



Date Valley School

Inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. 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: 315/6588
Association: AMSUK
Date of inspection: 6th - 9th July 2015
Lead Inspector: Mrs Meg Buckingham
Team inspectors: Mrs Almas Iqbal
Mrs Julie Purnell

Age range of pupils: 3 -11 years
Number on roll: 177
Full-time: 79 boys 57 girls
Part-time: 20 boys 21 girls
Number of pupils with an EHC plan or a statement of special educational need: 2

Proprietor: Date Valley School Trust
Head teacher: Mrs R Karim
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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

Date Valley School is a primary school with an Islamic religious character. Since the last inspection by BSI in 2009, it has moved to its current premises on one site in the London Borough of Merton. The proprietors are now Date Valley School Trust with a board of governors. One of the trustees chairs the governing body. The school has an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) unit with Nursery and Reception classes. For these younger pupils, the school does not now adhere so closely to the Montessori practices and principles as at the time of the last inspection. Throughout the school, girls and boys are educated together. All pupils are fluent in English, the language of instruction, except for Arabic and Qur'an lessons. Pupils come from diverse heritages, predominantly for the Indian sub-continent.

The school aims include:

'To create a calm and caring atmosphere, which encourages a joy of learning by arousing the child's curiosity.

To promote independence in the child, and encourage the child to work alongside others. The child is taught about the importance of caring and respecting friends, teachers and parents.

Most importantly, we aim to create a conducive Islamic environment, by making Islam an integral part of the child's life, so by the time the child leaves Date Valley School he or she is happy and proud to be a Muslim.'

At the request of the DfE this inspection was unannounced because of a complaint received concerning aspects of the balance of the curriculum and teaching about other faiths. Therefore, the school had no advanced notice of the start of the inspection.

Evaluation of the school

Date Valley is a good school and has many strengths. The school is achieving its aims well. The governors, principal and management group work effectively together to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The school provides a strong Islamic ethos so that pupils grow in their understanding and practice of their Islamic faith. Teaching is good overall and the curriculum as a whole is planned effectively to support pupils to become independent learners. Consequently, all pupils make at least good progress from their starting points. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils attain high standards in national literacy and numeracy tests, often exceeding national expectations. Pupils are very well cared for; they are happy and feel safe in school. Pupils are exuberant learners and this contributes to their enjoyment of school. Their attendance is excellent and behaviour is generally good. On occasion,

however, the school's behaviour policy is not consistently applied by all staff and so, in this regard, the school does not meet the regulation requiring that the behaviour policy is implemented effectively. All other regulations are met. No evidence was found to suggest that the complaint received by the DfE has substance.

Leadership and Management

The proprietor of the school is now the Date Valley School Trust, which is a charity. The proprietors have formed a board of governors who have a range of appropriate skills and expertise to have an informed strategic overview of the school. The day-to-day running of the school has been delegated to the principal who leads the management group herself with two assistant head teachers and the school manager. Governors have encouraged the professional development of these managers with participation in further training that is relevant to their respective responsibilities. There are clear systems in place for managers to be held to account by the proprietors and to ensure pupils' progress. Communications between the governors and the management group are good. Regular formal and informal meetings help the board of governors to keep up to date with the requirements for independent schools and governors are active in monitoring the work of the school.

The principal's determined leadership and management, together with the capable members of the management group, has ensured there is a shared vision to achieve the school's aims and for the well-being and high achievement of all pupils. They work effectively as a team undertaking capably their leadership and management roles. Training is a strong feature in the school, led well by the principal and management group. There is a culture of striving for continual improvement amongst the management group and this is disseminated throughout the school. The management group have identified the areas for development. They have the capabilities to bring about further improvement and to sustain the many strengths of the school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the EYFS continues to be good. Teachers work well together as a team to plan activities and assess progress. Pupils are making excellent progress towards their early learning goals with some exceeding them. Each child is assigned a key worker who works hard to settle pupils into the setting and makes sure feedback is given to parents on an ongoing basis, regarding character, learning and progress.

