

# Apex 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).

<b>DCSF number:</b>	301/6077
<b>Association:</b>	AMSUK
<b>Date of inspection:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
<b>Lead Inspector:</b>	Mrs Eileen McAndrew
<b>Team inspectors:</b>	Mr Ibrahim Hewitt Miss Julia Morgan
<b>Age range of pupils:</b>	3–11 years
<b>Number on roll:</b>	92
<b>Full-time:</b>	41 boys      51 girls
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:</b>	None
<b>Proprietor:</b>	Apex Trust
<b>Head teacher:</b>	Mrs Anjuman Iftikhar
<b>Address of school:</b>	60-62 Argyle Road Ilford Essex IG1 3BG
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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. A Material Change visit was incorporated into this inspection to assess the suitability of the premises and accommodation at the school's new site.

## **Information about the school**

Apex Primary School is an independent day school for pupils aged between three and eleven years of age. It is situated in a residential district of Ilford in Essex. The school was founded in September 2004 and is registered as a school of special religious character, having a Muslim ethos based on the beliefs and practices of Islam. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were 92 pupils on roll. The school completed the move to its current refurbished premises in May 2009. The school's aim is to provide *'a strong Islamic foundation coupled with a high standard of academic education, a balanced combination that will give pupils the best start in life.'*

## **Evaluation of the school**

Apex School achieves its aim in providing an outstanding Islamic foundation and an ethos within which a good quality academic education flourishes. The beliefs and values of Islam pervade and influence all aspects of the school's life, helping pupils to feel recognised in their faith, secure and valued. The good quality curriculum ensures a varied and interesting learning experience for all pupils. Teaching is consistently good and occasionally outstanding, and as a consequence pupils of all abilities make good progress. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They become effective learners who are highly motivated and keen to learn and make progress. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Pupils' welfare, health and safety are given a high priority and policies and procedures to support their well-being are good. Pupils enjoy school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The governors and staff have worked with dedication and effort to complete the move to the school's new premises, while continuing to develop, monitor and improve the curriculum and teaching. The school has rightly identified pupils' writing and their ability to work independently as areas for further improvement.

The school has made good progress particularly in relation to the curriculum and welfare, health and safety since its last inspection and now meets all but one of the regulatory requirements for the primary school and two for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

## **Quality of education**

The good quality curriculum provides a cohesive structure through which pupils learn very effectively. In the EYFS the curriculum covers all areas of learning as well as introducing pupils to the study of Arabic and of Islam. The primary curriculum provides a broad learning experience which includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum except music, with the addition of Arabic, the Qur'an and Islamic studies. Aspects of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship are included in the curriculum for Islamic studies. The curriculum is profoundly influenced and enriched at all levels by the beliefs and values of Islam.

The planning of the curriculum is a significant strength. The school has clearly mapped its curriculum across all subjects. Long term planning specifies what will be covered in each subject across the year having regard to the programmes of study of the National Curriculum and effectively informed by the National Primary Strategy and other national guidance. This curriculum map provides a secure framework through which to identify what will be taught and learned by all year groups in each term. It allows teachers to look across provision to ensure appropriate coverage in each subject and to check there is no unnecessary repetition or omission. Schemes of work are effectively used so that each level of planning expands and extends the preceding one, building a coherent, progressive learning experience for pupils.

The planning of the curriculum is developed assiduously across the year as teachers make links between elements from a range of subjects, helping pupils to make productive connections between different aspects of their learning. This builds on the good progress secured in the EYFS.

The common format for planning contributes strongly to coherence and consistency. In addition, the school's practice of keeping all planning on-line ensures that teachers are well informed about all aspects of each other's planning. It also enables the senior leadership team and the newly appointed subject leaders to access and monitor planning easily and routinely.

Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority and this strong emphasis contributes to the pupils' good overall progress in English and mathematics. Personal development is strongly fostered through Islamic studies, aspects of PSHE, study of the Qur'an and assemblies, contributing significantly to pupils' outstanding development in this area. Support for pupils who may experience learning difficulties is good, with differentiated provision and opportunities for individual support because numbers in each class are small.

The school places importance on enhancing pupils' education through first-hand learning. Visitors from the local community contribute to pupils' experience and understanding helping them to appreciate how the work of public services, such as the police, affects their everyday lives. Opportunities are planned making good use of the school's location for regular visits to a wide range of London's museums. Visits from other schools give pupils the experience of working alongside children from different cultures on exciting projects, such as the creative writing workshop. Such visits add significantly to pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the work they do in school and increase their appreciation of the wider world.

