

Inspection of The Fountain School

109–111 New Cross Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, Bradford BD5 8BP

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 February and 30 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' experiences of school vary a great deal. This is because a small number of older pupils say that they are unable to challenge when they do not feel something is right or express their views. Some older pupils also worry about their exams because they have had a number of changes of teachers. However, some pupils who are on the school council said that they do feel that they can express their opinions. All pupils say that they feel safe in school and almost all say they have a member of staff they can speak to for support if needed.

Pupils are ambitious and are keen to succeed. Teachers expect them to achieve highly. However, in some key stage 3 subjects, pupils spend too much time doing GCSE-style questions rather than studying a broad curriculum. This is repetitive and does not enable pupils to gain deep subject-specific knowledge and understanding. Pupils enjoy the Alimah studies that take place every morning. They are developing a strong knowledge of the Islamic faith.

Pupils behave very well and follow teachers' instructions. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. They have respect for other views and religions. Bullying between pupils is very rare. Pupils say it would not be tolerated. Suspensions from school are rare. However, when they occur, procedures and processes around suspension are too informal. Sometimes, pupils are confused about why they have been suspended.

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

In a number of subjects, pupils do not gain sufficient subject knowledge. The school's own policies state that pupils will be taught the subject content outlined in the national curriculum and this policy has not been followed. In several subjects, this is not the case and the curriculum is not broad enough. For example, in English pupils read very few whole texts and study very little drama and poetry. In history, pupils are taught hardly any British and local history. However, in some subjects, such as mathematics, Urdu and Arabic, the curriculum and teachers' subject knowledge are stronger. In these subjects, pupils cover a broader range of topics. They gain a greater knowledge of subject-specific concepts and skills.

Key stage 4 teaching largely consists of pupils practising past GCSE examination papers. This approach does not enable pupils to achieve the highest grades, nor does it consider a breadth of curriculum beyond that of the GCSE specifications. In addition, it does not support the small number of pupils who start the school below age-related expectations to achieve highly.

Pupils know subject-specific terminology well but do not have the breadth of vocabulary that comes from reading widely. Some pupils are reading books that are for very much younger pupils, even though they have the potential to read more challenging texts. The school does not have a well-considered approach to developing pupils' reading and vocabulary.

Leaders have not ensured that teachers have either the subject knowledge or the general teaching expertise they need. Some teachers do not have any formal qualifications in the subjects they teach, including at GCSE. Leaders have not put an effective programme in place to ensure that teachers gain the subject knowledge they need. This has an impact on the quality of the taught curriculum as well as pupils' learning and enjoyment. This means that a number of standards from part 1 of the independent school standards, relating to the quality of education, are not met.

There are no pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in the school. Some pupils have additional needs because English is not their first language. Assessment in key stages 3 and 4 in most subjects uses GCSE grading criteria. It does not enable teachers to identify any small gaps pupils may have in their knowledge or any specific aspects of the subject that they may struggle with.

Pupils have the opportunity to participate in work experience as part of a programme of careers education. This has not been possible for some older pupils due to the pandemic. The school has developed the curriculum for personal and social education. It now includes relationships and sex education, which is in line with government guidance. Pupils learn about respecting different communities, religions and cultures. They are taught about fundamental British values. Pupils have had opportunities to debate and take part in competitions such as 'young writers' and those from the UK Mathematics Trust. These extra-curricular opportunities have not yet resumed following the pandemic. Pupils are keen for them to do so. Pupils also take part in the school council. They have the opportunity to vote for a class representative to sit on this council.

Pupils' behaviour observed during the inspection, in class and around school, is impressive. Pupils listen to their teachers and try hard. They show respect for each other and the staff. Pupils form close social relationships with their classmates. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with current national averages. Records show that most behaviour issues are minor and relate to homework. Occasionally, some pupils are suspended for their behaviour. Although suspensions are rare, leaders do not record them in enough detail.

The proprietor and trustees have not evaluated the strengths and weaknesses in the school accurately. They have underestimated the impact of teachers' weak subject knowledge on pupils' learning.

The proprietor has not ensured that the school has improved enough since the previous inspection. The school does not meet several of the independent school standards in relation to the admissions register, recording of sanctions and the quality of leadership. Records of meetings between the proprietor and trustees show that they focus on operational issues, with little evidence of challenge to leaders. The proprietor and trustees have not placed enough emphasis on making sure that teaching staff have sufficient expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that they feel safe in school. A minority of pupils say that they do not feel that they can raise concerns. They are worried about how they will be treated by staff and volunteer supervisors if they do. Leaders were made aware of this during the inspection.

