

Inspection of Al Risalah Secondary School

145 Upper Tooting Road, London SW17 7TJ

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils said that this is a school where everyone is friendly and caring. They enjoy coming to school. They like the opportunities they have to learn and socialise together. Pupils are taught about life in modern Britain. They also study a range of subjects that provide them with opportunities to achieve their future goals, whatever these may be.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils, both in the Nursery class and in the secondary school. Pupils develop their knowledge progressively and they achieve well by the time they leave school. Nursery-aged children have many opportunities to develop their language and communication skills. Leaders make sure that the children are ready for their transition to Reception Year.

Pupils are polite and respectful to one another and to staff. They listen to each other carefully and they consider other people's views, including when these are different from their own. In lessons, pupils focus well on their learning and settle down to work quickly. Bullying is uncommon. Pupils are taught what bullying is, and staff respond swiftly if it does happen. There is a sense of community in the school. Pupils are kind to one another, and this helps to make them feel safe.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have made sure that they offer a range of subjects, in line with the requirements of the independent school standards. In nearly all subjects, leaders have planned sequences of learning that are ambitious. Subject plans are designed in a way that means pupils learn new material step by step. This helps pupils to be ready to understand more complex ideas in the future. However, this is not fully the case in all subjects. This is because, in a few instances, leaders are still refining their thinking on how they expect pupils to increase their knowledge and skills over time. As a result, teaching sometimes overly repeats knowledge that pupils have already mastered, rather than building on it.

Staff in Nursery provision receive regular training. They are knowledgeable about how to support children's development. Leaders have planned a curriculum that links together all seven areas of learning seamlessly. Staff use the curriculum well. They provide stimulating learning experiences that develop and secure children's understanding of key ideas. Communication and language are central to staff's approach. Adults model language appropriately. They encourage children to speak in full sentences and to use the words that they hear. Staff also read to children regularly. Story time, songs and rhymes are used well to support children's language development. Children are prepared effectively for their future learning.

Teachers in the secondary school are subject specialists. Expectations for what pupils need to know and remember are high. Pupils take pride in their work and achievements. Purposeful checks on pupils' learning enable staff to identify misconceptions, as well as the knowledge that pupils may need to go over again.

Staff use information from these checks to adapt teaching, and in turn, to improve pupils' understanding of what has been taught.

Reading remains a focus in the secondary school. Alongside reading a rich diet of literature in English, pupils are encouraged to read widely. During the school day, dedicated time is set aside for pupils to read independently and for pleasure. Pupils enjoy choosing books from the well-stocked library.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are quickly identified in the Nursery class. Staff use what they know about children's specific needs to adapt their teaching and help children learn the planned curriculum. Work with external agencies also means that children get the help they need at an early stage.

In the secondary school, teachers expect all pupils to aim for the highest outcomes. Leaders identify pupils who need additional help to learn the curriculum, and they put plans in place to support them. However, in some cases, leaders have not made sure that adaptations to teaching fully respond to pupils' individual needs and barriers to learning.

Pupils are keen to do well. They learn to manage their own behaviour, including in Nursery class. There is very little low-level disruption in lessons as pupils concentrate on their learning. Outside lessons, pupils enjoy participating in daily sports activities, for example football and badminton, or meeting up with their friends.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a planned part of the curriculum. It is enhanced by a well-thought-out assembly programme and links made in Islamic studies, religious education and other subjects. Pupils are encouraged to take an active role in society. They learn about Britain's public institutions, as well as the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Pupils also get involved in charity events. For example, they recently took part in a campaign to raise awareness of period poverty. Plentiful trips and visits are on offer, including to the theatre, and most recently to the television studios of a well-known media company. A broad careers programme provides secondary-aged pupils with impartial information about a wide range of potential careers. Leaders consulted with parents and carers ahead of implementing the new relationships and sex education (RSE) policy. The programme for RSE reflects government expectations.

Leaders make sure that they comply with all the independent school standards, as well as the statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage. The premises are suitable and well maintained. Outside space at the secondary school site is limited. However, leaders have made appropriate arrangements to use the local park for physical education and social times.

The proprietor is new to his role but has a good understanding of leaders' work from his previous role as a trustee. Governors and trustees have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have the necessary experience and knowledge to provide leaders with appropriate support and challenge.

Leaders and the proprietor make sure that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policy is made available on the school's website. The policy is up to date and in line with government guidance. Leaders and staff appreciate that safeguarding pupils in the school is everyone's responsibility. Leaders have made sure that they, and all staff, receive up-to-date safeguarding training. This includes training on online safety and the 'Prevent' duty. Staff understand the dangers and risks that pupils may face, and they know the signs to look for. Suitable systems are in place for staff to record any concerns that they may have, and staff know how to use these. Leaders take appropriate steps to help pupils at risk, and where necessary, seek advice and support from external agencies.

Pupils are also taught to keep themselves safe. They know whom they can speak to if they have any concerns, and they trust staff to deal with these appropriately.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects, leaders have not thought through fully how they want pupils' knowledge and skills to develop over time. Occasionally, this means that pupils repeat subject content they have already grasped securely, rather than developing and deepening their understanding further. Leaders should ensure that all subject leaders make their expectations for the development of knowledge and skills explicit.
- Sometimes, teaching is not adapted as well as it should be to support the needs of different pupils. When this happens, some pupils struggle with their learning. Leaders should support teachers to make well-targeted adaptations that enable pupils to fully overcome any specific barriers to learning the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	101090
DfE registration number	212/6396
Local authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	10214874
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	185
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Naeem Siddiqi
Chair	Yunus Bobat
Headteacher	Suhayl Lee (Executive Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,800 to £3,900
Telephone number	020 8767 6057
Website	www.alrisalahschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@alrisalahschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 March 2019

Information about this school

- Al-Risalah Secondary School is an independent Muslim day school for girls. It is part of the Al-Risalah Education Trust. The school has a Nursery section for children aged three to four. The secondary phase is for pupils aged 11 to 16.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place in March 2019, when the school was judged to require improvement. At the time, leaders had segregated pupils by sex without legal justification and were in breach of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have since registered two schools, one for boys and one for girls. The girls' school includes the Nursery class.
- The secondary phase is located in a converted cinema. This building also houses the Al-Risalah Secondary School for Boys. The Nursery provision is housed in a renovated residential building, which is 10 minutes' walk from the secondary school in Gatton Road SW17. Pupils use a local park for physical education, social times and some other enrichment activities.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal, the nursery manager and other staff. Inspectors met with the director of education for the trust and the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, Arabic and PSHE education. Inspectors visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work, met with pupils to discuss their learning and met with subject leaders and teachers. Inspectors also considered pupils' learning in other subjects, including mathematics, history and science.
- Through discussions with leaders, governors, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. Inspectors also looked at records related to safeguarding, including records of pre-employment checks carried out before staff are appointed.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from both early years and the secondary phase of the school. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtimes was observed.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff about safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and staff workload. Inspectors looked at staff, parent and pupil responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Mark Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Frances Hawkes

Ofsted Inspector

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