

Markazul Uloom

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mohammad Ismail

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Markazul Uloom is an independent Muslim boarding and day school in Blackburn, which provides education for boys and girls aged between 11 and 19 years of age, although only boys are accepted as boarders. Originally, the school was opened in 2001 for girls only, but in November 2006, it extended the provision to include boys. Girls and boys are taught separately. The majority of pupils are British Muslims of South Asian background. The school was last inspected in November 2007. The boarding provision was last inspected in June 2010. There are 200 students currently on roll with 81 boarders. There are no students with a statement of special educational needs.

The school aims to teach most of the National Curriculum and GCSE courses within an ethos of Islamic values, beliefs, culture and tradition. The school also aims to help students to acquire:

'knowledge, skills and qualities, which will help them to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, morally and spiritually, so they may become independent, responsible, confident and considerate members of the community.'

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The curriculum and students' progress overall are satisfactory, although some students, often girls, make good progress. Good teaching and assessment are leading to student's progress strengthening. The school meets its aims by ensuring students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the provision for their welfare, health and safety are good. The students' behaviour is outstanding. Students' attitudes to learning are very good. The school meets all the safeguarding requirements and it has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection. The school meets all of the regulations for independent schools.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. There are two parts to the curricular provision: the secular and the religious, with approximately half of the time being devoted to each. The provision is better for girls for both the secular and the Islamic education because throughout the curriculum, girls receive more taught time than the boys. There is a curriculum policy which sets out clear objectives for learning. Islamic and secular curriculum plans meet the varied academic and religious needs of the students.

The school has an effectively adapted *ders-e-nezami*, (Islamic studies) programme, which includes Qur'anic studies and *hadith* (the tradition of the prophet). It includes related subjects such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *aqeeda* (beliefs), Islamic manners, *seera* (life of the Prophet Muhammad with Islamic history) and Arabic language and literature to meet the religious needs of its students. In addition, Urdu is also included to address the cultural needs of some students.

For its secular curriculum the school has appropriately adapted National Curriculum schemes of work. These include good-quality schemes for English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). The humanities provision is good for girls and covers a variety of subjects to enhance their social and creative education, such as citizenship, geography and history. However, the humanities provision for boys is satisfactory due to the shorter timetabled time. There are schemes of work for each subject area with medium-term and short-term plans in place. The provision for physical education (PE) is satisfactory with a variety of opportunities for sporting activities during break and lunchtimes. The school offers a good quality programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) in accordance with the school's ethos.

The school offers extra-curricular activities and some outings which are related to its Islamic curriculum. For example, every week, students organise their own opportunities in which they learn to deliver speeches and conduct discussions on different topics such as social life and historic events. Students have opportunities to visit other seminaries to take part in different religious programmes. There are good opportunities for girls in creative learning such as textile and art work but the provision for boys is less strong. All students have opportunities to practice the recitation of the Qur'an and *nasheeds* (Arabic religious songs). Students are offered careers advice with opportunities for work placement in local mosques and supplementary schools. All students at the end of Key Stage 4 enter for GCSE examinations in different subjects. Post-16 students are offered opportunities to progress into further and higher education by undertaking 'A' levels in local colleges and most of them complete the Islamic theology programme to become imams and religious teachers. Extra sessions are in place to provide help for low achieving students. However, there is no provision to offer extra work for students who are gifted and talented. The school enjoys good support from parents and the local Muslim community.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge. They plan their lessons conscientiously. However, some lesson plans refer to the activities to be undertaken rather than the intended outcomes of the lesson and the knowledge and skills to be acquired. Nevertheless, lessons are mostly well structured and conducted with a sense of purpose. Teachers carefully check on previous learning and provide plenty of opportunities for discussion and problem solving. The groups are small, so students receive individual attention. Resources are used well and very good use is made of interactive whiteboards to explain and further the learning. Teachers motivate students by their enthusiasm for example, when comparing two room settings to illustrate the skills of H G Wells in his work *The Red Room*. Good links are made between subjects to consolidate students' skills in other subjects. For example, students increase their understanding of the binary system through activities in ICT. Appropriate homework and support for course work contributes to learning. Staff use a number of procedures to assess and record students' achievements. In addition, teachers mark students' work regularly. For example, the work is graded for attainment, effort and progress. Furthermore, students receive suitable praise, and in many cases an indication of the next steps in learning.

