

Al-Aqsa School

The Wayne Way, Leicester LE5 4PP

Inspection dates

14–16 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for children and learners	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. They have not ensured that teaching enables pupils to make equally good progress across the school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable. In some classes, pupils make good progress as a result of well-planned teaching. This is not the case in all classes.
- Teachers do not routinely take pupils' starting points into account when planning lessons, or use information from assessments to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Marking does not always give pupils clear next steps to improve their work.
- Teachers do not use questioning equally effectively to check how well pupils are learning, and to adapt the learning accordingly.
- Targets are not challenging enough, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- The tasks that pupils are set do not always have a clear purpose. Pupils do not always know what they need to do well to achieve good marks.
- In 2015, at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils achieved levels in both mathematics and reading that were broadly in line with national figures. However, outcomes for pupils are too inconsistent across the school.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in writing as they do in reading, because there are too few opportunities for them to practise writing at length across different subjects.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical reasoning skills. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics are not consistently good.
- Leaders have recently introduced a thematic approach to teaching called the 'new curriculum'. Not all teachers are using assessment to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable in these subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is ambitious for its further success. He has been pivotal in making improvements to the school, and has the full support of governors, teachers and parents.
- The school's ethos and values are well embedded into all areas of its work. The school has a strong sense of community; behaviour is good and pupils show respect.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Pupils settle well to their learning and make strong progress.
- Leaders work effectively with parents to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. School leaders and teachers promote tolerance and understanding of other faiths, beliefs and opinions.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - all teachers take pupils' different starting points into account, and use assessment information to plan lessons that enable all pupils to make progress
 - all teachers mark in line with the school's assessment policy, and give pupils clear next steps to improve their work
 - all teachers use questioning equally effectively to check how well pupils are learning, and to adapt the lesson accordingly
 - teaching consistently makes clear what pupils need to do to achieve their target grades
 - the tasks that pupils are given have a clear purpose, and clear success criteria
 - there are more opportunities for pupils to write at length in different subjects
 - there are more opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical reasoning.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - all pupils make consistently good progress across all subjects and in all classes
 - all teachers use assessment to ensure that pupils make good progress in the 'new curriculum' subjects
 - targets for pupils are sufficiently challenging, and enable the most-able pupils in particular to make good progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all the independent school standards are consistently met
 - developing the role of subject and curriculum leaders so that they embed the school's priorities for improvement in their areas.

The school must meet the following independent school standards:

- The proprietor must ensure that the teaching at the school:
 - enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught,
 - involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time
 - shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons
 - demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress (paragraphs 3, 3(a), 3(c), 3(d) and 3(g)).
- The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities:
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently (paragraph 34(1)(b)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. They have not ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is equally good in all classes. As a result, pupils make inconsistent progress across the school.
- Too much currently rests on the headteacher. He has recently taken steps to strengthen and develop leadership across the school, for example by developing a new model of governance and setting out plans to develop subject and curriculum leadership. These measures have not yet had an impact on improving standards.
- The headteacher has recently introduced a more rigorous system for monitoring the quality of teaching in the school. Regular lesson observations and learning walks ensure that leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Teachers have been given clear targets that link to their own practice, as well as to whole-school priorities. However, these systems have not been in place long enough for teaching to have improved across the school.
- Leaders have introduced new systems to track and monitor pupils' performance. However, to date leaders have not been able to measure the progress pupils make from different starting points, because this information was not previously gathered.
- At the heart of the school are a strong ethos and a strong set of values. Leaders, staff, parents and pupils know what the school stands for, and what the headteacher is trying to achieve. He is highly ambitious for the further success of the school, and enjoys the full support of the whole school community. Parents told inspectors how much they appreciate the improved communication they now have with the school.
- Leaders have recently introduced the 'new curriculum', which weaves the school's values into the subjects that pupils study. Pupils are excited by the new curriculum, and are enjoying the opportunities for debate, discussion and reflection that it brings.
- The school's work to promote British values is highly successful. Pupils feel proud of their heritage and of the diverse cultures they belong to, and they have a strong sense of their identity as British Muslims. As one pupil commented, 'It's just who we are, and what we do every day.'
- Pupils across the school have recently joined the Scouts movement. Leaders see this as pivotal to further strengthening their work to promote British values, and ensuring that the values of the school are well embedded into its extra-curricular activities.
- Leaders have made significant progress on the areas of development identified at the previous emergency inspection. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is a significant strength. The new curriculum in particular provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on learning, to develop a sense of wonder and awe, to think about their moral behaviour and their duties as morally responsible citizens. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures.
- The headteacher has been instrumental in setting up a network of headteachers of Islamic schools in Leicester, and currently chairs this group. This is enabling best practice to be shared across schools.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children learn well as a result of good teaching, and careful monitoring of their progress.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have a good understanding of the issues facing pupils, and work effectively with parents to improve their understanding of these issues. The school has set up mothers' and fathers' groups, who meet regularly to learn about the work of the school and how can they best support their children. Parenting classes, run by parents for parents, have been well attended. Leaders work proactively with the local 'Prevent' team, who have led staff training on radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders have ensured that all the necessary checks on staff are carried out. Training for staff is thorough and up to date. Staff are clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and know what steps to take if they have any concerns about pupils' welfare. They have a good understanding of how to spot the signs of abuse, and the range of issues that pupils might be vulnerable to.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors now work with school leaders to set the strategic direction of the school. They have each taken responsibility for one area of the school's improvement plan, and have a clear understanding of their role in holding leaders to account. They have begun to ask more challenging questions of leaders, and understand the areas that the school needs to improve.

