

# Birchfield Independent Girls' School

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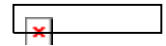
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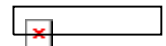
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## Introduction and summary

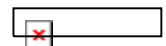


## Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

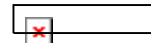


Birchfield Independent Girls' School is a well-established Muslim school situated in Aston, Birmingham. It provides full-time Islamic and secondary education for girls aged between eleven and sixteen. There is one pupil with a statement of special educational needs (SEN).

The school's educational provision is underpinned by thoughtfully considered Islamic principles. It aims to provide 'young Muslim girls with the same standard of education parents would expect from a state school while at the same time preserving and emphasising the cultural identity of pupils'.

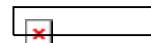
The pupils represent a broad spectrum of ability. This is reflected in the results achieved in national tests and in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in recent years.

## Summary of main findings



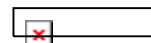
Birchfield Independent Girls' School is a good school. Its distinctive Islamic ethos provides pupils with well-judged opportunities to learn about their faith and attain good standards across a generally broad curriculum. The provision for girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and is a particular strength of the school. The girls are extremely well behaved and effective learners. The overall quality of the teaching is good; teachers use a suitable range of teaching styles and the girls are encouraged to think for themselves. They clearly enjoy being at school and relationships at all levels are excellent. Lessons are planned, managed and organised well for most subjects. These are major contributory factors to the good progress the girls make. However the planning and teaching of art, games and information and communication technology (ICT) is not as strong. The management is thoughtful and committed to continuous improvement for the benefit of the girls' learning and personal development.

## What the school does well



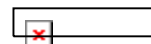
- it has a distinctive Islamic ethos which encourages pupils to be self-assured, caring and responsible young British Muslims;
- its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good;
- pupils' personal development is promoted very well and they are confident and motivated learners. Their behaviour is excellent;
- the overall quality of teaching is good; and
- pupils of all abilities achieve well and make good progress.

## What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations

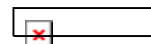


- improve the written curriculum policy as detailed in section 1;
- address the health and safety issues and maintain the attendance registers as identified in section 3;
- obtain professional references prior to staff appointments and take these into account in determining whether their appointment should be confirmed;
- provide a washbasin in the medical room; and
- ensure that the complaints procedure meets in full the requirements detailed in section 7.

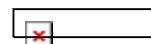
## Compliance with the regulations for registration



## 1. The quality of education provided by the school



### The quality of the curriculum



Since it was established in 1990 the school has succeeded in providing its pupils with an education, which combines Islamic Studies and a good range of subjects from the National Curriculum (NC). The curriculum is broad, balanced and generally of a good quality.

The curriculum is not supported in all subjects by sufficiently detailed schemes of work. Whilst most subject areas are appropriately underpinned by schemes of work and lesson plans, the long- and short-term planning for art, games and ICT do not provide adequate guidance for teachers. Schemes of work for these subjects are no more than content lists of topics and do not identify what is to be taught, learnt and how.

A particular strength of the school is that it raises pupils' awareness of the significant contribution Islam has made to citizenship and to social and cultural traditions. It provides pupils with a good understanding of their role in the community and the wider world.

The NC subjects that are taught include English language, English literature, mathematics, double science, domestic science, ICT, business studies, citizenship, Arabic, Urdu games and geography. History is not taught as a separate subject but aspects are covered within citizenship and Islamic Studies. Provision for technology is made mainly through domestic science and ICT. Pupils are encouraged to use word processing for presentation of some of their work. Arabic is taught primarily as a modern foreign language and also helps pupils to access the Qur'an and Hadith.

Literacy and numeracy are taught within subjects. Class discussions, small group work and presentations provide good opportunities for the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills.

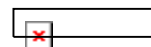
Sufficient time is allocated to cover adequately both the NC subjects and Islamic Studies including approximately 2.5 hours for worship including assemblies and Zohar Salah (early afternoon prayers). The school's results, in Key Stage 3 national tests and GCSE examinations, compare well with national averages.

