

Al-Risalah

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	212/6396
Unique Reference Number	101090
Inspection number	333810
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Young

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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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, the purpose of which is 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

Al-Risalah 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 three to 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 currently caters for 80 children aged three to four years of age and 218 aged 11 to 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. The school was last inspected in June 2006.

The school states that all students are Muslim and are selected for entry on the basis of an entry examination and interview. In its prospectus the school asserts that its fundamental aim is to provide for its students '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.'

Evaluation of the school

Al-Risalah secondary school and nursery provide a good quality of education. The Islamic ethos of the school makes a considerable and positive contribution to the personal development of the children and students at the school. The children in the nursery and students in the secondary school make good progress in their learning and at both stages are well prepared for future studies.

The school has improved since the last inspection and now meets the majority of regulations although there remain inadequacies in the procedures used to check the suitability of staff and proprietors. The school has taken urgent action to improve these arrangements.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum which is appropriately designed to combine the subjects of the National Curriculum, with the exception of music, and Islamic studies. Islamic studies occupy 20% of the curriculum in Key Stage 3 and 15% in Key Stage 4. This enables students to enjoy a balanced curriculum with appropriate time to study a range of subjects to GCSE level, while also developing their awareness and understanding of their own religion and culture. There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy, together with practical activities in science, art, information and communication technology and physical education. Opportunities to take part in a wide range of physical activities are restricted by the nature of the premises and the absence of an outdoor play area. This is compensated for, to some extent, by the provision of swimming for students in Key Stage 3. Physical education is temporarily not provided for girls in Key Stage 4; they and many of their parents expressed a desire for an increase in physical activity. Humanities subjects, religious education and personal and social education enable students to consider a number of personal and social issues which broaden their cultural awareness and preparation for further education and future employment.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. In the best lessons, some of which are outstanding, teachers show a good awareness of the individual needs of students and provide tasks and activities tailored to their various levels of attainment. In these lessons, all students work confidently with a sense of success while the highest achieving students respond to high levels of challenge in their learning. Both boys and girls enjoy opportunities for oral work and when teachers' questioning encourages them to evaluate, to analyse and to justify their answers, they respond with enthusiasm. In lessons where group work, practical activities and stimulating visual resources are used students demonstrate a mature attitude to learning and accept responsibility for their own learning. In lessons where the teacher's voice dominates, students remain respectful but do not always have sufficient opportunities to contribute their ideas and clarify their understanding.

Assessment is not used consistently to enable teachers to improve their planning and provide appropriate activities for the next lesson. In the best practice, teachers communicate with students in the language of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. In these lessons students know how well they are doing and understand their targets for improvement. Students state that they value this information. Individual teachers have a good understanding of students' attainment in individual subjects. However, there is no central system to record the progress made by individuals and groups of students over a period of time. The school is actively seeking appropriate software to implement an electronic tracking system.

Students attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE is consistently well above the local and national averages. This represents good progress from their starting points on entry to the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students of all ages speak highly of their school and boys and girls of all ages have very good attitudes towards their work. Students' good enjoyment of school is reflected in their level of attendance that is well above the national average. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and boys and girls alike thrive within the calm and purposeful atmosphere. The school's Islamic ethos underpins students' spiritual development and is central to everyday school life. Whilst retaining their youthful exuberance around the school, students' behaviour is good overall and often outstanding during lessons. They are respectful towards each other and adults during the school day.

Students make a satisfactory contribution to the day-to-day life of the school and the local community. The house system injects a spirit of friendly competition and the award of house points encourages students to work hard and do their best. Fund-raising activities have been undertaken successfully for local and international causes. Students are quick to use their initiative and show a healthy spirit of enterprise. For example, prior to the annual Family Fun Day, students present their fund-raising ideas to representatives from local businesses. Groups that successfully attract initial funding, use the resultant money to develop their ideas in order to raise funds for the school. In addition, some students have introduced a fortnightly house newsletter and the boys organise a football tournament. However, girls would like more opportunities for exercise and regret that Years 10 and 11 girls do not have any physical education lessons at present. Students, through their questionnaires, also indicated that their views and opinions are not listened to adequately. The school has a school council but this does not have sufficient status or visibility in the eyes of students.

Students' understanding of right and wrong and respect for the law are supported through the personal and social education programme. The Islamic ethos of the school, through the contribution of assemblies, Islamic Studies, religious education and personal and social education, is a strong influence on the attitudes and behaviour of the students. Students visit museums within London and acquire a general knowledge and appreciation of institutions and services within the community. Students have a good knowledge of their own culture through many aspects of the curriculum. Their awareness and understanding of other cultures is enhanced, in particular, through the personal and social education curriculum. However, there are too few systematically planned opportunities for students to interact with members of other cultural and religious communities both on- and off-site.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students ensure that they are safe and appropriately cared for in the daily life of the school. However, overall procedures are inadequate because important requirements to ensure the suitability of staff and trustees are not implemented consistently. The school has prepared and updated a range of appropriate policies for the management of students' welfare and safety. All staff have been trained in child protection procedures, first aid arrangements are suitable and risk assessments are undertaken in advance for visits off the school site. A full risk assessment and fire safety procedures are implemented appropriately. Admission and attendance registers are maintained to the required standard. The school provides a safe environment, although arrangements for the supervision of students around the school do not always ensure orderly and quiet movement around the premises. The school does not comply with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act to provide a three-year plan to improve accessibility for the current premises.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school does not meet all the requirements for ensuring that staff, volunteers and proprietors are consistently checked for suitability at the time of their appointment. There are gaps in the checks on written references and the required checks on the suitability of staff from overseas. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks have not been completed for cleaners who are on the premises during school hours. The required checks on the members of the proprietorial body are incomplete. The school has yet to complete a single, central register of all checks. Prompt action has been taken to remedy these weaknesses and the school knows that it must ensure that all regulations are complied with urgently.

