

Inspection of Al-Zahra School

134 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6PF

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Mutual respect and kindness are central to the ethos of the school. Staff nurture a sense of family and belonging. Pupils appreciate their small, close school community where they make good friends. Teachers are kind and help pupils to do well in their studies.

Teachers and leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and encourage positive attitudes towards schoolwork. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are enthusiastic about all that they learn.

Pupils are welcoming and very polite. Behaviour is exceptionally calm and settled in class and around the school. Pupils look out for each other and want to help if anyone ever feels sad. Pupils said that if friends fall out, or if there is any occasional bullying, teachers will always help to sort things out quickly. They said that there is no discriminatory behaviour or peer-on-peer abuse.

Pupils have a wealth of opportunities to take part in community events and acquire new interests. They work alongside others from a wide range of backgrounds and faiths. They contribute to special events at local churches and deliver greetings cards to celebrate different festivals. Pupils participate in conferences and debates with pupils from other schools and local politicians, helping to promote a very strong sense of citizenship and social responsibility.

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

Pupils study a broad range of subjects. Teachers typically have strong subject knowledge. They use subject plans to enable pupils to reinforce and apply their prior learning from one year to the next. Subject leaders generally identify the key content that they want pupils to know and remember. They regularly review and update subject plans, adding further detail to the content they want pupils to learn. However, planning is not equally detailed across a few subjects. This leads to some variation in the depth and quality of the curriculum content that pupils learn, particularly when teachers lack strong subject specialist knowledge.

Teachers help pupils remember and recall key facts. They review pupils' work, correct any misunderstandings and identify where pupils' learning needs developing further. Teachers generally know when pupils need additional support, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and help them to achieve as well as other pupils.

Leaders prioritise making sure that pupils develop reading fluency and a love of reading. All pupils read confidently and clearly. Regular story times and reading to adults promote pupils' enjoyment of books. Leaders have made sure that all teachers have received phonics training and are confident to support pupils to develop their early reading skills. However, occasionally, staff do not make sure that pupils read books that match the letter sounds they have learned.

Pupils have high expectations of their own and each other's behaviour in lessons. They value their education and are very keen to learn. In every lesson, pupils are attentive to their teachers and concentrate diligently on their tasks. They engage confidently in discussions and listen respectfully to their teachers and their peers. Pupils behave consistently well around the school.

The school has strong links with a range of organisations to provide pupils with exceptional opportunities to develop their personal and social skills. Leaders work with national charities and interfaith groups so that pupils are involved in high-quality events. Leaders plan activities to support pupils' learning. For example, pupils in Year 11 took part in a question and answer session with a medical surgeon when studying heart disease in biology, and guest speakers from Transport for London promoted safe ways to travel. Opportunities to meet with a wide range of professionals help pupils to grow in confidence and broaden their outlook as they plan their future education and careers.

Leaders aim to make learning relevant to pupils' lives and make pupils aware of current affairs and environmental issues. Teachers encourage pupils to develop an understanding and respect for differences and challenges within their own and other communities. Younger pupils demonstrated great empathy when talking about children raised in poor socio-economic circumstances. Older pupils discussed maturely the responsible use of online images and resources.

Leaders have been considerate of pupils' and staff's mental health and well-being throughout and after the periods of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff said that leaders support them well and watch over their workload.

Leaders provide parents and carers with regular information about their children's learning. Following consultation with parents, leaders recently introduced the relationships and sex education programme in all year groups. The school's website is being constructed. Paper copies of school policies, including the safeguarding policy, are available to parents on request.

The proprietor body has worked productively with the school's leaders so that all independent school standards are met. The proprietor body knows the strengths of the school and holds the school's leaders to account on the effectiveness of their strategies for further development.

The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are made of staff. Staff are familiar with and follow the school's safeguarding policy. They have regular training

and know what to do if they have any safeguarding concerns. Leaders work with outside agencies to seek guidance and support to keep pupils safe.

Leaders maintain a close eye on pupils' attendance and check on their welfare if they are absent from school. Staff maintained the same levels of vigilance during the periods of remote education.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some subject plans do not state all the key content that leaders intend pupils to know and remember. This leads to some variation in the quality of sequencing and coherence of subject content in a few subjects where teachers lack strong subject specialist knowledge. Leaders should ensure that all subject plans consistently detail the subject content pupils should learn. They should also ensure that teachers receive training and support to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogy in areas of the curriculum in which they are not subject specialists.
- Occasionally, pupils' reading books do not match the phonics they have learned. When this happens, pupils are not able to practise and consolidate the letter sounds they know. Leaders should make sure that teachers always match pupils with the right reading books to develop pupils' reading skills.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	147025
DfE registration number	304/6009
Local authority	Brent
Inspection number	10193523
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Al Khoei Foundation
Chair	Seyed Fazel Milani
Headteacher	Zamina Rizvi
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,100 to £6,200 per year
Telephone number	0207 3727706
Website	None
Email address	alzahra@asazs.co.uk

Information about this school

- Al-Zahra School is an independent day school for girls. It is located in a single building on a single site. The school opened in September 2019 following its de-amalgamation from Al-Sadiq School.
- This is the school's first standard inspection. It was registered with the Department for Education on 1 September 2019 for up to 210 pupils. It has an Islamic ethos.
- The school occupies the same premises as the boys' school from which it de-amalgamated. There is clear delineation between the schools, including separate entrances and reception areas. There is timetabled use of a few common areas, such as the library, so that boys and girls use these separately.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school does not have any provision for two-year-olds.
- There is a very small proportion of pupils with SEND.

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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the chair of the proprietor body, the leader with responsibility for safeguarding, and primary and secondary subject leaders. They also held meetings and informal conversations with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors did deep dives in personal, social, health and citizenship education, English, including early reading, religious studies and science. This included visits to lessons, discussions with pupils and teachers and review of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of the school's policies and other documentation, including those relating to behaviour and attendance, health and safety, curriculum planning, and communications with parents.
- Review of the single central record, the school's safeguarding policy, documents relating to the referral of concerns, responses to surveys, and discussions with staff, all contributed to the inspection of safeguarding.
- Inspectors took into account the surveys completed for this inspection by 13 parents, 67 pupils and 24 members of staff.

Inspection team

Amanda Carter-Fraser, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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