The provision for pupils with SEN is very good. A programme of individual support is provided for those who need it. This is achieved through close collaboration with a teacher of SEN and in-class support. The curriculum planned for the pupil with a statement of SEN meets fully the needs identified and this is reviewed regularly.

Citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are given a high priority, and reflect the Islamic ethos of the school. The PSHE programme provides a strong focus for developing the pupils' awareness of their rights and responsibilities as young British Muslims. Together with the Connexions careers service this prepares pupils adequately for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. Pupils have high and realistic expectations for their futures. Many aspire to become teachers, nurses and childcare professionals.

The timetabled school curriculum is enriched and extended through a programme of extra-curricular activities and educational visits; of particular note are the school newsletter, published by the pupils under staff supervision, trips to museums and the theatre.

## The quality of the teaching and assessment



The overall quality of the teaching is good and there is some very good teaching in the school. A few lessons observed in art, games and ICT were unsatisfactory.

In the good and very good lessons the teachers demonstrate a secure knowledge of their subject. Teachers use a suitable range of teaching styles and pupils are encouraged to think for themselves. Lessons are planned, managed and organised well. Effective questioning ensures that all pupils make good progress. Lessons are planned to build on what pupils already know and can do and to secure new learning. Planning takes account of the range of ability in the class, for example extension works for the more able, as seen in a mathematics lesson on the volume of a prism. For less able pupils in an English lesson teachers provided useful strategies to help them with their language, and this was also the case in an Islamic Studies lesson on the Five daily Salah (prayers). The closing sessions of lessons ensure that the pupils' learning is consolidated, as in science. Discussion is used well to develop ideas further, as in an Urdu lesson on 'Britain as our homeland'.

In a minority of unsatisfactory lessons the objectives are too limited and present insufficient challenge to the pupils. What is to be taught and learned is not clearly identified. The scheme of work and the lesson plan for art, games and ICT do little more than identify the content. This does not build on what pupils can already do and does not extend their learning. The teachers' subject knowledge and expertise in how to teach the subject is very insecure. Consequently the girls make unsatisfactory progress.

Relationships between the pupils and the teachers and the pupils themselves are very good. Teachers welcome pupils' responses and actively encourage participation. In return, they show high levels of self-awareness and confidence. They respond very actively to the tasks they are given. They are very strongly motivated, work hard, concentrate and are keen to succeed. This enables them to achieve well.

In both the Islamic Studies and the NC assessment and recording are thorough. Every six weeks assessments are completed in most subjects. These are used very well to inform the planning of the next stage of learning and contribute to termly reports. Some schemes of work, for example those for English and geography, contain assessment criteria against which pupils' achievements can be judged. Teachers use assessments in lessons effectively to elicit understanding and, where necessary, to consolidate or extend learning. Marking of work is regular and thorough and there are examples of marking in science and English, which makes helpful comments as to how pupils can improve their work. In a number of lessons the pupils are encouraged to be self-evaluative. In mathematics pupils clearly understand the traffic light colour-coded system and respond well to it.

Classroom resources are adequate and they are generally used effectively to support teaching and learning. However, resources for art and games need to be extended significantly if the school is to provide appropriately for these subjects.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

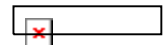
### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that the curriculum is supported more effectively by a appropriate plans and schemes of work in all subjects (paragraph 1(2));

- ensure that the subject matter in ICT, art and games is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those pupils with a statement (paragraph 1(2)(b));
- ensure that the subject matter for, art, games and ICT is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those pupils with a statement (paragraph 1(2)(b));
- improve the quality of teaching in art, games and ICT so that pupils acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability to increase their understanding and develop their skills in these subjects (paragraph 1(3)(a));
- ensure that art, games and ICT lessons are well planned, teaching methods are effective, activities are suitable and class time is used wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c));
- ensure that teachers of art, games and ICT have a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils and that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d));
- improve the knowledge and understanding of staff teaching art and games; (paragraph 1(3)(e)); and
- extend the resources for art and games (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

## 2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



The school has clear values, which reflect its Islamic ethos. There is positive encouragement for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The well designed Islamic Studies curriculum and citizenship together make an effective contribution in this respect. The importance of developing good citizenship and displaying high standards of behaviour is clearly described in the school prospectus and behaviour policy. This is reinforced in tutorials and lessons. Within the Islamic Studies curriculum there are planned opportunities to consider other religions. This enhances the pupils' basic understanding of a multi-faith, contemporary society.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils' spiritual development. For example, there is a dedicated area for quiet reflection and observing salah. Zohar salah are timetabled; staff and pupils are encouraged to participate in these. School assemblies provide further opportunities for reflection.

