

Azhar Academy

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	316/6064
Unique Reference Number	134417
Inspection number	316904
Inspection dates	15-16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew 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

Azhar Academy is an independent Muslim day school for girls aged between eleven and nineteen years of age which opened in September 2003. It is situated in Forest Gate in east London. Admission is by entry examination. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were 235 pupils on roll. The school adheres to and reflects Muslim principles and its aim is that *'through a sound education our children will learn and develop an understanding about their deen'*. This was the school's first inspection.

Evaluation of the school

Azhar Academy is achieving its aim providing a satisfactory quality of education with some good features. The curriculum is good and provides a broad learning experience, including strong elements of Islamic education and a wide range of secular subjects. Satisfactory and sometimes good teaching results in pupils making satisfactory progress. Pupils are happy to be in the school, they are interested in their work and prepared to try hard at the tasks they are set, and parents believe staff expect their children to work hard and do their best. Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good as are procedures to ensure their welfare, health and safety. The school meets all but one of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum which includes Islamic studies and all the subjects of the National Curriculum except music and design and technology. Citizenship, religious education (RE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE) add an additional strong dimension to provision. Within the religious curriculum, pupils can choose to follow a course in Islamic studies or the Aalimah course, which is more academic and suited to the more able.

The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is well planned and is supported by schemes of work for each subject which make effective use of a wide range of national guidance and materials. The schemes of work outline clearly what is to be taught each term to pupils in each year group. Short-term planning identifies objectives for each lesson and the activities and resources which will support the pupils' learning. The National Strategy for Literacy is used in planning but there is no established policy for teaching literacy across the curriculum.

In Key Stage 4 all pupils follow GCSE courses in the core and foundation subjects, with the majority of pupils taking five or more subjects at examination. Options for AS and A-level courses currently include English literature, mathematics, biology, chemistry, Urdu and general studies. Careers education is part of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and is supported well by the Connexions service and work experience in Year 10. The inclusion of Arabic for all pupils enriches provision.

In order to cover the broad curriculum, pupils begin school early, some at 7.30 am and the school generally balances the available time well. However, physical education (PE) has too small an allocation and this leaves pupils and parents dissatisfied.

Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities have individual education plans and receive additional support in lessons and through after-school provision. Similarly, out-of-school classes for more able pupils in science and mathematics help to ensure that these pupils are aware of their ability and have increased opportunities for challenging work. Homework clubs ensure that pupils have access to computers to develop their independent research skills. Clubs for Islamic studies, arts and crafts further enrich provision. The curriculum for all pupils is extended by visits out of school to museums and places of historical and geographical interest. These are valued by pupils and parents as contributing strongly to pupils' learning.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and some is good. As a result, pupils make satisfactory progress and becoming effective learners. The teachers' practice of setting targets for each individual encourages pupils to try hard and to appreciate that making progress depends on improvements that build up over time.

The teachers' subject knowledge is secure, and they are confident in planning clear learning objectives which can be assessed in lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils are almost always good, contributing to pupils' enjoyment of school and motivating them to try hard at their work. In the best lessons the teaching is effectively differentiated so that all pupils have a manageable level of challenge to ensure that they make rapid progress. In such lessons, teachers use a variety of approaches to maintain pupils' interest and to give them opportunities to explore different ways of learning. Teachers pose searching questions which improve the quality of pupils' thinking at the same time as assessing the extent of their knowledge and understanding. Where teaching is less effective, pupils have to listen for too long or instruction strays away from the learning objectives and their concentration dissipates.

Pupils are mostly second generation speakers of English but a significant number have insecure skills in literacy. They respond eagerly to questions in class but often their answers tend to be short, lacking more complex explanation and vocabulary. Similarly, pupils' work often has inaccuracies in the spelling of frequently used words. Subject planning, although detailed, does not take sufficient account of these

weaknesses by including a sustained focus on the key words and strategies to support writing in the subject.

The regular process of monitoring lessons has been introduced successfully and records indicate that this is a positive initiative likely to contribute constructively to teachers' professional development and so improve teaching and learning.

Systems for assessment are satisfactory. The policy is precise and outlines clearly the procedures to be followed, but it is not implemented consistently. The school has an entry examination but has not yet established a secure baseline against which to measure pupils' subsequent progress. Marking is regular and the most effective makes plain to pupils what is good about their work and what needs to be done to improve it further. End of topic assessments are valued by pupils because these help them to see what progress they are making. They believe that the targets set encourage them to try hard at their work and the process of self-assessment helps them to reflect seriously on their work. Twice-yearly written reports and parental consultations help to ensure that parents are well informed about their children's progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and is strongly fostered through the curriculum. The distinctive and well-established ethos of the school creates a strong sense of community. Pupils have opportunities through the house system to earn merits which contribute to their own self-esteem and to the achievement of the group. Work in citizenship gives opportunities for pupils to learn about life, work and social institutions in Britain. In RE the study of other world faiths expands pupils' knowledge of religious belief, strongly supported by the school's participation in the Three Faiths Forum. Alongside this knowledge comes a growing understanding and respect for other cultures, helping them to appreciate and value diversity.

