

# **Inspection report**

## **Islamia Girls' School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 304/6069**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 March 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A 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**

Islamia Girls' School is an independent day Muslim secondary school open to girls of all faiths, aged between 11 and 16 years. It is situated in northwest London, in the residential district of Queens Park, in the London Borough of Brent, close to rail, underground and bus links. It was set up in 1989 as a result of the expansion of Islamia Primary School, now a voluntary-aided school. It is part of a consortium of three schools run by two charitable trusts. The affiliated schools are Islamia Primary School and Brondesbury College for Boys. The Islamia Schools Trust is a founding member of the Association of Muslim Schools. The school provides secondary education based on National Curriculum subjects, with the addition of Islamic studies, Qur'an and Arabic. There are currently 104 Muslim girls of English, North African, Middle Eastern, African, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani heritages. Pupils are admitted on the basis of an entrance examination. At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils with a statement of special educational need (SEN). The vast majority of pupils were at various advanced stages of learning English as an additional language (EAL).

The school's mission is to *'strive to provide the best education in a secure Islamic environment through the knowledge and application of the Qur'an and Sunnah.'*

### **Summary of main findings**

Islamia Girls' School provides good quality education for its pupils. The new headteacher has improved the breadth of the curriculum. The teaching is good and, as a result, the school enjoys a high rate of success in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education. Assessment is good and the tracking of pupils' progress is very good. The school provides a welcoming learning environment in which the vast majority of pupils feel happy and can flourish. Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good. The school takes pupils' safety seriously and promotes a healthy lifestyle effectively. Some aspects of the provision for pupils' welfare need immediate improvement to address pupils' perceptions and real concerns. The school meets all but one of the regulations for registration.

### **What the school does well:**

- curricular provision is good in National Curriculum subjects and in Islamic studies, Qur'an and Arabic;

- teachers are conscientious and hard-working. Their good teaching enables pupils to gain deep understanding, develop a wide range of skills and make good progress;
- the efficient assessment, recording and tracking system is a strength;
- provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good; and
- the library and the information and communication technology (ICT) suite are valuable resources to support pupils' learning.

**What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:**

- implement the behaviour policy consistently.

**Next Steps**

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the pastoral care of pupils;
- provide responsibilities for senior pupils;
- continue to improve communication with parents;
- continue to develop the citizenship programme;
- develop Information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects; and
- prepare a strategic school development plan.

# COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

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

### The quality of the curriculum

The quality of curricular provision for the pupils' academic, physical and personal development is good. The school offers a fairly broad and balanced curriculum. It follows the National Curriculum enriched with Islamic and Qur'anic studies and Arabic. Music is not taught as a subject. History is taught in Years 7, 8 and 9 only. French was introduced in January 2005 and is currently taught up to Year 9. The pupils have worthwhile aesthetic and creative experiences through art and design, and ICT, as well as through *tajweed* (one of the two main styles of Qur'anic recitation). The school offers a minimum of nine subjects for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), including the possibility of triple award science. Child development, art and geography are currently offered as options and Urdu speakers may take their GCSE in Urdu as external candidates. In Year 10, pupils study critical thinking, a course that they can continue in Year 11 where it is examined at Advanced Subsidiary level.

Pupils take the national tests at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. They achieve well in the three subjects. When pupils join the school, their achievement is in line with national expectations or above. By the time they leave the school in Y11, the value added to their achievement is outstanding. This clearly reflects the school's strategy to focus on achievement at Key Stage 3. The 2005 GCSE results show that all pupils achieved grades A\* - C in at least 5 subjects. Pupils achieved best in English, mathematics, Islamic studies and chemistry. The GCSE results over the past 5 years have been consistently well above the national average and place the school amongst the best Muslim schools in the UK.

The curriculum is well supported by detailed schemes of work in most subjects. However, in the three sciences, geography, history, child development and Arabic, the plans are not sufficiently detailed to support other, possibly less experienced, teachers in the future. The curriculum policy provides a useful overview of the philosophy of the curriculum provision as well as an outline of teachers' responsibilities and assessment guidelines. The rationale for teaching each subject has been clearly articulated. Links with literacy, numeracy and the Islamic ethos are well planned in most subjects. The use of ICT in every subject is under-developed. Links with citizenship are consistently well made in a few subjects only. There is a clear emphasis on thinking and other key personal skills, as well as on independent work across all subjects.

Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good. There is a thematic programme that ensures a progression of skills and understanding across the age range. Personal development is taught through assemblies, tutorials, Islamic studies, and enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as visits and conferences. It includes whole school topics and specific year group topics. The school promotes a healthy lifestyle effectively through PSHE, Islamic studies and physical education (PE). At the time of the inspection, the general PSHE theme was 'eating disorders', presented in a well-prepared and thought-

provoking assembly. Provision for PE is particularly good. The school offers a varied programme of physical activities including fitness training, games, gymnastics, trampoline, yoga, ice-skating, and swimming. During the annual school trip, pupils are also able to join in horse riding or archery. However, the school does not provide meaningful activities for those pupils who, on occasions, cannot participate in PE.

The school provides sound careers education. This academic year, it has improved the Year 10 work experience programme by contracting its management to the local authority. The school is also building up the range of visitors coming to talk to pupils about career options and the job market. It is planning a more structured approach to careers education from Year 7 for the next academic year. In both Years 10 and 11, half of the pupils appreciate the improvements, and half feel that they have not received sufficient advice about the various career paths associated with their choice of subjects.

The school has a clearly written policy on SEN. There were no pupils identified as having SEN at the time of the inspection. The needs of the vast majority of pupils who are at advanced stages of learning EAL are well met in most subjects through appropriate language work. However, useful resources such as dictionaries are not always used effectively and not all teachers correct pupils' spelling mistakes.

A good range of extra-curricular activities including self-defence, drama, film and ICT clubs enhances the curriculum. However, not all are sufficiently regular to be of long-term benefit to pupils. Not all parents and pupils feel that the curriculum is enriched by sufficient school visits. The school provides 'booster' classes in several subjects to help pupils gain more understanding and confidence.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching is good overall and on occasion it is very good. It contributes effectively to pupils' achievement and progress.

Lessons are carefully and thoughtfully planned and a productive working atmosphere is established from the outset. The planning for most subjects links effectively with the schemes of work. Learning aims are clearly identified for individual lessons, and are translated into appropriate activities for pupils. In the most successful lessons teachers share the aims with the pupils ensuring that they understand fully what is expected of them. An appropriate range of teaching strategies and resources is employed to allow all pupils to learn effectively. A suitable pace is maintained in the majority of lessons, with well-judged intervention by the teacher and changes of direction and activity when appropriate. Teachers have expectations that pupils will apply themselves to the work in hand, and, through effective questioning, they systematically assess the progress made.

The majority of teachers' explanations are clear and concise and pupils' interest is immediately engaged in the topics introduced. In the best lessons, teachers combine encouragement and praise with high expectations, enabling them to extend pupils' performance with complex tasks. At its best, the teaching demonstrates very good understanding of how pupils learn, as the teachers break up modules of learning into small steps of increasing difficulty. Most lessons are characterised by

good relationships between pupils and teachers, and good working relationships among pupils.

Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good. In the most successful lessons teachers' enthusiasm for their subject inspires pupils. As a result, they become highly motivated and are eager to learn more about the topics studied. The lessons are imbued with a clear sense of purpose and a sharp focus on what the pupils should learn. Where teachers do not demonstrate such secure subject knowledge, pupils' interest is not sustained and behaviour deteriorates.

Pupils are taught well to use and apply their knowledge and understanding, such as in physics, where pupils investigated at first hand magnetic fields and, through practical experience, gained an insight into scientific methodology. Activities such as this give clear purpose to learning. Most teachers ask appropriate questions and these are effective in furthering all pupils' progress and ensuring all are fully included in activities. The best questioning is vigorous and makes pupils think carefully about the answers they give. Pupils respond positively. They show interest and work hard at their tasks independently or with each other. Good listening skills are actively promoted and as a result, pupils carry out tasks correctly.

The quality of assessment is good and the quality of recording of pupils' achievements, progress and needs is very good. A well-constructed test is conducted on pupils who wish to join the school. The school uses the results of this test as the baseline from which to track pupils' achievement in each curriculum subject. In Key Stage 3 all assessment is strongly linked to the National Curriculum. Pupils are assessed against National Curriculum attainment levels twice a year. In Key Stage 4, pupils are assessed systematically against GCSE examination levels. In ICT, the teacher uses an electronic system to ensure accurate assessment of pupils' skills such as animation and inter-activity. The records are accurate, detailed and provide effective monitoring of pupils' progress. The recording and analysis of the grades pupils achieve in each module of work is a strength of the assessment procedures. A new database, designed by the headteacher, is an efficient tool for the recording and retrieval of assessment information.

