

# Al-Risalah

Independent school standard inspection report

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Al-Risalah is an independent Muslim day school in Tooting, south-west London. It is run by the Al-Risaala Education Trust. The school consists of a nursery school and secondary school which are on two separate sites within a short walking distance of each other. The age range is three to sixteen years but it is split between nursery and secondary phases. The secondary school is located in a converted cinema, and the nursery is in a renovated residential building. The secondary school is registered to admit 287 pupils and the nursery can admit up to 45 children at any one time. Currently 268 pupils attend full time and 84 attend part-time. All except three nursery children attend part-time. All of the youngest children speak English as an additional language. All of them are funded under the government's nursery scheme. In the secondary school boys and girls are taught separately, but nursery education is mixed. None of the pupils has a statement of special educational needs and no pupils are looked after children. All pupils are from a range of diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. The school aims to, 'equip students with life skills in order to be role model citizens, ambassadors for Islam as well as good Muslims'. A new headteacher was appointed at the start of September 2011. This is the school's third full Ofsted inspection since it was registered and opened in November 1993. It was last inspected in March 2009.

## **Evaluation of the school**

Al-Risalah provides a satisfactory quality of education and meets its aims well. Pupils make satisfactory progress because of the satisfactory teaching and assessment supported by a satisfactory curriculum. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding arrangements, are good which is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The school's strengths lay in its good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and pupils' good behaviour. The school meets all of the regulatory requirements which is an improvement since the last inspection.

## **Quality of education**

The curriculum is satisfactory. In the nursery all children's needs are met well in all areas of learning and also in Arabic and Islamic studies. In the secondary school, the head teacher has ensured that policies and plans are more secure to support a

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

balanced curriculum for all subjects except music which is not taught. Arabic and Islamic studies are important aspects of the provision and both subjects help pupils gain a secure knowledge and understanding of their own religion and culture. Most subjects, including Arabic, are studied to GCSE level. Planning generally ensures that work is matched to most pupils' capabilities. However, there are occasions when work is not always well enough matched to the needs of average or below-average learners. Basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are suitably covered for all pupils. Pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is planned well. Some aspects of PSHE are integrated effectively in other subjects such as science. Physical education and opportunities for physical activity are satisfactorily planned and are provided for within the constraints of the current buildings. The recently appointed headteacher has arranged a contract with the local authority for pupils to regularly play games such as football, netball and cricket weekly in a local park. This is an improvement since the last inspection and enables adequate physical activity to be provided. The younger children have good access to outdoor areas, although opportunities for independent learning and easy access to outdoor learning are limited by the constraints of being in a listed building. Nonetheless, children regularly play outdoors and have access to a good level of equipment, materials and space. The secondary curriculum is becoming more enriched by visits. Some of the pupils, parents and carers who returned questionnaires stated that they felt there were too few opportunities for educational visits. Inspectors agree. The school is aware of the need to increase the number and frequency of visits and the headteacher has introduced plans for more visits in the near future. Since September 2011 there has already been an increase in trips to enrich learning which have included visits to the theatre and museums. Visitors to the school have included a theatre group and 'Bin it' workshops. Careers education is appropriately provided for the older pupils. There is a range of activities, events and meetings to inform, guide and advise pupils in their choices of further education and potential work-related activities.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. While teaching and assessment in the nursery are good, provision in the secondary school is inconsistent and feedback on pupils' performance has weaknesses. The quality of teaching in the secondary school is too variable across and within subjects, although the changes the headteacher has introduced are at the early stages of having some positive impact. These include procedures for setting targets and for monitoring the quality of teaching more closely. In well-taught lessons, for example boys' mathematics and history, teachers provide pupils with clear learning objectives and activities which are challenging. As a result, pupils make good progress. Most teachers effectively ensure that the teachings of Islam are reflected in their lessons. Other effective teaching strategies include the promotion of peer discussions to explore each other's understanding and to share information. A good example of this was seen in a girls' science lesson about the senses. In the best lessons pupils' work is well marked and there is helpful information about what went well and next steps for improvement. This said, the quality of marking is too inconsistent.

In the less effective lessons, teachers do not always use assessment information accurately enough to support pupils with different abilities, especially pupils of

average or below-average ability. As a result, pupils make slower progress. Some teachers have lower expectations of what the less-able and middle-ability pupils are capable of. Feedback and marking, although on the whole regular, are sometimes perfunctory with limited information given to pupils to help them improve their work or understand where they went wrong. In a very small number of books, there was little or no marking at all. In discussions with inspectors and in the questionnaires returned by pupils, although generally happy with their lessons, some felt they did not have enough practical opportunities in their science lessons even when they were in the laboratories. Consequently, some pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding are restricted to what the pupils have studied in books and on the internet.

The school's systems for assessment are satisfactory and provide sound information about individual pupils' performance in all subjects. Pupils' attainment and progress are suitably tracked across all year groups. This is an improvement since the last inspection. However, this information is mainly based on regular assessment tests. The use of teachers' informal assessments of pupils' work is beginning to increase but this is still too recent to have any discernable impact. Teachers' use of assessment information in their planning varies from subject to subject. When used well, teachers incorporate the information into their planning to challenge pupils by providing work that meets their needs and abilities accurately.