- Governors have a clear sense of how the school promotes British values, and work with leaders to engage parents more closely in the life of the school. They play a key role in developing the school community beyond the school gates.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors have ensured that safeguarding policies and practice are up to date and in line with the latest guidelines. They work closely with leaders to ensure that policies are implemented effectively.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Not all teachers consistently take pupils' starting points into account, or use assessment information, when planning learning. This means that learning is not always at the right level for pupils, and not all pupils make equally good progress.
- Marking does not always provide pupils with clear steps to improve their learning. In some examples seen, teachers commented on the effort made by pupils, and gave too much praise for mediocre answers. Pupils do not always know what their targets are, or what they need to do to reach them.
- Not all teachers have successfully woven the requirements of the new curriculum into their existing plans. Pupils sometimes do work that does not follow from their previous learning, or lead to the next piece. This means that they are not always clear about the purpose of the learning. Not all teachers have thought carefully enough about how they are going to assess pupils' work in these subjects.
- Teachers give pupils information on what to include in the content of their work, but not on the elements that will make it successful. As a consequence, pupils do not always produce work that is at the standard of which they are capable.
- Not all teachers use questioning equally well to check how well pupils have understood the learning. As a result, they do not always know when pupils need extra challenge or support. This slows the progress that pupils make.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to practise writing at length across different subjects. Mathematics lessons focus on number and calculation skills, but do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in mathematical reasoning.
- The new curriculum provides lots of opportunities for debate, discussion and reflection. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning about the wide range of current affairs, moral and ethical issues that are covered. However, they do not always express themselves correctly, and not all teachers correct pupils' spoken English.
- Teachers are typically warm but firm with pupils. Pupils know what their teachers' expectations are, but equally they appreciate the good, supportive relationships they have with them. The climate of mutual respect that is evident in most lessons means that pupils are confident to express their opinions and share their views.
- Teachers sensitively explore the concept of identity with pupils, and ensure that pupils feel positively about their identity as British Muslims. As one teacher put it, 'I want them to know that they are as British as the Queen!'
- When teaching is most successful, it is because teachers use their passion for their subjects to enthuse and motivate pupils. For example, Year 9 pupils were able to confidently state what they enjoyed most about *Pride and Prejudice*, because their teacher had won them over with her obvious enjoyment of the text, and provided opportunities to relate the themes of the book to modern-day Britain.

The personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school is a happy and inclusive environment where pupils feel safe, valued and well cared for.
- The school helps to keep pupils safe through personal, social and health education (PSHE) sessions and assemblies that reinforce the importance of staying safe online and in other situations. Pupils are confident of the steps they would take if they had any worries or concerns.
- The school's *Adab* policy emphasises the importance of good character development. Pupils develop a strong sense of self-respect and respect for others, and have a very clear understanding of the importance of making good moral choices.

- Pupils are excited to have joined the Scouts movement. They know what the values of the Scouts are, and can confidently state how these match the school's values. They were very keen to show inspectors their new ties, and feel rightly proud of the sense of belonging this new initiative brings.
- Pupils have a strong sense of pride in their school, and are keen to play their part in improving it. For example, leaders introduced swimming lessons as a result of a successful campaign by the school council.
- A well-planned programme of careers education begins in Year 7, where pupils learn about different types of careers, and continues into Year 11, when personal, impartial advice and guidance helps pupils to plan their next steps. The school works with representatives from business and industry, who give pupils valuable feedback on their social and communication skills and good advice on how pupils should prepare for their next steps. In addition, pupils undergo a two-week programme of work experience in Year 10. These experiences combine to ensure pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are courteous, very welcoming to visitors, and aware of their duty to behave well outside of school and be good neighbours to the community the school serves.
- The new behaviour policy emphasises the need to 'discipline with dignity' and is highly effective in encouraging pupils to reflect on and improve their behaviour. Pupils told inspectors how teachers help them to understand the impact of their actions, not only on themselves but on the whole school community. Behaviour logs show that there are very few repeated incidents of poor behaviour, and this was confirmed by pupils.
- Pupils are very clear that teachers do not tolerate any form of bullying, and work with pupils to help them understand the different forms it can take. Teachers and support staff emphasise the importance of understanding and respect, and pupils' attitudes and behaviours reflect these values.
- Pupils' attendance is below the national average, but is improving. Leaders have set ambitious targets for attendance, and work with parents to ensure that they, too, understand the importance of good attendance at school. Very few pupils are persistently absent, and the school has appropriate measures in place to deal with absence.
- On rare occasions, pupils do not display consistently positive attitudes to learning. This is usually when teachers have not planned activities carefully enough, and have not taken pupils' different abilities into consideration.

