

Markazul Uloom

Park Lee Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB2 3NY

Inspection dates

4–6 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school in a calm and committed way. They model the qualities and high expectations that they have of their staff and pupils. They are excellent role models.
- Leaders have ensured that the school is compliant with all of the independent school standards.
- The personal development, behaviour and welfare of the pupils is outstanding. Pupils leave Markazul Uloom as mature, well-rounded young people who are able to make a positive contribution to their community and to wider society.
- Pupils' behaviour around school is exemplary. They are extremely courteous and helpful. Visitors are made to feel very welcome.
- Pupils are happy in school. They benefit enormously from the family ethos. Mutually respectful, positive relationships are at the heart of the school's success.
- Leaders take their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding very seriously. Leaders have created a culture where pupils' safety and well-being is the top priority.
- During their time in school, pupils make at least good progress. The progress that some make in mathematics and English is exceptional. In 2016, the standards that pupils attained in most subjects were above national averages.
- Most pupils benefit from good teaching that enables them to learn successfully. However, some teachers do not use questioning effectively enough to check and develop pupils' understanding. Not all teachers insist on a high standard of written work, particularly from the boys.
- The trustees have a clear vision for the future of Markazul Uloom that involves relocating to a new building in September 2018. They demonstrate a genuine commitment to the school. Their forward-thinking and outward-looking approach ensures that the school continues to improve.
- The school benefits from strong leadership. However, strategic leadership across the school as a whole is not as effective as it could be. In many ways, the girls' and boys' sections operate as separate schools and opportunities are missed to share good practice.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and the associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - ensuring that the leaders of the girls' and boys' sections of the school work together more strategically
 - scheduling joint leadership meetings for the leaders of the girls' and boys' sections of the school
 - planning professional development more collaboratively across both sections of the school to enable good practice to be shared more effectively
 - making the most of the excellent administrative leadership that exists in the girls' section to benefit the whole school.
- Improve the quality of teaching further by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use questioning effectively to check and deepen pupils' understanding
 - insist on a high standard of written work, particularly from the boys.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead their respective areas of the school very effectively, with dedication, commitment and sincerity. They lead in a calm manner, modelling the qualities and high expectations that they have of their staff and pupils.
- Staff, pupils and parents value the commitment of leaders. The responses from all of the staff who filled in the Ofsted questionnaire were very positive. Pupils who met with the inspectors spoke of the high esteem in which they hold the leaders of the school.
- Parents who spoke with the lead inspector, or who wrote to her, were extremely positive about the quality of education at the school. A common thread for all was how happy their children are at the school. This was particularly the case for some parents whose children had moved here from other schools. They were all keen to tell the inspector how pleased they were with the decision that they made to send their children to this school. This was summed up by one parent, who said: 'Markazul Uloom provided my girls with a solid foundation which gave them the confidence to integrate and positively contribute to wider society.'
- Pupils are taught national curriculum subjects in the morning and Islamic studies in the afternoon. Leaders ensure that both aspects of pupils' education complement each other so that pupils become well-rounded individuals. There is a natural crossover in the way that both aspects of their studies contribute significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The use of Urdu and Arabic in the Islamic studies sessions contributes significantly to the standards that pupils achieve in these subjects at GCSE level.
- Despite the small size of the school, and limited resources and facilities, leaders ensure that pupils have access to a broad curriculum that gives them experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic education. Within the limitations of the current surroundings, trustees have made improvements for the start of the next academic year by providing a science laboratory and an indoor physical education room.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a range of enrichment activities. Recent visits have included trips to a farm, a museum, the magistrates' court, the town hall and a safari park. These are in addition to trips to a science and engineering day, a creative writing workshop and careers workshops. Pupils' experiences are also enhanced by visiting speakers such as a Church of England lay minister and various representatives from different professions who give careers talks. Pupils also participate in charity work, for example, raising money for the neighbouring hospice. This extensive range of enrichment opportunities demonstrates leaders' commitment to broadening pupils' horizons as well as helping to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- The school's philosophy promotes respect for diversity, and particular regard is paid to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Equality Act. In all aspects of their education, pupils are encouraged to respect every other individual. This comes across very strongly when talking to pupils, who express their views in a thoughtful and articulate manner.
- Trustees have enlisted the services of an educational consultant to work with the school. Since joining the school in January 2016, she has worked closely with leaders in the girls'

section to improve the quality of teaching. She has carried out joint observations with leaders and identified training needs. As a result, more pupils are benefiting from effective teaching, and leaders have an accurate view of where good practice exists and where further improvement is required. She has not had the same level of involvement with leaders in the boys' section but this is now beginning to happen.

