

# MUSLIMS ON EDUCATION

*A Position Paper*

THE ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM SOCIAL SCIENTISTS (AMSS UK)  
FORUM AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA & RACISM (FAIR)  
FED 2000 (FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT)  
THE MUSLIM COLLEGE UK

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# INTRODUCTION

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**W**HILST THE PRESENT Government has worked hard to communicate its guiding principles to the wider educational community there has been little detailed formal feedback from Muslim organisations and lobby groups. Yet an inclusive vision for education strategy in the United Kingdom (UK) cannot be formulated or implemented without such reference: the UK's largest minority community. This document therefore discusses a wide variety of issues in the field of education, in the hope that it may initiate a basis for dialogue between the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with representatives from the Muslim community.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- Qualitative aspects such as spirituality and independence of thought are as important as quantitative aspects such as key stage assessments and examination grades in setting a vision for education.
- The education system should aim to produce individuals who can survive in and relate to a society of diverse faiths without feeling a need to compromise their own faith.
- Muslim educationalists wish to play a central role in the consultation process where national and local policy is being determined.
- Given sufficient consensus, parents should be given the opportunity to determine a new Ethos Statement for an existing maintained school where there is a majority of pupils of another cultural/religious group.
- Many Muslim schools are unable to satisfy the criteria required of them in order to achieve maintained status. Some form of second-tier capacity building funding is required if these schools are to progress.
- The imposition of arbitrary regulations on admission to faith schools at the national level is probably unworkable. A better approach would be for Government to provide guidelines whilst leaving the ultimate responsibility for admissions policy to each School.
- Educational resources within the Muslim community are available for deployment within the mainstream sector. These resources could potentially assist in the provision of Citizenship education, particularly among non-Muslim children, and allow the provision of teaching in Islam to Muslim children who are withdrawn from statutory worship and RE.
- Single-sex education has been viewed positively by the Swann Report and other independent studies. The findings from these reports show single-sex education can prove beneficial to both boys and girls. Its decline should be halted and reversed in order to improve standards and meet parental choice.
- Opportunities to study community languages such as Arabic, Bengali, Hindi or Urdu would better reflect the linguistically diverse nature of our communities.

- Financial assistance should be made readily available to support industries that can satisfy the resource requirements of education on Islamic topics.
- Greater time and resources needs to be devoted to the training of governors and teachers in religious awareness.

## SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

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**1.1.1** In this paper, we address the education system in the UK for pupils aged 5 to 16. We use the term ‘Muslim School’ to describe a school that seeks to promote an overtly Islamic education for its pupils. This is in distinction to schools with a large number of Muslims or indeed those that provide education that is acceptable to Muslims, both of which we have classified as ‘Non-Muslim Schools’. In no way is this a derogatory distinction between the two.

**1.1.2** It is recognised that as with all religions, the adherent must be distinguished from the religion itself. However, we use the descriptive term ‘Muslim’ to encompass not only practising adherents of Islam, but also those who identify themselves as such (without necessarily being practising) or who belong to a household or family that holds Islam as its descendant faith.

# GENERAL CONCERNS

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## 2.1 THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

**2.1.1** In Islam, the purpose of education is to impart beneficial forms of knowledge in a manner that will help the individual attain success in this life and the next. In more contemporary terminology, such an observation might suggest that in Islam there is a requirement for both temporal and spiritual knowledge.

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Recommendations of the First World Conference on Muslim Education, Makkah, 1977

In other words, knowledge of the worldly life should be imparted within and alongside the context provided by religious belief.

**2.1.2** Although the 1988 Education Reform Act recognises the place of the spiritual in education, faith-based groups frequently criticise the modern education system for its predominantly secular and rather exclusive focus upon the functionality of life. This tendency reflects, and is perhaps reinforced by, the external pressures of modern society.

**2.1.3** Faith groups have in the past been asked to justify the incorporation of religion within education<sup>2</sup> and to explain why a secular state should undertake to promote non-secular school.<sup>3</sup> Hostility is based in part upon the idea that 'religion' is inconsistent with such processes as independent thought and freedom of expression. However, it is also clear that within such criticisms, there appears to be a belief that the inclusion of religion influences in education towards indoctrination.

