



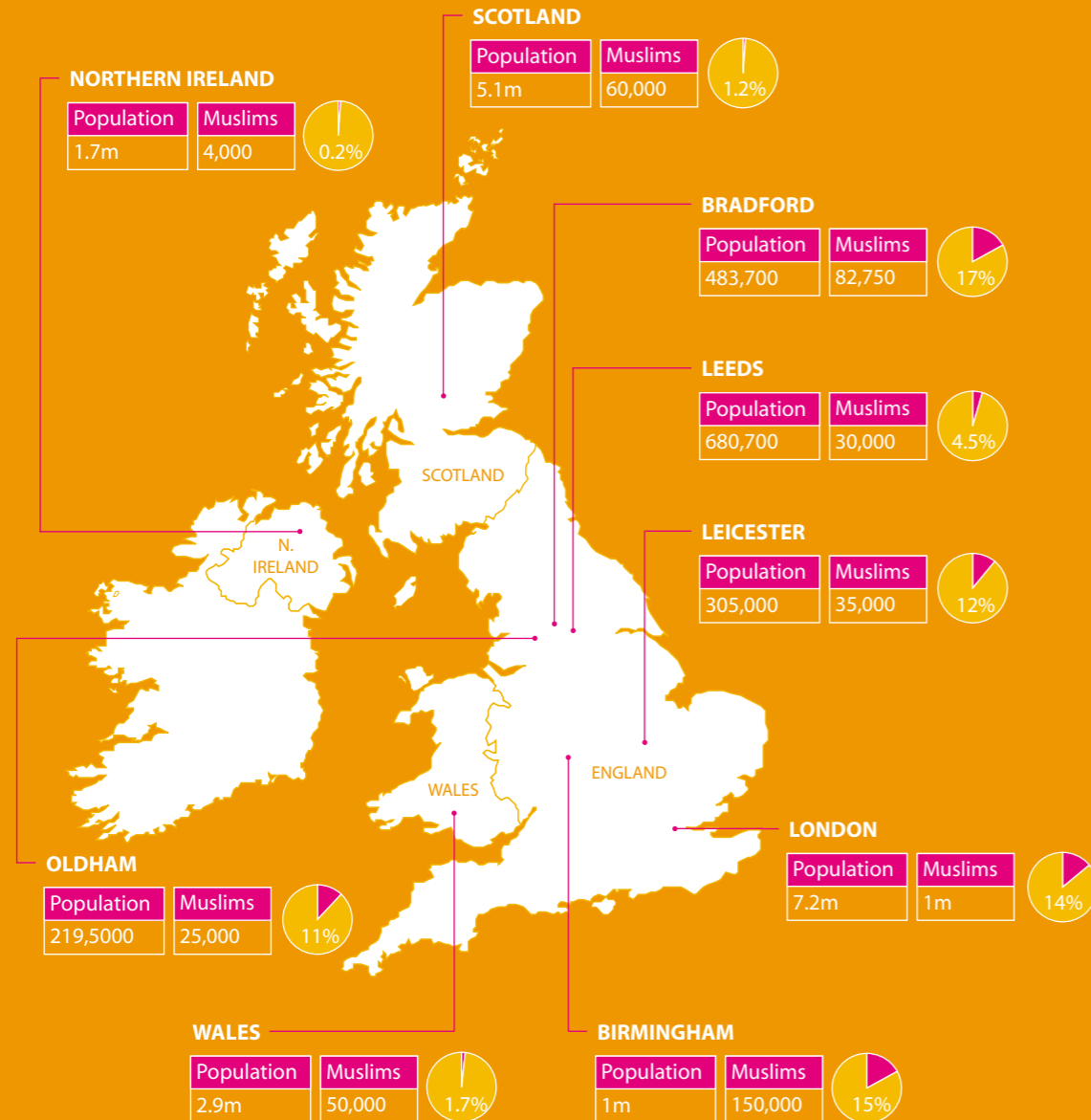
MUSLIM WELFARE HOUSE TRUST
233 SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, LONDON N4 2DA

Understanding the Educational Needs of Muslim Pupils

*Guidance for Schools, Teachers & Local
Education Authorities*

Main populations of Muslims in Britain

Source: Adapted from *The Guardian*, 17th June 2002



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Muslim Welfare House Trust, 233 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DA

Tel: 020 7263 3071, Fax: 020 7281 2687

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Foreword

1

In today's educational landscape, national statistics indicate that academically, Muslim children are underachieving. Ethnicity data show that Muslims, as a minority in the UK, are one of the most deprived segment of society – whether its education, employment, housing, healthcare, as well as access to justice.

Providing good education is our opportunity and duty to change these statistics – and groom all our children to become educated, responsible citizens and future leaders of UK society.

This is a long-term process, with many challenges.

Islam is the second largest religion practised in the UK after Christianity, with almost two million Muslims living in the UK. It has many theological and historical similarities with Christianity and Judaism. Despite these similarities and the contact with Muslims over hundreds of years, recent political events, misunderstanding of the religion and general ignorance of Islamic practices and Muslim communities, has brought about a perception that Islam is something alien and frightening.

In light of increasing misunderstanding, prejudice and Islamophobia in our society the identity of British Muslim community is put to question. Muslims are occasionally called to choose between the state and their religion, without seeing them as an inclusive part of the broader society. This type of insinuation and prejudice has a negative impact on the young people that are growing up in our communities and may also be creating more problems towards community integration.

With the cooperation of Muslim communities and educational bodies, and the support of faith groups and the community based educational organisations, we can create an environment where all children feel valued, and are given equal opportunities to develop academically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

This heavy responsibility to develop a cohesive future generation can be achieved through commitment to change, mutual respect and understanding of each others' diversity.

I hope this booklet will serve as a contribution towards providing teachers, local education authorities and schools with a basic guide on how to effectively reach out to Muslim pupils.

Fadi Itani

Executive Director
Muslim Welfare House
November 2004

Introduction

2

In the UK the percentage of British Muslim youth population under the age of 15 is proportionally higher than any other faith group [11]. They come from many different racial and cultural backgrounds. Despite their wide ethnic diversity, their identity as Muslims enables them to share many common values that influence their life style.