Pupils' progress is satisfactory. In the nursery children make good progress across all areas of learning from starting points which are generally below those expected for their age. In the secondary school, the majority of Year 7 pupils' standards of attainment are above average overall especially in English and mathematics. By the time they leave at the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils gaining five A\* to C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is higher than the national average. In all subjects, except Arabic and mathematics, girls' attainment is higher than that of the boys.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good in both age groups. Both the nursery and secondary settings have a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. There have been no reported incidents of bullying. Pupils' attendance is above average and their behaviour is good. Pupils say that they are safe, happy and generally enjoy their learning. However, a few pupils stated that they would like more opportunities to use the science laboratories and be able to go outside more frequently. The younger children settle quickly and become confident learners. Their personal, social and emotional skills are developing well. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They are developing a good awareness of different religions and cultures because plenty of opportunities are provided to learn about cultural diversity. An important outcome is the tolerant and harmonious way that all of the pupils, from a diverse range of ethnic minority backgrounds, relate to each other. This is exemplified in the school's arrangements to promote the Islamic faith. In the timetabled prayers and regular reflections on Islam, respect for their own and other cultures is promoted well. A good example of this is the links that have recently

been established with a Jewish care home for the elderly. Pupils are keen to take on a range of roles and responsibilities. These include being a head boy or head girl, monitors, prefects or a member of the recently-established school council which has already had a positive impact on issues such as more games at lunch times and re-decoration of the toilets.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Effective health and safety policies, including sound risk assessments, are in place. Guidance is implemented effectively. Safeguarding procedures including arrangements for child protection training are good. This is also an improvement since the last inspection. First aid training for all staff is up to date. There are sufficient first aiders on both sites at all times. Very clear policies for behaviour, anti-bullying, fire and first aid exist, are well understood by staff, and are implemented effectively on both sites. Pupils are supervised with care. Pupils who returned the questionnaires were positive about most aspects of school life, but felt the school could do more about promoting healthy lifestyles in terms of outdoor physical activity. Although the inspectors understood the constraints noted by pupils, parents and carers in questionnaire responses, inspection evidence indicates the school has made adequate arrangements to secure regular outdoor physical activity and has enhanced the indoor opportunities by being more creative with the use of the large indoor hall for physical activity. The school's three-year access plan meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

Thorough procedures for the vetting and appointment of staff and others are in place and arrangements meet all requirements. The school has a single central register of staff checks which contains all of the required information.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school's premises provide appropriate accommodation for all pupils to be taught satisfactorily and safely, and all of the regulations for this standard are met. The nursery premises provide children with suitable outdoor space and equipment to meet their needs. The secondary school building is satisfactorily maintained and decorated. All of the furniture and fittings on both sites meet requirements. There are suitable facilities for those who are ill. The school has no outside provision for the secondary-aged pupils, although the recently-appointed headteacher has made arrangements for pupils to access a local public park on a regular basis. This is another improvement since the last inspection.

## **Provision of information**

All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others. The majority of questionnaires that were returned by parents and carers were positive. A parent of a nursery aged child wrote, 'my son...is always happy, very

safe and settled'. A parent of a secondary pupil wrote: 'My child is very happy and fond of her teachers'.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

### **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.

- Increase the rates of pupils' progress by:
  - ensuring all teachers use assessment information to inform their planning in order to meet the needs and abilities of all pupils
  - ensuring all teachers provide pupils with appropriate information in their work and during lessons to help them understand their next steps in learning and what must be improved.

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Muslim secondary day school and nursery		
<b>Date school opened</b>	November 1993		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils secondary)</b>	Boys: 130	Girls: 138	Total: 268
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils nursery)</b>	Boys: 46	Girls: 41	Total: 84
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 1	Girls: 2	Total: 3
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£2,900		
<b>Address of school</b>	145 Upper Tooting Road London SW17 7TJ		
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 87676057		
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@alrisalahschool.co.uk nurserymanager@alrisalahschool.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nasir Qurashi		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Al-Risaala Education Trust		

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



17 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Al-Risalah School, London, SW17 7TJ**

Thank you for your warm and friendly welcome when inspectors visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you, observing you learn and looking at your work. We judged the school to be providing you with a satisfactory quality of education and all government requirements are met. It has some strengths. These include:

- your good behaviour
- your good attendance
- your enjoyment of the school and that you feel very safe and well looked after
- the school making sure you are able to worship and explore your faith throughout the school day
- the school looking after you well and making sure the building is safe and staff health and safety training is up to date.

We talked to your headteacher about the things the school can do to improve.

These include:

- making sure that more of your lessons are planned well, so that you are always challenged, so that you make even better progress and learn even more
- telling you more clearly about what your next steps in learning are and what must be improved.

I hope that you all continue to enjoy your time at Al-Risalah in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Seal  
Her Majesty's Inspector