

Azhar Academy

Independent school progress monitoring inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI

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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 inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Information about the school

Azhar Academy Girls School opened in 2003 and is an independent Muslim day school for girls between 11 and 19 years of age. The school is run under the proprietorship of Azhar Academy, a charitable trust, and the school is one of several different aspects of the trust's work. The school occupies two premises on opposite sides of the road, one of which is a Grade II listed Victorian church, in Forest Gate in the London Borough of Newham. The trust owns one of these buildings and the other is on a long-term lease. The premises are used for other aspects of the trust's work, which are not linked to the work of the school, in the evenings, at weekends and for Friday prayers. The proprietors have recently acquired additional premises and will be applying to the Department for Education to register this third property as part of the school and to vary the school's registration to accommodate additional students from January 2012.

Admission is by entry examination. The school currently has more than the 280 students that they are registered to admit and must check this with the Department for Education to ensure compliance with the current registration. At the time of the previous inspection there were 283 students on roll. The current number is 292. Eighteen students are in the sixth form with sixteen attending part-time, including ten students who attend only for the Aalimah course (in-depth Islamic studies). No student has a statement of special educational needs. The school serves a diverse community and most students are bilingual. The school's aim is that 'through a sound education our children will learn and develop an understanding about their Deen'.

The headteacher was new to the school in November 2010. Prior to that, there was an acting headteacher.

Context of the inspection

When the school was inspected in October 2010, the school's second full inspection, inspectors judged that the school was providing a satisfactory standard of education. Significant shortcomings in safeguarding procedures resulted in inadequate provision for students' welfare, health and safety. Three regulations were not met at that time. An action plan was required and, with amendments, was approved by the Department for Education in May 2011. This is the first monitoring visit to assess the

school's progress in addressing the issues raised in the October 2011 inspection. In addition, the Department for Education requested that this visit should assess the suitability of the curriculum and resources in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

The school has made satisfactory progress overall in implementing its action plan. All three of the regulations not met at the time of the previous inspection concerned students' welfare, health and safety. Two related to safeguarding, specifically the school's policies and procedures for recruitment and child protection. The school had not kept up to date with guidance for child protection and did not have a robust recruitment procedure. Actions planned to address these weaknesses were to ensure that all staff receive the relevant level of training in child protection, to review the child protection policy and to allow staff to start work only after suitable checks and references are obtained. These regulations are now met. The required training for all staff has taken place and the child protection policy has been suitably revised. All current staff have had the required checks on their identity and suitability to work with children and the current recruitment of new staff for September is being conducted according to a new, and suitably revised, recruitment policy. New staff will not be permitted to start work without the required checks being undertaken. The third regulation not met in October 2010 concerned the students' toilets, which were not always maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state. In order to meet the regulations, the action plan identified the appointment of a second cleaner and encouraging improved vigilance by students. The toilets are now kept clean. Students report that the condition of the toilet blocks are now much improved. Whereas they would previously avoid using them, they are now confident that they will find them in a suitable condition for use. This regulation is now met. One regulation is not met as a result of this inspection. The health and safety policy is not sufficiently detailed to ensure that appropriate practice takes place or that potential hazards are identified. For example, chemicals and other substances used in the science laboratory are not securely stored and trip and bump hazards in the prayer room have not been identified. In addition, subject policies, such as those for science and physical education, do not consider health and safety implications, thus giving staff insufficient guidance. Arrangements for students to eat their lunch in a hygienic and positive social setting are not adequate. The school is already aware of the issues and is planning different arrangements for the new academic year.

At the time of the October 2010 inspection, the curriculum was judged as good, as was students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At the request of the Department for Education, this inspection looked specifically at how well the school meets the regulations in respect of the suitability of the curriculum and resources to promote tolerance, harmony, and a broad knowledge of life within multicultural Britain. Inspectors found that the curriculum for Islamic studies, the Aalimah course, religious education, citizenship and personal, social and health education provide

suitable opportunities to enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities to develop these aspects in relation to their Islamic faith are more effective than those for multicultural British society. Nevertheless, through its teaching, resources and organisation of the curriculum, the school provides students with a balanced view of Muslim beliefs and practices within the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Through monitoring the content of the religious teaching and curriculum, the school's director and Islamic coordinator ensure that staff do not promote their own particular views, but instead promote reflection and sound knowledge of the underlying principles and practices of Islam.

Most of the curriculum is delivered through text books specific to the syllabus for each subject, giving students a range of appropriate knowledge. However, opportunities to extend students' understanding of this knowledge, or to demonstrate the associated skills through practical activities and experiences, are not well planned. This applies equally to opportunities in lessons as well as to those taught beyond the classroom. The reasons for this are three fold. First, beyond text books, there are few other resources, such as artefacts for different religions and traditions or reference books. The school has plans to develop the library, which at present is not well stocked or generally accessible to students. Second, schemes of work provide details of the breadth of what will be taught within general timelines for progression through each key stage, but schemes do not identify planned practical opportunities to develop the students' skills and understanding of wider cultures, beliefs and traditions, such as educational visits and visitors. Third, subject policies and schemes of work sit in isolation rather than making clear links with one another. The headteacher has already asked staff to revise their subject policies and schemes of work so that practical activities and experiences are more specifically planned to ensure that students develop the necessary skills and understanding of the knowledge taught, as well as a wider understanding of cultural difference. Cross-curricular links will also be identified. Partnerships with other schools and institutions are also planned.

Subject policies set out brief statements of intent, but contain nothing specific about the school's approach with relevance to their students' particular needs and experiences as Muslim girls within wider British society and culture. In addition, the school's ethos of delivering the National Curriculum avoiding influencing secular subjects with religious influence is not clearly stated in the policies. As a result, the school's aim for providing a balanced and moderate approach through the religious aspects of its teaching is not clearly reflected and the associated rationale for curriculum organisation and resources is not clear. This is further complicated by a lack of clarity of the school's role and work alongside that of the work of the trust as a whole through the Azhar Academy's website. The school does have its own dedicated site, but neither this nor the Azhar Academy's website make it clear how the work of the school and other aspects of the trust's work are separate. In addition, some of the information available in school gives the impression that the work of the two are the same. The school's own website is not up to date and is not clearly advertised as the first point of information for the school's ethos and work.

While there are a number of areas for improvement, as noted above, the school meets all the regulations with respect to the curriculum.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school must take action to meet The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010¹ ('the Regulations'), as follows:

- ensure that policies provide suitable guidance for staff to ensure students' health and safety, which have regard to the DCSF guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers* (DfES 0803/2001) (paragraph 11).

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

School details

School status	Independent
Type of school	Muslim day school
Date school opened	2003
Age range of pupils	11–19 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	276
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	16
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,400
Address of school	235A Romford Road Forest Gate London E7 9HL
Telephone number	0208 555 5959
Email address	girls.school@azharacademy.org
Headteacher	Mrs Aisha Desai
Proprietor	Azhar Academy (charitable trust) Chair of trustees Mr Ismail Gangat