

Olive Tree Primary School

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 Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to undertake inspections in designated independent schools within membership of the Christian Schools Trust (CST) or the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK).

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| DCSF number: | 821/6004 |
| Association: | AMSUK |
| Date of inspection: | 8 th -11 th June 2009 |
| Lead Inspector: | Christopher Schenk |
| Team inspectors: | Fatima Moolla Mary Mitchell |
| Age range of pupils: | 4-11 years |
| Number on roll: | 87 |
| Full-time: | 43 boys 44 girls |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | None |
| Proprietor: | Trustees of Olive Tree Primary School |
| Head teacher: | Jalil Ahmed Shaikh |
| Address of school: | 116 Bury Park Road Luton Bedfordshire LU1 1HE |
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The purpose and scope of the inspection

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the DCSF 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.

Information about the school

The school opened in 1998 as Madrassa Islamia. It was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2005. Since that inspection, the school has changed its name and has a new head teacher and new staff. It has also nearly doubled in size and has increased its age range to include the Reception year. It remains in the same premises, above an Islamic Centre, on a busy road in the heart of Luton. Pupils come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.

The present inspection took place at a difficult time for the school. Just over a month before, the school and the Islamic Centre had been the victim of a fire bomb attack, causing the school to close for two weeks. By the time of the inspection, the building had been made safe but further repairs were still pending and the school could not make full use of the facilities it shares with the Islamic Centre. In addition, all four of the class teachers were new to their role within the previous two months and two of them had only been in post for a matter of weeks.

The school's aim is 'to provide an education that stresses virtues such as discipline, dedication, family values, community spirit, respect and tolerance towards others.' The school endeavours 'to achieve this goal in accordance with the Islamic faith and prepare pupils towards entry into secondary school education.'

Evaluation of the school

The school meets its aim successfully. The energetic and enthusiastic head teacher sets the tone and imparts to pupils the importance of good manners, morals and respect within a strong Islamic ethos. Because clear structures are in place for the curriculum and for assessment, pupils are receiving a sound education despite the high turnover of staff. They make steady progress and by the time they leave they are prepared for secondary education and have a good understanding of their own faith and a respect for other faiths and cultures. Their spiritual and moral development is particularly well fostered by the school.

Most of the regulations are met, but the school has outgrown its premises and there is not enough space.

Quality of education

The curriculum is sufficiently broad. In the Reception class for four and five year olds, the pupils' activities cover all the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In addition they have a daily lesson in Arabic and the last half hour of each day is devoted to *Hifz* (memorisation of the Qur'an). In the Key

Stage 1 class for five to seven year olds, the pupils study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, except for music. In addition, they continue with the same pattern of Arabic lessons and *Hifz* as in the Reception and also have lessons in Islamic studies. The curriculum for the two classes in Key Stage 2 (7 – 11 year olds) is similar, although pupils no longer study history and geography. While the programme of work in Islamic studies includes some Islamic history and geography, and ensures that pupils experience the human and social area of learning, the lack of National Curriculum history and geography in this key stage limits the pupils' understanding of the wider world.

The curriculum is well planned. In all of the subjects taught, there are long, medium and short term plans that are set out to common formats. As a result, when new teachers take over classes they have a clear understanding of the subject matter that has already been covered and this helps them to plan future work that builds on the pupils' previous knowledge and skills.

The school gives appropriate emphasis to literacy and numeracy and uses national guidelines to ensure that pupils are given work at the right levels to bring them to the nationally expected standards. When pupils are not making sufficient progress in their skills, they are quickly identified and given extra support. These pupils have individual education plans with specific targets that are shared with their parents. The lead support teacher keeps efficient records of their progress and works with pupils across the age range. In addition, she gives advice and help to teaching assistants so that they can give support within their class. The school intends to arrange for the lead support teacher to have further training and this will be particularly helpful in increasing her understanding of specific learning difficulties and helping her to formulate even more precise targets.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught in accordance with the school's aims and ethos through Islamic studies and through science. While it is evident that the curriculum helps to develop the pupils' personal and social skills and their knowledge of how to stay healthy, the school has not yet written down the topics intended to be covered in PSHE and has not explicitly identified how they will be divided between the different subjects.