Back in 1997 the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia recognised many aspects of disadvantages faced by the Muslim community. One of the areas it identified was in education where the low attainment amongst certain Muslim groups was putting them at a considerable disadvantage when trying to access higher education or the labour market. An updated report in 2004 continues to highlight these disadvantages. One of the recommendations made by the Runnymede Trust was that local education authorities should work with schools to develop guidelines on the issues concerning Muslims. The areas that needed to be addressed by these guidelines included: religious education, school dress code, school meals, collective worship, fasting periods, religious holidays, Friday prayers, single-sex groupings, contact with parents, contact with mosques and mosque-based supplementary classes, showering arrangements and physical education dress [1].

The aim of this booklet is to provide basic information on the Muslim community living in the UK, their main beliefs and practices that may need to be considered in the educational environment. The booklet focuses on some of the frequent issues encountered by Muslim parents, community members, and teachers. Note, this booklet does not provide a standard comprehensive guidance on all Islamic issues that teachers and schools may encounter.

We hope this information will be a useful guide for teachers, local education authorities, and other educational professionals who are trying their best to meet the needs of Muslim children but may be unaware of some of the basic Islamic practices. We also hope this guide can enhance the level of co-operation between teachers and Muslim pupils and their families.

Muslim Roots in Britain

3

The United Kingdom has close to two million Muslims, representing one of the most diverse, multi-ethnic Muslim communities in the world. Although Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims form a large proportion of this population there are significant populations from European Balkan states, India, Malaysia, Turkey, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, the Caribbean, North African countries, Middle Eastern countries as well as a growing number of native Muslim converts.

Britain has a long history of contact with the Muslim world dating back for over a millennium. The examples below provide some glimpses to these early contacts.

- ❖ *Offa of Mercia (died 769), who was a powerful Anglo-Saxon King, had coins minted with Arabic inscriptions. The Ballycottin Cross, dated back to the 9th century, found on the Southern coast of Ireland also bears a Kufic Arabic script 'Bismillah' (In the name of Allah)*

- ❖ *It is generally accepted that the first Englishman known for certain to have been a scholar of Arabic was Henry II's tutor, Adelard of Bath (c. 1125) who travelled in Syria and Muslim Spain and translated a number of Arabic texts into Latin.*
- ❖ *The first translation of the Qur'an into Latin, which at that time was the common language of Europe, was made by an Englishman, Robert of Ketton, in 1143. He was in Toledo, Spain, translating scientific documents from Arabic, when the Bishop of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, commissioned him to do the translation. The first English translation was made much later, in 1649, by Alexander Ross, from a French translation by André du Ryer.*
- ❖ *By the time Chaucer was writing, around the 1380s, Muslim scholarship was well known amongst the learned. Later a chair of Arabic at Oxford University was established in 1636. Muslim intellectual pioneers came to be known by their Anglicised names 'Alfarabi, Algazel, Abensina, Abenrusd, Abulfeda, Abdiphaker, Almanzor, Alhazen'.*
- ❖ *Oriental historians such as Phillip K. Hitti in his book called the Short History of Arabs written in 1950 stated, 'For centuries Arabic was the language of learning, culture, and intellectual progress for the whole of the civilised world. From the 8th to 13th century there were more philosophical, medical, historical, religious, astronomical and geographical works written in Arabic than any other human tongue.' Hitti's contemporary, H. A. R Gibb, also makes similar remarks in his work, Modern Trend in Islam, published in 1949 and recognizes the contribution of Muslims in introducing scientific methodologies that enabled European growth and renaissance.*

The next phase of deep-rooted interaction that was one of the main precursors to the entry of Muslims into the British Isles occurred during the British colonial expansion into Muslim territories. The presence of Muslim communities in the UK can be traced back over 300 years to the sailors from the Indian sub-continent, some of whom were employed by the British East India Company. More Muslims arrived following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the subsequent recruitment of sailors from Yemen into the merchant navy. Consequently, the initial Muslim communities developed in port cities such as London, Cardiff, Liverpool, Hull and South Shields, the oldest of which is the Yemeni community [2]. By the 1890s a map of the British Empire would include Nigeria, Egypt, India and Malaya, all large territories with significant Muslim populations. These lands provided the manpower and material resources that contributed to the prosperity of Victorian and Edwardian England.

Substantial growth of the communities began from the 1950s onwards as a part of a wider post-war migration, followed by the economic migration of the 1960's and 1970's, and the more recent Muslims have arrived as refugees seeking asylum. [3, 4]

3.1 Current Demographic Context

According to the 2001 Census, the Muslim population forms the second largest faith group in the UK with a population edging towards two million. British Muslims can be found in all strata of life ranging from civil servants, doctors, and engineers to bus and train drivers. Also recent research suggests that there are over 5,000 Muslim entrepreneurs who are managing multi-million pound businesses that are contributing to the economic infrastructure in Britain [5]

Religious Affiliation	Value	Percentage
Christians	42,079,000	71.6
Muslims	1,591,000	2.7
Hindus	559,000	1
Sikhs	336,000	0.6
Jews	267,000	0.5
Buddhist	152,000	0.3
Other	179,000	0.3
No Religion	9,104,000	15.5
Not Stated	4,289,000	7.3

*Census 2001 figures for religious affiliation in UK
All the census data mentioned is crown copyright and can be found on www.statistics.gov.uk.*

The majority of Muslims living in the UK reside in London contributing to approximately 10% of London's 7.2 million people. The regions outside London that also have significant Muslim populations include Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and Kirklees. There are also sizeable concentrations of Muslims living in parts of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The vast majority of Muslims in Britain are citizens of the UK, especially the young, many of whom have been born in this country. However, there is still a perception in the wider community that Muslims are outsiders. No doubt the Gulf Wars, atrocities of 9/11 and the subsequent, continuous, media misrepresentations are contributing to this perception. A poll carried out by the Guardian newspaper in 2002 indicated that 69% of Muslims felt that the rest of society does not regard them as an integral part of life in Britain [6].

There is also official acknowledgement that Muslims often experience discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes as a consequence of their identity as Muslims. This evidence is highlighted by several studies including:

- *The Runnymede Trust Report in 1997 – 'Islamophobia a challenge for us all'*
- *Home Office report – 'Religious Discrimination in England and Wales (2001)'*

The reports indicate that the areas where the greatest degree of discrimination is likely to be encountered are in education, employment and media.

Ethnicity data provides very clear statistics for Pakistanis and Bangladeshi Muslim communities who are suffering deprivation in all aspects of life: education, employment, housing, healthcare, and access to justice.

