

Inspection report
Al Huda Girls'
School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 330/6088

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 23 - 26 January 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 registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Al Huda Girls' is an independent Islamic day school situated in Washward Heath, Salty, near Birmingham city centre. It opened in 1992 and continues to be provisionally registered by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Currently, there are 89 girls on roll aged between 11 -16 years. Islamic teachings form the foundation of the school, which aims to help pupils to '*...achieve and practice a high level of knowledge based on Islam and also gain confidence to understand and become integrated in British society of which they are members...*' .

Staff and pupils are all practising Muslims and come from a range of backgrounds including Pakistani, Somali, and Dutch of North African heritage. For the vast majority of pupils English is their main means of communication. There are currently a few pupils who need extra help to become fluent in the English language. No pupils have been identified as having special educational need (SEN).

Summary of main findings

Since opening, the school has experienced considerable turbulence over the years. Within the last year Al Huda has improved appreciably and is now meeting more of the statutory requirements. However, some essential regulations, such as checks for the suitability of all staff, are still not met. The curriculum is better planned and balanced but does not provide pupils with creative and aesthetic experiences and careers education. The school has recently introduced a satisfactory assessment framework, which needs refining to be fully effective. Within the last four months more qualified staff have been employed and teaching has improved and is satisfactory or better in the majority of lessons. This is beginning to contribute to some, but not all, pupils making good progress in lessons although progress made over time is poor. By the end of Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils have not made the progress of which they are capable, reflecting the past instability in the school. Pupils' social, spiritual and moral development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. Recent reworking of policies has ensured that nearly all meet the requirements to promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Extensive refurbishment has improved the standard of premises and accommodation. The school does not provide all the required information for parents, prospective parents and others.

What the school does well:

- overall the teaching is now satisfactory and in many cases it is good;

- procedures for assessing pupils' progress are developing along the right lines;
- pupils have good opportunities to gain a deeper knowledge of their faith, which is supported by the good quality of Qur'anic teaching and learning;
- pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem as young Muslims; and
- teachers provide good role models and relationships are good.

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

- improve the curricular provision and increase the quantity and range of resources, particularly books as outlined in section 1 of this report;
- arrange urgently for staff training on child protection and maintain an admission register that complies with the regulations as noted in section 3;
- urgently carry out the necessary checks on all staff for their suitability to work with children;
- take immediate action to ensure that the condition of the playground is made safe; and
- provide all parents, prospective parents and others with the information to which they are entitled, as outlined in section 6 of this report.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Over the last year, the school has significantly improved the quality of curricular provision for the pupils' academic, physical and personal development. However, the curriculum still lacks breadth despite the recent introduction of geography and citizenship at Key Stage 3.

From Years 7 to 9, pupils study English, mathematics, science, geography, Islamic studies and citizenship. The vast majority of pupils are Urdu speakers and choose to study Urdu as a modern foreign language. The non Urdu speakers have a choice between reinforcing their Arabic or their knowledge of Islam. In Years 10 and 11, pupils study English language, English literature, mathematics, double award science and Islamic studies up to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. They also have the option to take their GCSE in Urdu. Pupils of all ages also study Arabic, the Qur'an, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education (PE).

The school places an appropriate emphasis on Qur'anic studies and as from September 2005, pupils have the option to take an intensive *hifz* course leading to the memorisation of the whole Qur'an. Pupils learn to recite the Qur'an according to the rules of *tajweed* (one of the main styles of Qur'anic recitation), understand the meaning of its verses based on the interpretation of classical scholars, and they also learn *hadiths* (narrations illustrating Prophet Muhammad's example) relating to their daily lives. The Key Stage 3 Arabic curriculum focuses on Arabic as a modern foreign language. At Key Stage 4, pupils pursue their study of Arabic through the Qur'an. At Key Stage 3, the Islamic studies curriculum is centred on early Islamic history and *aqeedah* (Islamic beliefs). At Key Stage 4 all pupils study a GCSE religious education/Islamic studies course, which prepares them well for life in a multicultural society and promotes their analytical and communication skills.

Pupils have very limited aesthetic and creative experiences despite having frequent opportunities to sing a repertoire of *nashids* (religious songs) in English, Arabic and Urdu. The school intends to introduce art and design and technology in the near future.

Year 9 pupils take the national tests in the core subjects: English, mathematics and science, and Year 11 pupils can take their GCSEs in six to seven subjects. Over the last few years, pupils have achieved better in English than in mathematics and science at both key stages and their achievement in all core subjects has been below national expectations. There is evidence of varying degrees of underachievement in the three core subjects, the most significant of which being in science. The same data also shows that about 20 percent of pupils performed above expectations in English GCSE examination in 2005. The underachievement trend is likely to effect Key Stage 4 pupils in the next three years unless the school takes drastic remedial action.