The teaching is always sound and sometimes good. Lessons are suitably planned and have clear objectives and pupils are required to listen to their teacher and to each other. In the best lessons, there is a brisk pace and a good range of methods of presentation; the varied activities engage and sustain the pupils' interest and enjoyment. In one class, the work is marked well, giving encouragement and clear pointers for further improvement; this approach to marking is not yet sufficiently widespread.

The pupils generally respond well to the teaching that they receive and show positive attitudes to learning. Teachers give praise and encouragement and for the most part these positive reinforcements are successful in bringing about good behaviour and discipline in lessons. Occasionally, however, when behaviour deteriorates a little, some teachers are in danger of making matters worse by using too many negative admonishments.

There are good arrangements for the regular assessment of pupils. In the EYFS class, members of staff observe their pupils in their day to day activities and record judgements on progress based on these observations. In the classes in Key Stage 1 and 2 there are assessments every six weeks and the pupils' progress is carefully tracked using National Curriculum levels and sub-levels in literacy, numeracy and science. Individual education plans are regularly reviewed and decisions are made about whether to set new targets or whether extra support is no longer needed. The regular assessment arrangements have helped to keep the effects of staff turnover to a minimum. Nevertheless, it is understandable that teachers who are very new to the school are still making their own assessments of their pupils and are not yet able to set work at exactly the right level of difficulty for the wide range of attainments within each class. As a result, the turnover of teachers has inevitably had some adverse effects on the pupils' rates of progress.

The current levels of staffing are good in quantity and qualifications. Every class has a full-time classroom assistant and the Key Stage 1 class benefits from a third adult, who is working on a voluntary basis; her presence is particularly helpful because this is the largest class in the school and covers a wide range of attainments. The lead support teacher, who works part-time, has level 3 qualifications as a teaching assistant. The Reception class teacher has level 3 qualifications in the early years and is about to embark on further training. All the other class teachers have qualified teacher status and bring with them varied experience in maintained as well as independent schools. In addition to the class teachers, there are two teachers of Arabic and Islamic studies both of whom are native speakers of Arabic and one of whom has a degree in the subject and a teaching diploma. The school also makes use of instructors to teach physical education (PE), through its partnership with Luton Football Club. When all the teachers have fully settled in, the teaching team will be well placed to share good practice and develop and improve approaches to teaching, marking and the management of behaviour.

There are sufficient resources to support the teaching, though with some variations between subjects. Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are now good, following recent purchases of hardware and software and the provision of wireless internet access in all classes. Resources for EYFS are well used although they are no more than adequate, because there is no room to store a wider range. Resources for Islamic studies are sufficient to support the present teaching approaches but do not enable a wider variety of methods to be used. There is a small library that is well chosen, carefully organised and regularly used by the pupils.

As a result of the well-planned curriculum, the sound teaching and the pupils' positive attitudes to learning, they make steady progress and reach standards in line with, and sometimes above, the expectations for their ages. By the end of the EYFS, most pupils have reached their early learning goals. By the time that they leave the school, pupils are secure in their literacy and numeracy skills, have demonstrated good levels of scientific knowledge and also show good knowledge of Arabic and of Islam.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' spiritual development is good. Because the school is located above the Islamic Centre, the pupils pray in the *masjid* (mosque) on a daily basis with other worshippers and hear the local imam whose Friday *khutbah* (sermon) is in English. This strongly supports development of their spirituality, self-discipline and community spirit. Other worshippers comment on the pupils' good conduct in prayer. There are twice-weekly assemblies led by the head teacher, whose inspirational Islamic input brings the school family together and supports pupils in their understanding of their faith. Pupils' spirituality is further enhanced in Islamic studies and Arabic lessons. Pupils comment on how the school helps them to become better Muslims and members of the wider community.

The pupils' moral development is good: the school's ethos promotes Islamic *adab* and *akhlaq* (manners and behaviour). Pupils understand right from wrong and the values of honesty and truthfulness are inculcated in the daily life of the school. Relationships are good and pupils behave well. They appreciate the rewards they are given for good work, positive attitudes and thoughtful behaviour. They are considerate towards each other and have a strong sense of family values that extends further than their own families to the community of the school and beyond. A pupil from Year 2, when asked if he had any brothers, gestured towards the whole class and said, 'All these are my brothers'.

