

ROME Advice Note to DfES (RAN)

For emergency visits

School: The King Fahad Academy

DfES number: 307/6068

URN: 101957

HMI/AI: Honoree Gordon HMI

Date of visit: 15 February 2007

1. Context of the school

The King Fahad Academy is an Islamic day school for pupils age 5 to 18 funded by the Saudi Arabian government. It is located in North Acton, London. Pupils attending the school come from many different backgrounds and races.

2. Purpose of the visit

This was an unannounced visit conducted by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors; one of whom was a Muslim inspector. The visit was at the request of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), following a complaint. The complaint related to allegedly unsuitable teaching materials and approaches which might contravene the independent school regulations. The complaint referred to textbooks which might be considered to contain racist comments or exercises and which were the subject of publicity in a recent Newsnight television broadcast. The DfES requested that inspectors focus on standard 1 (the quality of education provided in the school) and standard 2 (the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development). Within this overall brief, inspectors were asked specifically to judge whether the school assists pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way which promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (regulation 2(e))

3. Advice to DfES

Inspectors scrutinised a large amount of documentation on the curriculum provided by the school in response to a request from the DfES, together with the covering letter from the school. Documentation included information on curriculum plans, schemes of work and copies of the two textbooks to which the television programme had referred. Inspectors had copies of the previous school inspection report (March 2006), the subsequent action plan submitted to the DfES and a copy of the transcript of the television programme. They looked at further textbooks and reference materials currently in use to support the Islamic Studies teaching programme, which were provided on arrival at the school.

Immediately on arrival in school, inspectors asked to see where books were stored. They examined the book store, which is kept locked, and were informed that apart from this, book resources are kept in individual classrooms and do not go home.

Inspectors held discussions separately with three groups of pupils, boys and girls ranging in age from 13 to 16, a total of thirty pupils, chosen by the inspectors at random. The purpose of these discussions was to check pupils' knowledge, awareness and appreciation of their own and different cultures and to form a view on their attitudes and opinions. Inspectors also wished to obtain pupils' views on the education they were receiving, including the curriculum provided and the extent to which this helps prepare them for their future.

Inspectors conducted a series of interviews with the headteacher and with senior members of staff from the boys' and girls' sections, specifically the deputy headteachers of the two sections, the International baccalaureate (IB) curriculum director and the English as additional language (EAL) co-ordinator. These members of staff, together with the headteacher, oversee how the curriculum is planned, organised and monitored.

As the quality of teaching and assessment had been judged to be satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, inspectors did not consider the quality of teaching in depth. However, inspectors observed two lessons which were considered relevant to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education: social studies and Islamic studies. They also made a brief visit to the reception class to look at the work pupils had done in relation to the Chinese New Year and to listen to part of their social studies lesson.

One inspector looked at the arrangements for the disposal of unwanted books.

Judgements

The school meets all the requirements for standards 1 and 2.

The quality of education (standard 1) is satisfactory, as at the time of the previous inspection. The school meets all the regulations concerning pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (standard 2). This includes specifically regulation 2(e), the focus of the unannounced visit.

Lesson observations, curriculum plans and discussions with pupils indicate that there are good opportunities provided for pupils to learn about their own and other cultures and religions. Pupils have ample opportunity to consider different views and belief systems, express opinions and discuss controversial issues or conflicting viewpoints. They have good knowledge and awareness of their own and other religions and cultures. Pupils express their opinions freely and well, showing good empathy and tolerance of others' views. They show good awareness of topical issues and

knowledge of British institutions. This reflects the school's stated aims and ethos as promoted by the headteacher and staff.

The textbooks referred to in the television programme have all been removed and are no longer available as a teaching resource. Inspectors are satisfied with the school's responses and explanations as to their previous very limited availability and usage. The school and the inspectors agree that these materials are inappropriate for the international curriculum that the school is developing.

The curriculum meets pupils' needs and prepares them for life in the 21st century as international citizens. The headteacher has the freedom to direct the curriculum. She has chosen wisely in phasing out the Saudi-Arabian curriculum and replacing this with an international curriculum. This offers increased opportunities and challenge to pupils and, as it develops further, has the potential to meet their needs well.