- *In education, only 29% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils gained five or more GCSE grades A-C, far lower than the national average of 49% [7].*
- *Four fifths of Pakistanis and Bangladeshi households have incomes that are below the national average compared to two-fifths for other ethnic minority households [8]*

- *Figures in housing also show that one-third of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis live in unfit properties in the private sector compared to 13% of black Caribbean and 6% of white households. And more than half of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are in the 10% most-deprived wards in England [8]*

Analysis of Census 2001 data has shown that 33.8% of the Muslim population is between the ages of 0-15 years and nearly 50% of the population is below the age of 24 years. With such a high proportion of Muslim youth, the education system can play a vital role in facilitating their cohesion within the wider community and thereby prevent, or at least begin the process of tackling some of the problems, of marginalisation. One of the ways this can be achieved is through a greater understanding of the cultural backgrounds of these students. This can enable education providers to be in a better position to develop tools and methodologies to maximise the achievements of the pupils under their care.

Introduction to Islam

4

The root meaning of the word Islam comes from Silm and Salam, meaning peace. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. The word Salam is also used by Muslims to greet one another. One of the attributes of Allah (God) is that He is the Peace. Muslims believe that peace can be achieved within oneself, with other people, and the environment by total submission to the Creator of the Universe - Allah.

4.1 Belief

The basis of Islamic doctrine is the belief in the Oneness and Uniqueness of God. From the Islamic view, the attributes of God are those of one Who is above any form of limitations, such as having a beginning or an end, begetting or being begotten, or needing food and rest; for He is the one who gives dimensions, limitations and attributes to His creatures.

The Qur'an, sacred scripture of Muslims, narrates the attributes of God, it says:

'Say, 'He is God the One, God the eternal. He fathered no one nor was He fathered. No one is comparable to Him. (Chapter 112:1-4)

'God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous.' Chapter 2:255

Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, prefer to use the Arabic word 'Allah' to refer to God; because the word Allah does not contain any plural, masculine or feminine connotations.

Crucial to the Islamic belief is also the acceptance of prophets, those of the Hebrew Bible such as Abraham and Moses, and of the New Testament, Jesus and John the Baptist, culminating in the final Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). Muslims consider that each one of the prophets was a human being, with human needs and feelings; Islam most emphatically denies any suggestions of the divinity or super-human nature of God's prophets. At the same time it recognises, these prophets were men with special qualities whom God singled out from rest of humanity to convey His guidance. God permitted some of them (e.g. Moses, Jesus) to perform miracles as His signs.

Muslims believe in angels, in books of revelation (Torah, Bible, Psalms), in the Day of Judgement, life after death, in God's Will, and in Heaven and Hell.

Muslims regard the Christians and Jews as the 'People of the Book', nations who received, through prophets, revelations in the form of the Torah, Psalms and the Gospel. The Qur'an which was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, through the Angel Gabriel, is considered to be the final revelation and guidance to mankind which served the purpose of correcting errors introduced into other scriptures and belief system. The Qur'an states:

'Say, we believe in God, and that which was revealed unto us, and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord; We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered' (Chapter 3.84)

4.2 Qur'an

The Qur'an is the sacred Book for Muslims who regard it as the very word of God, Almighty; a complete record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammad.

The Qur'an was memorized by Mohammad and his followers, dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during the Prophet Mohammed's lifetime. Not one word of its 114 surahs (chapters) has been changed over the centuries. The Qur'an is in every detail the same unique text that was revealed to Mohammad fourteen centuries ago.

The Qur'an is the principal source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all subjects that concern us as human beings, including wisdom, doctrine, worship and law; but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time, the Qur'an provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and equitable economic principles.

4.3 The Sunnah

The Sunnah is the example of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). It is recorded in books of Ahadith (sing. Hadith), which are collections of his sayings and actions, and the actions approved by him. It articulates how to put the guidance of the Qur'an into practice.

4.4 The 'Five Pillars' of Islam are the foundation of Muslim life

The value system of an Islamic life is built upon five broad principles, often referred to as the 'five pillars' of Islam.

4.4.1 Declaration of Faith (Shahadah)

La ilaha illa Llah, Mohammadun rasool Allah - 'There is no deity except God and Mohammad is the messenger of God.' This declaration of faith is called the Shahadah, a simple statement that, when sincerely uttered, brings one into the fold of Islam. From this expression of belief in the Oneness of God and the messengership of Mohammed gives rise to all of Islam's concepts, attitudes, moral values, and guidelines for human behaviour and relationships.

4.4.2 Prayer (Salah)

Prayer is the central practice that shapes the daily routine and consciousness of a Muslim. Salah is the name for the obligatory prayers that are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. There is no hierarchical authority in Islam and there are no clergy. Prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Qur'an and is generally chosen by the congregation.

Prayer prepares Muslims to work towards developing self discipline, steadfastness, and obedience to God, all of which lead to patience, honesty and truthfulness in the affairs of life.

Prayers are said before sunrise, after mid-day, at late-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, so determining the rhythm of the entire day. These five prescribed prayers are made by reciting verses from the Qur'an (said in Arabic) and involve bodily movements consisting of standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting. This cycle (rak'at) is repeated a specified number of times in each prayer.

Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, or at least in a group, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere that is clean and safe, such as any open spaces, office, factories, schools and universities.

4.4.3 Zakah - financial obligation to help the needy

An important principle of Islam is that everything belongs to God, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word zakah means both 'purification' and 'growth.'. Zakah expresses a Muslim's thanksgiving to God by supporting the poor.

Each Muslim calculates his or her own zakah individually. This involves the annual payment of 2.5% on cash or capital that has been held for at least 12 months and is beyond one's immediate need. Zakah is considered an act of worship and it can only be used to help the poor and needy, the disabled, debtors, and other specific designated groups.

An individual may also give as much as he or she pleases as sadaqah. Although this word can be translated as 'voluntary charity' it has a wider meaning. The Prophet Mohammed said, 'Even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is an act of charity.' The Prophet also said: 'Charity is a necessity for every Muslim.' He was asked: 'What if a person has nothing?' The Prophet replied: 'He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity.' The Companions of the Prophet asked: 'What if he is not able to work?'

The Prophet said: 'He should help the poor and needy.' The Companions further asked: 'What if he cannot do even that?' The Prophet said: 'He should urge others to do good.' The Companions said: 'What if he lacks that also?' The Prophet said: 'He should check himself from doing evil. That is also an act of charity.'