Pupils get on well together in classrooms and around the school. They readily undertake responsibility when given the opportunity and this positive response should encourage the school to find further ways of extending the responsibilities they are given. Some pupils in Years 5 and 6 have pen pals in a local state school, enabling friendships to be made with peers outside the school community. The school's partnership with Luton Football Club not only provides coaching for PE but also allows links with the other services that sponsor the club. This has resulted in visits from the fire service, police and health organisations, contributing to the pupils' understanding and knowledge of public services in England. The pupils have opportunities to raise funds for a variety of causes.

The wide diversity of family heritages among the pupils and the staff is respected and valued. As the school states, 'We have students from all walks of the local community, from white British, white European to African and Asian origins. We are proud of the multi-ethnic backgrounds at our school and celebrate our diversity under the umbrella of Islam.' Pupils are strongly encouraged to show tolerance and respect towards non-Muslims. This was very evident in an assembly observed during the inspection where a well-chosen story demonstrated the importance of treating non-Muslim neighbours with kindness and solicitude. Through Islamic studies, Eid celebrations and other important events in the Islamic calendar, pupils develop a good understanding of their own faith but there are fewer opportunities to increase their knowledge of other faiths in Britain.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school looks after its pupils well and gives close attention to their welfare, health and safety. There are very careful procedures at the beginnings and ends of days

for the pupils to come into and leave the school safely and this is particularly important because the school opens directly on to a very busy street. Five members of staff hold up-to-date first aid qualifications, and two of these have attended training in paediatric first aid. Procedures for recording accidents are thorough and first aid kits are well stocked. It is the school's intention that on all trips outside the premises there should be a person qualified in first aid, taking with them a first aid kit. However, on one occasion observed during the inspection this did not happen because a teacher who was very new to the school was unaware of the intention.

The head teacher is personally responsible for child protection and has attended recent training and knows the procedures to be followed. He takes care to ensure that all new members of staff are made aware of child protection issues as part of their induction into the school.

In accordance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the school has produced a detailed and thoughtful plan for improving access to its curriculum and accommodation, within the resources that it can afford.

While the actual procedures and practices of the school are robust and effective in promoting welfare, health and safety, the written policies are relatively weak. There are policies in all the areas required by the regulations but they are often of a generic nature and they are not sufficiently tailored to the school's particular ethos and circumstances. Few of the policies make explicit reference to the Islamic values that underpin the school's practices.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are good systems for the recruitment of suitable staff that ensure that all the required checks are made and that references are taken up. The school has recently made arrangements for timely checks to be made against List 99, and this is helpful in enabling new members of staff to start work, with appropriate supervision, if their CRB check is still pending. The members of the proprietorial body have recently been added to the school's single central register of checks. All the regulations are now met.

School's premises and accommodation

While the school makes good use of the limited accommodation that it has, there is not enough space for the current number of pupils on roll. There are five classrooms, two of which are too small for the numbers in them. There is also a small library that is also used for other purposes: staff use it for preparation and on the occasions when a pupil is ill a temporary bed is put up in it. The Islamic Centre on the ground floor is used regularly by the school for assemblies, for indoor play, for PE lessons and for other lessons for groups within a class.

The school is part-way through a programme of refurbishment to improve the sound insulation, which is now satisfactory: noise from adjacent classrooms can still be heard but effective teaching is possible. The Key Stage 1 classroom does not have any windows. There is sufficient lighting. The school has taken specialist advice about the adequacy of the ventilation and they have been told that the high ceiling

makes it satisfactory. However, the inspection team judge that the ventilation in this room is not sufficient.

The school uses the facilities of a nearby maintained primary school for indoor and outdoor PE and this is a major benefit for the pupils. The school itself has no outside play area. Visits to nearby parks give opportunities for the pupils to play outside and they are well supervised to ensure that they can play safely.

The school is well aware of the deficiencies of its accommodation. The trustees are drawing up ambitious plans to extend and redesign the whole school building, including the provision of a rooftop playground.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There are strong links with parents and regular communications with them. The head teacher is outside the school at the beginning and end of each day in all weathers and this gives parents very good opportunities for informal contact. The school meets the regulations for the provision of information. The results of the national tests taken by Year 6 pupils in 2008 have recently been put on the web-site. The school sensibly intends to make all its policies similarly available on its web-site but there have been some technical difficulties and at the time of the inspection it had not done so.

Written reports are sent to parents every term. The samples seen from the previous academic year are particularly helpful, detailed and informative with precise comments about what individual pupils know and can do in all the subjects they are taught. The termly reports issued so far this year give grades rather than written comments although the school sensibly intends to revert to the previous format for the final end of year report.

