

Inspection of Al-Aqsa Schools Trust

The Wayne Way, Leicester, Leicestershire LE5 4PP

Inspection dates: 14–16 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Across the whole school, pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. They are ambitious and want to achieve well. In the secondary provision, pupils have studied examples of successful Islamic women. This has inspired them to be as successful. Pupils in the primary provision enjoy receiving certificates for achieving well.

Pupils know that it is important to behave well and to respect others. They learn that it is right to respect people who are different from them. Pupils have good relationships with each other. They say that there is little bullying. When pupils fall out, staff support them to resolve their differences.

Pupils have opportunities to meet people who live locally. Younger pupils give food parcels to local older citizens. This helps them to learn the importance of sharing. Pupils say that there are too few clubs to take part in and that they do not study religions other than Islam and Christianity. In some subjects, teachers have not planned learning so that pupils build up their knowledge over time and use what they already know when they learn something new.

Pupils say that they feel safe. However, leaders' actions do not keep all pupils safe. Some secondary pupils feel unable to share with staff any concerns that they may have.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils across all years study a broad range of subjects. Leaders have recently increased the subjects that pupils can study at GCSE to include art and computer science. This is so that pupils can study art- and technology-related subjects when they leave the school at the end of Year 11.

Leaders have begun to review what pupils learn in the different subjects. This review includes all year groups in both the primary and secondary provisions. However, this review has yet to clarify what pupils will learn and when in all subjects. In some, it is not always clear how pupils' learning links to what they already know in that subject. Furthermore, pupils sometimes struggle to link their learning across different subjects. At the end of Year 6, pupils do not always have the knowledge they need to make a strong start to their learning in the secondary provision.

In most subjects, teachers' knowledge is secure. They use it well to explain ideas to pupils. Most teachers check pupils' understanding. They provide careful support to any pupils who struggle to learn. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Staff promote reading well across the whole school. Younger pupils learn phonics each day to develop their reading skills. Older primary pupils read regularly, including to each other, and as a class. Pupils in the secondary provision study a

wide range of texts. These include articles, novels, plays and poems. They often discuss what they can learn from what they have read.

Mathematics is taught well. Pupils develop their understanding of different mathematical concepts. They use this well to solve problems. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning in this subject.

Children in early years enjoy learning. Adults support them well, so that they settle in quickly and join in with the different activities. Adults encourage 'good thinking' and 'good listening'. This helps children to engage with their learning and behave well towards others. In Nursery, children enthusiastically joined in singing 'Old Macdonald's Farm'. In Reception, children worked well together in small groups to paint a picture of a river and to complete a jigsaw. Children have regular opportunities to learn to read and to count. They are well prepared for when they start Year 1.

Staff have very high expectations of behaviour, to which pupils respond well. They conduct themselves appropriately around the school site.

Pupils do not have the opportunity to develop a thorough understanding of different faiths. They do not learn about religions other than Islam and Christianity. This limits pupils' spiritual development. There are too few clubs and activities for pupils during their social time. The opportunities for pupils to explore their wider interests, then, are limited.

Older pupils receive effective careers advice and guidance. They take part in meaningful work experience. This helps these pupils prepare well for when they leave the school. At the end of Year 11, pupils usually continue with their studies elsewhere, or take up apprenticeships.

Senior leaders are mindful of staff's workload. They plan training to support staff to develop their practice, including in teaching English and mathematics. Staff are appreciative of the support senior leaders give them.

The school does not meet all the independent school standards.

Members of the proprietorial body, the trustees, have not made sure that all parts of both school sites are safe for pupils. Their health and safety checks have been ad hoc. At the time of the inspection, inspectors found many health and safety concerns across both sites. For example, the water in the primary and early years toilet sinks was too hot. In the secondary school, there were several stand-alone heaters that had not been tested to check their suitability for use. The use of these heaters in classrooms was contrary to the school's own fire risk assessment policy. Leaders resolved these failings during the time that inspectors were on site. However, over time, they have not maintained the school sites to an appropriate standard.

Senior leaders do not have the time, knowledge and resources to fulfil their roles well. This is particularly the case for those responsible for safeguarding. These leaders have other responsibilities that take them away from their work to keep pupils safe.

Trustees have not made sure that the school's admission policy contains all the necessary information.

The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school's website. However, leaders' practices and procedures to keep pupils safe do not follow the latest guidance. This is the case when leaders appoint new staff and when they respond to safeguarding concerns.

The guidance for staff on how to assess risk when planning activities for pupils lacks clarity. The risk assessment policy does not explain how to measure the severity of any risk staff may have identified. This prevents staff from identifying all possible risks, or from accurately assessing the nature of risk. In turn, this prevents staff from considering what to do to reduce any possible risk. It is also unclear from the guidance how staff should record their assessments of risk. There is inconsistency in staff practice when completing risk assessments. Pupils in the secondary provision cross a car park to go to the outdoor area they use during social times. There is no risk assessment in place for this. This places these pupils unnecessarily at risk.

