others and the Earth, God's creation. Nine more Gurus succeeded Guru Nanak and continued to spread his teachings across the world. Guru Gobind Singh was the last Guru; he named the Sikh sacred text, the Guru Granth Sahib, to be the eternal Guru that would guide the Sikhs going forward.

The verses of the Guru Granth Sahib are written in poetic verse and are intended to be sung, though singing isn't a crucial component of Sikhism; Guru Nanak himself was known to sing his teachings as he travelled across South Asia on foot. The hymns of the Gurus are known as *Gurbani*, the Guru's word. It contains the words spoken by the Gurus. This is known as *Gurbani*, which means 'from the Guru's mouth'. The book is believed to be the word of God and is therefore *infallible*. It is written in *Gurmukhi*; this is the script the Punjabi language is written in. The Guru Granth Sahib is always placed in the prayer hall within the *gurdwara*. Any building that has a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib is considered a gurdwara. It is considered as the Living Guru, because the Gurmukhi scripture is considered the word of God and therefore treated with respect as a human might be.

There are three core pillars of Sikhism, formalised by Guru Nanak. These are:

- *Vaṇḍ Chakkō*: Sharing with others, helping those in need, as well as participating as part of a community. A spirit of giving, sharing, and caring for one another is central to Sikhism.
- *Kirat Karō*: Earning/making a living honestly, without exploitation or fraud, and always speaking the truth.
- *Naam Japna*: Meditating on God's name to live a life of decency and humility.

In line with *Vanḍ Chakkō*, Sikhs often perform *langar*. This is where they provide food for the local community. Following the closure of the Channel Tunnel and border lockdown of 2020, the Guru Nanak Temple gurdwara in Gravesend, Kent (the largest gurdwara in Europe) [prepared and delivered over 800](#) meals for stranded lorry drivers stuck for days on the M20. They also extended their generosity to the local community during the Covid pandemic, sending food and supplies to those in need and [NHS workers](#) at Darent Valley Hospital.

Sikhs see the temporary distractions of the material world as an illusion, or *Māyā*. The five qualities of ego, anger, greed, attachment and lust are known as the Five Thieves that rob a person of their ability to realize their oneness with God and creation. Sikhs work to counteract the temptations of these qualities through the Sikh values of service, equality, and seeking justice for all.

Sikhs believe that one's form on Earth is only a temporary vessel for the eternal soul. Thus, the death of the physical body is a natural part of the life cycle, while the soul remains. Sikhs believe in reincarnation, meaning death is not an end, but merely the progression of the soul on its journey toward God.

The Gurdwara is the Sikh place of learning and worship where the community gathers. Visitors of any background can seek shelter, comfort, and food through the institution of *langar*, via a free community kitchen open to all. Because the Sikh faith does not have an ordained clergy, any woman or man from the congregation may lead religious services.

As the Guru Granth Sahib is written as poetry and music, most of the service is conducted in song. Community members and musicians lead the congregation in singing and chanting, and often community leaders will take a few moments to explain basic ideas and lessons from the selections. After the ceremony, the congregants gather for a meal together. Everyone sits on the floor as a sign of equality, and people of all backgrounds and identity groups are welcome to join.

There are a few basic aspects of etiquette to know when visiting a gurdwara. Visitors must take off their shoes and cover their heads before entering the worship space. Both practices are signs of respect. Upon entering the space, Sikhs bow before the Guru Granth Sahib as a sign of submission to the teachings — this is not obligatory for observers. All congregants then sit on the floor together to participate in the worship and singing. Everyone is welcome to participate as they see fit. Most commonly, visitors prefer to sit, observe, and enjoy the music.

The Sikh tradition does not celebrate “holidays” the same way as other religious traditions. Sikhs believe that no time or space is holier than any other — the divine is seen to permeate all time and space equally. At the same time, there are certain days of historical significance on which Sikhs around the world gather for reflection and celebration. The most common is the [Gurpurab](#), which marks the anniversary of the birth or death of a Guru. [Vaishakhi](#) is also celebrated every spring to mark the dates when the 10th Guru chose the traditional Punjabi harvest festival to create the [Khalsa](#), bringing all Sikhs together as a religion.

