

# Al-Hijrah School

## Inspection Report

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**Local authority** Birmingham Council  
**Inspected under the auspices of:** AMS UK  
**Inspection dates:** 21 May 2015  
**Lead inspector:** Mrs Hasina Varachia

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school:</b>	All-through school
<b>School category:</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils:</b>	4 -16
<b>Gender of pupils:</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll:</b>	774
<b>Appropriate authority:</b>	Interim Executive Board
<b>Chair:</b>	Mr David Willey
<b>Headteacher:</b>	Mr David Brown
<b>Date of previous school inspection:</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2009
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# Introduction

## Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Mrs Hasina Varachia  
Team Inspectors: Mr. Yusuf Seedat  
Mr. Abdul Hameed  
Mr. Mohammad Asad

This inspection was carried out by four inspectors. The inspection was observed by two officers from the Department for Education (DfE). Inspectors visited five lessons or parts of lessons including observing registration. They observed lunchtimes and collective prayers sessions. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, governors, staff, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including pupils' written work, planning, the religious education (RE) curriculum which includes Islamic Studies, the school's self-evaluation documents and the school's RE development plan. In accordance with the protocol that exists between DfE and AMS UK (Section 48), the Lead inspector had a look at the school's recent Ofsted inspection report, which took place in February 2014.

The inspection team looked in detail at the following:

- The RE curriculum
- The progress pupils make in RE
- The quality of teaching in RE
- Leadership and management for RE
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including collective worship.

## Information about the school

Al-Hijrah School is an Islamic faith school that serves the city of Birmingham. The school is situated in the Nechells ward and admits pupils from all across Birmingham. The school is in great demand. All 774 pupils are from the Muslim (Islamic) faith. Although the majority of pupils are of South Asian origin, the school aims to celebrate cultural diversity and become an excellent example of community cohesion. The school's secondary section became voluntary aided (VA) in 2002. The school expanded its age range in January 2012 and is now a through school with pupils joining in the Reception class.

## Inspection judgments

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	2
<b>The achievement of pupils in their religious education.</b>	2
<b>The quality of teaching and learning.</b>	2
<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of religious education, including the role of the school's governing body in RE.</b>	2
<b>The extent to which the religious education curriculum meets pupils' needs.</b>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development including the daily act of collective worship.</b>	2

### **Overall effectiveness: the quality of religious education provided at Al-Hijrah School is good because:**

The school aims to ensure that all pupils have access to an outstanding RE curriculum, achieve their full potential and develop as excellent role models who are confident, ambitious and successful in their present and future lives.

The headteacher, other leaders and governors communicate high expectations and ambition. They have a clear vision of how good they want the school to be and the steps that the school should take in order to improve.

The school has received a number of monitoring visits since it went into special measures and these visits show that it is making positive progress towards removal of that category.

Pupils achieve very well in GCSE examinations with over 96% achieving A\*- C and of these an impressive 57% achieving A & A\* grades. However, inspection evidence indicates that in some lessons, teaching does not take into account pupils' needs sufficiently for them to progress as well as they can. Work is not always pitched correctly so pupils are overstretched, whilst in other lessons pupils occasionally lose focus because they are not sufficiently engaged, leading to a little disruptive behaviour at times that is well controlled by the teachers.

Pupils' behaviour is good overall. They show good attitudes to learning, particularly primary pupils who are ambitious and have high expectations of themselves. There have been a small number of exclusions in recent times. However, the school is working hard to promote the highest standards of behaviour in and around school. For example, pupils are well motivated when they receive praise, encouragement or reward for good work or conduct.

Pupils feel safe in school and say that there is virtually no bullying in school.

Daily activities and the 'Theme of the Week' contribute strongly to pupils' spiritual development. So too does *Salah* (collective worship), recitation of the Qur'an and *duas*

(supplications) during registration time. Discussions with pupils indicate that there are good links between Islamic Studies and other subjects. For example, pupils say that Islamic Studies topics are referred to in different subjects regularly and this makes learning more stimulating.