Trustees have not fulfilled their duty as members of the proprietorial body. They have not ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards. Their checks have been insufficient to identify any failings. Trustees were unaware of many of the failings until inspectors brought them to their attention. Their lack of knowledge of these failings has put pupils at risk. Trustees have made sure that the school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Staff know to check on pupils' welfare and to pass on any safeguarding concerns. However, leaders do not always respond appropriately. On occasions, they have not provided the right support to pupils. They have not sought advice from other agencies quickly enough. Leaders do not keep detailed, accurate safeguarding records. Some pupils do not feel that they can speak with staff to share their concerns. Leaders have not followed the correct procedures when taking pupils off the school roll during the school year.

Senior leaders do not make all the necessary checks on new staff. They have not recorded correctly the checks they have made.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Senior leaders do not always respond effectively to concerns about pupils' welfare. On occasions, leaders have not accurately identified possible safeguarding concerns to which pupils may be subject. Leaders have not always provided pupils with appropriate support, and nor have they kept accurate safeguarding records. Trustees must ensure that senior leaders have the necessary skills, time and resources to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.
- Senior leaders do not fully understand their duty regarding pupils who leave the school during the academic year. On occasions, leaders have removed pupils from the school roll before confirming their attendance at their next place of learning. Senior leaders must ensure that they understand and fulfil their duties in relation to removing from the school roll pupils who leave the school during the school year.
- Senior leaders do not make all the necessary recruitment checks in a timely manner. They have not maintained accurate records of their recruitment checks. Leaders must ensure that their recruitment procedures comply with the latest national guidance.
- Staff do not always make appropriate assessments of the risks pupils may encounter, including during off-site trips. This limits staff's ability to judge the necessary action they should take to reduce any potential risks that may occur. Leaders must ensure that there is clear guidance on assessing risk, so that all staff understand how to calculate and manage risk effectively.
- Trustees and senior leaders have not made sure that the school's two sites are continually safe. Until very recently, leaders have failed to identify hazards that have compromised pupils' safety. This includes in early years. Leaders must ensure that they maintain the school sites to an appropriate standard.
- In some subjects, plans for learning do not identify what pupils will learn and when across the different year groups and by the end of each key stage. When this happens, pupils do not build up their knowledge well enough so that, at the end of each key stage, they are ready for their next stage of learning. Leaders should ensure that it is clear what pupils should learn and when in each subject, in each year group, so that pupils know more over time and connect what they are learning with what they already know.
- Pupils do not learn about religions other than Islam and Christianity. This limits their chance of developing a thorough understanding of different faiths. Leaders should ensure that pupils study a broad range of religions.
- There are too few clubs and other activities for pupils, particularly in the primary school. This limits their opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills outside the classroom. Leaders should ensure that there is a wide range of activities available for pupils, including in their social time.

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School details

Unique reference number	134809
DfE registration number	856/6017
Local authority	Leicester
Inspection number	10128019
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	312
Proprietor	Al-Aqsa Schools Trust
Chair	Ibrahim Hewitt
Headteacher	Amina Patel
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,850 to £2,100
Telephone number	0116 276 0953
Website	www.alaqsaschool.co.uk
Email address	headteacher@alaqsaschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–30 November 2017

Information about this school

- Al-Aqsa Schools Trust is an Islamic independent day school.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for 292 pupils aged three to 16. The school currently has 312 pupils on roll, which is above that for which the school is registered.
- The school admits girls and boys to the early years and the primary provision. Girls only are admitted to the secondary provision.
- Children in early years and the primary provision are taught on a separate site to the girls in the secondary provision. The two sites are next door to each other and share the same address.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

- The school's last standard inspection took place on 28–30 November 2017.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leader of early years and the chair of trustees.
- We looked closely at the quality of education in English, including early reading, mathematics, art and computing. We met with the lead teacher for each subject. We visited lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks, and met with teachers and some pupils of the lessons we visited.
- We met with staff and groups of pupils from both the primary and the secondary provision.
- The lead inspector met with the safeguarding leaders to discuss safeguarding. He also considered documentation relating to safeguarding, the school's single central register and the system for undertaking checks on new staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with representatives from the local authority and a member of the local 'Prevent' duty team.
- We took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 10 responses to the free-text service. There were no responses either to the staff or pupil online surveys.
- The lead inspector toured the school site to check the school's compliance with Part 5 of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Simon Hollingsworth, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Steven Barnes

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 18(2)(c) the proprietor carries out appropriate checks to confirm in respect of each such person–
 - 18(2)(c)(ii) the person’s medical fitness.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to

a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- 3.5 The lead practitioner must attend a child protection training course that enables them to identify, understand and respond appropriately to signs of possible abuse and neglect.

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