Supporting evidence

The curriculum is broad and appropriately balanced between religious study and secular subjects. The move to an international curriculum has been made as the headteacher feels this will deliver better opportunities to develop higher-level thinking skills in pupils and so better meet their needs. There has been a programme of staff development to underpin this since the time of the last inspection. The school has a number of active links with other schools and institutions, both in the UK and in other countries, which foster this international outlook and approach.

The curriculum for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is integrated but delivered principally through timetabled social studies lessons in all years and through the Islamic Studies programme. It is well-planned and meets the regulations. There is some input from other subjects, for example science on evolution and health.

Through their Islamic Studies programme pupils learn a great deal about their own religion and culture. As many pupils were born in England, this is often new knowledge to them. For others, who join the school from the Middle East, the curriculum develops their knowledge of Western society. One pupil summed it up aptly: "We get the whole package here. We get both aspects." As a result, pupils feel that the curriculum serves their needs well and prepares them for life in England or, if they wish, to return to the Middle East.

Pupils say that the many different races and cultures within the school get on well together and that there is no racism. At age 16 many pupils transfer to non-Islamic educational establishments to continue their studies and feel comfortable with this. There is a school uniform, but there is freedom of choice and individual interpretation of the dress code allowed within this. Not all staff are Muslim: Muslim and non-Muslim staff work alongside each other in harmony.

Teachers have considerable freedom to choose their teaching sources and materials, providing they fit the school's ethos. The textbooks with allegedly racist comments had previously been accessible as possible teaching resources amongst the many curriculum resources which teachers could draw on. Older pupils confirm that they have not used these books. Those interviewed state that they would consider them unsuitable, especially for younger pupils. They say that such books do not fit the school's philosophy.

These books have been withdrawn and are to be shredded, along with all other books from the Saudi curriculum. (Inspectors visited the skip with over 2000 books awaiting shredding and saw the supporting paperwork). Current textbooks seen for Islamic Studies meet the requirements of the regulations. The books in the book store are for core subjects of the secular programme and are no longer required. They are due for recycling or will be destroyed. Inspectors were satisfied that the books they saw are not offensive in any way. Inspectors were informed that a local recycling centre is used, but that some books go to other schools. The school does not know which specific schools but says that they are for small local or 'community schools' who have made a request. The school does not send out a general offer of books prior to disposal. Textbooks come from Saudi Arabia once or twice per year and the school has to dispose of books which are surplus to requirements at least annually. Some books are expendable, for example for writing practice or vocabulary building.

(The footnote in the text of one of the two specific books about which concerns had been expressed, was a commentary related to an Old Testament event. It referred to groups who had disobeyed God and does not imply or infer that this is a general comment on these faith groups applicable today. The other book exercise presents a particular standpoint which many religions and faiths hold, namely that those who will be saved in the end will be only the followers of their own religion.)

The school has changed its curriculum to an international curriculum and is phasing out the Saudi-Arabian curriculum. This is nearly complete, with only a small number of older pupils (year11) following this as an option. This programme had been useful to help pupils transferring into and out of the school, for example to re-integrate back into the Middle East. A structured programme for English as a foreign language is replacing this, allowing pupils to build up their command of English rapidly, and so be able to access the full international curriculum. This programme has moved forward considerably since the time of the last inspection. The headteacher confirms that she has the freedom to direct the curriculum and is very clear that this is a modern curriculum which seeks to prepare pupils for life in the 21st century as international citizens. Pupils are ambitious and many move on ultimately to careers in the professions.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the school specify a list of books and resources which it has approved for use by teachers to support the curriculum and that it monitors this closely.

It is further recommended that the code of conduct for pupils is amended to include racist or offensive materials in the list of items which pupils may not bring into school.

The school was open and co-operative with this inspection. The documentation was helpful. Please convey inspectors' thanks.

Indicate in the table below the quality of any lessons seen.

EF no.	Year group	Subject	Teaching	Progress	Curriculum
1	6 (=7 NC)	Social Studies (PSHE)	2	2	2
2	10 (=11)	Islamic Studies	2	2	2
3	R	Social Studies	0	0	0

Indicate in the table below any regulations which are not met.

Regulation no.	What the school must do to meet the regulation