



Leicester Islamic Academy

Inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 162 (A) of the Education Act 2002 as amended. Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake inspections in designated independent schools within membership of the Christian Schools Trust (CST) or the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK).

DfE Number:	856/6007
Association:	AMSUK
Date of inspection:	21 st - 24 th June 2010
Lead Inspector:	Mr C Schenk
Team inspectors:	Mrs F Moolla Miss J Morgan
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11 years
Number on roll:	404
Full-time:	159 boys 196 girls
Part-time:	25 boys 24 girls
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	None
Proprietor:	Board of Governors
Head teacher:	Mrs N P Shakir
Address of school:	320 London Road Leicester LE2 2PJ
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The purpose and scope of the inspection

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the DfE whether the school continues to meet the requirements for registration, and to determine whether the school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of its association. Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates, including a sample of inspections, and you can find the latest evaluation of the work of The Bridge Schools Inspectorate on the Ofsted website.

Information about the school

Leicester Islamic Academy (LIA) was opened in 1982 by the LIA Trust and grew rapidly to become a large Muslim school for boys and girls covering a wide age range, from 3 to 16. In September 2007, the secondary part of the school obtained voluntary aided status and senior pupils moved to the newly created Madani High, a purpose-built school nearby. The Trust retains overall responsibility for the two schools: it owns the LIA building and provides the Foundation Governors for Madani. There are strong links between LIA and Madani High, but recent changes in the admission arrangements for voluntary aided schools have meant that former LIA pupils can no longer be guaranteed a place at Madani, though it is still the destination of choice for most parents. The Trust has delegated the proprietorship of LIA to the school's Board of Governors, many of whom are also trustees, on the condition that the school continues to operate in accordance with the religious values and the practices as contained in its Trust Deed. There are currently 93 pupils aged between 3 and 5 in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), of whom the 49 Nursery pupils attend part-time for either morning or afternoon sessions; 106 pupils aged between 5 and 7 in Key Stage 1; and 205 pupils aged between 7 and 11 in Key Stage 2. All pupils are Muslim. They come from a wide geographical area in and around Leicester and from several different cultural heritages including Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Arab and Somali. It was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2007. Because several regulations were found not to be met at that time, a further inspection visit took place in July 2008 to monitor progress.

The school's aims are 'to provide a broadly based and balanced curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of all pupils at LIA; to promote Islamic, spiritual and moral values and preserve the ethos of the school of ensuring inclusion for all pupils. Its pupils are guided to become capable of carrying the Islamic beliefs, practices and values as enshrined in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* into their everyday lives. The school also aims to prepare pupils for their lives as responsible Muslim adults. The school is part of the Muslim community as well as the wider society from which its pupils are drawn. We see the school as an integral and formative part of the universal *Ummah* and we play a positive part in the life of its neighbourhood. We aim to educate all pupils to become: successful learners who work hard with sincerity, enjoy learning, pursue excellence and become life-long learners; individuals to achieve their full potential; confident individuals who interact with others to live safe, healthy and meaningful lives; and responsible citizens who see it as their religious duty to make positive contributions to society.'

