

Muslim schools (independent)

Background

These schools seek to promote an Islamic ethos throughout the curriculum. They are generally supported by local communities and are therefore most frequently located in areas with substantial Muslim populations.

Daily prayers (Salat) five times a day will often dictate the shape of the school day, so timetables are usually adjusted in the autumn and spring terms to accommodate the midday and afternoon prayers.

During Ramadan, activities such as physical education may be restricted as many pupils will be observing the fast. During Eids and Muharram many schools will have celebrations to mark the importance of these events.

Boys and girls may be taught or seated separately according to the specific context, particularly during collective acts of worship. This should not be taken as a sign of inequality between different genders.

Most schools have a uniform for boys and girls. Most often it is the traditional Asian style clothes representing the Islamic principle of modesty. Girls will cover their head with the 'hijab' or scarf. Boys may wear a small cap.

Female staff often cover their heads; some wear the full face covering (niqaab).

The accommodation will include facilities for 'wudu', the required ritual washing before prayers and meals. This is done by sitting on a fixed stool before a tap, so that feet, hands and parts of the head can be washed under running water. These ablution areas may be separate from toilets, which may be 'western' or 'eastern' style. Troughs with several taps are sometimes provided as washbasins.

Curriculum

The curriculum varies according to the views of the Trustees and the Islamic tradition followed. In line with the independent school standards, inspectors should evaluate the breadth and balance of the curriculum, including skills taught in the different subjects

and across age groups.

Modern foreign languages provision is usually taught through Arabic and occasionally other European languages.

Art and music can be restricted. Inspectors may find evidence of music being taught through religious worship sessions: the tajweed (recitation of the Qur'an), the singing of Arabic songs (nasheed), the playing of the Duff (drums) and the call to prayer (adhaan). Pupils are taught these from an early age. Muslim schools will not teach any form of art that portrays the human form or living creatures. However, there is no restriction on the teaching of abstract, geometrical or arabesque styles of art.

For physical education, older girls will tend to wear tracksuits and cover their heads. Primary school pupils will be taught physical education together and separated once they reach secondary school.

Health and sex education will be taught within Islamic studies and often under the umbrella of personal, social and health education unless required by an examination syllabus such as GCSE science. Some schools require it to be taught only by Muslim teachers of the same gender as the pupils.

Etiquette

Schools will have a prayer room and shoes must always be removed before entering this room. Some school staff change into slippers. Inspectors are advised to bring slippers or wear socks. Some schools will have a purpose-built mosque on site. Some schools may also request inspectors to remove their shoes before entering the main school.

It is important for inspectors to be aware of and respect religious sensitivities. Muslims greet each other with 'as-salamu alaykum' - 'peace be on you'. The reply is 'wa' alaykum as-salam' - 'peace be also on you'. If used respectfully on entering a class, the children will respond.

Female inspectors are advised to wear a trouser suit or longer skirt and jacket to cover their arms. Female inspectors are also recommended to carry a scarf in case they enter the prayer room or a mosque when they will need to cover their head.

There is usually no physical contact between males and females who are not part of the same family. Muslim men do not usually shake hands with women, and Muslim women do not shake hands with men, so the best policy is not to offer to shake hands unless

someone offers their hand to you.

It is important to check with the school the etiquette regarding male inspectors entering the classroom of female teachers. In some schools, time will need to be given so that the female teacher can cover her head and/or face from the male inspector. Inspectors also need to be aware that they may find themselves providing feedback from a lesson to a teacher that may be wearing a full 'niqaab' (face and head cover). In some schools, male inspectors will need another female present in order to give feedback to a female teacher.