

Ash-Shifa School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	931/6121
Unique Reference Number	134166
Inspection number	316890
Inspection dates	6-7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Ann Boyle AI

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

Ash-Shifa is an independent day school with an Islamic ethos for girls aged 11 to 16. It was founded by the Ash-Shifa Trust. It opened in September 2002 and gained registration in January 2005. The school provides secondary education based on National Curriculum subjects and Islamic studies. Currently, there are 23 girls on roll, all from the local community. Ash-Shifa aims to "*provide its pupils with a complete programme of education along with balanced growth of personality using our Prophet Muhammad as their example. We also aim to assist them in developing skills and qualities according to the Qur'an and Sunnah for life in a multi-cultural society.*" This is the first inspection of the school.

Evaluation of the school

Ash-Shifa is an improving school which provides good education and care for its pupils. Its views of itself are accurate, and its managers have a clear plan for its future development. The school successfully meets its aims and all of the regulations. Relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school are extremely caring and supportive and pupils enjoy coming to school. Ash-Shifa successfully integrates National Curriculum subjects including religious studies with Islamic studies and a programme of personal care. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are promoted well and a majority of parents feel that their children are safe and well cared for; they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, it includes an appropriate balance between National Curriculum subjects, Islamic studies and a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) development. Key Stage 3 pupils are taught all National Curriculum subjects with the exception of a modern foreign language. They are also taught PSHE as well as Urdu, Arabic, Islamic studies and the Qur'an. Key Stage 4 pupils have access to a good range of accreditation including GCSE examinations in English language and literature, mathematics, double science, Arabic, Urdu, religious studies and information and communication technology (ICT). Lessons in practical science, ICT and physical education (PE) are taught at a local secondary school because facilities and resources for these subjects are limited at present. Supplementary science lessons are taught in school; however, there are few opportunities for pupils

to use their ICT skills in other subjects and pupils have few opportunities to participate in outdoor games and recreational pursuits at the school. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's participation in a range of nationally funded initiatives for black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. One such project provided lessons and workshops to help develop organisational and presentation skills, as well as careers' counselling, individual mentoring and support for the transition to next stage of learning. Last year, the leavers group participated in a taster programme at the local sixth form college and the vast majority of the first cohort of leavers went to this local sixth form college.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, with some that is outstanding. As a result of this good teaching pupils achieve well and make good progress particularly in English and religious studies, as reflected in the school's good results in its first GCSE examinations in 2007. The relationships between staff and pupils are very good and result in a very positive, harmonious atmosphere for learning. Specialist teaching takes place in English, mathematics, science, Islamic studies, religious studies, ICT, Arabic and Urdu by staff who have very good subject knowledge. This has a positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement. The very best teaching is provided by those teachers with the most experience. In these lessons teachers set very high standards for individuals, communicate knowledge effectively, encourage pupils to work independently and to think for themselves. As a result pupils are highly motivated, work hard, grow in confidence and achieve high standards in their work. Weekly homework, based on lesson activities, is set by all teachers; this too extends pupils' knowledge and encourages them to show initiative and work independently. The satisfactory lessons tend to be predominantly instructional with too little dialogue or opportunities for discussion. The school recognises the need to improve facilities and resources for ICT within the school and has included this as a priority within its action plan.

There are good procedures for assessing, testing and recording pupils' progress. The school records accurately identify each pupil's level of achievement and charts their progress as they move through the school. Most teachers show pupils how to improve their work through good quality marking. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and achievement through pupil progress meetings and end of year reports.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They willingly help each other, show great respect for their teachers and express their affiliation to their school and religion. They offer a warm welcome to visitors and talk with them in a friendly and courteous manner. Pupils' attendance and punctuality to lessons are good. They take pride in their work, as shown by the good standard of presentation. Pupils have good links with the local and wider community particularly through BME projects. For example, as part of an open evening to celebrate the end of Ramadan the pupils organised entertainment

including songs, poems and presentations and served food for invited guests from the community. Pupils also participate in funding for national and international charities including the Pakistan earthquake disaster appeal. The daily prayer sessions make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Also, in lessons such as English, pupils have opportunities to consider issues such as death and bereavement by looking at how some poets deal with these issues. Islamic studies contribute well to pupils' moral development and in lessons such as English, religious studies and humanities, pupils learn about other faiths and cultures as well as public institutions and services in England. Pupils have good opportunities to engage in social events within the school and they use the school council well to ensure that their views are heard. For example, they have highlighted the need for more outdoor sports equipment and facilities at the school. Also, through questionnaires and suggestion boxes pupils are consulted about a range of school issues such as the timing of daily breaks. These consultations, together with active participation in school based BME projects, help to promote pupils' communication skills, confidence and self esteem, as well as their social development. Older pupils benefit from the provision of careers advice and, it is envisaged that the current Year 11 will all have opportunities to take part in work placements.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of pupils, in all circumstances, is good. The vast majority of pupils said that they feel safe, well cared for and enjoy working in an orderly environment. Arrangements for ensuring child protection are suitable and the named person is appropriately trained. Further training is planned for the child protection officer later this year. First aid provision is good and two members of staff are trained in this. The school has zero tolerance towards bad behaviour and racism and its anti-bullying policy meets requirements. In lessons such as science, PE, Islamic studies and religious education pupils are taught the benefits of staying safe and eating healthy diets. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff who work in the school and have direct contact with pupils have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with children. The school maintains a complete single central record and follows thoroughly its recruitment procedures including the required checks on staff before their appointment is confirmed. Its procedures meet the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation.

The premises and accommodation are fit for purpose. The school is housed in a series of modern purpose built mobile classrooms within the grounds of Banbury Mosque. In front of the school there is a very large hard court area which is shared with the Mosque and used only at break times. There are adequate classrooms and washrooms for the number of staff and pupils but facilities for practical science and

ICT and PE are limited. The school is considering, with the Trust, ways of providing a discrete area within the grounds where the pupils can have instructions in outdoor team games.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has good procedures for communicating with parents and others. The prospectus provides appropriate and useful information, including information about the curriculum and the school's ethos. Detailed and informative reports are sent to parents once a year and pupils' progress meetings are held three times each year to inform parents about their child's attainment and progress. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt comfortable in approaching the school for information and resolving issues.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has effective procedures for handling complaints, which comply with the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

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:

- implement plans to improve provision and resources for ICT at the school
- investigate ways of providing a discrete play area for outdoor games and recreational purposes.

School details

Name of school	Ash-Shifa School
DCSF number	931/6121
Unique reference number	134166
Type of school	Secondary
Status	Independent
Date school opened	23 September 2002
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Girls: 23
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,500
Address of school	Merton Street Banbury Oxfordshire OX16 4RP
Telephone number	01295279954
Fax number	01295279954
Email address	info@ash-shifa.org.uk
Headteacher	Miss Frazana Aslam
Proprietor	Ash-Shifa Trust
Reporting inspector	Sheila Ann Boyle AI
Dates of inspection	6-7 November 2007