Evaluation of the school

'It's a really fun school and you learn a lot.' This comment from a Year 6 pupil encapsulates what it is that makes the school very successful in meeting its aims. Because the pupils enjoy learning, they work hard and are well on the way to becoming life-long learners. Their teachers are good role models: they are also learners who enjoy their learning and have fun. The teaching is consistently good. The stable, creative and lively staff work together effectively to develop common approaches to teaching and learning under the skilful leadership of their respected head teacher. The strong Islamic ethos runs through everything that the school does, contributing to the pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development. Their cultural development is outstanding. They have a strong sense of their own identity and cultures, together with an understanding of and respect for cultures other than their own that fosters tolerance and community cohesion. They are growing into responsible citizens who see it as their religious duty to make positive contributions to their own community and to the wider society. Pupils are given a very good start in the well-resourced EYFS setting. Throughout the school, careful attention is paid to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils with policies that are well thought through and procedures that are consistently implemented. There have been considerable improvements since the last inspection and all the regulations are now met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is broad and balanced and carefully planned so that all pupils can make progress in an interesting and enjoyable way. The curriculum in the EYFS covers all six areas of learning and is implemented with a healthy balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Planned, purposeful play is carefully structured to promote learning and to harness and extend the pupils' natural interests and enthusiasms.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, there is a strong and appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy that is well planned, using national guidance. The school has successfully implemented the Renewed Frameworks now generally followed in state schools. The pupils are benefiting from the greater attention that is now being given to speaking and listening. Parent volunteers give valuable support, particularly with the teaching of reading. The broad programme of work is taught in a lively manner that engages the pupils' interests and enables them to make good progress in their key skills.

The curriculum also includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, except for music. Strong links are made between subjects so that, for example, work in science can be used as a starting point for developing literacy skills. These links between subjects enable well-planned topics to be followed that give increased coherence and interest to the work that the pupils do. Classes have a weekly lesson in information and communication technology (ICT) in the adequately resourced ICT room and they make steady progress in their ICT skills, which they are able to use to enhance their work in other subjects. Some elements of design and technology are taught as part of historical, geographical and scientific topics. Although music is not taught as a separate subject, the pupils do have frequent opportunities to listen to

and to sing *nasheed* (Islamic songs); indeed, some of the older girls have recently won a competition in this field.

Pupils throughout the age range have a one hour lesson every week in Islamic studies. Although the time allocation is relatively small, the pupils benefit considerably because of the outstanding teaching that they receive. There is a specialist room that is beautifully set up to create a reverential atmosphere. Pupils make good progress in their knowledge about Islam, but also more deeply in their understanding and spiritual development. The well-planned programme of work in Islamic studies makes an important contribution to the pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE), which is also promoted in classes through the good use that is made of daily registration times and through weekly lessons that follow the national guidance on the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL).

Arabic is also introduced in Key Stage 1 and taught throughout Key Stage 2 as a modern foreign language. It has only been part of the curriculum for two years and has suffered in that time from unexpected staff changes. The school is about to appoint a substantive Arabic teacher and is aware that resources and long-term planning need to be improved.

Every afternoon, after school has finished, there is a *madrassah* run by the school that gives two hours of additional Islamic instruction. Around ten per cent of the pupils attend; the others go to similar establishments nearer their homes. The school does not currently offer any other after-schools clubs or activities but in response to parental requests, it is reconsidering the situation and exploring possibilities.

From time to time the normal timetable is adapted for a few days or a week to enable pupils to focus on a particular aspect of the curriculum. For example, during the inspection there were two 'culture days'. The pupils in Year 1 came to school dressed in their best clothes to celebrate and share their different cultural heritages. In each other year group, capitalising on the pupils' natural interest in the World Cup, pupils found out about the language and culture of one of the participating nations including Mexico, France, Italy, South Africa and Spain. At other times of the year, special weeks have included 'fun maths', 'fun science' and 'fun creative writing'.

Because the Islamic ethos is strong, teachers often add an Islamic perspective to their lessons. For example, a mathematics lesson on tessellation in Year 6 made good use of Islamic art and in Year 3 pupils finding out about the French language and culture were reminded that Islam treats all cultures with respect. Some teachers explicitly identify Islamic perspectives in their planning, but this is not widespread and the formats for lesson plans do not include a section in which to do so.

Since the last inspection, the school has made considerable improvements in its provision for pupils with special educational needs. There are now good systems for the identification and support of these pupils, and for obtaining advice from outside agencies such as the local authority or the health service when necessary. The co-ordinator and the teaching assistant keep careful track of the pupils' progress through individual education plans that are regularly reviewed. The spacious, light and attractive special needs room provides a very good environment for withdrawing

small groups of pupils. The skilled teaching that they receive, building their confidence and independence as learners, helps them to make good progress. They are also given support within their own class.

