

# Inspection of Al-Aqsa Schools Trust

The Wayne Way, Leicester, Leicestershire LE5 4PP

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Inspection dates: 1 to 3 February 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy attending and say that it is a safe and friendly place. They are well cared for. Staff know each pupil well. Pupils say that staff are always there when they need help.

Staff have high expectations of pupils. Pupils meet these expectations. They achieve well in a range of subjects. Older pupils are proud of the poems their peers have had published in a collection of teenage poetry.

Pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite and respectful. They apply themselves well in lessons. They are keen to learn. They take pride in their work. They say that bullying rarely happens. They are assured that staff deal with it effectively when it happens.

Pupils gain from a range of opportunities that support their personal development. They develop self-confidence and resilience. They are well prepared for their next steps.

Several parents and carers comment positively about the school. Typically, one parent stated, 'My child looks forward to going to school.' Other parents value the family feel, with happy and helpful teachers.

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

Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum that reflects the school's values. They provide pupils with subject curriculums that build pupils' knowledge and skills over time. For example, pupils learn Arabic and develop a sound understanding of linguistics. They become increasingly capable in their use and application of mathematics. Teachers support and challenge pupils to revisit and build on previous learning each term and from one year to the next. Pupils know more and remember more over time.

Leaders identify and assess pupils' needs effectively. Teachers ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to access and make progress through the curriculum. Leaders use the help of external professionals to provide specialist support when needed.

The culture of reading is strong. Children in the early years get off to a good start especially in learning to read. Leaders have planned a curriculum that develops pupils' love of reading. Younger pupils use phonics to learn to read. They use their phonics knowledge and skills to write words, sentences and stories. Leaders are following their plans to strengthen the teaching of phonics. They have plans in place to train staff well and make sure that all books match the sounds that pupils are learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' reading and writing. Older pupils read a range of books that broaden their understanding of the world. Pupils speak knowledgeably about their favourite authors.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning and conduct themselves well. Pupils value their education. Leaders continue to support and challenge parents when pupils do not attend regularly. The attendance of some pupils has been affected by the pandemic.

Leaders provide rich opportunities for pupils' personal development. They provide pupils with a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Pupils learn about different aspects of physical and emotional health and well-being. Leaders have developed a well-sequenced and age-appropriate relationships, sex and health education curriculum. Pupils develop a sense of right and wrong. They have opportunities to celebrate their learning and reflect on life's big questions.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of respect. Pupils show a deep understanding of equality and diversity. They learn about different world views and religions in religious education (RE). Pupils have a mature understanding of difference. Teachers prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. Teachers encourage pupils to be aspirational. Older pupils receive impartial and effective careers guidance. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education or training.

Trustees, governors and senior leaders make sure that all of the independent school standards are met. They ensure that pupils' welfare, health and safety are paramount. The premises are well maintained. Risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed. Leaders make sure the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. They make sure that policies are readily available to parents on request and are published on the school's website. These include safeguarding, behaviour and curriculum policies.

Trustees and governors fulfil their responsibilities well. For example, they deal with any complaints in line with the school's complaints procedure, which is published on the school's website. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. They developed an effective action plan following the last inspection. They have taken effective steps to address the areas for improvement reported in the last inspection. Leaders demonstrate a secure capacity to further develop the school.

All staff enjoy working at the school. They are proud to be part of the school. They benefit from a range of professional development opportunities. Teachers new to teaching are well supported. Staff say that leaders are mindful of their well-being and workload. They feel valued by leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and reflects the latest statutory guidance. Staff are well trained. They receive regular updates and understand their responsibilities. They are focused on each pupil's welfare. Safeguarding leaders are decisive in their actions. They make sure pupils receive the help they need. They work with external organisations and professionals. Leaders keep detailed safeguarding records.

Leaders complete all pre-employment checks before adults start working with pupils. Pupils learn about risk and how to keep themselves safe in different situations. For example, pupils are taught about online safety and potentially harmful relationships.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding. This is much improved from the previous inspection.

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

- Leaders promote a love of reading, and pupils learn to read well. However, some pupils do not benefit from a consistent and faithful approach to the school's chosen phonics scheme. For example, books and resources are not always well matched to sounds pupils are learning, and some staff have not been fully trained. Leaders need to enable pupils to make even better progress with their reading by consolidating the school's approach to early reading.

## **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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134809
<b>DfE registration number</b>	856/6017
<b>Local authority</b>	Leicester
<b>Inspection number</b>	10214281
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	288
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	None
<b>Proprietor</b>	Al-Aqsa Schools Trust
<b>Chair</b>	Ibrahim Hewitt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Arafat Hingora
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£1,900 to £2,200
<b>Telephone number</b>	0116 276 0953
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.alaqsaschool.co.uk">www.alaqsaschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@alaqsaschool.co.uk">admin@alaqsaschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 to 16 January 2020

## Information about this school

- Al-Aqsa Schools Trust is an Islamic independent day school.
- The new headteacher started at the school in August 2020. The senior leadership team has been restructured to include two deputy headteachers and an office manager.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for 292 pupils aged three to 16. The school currently has 288 pupils on roll aged between three and 16.
- The school has a Nursery. Thirty-seven children attend either morning or afternoon sessions. Three children attend both morning and afternoon sessions.
- The school admits girls and boys to the early years and primary provision. Girls only are admitted to the secondary phase. Leaders state that the school does not receive applications for boys in the secondary phase.
- 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 alternative provision.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in January 2020, when it was judged to be inadequate.