<sup>2</sup> British Humanist Association, "Collective Worship & School Assemblies", November 1998

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Dorn, "Religious Ambitions, Educational Realities", *Protecting Rights to Religion and Belief: Priorities for Reform*, Justice Seminar, 9 July 2001

**2.1.4** It is fair to add though, that secularism can also be equally interpreted as a form of indoctrination. Indeed as Dr David Lankshear, speaking from an Anglican perspective explains, the real issue is to obtain for religion the same rights that are already enjoyed by secularism. " 'Secular' is not a neutral term, it is fundamentally opposed to religion".<sup>4</sup> It may be too early to ask for a level playing field upon which religious and secular ideals can compete, but we should at least recognise that indoctrination must be perceived from the different perspectives of different people.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. David Lankshear, "Education an Anglican Perspective", Justice Seminar, 9 July 2001

**2.1.5** As with the situation regarding state funding for other faith schools, it is suggested that Muslim children should be afforded the same opportunities

enjoyed by other faith groups in respect of religious education. However, there is still some shortfall in the UK and many Muslims feel that the faith communities should work towards building a more equal representation of all faiths. Only then will parents, schools and wider society contribute evenly to the holistic education and upbringing of children irrespective of faith.

## 2.2 MULTI-CULTURALISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

**2.2.1** The Muslim communities of the UK reside mainly in the large metropolitan conurbations. The 1991 Census<sup>5</sup> shows that 44.8% of the ethnic minority population of the UK lives in the Greater London area, 12.4% in the West Midlands and 4.9% in Greater Manchester. Only 1.4% of the ethnic minority population lives in Wales and 2.1% in Scotland. For this reason there is a natural tendency to discuss Islamic educational policies within the context of an English framework.

It is worth noting as well that within those conurbations, communities maintain close links and concentrate in confined areas. For example, 54% of the Bangladeshi community of the UK live in Greater London, constituting 22.9% of the population of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The potential within such areas of a racism backlash therefore remains within the bounds of reality, indeed it might be suggested that a politically inspired racist backlash is now being evidenced by the rising popularity of the British National Party (BNP) and other far-right groups in many Asian-Muslim areas.<sup>6</sup>

**2.2.2** One factor underlying this, and indeed is pertinent to all issues relating to the provision of education, is the fact that the Race Relations Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person directly or indirectly on the grounds of race. However, the definition of 'race' does not include Muslims as these are not seen as a racial group. So the same loophole in legislation that allows the BNP to target Muslim communities can be equally as divisive with regards to education as well as wider society. Even forthcoming legislation intended to protect individuals from religious discrimination will apply only in the workplace. Actions borne out of Islamophobia, the dread or hatred of Islam and Muslims, will therefore still escape the purview of very necessary regulation anywhere outside the workplace.

**2.2.3** Educationists should realise this and clearly understand that Islamophobia has a nature that can manifest itself in subtle and sometimes implicit ways. Expressions include what the Runnymede Trust described as 'closed views' based upon phobia, ignorance and prejudice.<sup>7</sup> At its most explicit, Islamophobia could therefore be encountered at a personal level as a mockery of dress codes; in wider political discourse where Muslim views are rejected out of hand; or where Muslims and the religion itself is seen as being somewhat oppressive and backward. Much of this - and indeed much more subtle forms - could therefore transfer into the classroom environment through educational processes, the curriculum, staff and pupils.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, D., quoted in CRE Fact-sheet *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, 1999

<sup>6</sup> One should consider the undercurrents of those disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001

<sup>7</sup> The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia, a Challenge For Us All*, 1997

**2.2.4** In response to the events of the summer of 2001, the Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT) Report tackled a variety of issues relevant to community relations, of which education is one. By focusing on issues of multi-culturalism, issues relating directly to religion were overlooked. It is our belief that this report presented a unique opportunity to open discussions of this nature. However, this opportunity has now passed and it is imperative that a subsequent opportunity to engage in debate is located, particularly with regards issues of community cohesion.