Provision for pupils' moral development is good. There are many carefully planned opportunities for pupils to explore the differences between right and wrong through discussion and debate. For example, in citizenship and PSHE lessons pupils explore topics such as prejudice, discrimination, oppression and human rights.

Provision for pupils' social development is good. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are characterised by courtesy and consideration towards each other. As a result, the school is a harmonious learning community with a positive atmosphere. Pupils are also encouraged to develop their sense of social responsibility. For example, they have been fund-raising for Cancer Research UK, and in response to natural disasters in Bangladesh.

The school provides extra-curricular activities, which bring together people from different social backgrounds. The school recently hosted a conference for community cohesion. This was well attended by pupils, parents, teachers, police officers and government officials. Pupils showed good levels of self-confidence and responsibility by volunteering to plan and run this conference, which also contributed to their general knowledge of public institutions and services. There are good opportunities in citizenship lessons for pupils to enhance their knowledge and understanding of these in Britain.

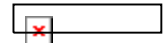
The school provides good opportunities for the cultural development of its pupils. Central to this is handing on to them a deeper understanding of their own and others' cultural heritage; for example, through plays and assemblies which focus on particular cultures. There is a small number of Somali pupils in the school and they are encouraged to retain and build on their distinctive cultural

traditions. In a number of curriculum areas, including Arabic, Urdu and citizenship, pupils consider the importance of tolerance and harmony between peoples of different cultures.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**



Overall, the school provides a safe, secure and healthy environment for its pupils. There is a range of written policies and procedures to promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils. These fulfil most, but not all, of the requirements. The behaviour policy sets out guidelines for the management of behaviour in school. Pupil behaviour is excellent. The anti-bullying policy explains how the school deals with issues of bullying. The pupils and the staff are aware of the policies. Matters such as bullying and the importance of good behaviour are discussed in PHSE, Islamic Studies and tutorial sessions.

The school has a written First Aid policy and there are three qualified First Aiders on site throughout the school day. The fire alarm is regularly maintained. The school has recently carried out a fire risk assessment and a suitable written record is kept. The last fire officer's report makes no substantial recommendations. Fire drills are carried out once a term. The school maintains records of all fire drills; fire drills instructions are displayed in classrooms. Fire blankets and fire extinguishers are appropriately sited.

Pupils' safety on school outings is paid due attention but risk assessments are not routinely completed prior to these. There is no written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school.

The school has an appropriate policy for child protection. The acting head teacher is the person designated to deal with this area and to liaise with external bodies. The staff show a good awareness of the necessary actions to be taken if there are causes for concern.

The school maintains an admission register and an attendance register for each class. However, some attendance registers are not fully completed on time.

The staff are deployed appropriately to ensure the proper supervision of girls in the school building, in the grounds and on outings. The girls are very well-behaved and to date there have been no recorded serious disciplinary offences. There is, however, a system for keeping appropriate records of misdemeanours. Staff are aware of this.

Insufficient regard is shown for some aspects of health and safety, for example, pillars in the hall constitute a potential hazard and require cushioned cladding. The unsecured netball posts and a broken step outside the kitchen require repair.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

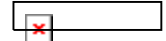
No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' (paragraph 3(2)(c));
- show full regard for DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' (paragraph 3(4)); and
- complete attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)).

#### 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



Generally thorough procedures are in place for checking the suitability of all staff, both teaching and non-teaching. Criminal Records Bureau checks are made before the confirmation of staff appointments and several other appropriate checks are in place. However, the school does not seek professional references on individual staff.

##### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

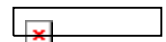
No.

##### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- obtain professional references in relation to staff applying for posts and take these into account in determining whether their appointment should be confirmed (paragraph 4(c)).

#### 5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The school is housed in what used to be an employment exchange, built in the 1930's, which has been suitably adapted for use as a school. The school does not currently use all the accommodation; some rooms on the ground floor are used by a nursery and a sixth form centre uses some of the rooms on the second floor but this additional use does not affect the running of the school. There are five classrooms which are adequate for the numbers of pupils currently in each class and are suitably heated and ventilated. The quality of the learning environment in the classrooms is generally good. Displays of girls' work and posters celebrate their achievements and provide support for the curriculum.

There is a well-equipped science laboratory that supports the teaching and learning of science very effectively. A specialist ICT room is being developed. A kitchen is used for domestic science lessons and because of its size, only small groups of pupils are timetabled to use it at any one time. The library is of adequate size. Additionally there is a large dining room and a hall of similar size which is used for daily prayers, assembly and some games lessons. There is a medical room with a suitable bed, but no washbasin. Toilet facilities are only a short distance away and overall the toilet provision in the school is adequate. The playground is modest in size but the school staggers its use and it is therefore adequate for its purpose.

##### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***



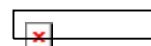
The school meets all but one requirement.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply in full with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide a washbasin in the medical room (paragraph 5(l)).

**6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**



The school provides a generally appropriate range of information to parents and others. The prospectus contains relevant information about the school and its provision. It is regularly updated. Although it states that parents can ask to see copies of the school's policies it does not include details of these. Parents are not provided with all the necessary contact details.

Termly reports are clear and very informative. These grade pupils' effort, progress, attitude, behaviour and homework. Additionally they contain comments by each subject teacher and the form teacher. Annual reports provide detailed end-of-year test results and subject teachers' comments. These provide parents with evaluative statements of their daughter's achievements in each subject. Parents' evenings are held twice a year to discuss their daughters' achievements with subject and form teachers. An additional parents' evening is held for Year 11 following mock GCSE examinations in February. These arrangements should enable all parents to have a clear knowledge of their daughters' strengths and points for development. However, in the questionnaires completed for this inspection nearly a third of parents responding felt that they were not well informed about their daughter's progress.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should provide parents, prospective parents and other interested parties with the following information: 6(2)(b) and 6(2)(c):

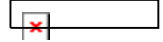
- the full name, usual residential address and telephone number of the school proprietor (paragraph 6(2)(b)); and
- the address of the chair of governors; (paragraph 6(2)(c)).

In addition, the school should make it clear to parents of pupils and prospective parents that the following information is available if requested: 6(2)(h), 6(2)(j) and 6(2)(k):

- particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, the promotion of good behaviour and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving, (paragraph 6(2)(h));
- details of the numbers of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)); and
- details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff,

and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

## 7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints



The school has a written complaints procedure which is available on request for parents of pupils and prospective parents. However, the procedure does not meet all the requirements and a quarter of the 108 parents who responded to the questionnaire said that they did not understand the school's complaints procedure.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

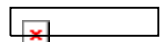
No.

### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- set out clear timescales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c));
- ensure that one member of the panel hearing the complaint should be independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));
- enable parents attending the panel hearing to be accompanied if they wish (paragraph 7(h));
- keep written records of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)); and
- ensure that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

## School details



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Name of school:	Birchfield Independent Girls' School		
DfES ref number:	330/6083		
Type of school:	Secondary		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years		
Gender of pupils:	Girls		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 0,	Girls 151,	Total 151
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 0,	Girls 1,	Total 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£1,050		
Address of school:	Birchfield Independent Girls' School Beacon House 30 Beacon Hill Aston, Birmingham, B6 6JU		
E-mail address:	big786@hotmail.com		
Telephone number:	0121 3277707		
Fax number:	0121 3276888		
Headteacher:	Mr Anwar Teladia		

Proprietor:  
Lead Inspector:  
Dates of inspection:

Mr Hafez Ahmed Omar  
Ms D Fareeda Naeem  
6 - 9 December 2004

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