Pupils' behaviour is consistently good. Themes of tolerance and understanding lead pupils to reflect thoughtfully on their own conduct and attitudes. The curriculum in PSHE strongly contributes to pupils' self-awareness and understanding of how their conduct affects others. The classroom rules and the policies supporting good behaviour reinforce pupils' understanding of right and wrong. Pupils are well known to all staff and feel safe in their care. Discussions with younger pupils, and the questionnaire responses of older ones, confirmed overwhelmingly their enjoyment of school. In discussion with older pupils and in their questionnaires, pupils indicated that they would value having more opportunities to contribute to decision making in school. Attendance is consistently high.

Snack and lunch times are enjoyable social occasions where older and younger pupils talk animatedly of things which interest them. Younger pupils recognise the maturity

of older pupils and trust them to give advice and help them if they have any problems.

Younger pupils believe they make good progress which will help them as they grow up. Work in citizenship ensures that pupils have increasing understanding of job opportunities and the world of work and greater economic and social understanding. Pupils contribute to the life of the school through house activities and presentations and through performance at school events. Work in PSHE teaches pupils how they might meet their responsibilities towards society, for example, through recycling projects and fund-raising for charities.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The positive relationships between staff and pupils create an ethos in which pupils feel cared for and secure. The child protection policy identifies a designated person but she has not received recent training. The policy covering the health and safety of pupils on visits out of school, takes account of Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance.

Fire prevention and fire-fighting procedures are comprehensive and equipment is checked regularly by specialist providers. Fire risk assessments have been carried out on both buildings and sent to the fire officer but a response has not yet been received. Records are kept securely. First aid is supported well by a clear, detailed policy and qualified staff.

Nutrition and healthy eating are explored in curricular topics and older pupils recently organised a highly successful whole school *Healthy Eating Project* as part of their course work in citizenship. Similarly, the importance of exercise as part of healthy living, and the avoidance of potential dangers to health are understood clearly by pupils. They enjoy PE but they have insufficient opportunities because of limited curriculum time.

The school meets its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level and all other necessary checks are carried out. The register which records employment checks complies with the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is situated on two sites on opposite sides of the road. The main school premises are a Grade II listed Victorian church which has been remodelled with sensitivity and imagination to provide good quality accommodation designed well for

its purpose. Good use is made of specialist rooms including the Prayer Room, a laboratory and an information and communication technology (ICT) suite. The available space is used to maximise potential and create interesting learning environments. The building for Years 12 and 13 has been refurbished and is in the process of being fitted with specialist ICT provision.

The outside play space is limited but the school is improving it to provide a small recreational space for pupils. Local facilities are used for PE including swimming. The school has plans to improve its premises further, including its facilities for PE.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents with clear and useful information through its prospectus and parents' handbook. The prospectus gives clear details of the school's curriculum and approaches while the handbook includes a useful range of practical information about the school's organisation.

The small number of parents who responded to the questionnaire were supportive of the school but a significant number of them raised a variety of issues, chief of which was a lack of confidence in approaching the school with suggestions or problems. Although this number was small when compared with the number of parents overall, the concerns were shared with the school for their consideration.

Parents who responded to the questionnaire believe that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. The school's website contributes an additional updating dimension to its communication with parents and the wider community.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has recently reviewed its policy and procedures for handling complaints and now meets the requirements in full.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that the designated person for child protection receives training every two years in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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:

- the development of a policy for literacy across the curriculum
- the improvement of procedures for tracking pupils' progress over time
- the continuation of the development of the policy for the support and monitoring of teaching and learning.

School details

Name of school	Azhar Academy
DCSF number	316/6064
Unique reference number	134417
Type of school	Muslim
Status	Independent
Date school opened	June 2003
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Girls: 235
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,000
Address of school	235A Romford Road Forest Gate London E7 9HL
Telephone number	0208 555 5959
Fax number	0208 534 5960
Email address	girls.school@azharacademy.org
Headteacher	Mrs Rahila Rehman
Proprietor	Ismail Gangat
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew AI
Dates of inspection	15-16 November 2007