

Markazul Uloom

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	889/6009
Unique Reference Number	133541
Inspection number	316843
Inspection dates	29–30 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Cecile Corfield

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Markazul Uloom is an independent boarding and day school in Blackburn which provides education for boys and girls aged between 11 and 19, although only boys are accepted as boarders. Originally, the school was for girls only, but in November 2006, it extended the provision to boys. Twelve girls beyond the age of sixteen remain at school to study Islamic theology. The school serves the Blackburn community, but pupils also travel from surrounding towns such as Burnley, Nelson and Haslingden. There are 102 girls on roll and 121 boys, all of whom are Muslim. Sixty-seven boys are boarders. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils are British Muslims of Asian family heritage. The school aims to teach most of the National Curriculum and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) course work within an ethos of Islamic values, beliefs, culture and tradition. This is the school's first published report. The boarding provision was inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) in February 2007.

The school's aim is to *'foster and enhance pupils' creativity, and (for them) to discover a joy and commitment to learning that will last a lifetime'*.

Evaluation of the school

Markazul Uloom provides a good quality of education which enables pupils to make good progress. The school is successful in meeting its aims. Staff are committed and are successful in promoting the academic and personal progress of the pupils. The small numbers of pupils in most classes ensure that all are valued as individuals. The quality of teaching is good. The Islamic studies curriculum is good and taught particularly well. The satisfactory secular curriculum is firmly based on the National Curriculum and requirements for the GCSE. Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning and their behaviour is outstanding. Teachers provide good role models which promote the school's positive ethos. The school meets all but two of the regulations required for continued registration. These are related to the current premises.

Quality of education

Curriculum provision is satisfactory with some good features in Islamic studies. Appropriate long-term and medium-term planning is in place. Most teachers have good subject knowledge. There is a detailed curriculum policy for each subject. A good five-year Islamic studies programme is offered by the school for girls only which will be extended for boys when construction work is completed. Most subjects of the National Curriculum are provided. These include English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT) and business studies. Business studies and areas of mathematics prepare pupils for their future economic well-being. Citizenship, history, geography and religious education are included in general studies which is taught weekly. Personal, health and social education (PSHE) is provided each week and includes promoting healthy living, as does Islamic studies. Provision for physical education (PE) is satisfactory with limited resources which will improve when the new building comes into use.

In the girls' section, the Islamic studies programme includes Qur'anic studies including *tafseer*, (translation and interpretation) *tajweed*, (recitation), *Hadith* (the traditions of the prophet), *fiqh* (theology), Islamic history, Arabic and Urdu. The school has started to extend this programme for boys.

There is a satisfactory number of extra curricular activities for boarders and some limited provision for day boys and girls. Careers guidance is offered and arrangements have been made for some work experience placement in the community.

Teaching and assessment are good overall in both Islamic studies and the secular curriculum. This ensures that the pupils make good progress over time. Pupils say that they learn a lot in school and this is reflected by the large majority of parents' views expressed in the pre-inspection questionnaire. Lesson planning is thorough and lessons are well prepared. In the best lessons, sharply focussed questioning and opportunities for pupils to collaborate lend interest and challenge to the lessons. Clear aims and objectives are set at the start of most lessons. Teachers have a good command of their subjects and use their skills and experiences to promote pupils' knowledge and understanding. Good use is made of time and lessons are well-paced to enable pupils to complete their tasks. Most lessons are teacher-directed. However, in the small number of practical lessons, pupils show evident enjoyment which promotes their learning. Lessons where the pupils work in pairs or small groups to share their views are particularly effective. Good relationships abound throughout the school and the positive ethos in lessons enables pupils to tackle new concepts with confidence.

In the small number of lessons judged to be satisfactory, most contain some of the good elements above, but sometimes teachers' explanations are not clear enough or the teacher does not always circulate around the pupils' tables to provide individual help.