The quality of teaching is predominantly good and occasionally outstanding, resulting in commensurate progress by pupils. Good quality lesson planning specifies precisely what pupils will learn, the methods and approaches to be used and how tasks will be differentiated to meet the identified needs and abilities of pupils. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach and a high level of professional expertise. They are skilled at asking open-ended questions giving pupils the opportunity to marshal their thoughts, build on their previous learning and respond in ways which expand and consolidate what they know. Teachers listen carefully, giving pupils time to think. They assess what pupils have understood and plan what the next steps should be. In the lessons where teaching is outstanding teachers bring an additional element of creativity and flair which captures pupils' imagination and sustains their engagement and involvement. Pupils are challenged to respond with spontaneity, to think for themselves and to work from their individual knowledge and experience, rather than merely to tackle a task set for them. The outstanding teaching provides a model for dissemination across the school.

Pupils invariably respond well to the tasks they are given in class but these are most often set by the teacher. Similarly, opportunities for them to use their good reading skills to investigate a topic of particular interest and write about it are too infrequent. All pupils, but particularly the more able, do not yet have sufficient opportunities to work independently on a chosen subject, decide how to record their findings and share what they have learned with the class.

Teachers are enthusiastic and encouraging. This enthusiasm is apparent and results in pupils who enjoy school and are able to work with unusually high levels of concentration and motivation. The excellent relationships within classes develop and foster trust and confidence, enabling pupils to believe in the gifts they have been given and their obligation to use them to seek knowledge and understanding. All pupils are suitably challenged by tasks which expect them to recall previous learning, explain their thinking to others or express an opinion. Teachers expect pupils to work hard and they respond wholeheartedly.

The consistent emphasis on speaking and listening contributes significantly to pupils becoming highly articulate and confident speakers. They read with accuracy, understanding and increasing fluency and expression. Pupils have a good understanding of language but their skills in writing lag behind their skills in reading. In some classes there is an overuse of prescriptive worksheets, most notably in science and the humanities. Such resources limit the quality and amount of what pupils write and give teachers too little information about what pupils know and can do in the subject. In English in some classes pupils have opportunities to write extended pieces of work but in the humanities there are few examples of longer factual writing on the topics pupils study. Pupils are lively, enthusiastic learners who take satisfaction from their achievement.

Systems for assessment are good. Marking is regular and focuses on identifying whether or not the learning objective for the work has been achieved. In the best examples, comments on pupils' work make clear to them why their work is good and tells them what they need to do next to improve it further. Target setting is clearly established in core subjects and pupils say it helps them to make progress. Pupils'

progress in reading, writing and mathematics is continuously assessed against the targets set and recorded in the individual pupil's profile. Teachers transfer this information to their planning sheets so they are constantly aware of the levels at which individual pupils are working and can amend and refine planning accordingly. The school has designed a Pupil Progress Tracker which enables the progress of individuals and groups of pupils to be tracked over time and strengths and weaknesses identified. The system is being continually refined and used effectively to inform curriculum planning. The school usefully carries out nationally validated tests each year and the Key Stage 2 results are externally marked.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

The provision made by the school for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The governors and staff are committed to providing the best faith-based education which encourages the development of pupils' Islamic identity, so that pupils are capable and confident of making a full and active contribution as responsible members of British society. The school ethos supports a firm understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. It also encourages self-reflection and sincere advice through the rewards and behaviour policy. Classroom rules reflect the ethos and are adhered to by pupils during lessons and around the school. Regular assemblies effectively reinforce the wider curriculum. A good programme of in-service training for teachers is in place to equip members of the staff with the knowledge and skills to impart an education that matches the aims and objectives of the ethos and the founding trustees.

Children pray together in congregation, in a quiet manner with due respect and consideration for the act of prayer itself and their peers. An example of such respect occurred when one boy recited the Qur'an from memory while waiting for the prayer to begin. The teacher present was very positive and encouraged the rest of the boys to show their appreciation for his recitation; they did so enthusiastically and with sincerity. Pupils start the day and lessons with a *dua* (supplication), which reinforces the role and importance of Islam and faith in the school and, indeed, in the everyday life of a Muslim. Visitors to classrooms are greeted with "*Assalamu Alaikum...*" and most children greet visitors they meet around the school, which is an excellent demonstration of a core value of Islam.

The school's programme of "*Hadith of the Week*" encourages good *adab* and *akhlaq* (manners and behaviour), and this is demonstrated by the behaviour of the pupils around the school and their relationships with each other and their teachers. Cultural and faith practices within the school take the middle ground so as to cater for as many members of the Muslim community as possible. This approach is clearly communicated to parents at the admissions interview stage. An example in practice is that children are advised to pray in the way that their parents pray, acknowledging scholarly differences on this matter.

