

Darul Uloom Islamic High School

Inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 162 (A) of the Education Act 2002 as amended. Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to undertake inspections in designated independent schools within membership of the Christian Schools Trust (CST) or the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK).

DCSF number:	330/6078
Association:	AMSUK
Date of inspection:	23 rd – 26 th February 2009
Lead Inspector:	Mr Mike Thirkell
Team inspectors:	Mr Israr Khan Mr Ross Evans
Age range of pupils:	11-16 years
Number on roll	
Full-time:	113 boys
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	None
Proprietor:	Jami Mosque & Islamic Centre Birmingham Trustees Ltd
Head teacher:	Mr Mujahid Aziz
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The purpose and scope of the inspection

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the DCSF whether the school continues to meet the requirements for registration, and to determine whether the school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of its association. Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates, including a sample of inspections.

Information about the school

Darul Uloom Islamic High School is an independent school for boys aged between 11 and 19 situated in the Small Heath area of Birmingham. Run by a charitable trust, it has been established on the same site since 1985. It has expanded its premises considerably over the subsequent years. The pupils are from a range of cultural heritages from within the Islamic faith. There are currently 113 pupils attending the school, 80 between the ages of 11 and 14 (Key Stage 3), 14 between 15 and 16 (Key Stage 4), and 19 above the age of 16 who study a full-time *Alimi* course designed to develop Islamic scholars, although many subsequently go into further or higher education or into business. Three of the students currently taking the *Alimi* course are above 19 years of age. The school follows the model of the *madrassa* (place of Islamic study) with the aim of providing 'a balance of traditional Islamic education and a secular curriculum' and to 'create individuals who can become exemplary representatives of Islam'. The last published report on the school by Ofsted followed an inspection in February, 2005; the school received a subsequent Ofsted progress monitoring inspection in October 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Darul Uloom is an improving school which has a number of positive features and strong links to its local community. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Spiritual and moral education is outstanding. Overall, the school provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education which supports the progress made by boys of all ages and abilities. Results in the GCSE show steady improvement during the past three years. The improving quality of teaching and assessment, which both show good features, supported by well chosen staff training opportunities, provide a firm foundation for future school development. The current leadership demonstrates a clear understanding of the school's needs and has been responsible for introducing improvements which have had a significant impact on the quality of provision. The excellent behaviour and generally good relationships between staff and pupils, results in a positive learning environment in which pupils of all ages and abilities are able to learn. Pupils say that they feel well cared for; they show a willingness to learn and say that they appreciate the support, attention and time that their teachers provide, through both the Islamic and secular aspects of the curriculum. The school's provision shows significant improvement since the last published inspection report. It now meets all the regulatory requirements for independent schools.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with good features. Following some initial delays the school has made a very positive response to the issues raised by the last inspection. In particular, the balance between the Islamic and secular aspects of the curriculum has been improved. Faith aspects of the provision are largely delivered by the Islamic curriculum. The secular curriculum is supported by a suitable range of documentation and schemes of work. These schemes of work are on the whole appropriately detailed documents; they are helpfully aimed at ensuring the continuity of delivery of this aspect of the curriculum. The school has already begun to map where the Islamic curriculum delivers aspects of the secular curriculum, but it has still to consider how faith can be reflected, where relevant, within its National Curriculum subjects. The school has begun to document the content of the Islamic curriculum, in which many of the courses are based on classical texts. Textbooks at the moment provide the essential curriculum content and plans. The school intends to provide schemes of work, but this is still at an early stage and limited work has been completed as yet. This is a significant undertaking by the school.

The curriculum provides pupils below the age of 16 with a suitably wide range of learning experiences in most respects. The secular curriculum provides courses in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, social studies and religious education (RE). Pupils have the opportunity of studying a modern foreign language and Arabic, Urdu or Bengali are provided within the Islamic curriculum. All pupils have suitable access to physical education (PE), supervised by a specialist teacher within the curriculum and supplemented by allocated time at a local sports centre. Aesthetic and creative development is satisfactory but rather limited. An Islamic art course has recently been introduced into Year 9 and Arabic calligraphy is studied by all pupils. Opportunities in relation to this aspect of curriculum do not build on the rich cultural heritage of art and design within Islam. The school's woodwork facilities were being refurbished at the time of the inspection and this further reduced pupils' access to creative education. PSHE makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal development, both through the secular curriculum and through aspects of the Islamic provision. Citizenship contributes to pupils' good knowledge of British institutions and government. Social studies, taken by all pupils in Years 7 and 8 support their developing knowledge of historical, geographical and social issues supported by other aspects of the provision, including a good range of extra-curricular studies relative to the size of the school. These include the development of pupils' communication skills through competitions relating to the reciting of the Qu'ran. Careers education has improved significantly since the last inspection. The provision is now guided by suitable documentation and regular learning opportunities. It is supported by visitors to the school, the local Connexions service and a week's work experience for pupils in Year 10. Pupils recognised by the school as having learning difficulties receive additional support for literacy and numeracy both within, and in addition to the timetabled lessons. The relatively small sizes of the classes enable pupils to receive good individual support.