- Having the opportunity to work alongside an external consultant means that the leaders in the girls' section are further down the road of systematically monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. This is an example of how the two sections of the school appear to operate completely separately rather than as one school. This way of working is a hindrance to further improvement, and is not making the best use of leadership expertise for all pupils. There is frequent informal communication between the leaders of both sections of the school but they do not hold formal joint senior leadership team meetings. This means that there are missed opportunities for working strategically and sharing best practice across the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. Administrative leadership in the girls' section is very strong. There is some duplication of administrative procedures, with different systems in place in the two sections of the school. This is not the most efficient way of running one school.

Governance

- Governance of the school is provided by a small group of trustees. They are totally committed to driving the future development of Markazul Uloom. To this end, they are investing a considerable amount of funds into completely refurbishing a large building on the school site. This will become the new school from September 2018 and pupils will enjoy high-quality facilities. Alongside this, trustees are making sure that the existing facilities provide suitable accommodation for pupils for the next academic year.
- As well as being forward-thinking, the trustees are outward-looking. Employing an external consultant has helped to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching. However, her work has been mainly in the girls' section and trustees have not provided enough opportunities for her to make an impact in the boys' section. The trustees also seek out good practice by working with leaders of other local Muslim schools.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A culture of safeguarding pervades the school. It informs everything that leaders do. The main reason why safeguarding is so effective is that all the staff know each individual pupil extremely well. Everyone in the school community genuinely cares for each other. Pupils describe the school as 'like a second home'. They talk about the teachers being 'always there for you'. They say that they would go to any member of staff and talk about any issue. As one pupil said: 'They feel like our counsellors.'
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and leaders fulfil their statutory duties in this area effectively. The school's safeguarding and child protection policies comply with the latest government requirements. Systems to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to work with children in the school are secure.

- Leaders deliver safeguarding training to all staff to ensure that they understand their responsibilities. Training on safeguarding issues is revisited throughout the year. Alongside the general training on potential areas of risks for children and young people, staff have also undertaken further specific training on 'Prevent' duty and female genital mutilation. If staff join the school during the academic year, leaders ensure that they receive safeguarding training in their probationary period.
- Pupils also receive regular training on safeguarding issues. Leaders ensure that this happens in an accessible way, using appropriate language that helps them to stay safe and be alert to any potential risks.
- All staff have had e-safety training. Leaders have also provided e-safety training for parents of Year 7 pupils and there are plans to roll this out to other parents in the next academic year. The use of computers to access the internet is supervised and appropriate filtering systems are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most pupils benefit from high-quality teaching that enables them to make at least good progress during their time in school. The extremely positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils, and pupils and their peers, make a significant contribution to the quality of learning across the school. Pupils feel valued and well supported by their teachers and their peers. This safe and collaborative learning environment builds pupils' confidence.
- The small class sizes mean that teachers know their pupils very well and are able to plan learning to meet their individual needs. This is particularly the case in the boys' section, where class sizes are extremely small. The exceptional progress that most boys make in mathematics is evidence of how much they benefit from the individual attention that they receive.
- The strongest teachers use their expertise and passion for their subjects to engage pupils in their learning. This happens particularly in science and Islamic studies. In these subjects, teachers are very clear when explaining aspects of learning, check that pupils have understood before moving on and challenge them to think deeply.
- Leaders are aware that some inconsistencies exist in the quality of teaching across the school. For example, not all teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and to deepen and extend their thinking. Also, a scrutiny of pupils' work revealed that not all teachers have high enough expectations of the standard of written work that pupils produce. This is particularly the case for the boys.
- The school has an effective system to assess how well pupils are progressing. If pupils are falling behind they receive extra support to help them catch up. Parents receive regular and clear information about how their children are progressing in school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. It is at the heart of the school's ethos and culture.