Some famous Sikhs are:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| ➤ Waris Ahluwalia | ➤ Princess Sophia Alexandra Duleep Singh |
| ➤ Neelam Gill | ➤ Monty Panesar |
| ➤ Anita Rani | ➤ Panjabi MC |

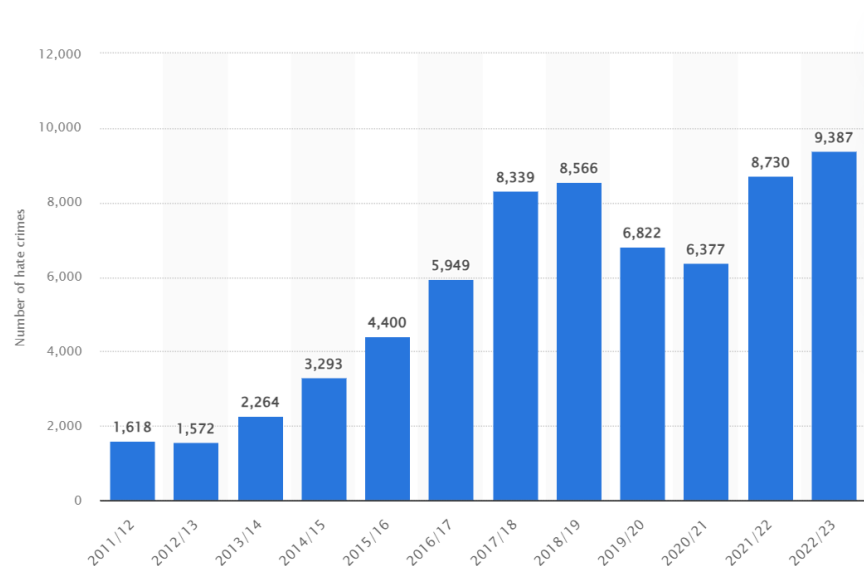
What are the challenges that people of faith face in the U.K.?

The National Centre for Social Research carried out a survey over twenty years of religion and attitudes towards religion in the U.K. They found that there has been a fundamental shift in both religious affiliation and attitudes towards religion and religious institutions throughout British society.

- Most of the shift in the religious profile of the nation has been towards non-affiliation, with 52% of the public now saying they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion.
- Two-thirds (66%) of people in Britain never attend religious services, apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms.
- Most people show little enthusiasm for institutionalised religion, although there is evidence that the public are, in general, prepared to be tolerant of the faith of others.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) believe religions bring more conflict than peace.
- Under half (46%) have some or more confidence in churches and religious organisations, with 21% expressing “no confidence at all”.
- Most people have a positive, or at least tolerant view, of members of other religious groups, but have more reservations about extremism.

This shift in attitudes has exacerbated feelings of mistrust and paranoia regarding religious extremism. The UK has been involved in wars in countries with predominantly Muslim populations and has suffered jihadi terrorist attacks: for example, on the London transport network in 2005 and at a Manchester concert in 2017. Consequently, some English xenophobes associated with the English Defence League and other right-wing groups have justified their attacks on Muslims with the claim that Islamic values are displacing Christian culture in the West. If nothing else, that Muslims are often culturally distinctive and sometimes socially segregated allows many non-Muslims to feel that religion taken seriously is at best a nuisance and at worst a danger. British Muslims have repeatedly come [under attack](#) and, according to a recent [joint survey](#) carried out by Muslim Engagement and Development and Muslim Census, approximately 42 percent of mosques have come under attack in the past three years. Recent events in the Middle East have also led to antisemitic attacks across the U.K., with properties and individuals being attacked. [The Met Police](#) have reported an increase of 1,350 percent in reported antisemitic crimes across the U.K. and a 140 percent rise in the capital.

There were 9,387 religious hate crimes reported by the police in England and Wales in the 2022/23 reporting year, which was more than in the previous year when there were 8,730. In London there



were 1,989 reported religious hate crimes in this same period, a large percentage of the total reported. In the U.K. the number of [reported religious hate crimes](#) has risen annually almost every year for the past twenty years, with a noticeable upswing immediately following the Brexit referendum in 2016.