**2.2.5** The CCRT report suggested that mono-cultured schools presented a ‘significant problem’ for community cohesion. It went on to add that all funding for schools should be made conditional upon contact with other cultures, and that this in turn should be made a curricular necessity as a programme of Citizenship. Indeed as part of this, it adds that all schools should be under a statutory duty to promote a respect for, and an understanding of, the cultures in the school and the surrounding area through programmes of cross cultural contact. This of course is now to be undertaken within the context of the recently expanded Citizenship programme<sup>8</sup> and may include twinning between schools of differing cultures, teacher exchanges, joint curriculum activities, joint parental activities and joint sports programmes.<sup>9</sup> There is much to be applauded in the CCRT approach, although we feel that some points need to be emphasised.

<sup>8</sup> Schools Achieving Success, 2001, section 3-47

<sup>9</sup> CCRT Report 2001

**2.2.6** Firstly, we should not fall victim to the belief that the best multi-cultural curriculum is one based on the educational equivalent of proportional representation for the various cultural groups. We feel that a better strategy is to promote in schools the best education in each given field. If in some areas the material happens to derive from one particular cultural, ethnic, racial or religious group, so be it.

**2.2.7** It should also be recognised that mono-cultured schools are not necessarily insular and ignorant of other cultures. Culturally separate groups, communities and institutions do not have to be causes of social instability. The price of peace need not be cultural or religious globalisation and/or assimilation.

**2.2.8** Some unease may therefore be felt at proposals for twinning or other forms of contact where they are imposed without the full agreement of all parties involved, including parents. Hence formulation of policy should be undertaken with reference to the views and opinions of those religious and cultural groups concerned, including Muslim, at the most local level.

**2.2.9** Neither should policy makers be oblivious to the resource requirements implicit in their policies. Some attention must therefore be given to what is practically achievable within the multi-culturalism agenda, given the capacity of the education system, the various support industries and the existing demands already placed upon them.

**2.2.10** Finally, we are concerned that Citizenship should not be given lip service in the same way that Religious Education ('RE') often is. To this end, we propose that education containing Citizenship is made a compulsory part of either the national or basic curriculum.

**2.2.11** An example of such a system is the successful cultural awareness programme run by Butler University in the United States (US). It's 'Change and Tradition' course presents a series of cultures using available teacher resources on a volunteer basis in combination with teacher training during the Summer vacation. Committed and interested teachers tend to participate in this programme, making it all the more successful, whilst the wide reach of content can be designed to span the interest of all minority groups. It is also worth noting that a cross-cultural aspect can be implemented in almost every curriculum subject, including the sciences

**2.2.12** The importance of teacher training cannot be over-emphasised, especially among those teachers who would not normally volunteer for programmes of relevance to the multi-cultural agenda. The example of one Brent teacher who did not address Bengali pupils by their names with the justification that it would require a lot of effort to learn them all, demonstrates how easily a teacher's lack of multi-cultural commitment can damage/impact on a child's feeling of self-worth.

**2.2.13** Teacher training should not be discussed in isolation from employment policy. Where safeguards against Islamophobia are weak, it may well be that both teacher training and employment policies reinforce one another to produce a highly undesirable school environment. Voluntary Aided Schools are perhaps most at risk in this respect. In Voluntary Controlled Schools, LEA policies prevent discrimination in the employment of any one racial group, whilst in Foundation Schools normal employment law fulfils the same objective. In Voluntary Aided Schools however, employment criteria are set by the governing body and so governors in effect have control in matters of staffing.

**2.2.14** We propose that suitable safeguards are established such that the spirit of the relevant policies and employment laws can continue to be met across the range of schools. This is all the more relevant given that the recommendations of the Runnymede report on Islamophobia have yet to be fully implemented.

## **2.3 PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE**

**2.3.1** Within the maintained sector there seems to be much apprehension over what is frequently seen, by teachers and governors alike, as an increasing tide of bureaucracy and initiatives. This feeling accords with that expressed by counterparts in the National Health Service in particular, and seems to explain the declining morale of professionals working on the front line. As a result, independent schools that are not normally subject to every turn of political fashion

tend to experience higher morale. Independence of governance, whilst not an end in itself, seems to be a major factor of a school's success.

