

# Azhar Academy

235a Romford Road, Forest Gate, London E7 9HL

**Inspection dates** 22–24 March

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The deputy headteacher is very knowledgeable about the work of the school. During the inspection, she liaised effectively with the inspectors in the absence of the headteacher who was away to visit her sick mother.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning systematically. As a result, pupils make good progress in all areas of learning required by the independent school standards.
- The curriculum meets pupils' needs effectively. They receive a broad and balanced experience. Pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is well supported through the citizenship curriculum. Visits to places of educational interest and visitors to school further enrich learning.
- The early years provision is outstanding. It provides an excellent start to children's education. They enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities and make rapid progress.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe and know how to keep safe, especially from radicalisation or extremist views.
- Pupils receive high-quality careers guidance. Leaders have created a culture of high expectations for pupils' next stages of education. All pupils go to sixth form colleges and then on to universities.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted. Pupils are given many opportunities to learn about fundamental British values. They learn about all the major faiths represented in the country. Equality is highly promoted and pupils have many opportunities to complete projects against exploitation of women such as forced marriages.
- Leaders have made sure that all the independent school standards are met.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' expectations of what the most-able pupils can achieve are not high enough. As a result, pupils do not always make good progress, as they should.
- The school's procedures for teachers' performance management are not yet well developed.
- The school does not rigorously monitor the effectiveness of its strategies, to reduce the number of exclusions.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers consistently set work that makes the most-able pupils think hard about their work, so that they make rapid and sustained progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - systems for staff appraisal are linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
  - strategies to reduce the number of exclusions are monitored more effectively.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school is well led and managed by the senior leaders. They have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- In the absence of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher ably led the school staff and liaised with the inspection team. She knows the school well and therefore makes accurate judgements about the quality of teaching. She is very knowledgeable about the progress individual and groups of pupils make.
- Senior leaders monitor teaching systematically to ensure pupils' learning remains consistently good. However, sometimes, pupils' learning is compromised when the teachers who cover for staff absences are not specialists in the subject being taught. Cover teachers are not always provided with sufficient information to ensure that learning continues despite the absence of the regular teacher. The school provides regular opportunities for staff development through partnership with their local teaching alliance. However, though the staff performance management systems are developing, they are not yet fully established.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points, and attain standards that are well above the national average. However, sometimes teachers do not make sure that activities always make the most-able pupils think and work hard enough. On occasion, these pupils get work that is too easy and finish it quickly. They then sit and wait for others to complete the task. This slows their progress.
- The school's assessment procedures are effective. Leaders monitor progress well through an ongoing constructive dialogue with teaching staff. Staff follow the school marking policy robustly and provide good guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. The school's systems to track pupils' progress are robust and the resulting information is used to inform future practice. The deputy headteacher correctly identified the need for setting appropriately challenging work for the most-able pupils so that they make the best possible progress and attain higher grades in examinations. This has yet to happen consistently across the school.
- The leadership of the early years provision is outstanding and children make rapid progress in their speaking and listening skills. An excellent focus on teaching reading, writing and number gives children a very strong grounding in the basic skills. This enables them to make outstanding progress in all areas of learning.
- The school's curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of its pupils. It covers all the required areas of learning in the independent school standards. PSHE is well taught through the citizenship curriculum. The curriculum is enriched well through visits to places of interest. Visitors come to school to talk about their life experiences, including former pupils who have been very successful in their own careers.
- All pupils engage in Alimaah and Hifz Studies for two and a half hours daily and this gives them a good grounding in their own faith. Additionally, pupils have good opportunities to learn Arabic and French. Pupils receive good careers guidance and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is effectively promoted. They are taught to respect and be tolerant of others' beliefs. They learn about all the major faiths represented in the country. They have a good knowledge and understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils understand democracy and the principles of equality. They have taken part, and have won awards, in many projects to raise awareness of exploitation of women. Pupils are well aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Parents receive detailed reports on the progress of their children and appreciate the work of the school. Staff are happy working in the school.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The governors bring a range of skills and expertise to challenge and hold the school's leaders to account to bring about further developments. They are highly committed to improving the school.
  - Governors know the strengths and areas for development of the school. They accurately identify that the work of the school is good and are clear what they need to do to improve further.
  - When concerns were raised about health and safety arrangements in the school, governors took swift and decisive action. They implemented changes which ensure that the health and safety of pupils are not compromised.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all checks are made on staff before they start work in the school. All policies and procedures are effectively implemented to ensure that