The teaching is consistently good, with common approaches evident in all lessons. The management of behaviour in lessons is good and is largely achieved through praise and encouragement. Lessons are thoughtfully planned and carefully prepared with clear learning objectives that are shared with the pupils. Teachers know their pupils well and give them tasks that are at the right level of difficulty, providing extra support for some and extra challenge for others. Lessons proceed at a good pace and there is sufficient variety of activities to sustain the pupils' interests. Above all, the lively teaching encourages the pupils to enjoy their learning.

There is a strong culture of continued professional development. Many teachers have acquired qualified teacher status (QTS) or gone through their newly qualified teacher (NQT) year while they have been at the school. The assessment frameworks that are required to be used for QTS and NQT have sharpened senior managers' awareness of the components of good teaching and enabled them to observe lessons perceptively, so that all the teachers' skills can be developed.

All the teachers are female and the school is rightly concerned to ensure that the older boys have male, Muslim, role models to guide them as they grow in maturity and faith. There is a male learning mentor who comes in regularly to work with small groups of boys in Year 5 and Year 6 and there are also plans to involve the members of the all-male governing body more fully in the teaching and learning and in the spiritual life of the school.

Teachers make frequent informal assessments of their pupils' learning and encourage their pupils to assess their own progress. There are also regular, half-termly, formal assessments of pupils' attainments in literacy, numeracy and science that are used to track progress. Recently, the school has made contact with several local state primary schools as part of its review of assessment procedures. Acting on their advice, the school is sensibly looking for ways to give more emphasis to teacher assessments and less to testing, building on the good assessment practice which already exists in the EYFS.

Because pupils enjoy their learning, they respond well to the good teaching that they receive and make good progress from their different starting points. By the time that they leave the school, around 90% of the pupils reach at least the level expected of the average 11 year old (Level 4) in English and mathematics and around a third reach the higher level (Level 5).

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' good spiritual development is nurtured through the school's Islamic ethos. In keeping with its mission statement and aims, the school gives prominence to developing pupils' *taqwa* (God consciousness) ensuring that they understand the meaning of Islamic beliefs and values. Pupils are taught how to pray, learn the attributes of Allah and are given the opportunity to reflect on

His qualities. They learn to appreciate the beauty of the Qur'an and *sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet) through recitation and *nasheeds*. Pupils spontaneously use Islamic terminology in their daily routines, for example when beginning tasks, when praising, thanking, and showing respect, and pupils invoke Allah's blessings before eating. The school's bold displays make a significant contribution in supporting pupils' understanding of their faith and the Islamic Studies room provides a haven for worship. The school's practice of focusing on a particular *hadith* (saying of the Prophet) each week highlights developing piety and good character. Currently, during the summer months, *zuhr salah* (early afternoon prayer) is not offered at school but there are plans to reintroduce it in the future, recognising that it gives opportunities for older boys to lead and be responsible for prayer.

Pupils' moral development is good. There is a strong emphasis on character development. A much valued feature of classroom displays are the many 'Goodness Trees' which pupils are eager to adorn with leaves that carry praise for their good conduct. Pupils are responsive and value the praise they are given for their *akhlaq* (good morals and manners). From the outset, pupils are taught how to respect the sacred nature of the Qur'an and its moral teachings. They have a growing understanding of the consequences of their own actions and those of others. Pupils are aware that they are personally responsible for the moral choices that they make.

Pupils' social development is good. They appreciate the benefits of friendship. They work well together in groups, play cooperatively and are considerate to each other. There is an active school council and its members contribute to the school community through a range of duties which include playground supervision and recycling of paper. Through the pupils' fundraising for charities both far afield and close to home, they demonstrate concern and compassion for neighbours and others around the globe. Pupils have opportunities to learn about various public services such as the police and the health service.