The school has a clear and detailed curriculum policy supported by a comprehensive assessment framework. It has adapted suitable commercial schemes of work for National Curriculum subjects, as well as for Islamic studies. These long-term plans provide a firm basis for teachers' daily planning in most subjects. The Urdu schemes of work focus on the topics to be taught and do not show any progression of linguistic skills. Similarly, the Key Stage 3 Islamic studies plans do not incorporate progression of skills. Apart from Year 7, pupils are taught in mixed age groups. The school plans the curriculum for these groups following a two-year cycle so as to avoid overlapping and repetition in subjects.

Provision for all subjects except ICT is satisfactory. Provision for ICT as a subject has been hindered by lack of resources. The new ICT suite will become operational by the end of January 2006, but the school has not yet planned the use of ICT in all subjects. The school has planned the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum but insufficient visual support is given in all subjects. Most teachers make good links between their subject and the Islamic ethos of the school. However, cross curricular links in general, are at a very early stage of planning, in particular ICT and citizenship. PE includes a good balance of games and individual skill development and pupils enjoy playing football.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) has just been introduced. It is taught within an Islamic framework, partly through a dedicated fortnightly assembly as well as through science, Islamic studies and Urdu. It includes a drug awareness and sex education programme supported effectively by Islamic sources. In addition, the school provides a full programme of citizenship taught in weekly lessons from Year 7 to Year 9.

At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils identified by the school as having SEN. However, there are some pupils that have learning difficulties, which remain to be diagnosed and addressed effectively. Consequently, these pupils do not achieve as well as they can. The school is familiarising itself with the procedures to follow to support SEN pupils.

There are currently three pupils in the early stages of learning English as an additional language (EAL) whose needs were assessed on entry. Provision for these pupils is only just satisfactory as the framework used to assess their needs is not sufficiently rigorous. The school has drawn up detailed individual educational plans outlining the nature of the support to be provided in English and the targets to be achieved. These plans do not include sufficient information about the pupils' linguistic background in order to improve the links between home and school and therefore ensure continuity of support. Neither are they shared with all teachers so that closely matched work can be provided in every subject. There is one pupil at a more advanced stage of learning EAL who is not receiving sufficiently focused support to improve her writing skills.

The school does not have a comprehensive careers guidance programme that includes opportunities for work experience and links with outside agencies. This provision is essential to prepare pupils effectively for the next stage of their education. Preparation for adult life is limited and is not enhanced either by the

contributions of guest speakers, who can give pupils first hand information about career choices and the job market.

The school plans to run clubs in the near future to enhance pupils' learning and personal development. There are no educational visits planned for any of the year groups to enrich pupils' cultural experiences. This has been noted by pupils and parents alike in their pre-inspection questionnaires.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is now satisfactory or better. The school has made significant improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. It was good in half the lessons observed and only a small minority of the teaching seen was unsatisfactory. The quality of assessment is satisfactory and improving.

Teachers share clear learning objectives with their pupils, which are generally achieved by the end of the lesson. They conduct lessons at a good pace, which enables pupils to produce a sufficient amount of work to increase their knowledge and understanding. Teachers manage their classes well and enjoy good relationships with them. Their questioning is usually sharply focused, enabling pupils to think through issues more easily. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide useful feedback showing them how to improve. They often set learning targets to help pupils know what they have to do to make progress. They do their best to raise the standard of literacy in their subject but do not provide sufficient visual support. They set homework regularly but not all parents and pupils feel that homework builds on pupils' knowledge.

In good lessons, teachers consistently use a variety of methods and approaches to sustain pupils' interest as for example, in Year 10 -11 Qur'anic studies. Teachers closely match the planned activities to individual pupils' needs, enabling them to achieve as well as they can. Their teaching is stimulating and fully engages pupils who become active learners and apply intellectual effort. In English, Year 7 pupils critically analysed a poem read by the teacher then demonstrated their understanding by composing thoughtful verses of their own. However, teaching does not provide consistent challenge for pupils of all abilities, particularly the more able.

In some lessons where the teaching was satisfactory, the teacher's exposition was too long, which left too little time for the activities. In others, the work was not set at the appropriate level for a number of pupils. There were also missed opportunities to reinforce skills in the conclusion part of the lesson.