The small number of parents who attended a meeting at the beginning of the inspection and who returned the questionnaires sent out as part of the inspection were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They are, however, aware of the deficiencies of the accommodation and are concerned about the high turnover of staff.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has recently made amendments to its complaints procedures, which now meet all the requirements. During the last twelve months there has been one formal complaint which has been satisfactorily resolved.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision for the 17 pupils in the EYFS is good, despite the insufficient space and the limitations of the resources, which are no more than adequate. Nearly all the requirements are met, but there are two important welfare requirements that are not: the classroom is too small, and the child to adult ratio falls just outside the maximum of eight to one.

Pupils are happy, safe and secure. They enjoy coming to school and each child feels special and unique as a result of the care and encouragement they receive from the teacher and her assistant. Effective strategies are in place to safeguard the pupils' well-being and welfare. They are making good progress in their learning which is well supported by staff and by parents who are kept fully informed of their children's development. The teacher works hard to find effective and creative ways of overcoming the constraints of the limited space and resources.

There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Most days start with free play, while the pupils are fresh and alert. These sessions are well organised and carefully set up and pupils are able to choose from a reasonable range of activities. They respond with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Both members of staff are skilled in their interventions, developing the pupils' vocabulary and imagination as they join in their play, for example in the role play area which was set up as a café at the time of the inspection. Later in the day, there are adult-led sessions that are well planned and focus on developing the pupils' skills in numeracy, in speaking and listening and in literacy. Although there is no outside play area on site, pupils have daily sessions of PE which take place either in the hall of the Islamic Centre, the hall of a nearby primary school or outside in a park. The programme of activities covers all areas of learning with an appropriate balance between them. In addition, pupils benefit from a daily lesson in Arabic taught with enthusiasm by a native speaker. However, these lessons last for around fifty minutes and this is too long for the pupils to sustain their attention.

Adults promote personal, social and emotional development on a regular basis and link it to their faith teaching. Adults' communication is lively, clear and positive. The pupils are praised often and they respond by their enthusiastic conversations with adults and peers. Their work and efforts are celebrated and the environment is varied and stimulating. Pupils are learning to work independently and under instruction and they show positive attitudes to work and play.

All pupils are assessed on entry and the assessments are used to plan the programme of work. Accurate and frequent observations of the pupils in their day-to-day activities provide a good basis for judging their progress and for planning the next steps in their development, enabling the teacher to match the tasks she gives to the pupils' different levels of attainment. She has a clear understanding of what she wants the children to achieve by the end of the year. The evidence gathered from observations is used to complete the EYFS profiles, which show that most pupils are reaching the early learning goals.

Pupils are learning the importance of healthy eating and keeping fit. There is good training in personal care and hygiene. The pupils work and play harmoniously together, sharing and taking turns and learning to make wise choices within a safe environment. They are learning to respect each other and to look beyond the classroom to the community and the part they can play in it.

The EYFS provision is well led and managed. The two adults work well together. They communicate regularly with parents verbally and through the home/school books. The teacher guides and supports her assistant effectively, delegating responsibilities to her and training her in the requirements of EYFS.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets most of the regulations for registration.

The school must take action to meet the outstanding regulations as listed below. An action plan should be prepared detailing the action to be taken.

In order to meet fully the regulations in **standard 5**, the school's premises and accommodation, the school must:

- ensure that all classrooms are appropriate in size having regard to the number, age and needs of pupils (Regulation 5 (j))
- improve the ventilation in the Key Stage 1 classroom so that it meets the requirements of The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (Regulation 5 (p))

The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure that there is at least 2.3 square metres of space per pupil in the Reception classroom
- keep the ratio of pupils to adults to eight to one or less.

Meeting the expectations of AMSUK

The school's religious ethos broadly meets the expectations of AMSUK but in order to strengthen its religious ethos the school should consider:

- making its Islamic values more evident and explicit in its written policies.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- developing policies that reflect the school's values and aims and are particular to the school's circumstances
- sharing good practice among teachers to bring about further improvement in teaching, marking and the management of behaviour
- increasing the pupils' knowledge of other faiths
- ensuring that Arabic lessons in Reception are of an appropriate length for the pupils' ages and stages of development.