The Islamic curriculum is wide in scope and is divided into two distinct parts. One group of pupils undertake to memorise the entire Qu'ran by heart. These *hifz* pupils

spend three hours in the morning before lunch in this aspect of the curriculum; they then study secular subjects in the afternoon followed, by a further two hours of Qu'ranic study in the late afternoon or early evening. The other part of the Islamic studies curriculum is broad. The subjects studied include: Arabic, *nahwa* (Arabic grammar), *seerah* (study of the life of the Prophet), *hadith* (Prophetic traditions), *adab* (Arabic literature), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tajweed* (correct and respectful pronunciation of the Qu'ran), *ilm al faraidh* (laws of inheritance) and *al aqeedah* (Islamic creed). Both parts of the Islamic curriculum are supported by morning and afternoon *salah* (prayers) held in the mosque.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Overall, teaching in the secular curriculum is better than for Islamic studies. Nevertheless, teachers in both aspects of the curriculum have appropriate subject expertise or are scholars in the subjects that they teach. The school has recognised the need for developing staff expertise and teaching skills. Consequently, it has focused staff training on raising the standard of teaching in both Islamic and secular aspects of the curriculum. The quality of teaching provided by both aspects of the curriculum ensures a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to acquire new knowledge and to make progress relative to their ages and abilities. The teaching, in both aspects of the curriculum, supports the intellectual development of pupils. For example, in the secular curriculum in an English lesson, Year 9 pupils were encouraged to empathise with people and conditions in the Victorian period. In the Islamic curriculum, older pupils were encouraged to analyse the deeper meaning of classical texts.

The school has worked hard to develop a consistent and constructive approach to lesson planning by teachers. It has not yet achieved the desired consistency but teachers already apply a generally structured approach in their planning. The best planning provides details relating to teaching approaches and recognises the particular learning needs of pupils. Teachers' understanding of the individual learning needs of pupils, including those identified as having learning difficulties, has been supported by recent staff training. In the best lessons teachers use careful questioning to engage the pupils in learning. The teaching challenges pupils to think independently and to draw conclusions from previous learning. Such lessons are carefully planned and conducted at a suitably brisk pace. There is an adequate range of resources which are used well to support teaching and learning. Teachers in the secular curriculum are beginning to make good use of computers and projectors to enrich pupils' learning experience. The school now has good provision of computers for ICT.

Assessment is satisfactory, though it is better with respect to the secular provision where the school has introduced a number of positive developments. It is supported by an appropriate framework and policies which set down the school's expectations for both assessment and marking. Strategies are now established for using baseline assessment and regular testing to support pupil tracking, with the aim of raising attainment further. The school's management has a clear view of how it needs to improve the use of assessment to support teachers' planning, which is currently satisfactory. Courses already provided for teachers in relation to assessment practice emphasise the school's recognition of the importance of this aspect of planning. Good use has been made of sharing expertise with local schools and through valued support provided by the local authority. Marking of pupils' work is

regular, although it sometimes provides too limited written feedback on what is good about a piece of work or what needs to be done to improve. The school is aware that the assessment of Islamic studies, and its use in lesson planning, is in need of further development and has already held training for all teachers, including the scholars that deliver the Islamic curriculum, on how to plan lessons taking into account the different abilities of the pupils.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good overall. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong and their moral development is supported by the excellent role models presented by the teachers and Islamic scholars. This has a very strong and positive influence upon pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. Pupils say that staff are approachable and easily accessible. They participate enthusiastically in lessons and confidently engage with their teachers as well as showing them appropriate respect. Overall, pupils have excellent manners and are very courteous to their teachers and to visitors.

In Islamic studies, pupils have frequent opportunities to engage in deep reflection on both spiritual and practical aspects of Islam, for example, when discussing the public and private lives of important figures in Islamic history. Pupils are clearly moved by the example such luminaries present. These examples are used to remind pupils of the type of individuals they should be striving to emulate. This reflection strengthens their self-knowledge, self-esteem and confidence. The importance of contributing to society is continually emphasised by the school. For example, in an assembly pupils were encouraged to consider the benefits they could bring about for their neighbours, the wider community and humanity as a whole. Pupils were encouraged to consider ways of preventing harm reaching them.

Pupils are given plenty of praise and encouragement and this is balanced by sensitively showing them how to develop areas of weakness. This contributes further to the pupils' positive self-esteem and confidence. They pray regularly in the mosque attached to the school and this strengthens their ties to their community and their faith. The experience of learning as part of the community helps to develop the pupils' social skills. The school council plays an active role in the life of the school and pupils say that its contributions are valued. In lessons pupils are reminded of their duty to the environment, in both the Islamic and secular curriculum.

Through both the Islamic studies and the secular curriculum pupils learn about the beliefs and practices of other faiths and are taught to show respect to other world religions. Lessons in citizenship play an important part of this provision.