provision meets requirements. These policies take account of recent guidance contained in the government publication 'Keeping children safe in education' (July 2015). The designated safeguarding leaders have undertaken appropriate training at the required level and all staff receive regular updated training on how to keep pupils safe.

- Health and safety policies are implemented well. Fire checks and evacuations are conducted termly and a number of staff are trained in first aid. Admissions and destinations of pupils who join and leave the school are accurately recorded. The school appropriately informed the local authority about three pupils who have left the school but are still at home.
- Inspectors followed up the complaint received by the Department for Education (DfE) about the danger to the health and welfare of pupils. Discussions took place with staff, governors and pupils; documents were analysed and the school premises were examined. All the documents relating to the school's efforts to rectify issues were examined. The inspection judgement is that there are no issues that jeopardise the health and welfare of pupils.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** is good

- Teachers use their subject knowledge to plan activities that keep pupils interested in their learning. They identify when pupils need support and ensure that this is provided so that all pupils make good progress. Sometimes, when the teacher is absent and the cover teacher is not the subject specialist, pupils' learning is hindered. This was seen in one lesson where pupils were not given any work and they were finishing their assignments for the holiday homework. This is one of the reasons why teaching is yet not outstanding.
- Teachers skilfully question to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. This encourages pupils to reflect on what they have learned and think deeply about their responses. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to use the concepts and skills learned. This was seen in one lesson where pupils were writing their own formulas. Pupils were given opportunities to think and learn from their mistakes.
- Teachers assess pupils' work in their books following the school policy. Pupils' work in their books is neat and well presented. Teachers give pupils good advice on how to further improve their work. As a result, pupils make good progress. Teachers have a good understanding of their pupils' needs and they match work appropriately. However, teachers do not consistently provide appropriately challenging work for the most-able pupils to ensure that they make the best possible progress.
- Currently, there is only one class of Year 1 pupils in the primary school. Teaching in this year group is well focused on developing pupils' reading, writing and number skills. Pupils are able to use their phonics (letters and the sounds they make) skills to read simple books and write their daily news. Pupils' handwriting skills are excellent. The work presented in their books is neat and legible.
- In mathematics, staff have high expectations in Year 1 and provide many opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills to solve specific mathematical problems. Pupils have a clear understanding of, for example, how to use addition and subtraction skills to solve problems. Teachers give work that is challenging, and most pupils manage to complete tasks with clear explanations from the teacher. However, occasionally, the work is too difficult for pupils who learn more slowly than others.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and this helps to develop good attitudes to learning. Pupils are well motivated and they engage quickly with their work, and lessons proceed smoothly with little disruption.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** are good

#### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Policies and procedures for the welfare of pupils are implemented effectively. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and they are highly confident and self-assured.
- Pupils work amicably in pairs and in groups, supporting and learning from each other. Pupils have high expectations of their own learning and concentrate and work hard in lessons.
- Pupils are reflective about the values of their faith, and any prejudice or discriminatory language is not accepted. They have high aspirations for their own future careers, and all pupils go to sixth form colleges and universities of their choice.