4.4.4 Ramadan (Sawm)

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and it is the month on which the first revelation of the Qur'an was made to Prophet Mohammed.

In the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations with their spouses. In addition there is an extra prayer called taraweeh, which is observed either in congregation or individually at night.

Fasting is an opportunity for Muslims to increase their level of discipline, steadfastness and resilience. It trains them to be flexible and adaptable in habits, not to take God's bounties for granted and to feel empathy towards the poor and be active in compassion and charity towards them.

Although fasting is beneficial to health, it is mainly a method of self-purification and self-restraint. By cutting oneself from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person focuses on his or her purpose in life by constantly being aware of the presence of God. It is stated in the Qur'an:

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may learn God-consciousness / awareness of God.' (Chapter 2:183)

Those who are sick, elderly or on a journey, and women who are menstruating, pregnant or nursing, are permitted to break the fast and make up an equal number of days later in the year if they are healthy and able. Children begin to fast (and to observe prayers) from puberty, although many start earlier.

The end of Ramadan is celebrated by a festival called Eid-ul-Fitr.

4.4.5 Hajj (Pilgrimage)

The pilgrimage to Makkah (the Hajj) is an obligation to be performed at least once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to do so. Every year over two million people go to Makkah, in Saudi Arabia, from every corner of the globe, providing a unique opportunity for those of different nations to meet one another.

The annual Hajj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year (which is lunar, not solar, so that Hajj and Ramadan fall sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter). Pilgrims wear special clothes: simple garments that strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before God. Hajj is a festival of diversity and unity: people coming from different countries, different ethnicities, languages, colours, but all united in simple clothing, in their brotherhood and in their purpose of seeking God's mercy and forgiveness.

The rites of the Hajj, which are of Abrahamic origin, include going around the Ka'bah seven times, and going seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa as did Hagar (Abraham's wife) during her search for water. The pilgrims later stand together on the wide plains of 'Arafat (a large expanse of desert outside Makkah) and join in prayer for God's forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Day of Judgment.

The close of the Hajj is marked by a festival, the Eid-ul-Adha, which is the second of the two major festivals in Islam.

Developing a Positive School Culture

5

An extensive study assessing the needs and barriers to achievements of mixed heritage pupils, carried out in 2004 by the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship at Bristol University, identified certain strategies adopted by schools that made all their pupils, including those from minority backgrounds, perform well [9]. These features or strategies created a positive culture within the school environment, which contributed to making the students feel valued, reduced marginalisation, and increased their achievements. Adopting these strategies can also make Muslim students feel part of an inclusive school environment, reduce bullying, tackle attitudes of Islamophobia and underachievement among pupils. Some of the key characteristics of these schools have been outlined below.

- 1 *An emphasis on common values of respect and tolerance.*
- 2 *Senior teachers often talked about their school in terms of a family or a community.*
- 3 *High expectations of all pupils are perceived to be acted on in practice.*
- 4 *Senior management and staff place a great value on minority ethnic achievement.*
- 5 *Effective systems in place for recording racist incidents and bullying and for responding to these.*
- 6 *As a consequence of the above, pupils felt 'safe' and able to focus on their learning.*
- 7 *High levels of communication and openness between the staff and the senior management in sharing information.*
- 8 *Visible presence of minority ethnic staff, mentors and members of the local community in schools.*
- 9 *A culture of openness and trust between teachers and pupils based on teachers valuing and listening to pupils' problems.*
- 10 *Diversity is highly valued and reflected in the curriculum, in wall displays, in assemblies etc.*
- 11 *The head teacher and the senior management team adopting and investing a lot of time in meeting with parents and getting to know the specific issues relating to each child's learning and encouraging other teachers to do the same.*
- 12 *Working with local community associations to identify and overcome specific problems and issues, for example, related to the behaviour of pupils.*
- 13 *Initiatives to get more minority ethnic governors.*
- 14 *Schools are eager to pilot new initiatives such as Aiming High or similar strategies to raise the achievement of minority ethnic groups.*

- 15 The schools were committed to continuous staff development as a means to understand and develop effective strategies to raise the achievement of mixed and 'mono' heritage groups.
- 16 Schools are open to the ideas and views of parents and to providing learning opportunities for parents to assist in meeting the educational needs of their children.

Involving Muslim Parents

6

The importance of parental involvement is widely recognised for raising achievements of all pupils. Parents can play an important role in ensuring attendance and good behaviour of their children and providing them support with their school work. Detailed below are some strategies that schools can adopt for involving Muslim parents in the school life.

- ❖ *Develop a relationship with local mosques or Islamic community centres to understand issues concerning the local Muslim population. This would raise the profile of the school among people of these centres many of whom may be parents of children attending the local school.*
- ❖ *Assess whether a joint project can be developed with local mosques or Islamic community centres in areas of providing supplementary classes, developing mentoring schemes, holding assemblies, identifying potential school governors, and celebrating important festivals.*
- ❖ *In schools with large numbers of Muslim pupils, a teacher with a special responsibility for Islamic understanding can be appointed to liaise with the Muslim families. The person appointed should have a good understanding of the cultural backgrounds of these families and be able to relate to them.*
- ❖ *Arrange meetings with Muslim parents to explain how the school curriculum works so that they can offer support to their children. Arrange for translators to be present at such meetings and let the parents know that there will be some one that can help with language barriers. Likewise, have translators available for regular parents' evenings. During these meetings the school should try and address some basic needs of Muslim parents, for example setting a room aside for prayer facilities. All this will give a positive image to parents and make them feel their involvement is valued.*
- ❖ *It is important that Head teachers and senior management adopt an attitude that positively encourages other teachers to be aware and sensitive to the needs of the Muslim children in the school. This can be achieved through organising a cultural awareness program for the teachers.*
- ❖ *Develop a Muslim parent support group to discuss issues relating to the achievements and educational needs of the pupils. Allow this support group to organise activities for other Muslim parents in the school.*

Finally it would be useful if teachers were aware of some cultural etiquette when meeting Muslim parents.