Attendance is 95.3% having seen a recent increase. Punctuality is less good. The school encourages all pupils to attend regularly and punctually so that they can take full advantage of all that the school has to offer. The school serves the whole of Birmingham, meaning many pupils travel a considerable distance to attend.

The school's whole curriculum is linked to spiritual values and Islamic beliefs. The curriculum for Islamic studies and religious studies generally, fosters good moral development and a sense of identity. It benefits from specialist teaching and the subject expertise that this brings.

Pupils are given opportunities to develop as British citizens and demonstrate their respect for others and learning of Islam through their contribution to the wider community. This includes charity work. During the inspection week, pupils organised fundraising activities for the people of Nepal. Such experiences enable them to show initiative and develop their understanding of how they can contribute positively to other people's lives.

British values are promoted well throughout the curriculum including at assemblies and through displays around school. However, a more systematic approach is required before it can be said that the school's work is better than good in this regard. For example, the school's actions are not always clearly documented.

All pupils in the secondary school visit various places of worship. Pupils are given the opportunity to exercise democracy by taking part in school council elections and the election of the head boy and head girl.

Relationships with parents are generally satisfactory. Parents say they would like to play a more active part in the school. The end of the school day is not always monitored. Parents report concerns about safety outside school when they collect their children, due to what they feel is a lack of organisation on the school's part.

Parents also feel that their views are not always listened to carefully enough and a small number of parents who wrote to the AMS after the inspection felt that sufficient time had not been given to parents by the school to write their views and on completion, the questionnaires had not been collected. The small number of questionnaires concerned was sent to the AMS separately. On the day of the inspection, very few questionnaires were received by inspectors. No secondary school parents attended the parents meeting held with inspectors.

The quality of collective worship is outstanding; pupils participate with confidence, respect and sincerity.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that all pupils make outstanding progress through pitching work at the right level and ensuring that all activities sufficiently motivate and engage pupils in their learning.
- Develop more positive relationships with parents.
- Ensure the safety of pupils and parents is given due regard at the end of the school day.
- Ensure that British values are more effectively promoted throughout the curriculum so pupils are even better prepared for life in British society.

## **Achievement of pupils at the school in their religious education is good because:**

Secondary pupils make very good progress in GCSE, with an impressive 96% achieving A\*- C and a significant number of pupils achieving A/A\* grades. Teachers moderate pupils' work effectively at Key Stage 4 which ensures that pupils are well prepared for GCSE examinations.

All of the evidence indicates that pupils of all abilities achieve well overall. This includes the most able, boys and girls. The good quality of teaching, care guidance and support and attractive learning activities ensure that pupils have a positive learning experience. Furthermore, they are happy in school.

Although there are tracking systems in place for primary pupils, they are not yet fully developed to provide a clear picture of progress. The school's records regarding starting points are not always clear. Pupils demonstrate generally good subject knowledge of *surahs* (chapters of the Qur'an) and are able to read *duas* in context, but time is needed to ensure that pupils have an understanding of what they are reading so that it becomes more meaningful to them. For example, during registration, it is the practice for older pupils to read the translation of the Qur'an but they do so without teacher direction, whilst younger pupils occasionally recite without understanding. As a result of these factors the school could not fully demonstrate pupils' achievement over time.

Pupils' understanding is not always checked thoroughly enough in lessons to make sure they understand all their work. In books, pupils do not always receive detailed feedback so they do not always know what they have done well and what they need to do next to improve.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Further develop the tracking of pupils' progress to provide a clear picture of their progress based on recorded starting points.
- Increase opportunities in lessons for pupils to demonstrate their understanding of the work they do.
- Always provide detailed feedback to pupils so they know what they have done well and what they need to do next to improve.

## **The quality of teaching and assessment in the school are good because:**

Teaching is good overall and this ensures that pupils achieve well over time. In the best lessons seen the planning is very effective. The learning process is sequenced well to ensure a secure understanding of concepts and development of new skills. Teachers' questioning is good. For example, teachers often ask probing questions which make pupils apply effort and think through their answers. Resources are used effectively to support learning and classroom assistants are generally deployed well to support pupils' learning. The teaching promotes positive attitudes to learning and good standards of behaviour.