- Pupils wear their uniform with pride. They say that: 'We feel comfortable in the school'. They understand what constitutes bullying and say that it does happen in the school, but that the staff are supportive and sort out any problems. The school bullying records indicate that there are cases of bullying, but these are reducing.
- Pupils are able to raise their voice if they are unhappy with any of the school's work. A few of the older pupils expressed their discontent with school leaders for not listening to them. They explained that: 'The school does not listen to us and we have to complain through our parents'. Leaders have implemented strategies to rectify this.
- Pupils' attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils are keen learners and enthusiastically take part in all activities.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They move from lesson to lesson with little disruption. Pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour and are polite and courteous to visitors.
- Pupils behave well during breaktimes. They use these as social occasions to talk and discuss events amicably. They have strong friendships and value the opportunities the school provides for them to be comfortable in relationships with friends and staff.
- Pupils receive good impartial careers advice, including work experience. They attend Oxford University's 'Women in Mathematics' and 'Women in Computing' days. Pupils keep work experience diaries, which are examined by the tutors and further guidance is given. As a result, all pupils are extremely well prepared for their future education. The school has an extensive range of policies and procedures in place to ensure that pupils are not subject to any partisan views.
- The school implements its behaviour policy rigorously. Pupils are given rewards for good behaviour and sanctions are applied for poor behaviour. However, a small minority of pupils feel that they are sometimes excluded on minor matters such as, in their view, 'using mobile phones'. The school's information indicates that there are a large number of exclusions, one of the main reasons being the school's zero tolerance policy on the unauthorised use of mobile phones. The reasons for the exclusions are monitored systematically, but the school has not robustly monitored the impact of its interventions on reducing the number of exclusions.

### Outcomes for pupils

### are good

- Achievement for primary-aged pupils is good across all subjects. There is a good focus on teaching reading and writing and this helps them to make good progress in other subjects. In mathematics, pupils make good progress and are able to apply their skills to solve simple addition and subtraction problems.
- The school's performance information indicates that pupils achieve well, and this is also evidenced in pupils' books. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. In the secondary school, about half of pupils start the school in Year 7 with attainment in English and mathematics that is around the national average and the other half above the national average.
- As a result of good progress, in 2015 the proportion of pupils who achieved A\* to C grades in at least five subjects, including English and mathematics, was much higher than average. In the current cohort, a high number of pupils (93% in English, 92% in science and 88% in mathematics) are predicted to achieve A\* to C grades. Progress in mathematics is slightly lower than in English and science. The school is well aware of this and has successfully put strategies in place to combat any underachievement.
- Equally, pupils make similarly good progress in all other subjects and attain standards above the national averages. However, the most-able pupils do not do as well as they should do. This is because teachers do not consistently have high expectations, and as a result do not set sufficiently challenging tasks to ensure that the most-able pupils make the best possible progress. This is an area for development.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal development and are confident and self-assured. This, along with good, impartial careers advice, prepares them well for the next stage of their education. All pupils go to sixth form colleges and then to universities to study academic subjects.

## Early years provision

is outstanding

- The new early years leader is highly knowledgeable about how young children learn and provides outstanding leadership and management. She is highly ambitious and is committed to further improving the provision. The whole team support her in her drive for outstanding practice. When children join the school, their skills are checked in all areas of learning and this information is used to track progress. The school records and children's work in their books and in their learning journeys indicate that they make outstanding progress.
- Children enter the Nursery with skills in communication, literacy, reading and writing that are lower than is typical for their age. A wide range of stimulating activities in both the indoor classroom and the outdoor areas motivate them to engage in learning.
- Staff know children's learning needs well and plan appropriate activities. For example, in the Nursery, while children were rolling dough, the teacher took the opportunity to improve children's counting skills by asking children to count the rolling pins. Another group were looking in the mirrors, and staff encouraged them to draw their faces, improving their language and knowledge of facial features. This incidental but planned learning was great fun for the children.
- In the Reception class, the most-able children were learning phonics and could use double letter sounds to make and spell words such as 'ship', 'moon' and 'chip'. The lower-ability children were learning to make three-letter words such as 'tin' and 'bin'. Many children are able to read simple storybooks.
- Children have many opportunities to choose their own activities and learn independently. Staff take these opportunities to talk to the children and extend their communication skills. They question children to extend and deepen their learning.
- Visitors also enrich children's learning. During the inspection, a visitor came to show children her 'little creatures'. Children enjoyed handling snails, stick insects and a snake. Through skilful questioning, the staff developed children's communication skills, knowledge and understanding of the different creatures they handled.
- Staff have high expectations of children and support their learning extremely well. Children are also taught Islamic studies and Arabic. In one lesson, Reception class children were learning numbers and phonics in Arabic. An excellent range of resources made learning fun. As a result, over time the children make outstanding progress.
- Children's welfare, health and safety are a priority. The whole learning environment is exciting, and resources are well stored and are easily accessible for children to use independently. Children were seen balancing on narrow benches with great care, and staff were always at hand if needed.
- Staff accurately assess children's skills and understanding, and their records indicate what children can do and what the next steps are in their learning. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Positive relations with parents and staff help children to settle quickly.
- The leader monitors teaching and learning rigorously and staff are provided with excellent training to improve their skills. In a short time, she has secured staff training to improve children's skills in phonics, writing and number. The leader has also pinpointed development points for each teacher linked to specific training tailored to individual needs.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134417
<b>Inspection number</b>	10007702
<b>DfE registration number</b>	316/6064