Where the teaching was less than satisfactory, the teachers did not use time and resources wisely and teaching methods lacked variety. As a result, pupils did not have the opportunity to practise the skills that they can develop through these subjects, as well as other, more general learning skills. Consequently they became passive learners.

The school has successfully introduced the three-part lesson format including an introduction, activities and a conclusion. This is well implemented by all staff except

for those who have been recruited this term and have not yet received full induction. The school has yet to put in place a system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and of planning in particular.

The school's assessment framework includes numerous opportunities to evaluate pupils' performance against internal or national norms as they work toward Key Stage 3 national tests and GCSEs. Pupils are assessed at the end of every term against National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science. The school is planning to extend this system to other subjects as soon as the relevant staff receive the appropriate training. It has recently put in place a system to track the progress of every pupil in the core subjects. However, this system is not rigorous enough to inform the planning of further work and to set sufficiently specific targets to ensure that each pupil achieves as well as she can, including for those with EAL or learning difficulties. Furthermore, the school has yet to ensure that each pupil's progress is tracked in other subjects.

The school has recently recruited suitably qualified teachers who bring with them valuable expertise gained in more established schools. However, these effective teachers have not yet had time to have a measurable impact on pupils' achievement. Training opportunities are insufficient to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills they require to fulfil their roles effectively.

Resources are inadequate to support the curriculum. The management of the school has concentrated its energy on improving the teaching accommodation and providing two science laboratories and an ICT suite. It can now turn to building up resources such as a library and good quality teaching materials for every subject. Teachers make effective use of the few resources they have and some have been imaginative in creating their own teaching aids.

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 gives pupils experience in the aesthetic and creative areas of learning (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii));*
- *provide appropriate careers guidance for pupils (paragraph 1(2)(g));*
- *ensure that the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i));*
- *give pupils adequate preparation for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 1(2)(j)); and*
- *ensure that classroom resources are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and that they are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).*

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

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. The quality of their cultural development is just satisfactory. The school gives pupils the opportunity to develop as young Muslim girls in a secure, all-female environment where they can flourish. Pupils are confident, lively and well-behaved individuals eager to contribute to the community.

The school is successful in providing a strong spiritual environment where teachers can nurture pupils' faith. The *hifz* programme gives pupils the opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an. The daily routines enable pupils to practise their faith in congregation.

Teachers are good role models who create a calm, friendly, respectful and supportive working atmosphere. They use teaching strategies that boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem. For example, they plan opportunities for pupils to make presentations to their class or the whole school, to explore ideas and views through 'hot seating', discussion and debate. This helps pupils develop good communication and interpersonal skills. Teachers implement the behaviour policy consistently and make effective use of the reward system. As a result, they rarely have to resort to sanctions. Pupils work sensibly whether independently or collaboratively. Their moral development is further enhanced by the Islamic studies and citizenship programmes that provide many opportunities for looking at moral issues on the levels of the individual and society. They learn to contribute to community life through fulfilling daily roles of responsibility within the school and organising social and cultural events such as Eid concerts.

Pupils from Year 7 to Year 9 gain a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England through a wide-ranging citizenship programme. For example, they learn about local and central government, democracy, human rights, life in a diverse society, crime and the penal system, and animal rights. However, their knowledge and understanding are not enhanced by regular school visits or exchanges with guest speakers.

The Islamic studies curriculum helps pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony in a multicultural society. For example, pupils compare how Muslims and Christians view marriage. However, the school does not provide a broad enough curriculum to extend pupils' cultural development. Furthermore, there are insufficient resources to support this area of learning.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school has in place all but one of the policies and procedures to promote the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The exception is that for child protection. There

is a written policy but the designated child protection officer and staff have not received any training on safeguarding children.

Pupils understand that the school will not tolerate bullying and report that instances, such as name calling, have been dealt with effectively. Form teachers take their duties seriously and demonstrate good pastoral care. In turn, pupils feel safe at school and would approach staff if they had concerns. They are confident that they would be heard sympathetically. The school rules, rewards and sanctions are clearly understood. Younger pupils particularly welcome the commendations for good work and positive attitudes. Year 7 proudly point to the commendation stars chart recording good behaviour displayed in their form room.

Health and safety procedures are in place. A detailed risk assessment has been completed and a more comprehensive version will be used in future. A visit from the local fire officer is awaited to check the safety of the new ICT suite and science rooms before they are used by pupils. Two first aiders provide the necessary cover should a pupil have an accident or be taken ill while at school. Pupils greatly enjoy their PE lessons and take part with enthusiasm and this contributes to their health. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to broaden their knowledge and understanding, for example of healthy eating, to help the school to achieve more fully one of its aims ‘...to encourage pupils to be physically fit and alert, leading to a healthy lifestyle...’