In fact, global politics seems to have a tremendous impact on religious communities. With some people seemingly unable, or unwilling, to separate politics from religion, the conflation of the two often results in the targeting of religious or cultural groups.

Misrepresentation of the facts and partisan journalism throughout the media and on social media, digital echo chambers, and extremist grooming online are all exacerbating the issue. Young people are particularly vulnerable as their brains and critical thinking skills are not yet fully developed.

How can I be an ally and positively support those who have religious conviction, around me?

In addition to being members of staff at a school we are also people in a community and there are specific things we can all do to support those in our community that have religious conviction, not only at school but in our society. As ever, the most important thing is to treat everyone with respect:

- Listen. If a person is talking to you about their experiences or concerns avoid giving the impression of not being interested or asking probing/challenging questions.
- Take people's concerns seriously. No matter how confident people can appear, many people experience times where they feel less accepted or vulnerable. If a person opens up to you about this then take it seriously and offer them support as necessary.
- Be clear in your support for religious diversity and the right to practice religion without fear. Encourage supportive discussion of any issues religious communities are facing and challenge prejudice wherever you encounter it.
- Avoid assumptions. Avoid assuming a person's background, beliefs or interests. Instead, be open to learning. Educate yourself.
- Try to be more empathetic, view the world or situation from the perspective of others.
- Consider the religious beliefs of others when planning activities for lessons, outings, parties etc. Are the activities inclusive, can they be adapted to allow participants from a variety of religions to feel seen and heard?
- Accept we all make mistakes, but learn from it. Everyone says the wrong thing from time to time. What matters is what we do next: if someone corrects you, listen and take it onboard. Continuing to say the wrong thing simply shows you do not respect that person/group.

A calendar of religious festivals 2024

● Baha'i
 ● Buddhism
 ● Christianity
 ● Hinduism
 ● Islam
 ● Judaism
 ● National Holidays

2024 HOLIDAYS

Jan 1	New Year's Day	Jul 4	Independence Day
Jan 15	Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Jul 7	Muharram (New Year)*
Feb 14	Ash Wednesday	Jul 9	Martyrdom of the Bab*
Feb 15	Buddha's Death	Jul 16	Ashura*
Feb 19	President's Day	Sep 2	Labor Day
Mar 11	Ramadan (ends April 10)*	Sep 7	Ganesh Chaturti
Mar 20	Naw-Ruz (New Year)*	Sep 16	Mawlid an-Nabi*
Mar 25	Holi	Oct 3-4	Rosh Hashana*
Mar 29	Good Friday	Oct 3	Navratri (ends Oct 11)
Mar 31	Easter	Oct 12	Yom Kippur*
Apr 8	Buddha's Birthday	Oct 12	Dussehra
Apr 10	Eid al-Fitr*	Oct 14	Indigenous Peoples Day
Apr 20	First Day of Ridvan*	Oct 17-18	Sukkot*
Apr 23-24	First and Second Day of Passover*	Oct 24	Shemini Atzeret*
Apr 28	Ninth Day of Ridvan*	Oct 25	Simchat Torah*
Apr 29-30	Seventh and Eighth Day of Passover*	Nov 1	Diwali
May 1	Twelfth Day of Ridvan*	Nov 2-3	Twin Births of the Bab and Baha'u'llah (respectively)*
May 19	Pentecost Sunday	Nov 28	Thanksgiving Day
May 23	Declaration of the Bab*	Dec 8	Buddha's Enlightenment
May 27	Memorial Day	Dec 25	Christmas
May 28	Ascension of the Baha'u'llah*		
Jun 8	Hajj (ends Jun 16)*		
Jun 12-13	Shavuot*		
Jun 16	Day of Arafat*		
Jun 16	Eid al-Adha*		
Jun 19	Juneteenth		

* Holidays begin at sundown the day before

What can I do if I have any questions or would like further guidance?

Check out the further reading section below and feel free to get in touch with Danielle Dunsdon at ddu@blackfen.bexley.sch.uk