School's premises and accommodation

The current school premises provide satisfactory accommodation for the school. Issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. Classrooms are adequate for the generally small class sizes and satisfactory facilities exist for the teaching of specialist subjects including science and information and communication technology. The school is maintained to an adequate standard and many areas are enhanced by well chosen displays of students' work and learning materials. Appropriate supervision by staff ensures that boys may attend Friday prayers in the mosque (also used as the school hall), together with adult worshippers. The facilities for physical education are very restricted due to the absence of an outdoor play space and there is sometimes an issue of noise intrusion from the hall into adjacent classrooms. In order to improve the accommodation and facilities, the proprietors have purchased a site for a new secondary school. Negotiations are underway to secure a start to this project.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides all the required information for parents and prospective parents through a combination of its prospectus, parents' handbook and website. Some parents expressed the view that they are not adequately informed about their children's progress. Inspectors are of the view that two parents' evenings annually for each year group, together with a revised format for progress reports, provide a suitable opportunity for parents to receive and discuss information about their children's progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a fair and comprehensive process for handling complaints. Parents have access to a formal hearing with the governors if required. No complaints have proceeded to this formal stage in the last 12 months.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children start their education in the nursery with knowledge and skills that are generally below those expected for their age. They make good progress overall including in their communication skills and personal development. The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides good learning opportunities in both the indoor and the outdoor environments. Staff undertake observations to inform future planning and assessment and this information is used well to provide first-hand experiences. However, the setting does not provide enough challenging opportunities to challenge the more able children.

Children enjoy their education and this is well reflected in their respectful relationships and positive attitudes towards learning. They are polite and get on well with each other. Staff role-model positive behaviour and this contributes significantly to children's good personal development. As a result, they behave well in the nursery and in the outside area. They are confident and able to initiate conversations with staff and visitors. The nursery provides a strongly spiritual learning environment where children learn to recite Qur'an (*Suras*) and learn Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, supporting improvements in their linguistic skills as well as their cultural development.

Staff are sensitive to the children's needs and support their emotional development effectively. Children feel safe and valued and can approach members of staff for help and support when required. While children are well cared for in the nursery, the provision for their welfare, health and safety is only satisfactory because there are omissions in the records of staff checks held in the secondary school. Risk assessments are carried out on educational visits, which are some distance away from the school, but are not completed for visits within the local area. The learning environment is hygienic and well kept. Staff work in partnership with parents and

have developed close links with other agencies and organisations, so ensuring the appropriate support for the children. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good; staff work well together, and are willing to learn.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), ensure appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references and take such information into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- in the case of any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining an enhanced criminal record certificate is not sufficient to establish his or her suitability to work in a school, ensure such further checks been made as the proprietor considers appropriate having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 4(2)(c))
- ensure the chairperson has checked the other members of the proprietorial body to confirm their identity, right to work in the UK, enhanced CRB check, or where appropriate confirmation that he/she does not contravene section 142 of the 2002 Act(a) (paragraph 4B(4 and 5))
- in relation to each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, keep a register showing checks made (and certificates obtained where relevant) of: his/her identity; qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB was obtained, or where appropriate, that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99); the right to work in the UK and, where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK, suitability to work in a school. Ensure the register includes the date on which each such check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(2 and 3))
- in relation to each member of a body of persons named as the proprietor in post on or after 1 August 2007, ensure the register shows whether a check was made of: his/her identity; right to work in the United Kingdom; and

whether an enhanced CRB check was carried out and certificate obtained, or where appropriate, confirmation that he/she is not barred from working in school under section 142 of the Education Act 2002? Ensure the register also shows the date on which any check was completed or certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(6 and 7))

- ensure the information recorded in the register, if kept in electronic form, is capable of being reproduced in legible form (paragraph 4C(9)).

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

- make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for students to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as amended (DDA) the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that physical education is consistently available for all students in Key Stage 4
- implement a centralised assessment system which will enable teachers to measure the progress of students over time, identify underachievement, and contribute to the refinement of lesson planning
- ensure risk assessments are completed consistently for all off-site activities.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		✓		
How well students make progress in their learning		✓		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of students		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students				✓
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Al-Risalah		
DCSF number	212/6396		
Unique reference number	101090		
Type of school	Muslim secondary day school and nursery		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1993		
Age range of children and students	3–4 and 11–16		
Gender of children and students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time secondary students)	Boys: 102	Girls: 116	Total: 218
Number on roll (part-time children in nursery)	Boys: 27	Girls: 42	Total: 69
Number on roll (full-time children in nursery)	Boys: 5	Girls: 6	Total: 80
Number of children with a statement of special educational need (nursery)	Boys: 3	Girls: 5	Total: 8
Annual fees (day students)	£2500		
Address of school	Tooting Islamic Centre 145 Upper Tooting Road London SW17 7TJ		
Telephone number	0208 767 6057		
Fax number	0208 675 7747		
Email address	headteacher@al-risaala.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr I Lawson		
Proprietor	Al Risaala Education Trust		
Reporting inspector	David Young		
Dates of inspection	24–25 March 2009		