

Inspection report

Balham Preparatory School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 212/6396

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 26 - 29 June 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

Balham Preparatory School is an independent Muslim day school in Tooting, in south west London. It was founded in 1993 under the auspices of Balham mosque to provide care and education for children from the ages of 3 - 11. The primary part of the school gained maintained and voluntary aided (VA) status in September 2004, becoming known as Gatton VA primary school and moved to new premises in January 2006. The independent school now caters for children aged 3 - 4 and 11 - 16. It is based on two sites. The nursery is housed on the ground floor of a recently renovated building which is also used for residential accommodation. The secondary school is based in a former cinema, which also houses the Tooting Islamic Centre and is only a short walk from the nursery. The boys use one floor of the cinema building and the girls use another floor. The school facilities are used a great deal by the local community out of school hours and the school hall is used to extend the mosque's provision for corporate prayer on Fridays during the school day. The school is owned by the Al-Risaala Educational Trust and the name Al-Risaala is now often used for the secondary part of the school. Nursery education was last inspected in July 2004.

The school states that all pupils are Muslim and that virtually all are seen as having English as an additional language (EAL). In its prospectus the school asserts that its fundamental aim is to provide for its pupils *'a first class education.... grounded in the tradition of academic rigour, focused on developing.... the skills and confidence to face the challenge and enjoy the opportunities of life in the twenty first century, while at the same time inculcating...the character and religion to live as a true Muslim.'* It provides *'a segregated environment'* for boys and girls to enable them to pursue their studies in a manner in keeping with Islamic beliefs, values and traditions. It seeks to blend the National Curriculum with additional Islamic components, thus *'breaking down the barriers between state and religious education, reuniting these two strands of knowledge into a complete Islamic education system.'*

Summary of main findings

Balham Preparatory School provides a good education for its pupils. It has made good progress towards fulfilling its aims since it was established. It is successful in helping its pupils to become good Muslim citizens in contemporary British society. The school enables its pupils to achieve above average standards in national tests and examinations. It has a number of major strengths: it is a harmonious community of learners with shared values, it has a positive ethos for learning, it encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own lives and it has created a culture of high expectations and aspirations.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. These factors, coupled with the extra booster classes available and strong parental support, enable the pupils to make good progress in their learning. However, assessment systems are undeveloped; this prevents the school from fully meeting the different learning needs of the pupils. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The provision for their welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school provides a safe environment in which learning can take place. Pupils are well-behaved and self-disciplined. They are given good opportunities to make academic progress, to develop an Islamic lifestyle and to flourish as young people.

School leaders are committed to improvement but staff do not receive sufficient training and support to enable them to develop their teaching skills. The newly appointed headteacher has begun to make changes but has had too little time to bring about the necessary improvements that will have an impact on teaching and learning and assessment practices.

What the school does well:

- the school provides good nursery education;
- the secondary school achieves above average standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations;
- the staff form good relationships with the pupils and know them well; and
- the teachers are successful in developing the pupils' self-confidence, nurturing them into an Islamic way of life and helping them to relate Islamic teaching to everyday life in Britain today.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and assessment as indicated in section 1;
- attend to the welfare issues identified in section 3;
- ensure that all appropriate checks have been carried out on all staff as indicated in section 4;
- attend to the issues relating to the premises as indicated in section 5;
- provide fuller information for parents and others and ensure that they are aware that the information detailed in section 6 is available on request; and
- redraft the complaints policy so as to include the details required in section 7.

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

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The pre-school children follow the national Foundation Stage guidelines as well as the literacy and numeracy strategies. There is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy throughout the school so as to establish a secure base for the broader curriculum.

Religious education is taught as a subject and Islamic Studies are an integral part of the curriculum. The school works at integrating Islamic teachings into the whole curriculum. It has planned useful links between subjects, including Islamic teachings, which reinforces the Islamic ethos and unifies the pupils' learning experience. Work in history links up with elements of *Tareekh* (Islamic history). The use of information and communication technology in all subjects is under-developed.