## 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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 headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with the designated safeguarding lead, the special educational needs coordinator and the early years leaders. They met with other members of staff.
- Inspectors met with two trustees remotely, including the chair of trustees, and a governor on site.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with teachers and subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, visited sample lessons, spoke with teachers and teaching assistants, spoke with some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of

pupils' work and listened to pupils read. Inspectors looked at a range of other subjects, including art, Arabic, history, English, physical education and RE.

- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils informally about different aspects of school life.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included policies related to the curriculum, teaching, assessment and health and safety. Inspectors reviewed the single central record. They reviewed safeguarding documents.
- Inspectors toured the premises to review the suitability of the accommodation.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the school day. They considered 54 views of parents who completed the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, as well as 12 free-text responses received. They reviewed 31 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. They analysed 28 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

### **The schools' progress in meeting previously failed standards**

During the inspection, inspectors checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous standard inspection on 14 to 16 January 2020.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school now meets the previously failed standards.**
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that leaders had not always responded effectively to concerns about pupils' welfare. On occasions, leaders had not identified possible safeguarding concerns accurately. Leaders had not always provided pupils with appropriate support. They had not kept accurate safeguarding records.
- Trustees have built the school's leadership capacity to enable leaders to fulfil their responsibilities and develop an effective culture of safeguarding. Leaders are suitably trained and understand their roles. Safeguarding leaders make sure that all staff are trained and know how to respond to any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare. Leaders keep detailed records. They seek additional support for pupils when needed. They work effectively with external agencies.
- At the previous standard inspection, inspectors found that senior leaders did not understand their duty regarding pupils who leave the school during the academic year. On occasions, leaders had removed pupils from the school roll before confirming their attendance at the next place of learning.
- Leaders have reviewed their procedures for informing a local authority and checking on the whereabouts of pupils before they remove them from the school's roll. Leaders tenaciously follow up all pupils that leave the school. They check that pupils have been registered at their next school, including those who leave the country.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that leaders had not made all of the necessary recruitment checks in a timely manner. They had not maintained accurate records of all pre-employment checks.
- Leaders now comply with statutory guidance and ensure that all pre-employment vetting checks are undertaken before adults start working with pupils. Leaders

have a sound appreciation of safer recruitment principles and processes. Leaders make sure that pre-employment checks, including a person's medical fitness, are recorded on the single central record. Senior leaders and trustees regularly monitor this aspect of safeguarding.

- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that the trustees had not made sure that the school's admissions policy contained all the necessary information.
- Leaders have updated the admissions policy. The admissions register is maintained in accordance with statutory requirements.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that staff did not always make appropriate assessments of the risks pupils may encounter, including during off-site trips. This limited staff's ability to judge the necessary actions they should take to reduce potential risks that may occur.
- Leaders have updated their written risk assessment policy. The policy is suitable and provides staff with clear guidance regarding the identification of potential hazards and steps to be taken to mitigate risk. A review of sample risk assessments indicates that leaders consistently implement this policy.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that trustees and senior leaders had not made sure that the school's two sites were continually safe. Leaders had failed to identify hazards that compromised pupils' safety.
- Leaders have updated their written health and safety policy. This policy is consistently implemented. The school's premises, accommodation and facilities are maintained to a standard that the welfare, health and safety of pupils are ensured. Regular health and safety checks, including water temperature checks, identify potential risks that are promptly addressed by leaders.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that some subject plans for learning did not identify what pupils should learn and when across the different year groups and by the end of each key stage. Pupils were not building up their knowledge well enough. They were not ready for the next stage of learning.
- Leaders have created ambitious and well-sequenced subject curriculums. These curriculum plans are well implemented. Leaders have established high expectations of staff and pupils. The quality of education is now good. Pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that pupils did not learn about religions other than Islam and Christianity. This limited pupils' opportunities to develop a thorough understanding of different faiths.
- Leaders have developed an RE curriculum that includes the world's main religions and world views in key stages 1, 2 and 3. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils learn about Christianity and Islam as part of GCSE religious studies. Pupils have the opportunity to learn about different religions. This provides opportunities for pupils' spiritual development.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that there were too few clubs and other activities for pupils. This limited the opportunity to develop pupils' knowledge and skills outside the classroom.



- Staff now provide pupils with a range of opportunities during social times, for example debating, netball and art clubs. They have arranged educational visits to complement classroom learning, such as trips to the theatre and museums. Staff have supported members of the student council to raise mental health awareness in recent weeks. Further opportunities to develop pupils' interests and talents have been adversely impacted by the pandemic.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that the trustees had not ensured that all welfare requirements were met in the early years and foundation stage provision.
- Senior leaders have ensured that the lead practitioners have received appropriate safeguarding training. Early years leaders know how to identify and respond appropriately to signs of possible abuse or neglect.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that the trustees were not fulfilling their duties as members of the proprietor body. They had not ensured that the school met all of the independent school standards. Their checks had been ineffective to identify any failings.
- Trustees and senior leaders now fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. They actively promote the well-being of pupils. They have effectively implemented the action plan that was written following the previous inspection.

**The school now meets the following requirements of the 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.

#### **Inspection team**

Chris Davies, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Stephen Long

Ofsted Inspector

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