In addition to regular testing in each subject, whole school examinations are held in the summer term and the results are reported to parents, along with a national examination grade. Pupils are confident they understand the assessment criteria used. They feel they understand where they achieve well and what improvements could be made.

There is a whole-school marking policy. Marking is frequent and focuses on positive and encouraging comment, but the amount and type of comment is inconsistent. In some subjects, such as English, detailed and extended comment shows pupils how to improve their work but in some other subjects teachers' responses give insufficient guidance to help pupils improve their understanding and work. Oral feedback is used well. There is inconsistency in the levels of presentation expected by staff.

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

Yes.

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

Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good. Provision for their moral and social development is satisfactory. The vast majority of pupils report that they are happy at their school. They are warm and welcoming to visitors. They are confident, self-assured and articulate. The majority are well-mannered. They are all proud of their Islamic identity.

Pupils' spiritual development is well led by the Islamic and Qur'anic studies teachers and by the imam who leads the midday prayer. The architectural uniqueness of the mosque provides an ideal space for reflection. Most pupils respond well to it but a small number shows disrespect to the mosque and their teachers by chatting.

Pupils' cultural development is well promoted. The school is at the initial stage of piloting an interfaith programme in conjunction with a London university college. Pupils are well prepared for life in a multicultural and multifaith society through Islamic studies, art, and many other curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. In Islamic studies, they have ample opportunities to compare the Islamic point of view on ethical and spiritual issues with that of other faiths or no faith. In art, they are exposed to a wealth of world art.

Staff provide good role models in lessons. However, there is no clear strategy to model and promote Islamic values consistently outside lessons as the pastoral system is under-developed. The good quality of provision in Islamic and Qur'anic studies, PSHE and assemblies contributes largely to promoting a strong Islamic ethos. However, the effective strategies that are used in class to promote social development are not followed through in the general life of the school. The school has yet to devise a sufficiently broad range of strategies to improve the social cohesion of the school population.

There is a strong drive in the school to build pupils' confidence and initiative that is much appreciated by the vast majority of pupils. There is also a strong emphasis on moral integrity and civic conscience with respect for rules and the law. However, this is weakened by perceived and real deficiencies in the implementation of the behaviour policy. Provision for citizenship is satisfactory and developing. Pupils appreciate having a school council and have contributed to school improvement, for example by enhancing the use of the library and by starting to produce a school magazine. They are keen to shoulder even more responsibilities that would prepare them even better for the next stage of their education and further their personal development.

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

Yes.

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

Provision for pupils' health and safety is good. Some aspects of the provision for pupils' welfare are less than satisfactory.

The school implements its health and safety policy conscientiously. It meets all fire safety regulations. Staff carry out appropriate risk assessments before taking pupils out of the school premises and pupils are well supervised throughout the day.

The school has devised a thoughtful anti-bullying policy and an effective system to monitor bullying patterns through a database. However, a significant minority of pupils feel that the school does not deal with bullying effectively.

The school has enhanced its management of behaviour by introducing a house system that enables staff to reward good work and behaviour more effectively. Most staff implement the behaviour policy consistently and most pupils are well behaved. However, about half of the pupils feel that, on occasions, a few members of staff are not fair to all pupils. As a result, there is a perceived feeling of injustice that affects adversely the ethos of the school. Furthermore, the school is not using a sufficiently wide range of strategies to manage a core of disruptive pupils. These pupils take up an inordinate amount of the senior management's time. The partnership between school, parents and pupils appears to be somewhat weak, as indicated by the very low return rate of parents' pre-inspection questionnaires. The weakness of this partnership sometimes makes it difficult to resolve issues constructively. The pastoral system is not sufficiently developed to enable the staff to foster positive attitudes in all pupils. The majority of pupils enjoy good relationships based on mutual respect with the staff. However, in extreme cases, this is lost when communication breaks down between a few pupils and some staff. Also, about half of the pupils report that they feel that their property is not secure in the school, and there is evidence to support this view. The school has yet to address this concern effectively.

All staff have received appropriate training in child protection to comply with the latest legislation and the policy has been suitably updated. A parent volunteer with appropriate training offers a much-appreciated Islamic counselling service when needed. However, over one third of the pupils feel that they could not turn to an adult in full confidence if they had a personal problem.