Assessment of pupils' progress is good. Detailed analysis is made to ascertain the standards achieved by pupils in relation to National Curriculum levels. There are twice yearly examinations in all subjects and tests at the end of units or a term's work. This school year the school is starting optional National Curriculum assessment for pupils in Years 7 and 8 and end of Key Stage 3 assessments in Year 9. Recently, the school has developed a good strategy to track pupils' progress as they move through the school. The intention is that the information gained will enable the school to assess whether pupils are attaining the standards of which they are capable as they move through the school. Although marking of pupils' workbooks is undertaken, there are few examples of comments that inform pupils of how they can improve their work.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school's provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There is an effective behaviour policy which clearly details an appropriate range of rewards and sanctions, fully understood by the pupils. Teachers manage their pupils well and, as a result, the pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are respectful, friendly and well-mannered to staff and visitors. Teachers make judicious use of praise and merit points to reward effort. The school has a positive ethos.

The pupils state that school deals effectively with any problems that they may experience. As a result, they are confident, friendly, well-mannered and thoughtful. Pupils show consideration for others and help and respect each other. Regular assemblies and prayer sessions support pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils have great respect for their teachers and express their affiliation to their school and religion. Boys are involved in a School Council which enables them to air their views and have some influence in areas of school life that are important to them. The girls do not have this opportunity.

The school provides a limited number of out-of-school visits for its pupils to broaden their horizons. They study British public institutions and learn about other cultures in both general and Islamic studies. Pupils are also provided with opportunities to make a positive contribution through fund-raising, for example, by filling shoe boxes for children in need. Attendance is good and above the national average.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. A well thought out range of policies and procedures addresses all aspects of pupils' welfare, including child protection. Detailed positive behaviour and anti-bullying policies outline the school's caring ethos and its sensible approach to sanctions and rewards. Pupils are closely supervised and this safeguards their safety and well-being at all times. Most members of staff are qualified in first aid. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about the importance of safety in school and at home. Staff are well-deployed to ensure the pupils' safety and pupils are supervised effectively. An admission register and attendance registers for each class are kept and administered to comply with the regulations. The school's detailed three-year accessibility plan is based on an audit of the premises and fulfils its duties under the Disabilities Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate recruitment procedures. Appropriate checks are carried out before employment is confirmed. Details of the checks are logged on a central record.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is appropriate to meet the needs of the pupils, although two regulations are not met. The buildings are adequately maintained and kept reasonably clean and tidy. However, the decoration in the boarding area is unsatisfactory. This was noted by the CSCI inspection in February 2007 and has not yet been attended to. The outdoor space in the girls' section is unsuitable. The only available area is grassed and muddy which means that it cannot be used for PE or at break times for most of the year. Classrooms are large enough for some aspects of PE and games to take place. The arrangements for pupils who are ill meet regulations. The school has appropriate washroom facilities for pupils and staff. In approximately a year's time, the ongoing building work will provide improved boarding accommodation, more classrooms, an indoor hall and further outdoor space.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents and prospective parents with comprehensive and useful information through its prospectus and parents' information booklet. The school informs parents of the range of policies that they may request to see.

One consultation evening for parents has been held each academic year, although from the current school year onward the school is to hold two meetings. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents state that they are kept informed of their children's progress. The school provides parents with an informative written report on their children's progress. However, the reports from the girls' school include targets for improvement and the boys' reports do not. The targets are not always specific to the subjects and sometimes refer to personal development.

Procedures for handling complaints

Although the school has not received any formal complaints, appropriate procedures are in place to deal with complaints should they arise.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- improve the décor in the boarding area of the school (paragraph 5(q))
- provide outdoor space in the girls' section that can be used throughout the year (paragraph 5(t)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- further develop tracking procedures to monitor pupils' progress over time
- improve marking so that pupils are informed of how to improve their work
- ensure that targets in the pupils' annual reports are specific to each subject
- provide more extra-curricular activities and visits for day pupils
- enable the girls to form a School Council.

School details

Name of school	Markazul Uloom		
DCSF number	889/6009		
Unique reference number	133541		
Type of school	Muslim boarding and day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2001		
Age range of pupils	11-19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 121	Girls: 102	Total: 223
Number of boarders	Boys: 67	Girls: 0	Total: 67
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 1,050 (maximum)		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 1,850 (maximum)		
Address of school	Park Lee Road Blackburn Lancashire BB2 3NY		
Telephone number	01254 660026		
Fax number	01254 660026		
Email address	markaz@fsmail.net		
Headteacher	Mrs Asiya Gajaria		
Proprietor	Board of Trustees		
Reporting inspector	Mrs Cecile Corfield		
Dates of inspection	29–30 November 2007		