Leaders have ensured that the appropriate recruitment checks have taken place on staff employed by the school. Post-16 pupils who attend the madrasa have undertaken disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks. This is to enable them to carry out voluntary duties in the school. There are also risk assessments in place for when post-16 pupils work alongside current Year 11 pupils.

Leaders have undertaken a lot of online safeguarding training during the pandemic to keep their knowledge up to date. At the time of this inspection, some statutory safeguarding training for leaders was overdue. This was rectified during the inspection. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding do understand their roles in keeping pupils safe. However, leaders were not fully aware of their statutory duties when suspending a pupil.

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

- Leaders are operating outside of their registered age range by teaching pupils aged over 16 years of age alongside the pupils on their admissions register. Leaders should rectify this situation so that they are operating within their registered age range.
- Leaders do not have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have not accurately evaluated the impact of weaknesses in teaching on the quality of education. Teachers' weak subject knowledge in some areas is limiting how much pupils can learn. Leaders should prioritise evaluating the quality of education in the school accurately and developing the subject knowledge of teaching staff. They should aim to recruit teachers with higher levels of subject expertise.
- In some subjects, there is a disconnect between the curriculum intent and what pupils are taught, particularly the breadth and range of topics taught in each subject. In some cases, this is because teachers do not have the subject knowledge required to teach certain topics. This means that pupils are taught a narrowed, watered-down version of some subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers have relevant training and the subject knowledge needed to implement the school's intended curriculum.
- Pupils do not have a wide or varied general vocabulary. This is because they do not read enough high-quality literature in English, nor texts written by experts in the other subjects they study, such as accounts written by published historians.

Leaders and teachers should ensure that pupils read a wide range of high-quality literature in English, including drama and poetry. They should make sure that books pupils read for pleasure have ambitious content and vocabulary. Leaders should also ensure that the curriculum across subjects enables pupils to develop and use a range of vocabulary.

- The proprietor and trustees have not ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards. They should take action to make sure that the school meets all standards in part 1, part 3 and part 8 of the independent school standards.

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School details

Unique reference number	134587
DfE registration number	380/6116
Local authority	Bradford
Inspection number	10212944
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Mohammad Afsar
Headteacher	Abeer Niehad
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1895
Telephone number	01274 735 913
Email address	admin@fountainschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 to 28 February 2019

Information about this school

- The Fountain School is an Islamic school. It does not use any alternative education provision.
- The Fountain School's last standard inspection was in February 2019, when it was graded requires improvement overall.
- The school is operating beyond its government registration because the school admits pupils above the registered age range.
- The school building is used in the mornings, evenings and at weekends as a madrasa. The proprietor is one of the local imams leading the studies in the madrasa.
- In the mornings all school pupils undertake Islamic 'Alimah' curriculum. This includes Islamic religious studies, as well as the study of Urdu and Arabic languages. In the afternoon, pupils study a range of national curriculum subjects, as well as religious education.
- There are no pupils currently on roll with SEND.
- Concerns raised by some pupils during the inspection have been referred to the appropriate agencies.

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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- This was a standard inspection during which inspectors considered the school's request for a material change to allow pupils aged between 16 and 18 to attend the school. The inspection was deemed incomplete after the first 3 days. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors returned on 30 March 2022 to gather additional evidence about safeguarding and personal development.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and the religious education taught in the afternoon. As part of these deep dives, they spoke with the headteacher, met with teachers and pupils, undertook an analysis of pupils' work and visited lessons. Inspectors met with ten pupils to discuss their reading habits.

- Inspectors met with pupils to ask them about safeguarding and reading for pleasure.
- They also discussed a number of issues relating to the school, including safeguarding, with the headteacher, the proprietor accompanied by a trustee, and staff.
- They reviewed documentation that included the school’s safeguarding policy, the register of checks carried out on employees and safeguarding records.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s behaviour and exclusion records, observed pupils in and around the school and met with leaders about behaviour and personal development.
- Inspectors took account of Ofsted’s Parent View survey results, as well as four written free-text responses, seven responses to the staff’s survey and 40 responses to the pupils’ survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of a group of pupils who visited the inspectors to share their views about the school. All pupils who were present on the day the additional evidence was gathered completed a questionnaire and spoke with inspectors in year groups.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Nick Horn	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Redshaw	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Belita Scott	Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time; and
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 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].

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; and
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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