**2.3.2** Responses to the consultation document for the *Education and Training in Britain Report* reiterate this point. The consultation responses showed 91% support for adopting the stakeholder model for the constitution of governing bodies, 91% support for all member voting, 90% support for the formation of a single stakeholder group to represent staff employed at the school (almost half of respondents strongly supported this proposal), 81% support for allowing governing bodies to regulate their own procedures and 85% support for allowing governing bodies to provide family and community facilities.

**2.3.3** In principle, many Muslim thinkers are broadly in favour of delegation of responsibility to the local level wherever possible. The proposed reduction of bureaucracy and regulation is therefore welcomed.<sup>10</sup> This should extend the progress begun by the 1988 Education Act under which school and college governors were given greater responsibility for the provision of education within their institutions including employment, admissions, implementation of the National Curriculum and resource allocation.

<sup>10</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 8

**2.3.4** One subtle aspect to the governance issue, as far as Muslims are concerned, is that governance policies should not be annulled by 'facts on the ground'. Insufficient representation among senior staff and governors from members of the Muslim faith may prejudice the concern of an educational institution for the implementation of a Muslim-relevant policy. Data from the CRE is relevant here because it shows that only 3% of governors at further education colleges and 2% of governors at Sixth Form colleges were from ethnic minorities.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, moves proposed in the Modernised Framework for Schools Governance Report to co-opt community governors onto the governing body are to be welcomed. Over half of the respondents to the consultation document for *Education and Training in Britain* strongly supported this move.

<sup>11</sup> *Education and Training in Britain*, 1998

**2.3.5** Muslim participation within the political process in the UK has often been minimal and occasionally non-existent. This is partly due to a lack of engagement and sustained interaction on the part of Muslims themselves and is compounded by the small number of Muslim members in both of the Houses of Parliament. Against a background in which 5.5% of the general population is of an ethnic minority group, in December 1998 the CRE showed that only 1.4% of MPs in Parliament are from an ethnic background (9 out of 652 MPs, all being Labour members) and 3% of councillors (662 out of 21,198 Councillors).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> CRE, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, 1999

**2.3.6** It follows therefore that many political committees do not have any Muslim representation and that those Muslim representatives who are involved are usually overstretched and unable to fulfil the desired duties across the spectrum of relevant issues. It is apparent that minority faith communities have failed to learn and engage in the processes of political participation, so much so that this

has put the minority faiths at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to setting agendas and responding to mainstream proposals.

**2.3.7** We feel therefore that consideration should be given to addressing the democratic deficit in order to allow greater engagement between members of the political executive and interested Muslim representatives. We naturally hope that this report can form part of such a dialogue, but also recognise that our effort is something of an exception. Therefore, we also support a formal consultation system in which people of all faiths meet to represent their views at a national level as part of an on-going process.

**2.3.8** As far as Muslim participation in education policy is concerned, increased efforts must be made to undertake empirical research into the Muslim community itself. This would extend to such matters as demographics, post-school achievement, communal aspiration, family background, and educational performance. In due course we hope to establish a database of Muslim educationalists who are able to contribute to such research. In the meantime, Government could assist this by including questions that are of relevance to all faiths in the Annual Schools' Census.

**2.3.9** Note should also be taken of developments at the European level as well. It is Lankshear again that points out that religious bodies and their adherents have little representation at the EU level, with the exception of Roman Catholics through the status of the Vatican.<sup>15</sup> Such a situation may become more important as European political integration continues. It may therefore initiate a situation where greater domestic representation is overshadowed by developments at European level. To ensure that the same struggles for inclusion do not take place twice, the European situation must always be clear and apparent.

<sup>15</sup> *Church of England, Education: an Anglican Perspective*, 2001

## **2.4 CURRICULUM AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES**

**2.4.1** It is quite clear that the modern curriculum is based largely upon temporal knowledge, some would say to the detriment of spiritual knowledge or development.