The school has a very detailed and systematic approach to monitoring pupils' progress. Teachers make careful observation of pupils in different situations and using a variety of methods such as photographs, notes and anecdotal evidence. This information is recorded on an online tracking system, which matches targets with pupils' capabilities and is used effectively contributing to pupils' excellent progress towards their early learning goals.

The experienced EYFS coordinator makes excellent use of offsite training and ensures the key workers attend additional training courses termly to further extend their understanding of the curriculum and contribute to their professional

development. The EYFS team work closely with other outside agencies to ensure good practices are being followed. The school has a clear and detailed policy outlining their provision for any pupils identified with special educational needs and disability (SEND), which is implemented well. Comprehensive individual education plans are written to ensure all pupils are able access the curriculum and make progress towards their early learning goals.

All seven areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum are covered. Planning for these areas is detailed and takes into account pupils' targets and next learning steps in order to ensure that all pupils are making progress. Planning indicates that the seven areas are not taught in isolation but, rather, are worked together to provide many cross-curricular learning opportunities. There is also a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. In addition to the EYFS curriculum, pupils also have Qur'an recitation and memorization and Islamic studies lessons. They learn daily *duas* (supplications) and the Arabic alphabet, numbers and basic vocabulary.

The environment is bright, bold and stimulating with lovely displays celebrating pupils' work on a variety of topics which serve to demonstrate to the pupils that what they do is important and valued. Pupils arrive enthusiastically into the EYFS unit. Well-established routines of putting away their lunch boxes and book bags encourage independence and give the pupils a focus and sense of belonging straight away. Pupils carry out their responsibility of collecting and returning the register very seriously and do so with pride.

The school values highly the partnership it has with parents and welcomes information they may wish to share with the school, in order to build up further a full picture of the child. There is a parent sharing board in the Reception end of the setting where anecdotes or other comments about pupils can be put. Parents are given two informative, written reports each year detailing their child's progress during the academic year. There are also ongoing opportunities for discussion at the beginning and end of the school day as well as a home communication book, which is used daily by staff, to share highlights of a child's day.

Teachers are caring and gentle towards the pupils. Pupils' behaviour is generally good although there were some occasions in the Reception classes where opportunities to teach about sharing nicely and taking turns in discussion times were missed.

A particular feature of the EYFS unit is the outdoor provision, an area which has been developed since the last inspection. Here the pupils can take part in a wealth of well-planned activities using a range of good quality equipment. There is a small set of raised beds for gardening, equipment to develop balancing and climbing, as well as opportunities for more sedentary activities such as reading a book in a pop-up tent or engaging in writing opportunities whilst outdoors. Language is developed well and pupils are articulate and describe creatures they see in the outdoor space. One child pointed out a butterfly and said she will try and catch it with her hoop but then 'it's way too high up now'. Meanwhile ants are spotted on the pavement and the EYFS practitioner helps the pupils to explore them safely, leading to a child explaining she remembered a time when an ant crawled on her and it was 'so tickly'.

The team are skilled at ensuring that there are lots of opportunities both indoors and outdoors for pupils to explore and solve problems. On one occasion a pupil had managed to get all of the shapes stuck in the shape box and the key appeared not to work anymore. The teacher enabled the pupil, later assisted by other interested pupils to persevere and make suggestions of how they could get the shapes out. At snack time there is a focus on healthy eating. Snack time in the Nursery is used as a time of social sharing and for developing language. The teacher engaged pupils in discussing their fruit and of thinking creatively about the shapes of their snack. One pupil later referred to her cheese strings as being 'like spaghetti hair.'

The pupils in the EYFS unit are happy, confident and enjoy coming to school. It provides a safe, secure and stimulating setting for them to learn and develop and they are well prepared for their future challenges in Key Stage1.

Quality of education provided

The school provides a good quality of education. The primary years' curriculum is broad and well planned including most of the National Curriculum subjects. Pupils are not taught music but *nasheeds* (Islamic songs) and role-play, with art and model-making contribute well to pupils' creative and aesthetic development.