The school places an appropriate emphasis on study of the Qur'an and of the *Aqai'd* (beliefs) and *Fiqh* (applied Islamic Theology). Pupils learn to recite the Qur'an according to the conventions of *tajweed* (one of the main styles of Qur'anic recitation with particular rules of pronunciation) and understand the meaning of its verses based on the interpretation of classical scholars. They also learn *Hadiths* (narrations illustrating Prophet Muhammad's example) relating to their daily lives. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is covered effectively through Islamic Studies and other subjects. The Arabic curriculum focuses on Arabic as a modern foreign language and provides access to the Qur'an. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 study a GCSE Islamic Studies course which prepares them well for life in modern British society and promotes their thinking and communication skills.

Pupils benefit from a cross-curricular approach to craft, design and technology. They gain experience in the aesthetic and creative areas of learning through English literature, *Tajweed* and opportunities to sing a repertoire of *nashids* (religious songs) in English, Arabic and Urdu. Year 9 pupils take the national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and in Year 11 take GCSEs in six or seven subjects.

The school has a clear and detailed curriculum policy. It has adapted national schemes of work for National Curriculum subjects, and has plans for Islamic Studies which provide a firm basis for teachers' daily planning. Most teachers use the same lesson plan format which includes a section for an evaluation. However, the day-to-day planning does not take sufficient account of the pupils' different abilities. Some lesson plans are sketchy and lack appropriate detail about intended lesson outcomes and strategies to meet individual learning needs. The teachers make good links between their subject and the Islamic ethos of the school. Appropriate time is allocated to each area of learning. The curriculum is supplemented with educational visits. For example, Year 10 pupils went to the theatre to see 'Macbeth', a work being studied for GCSE. However, a large proportion of the pupils and their parents would like the school to provide more trips and enrichment activities. Provision for physical education (PE) is satisfactory. The pupils enjoy PE and work

undertaken in this subject contributes to their awareness of healthy living. However, they do not have access to a playground.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Overall, the quality of teaching in the school is satisfactory. Teaching in the nursery class is good. The staff work well together and provide a good range of activities that help the children make good progress in their language and personal and social development. Much of the work is focused on first-hand experiences. During the inspection, children were observed gaining much enjoyment from building bridges with large cardboard boxes. This helped to develop their understanding of the wider world, and prepared them well for a planned trip to central London later in the term. The nursery is successfully addressing the issues raised in its last inspection in 2004.

There are some good features to the teaching in the secondary school. For example, the positive relationships that exist between the teachers and the pupils foster mutual respect and good behaviour in almost all lessons. The pupils say they enjoy school and appreciate the work the teachers do for them. The teachers give very willingly of their time to provide a range of extra classes to help pupils prepare for tests and examinations. This provision has a positive impact on the progress pupils make and enables many to achieve well. The teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to respond very well to the questions the pupils ask. Some teachers use praise very well which motivates the pupils to work hard. In the best lessons the teachers provide opportunities for the pupils to work together to solve problems and discuss their work. Consequently, they develop a good understanding of what they are doing and make good progress. In these good lessons, the teachers set clear targets for the pupils and give them time limits to complete tasks which provides a good pace for much to be achieved in a short time. More could be done to share this good practice within the school to improve the overall quality of the teaching.

The teaching of Islamic Studies is good. The pupils are able to recite different types of Du'a in Arabic and to translate them into English. A good feature of the teaching is the way the staff relate the Du'a to daily life such as mealtimes, travel, sickness and expressions of gratitude.

However, a limited range of teaching strategies is employed. Teachers use explanation, video and questioning to engage the pupils in their learning, but some teachers spend too long talking to the whole class. Consequently, some pupils lose concentration because they are not sufficiently actively involved in their learning. The school recognises the need to introduce a wider range of teaching methods and more opportunities for group work. Lessons are adequately planned and most teachers are clear about what it is they want the pupils to learn but not all successfully convey these objectives to the pupils in the lessons.