The school maintains the attendance and admission registers in accordance with the regulations. The level of unauthorised absence is high and the school is working hard to improve punctuality. A small number of pupils disrupt lessons by arriving late for no valid reason and the school monitors this closely by calling the register in every lesson. The school takes its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 seriously and has taken steps to make improvements to its provision for pupils with a disability from next academic year.

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

*The school meets all but one of the regulations.*

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

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

- *implement consistently its policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils (paragraph 3(2)(d)).*



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

The school has recently updated its recruitment procedure. It ensures that prior to employing staff, it checks their suitability to work with children with the Criminal Records Bureau. It verifies their identity, their qualifications and employment history. It obtains written references and written evidence of their medical fitness.

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

Yes.

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

The premises and accommodation are suitable for their purpose. Islamia Girls' School occupies the first floor of a large two-storey Victorian school building that offers spacious accommodation. It shares the site and some of the facilities with Islamia Primary School which is located on the ground floor. These include the mosque, the dining room and the hall. Timetables are devised to ensure that there is no overlap in the use of these rooms. The two schools also share the well-equipped room for pupils who are ill. Play times are staggered so that the number of pupils outside at any one time is not excessive. Pupils eat their packed lunches in a dining room that is separate from the main school building. This is of an appropriate size but bleak in appearance.

The fabric of the building is in a satisfactory state of repair. Each classroom is designated for a specific subject and the environment is enhanced by appropriate displays of pupils' work and posters that provide relevant subject information. Washroom facilities for pupils and staff are satisfactory.

The specialist facilities in the school support teaching and learning well. The science accommodation and equipment are appropriate for the needs of the school. The ICT suite is well-resourced. However, a pillar located in the centre of the room means that teachers are unable to gain a clear view of the whole class when they are working. The décor of the art room does not provide an environment conducive to aesthetic and creative activities. The large, airy and attractive library is a valuable facility and contributes effectively to pupils' education. It is well planned so that pupils have easy access to a wide range of suitable books of good quality and are able to conduct research using computers and books. The use of the library is maximised by the efforts of a parent working as a volunteer librarian. The generously sized hall provides a good venue for a variety of PE activities. The mosque is an oasis of peace for prayer and reflection during the busy school day.

The accommodation is clean, neat and tidy. The rooms are warm, light and well ventilated. They are suitably equipped for teaching purposes, and furnished appropriately for the ages of pupils. Most of the furniture is in a satisfactory condition. However, the chairs in some rooms require attention.

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

Yes.

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

The school meets all the regulations regarding the information provided for parents. However, it is reviewing how it communicates with parents so that they feel they are fully informed about all aspects of its work. The prospectus was being redrafted at the time of the inspection. The draft prospectus articulates the school's ethos well. It gives a thorough picture of what the school provides and will be an effective means of communication with prospective parents.

The first newsletter for parents was published in February 2006 in order to provide parents with up-to-date information about the school's organisation and current issues. The school has written policies on bullying, child protection, health and safety, and behaviour and has informed parents that they can request these.

A range of documents is provided for prospective parents who show an interest in the school. Once pupils are accepted, parents receive a more detailed set of documents. At this point a home/school contract is signed and the first step in a partnership is taken. The setting of homework, and the arrangements that ensure the parents know what has been set, provide good opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's work. However, not all parents make full use of this.

Reporting to parents is thorough. Each term, an interim report provides a snapshot of their children's progress and achievement. This is followed by a longer report at the end of the school year. The longer reports contain detailed information for parents about their children's attainment and information about national examinations. Parent consultations are held formally twice a year to give parents the opportunity to discuss any matters arising.

The 'Cultural Evening' is an important event each year when mothers are invited to an entertainment provided by the pupils. Where whole school issues need to be discussed, parents are invited for an evening meeting so that information can be shared and their views taken on board.

'Friends of Islamia' is a parent/teacher group which supports the school in many ways such as assisting with school trips and extra-curricular activities. The school is very supportive of this initiative.

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

Yes.

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

The school's procedure for dealing with complaints is included in the registration pack given to parents. It has recently been reviewed to comply fully with regulations and copies have been sent to all parents.

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

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Islamia Girls' School
DfES Number:	304/6069
Type of school:	Muslim day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
Number on roll:	104
Annual fees:	£5,500
Address of school:	129 Salusbury Road London NW6 6PE
Telephone number:	020 7372 3472
Fax number:	020 7604 4061
Email address:	headteacher@islamiaschools.com
Headteacher:	Ms Asmat Ali
Proprietor:	Mrs Fowzia Islam
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi
Date of inspection:	6 – 9 March 2006

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