The behaviour of pupils in class and around the school is outstanding. Relationships between pupils, and between staff and pupils and between members of the staff themselves are excellent. Pupils are very keen to learn and are motivated to do so by the teaching they receive and the positive role-models they have in their teachers. Within the classroom, pupils work in pairs and groups, encouraging social skills. Co-

operation between pupils is evident in the quick and quiet way most class groups move into smaller groups during lessons, with minimum disruption and noise. Displays around the school, in classrooms and communal spaces, reinforce the importance of education from a faith perspective and encourage pupils to aspire for excellence in all that they do. Pupils are well-motivated to learn through the setting of targets, verbal encouragement and being made aware of the importance of education in Islam. The teachers are very positive role models.

PSHE and citizenship topics are included within designated Islamic studies lessons. Visitors from outside institutions and authorities, including police officers and health officials provide the basis for an understanding of the role of public institutions and services in Britain and respect for the rule of law. This is reinforced by excellent resources used in Islamic studies which feature the work of public service and others on whom society depends.

Events such as the end of year whole school presentation, Sports Day, the Annual Fun Trip, competitions, assemblies and class plays, school visits and visitors all contribute to pupils' overall cultural and social development. Pupils are given responsibilities within the classroom and around school which they enjoy and take seriously. School newsletters compiled by classes are distributed to the local neighbours and engaging with local councillors gives pupils a sense of the democratic process and the possibilities for their involvement now and in the future.

The school seeks to reflect in its intake and ethos the diverse nature of the Muslim community it serves. The ethos recognises difference within the community, and in the wider society, and pupils are taught to acknowledge diversity; to respect and tolerate differences and work towards unity. The success of promoting inclusion is evident by the positive relationships pupils have with each other and their teachers, regardless of their different backgrounds and cultures. The school celebrates difference; this engenders respect and tolerance of the views and physical differences of others, including those outside the Muslim community.

The Islamic studies curriculum includes and encourages an appreciation of and respect for different faiths and cultures and pupils are encouraged to build and maintain good relationships while raising awareness about the society within which they live. This is reflected in the way the pupils welcome and interact with visitors from the community and local organisations who visit the school and those they meet outside on school trips. Such occasions provide pupils with the experience of actively engaging with people from different backgrounds.

Pupils are aware of the importance of economic well-being and individual classes raise funds for resources for their own class groups. Pupils are encouraged to develop skills such as skipping, bowling and juggling and to raise funds through sponsorship of activities utilising those skills. These events included the preparation and implementation of advance marketing and advertising. Pupils have also looked beyond the school community and raised funds for local and international charities, including Helping Households under Great Stress (HHUGS) the NSPCC and Muslim Hands. Pupils also planted the first Californian Redwood in the London Borough of Redbridge as part of National Tree Week.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are given a high priority and the school makes good provision to ensure that all its pupils are well cared for and kept safe and healthy.

The school has a clear health and safety policy and a nominated health and safety officer with appropriate training, who is supported by a nominated governor. There are appointed staff to cover first aid, all of whom have received appropriate training approved by the local authority for the full age range. The school has a no tolerance policy on bullying. In conversation with pupils, they report that teachers seek to resolve bullying issues quickly so incidents are rare. The school takes part in an anti-bullying week each year resulting in pupils being well informed.

Child protection policies and procedures are detailed and clear. The child protection officer is an experienced member of the senior leadership team. She has received the appropriate level of training, which has been updated as required. All members of staff receive training as part of their induction into the school and this is regularly updated.

A good level of fire safety equipment and resources was installed as part of the overall refurbishment of the new school building. On moving to its current site the building was fire-risk assessed. All fire-fighting equipment is regularly checked and serviced by a specialist company. Detailed risk assessments are also carried out to ascertain and evaluate potential hazards during educational visits.

The curriculum in Islamic studies gives a continuing emphasis to pupils' awareness of the importance of leading a healthy life. They increasingly understand their responsibility to eat a healthy diet, choosing food which contributes to their physical well-being and conforms to their religious observance. Pupils understand the importance of regular exercise as part of staying healthy.

The school has a very comprehensive system of rewards and encouragements as well as carefully thought-out procedures for correcting and training pupils in good behaviour. This effectively supports the Islamic belief that good deeds compensate for bad deeds. Rewards are in the form of stars, certificates, small prizes, badges and 'golden time' in which classes are given opportunities for practical and creative activities. Pupils are rewarded for individual, group and class effort and achievement. Attendance is good.

The school has prepared a three year plan to meet its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

## **Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school has rigorous and effective policies and procedures relating to the recruitment and employment of staff. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level and other essential checks are systematically carried out. The register which records employment checks complies fully with the regulations.