The outcomes for children and learners

require improvement

- In 2015, at the end of Year 6, pupils achieved levels in reading, writing and mathematics that were broadly in line with national figures. However, across the school, pupils do not always achieve well in writing, and their achievement in mathematics varies greatly.
- In several classes, pupils do not do as well in mathematics as they do in English. Their attainment in mathematics is below age-related expectations in a number of classes.
- Pupils in different year groups do not do as well as others nationally in mathematical reasoning. This is because they do not practise these skills enough in lessons.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work across different classes revealed that pupils do not make consistently strong progress. This is sometimes because all pupils complete the same work, regardless of their ability, and sometimes because they do not have clear enough information on how to do well in their work.
- Targets set for the most-able pupils are too low. These pupils do not have the information they need to achieve the highest grades in their courses.
- Outcomes in reading show improvement, as a result of strategies to improve pupils' reading abilities and encourage them to read more widely. Pupils who read to inspectors showed a good understanding of how to use their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) to decode words.
- There are very few pupils with special educational needs. Scrutiny of their work showed that they make good progress as a result of the support they receive from teachers and support staff.
- Outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching, close monitoring of children's progress and well-planned interventions.

The early years provision

is good

- All of the independent school standards are met in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and there are no breaches of statutory welfare requirements.
- The early years leader has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the provision, based on careful assessment of pupils on entry. Staff quickly identify any gaps in pupils' learning and take steps to address these.
- Teachers and support staff make regular and precise assessments of children's learning and use this information to carefully plan next steps.
- The curriculum is well matched to children's interests and needs. The outdoor area is now well used to complement and extend their learning.
- Teachers and support staff have successfully established clear routines and emphasise the importance of good behaviour, respect and cooperative play. Children respond well to these expectations, settle well to their learning and behave well. As a result they make strong progress in their learning.
- Children are well motivated and interested in their learning, because teachers and support staff plan interesting activities for them. For example, in a Foundation Stage 1 session, pupils enjoyed learning about clothes worn by members of the Hindu community. They extended their learning by modelling, painting and cutting out examples of these clothes.
- Leaders ensure that they communicate regularly with parents. Homework books and other activities keep parents involved with and well informed about their children's learning.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development increased significantly in 2015, and was well above the national average. Children made particularly strong progress in communication and language. Across the different areas of development, children make at least typical or better progress from their starting points and are well prepared for Year 1. They make a good start to their phonics development.

School details

Unique reference number	134809
Inspection number	10007700
DfE registration number	856/6017
Type of school	Muslim primary and secondary school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	294
Number of part time pupils	2
Proprietor	Al-Aqsa Schools Trust
Chair	Ibrahim Hewitt
Headteacher	Ataullah Parkar
Annual fees (day pupils)	Primary: £1,700 Secondary: £1,900
Telephone number	0116 2760953
Website	www.alaqsaschool.org.uk
Email address	headteacher@alaqsaschool.co.uk
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2014

Information about this school

- This is a non-selective school, which promotes a Muslim ethos. All pupils attending the school originate from Muslim families, but the school is happy to accept pupils from any faith.
- The school is located in two adjacent buildings, which were previously local authority maintained schools. The school is situated in a residential area, close to the centre of Leicester.
- The school admits children in the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 11. The primary school is open to boys and girls. The secondary school admits girls only.
- The school is registered for 292 pupils. There are currently 294 pupils on roll at the school, including 5 in Year 11. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has a number of aims, including: 'to develop the whole personality of pupils with Tauheed at the core and Islam as the main focus of their lives; to develop an understanding of and respect for the differences that exist in multi-cultural, multi-faith British society'; and, 'to ensure that young people enjoy their life at school and develop a love of learning and a strong desire to continue their education as a lifelong experience.'

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education.
- Inspectors visited an assembly and 19 lessons; some were visited jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, five members of the governing body, including the chair, and a group of teachers. Inspectors spoke informally with parents as they dropped off their children to school.
- Inspectors toured the new building with school leaders in order to check compliance with the independent schools standards.
- Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils, and informally with others at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the quality of work in pupils' books and listened to younger pupils reading.
- 50 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were taken into account, alongside 12 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors viewed a range of documentation, including: the school improvement plan and self-evaluation; safeguarding policies and training records; behaviour records; the single central record; curriculum documents and health and safety policies and records.

Inspection team

Deirdre Duignan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janice Warren

Ofsted inspector

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