The curriculum also includes Islamic studies with the Qur'an and religious education. The planning of Qur'anic studies, Islamic studies and the Arabic curriculum is thorough and detailed and regular review ensures that the quality is of a high standard. The Arabic curriculum begins in term 2 of Year 3, with the emphasis on Arabic being taught as a modern foreign language. Pupils also learn how to recite *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) in the Qur'an lessons.

In Key Stage 2 parents have an option for their child to follow an enhanced Qur'anic *hifz* (memorisation of the Qur'an) course alongside the National Curriculum subjects. Currently, there is a small class of girls and boys in Year 4 and a small class of Year 5 and 6 boys. As these pupils have less time for literacy and numeracy than their peers, parents must demonstrate their commitment to providing additional support at home. The progress of these pupils in meeting their targets in literacy and numeracy is monitored carefully. The principal undertakes a detailed analysis of the progress of these pupils over time and their attainment is in line with their peers.

The school sees both elements - National curriculum subjects and Islamic studies - as part of a whole curriculum approach with some mapping of topics across both strands so they complement pupils' learning. The next step is to extend this cross-curriculum exercise to reinforce topics, for example within personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE).

To take account of the mixed age classes in Key Stages 1 and 2, planning is on a two-yearly cycle. A strong emphasis is given to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, and these areas have an appropriate allocation of time and pupils do well. Science, physical education (PE), computing, and 'topic' ensure that all the required areas of experience for independent schools are covered. The timetable is sensibly organised so that some subjects can be taught in blocks for extended activities. The themed weeks and events contribute well to the broad curriculum. Topics are

carefully chosen, for example to ensure that historical and geographical elements are present over the year and key stages.

Aspects of PSHEE are taught in accordance with the school's aims and ethos through carefully planned assemblies, Islamic studies, science and PE. As part of the planning cycle, further topics are to be included for the coming year, for example ones that extend pupils' knowledge of different families, faiths and cultures. Older pupils can apply their good mathematical knowledge, for example when running the tuck shop, and taking an active part in fund-raising events also helps to develop their economic understanding.

The identification and support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is good. Statemented pupils are well supported and those identified by the school have appropriate individual education plans that are regularly reviewed and parents are fully involved. Teaching assistants provide effective support for individual pupils and small groups, so they make progress. Pupils at an early stage of learning English are also suitably supported. There is some identification of gifted and talented pupils and intervention of extended activities is discussed with parents.

The curriculum is greatly enriched by activities and trips to broaden pupils' experiences. Pupils say they enjoy these very much and older pupils often make a good contribution in helping to arrange these events developing their social skills and sense of responsibility. Resources are good and are well used to support learning. Pupils become proficient in using lap-tops and these are used effectively so pupils make good progress in researching topics. The library is well organised with a wide range of books, both fiction and non-fiction, that are readily accessible to pupils to support and extend their learning. A member of staff maintains it conscientiously.

Teaching is good overall. The principal and assistant heads monitor teaching regularly and provide support and guidance to teachers to assist pupils' progress. In the best lessons, pupils are making good progress in their learning by acquiring new knowledge or by developing and consolidating their skills and deepening their understanding. This is because the teaching is well planned, relationships are good, pupils are given appropriate praise so that they are engaged, enjoy their learning and behave very well. Teachers use resources effectively and the activities are focused on individual pupil's needs. As part of the school's organisation of learning, teachers provide each pupil with a written 'work plan' of activities they are to complete for each session. These provide a good means of matching the tasks to individual pupil's ability so they make progress. Pupils say they enjoy this way of working and they are becoming independent learners, fulfilling one of the school's aims.

Assessment is good; it is frequent and thorough and contributes effectively to pupils' learning. Pupils' progress is thoroughly assessed and the tracking system sheets are analysed carefully to monitor if pupils have met their targets. If this is not the case, effective intervention is put in place. Able pupils are also identified so that appropriate work is provided to extend their learning. Pupils' books show a wide variety of activities and progress across the key stages. Marking is usually well done. Teachers encourage pupils to improve their work with supportive comments. On occasions, however, marking is less detailed.