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

<b>Type of school</b>	Muslim day school
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls secondary; Mixed primary
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	260 secondary; 68.5 full-time equivalent primary and early years
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	45 nursery children
<b>Proprietor</b>	Azhar Academy
<b>Chair</b>	Ismail Gangat
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rookshana Adam
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£2,800
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8555 5959
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aags.org.uk">www.aags.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:girls.school@azharacademy.org">girls.school@azharacademy.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	25–27 February 2014

## Information about this school

- Azhar Academy is a Muslim day school. The secondary school is for girls only and is located in a former Victorian church in the London Borough of Newham. It was opened in 2003 and currently has 260 pupils.
- Azhar Primary Academy is located about 10 minutes' drive away in a building that was formerly a police station. It is in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It opened in September 2015 with a Year 1 class. The Nursery opened in December 2014. There are 45 children in the Nursery who attend either morning or afternoon provision, and all receive funding under the government's nursery education grant scheme. There are 16 children in the Reception class and 14 children in Year 1. The school has its own large outdoor playground.
- There are no pupils with a statement of educational needs or education, health and care plans.
- There are no pupils who receive support through pupil premium funding. The pupil premium is additional government funding given to schools for disadvantaged pupils who qualify for free school meals or children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Pupils are mainly from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian and Somali heritages. The majority of pupils travel from Newham and the surrounding boroughs.
- The secondary school uses a local community centre for physical education. It also has a small area at the front of the school for pupils to use for breaktimes.
- The secondary school is a member of the East London Teaching School Alliance.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school aims to provide a 'broad and balanced education to students and enrich Islamic values in them'.
- In the absence of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher liaised with the inspectors.

## Information about this inspection

- Discussions took place with the deputy headteacher, the leader responsible for safeguarding, and governors. A short conversation on a mobile phone took place with the headteacher. Two meetings were held with secondary pupils.
- Inspectors investigated the complaint made to the DfE through meetings with governors, pupils and senior leaders. A range of documentation was analysed, such as notes of meetings and evidence of work completed. The premises were visited to ensure these were hygienically clean. All documentation relating to welfare and safety of pupils was scrutinised.
- Inspectors held discussions with the early years leader and looked at the school's welfare and safety arrangements in the primary school. Premises on both sites were examined. All the independent standards were checked.
- Inspectors observed 13 lessons and five of these were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also made eight shorter visits (of 10 minutes each) to observe teaching and learning. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in their books and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed a teacher's professional development session on 'effectiveness of marking'.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation available on the school's website and through hard copies presented in the school.
- The school's information on pupils' academic performance was scrutinised. The school's improvement plan, exclusion data, bullying and behaviour logs were examined. The behaviour of pupils was observed in and out of lessons and during lunch and breaktimes.
- Inspectors analysed parents' views through 65 responses to Ofsted's online survey. Views expressed in 15 responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

## Inspection team

Kanwaljit Singh, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Martin Roberts

Ofsted Inspector

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