- ❖ *Fathers and mothers of Muslim pupils may not share the same surname. A pupil's mother may retain her maiden surname as is customary among Islamic cultures.*
- ❖ *Please note, it is better when asking a pupil for their name, ask them for their first name, rather than their Christian name.*
- ❖ *Some Muslim parents may not shake hands with (or even look directly at) a member of the opposite sex. So teachers should not feel offended if a pupil's mother does not shake hands with a male teacher or vice versa. From an Islamic perspective this is a way of showing respect between male and female.*

Issues Around Curriculum

7

In general Muslim students are encouraged to learn a variety of subjects and their faith obliges them to try their utmost in achieving excellence. However teachers should be aware that there is a different approach or attitude that exists in the Muslim community regarding teaching of certain subjects. These sensitivities may vary between families but the subjects they are likely to reside in are aspects of sex education, collective worship, art, music, dance and school plays/drama.

7.1 Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)

Section 46 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 requires that:

'The local education authority by whom any county, voluntary, or special school is maintained, and the governing body and head teacher of the school, shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where sex education is given to any registered pupils at the school it is given in such a manner as to encourage those pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life.'

The concern Muslim parents have in this area is not whether there should be sex education, but rather they fear the methodology and content used in teaching the subject. As with other Abrahamic faiths, Islam considers marriage as the only channel for experiencing a sexual relationship. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is not acceptable in Islam.

Sex education is a topic that often raises issues with many parents, and teachers should encourage parents to discuss the programme with them so that they understand what is being taught to their children and how. They should be shown samples of the textbooks, videos and other materials to be used. Muslim parents would prefer that teaching of this subject should be performed by male teachers for boys and female teachers for girls.

If there is a large number of Muslim pupils in the school then teachers or school governors should seek advice from local Imams or Islamic centres on the best way to approach the teaching of SRE – see contact details at the back.



DfEE circular 0116/2000 (para 1.7, page 8) – talks about taking into account parental, teacher, and religious sensitivities:

'The teaching of some aspects of sex and relationship education might be of concern to teachers and parents. Sensitive issues should be covered by the school's policy and in consultation with parents. Schools of a particular religious ethos may choose to reflect that in their sex and relationship education policy'....

If parents request to withdraw their children from sex education classes' teachers should respect their wishes and co-operate with the parents in providing alternative work.

Education Act 1996 (section 405) – exemption from sex education:

'If the parent of any pupil in attendance at a maintained school requests that he may be wholly or partly excused from receiving sex education at the school, the pupil shall, except so far as such education is compromised in the National Curriculum, be so excused accordingly until the request is withdrawn.'



 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual education • Abstinence until marriage • Discussing teenage pregnancies and repercussions • STD's, HIV, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being able to withdraw children from SRE classes • Children getting confused between their religious values and school SRE classes • Although the subject of sex education is approached in a non-religious manner, however it would be useful for teachers to know that Islam prohibits pre-marital sex, extra-marital and same sex relationships.

7.2 Art

In Islamic cultures the decorative arts provide the primary means of artistic expression, in contrast to Western art, where painting and sculpture dominates. Decorative manuscripts, woven textiles and carpets, inlaid metalwork, blown glass, glazed ceramics and carved wood and stone all absorbed the creative energies of artists, becoming highly developed art forms

Calligraphy is probably most important and popular element in Islamic art. It has always been considered the noblest form of art because of its association with the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, which is written in Arabic.

Creation of figurative images is traditionally understood by Muslims to be outside the teachings of the Qur'an and wholly excluded from decoration of religious monuments. This is primarily due to the Islamic stance against any form of idolatry. However, art from the Muslim world does include figurative miniature paintings from Persia, India and Turkey and Egypt.



 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calligraphy • Textile Arts • Ceramic glass • Metal/Wood Work • Landscape drawings and paintings • Architecture • Geometric shapes • Photography • Mosaic art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing images in the form of sculptures specifically humans and animals, especially three-dimensional images.

7.3 Music

There is a diverse set of opinions regarding music in the Muslim world. This is dictated by local cultures and level of understanding and adherence to their beliefs. Traditionally, Islamic music is limited to the human voice and percussion (drum). But within these constraints, Muslim artists have been both modern and creative. Relying on the beauty and harmony of their voices, Muslims use music to remember God, nature, justice, morality and history. Traditionally this type of music is called 'Nasheed' and Muslims have been singing them over the centuries especially during celebrations of weddings and festive times. Recently nasheeds have been developed by western Muslim artists to be an alternative to the modern music, and have since grown in popularity amongst Muslims living in the West.

Some Muslims are very reserved in their attitude towards music and may avoid music altogether, not wishing their children to participate in school music lessons. In general any type of music that arouses lust, seduction, unrestricted mixing, and consumption of any form of intoxicants or containing unethical and non-Islamic lyrics is prohibited.



For these reasons some Muslim parents may show concern with the way music is taught in school and the extent to which their children may participate.

 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasheeds – Islamic songs • Playing of drums or non-wind / string based instruments • Using the human voice to create melody and harmony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of string and wind instruments • Use of lyrics that contradicts Islamic principles e.g Nativity Songs

7.4 Dance

Muslim parents and children will usually have no problems when dancing is being performed as a form of exercise, for example aerobics, within a single sex-group environment and wearing modest clothing (see clothing requirements). Some Muslims may also accept folk and cultural dances taught to single-sex groups, however parents of older pupils may prefer their children to have an alternative sport activity.

The more expressive forms of dance such as ballet, jazz, tango, and disco dancing are likely to be unacceptable to most parents and pupils if they are performed in a mixed environment. This is more of an issue amongst secondary aged pupils.



 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dancing in single-sex environments</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dancing in mixed gender environment; this is usually an issue for older children in secondary schools.</i>

7.5 Drama

In principle, dramas, plays and artistic works are acceptable for educational purposes.

However reservations may be shown in participating in theatrical plays or acting that involves physical contact between males and females, encouragement of role swapping (girls dressing as boys and vice-versa) or performing in a manner that may lead to stirring of sexual instincts.

This subject usually causes more concern at primary school level since drama is often used as an education tool to develop social and verbal skills. Parents are likely to show reservations if their child is cast in Christmas plays, or asked to act as gods or prophets. Teachers should not be offended if a parent requests that their child should not take part in this type of dramatisation since it clashes with some basic Islamic principles.

 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Educational plays</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking part in Christmas plays or any form of dramatisation that contradicts Islamic principles.</i>

School Outings

8

8.1 Day Trips

Class outings for educational purposes should not generally pose any problems as long as the parents are made aware of the objectives and purpose of the trip.