## **School's premises and accommodation**

The school is accommodated in two large adjacent houses in a residential area. The houses have been effectively adapted and refurbished to a high standard to provide suitable, though not ideal accommodation. The large domestic rooms provide light, well decorated and suitably furnished classrooms, though with limited space for practical activities. The nursery provides good quality accommodation suitable for its purpose, but is not quite large enough for the present numbers. Good use is made of the available space to maximise potential and create interesting and stimulating learning environments, including an information and communication technology (ICT) suite.

The outside play space is currently too small for the numbers of pupils so outside access is severely limited for all but the youngest pupils. The school has planning permission to re-develop the whole of the rear garden area and this work is projected for the summer holiday of this year. This will include a new hall, sheltered perimeter wall and a greatly increased play space. Good use is made of the nearby park for games when the weather permits.

## **Provision of information for parents, carers and others**

The school meets the regulations for the provision of information to parents and others, and the senior leadership team has been made aware of the new requirements from September 2009. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents expressed overwhelming satisfaction with the school, demonstrating support for the ethos and management. The Islamic ethos of the school and its influence on the whole curriculum is set out in the comprehensive school development plan, displayed in a prominent position. This includes matters such as honesty, respect for the law and the beliefs of others. Parents and visitors thus have an open opportunity to study and discuss all aspects of the ethos and curriculum of the school.

The staff ensure that there is a regular flow of information to keep parents up to date with their child's progress, including twice yearly written reports of a good quality. The school's website contributes a useful and informative additional dimension to its communication with parents and the wider community.

## **Procedures for handling complaints**

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements in full.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The provision for the 33 pupils in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. The provision for their personal development is outstanding. During the inspection the EYFS pupils were still settling into their new environment, having just moved from a separate site to the main school building. As mentioned previously in this report, the outdoor space is very limited at present but the school intends to extend the play area imminently, with a separate fenced section for the EYFS boys and girls. The

classrooms are attractively decorated with relevant displays and neatly stored, labelled resources.

Meticulous long, medium and short term planning ensures coverage and balance in all the EYFS areas of learning. The Islamic ethos is an integral part of the curricular planning, for example, a topic on Ourselves includes friendship and family life in Islam. Teaching is good, and occasionally outstanding, motivating pupils and enabling them to make good progress. The staff ensure that activities are well-matched to their pupils' needs and there is a healthy balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities. Skilful questioning in both classes serves to extend pupils' vocabulary and knowledge. The pupils' progress is carefully tracked by observations of their day-to-day activities, noted in their profile and later transferred to electronic assessment records. These are sensibly used to inform future lesson planning. Individual record books are created to show pupils' progress and attainment and helpfully illustrated by photographic evidence. The Nursery staff have appropriate qualifications but the overseas qualifications of one member of staff in the Reception class does not meet requirements.

The school pays careful attention to the welfare, health and safety of all its pupils so that almost all requirements are met. However, there is not enough space in the Nursery classroom to meet the minimum space requirements of EYFS when all pupils are present. The children are carefully supervised throughout the day resulting in well-behaved classes. The boys and girls are actively encouraged to cooperate, to share toys and equipment and to resolve conflict. The 'hands up' rule is reinforced resulting in an ordered and respectful atmosphere. The school development plan has identified valuable character qualities for each year group. The Nursery class is working towards developing generosity, selflessness, greeting others and *dawah* (inviting each other to perform good deeds). The Reception class is seeking to develop cultural awareness by encouraging the pupils to recognise and respect other people's differing views and beliefs.

The provision is well led and managed by the teacher who has responsibility for Key Stage 1 as well as for EYFS. The EYFS teachers have created a useful booklet for new parents to help them to understand the procedures, especially the importance of providing pupils with healthy lunch boxes. Information from parents is carefully gathered and well used as pupils start school. Members of staff in both the Nursery and Reception work very effectively together, sharing a common understanding of the needs of the pupils.

### **Compliance with the regulations**

The school meets all but one of the regulations for registration and all the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

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

- provide appropriate arrangements for outside space for all pupils to play safely (Regulation 5 (t)).

In order to meet fully the welfare requirements of the EYFS the school must:

- ensure that there is a minimum of 2.3 square metres of space per pupil in both EYFS classrooms
- ensure that at least half the staff in the EYFS have relevant qualifications at NVQ Level 2 or above.

### **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:

- ensuring that pupils use their good skills in reading to work more independently, investigating and researching topics for themselves
- planning more opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces of work
- disseminating across the school the creative and innovative strategies used in the outstanding lessons.