The work in lessons is not always pitched at a level that is appropriate for some groups of pupils including those of different capability. As a result, pupils' progress is not outstanding.

Planning for different ability groups to achieve as well as they can is underdeveloped. For example, opportunities and learning targets for pupils' of different abilities are not always specified. As a result, an opportunity to ensure that all groups of pupils make outstanding progress is lost. At times, didactic teaching means that not all pupils have an opportunity to contribute to lessons and they are not always told how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils say that they would like a greater variety of teaching activities which they feel would engage and excite them much more.

The RE curriculum complements the rest of the curriculum well with teachers supporting class teachers with Qur'anic *ayahs* (verses) and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet). Teachers praise using Islamic terms. Pupils learn well about aspects of other religions including different forms of worship and places of worship. A variety of planned experiences outside the classroom enriches provision such as the Ramadan programme and *Qiyam ul Layl* (Night Worship). Teachers demonstrate strong specialist knowledge, particularly in the secondary phase.

Although curriculum content coverage is detailed and pupils' presentation skills are good, pupils do not always receive focused feedback, so do not always know why they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work to outstanding levels.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that teaching involves even more effective teaching methods and results in outstanding progress.
- Ensure that teaching and planning always take into account pupils' needs and capabilities so that they can achieve as well as possible.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of religious education is good because:**

Senior leaders are ambitious individuals who are supported by the Interim Executive Board (IEB). They have a clear vision based on ensuring the best possible academic and personal experiences and outcomes for all pupils. The focus is on developing the skills of teachers,

although in lessons seen, progress was variable as a result of a little inconsistency in the quality of teaching. The school is now actively working towards ensuring that teaching caters for the needs of pupils in all phases so that they make even better progress, whatever level they are working at.

The IEB is committed to maintaining the school's Islamic ethos by regular reviews and evaluation. Governors share the same aims and ambition as other leaders, and work in full partnership with them. An example of improvement through this partnership has been the increase of resources for the departments which enrich learning the most for pupils.

The Ethos Committee is keen to strengthen the Islamic ethos of the school. Leaders feel that the impact of the committee has resulted in improved behaviour across the school. There are fewer reported incidences of poor behaviour and inspectors observe that pupils work well together. The school has clear plans in place for very good moral development. However, occasionally, behaviour does not reflect this aim and more rigorous and effective monitoring of behaviour is required to ensure that the aims of the Ethos Committee are fully achieved.

The senior leaders have correctly identified the main priorities for improvement. However, a more detailed development plan is needed with a sharper focus on pupils' progress across all year groups, pupils' further development as British citizens and how the safety of pupils, parents and staff can be improved.

The curriculum is planned well and is regularly reviewed. A number of varied and interesting activities are provided for pupils which extend and enrich their experiences. Parents and pupils however, would welcome a wider range of extra-curricular activities to enhance pupils' spiritual development to the highest levels as well as the links pupils have with the wider Muslim and non-Muslim community.

The school has in place monitoring systems which include book monitoring, learning walks and observations. These procedures are effective and result in a strong ethos where good behaviour is the norm and pupils achieve well.

The school's self-evaluation is effective but not developed to a point that it is penetrating and incisive enough to be used as a tool for further improvement. For example, it is not robust enough in identifying precisely all the actions necessary to make the school outstanding.

Regular continuous professional development (CPD) is provided to support staff in developing spirituality and contributing to shaping the Islamic ethos of the school. New staff are well supported through a thorough induction programme. CPD days have included 'developing outstanding learners', the Prevent Strategy and safeguarding. However, the school's arrangements for performance management and professional development have not had enough impact on raising the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes to outstanding.

The senior management team is of the opinion that it has strong relationships with parents, although some parents do not agree with this view. Their views were reflected in both parental discussion and in questionnaires inspectors received. Parents report concerns about

safety outside school when they collect their children and also that the school could do more to improve parent/school relations.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that performance management and professional development are closely matched to the needs of staff and effective in improving outcomes for pupils.
- Ensure that self-evaluation more precisely identifies the actions which must be taken to make the school outstanding in all respects.
- Develop more positive relationships with parents.
- Improve safety in the area immediately outside the school premises so far as this is reasonably possible.