Assessment is unsatisfactory overall, and insufficient use is made of available information from assessment. The work the pupils are asked to do too often does not take enough account of the different abilities in the class, as all pupils regularly do the same work. Consequently, the work can be too easy for some pupils and too

difficult for others. The assessment policy is not being implemented consistently. Some teachers are not marking the pupils' work carefully enough, nor are they using information from tests to find out what the pupils know already and what they need to learn next. Many pupils feel they do not receive enough helpful comments on their work to enable them to have a clear idea about what they need to do to improve. The system for checking on the pupils' progress across subjects and in all years is not rigorous enough. It does not enable the school to know the extent to which the pupils are improving in their work.

The school has experienced considerable staff turnover in recent months which has disrupted some pupils' progress, because some work has been repeated. The school needs to do more to ensure that new teachers receive clear information on the abilities of their pupils, to ensure work can be set at the right level and previous lessons are not repeated.

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 teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils and that these factors are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d)); and*
- *develop a framework to assess and track pupils' progress and use the information gained from such assessment to plan teaching so that all pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).*

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

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school provides a strongly spiritual environment where teachers nurture pupils' faith. The Islamic Studies programme gives pupils the opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an. The daily routines, including the *Zohar Salah* (early afternoon prayers), enable pupils to practise their faith and develop a sense of community. Pupils learn to distinguish right from wrong through Qur'anic studies, *Hadith* and *Fiqh*. This is reinforced well in daily assemblies.

The teachers ensure that pupils acquire a sound understanding of Islamic teachings whilst learning about other faiths. As a result, they are confident in their Muslim identity and appreciate being educated within an Islamic ethos. They are also respectful of other faiths.

The teachers promote the pupils' moral development well. Teachers implement the behaviour policy consistently, provide positive role models and make effective use of the reward system. There is a strong emphasis on good manners and caring. As a result, pupils acquire good social skills and moral awareness. They are well-

behaved in and out of lessons. They work well independently, in pairs and in groups. They treat staff and each other with courtesy. Through PSHE the pupils develop their skills of reflection and analysis. In one lesson they debated the cost-benefit considerations of a business proposal and then reflected on their contributions.

Teachers boost the pupils' confidence and self-esteem well. They plan opportunities for them to make presentations to their class or the whole school and to develop their views through discussion and debate which helps to develop good communication skills. A prefect system helps to prepare them for future adult responsibilities. The pupils gain a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England through interaction with local councillors, members of parliament and community leaders of different faiths who have visited the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

There is a strong commitment from the staff to do all they can to keep the pupils safe in school. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place relating to behaviour and bullying and the teachers apply these well. Children and pupils are treated in a fair and friendly manner which contributes to the harmonious atmosphere in the school. All staff have recently received training in child protection issues and procedures. The pupils say they feel safe and cared for in school and they are confident that the teachers will help them if they have any concerns. They move around school in an orderly fashion with older pupils acting as prefects in helping the staff to keep everyone safe at break times.

Some aspects of the school's health and safety policy are not fully implemented. Not all rooms and cupboards containing potentially dangerous materials are locked and secure. The school does not fully meet fire safety regulations. Fire drills take place regularly, but the school has not completed a fire risk assessment and there is no accompanying fire officer's report. Risk assessments are completed for educational visits some distance away from the school, but are not always completed for visits to the immediate locality, such as the playing fields. The school maintains accurate attendance registers and carefully notes accidents and illnesses. The school does not have a detailed plan on how it intends to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

The quality of care, health and safety in the nursery class is good. The building is secure and the staff are vigilant in providing a safe environment for the youngest children. At the time of the inspection there were no paper towels in the nursery washrooms. Consequently, there is a danger of cross infection, because the children were all sharing cotton towels.

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 risk assessments are completed for all off-site visits (paragraph 3(2)(c));*
- *ensure all cupboards and rooms containing potentially hazardous materials are kept locked and ensure disposable towels are available for the children to use in the nursery (paragraph 3(4)); and*
- *conduct a fire risk assessment and obtain a fire officer's report (paragraph 3(5)).*

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 sufficient staff who are qualified in academic disciplines but fewer who are trained and qualified as teachers. The school has carried out most, but not all, of the necessary checks to confirm the suitability of the staff to work with children.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most of the requirements.