Muslim students are allowed to take part in educational visits to other places of worship, e.g. churches, synagogues, temples. More conservative parents may object to this, but if they are made aware of the objectives and the purpose of the trip, this should be sufficient to satisfy them.

For students at secondary school, it is advisable not to organise class outings during a Friday, since this will prevent attendance at the weekly congregational Friday prayers. Attendance of the Friday congregational prayer is mandatory for boys.

8.2 Residential Trips

Overnight stay trips should not pose many problems if they are organised within the following framework:

- *A detailed explanation of the objectives behind the trips and its format*
- *Availability of segregated washing and sleeping facilities for boys and girls*
- *Availability of halal food or vegetarian or seafood alternatives*
- *Facility to offer prayer in a clean environment*
- *Availability of a compass to work out direction of Qiblah – prayer direction*
- *Adult supervision*
- *Teachers should be aware that taking part in discos during residential trips is not acceptable to parents.*

 Acceptable Areas	 Parental Concerns/Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Educational outings</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Place of outing, e.g. Parents may not allow children to go on outings to a brewery.</i> • <i>Availability of halal food</i> • <i>Space and time for prayer</i>

Dress requirements

9

9.1 Principle of Islamic Dress Code

The Islamic point of view on clothing has two simple objectives: to cover the body and to dignify the appearance. The Qur'an states 'O children of Adam, verily We have bestowed upon you clothing to cover your shame as well as to be an adornment to you ...' (7:26). Therefore Muslims are required to adhere to Islamic dress codes from the time they reach puberty, dress decently, maintain their dignity and act modestly.

Islamic dress for both sexes should be modest and neither transparent nor tight fitting such that it accentuates the body shape. In practice this means that a variety of styles can be worn. Boys need to cover the area between the navel and knee, while girls are required to cover their body, revealing their hands and faces in public (hijab). Naturally the local traditions and customs of the people also influence the dress code and can vary from one culture to another.

9.2 School Uniform

Provided that Muslim girls are allowed to wear long, loose versions of a school skirt or trousers with long-sleeved shirt, as well as a headscarf (hijab) to cover their hair, they can comply with school uniform without a problem. The school has a right to expect that Muslim parents provide their children with suitable clothing for the climate and to ensure that any headscarves worn by their daughters can be safely tied for work in science laboratories, domestic science or CDT workshops.

9.3 Sportswear

Most schools also have a uniform for sports, consisting of either a tracksuit or shorts and vest, with girls sometimes having to wear short tennis or netball style skirts. The most suitable sportswear for Muslim boys and girls is a tracksuit which, when used for games, physical education or team sports, respects the idea of Islamic modesty.

9.4 Sporting facilities

An area of concern regarding sports facilities is the practice of undressing or being naked in front of other children. Islam does not allow being naked in public settings. Therefore the practice of communal showering is something that many Muslim children would be resistant towards. In the absence of individual shower cubicles, Muslim children should be allowed to wash themselves by other means or be allowed to shower when they get home.

For Muslim pupils in mixed schools, certain classes will need to be segregated. Activities such as swimming lessons, especially for secondary age pupils, should not be taken in mixed-sex groups, and girls must be taught by female instructors and boys by males at single-sex sessions in the pool. Swimwear for both sexes should comply with Islamic modesty. Many swimming pools now allow girls to wear full leotards and leggings in the pool. Provided these guidelines are adhered to, there should be no reason why Muslim children should be withdrawn from swimming lessons.

Sensitivity and understanding by school staff in these matters will be much appreciated by parents and Muslim children.



Acceptable Areas

- Pupils allowed to wear tracksuit for P.E.
- Girls: Being able to wear hijab, within the bounds of school uniform
- Girls: Being able to wear leotards and leggings for swimming



Parental Concerns/Issues

- Girls: not being able to wear hijab in school.
- Showering in communal setting
- Mixed swimming areas

Diet

10

10.1 School Meals

Muslims do eat meat, but only if it is halal. This means that it has been slaughtered to allow all blood and harmful bacteria to drain naturally, and that the name of God has been pronounced over it at the time of killing. Any meat or by-product derived from the pig is not eaten by Muslims, and food cooked in pig fat or that includes animal rennet is likewise forbidden. This includes sausages, bacon, pork, ham and gelatine.

Local Education Authorities with a high number of Muslim children may find it economical to buy halal meat for all the food in their canteens, which should not result in higher costs. Others may wish to modify their catering policies. Muslims are also forbidden from drinking alcohol, therefore food prepared with alcohol as one of the ingredients will not be acceptable for Muslims to eat.

Food needs to be prepared in halal environments where utensils are not also used for non-halal items, e.g. a knife used to cut non-halal meat should not be used to cut cheese to serve to Muslim students.

In the case where halal meals are not served, schools need to ensure that there are vegetarian or sea food options available to students.



Acceptable Areas

- Vegetarian meals
- Seafood
- Halal red meat and chicken



Parental Concerns/Issues

- Food preparation techniques



Salah – Prayer

11

Children are asked to pray the five daily prayers from the age of seven, and they are required by Islam to do so from the time they reach puberty.

A clean room or a quiet area can be made available for children to perform those prayers which occur during the school day. The timings of the prayer are as follows:

- 1) *Before sunrise (Fajr)*
- 2) *Between sun reaching it's height and mid-afternoon (Zuhr)*
- 3) *Between mid-afternoon and sunset (Asr)*
- 4) *Just after sunset (Maghrib)*
- 5) *Late evening, when all the sun's rays have disappeared (Eesha)*

During summer periods the only prayer likely to fall during school hours is Zuhr, and during winter periods Zuhr, Asr and Maghrib, are likely to fall within school hours. Note, these prayers do not take very long and can be completed within ten minutes. In schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils, ten minutes at the beginning or end of the lunch break could be allowed for pupils to pray in an allocated area. If it is not possible to make prayers at the appointed times they can be made as soon as possible. Schools can arrange their own timetable for prayers and a prayer room can be made available at the end of the school day.

It is important that:

- *All staff members are briefed as to why the room is being made available.*
- *Schools seek advice and support from the local Muslim community or Muslim organisations if necessary.*

It would thus be helpful if schools knew the direction of the Qiblah (the direction of Makkah, i.e. south east from England), which can be easily calculated using a compass.

11.1 Ablution before prayer

Before prayer Muslims are required to wash their face, arms, forehead and feet. In order to do so, it is important that running water is available; a wash basin would suffice for this purpose. Muslims also wash their private parts after using the toilet. Small plastic bottles or jugs can be kept in the toilet areas for this purpose.

