



MEND's Easy Read Guide
**Nurturing Muslim
Identities in Schools:**

Halal Meat

www.mend.org.uk

mend

حلال Halal حلال

What is halal meat?

Image Credit: Raysonho @ Open Grid Scheduler / Scalable Grid Engine, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Halal meat is an integral part of the Islamic faith. Halal means permissible, so when we discuss halal food or halal meat, we are talking about what Muslims are allowed to eat.

Muslims are prohibited from eating pork or drinking alcohol. They must also only eat meat that has been raised in an ethical way and slaughtered according to religious practice. This is similar to kosher requirements for Jewish communities.

The Department for Halal Certification EU states “Halal slaughter is one of the more humane methods available... and the only method acceptable for Muslim consumers.” The method for slaughtering requires the animal to be healthy and well looked after, with the slaughter being performed by a Muslim after the invocation of ‘In the name of Allah; Allah is the Greatest’.

1. “Islamic Method Of Slaughtering – Department Of Halal Certification EU”. 2020. Halalcertification. ie. <http://halalcertification.ie/islamic-method-of-slaughtering/>.

Halal meat requires that the animal:

- Is kept healthy,
- Is given an adequate amount and quality of food and space to roam,
- Is slaughtered away from other animals so that they cannot see it and become stressed,
- Has its throat cut very quickly with a sharp knife so that death occurs quickly and as painlessly as possible.



A photograph of a buffet table in a restaurant, featuring various food items like appetizers, bread, and drinks. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal filter. The text "Why is there controversy around halal meat?" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

Why is there controversy around halal meat?

When it comes to halal meat, the primary concern is an emphasis on providing the best welfare throughout the animal's life. However, halal meat has often been used as a political football used by right wing commentators to present halal practices as barbaric and inhumane.

These criticisms usually centre on the fact that some interpretations of halal slaughter do not permit stunning before the animal is slaughtered. However, when we consider the ethical qualifications of the industrialised meat industry as a whole (eg. battery farming, conveyor belt slaughter, electrocution of chickens, the high rate of failure for captive bolt stunning), it is clear that singling out Muslim practices as singularly or uniquely cruel is disingenuous at best and overlooks the core concept of animal welfare that underpins it.

However, these accusations often hold weight in the public imagination because the visible image of cutting the neck may appear traumatic, but does not reflect the speed with which the animal loses consciousness and the lack of pain felt compared to other methods.




Why is Muslim dietary requirements in schools important?

Facilitating Muslim dietary requirements in schools is simple to achieve and has wide-reaching benefits for students and the school environment.

Supporting this practice allows Muslim students to develop their religious identities with confidence and feel secure in their positions as members of society. This is particularly important due to the Islamophobia that many Muslim students face throughout their lives.

Muslim students are often excluded from eating in canteens that do not offer halal meat or vegetarian options. Indeed, **if the only food available is meat based or has been mixed with pork products, many groups, including Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, will likely be unable to partake.** Therefore, it is always advisable to have a vegetarian, vegan and halal options available that are kept separate from other meat options and pork products.

If their dietary requirements are not catered for, people often bring packed food from home, which is less convenient and also can create a feeling of exclusion. By accommodating different dietary requirements, school environments become more inclusive which will increase collaborative creativity, social connection, comfort, confidence, and wellbeing amongst students.



What are the legal responsibilities of schools?

The Equality Act 2010 is designed to protect the rights of individuals and ensure equality of opportunity for everyone, thus promoting a fair and equal society.

The Act covers nine protected characteristics, one of which is 'religion or belief'.

The Public Sector Equality Duty, created by Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, demands that public bodies (such as schools) must give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and any other unlawful conduct in the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

At the same time, Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 (freedom of thought, belief and religion) protects the right to put your thoughts and beliefs into action, including:

- The right to wear religious clothing,
- And the right to take part in religious worship.

As public bodies, schools must respect and protect these human rights.





**What does this
mean for schools?**

In other words, schools must always consider how their policies or decisions impact people who are protected under the Equality Act.

The Department for Education released advice for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies, and local authorities on how best to fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty. Specifically, they state that one of the ways to advance ‘equality of opportunity’ is to meet the needs of people who have a particular characteristic, for example “enabling Muslim pupils to pray at prescribed times”.²

Simple accommodations, such as providing Halal meat, are therefore, important steps in fulfilling this Public Sector Equality Duty as they support students to fully engage with public life through encouraging confidence in their identity and sense of belonging.

2. Department for Education, “Equality Act 2010: Advice for Schools,” GOV.UK, June 28, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

Schools must also be aware of avoiding any direct or indirect discrimination against people with protected characteristics protected by the Equality Act.

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, “The way in which school facilities are provided can lead to discrimination.” The commission gives the example of a school that does not provide Halal food in its canteen for its Muslim students, which means that they are unable to eat school lunches. “This is likely to be indirect religion or belief discrimination, because the school is unlikely to be able to justify this action.”³

3. “Technical Guidance for Schools in England,” Technical Guidance for Schools in England | Equality and Human Rights Commission, accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-schools-england>



A young girl with dark hair and bangs is shown from the chest up, eating a slice of pizza. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a table with some papers or drawings. The entire image has a teal-colored overlay.

**My school doesn't
accommodate Muslim
dietary requirements, what
can I do?**

- Read the school's policies, procedures, and guidelines which are usually published on the governance section of their website.
- Speak to the headteacher.

Discuss with them:

- The benefits of providing Halal meat,
- Why it is important to you/ your child,
- What the law says,
- What their current policies and procedures state,
- How they can introduce halal meat.

A hand wearing a white glove is pointing towards a tray of food in a cafeteria. The tray contains a dark, textured substance, possibly meat or a vegetable. The background shows other trays and a person in a white uniform. The entire image has a purple tint.

I have spoken to my school, but they haven't agreed to provide Halal meat. What can I do?

At any time during the process, you can contact the **Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU)**.

The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU), is a charity dedicated to supporting victims of Islamophobia. It was founded in response to rising anti-Muslim attacks, and the growing tide of anti-Muslim sentiment, across the United Kingdom. This service is for anyone who suffers or has suffered, an incident of hate crime or discrimination as a result of their Muslim faith (or perceived Muslim faith). The IRU offers a platform for victims of Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination to confidentially report and share their experiences and serves as a source for free legal assistance.



**Find out more and contact the IRU
at www.theiru.org.uk**

0203 904 6555 | info@theiru.org.uk

Muslim engagement
& development

mend

    /mendcommunity | www.mend.org.uk