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:

- *ensure that prior to the confirmation of the appointment, appropriate checks have been carried out on all staff to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references (paragraph 4(c)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is located in the largest section of a former cinema. The school looks out onto roads from the front and both sides of the building and onto local residents' back gardens from the back. Much time and effort has been expended in transforming the building into a suitable setting for the education of young people. A considerable amount of building work has been undertaken to create three floors of rooms. The first floor contains offices, a suite of computers, the science room, a library and a large hall used for PE and prayer. Most of the generally small classrooms on the second floor are used by the boys and those on the third floor by the girls. There are two smaller halls on the third floor used by the girls.

The interior of the building is clean, in good order and satisfactorily decorated. Lighting and heating in classrooms and other parts of the building are satisfactory. Some classrooms have natural light with windows looking out on the road. However, other classrooms, created within the building without exterior facing windows, have less natural light and less effective ventilation. The school have provided fans and some portable air-conditioning to tackle the problem. The classrooms are adequately furnished, with carpeting in most of them and in corridors. Classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state. The sound insulation and acoustics allow effective teaching and communication in the classrooms although noise from the large main hall, when PE takes place, does intrude into the classrooms nearby. There is new, and well laid, hard flooring in the three halls. There is no space outside the school for pupils to play safely which means all pupils remain in the building at break and lunchtimes. The furniture and fittings are appropriate for the age and needs of the pupils. Some new furniture has been purchased. However, some chairs are rather small for the older pupils.

Facilities for pupils who are unwell do not meet requirements. As there are no facilities for the preparation and serving of food, pupils bring their own food and drink and consume them in the different halls.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most 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 there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)); and*
- *make arrangements to provide outside space for pupils to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school communicates well with parents. Regular newsletters are sent home providing parents with good information on school events and how they can help their children do well at school. The school acts quickly to inform parents if there are any safety issues they need to be aware of.

The school prospectus clearly defines the school's ethos, but it does not provide all the information required by the regulations. It does not make clear to parents that other pieces of information are available on request: those relating to child protection, health and safety, behaviour, the number of complaints received by the school, the names and qualifications of the staff, bullying, arrangements for pupils with special needs and how the school caters for pupils with EAL. There are regular evening meetings throughout the year when parents are invited to the school to discuss their children's progress. The school sends two written reports home each

year which contain information on the current level of attainment in most areas of the curriculum, but there is no indication of the progress the pupils are making or their targets for improvement. Some parents also feel they are not sufficiently well informed about their children'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 and prospective parents with particulars of the school's policy on discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e));*
- *provide parents and prospective parents with particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f));*
- *provide written reports for parents that includes information on both attainment and progress (paragraph 6(5));*
- *make it clear to parents and prospective parents that particulars of policies are available on request relating to:*

bullying, child protection, health and safety and the promotion of good behaviour and rewards and sanctions (paragraph 6(2)(h));

the complaints procedure and the number of complaints during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)); and

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 policy which sets out the procedures the school will follow in the management of any complaint. However it contains too little information about some of the specific elements and processes required by the regulations.

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 the procedure sets out clear timescales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c));*
- *ensure the procedure allows for parents to attend the panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));*
- *ensure the procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors and headteacher and where relevant, the person complained about, are given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i));*
- *ensure the procedure provides for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)); and*
- *ensure the procedure provides for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Balham Preparatory School
DfES Number:	212/6396
Type of school:	Nursery and secondary Muslim day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 - 4 and 11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 110 Girls: 118 Total: 228
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 34 Girls: 49 Total: 83
Annual fees (day pupils):	£1,700
Address of school:	145 Upper Tooting Road London SW17 7TJ
Telephone number:	020 8767 6057
Fax number:	020 8682 4272
Email address:	gatton.wandsworth@lgfl.net
Headteacher:	Mr Maksud Gangat
Proprietor:	Al-Risaala Education Trust
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ian Hartland HMI
Date of inspection:	26 - 29 June 2006

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