The pupils' cultural awareness, their tolerance and their community spirit are outstanding. Staff work hard to inculcate positive attitudes towards cultural diversity within the UK and globally. A Mini World Cup, organised in the school at the time of the inspection, resulted not only in a series of football matches that were much enjoyed but also gave an added motivation for pupils to learn about the languages and cultures of participating countries. LIA pupils are from a variety of cultural heritages and all work together harmoniously as Muslims. There is cohesion, respect and tolerance within the school community. A range of visitors including people of other faiths, have come to the school and contributed to pupils' learning, helping them to understand different cultures. A long-standing Christian class teacher plays a full part in the life of the school. The Islamic ethos of respect for all permeates everything. Pupils grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. They are able to articulate their own faith and to listen with respect to the views of others.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils and all of the regulations are met. Significant improvements have been made since the last inspection. The school has a wide range of effective policies and procedures. Some of them, for example the behaviour policy, have been set in an Islamic context

whilst others do not yet have explicit written references to the Islamic values upon which they are based. Nevertheless, in practice all policies are implemented in an Islamic spirit.

There are designated members of staff to take responsibility for child protection, fire precautions, first aid, and health and safety. All of these people are appropriately trained and diligent in fulfilling their responsibilities. The caretaker is a valued member of the school community and acts as an especially vigilant health and safety officer. In particular, he has been instrumental in ensuring the safety of pupils at the beginning and end of the school day when many are being transported in mini-buses. The arrangements which have been put in place recently are very effective in bringing peace and order to these potentially challenging times of the school day.

The strong Islamic influence promotes respect, care and consideration so pupils are usually well behaved and they are adequately supervised at all times. New pupils are helped to settle in quickly and EYFS pupils are encouraged to use a 'friendship bench'. There are effective ways of promoting and affirming good behaviour such as the use of 'Golden Rules' and 'Goodness Trees'. Pupils on the school council are trained to deal with playground incidents, though serious ones are few in number.

Regular risk assessments are carried out on the school building as well as on equipment within the classrooms by commercial companies or by the caretaker. School trips are also risk assessed including recent ones to Thomas Land Theme Park and Drayton Manor.

The school encourages pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle. Boys and girls in the EYFS are given fruit, vegetables and milk for snacks and all parents are encouraged to supply healthy lunch boxes. Pupils learn to cook using healthy ingredients and at the time of inspection the pupils were learning about foods from other countries as a part of the 'culture days'. Pupils understand the benefits of physical exercise. Emotional well being is actively promoted through the SEAL programme and through the Islamic ethos.

The admission register and attendance registers are meticulously maintained and the school fulfils its responsibilities in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act by planning for ongoing improvements to the school buildings and site.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are very careful procedures for recruiting staff and ensuring that all adults who come into contact with pupils have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. A single central record of staff checks is kept and is now fully up to date. All the regulations are met.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is accommodated in a former mainstream independent school, converted from two houses to which a sports hall, offices and three classrooms have been added. Recent improvements have included an air-conditioned ICT suite and, for the EYFS pupils, a partially covered outdoor play area and a practical room. There

is a good-sized library, a particularly spacious and attractive special needs room and an Islamic studies room that fits its purpose very well. Despite the age of the building, most rooms and corridors are in reasonable repair and decorative order. Throughout the school there are informative and colourful displays many of which reflect the Islamic ethos.

Ongoing maintenance and decorating programmes are in place to ensure standards are maintained. Most of the classrooms are of a good size and all are at least adequate for the numbers of pupils that use them. The caretaker regularly checks to ensure that heating, lighting and ventilation are satisfactory. Staggered break times prevent overcrowding on the playground so that all age groups are able to play games and enjoy physical exercise safely.