11.2 Friday congregational prayer

On Fridays, it is necessary for the midday prayer to be a congregational prayer, and hence a place would need to be designated for that purpose to ensure that it accommodates all pupils. However, for all other prayers Muslims may pray individually, although it is preferable that they pray in congregation. Secondary boys' schools with a large

number of Muslim pupils could invite an appropriate person from the local community to lead the Friday prayer and give the khutbah, a short sermon. This would take no longer than half an hour in total. Alternatively, if there is a local mosque within walking distance the pupils should be allowed to use half of their lunch break to pray the Friday prayer at the mosque.

✓ Do	✗ Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a room/ space available for students to do their prayers • Allow sufficient time for pupils to attend the Friday prayer. • Recommend a convenient time in which prayers can be done, e.g. Midday prayer can be done during lunch break 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule any classes/ important activities/ outings/ during the time of the Friday congregational prayer

Ramadan - Month of Fasting

12

Fasting takes place during the Islamic month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar, and many Muslim pupils may wish to fast. This is expected of children above the age of puberty, though some children fast before this age to progressively get accustomed to it so that by puberty most practising Muslim children will fast from dawn to sunset. Girls are not required to fast or pray during menstruation.

Fasting is an Islamic obligation on Muslims and it is important that pupils are supported while continuing with normal school life. Teachers can take this opportunity to teach pupils about Ramadan and invite guest speakers to explain the subject. This will help in teaching of diversity and inclusiveness as well as make Muslim students feel more comfortable within the school environment.

Fasting involves abstaining from both food and liquid, including water from dawn to dusk. Those fasting must also take care to refrain from petty wrongdoings or give way to ill-temper. These acts are a form of training in self-discipline, and they increase one's understanding and empathy towards those who are hungry and suffering from famine in other parts of the world.

During the fasting period a family's sleeping and eating times are also altered which can make some children feel tired, drowsy or have headaches during the day. Consequently some Muslim pupils may need to reduce their physical exercise. Schools may wish to plan alternative, less strenuous activities during Physical Education classes. Fasting is not regarded by Muslims as an opportunity to avoid aspects of life but rather to cope with normal life under a different set of circumstances.

12.1 Examinations during Ramadan

Muslims use the lunar calendar to measure the Islamic months, and therefore Ramadan moves forward 11 days each year on the Gregorian calendar that we use (see below); hence it will take Ramadan will about 30 years to move around all the months from to December to January. It is therefore inevitable that certain examinations may fall during Ramadan. However schools should consider rescheduling internal examinations since the rigour of preparing for exams and fasting may prove very difficult for some children.

12.2 Parents evening and school functions

During the fasting period there are also additional religious duties performed by adults, for example attending special prayers at the mosque in addition to the preparation and consumption of food that takes place over a few hours of the evening and early morning. Therefore it might be difficult for parents to attend meetings or other functions in the evening during the month of Ramadan. If it is possible to avoid scheduling parent meetings during Ramadan it would be appreciated by the parents and result in better home-school relationships.

12.3 Medication

Islam does not require that the very old, seriously ill or travellers to keep the fast. No oral medication can be taken by a person who is fasting. They can be taken after the fasting period is over. Medical injections can be taken by a person who is fasting, however injections that influences body nutrition are usually not allowed – guidance should sought on the specific matter. Of course, during emergencies where a child's life is at risk or severe illness is diagnosed, then medicine should be administered

Muslim Religious Days

13

The following list gives an indication of days on which Muslim pupils will request permission to be absent from school for part of the day or all of it.

13.1 Jumu'ah -Friday congregational prayer

Under the terms of the 1988 Education Reform Act, children may leave school premises to receive Religious Education. As attendance at the Friday prayer is obligatory in Islam, a written request may be made by parents to take their child off the premises for part of the afternoon to attend the mosque. Friday congregation lasts for approximately 30 minutes and children may be able to use part of their lunch hour to attend the prayers.

13.2 Eid-ul-Fitr – this day celebrates the end of the fasting month of Ramadan

The Muslim calendar is a lunar one, consisting of 12 months, each between 29 and 30 days long, depending on the sighting of the new moon. This means that in relation to the solar year, the Islamic year moves forward by approximately 11 days per year. The dates of the main festivals are determined by the actual sighting of the new

moon at the beginning of the month, and this applies particularly to Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr. In order to accommodate this uncertainty, schools with large numbers of Muslim pupils are advised, if possible, to allow 2-3 days for each of the two Eid holidays, which can be taken from other long holidays.

13.3 Eid-ul-Adha – this day celebrates the end of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah)

Hajj is another fundamental pillar of Islam. Eid-ul-Adha takes place approximately two months and ten days after the end of Ramadan. This festival has direct historical links to Abraham.

On both Eid's, Muslims are required to attend the mosque in the morning for the Eid prayer, and the days are meant to be times of relaxation, celebration, and visiting relatives and friends.

Collective Worship

14

The Education Reform Act of 1988 stipulated that collective worship should take place for all children, and in county schools the majority of acts of worship to be 'wholly or mainly of a broad Christian character.' It should be noted that worship need not only use Christian material as long as the content 'taken as a whole reflects the traditions of Christian beliefs'.

In county schools the organisation of collective worship rests with the Head Teacher after consultation with the governing body. By contrast in voluntary school, the school governing body is responsible for directing collective worship with consultation from the Head Teacher.

Where there is a large multi-faith mix in the school, or significant non-Christian presence, the Head Teacher can apply to their Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) that the 1988 Education Reform Act, section seven (1) need not apply to:

- *The whole school*
- *A particular class within the school*
- *Certain type of pupils in the school where the faith of the families of these children makes a 'broadly Christian' worship inappropriate.*

Furthermore, if there is a significant number of Muslim pupils in the school then an application to include daily Muslim act of worship can be made.

It is agreed upon by the majority of RE inspectors, advisers, teachers and Head Teachers that worship which is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' does not have to be uniquely Christian, but can concentrate on those aspects which the different Abrahamic, monotheistic faiths, i.e. Christianity, Judaism and Islam have in common – for instance, the belief in one God, in morality, in brotherhood, the power of love and in tolerance of beliefs that differ from our own.

