

Inspection of Al Hikmah Boys School

145 High Street, Luton, Bedfordshire LU4 9LE

Inspection dates:

19 to 22 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Al Hikmah Boys School has two overriding aims that are fully entwined with each other. The school's vision is to give boys the knowledge and skills they need to become good Muslims. The school sees it as equally important that boys are taught to be useful and effective members of modern British society. Leaders and staff share this view and it influences every aspect of the school's work.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of how pupils should behave. They make these expectations clear, and pupils respond very well to them. Sanctions are proportionate and applied consistently. As a result, classrooms are calm, productive places where pupils can learn. The atmosphere around the school is welcoming and friendly. Pupils are notably polite and well mannered.

Leaders and staff also have high expectations of pupils academically. Pupils are expected to work hard and to achieve as well as they can. Leaders and staff monitor pupils' progress regularly to check that they are learning the curriculum as well as they should, from their individual starting points.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe there. Pupils told inspectors that the school 'is like a family' and that they have no concerns about bullying.

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

Leaders have focused well on developing the school's curriculum. The curriculum has two parts, Islamic studies and the study of national curriculum subjects. The two parts are closely connected and woven together. Links between the two are made wherever possible and meaningful. The religious side of the curriculum includes study of Islam, the Qur'an, Arabic and Hadith. The secular arm of the curriculum includes English, mathematics, history, science, physical education, computing, business studies, Arabic and physical education. Personal, social, health and economic education is taught across both parts of the curriculum.

Leaders have thought carefully about what aspects of each subject should be taught and when. Plans for individual subjects show that pupils are taught key content in a carefully sequenced and well-ordered way. Teaching staff have strong knowledge of the subjects that they teach. This means that they are able to provide appropriate challenge for pupils and to answer pupils' questions effectively.

Pupils are given frequent opportunities to revisit and practise what they have been taught previously. This helps them to learn the curriculum well. Pupils remember a great deal about the subjects they learn about. They use their prior knowledge to help them learn more. For example, pupils in Year 8 were able to use their prior knowledge about gases and the periodic table to help them with their study of human respiration.

When they join the school, pupils are assessed to check what they already know and to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Each pupil is given a 'flight path' based on these initial assessments. The 'flight paths' are used as a guide throughout boys' time at the school. Teachers frequently assess how well pupils are learning the curriculum, using both informal and formal methods. When pupils do not do as well in assessments as their 'flight path' indicates they should, they are given additional tuition to help them to catch up.

Pupils have strong attitudes to learning. They listen carefully and want to do well. They enjoy learning for its own sake. Pupils also behave very well, following the school's rules closely. This means that lessons are delivered with very little disruption. Pupils are able to concentrate, and this helps them to learn.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong focus on pupils' personal development. The Islamic arm of the curriculum is heavily focused on encouraging pupils to develop into well-adjusted, young British men. Leaders are determined that pupils should be part of, and help, the broader communities that they live in. Pupils are given the knowledge and understanding they need to respect and celebrate the differences between people in modern British society. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, leaders planned regular opportunities for pupils to broaden their knowledge of other people's experiences and views. For example, representatives of other faith groups regularly visited the school. Leaders are in the process of re-establishing these links now that the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Although the school opened as a new legal entity in March 2020, the provision has been operating on the current site since September 2016. It previously operated as part of the separately registered Bury Park Educational Institute (Al-Hikmah Secondary School), which then provided education for both boys and girls, and now provides education for girls only.

Governance arrangements continue to operate across the boys' and girls' schools, as if they are still two parts of the same whole. As a result, governors and trustees have not established strong enough systems for ensuring the quality of the provision at this school. Trustees and governors do not demonstrate the skills and knowledge they need to carry out their roles effectively. As a result, they have not ensured that all of the independent school standards have been met consistently over time.

A small number of the standards were not met at the beginning of the inspection. For example, some information was missing from the school's single central record of pre-employment checks when it was scrutinised at the beginning of the inspection. In addition, information required when changes are made to entries was missing from the school's admissions register. Although these were rectified during the inspection, leaders and those responsible for governance were not aware of these omissions until they were pointed out by inspectors. Governors and trustees had also not ensured that safeguarding arrangements were effective over time. These weaknesses were picked up and addressed by the acting headteacher prior to the inspection.

The school's safeguarding policy is available on its website. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Until recently, safeguarding practices were not strong enough. Staff were vigilant and reported concerns when they arose. However, concerns were not always acted on appropriately. There were weaknesses in record-keeping.

Leaders have recently taken decisive action to improve this. Current leaders view safeguarding as their most important priority. They have undertaken training, and provided additional training for all staff, to ensure that everyone in the school is well informed about safeguarding guidance. Leaders have improved the way that concerns about pupils' welfare are both recorded and dealt with. Although very new, systems are now strong, and safeguarding is effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor has delegated strategic oversight of the school to the school's governing body. The governing body remains shared with Bury Park Educational Institute (Al-Hikmah Secondary School), despite the proprietor's intention to have two separate governing bodies. Governors and trustees do not fully recognise that Al Hikmah Boys School is now a standalone organisation, and they continue to treat the two schools as one in some respects. Governors and trustees have not established sufficiently strong processes for evaluating the quality of this school. The governing body does not carry out its role effectively, particularly in holding leaders to account. Governors and trustees, as a corporate body, do not have a clear enough view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Prior to this inspection, governors and trustees were not aware that some of the independent school standards were not met. They have not ensured that all standards are met fully and consistently. The proprietor now needs to ensure that all trustees and governors:
 - recognise this school as a separate legal entity, unconnected with the previous school
 - have strong working knowledge of the independent school standards, and ensure that all standards are met fully and consistently
 - monitor leaders' actions systematically, and hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work
 - regularly and accurately evaluate the quality of provision, by being sharply analytical and appropriately self-critical.

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School details

Unique reference number	147690
DfE registration number	821/6017
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10203409
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	131
Proprietor	Bury Park Educational Institute
Chair	Abul Hussain
Headteacher	Abdul Muhit
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,000
Telephone number	01582 594885
Website	www.alhikmahschool.com
Email address	shussain@alhikmahschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school was previously part of Bury Park Educational Institute (Al-Hikmah Secondary School), a mixed-gender school, separately registered with the Department for Education (DfE). The school followed a policy of segregating pupils by gender and operated on two sites. The boys' part of the school moved to its current site, with DfE agreement, in 2016.
- A ruling by the Court of Appeal in 2017 affirmed that separate but equal treatment of girl and boy pupils in co-educational schools is contrary to the Equality Act 2010. In response, the proprietor applied to the DfE to register the boys' site as a separate school. This was agreed and Al Hikmah Boys School was registered by the DfE on 26 March 2020. Bury Park Educational Institute (Al-Hikmah Secondary School) continues to operate but is now a single-sex school for girls.
- This is the first standard inspection of Al Hikmah Boys School under its current registration.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school has a religious ethos. It teaches both an Islamic curriculum and a secular curriculum.
- The previous headteacher left the school in September 2021. The substantive deputy headteacher is currently acting as headteacher.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, other leaders and staff, pupils and trustees and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, science and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work.

- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns and spoke with parents, staff and pupils.
- In order to check compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors looked at the school's website, checked policies and other documents, looked at documents relating to health and safety, and checked the school premises.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kim Hall

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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.

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