**The extent to which the religious education curriculum meets pupils' needs is good because:**

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum for its RE provision in both the primary and secondary phases. At Key Stage 1 and 2, pupils have recently started to follow the agreed syllabus for Birmingham. In Islamic studies, the curriculum provides pupils with knowledge and understanding of *aqaid* (Creed), *aklaaq* (morals and manners) *Seerah* (the life of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh) and history as well as learning opportunities about other religions. Visits to different places of worship enrich opportunities for pupils to develop tolerance of and respect for others. Pupils say however, they would welcome further opportunities to receive visitors of different faiths into school.

The school has a strategic approach to the development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are a good range of themed days which encourage spiritual development including *Seerah* Days and school performances such as '*The Light Within*', a recent adaptation of Scrooge.

The school conducts *Zuhr* prayer (midday prayers) in congregation for boys and girls, and primary pupils from Key Stage 2 upwards. All these pupils partake in *Jummah* (Friday prayers) and the school offers pupils suitable facilities. During prayer times, pupils partake respectively in *dua*, offering supplication to Allah.

Assemblies are led by pupils and this demonstrates their growing leadership skills. They have the opportunity to recite *Surahs* for spiritual reflection and fulfillment. Pupils also partake in performing *nasheeds* (Islamic songs).

The school day begins respectfully with *Surahs* from the Qur'an. Each week, pupils and staff are presented with a Theme of the Week. Examples include: respecting others, good manners and *haji* (pilgrimage). This provides an excellent opportunity to foster a sense of Islamic identity.

The school has, within its team, a number of theologians who are well informed on Islamic teachings and actively contribute to shaping the spiritual life of the school.

Pupils learn about the British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and cultures. Pupils say they are regularly reminded that extremism is not allowed in Islam.

## **The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good**

The spiritual development of pupils is the strength of the school. It is implemented by daily *Zuhr* prayers, recitation of the Qur'an and reading of daily *duas*. Some of these activities are led by pupils and this helps to develop their leadership skills, self-esteem and self-worth. The Theme of the Week with topics like tolerance and respect, encourage spiritual development and are reflected in the weekly assembly held on Fridays. The excellent learning and memorisation of the Qur'an also develops pupils' spirituality very effectively.

During observations, especially in the secondary school, reading of daily *duas* or showing due reverence to the recitation of the Quran is not consistently practiced by all pupils, nor is behaviour promoted consistently well. However, the Ethos Committee set up in January is in its infancy and strategies it has recently put in place show promising signs that it will eventually have an impact in developing pupils' spiritual, moral and social development further.

Senior leaders promote fundamental British values giving pupils opportunities to explore and develop moral concepts and values, such as right and wrong, justice, personal rights and responsibilities. For example, the school council, head girl and boy are democratically elected. However, the school needs to audit the spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision thoroughly so as not to miss out any aspect contrary to promoting fundamental British values or personal development, such as gender stereotyping.

The pupils come from diverse Muslim cultural backgrounds and show an appreciation of this diversity and interdependence of cultures. This is evidenced by their harmonious interaction with each other.

However, the school needs to provide a clear moral code as a basis for pupils' behaviour. Other than that, the school usually promotes good behaviour effectively. Behaviour is monitored in many different ways and the school provides pupils with opportunities to contribute positively to the lives of those living in the locality.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that pupils' behaviour is consistently good or better.
- Ensure that British values are promoted effectively across the school.

## **Views of parents and carers**

- Parents are generally supportive of the school.
- Some parents feel that safety outside the school is a concern.
- Some parents would like a greater range of extra -curricular activities and would like to be more involved in the life of the school.

## Glossary

What inspection judgments mean

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Requires Improvement	A school requiring improvement is not providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. AMS UK inspectors will make further visits until it improves.