

Al-Risalah

Independent school progress report

DCSF registration number	212/6396
Unique reference number	101090
Inspection dates	30 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Fatiha Maitland

Age group: 3–4 and 11–16

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Purpose and scope of the visit

This inspection visit was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

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 pupils from the ages of three to 11. The primary part of the school gained 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 78 children aged three to four and 213 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-Risalah Education Trust.

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.'

Context of the visit

The school was last inspected on 24–25 March 2009. The school produced an action plan in July 2009, which was then evaluated in August 2009. The action plan was deemed satisfactory subject to satisfactory implementation. The purpose of this visit was to check whether the school has taken appropriate steps to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection report and to assess the amount of progress made in meeting regulations.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

At its previous inspection in March 2009, the school did not meet all the requirements for ensuring that staff, volunteers and proprietors are consistently checked for suitability at the time of their appointment. The school has made satisfactory progress in remedying these weaknesses. The school now ensures that all the appropriate checks are carried out on all teaching and non-teaching members of staff, volunteers and cleaners at the time of their employment. Staff from overseas are now checked for their suitability to work in school. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for all members of staff are obtained and recorded with unique reference numbers and the dates on which checks are completed. Checks have been carried on members of the proprietorial body to confirm their identity and right to work in the United Kingdom. Their CRB checks have been applied for, but the certificates have not yet been obtained. As a result, the single central register cannot confirm that such checks are completed.

Earlier weaknesses in the staff recruitment process have been remedied so that the school now has robust staff recruitment and checking procedures. It maintains the required single central record of checks, which enables it to verify that all checks are made and to monitor this process easily.

The earlier inspection found that the school did not comply with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 to provide a three-year plan to improve accessibility for the current premises. The school feels that it is not possible to improve accessibility on the existing secondary school site. The school has proposed alternative plans to improve accessibility by relocating to purpose-built accommodation by 2012. However, the school has not produced a three-year action plan to show how to improve access to the existing premises. Therefore, the school does not meet this requirement.

The school is aware, as it was at the time of the last inspection, that the current accommodation cannot be adapted to provide outside space for students to play safely. Although the school makes good use of the existing large hall to provide physical education (PE) and play and satisfactory arrangements for PE and games to be taught on the local authority field when weather permits, students still do not have daily access to outdoor space.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school has made satisfactory progress overall in implementing its action plan. It now meets most of the regulations it did not meet at the time of the inspection in March 2009.

As a result of this inspection visit, the school must take action to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003¹ as amended ('the Regulations'), as follows:

- ensure that enhanced CRB checks are completed on the proprietorial body (paragraph 4B(4) and (5))
- ensure that the single central register of staff checks shows completed enhanced CRB checks on the proprietorial body, with unique references and the date on which each check was completed (paragraph 4C(6 and 7))
- fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) by providing a three-year plan to improve access to the premises
- provide outside space for students to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

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 pupils	3–4 and 11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time secondary students)	Boys: 98	Girls: 115	Total: 213
Number on roll (part-time children in nursery)	Boys: 41	Girls: 25	Total: 66
Number on roll (full time children in nursery)	Boys: 5	Girls: 7	Total: 12
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,600		
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-Risalah Education Trust		
Reporting inspector	Fatih Maitland		
Dates of inspection	30 September 2009		