Since the last inspection, new washrooms have been fitted so that the regulations are now met. The first aid room is well positioned with appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school communicates with parents in a variety of ways and meets all the regulations. The prospectus has recently been revised and a new website has come on line that is attractive and user friendly and easy to keep up to date. Full and detailed written reports are sent to parents twice a year. Parents whose children are in the EYFS are given a particularly helpful weekly newsletter that outlines the teaching proposed for the week ahead so that follow-up work can be done at home. In other year groups, parents are informed at the beginning of the year about the curriculum topics to be covered, but the school is now considering following the good practice in the EYFS by providing this information at more frequent intervals, and including details about the current Islamic focus.

The responses of parents to a questionnaire that was sent out at the time of the inspection were generally positive, but the return rate was relatively low, at just over a third. Only 18 parents came to a meeting held at the start of the inspection. They spoke highly of the caring ethos of the school, but some felt that there are not enough opportunities for parents to be involved and to work together with the school in partnership.

The governors hold an annual meeting for parents and produce a report that gives detailed information about what has been happening in school. Last year's report contained a section on working with parents that encouraged them to be actively involved. Nevertheless, relations between parents and governors have sometimes been strained over the last few years, particularly with regard to the issue of whether children can gain admission to the voluntary aided secondary school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints procedure meets all requirements, though it makes no explicit mention of the Islamic context in which complaints should be received and considered. Careful records are kept of serious concerns that are brought to the head teacher's attention by parents. In the three very different cases recorded over

the last year, the school took appropriate action, though in one case the governors were slow to respond. None of these concerns became formal complaints that required a panel to be set up to consider them.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The EYFS unit consists of the Nursery and two Reception classes. The provision is good and some of the teaching is outstanding. The head teacher leads the EYFS well: she retains overall responsibility though she has recently begun to hand over more of the leadership and management to the well-qualified, experienced and committed staff working in the unit. With support from the local authority, the implementation of the Statutory Framework introduced in September 2008 has been successful and all the requirements are met.

The staff work very effectively together to produce detailed long, medium and short term plans to ensure a healthy balance of child-initiated and teacher-led sessions covering the six areas of learning. Members of staff are keen to bring about further improvements: last year, they identified some weaknesses in the creative area of learning and have made effective changes that include a stronger emphasis on singing. Activities and questions are frequently differentiated to cater for the wide range of attainments within the setting. Pupils are taught the basic values of Islam and from Nursery upwards have a weekly Islamic studies lesson. One parent commented, 'I am amazed at some of the things my daughter has learnt. I am very impressed with the nursery staff and the job they are doing.'

The well-organised and carefully structured environment, together with the good behaviour of the pupils, creates an atmosphere of calm and purposeful learning. Staff make regular assessments of pupils' progress, using photographic and anecdotal evidence to support their judgments. These assessments enable the EYFS Profile to be completed by the end of the year, and the completed profiles show that by the time they leave the EYFS most pupils are reaching the early learning goals in all areas of their learning. Parents are well informed about their children's progress through informal conversations, reports and parents' meetings.

The unit is well resourced with accessible, clearly-labelled, indoor equipment, including computers with carefully chosen software, and a wide range of outdoor toys and apparatus. Role play areas are used imaginatively to develop and extend the pupils' learning: for example, in one of the Reception classes a travel agent's corner is promoting the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world. Pupils are also able to enjoy outdoor learning throughout the year as money has been donated to create a spacious, covered, outside play area.

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils have been carefully considered; detailed policies and procedures together with regular checks on outdoor apparatus and equipment minimise the hazards to the pupils. Healthy eating is promoted through teaching, displays and a healthy eating policy.

Overall, the EYFS is very effective in providing a welcoming and stimulating environment in which young children learn well and with enjoyment. Members of

staff show considerable commitment to their work and have made many improvements in recent years.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all of the regulations for registration and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Meeting the expectations of AMSUK

The school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of AMSUK.

What the school could do to improve further

As part of future development the school might wish to consider:

- being more explicit about the Islamic ethos in written policies and plans
- finding ways of working more closely with parents and governors.