The 1988 Education Reform Act allows that if no determination has been sought from the SACRE to allow the school to conduct multi-faith collective worship, and the numbers of Muslim children are too few to warrant an application for Muslim collective worship, Muslim parents may exercise the right of withdrawing their children from the daily predominantly Christian worship.

The school can respond to requests for withdrawal in the following ways:

- *accept and agree to requests for withdrawal*
- *ensure that there is a suitable, clean space within the school for Muslim children to perform their obligatory prayers at the required times (see Salat – prayer)*

Conclusions and Recommendations for Schools

15

For young Muslims the education system is their earliest and most significant point of contact with the wider society. The messages the school system provides in supporting and accommodating their educational needs will no doubt influence their attitude to integration and participation in the community. The overwhelming majority of Muslim pupils are educated in state schools and therefore it becomes important for teachers and the Local Education Authorities (LEA) to have an understanding of the basic beliefs, practices and cultural norms that prevail in the Muslim community.

Outlined below are some recommendations that have been identified by various research reports and community projects, if implemented by schools or LEAs, these can result in improving pupil's achievements, address discriminatory stereotypes and forge better school-community relationships [9, 10].

- *Citizenship class became part of the non-statutory framework for Personal, Social, and Health Education in English primary schools from September 2000 and part of the national curriculum in secondary schools in September 2002. In these classes the Local Education Departments should review their curriculum so that it reflects the contribution made by the Muslim civilisations in science, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, technology, art and literature. This would be a positive step towards developing an integrated community that values, respects and understands the contributions of the diverse group of people that make up Britain. It would also help to develop self esteem amongst Muslim children and increase their feeling of inclusiveness.*

- ❖ Muslim children are sent to evening classes or weekend schools to learn Arabic so that they can recite the Qur'an and offer their prayers. Muslim parents value the opportunity for their children to learn Arabic, irrespective of whatever ethnic background they originate from. Providing an option for Arabic classes in schools, where demand exists, would be a useful way of engaging Muslim parents and pupils in the activities of the school. Such classes may also reduce the need for Muslim students in spending time in after-school classes learning Arabic and therefore more time would be available to concentrate on their school home work.
- ❖ Recognition of pupils' Islamic identity, and developing partnerships with Muslim community bodies may help towards developing creative policies that work to raise school standards. An example of where this has achieved considerable success is in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The local LEA wanted to tackle the issue of high level of absenteeism in primary schools which was very high and consequently having an adverse effect on the schools achievement. Since Tower Hamlets has a significantly high Muslim population the LEA decided to develop a joint project in partnership with the East London Mosque – improving school attendance in partnership. The success of this project has been recognised nationally and has been widely reported in the media. Not only did the project improve the attendance records but it also produced other positive knock-on effects such as improving home-school liaison and greater parental involvement in school life. The Head teachers from these schools believe this type of partnership will gradually improve the educational achievements of their pupils.
- ❖ Muslim communities have experienced that some teachers are not aware of the basic sensitivities, for example in diet, dress and beliefs, regarding Muslim students and parents. Teachers and non-teaching staff in multi-faith school environments should be given appropriate cultural awareness classes so that they are more informed and engage better with pupils.
- ❖ School ethos should celebrate diversity by having an Islam Awareness Week during Ramadan or after Eid. This can be organised in corporation with local mosques, or community centres. This would help in alleviating misconceptions, prejudice or Islamophobia developing within the school environment.
- ❖ Schools should develop clear policies on dealing with any form of racism or Islamophobia, and emphasise common values of respect and tolerance.

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Muslim Organisations

The organisations listed below can be contacted for help and advice by teachers or schools

Muslim Educational Trust

130 Stroud Green Road, London N4 3RZ
Tel: 020 7272 8502 Fax: 020 7281 3457
www.muslim-ed-trust.org.uk

Federation Of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)

38 Mapesbury Road, London NW2 4JD
Tel: 0208 452 4493 Fax: 0208 208 4161
www.fosis.org.uk

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)

The Muslim Council of Britain
Boardman House, 64 Broadway, London E15 1NT
Tel: 0845 1 23 23 63 Fax: 0208 432 0587
www.mcb.org.uk

Muslim Welfare House Trust

233 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DA
Tel: 020 7263 3071 Fax: 020 72812687
www.mwht.org.uk

Islamic Foundation

Markfield Conference Centre
Ratby Lane, Markfield LE67
Leicestershire LE67 9SY
Tel: 01530 244 944 Fax: 01530 244946
www.islamic-foundation.org.uk

Muslim Youth Helpline

PO Box 659
Wembley HA0 3WH
Tel: 020 8795 5321 Fax: 020 8451 6615
www.myh.org.uk

Glossary

Alhamdulillah	Commonly used expression, meaning ‘all praise is due to Allah’
Assalâmu Alaikum	Commonly used greeting between Muslims, meaning ‘peace be with you’
Bismillah	Commonly used expression, meaning ‘in the name of Allah’; it is said before starting any activity e.g. before eating
Dua’a	Supplication and invocation to Allah
Eid	Name of two Muslim festivals, meaning ‘festival’
Hajj	The pilgrimage to Makkah which a Muslim must undertake once in their lifetime; one of the five pillars of Islam
Halal	Permissible, lawful
Haraam	Prohibited, illegal
Hijab	Refers to the mandatory dress of the Muslim female
Insha’Allah	Commonly used expression, meaning ‘God willing’
Jumu’ah	The weekly congregational prayer held on Fridays.
Ka’bah	The holiest and most sacred building in Islam located in the holiest mosque in Makkah. Muslims line up in prayer facing towards this direction
Khutbah	Friday congregational sermon
Makkah	A city in Saudi Arabia and the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad
Medina	A city in Saudi Arabia containing the Prophet’s Mosque and tomb
Qiblah	Direction of prayer (facing the Ka’bah)
Qur’an	The sacred text of Islam, containing the revelations of God to Muhammad
Ramadan	The month of fasting, ninth month of the Islamic calendar.
Shariah	The code of law derived from the Qur’an and from the teachings and example of the Prophet Mohammed. Note that sharia is only applicable to Muslims
Sunnah	Refers to sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed, as well as actions approved by the Prophet Mohammed
Zakât	2.5% of wealth given yearly; one of the five pillars of Islam

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Muslim Welfare House Trust,
233 Seven Sisters Road,
London N4 2DA
Tel: 020 7263 3071
Fax: 020 7281 2687
www.mwht.org.uk