The admission register does not comply with requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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 the child protection officer and other staff receive the required training for safeguarding children (paragraph 3(2)(b)); and*
- *maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)).*

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has not completed the required checks on all staff for their suitability to work with children. Criminal Record Bureaux (CRB) checks have not been obtained for all adults currently working in the school. Those checks on teachers that have

been employed through an agency are in place. However, there is no comprehensive administrative system to ensure that the requirements are met. Records to show that references have been followed up are not complete, including for the foreign nationals employed at the school. The medical fitness of staff is not verified.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

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

- *undertake CRB checks for all staff that work in the school (paragraph 4(b));*
- *prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out checks to confirm their medical fitness and keep a record of professional references obtained (paragraph 4(c));and*
- *carry out checks on the foreign nationals employed, for whom a CRB check is inappropriate, in accordance with Department for Education and Skills guidance (paragraph 4(f)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

Over the past year, considerable efforts, both in time and resources, have been made to improve the premises and accommodation in order to bring them up to a satisfactory standard. This has resulted in all, but one, of the regulations being met. The school has sought to provide specialist facilities to extend pupils' learning. Two small science laboratories are almost complete and, for the first time, pupils will have opportunities for practical investigative and experimental work. Similarly, the newly equipped ICT suite on the top floor will enable pupils to have 'hands on' experience with computers in school. There is some health and safety work outstanding that must be completed before these specialist rooms are used. Other refurbishment has included building an extension of adequate size, which is well used for daily *Salah* (prayers), assemblies and as a dining room. The number of lavatories is just adequate for the current number on roll. All areas of the school have been redecorated and new flooring has been laid. Classrooms have suitable furniture and pupils have arranged attractive displays in each room. Pupils respect these areas and displays but elsewhere, and in the playground, litter is often a problem following breaks and lunchtimes.

The play ground is not in a condition for pupils to use safely. The tarmac surface is uneven in places and scattered with rubble from the surrounding rough edging. This is not cleared before pupils go out, and is particularly hazardous during PE lessons. Items remaining from previous building work must be removed.

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 with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that the uneven surface of the playground is repaired and all rubble and other hazardous items are removed, so that it is made safe for pupils to use (paragraph 5(t)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides a suitable range of basic information to parents and others. A brief prospectus clearly defines its Islamic ethos, outlines its curriculum and its admission procedure. However, the information on the selection process is insufficient. There is no information related to the admission of pupils with SEN and for those who have EAL needs. Although the school states that parents can request the discipline policy, it does not supply any detail on general school rules and its policy and procedure as regards exclusions. An appropriate range of documents is available to parents upon request and regular notices are posted on windows outside the main entrance. Monthly newsletters inform parents of school events, developments and academic matters. The school has recently purchased home diaries to provide a vital link between school and home. The head teacher and staff make themselves available to meet parents on request. The majority of parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem.

The school invites parents to meet their children's teachers at least once a year to discuss any issue concerning their academic and personal development. This is to be increased to three times. At the end of the academic year, parents receive a report that informs them of their daughters' progress. The report includes a record of attendance to lessons and prayers, and detailed subject reports. The subject reports indicate the quality of the pupils' personal organisation, behaviour, effort, homework and standard of work, as well as examination marks. The pupils' achievement is sometimes expressed in National Curriculum levels, and sometimes in percentages, which leads to a lack of clarity. Subject teachers do not always explain what pupils can and cannot do and do not always provide improvement targets. Not all parents feel well informed about their children's progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets many but not all of the requirements.

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 particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e));*

- *provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils statements special educational need, including those with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f));*
- *make available upon request to parents of registered pupils and parents of prospective pupils particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)); and*
- *provide upon request to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).*

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

The school has recently revised the policy for handling complaints and it now meets all of the requirements. Information in the school prospectus states that a copy of this policy is available on request to parents and prospective parents. However, in the questionnaire completed prior to the inspection a minority of parents reported they were not clear about the school's procedures for dealing with complaints.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Al Huda Girls' School	
DfES Number:	330/6088	
Type of school:	Secondary	
Status:	Independent	
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years	
Gender of pupils:	Female	
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Girls: 89	Total: 89
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees:	£900	
Address of school:	74 -76 Washwood Heath Road, Saltly, Birmingham B8 1RD	
Telephone number:	0121 3288999	
Head teacher:	Mrs Y Jawaid	
Proprietor:	Mr Jawaid	
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs M A Buckingham HMI	
Date of inspection:	23 - 26 January 2006	

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