By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are achieving at or above national expectations in literacy and numeracy national tests. This represents good achievement and prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good with many strengths. Pupils' spiritual development is good with strong features. The Islamic studies curriculum plays a vital role in developing the positive spiritual atmosphere around the school and within the classroom. The co-ordination of Islamic studies is good and staff training contributes to the effective teaching and learning in this aspect of the curriculum. The displays around the school feature aspects of spiritual development. Large displays of Islamic designs adorn the walls and others remind pupils of the beauty of creation and the wonders of the world. The Islamic ethos permeates throughout the whole school with the daily practice of short *duas* before most of the lessons, congregational prayers, and daily reminders of *hadith*. The pupils perform their daily *salah* (prayers) with reverence, enhancing their spirituality and helping them to grow in their faith. The newsletters sent to parents reinforce the spiritual element of the school. For example, pertinent issues relevant to the pupils and their parents are included such as the importance of parental involvement in their children's spiritual education, working as a team, the importance of charity, and the virtues of being patient and kind.

Pupils' moral development is good. It is fostered through assemblies, tutorial times and the Islamic studies curriculum. The focus on morality and development of character is strong throughout the school. The PSHEE lessons are an extension of the weekly assembly. They cover topics such as respect, tolerance, patience, kindness, and being generous. The assemblies and lessons serve to reinforce these values for pupils.

Pupils' social development is good. The school continues to make links with the local community. For example, pupils described the 'chocolate drop' where they gave sweets to neighbours and invited local residents to the school open day. The school has been actively trying to create links with local primary schools but has not yet been successful; they are hopeful that links can be established in the next academic year. The pupils are aware of the importance of charity by giving some of their old toys to a local charity shop, as well as donating to a local food bank located in Streatham, which is used by people of different backgrounds.

Pupils have an increasing sense of modern-day British society, extended by their experience within the school council known as the *shura*. Pupils could explain about the general election likening it to how members of the *shura* are elected. Pupils take responsibility and develop leadership qualities as the *shura* gives them first hand opportunities to see democracy in action. The *shura* is responsible for gathering thoughts and ideas from their peers and acting upon them. Pupils have organised fundraising for those in need in the UK and abroad, and run a tuck shop and a bric-a-brac sale. The members of the *shura* take their position very seriously.

Pupils' cultural development is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The school has embraced the new government guidelines and places an

emphasis on promoting the fundamental British values. The Islamic studies programme has been revised and the curriculum extended with the introduction of religious education. This provides opportunities for the pupils to be taught about the different faiths and to acquire an appreciation of their own culture and respect for other cultures. Pupils have learnt about Christianity and Judaism, although no planned opportunities have yet occurred to meet with others from different faiths. Visits to different places of worship are being planned for the new academic year. In discussion with inspectors, older pupils were clear that they should help their neighbours and be respectful even if they were different from themselves and do not share the same faith. The school has a programme of activities promoting diversity and celebrating different cultures. During a recent 'culture week' pupils said they had learnt a lot about different cultures and had great fun. During a 'public institutions week' each classroom became a different national service including a passport office, a post office, a bank, a court, and the Houses of Parliament. Pupils had opportunity to explore the different services and learnt how each functions and is relevant to their own lives. This enabled pupils to gain insight and respect for these public institutions.

The school is well aware of its responsibility regarding partisan views: all staff contracts state that partisan views are not to be promoted by teachers in any subject, and this is reinforced at staff induction. Similarly, the school has regard to the government's Prevent agenda and recognises that it has a responsibility to protect pupils from extremist views.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school continues to make good provision for its pupils in the areas of welfare, health and safety and meets all but one of the regulations. The school takes its roles of providing a safe and happy environment for its pupils, staff and parents very seriously and has drawn up a set of thorough policies outlining its practices and procedures for all aspects of safeguarding and child protection.

Members of staff are well-informed about protocols and procedures concerning safeguarding and child protection issues during induction sessions and are reminded about these at the beginning of each academic year. All staff members have read at least Part 1 of *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, the statutory guidance issued in March 2015.