Pupils are trained to lead the daily congregational prayers and those who have completed *hifz* (memorization of the Qu'ran) lead the whole community in prayer during Ramadan in various mosques across the city. This represents a valuable service that the school provides to the local and wider community. Parents also feel that the school helps their children to grow in spirituality, as well as maturing in their general attitudes. Pupils make efforts to raise money for the less fortunate. For

example, large sums of money have been raised for relief in Gaza, as well as for earthquake victims in Pakistan.

Pupils and staff represent a rich diversity of cultural heritage which provides an awareness of different cultures and traditions. The awareness of diversity is enhanced further by the secular curriculum. Pupils have a secure understanding of their own cultural heritage, but at present there is little opportunity to explore the rich artistic heritage of Islam. Opportunities to address this through displays around the school are not fully seized. Visitors from the emergency services, as well as a wide range of professionals, come to the school. Visits by MPs, local councillors and the Chief Constable have helped pupils in gaining a broad understanding of public institutions and services in England. This is enhanced further by visits made to law courts and local police stations. The hosting of interfaith dialogue groups makes a significant contribution to promoting tolerance and harmony in society.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The quality of welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The measures the school has put in place to support welfare, health and safety, ensure that the pupils are safe and well cared for. All the required procedures and policies are in place and sufficient guidance is provided for staff. A review programme for all policies is operating, with a current focus on positive rewards for the pupils. Named teachers have responsibilities for first aid and safeguarding children, and are suitably trained. Pupils interviewed feel safe and say they are not aware of any bullying, but they knew what to do if that was to occur. Pupils are very clear as to procedures in the event of an accident. As the pupils bring their own food to school, the school is making efforts to encourage healthy eating through the curriculum and by making parents more aware of healthy diets. The range of selection of food available from the tuck shop, run by pupils, is currently being reviewed. Pupils are encouraged to take regular exercise in their own time. Rigorous football matches are a feature of break-times.

Pupils are well supervised throughout the day, including at prayer times when worshipers from the local community attend the mosque. Supervision is notably good at lunchtimes, when the school has made efforts to give pupils a variety of activities and places to go. For example, a wooden building is now equipped with table tennis and a pool table. Pupils are clearly enjoying these facilities. Pupils speak positively about the good relationships they have with staff. They feel confident that they can turn to a teacher to raise issues of concern. Pupils say that any issues raised are addressed as quickly as possible. They are very positive about the school council as a way of raising their concerns. Visits off site are appropriately risk assessed and pupils going on work experience attend a safety course before starting. Most of the school is accessible to pupils with physical disabilities and the school has made significant improvements to increase wheelchair accessibility. Strategies to ensure access are supported by a suitable three year plan that meets the Disability Discrimination Act, which is reviewed annually.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school fully understands the requirements for checks on staff. It has established appropriate procedures for undertaking them. Checks on all staff and trustees are kept in the recommended manner in a register. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are sufficient to support and encourage a suitable range of learning experiences for the pupils. The school is located in two well maintained buildings within a mosque complex. The classrooms are adequate in size for the numbers in the classes. There are specialist rooms for science, ICT and woodwork, and a library run by the pupils themselves. The classrooms are clean, tidy, warm, well decorated and adequately ventilated. Pupils show respect for the school environment.

The classrooms and around the school have very little pupil work displayed or materials which reflect the Islamic ethos of the school. The eating area is clean and the toilets and washrooms are sufficient to allow the pupils to perform their ablutions before prayers. A good hard surface fenced play space is available for outdoor games and a prefabricated wooden building supports the provision of indoor games, thus extending the pupils' opportunities for a wider range of physical activity, for example, table-tennis. The school prayer hall is used for indoor PE activities. Although there is adequate outdoor space there is a current lack of grassed area, which the school intends to address as part of the planned redevelopment of the site.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides all the required information for parents and prospective parents in the prescribed way. Regular informal as well as formal contact with parents keeps them well informed about school affairs. This is confirmed by the views of parents. Parents are provided with information about the progress that their children make through regular school reports. Whilst reports meet the requirement, they do not always say enough about what a pupil has actually achieved or learned in a subject. Sometimes the emphasis is balanced too heavily on issues relating to effort. Guidance provided in the prospectus makes it clear that all the required information, policies and procedures are available on request from the school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints are provided in the form of an adequate summary for parents in a prospectus and helpful handbook, which also makes clear that the full version of the procedures is available on request from the school. They are written in appropriately clear and accessible language. There have been no formal complaints in the last 12 months.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all of the regulations for registration and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Meeting the expectations of AMSUK

The school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of AMSUK.

What the school could do to improve further

As part of future development the school might wish to consider:

- further developing assessment practice, pupil tracking and the use of assessment to inform planning and teaching
- improving provision for aesthetic aspects of the curriculum
- continuing the regular programme of teachers' professional development
- extending and improving the documentation of the Islamic curriculum
- finding ways, where relevant, of reflecting faith elements within the secular curriculum.