Students' progress is strengthening because of the good teaching but on balance progress is satisfactory overall because the rate of progress varies between girls and boys, between subjects and for students of different ages. For example, girls in Key Stages 3 and 4 make very good progress in English and good progress in mathematics. It is satisfactory in science. On the other hand, boys in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress; more-able boys do not attain as well as they could. Though satisfactory overall, boys in Key Stage 4 make good progress in mathematics. As a result of the improved rate of progress, standards are rising and progress in lessons is strengthening. During the inspection, it was often good. The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades at A* to C has increased from 36% to 53%. Similarly, the percentage of students gaining higher grades in five GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics, is now broadly average. The attainment of boys in English is improving considerably. All students make good progress and achieve well in information and communication technology. Progress in Islamic studies is satisfactory overall and good in some areas, particularly in the memorization of the Qur'an.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and their behaviour is outstanding. They attend very regularly and their attitudes to learning are very good. They are extremely respectful, polite and exceptionally well behaved in and around their classrooms. They greet visitors and their teachers with respect and express their love for the school. The elected school council meets regularly with the school leaders and takes an active part in the school's development. Students make a good contribution to the school and local community, for example, during the month of Ramadan they conducted prayer sessions at night.

They take part in different events such as sporting activities and competitions. They learn about other cultures and about British institutions, for example, in citizenship and English lessons. The school ensures that through its Islamic studies programme students are well informed about the importance of tolerance in society and respect for those with different beliefs and cultures. There is a well planned school assembly programme which helps students to learn to respect the law. The school has effective links with the local community and local Muslim institutions. However, the school does not provide students with a broad range of opportunities to visit places of interest from cultures different to their own.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for safeguarding the students' welfare, health and safety is good. All students feel safe. There is a healthy food policy and students are encouraged to eat healthy food such as fruit and vegetables at break time. The school very effectively raises students' awareness about the dangers of smoking and the abuse of drugs. All the required policies and procedures are in place, including the safeguarding policy and all staff are trained in child protection to the required level. The health and safety risk assessment policy is effectively implemented as is the policy on educational visits. First aid officers are trained at the required level. The school has a fire risk assessment, all fire-fighting equipment is regularly tested and regular fire drills are conducted. The school has a three-year plan which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended. The school's attendance and admission registers meet the regulations.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All required checks have been undertaken to ensure that staff and the proprietors are suitable to work with children. The school maintains a single central register of checks undertaken which meets requirements.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn safely and securely. There are sufficient classrooms, two ICT rooms and sufficient washroom facilities for the number of students on roll. There are suitable outdoor play areas for boys and girls. The school building has undergone significant improvements since the last inspection.

Provision of information

The school meets all the requirements by providing the necessary information to parents, carers and others through an up-to-date prospectus. The school reports on

students' progress annually to parents, carers and others. All parents were very supportive of the school in their responses to the inspection questionnaires.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a complaints policy and set of procedures which meet all of the regulations. The school has taken steps to ensure that parents and carers are aware of these.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the provision for social and creative learning for boys
- improve the provision for gifted and talented students in all year groups by providing extra help to meet their needs
- provide more opportunities for students to develop their knowledge of different faiths and cultures by organising visits to different places of interest.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			√	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			√	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning			√	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Muslim boarding and day school		
Date school opened	September 2001		
Age range of pupils	11-19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 120	Girls: 80	Total: 200
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,100		
Annual fees (boarders)	£2,100		
Address of school	Park Lee Road Blackburn Lancashire BB2 3NY		
Telephone number	Girls – 01254 581569 Boys – 01254 660026		
Email address	Girls – markazul.uloom@hotmail.co.uk Boys – markazul.uloom@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Ayesha Desai		
Proprietor	Board of Trustees		