Pupils are happy, confident and enthusiastic learners who are keen to contribute in lessons and who enjoy their learning. They say that they feel safe in their school and enjoy coming. Attendance is excellent. Pupils know who to talk to when problems arise and are confident that such matters will be dealt with fairly by their teachers.

The school has a detailed behaviour policy and set of procedures to follow should there be behaviour issues. Behaviour in the school is generally good with pupils responding well to teachers and to each other. Occasionally, however, misbehaviour is not picked up in a few lessons and around the school and dealt with quickly enough by some teachers. These same pupils work well on other occasions when the routines are established and constantly applied. It is in this regard that the

school fails to meet the regulation, which specifies that the behaviour policy must be implemented effectively. The school is aware that on occasions behaviour falls short of the high standards it expects and is taking action.

Since the last inspection the school has relocated to new premises. The school now has very detailed fire risk assessments and health and safety risk assessments.

The school's anti-bullying policy ensures staff, pupils, parents and carers work closely to maintain a community where bullying is not tolerated. Pupils said that they had enjoyed the work they were involved in during the school's anti-bullying week and found it helpful. The school promotes understanding of the principles and practices of equality and aims to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly. There is an anti-discrimination policy which details how the governors and school staff will not discriminate directly or indirectly towards anyone on the grounds of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act, 2010. To further equip teachers on these issues the school has recently purchased a set of resources reflecting positive images of people and families of other races, cultures, different lifestyles, and disabilities, which are to be incorporated into curriculum planning in the coming academic year.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The required staff checks are carried out thoroughly by the administrator and recorded carefully in the single central register; staff files are kept in good order.

Premises of and accommodation at schools

The school is housed in a large, attractive 19th century building. It is situated in a quiet residential road, which overlooks a green. The classrooms are adequate in size for the number of pupils and are well organised. Classrooms and corridors are bright with vibrant displays, which add to pupils' learning. A larger room serves well for a science room and for computing, and incorporates the library. Suitable facilities are available for pupils taken ill while at school. A conscientious member of staff cleans the school very well. The outside play area is well maintained and is suitable for playtimes and for PE lessons. The outdoor area is kept clean and has a wide variety of good quality equipment for the EYFS and lower primary pupils. There is adequate outdoor space for the upper primary. With funds raised, including by the parent association, there are plans to refurbish this area over the summer. Pupils also use the cricket green in front of the school for playtimes and a nearby sports centre for swimming lessons and PE.

Provision of information

The school communicates well with parents and gives them much information in a variety of ways. An informative newsletter is sent to parents monthly; updated information is regularly posted on the notice-board in the entrance hall and the website is excellent in providing detailed information with policies, notices and general updates. Reports are sent out twice a year to all parents, giving a full and detailed picture of their children's progress. Parents receive helpful information about their children's curriculum. Parents meetings are held twice a year and

parents are able to request a meeting with a teacher if they feel it is necessary. The prospectus is well considered and has all the information necessary for parents and prospective parents. Parents are kept well informed about the curriculum and about their children's learning through workshops including on literacy, numeracy and assessment.

All prospective parents are clearly informed about what the school stands for when they apply for a place for their children. The principal gives a talk explaining particulars of the curriculum and what is offered at the school to prospective parents during open days and to all new parents when they join. In the questionnaire that parents completed as part of the inspection, they showed that they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and what it provides for their children. As one parent said 'they provide the best of both worlds together - Islamic and academic.'

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints policy meets the regulations. The only formal complaint received during the last year was investigated according to the policy and resolved.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all but one of the regulations for registration.

In order to meet fully the regulations in **part 3**, welfare, health and safety of pupils, the school must:

- ensure that the behaviour policy is effectively and consistently implemented by all staff (Regulation 9 (b))

The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

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:

- extending the cross-curricular links to reinforce the PSHEE aspects
- continuing with developments for providing pupils with opportunities to meet with others from different faiths and cultures.