- All pupils are encouraged to be the best that they can be. The support that they receive from all the staff in a very nurturing environment means that pupils flourish. Pupils really value the support of adults in school. In order to cover the national curriculum subjects and their Islamic studies, the school day is long. However, pupils are clearly very happy in school and know that the staff care for them.
- All the pupils who spoke to the inspectors were very proud of their school and felt very happy and safe. They described their school as a family in which everyone cares for each other. This family ethos, in which all pupils look out for each other, means that incidents of bullying and unkindness are extremely rare.
- Pupils are thoughtful, confident and articulate. They have a strong sense of their Islamic identity which is complemented by a knowledge and understanding of the diverse nature of modern Britain. Pupils learn about different religions. They are taught to be respectful of others, for example those of a different religion or sexual orientation. When talking to pupils they demonstrate a very strong moral purpose. It is clear that these young people are equipped with the skills and qualities that will enable them to contribute positively to society.
- Pupils receive high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance. Leaders encourage pupils to have high career aspirations and equip them with the knowledge and skills to be successful.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are gracious, sociable and respectful to each other and adults. They are very welcoming and helpful to visitors.
- Pupils value their education and, consequently, they have a very positive attitude to their learning. During lessons, they are actively engaged in their studies, which helps them to make good progress. However, for some of the boys in particular, this positive attitude to learning does not always translate into pride in the presentation and quality of their written work.
- Leaders make sure that families understand the importance of good attendance in school. Consequently, the school's overall attendance rate has been above average for the last three years.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- During the time that they spend in school, pupils make at least good progress. The standards that some pupils achieved in mathematics and English in 2016 represented exceptional progress from their respective starting points.
- In 2016, the standards that pupils attained in most subjects were above national averages. For the majority of subjects, the outcomes improved on the previous year's results.
- Pupils make particularly good progress in science and, over recent years, have achieved high standards. Outcomes in history have not been as strong. Consequently, leaders have made the decision that pupils will now study GCSE geography rather than history. This bodes well for the future, as the standard of work that pupils produce in this subject in

key stage 3 is very high.

- As the school does not receive additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, leaders do not identify and track the performance of these pupils as a separate group. However, leaders ensure that they identify any barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils might encounter and take action to overcome them.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often. Many pupils read fluently and demonstrate understanding of what they are reading. However, leaders are aware that developing the comprehension skills of boys with low prior attainment needs to be a higher priority.
- Destination information shows that all pupils are being very well prepared to progress to the next stage of their education. The outcomes that they achieve enable many pupils to go on to study A levels. A significant proportion of pupils then go on to study at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

School details

Unique reference number	133541
DfE registration number	889/6009
Inspection number	10026008

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Islamic faith school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	161
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr Hanif Amla
Headteacher	Mr Sajid Bargit
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,350
Telephone number	01254 581569
Website	
Email address	Girls – info@mugirls.org.uk Boys – markazul.uloom@yahoo.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–30 January 2014

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2001 in Blackburn, Lancashire. The school is registered as an independent day Muslim faith school for up to 217 boys and girls aged from 11 to 19 years. Boys and girls are taught in separate buildings on the school campus.
- Currently, there are 161 pupils on roll, comprising 135 girls and 26 boys. This includes a small number of girls who are aged 17 or 18 years. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils are of mainly Asian heritage. The school has an Islamic religious affiliation. Some

pupils aspire to ultimately become religious scholars.

- The school follows the national curriculum and provides GCSE courses. It works within an ethos of Islamic values, beliefs, culture and tradition. The school also aims to help pupils 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'.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors toured the school site accompanied by senior members of staff.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school. Most of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct in lessons and at other times during the school day.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher; the deputy headteacher; a trustee; an education consultant who is employed by the school; members of the teaching staff following observations of their lessons; and three groups of pupils. An inspector listened to a small number of pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' work jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors reviewed documents to confirm compliance with the independent school standards and provide other inspection evidence. These documents included various policies; health and safety records and other safeguarding information; data relating to past and current pupils' achievement; the self-evaluation and improvement plan; minutes of meetings; and the admissions and attendance registers.
- The lead inspector took account of the 13 responses to Ofsted's online 'Parent View' survey and three letters from parents, and held meeting with two parents. The lead inspector also considered the seven responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Anne Seneviratne, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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