**2.4.2** One clear improvement that Muslims would prefer to initiate would be to aid the development of a curriculum that incorporates spiritual learning as a counter-balance to the prominence of secular ideas in several key subjects. For example, modern science incorporates ideas and theories that are based upon a number of value judgements. One such way of offering balance may be to explain that this is the case whereby those value judgements are then allowed to be discussed so that a greater insight into the nature of the philosophies that underlie them may be achieved. In this manner the negative images of “non-Western” science in mainstream education may be begin to be re-evaluated.<sup>14</sup>

**2.4.3** Maintained schools must follow the National Curriculum (‘NC’) whereas non-maintained schools and home-schoolers are under no such restriction.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Naseem Butt, *Issues in Islamic Education*, Muslim Educational Trust, 1996

Much attention on the part of Muslim and other faith-based educationists therefore is paid to curriculum issues within the context of the maintained sector. Here, Voluntary Controlled Schools and Foundation Schools must follow the LEA Agreed Syllabus for RE. Meanwhile, Voluntary Aided Schools may have a 'religious character' in accordance with the school's Ethos Statement but do not need to follow the LEA Agreed Syllabus for RE. The Voluntary Aided model is therefore the one used by faith communities to obtain state funding and the Muslim community is keen to see that this facility is not restricted or removed in future.

**2.4.4** Muslim schools focus upon a holistic approach to education that includes both temporal and spiritual knowledge. Muslim educationists recognise that Islamic education must be included as part of an integrated syllabus or curriculum. However, such a provision requires a breadth that can easily be frustrated by a lack of funding. Even some better known institutions such as Islamia School in London are said to suffer from this problem. If one adds to these problems a consideration of peripheral objectives, such as the establishment of a physical environment concordant with the Muslim School's Ethos Statement, then funding shortages can become a major obstacle to achieving the desired ideal.

**2.4.5** A concern of many Muslim schools, particularly at primary level, is the pressure on time allocation created by the NC. For example, many Muslim schools would like to devote time towards the teaching of Arabic, Qur'anic studies and a related understanding of Islamic practices. Given that the NC's time allocation is determined centrally, this goal can be difficult to achieve. We are therefore encouraged that the Government seeks a greater devolution of decisions on education provision to front-line performers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 1.8

**2.4.6** However, other aspects of the NC are quite insufficient. The lack of a suitable A-level curriculum in Islamic Studies is a case in point, something for which co-operation between Muslim groups and the relevant authorities would be welcomed. We are also keen to see that RE becomes compulsory at Key Stage 4 as this should have the double benefit of not only providing a bigger Islamic education component, but also of encouraging a longer and consequently more adult discussion relating to issues of morality and ethics.

**2.4.7** A more difficult issue relates to those faith schools that have attracted members of other faith communities. Clearly, Muslims should not argue on the one hand for the maintenance of religious purity in Muslim schools, yet insist upon religious diversity for the benefit of Muslims attending those, such as Catholic, schools. We therefore hope to encourage detailed inter-faith discussions (especially with representatives of Christian faith schools, by virtue of their number) in order to arrive at a sensible position on this point.

**2.4.8** We welcome the diversity that is already present within the education system of the UK and believe that this is extremely healthy both from the pers-

pective of parental choice and of matching educational provision to cultural need. Yet despite this rich diversity, an increasing focus upon quantitative measures of educational success seems to have permeated the UK system. Baseline assessments and SATs from the age of seven have extended this approach to measurement into the youngest age groups. Some commentators argue that these devices are welcomed by schools as a means of gaining external recognition. Others point out that the pressure to succeed acts upon both children and parents as exams draw near. None of these motivations and pressures necessarily have a healthy effect upon a child's education.

**2.4.9** One system that may reflect Muslim attitudes to education more readily is the Steiner approach, wherein there is little emphasis on pressured or formal education until the age of seven. However, we acknowledge that this type of provision is limited.

**2.4.10** Another system that is finding increased recognition within the frame of Islamic education is the Montessori approach,<sup>16</sup> a child-led but nevertheless structured approach to education. Here, concepts of personal and team responsibility are emphasised but the child's creativity is also given full freedom for expression.

**2.4.11** Mention should also be given to Muslim attitudes in the debate on abuse and maltreatment within schools. The use of occasional physical discipline although rejected by the majority of Muslim parents following numerous Islamic injunctions may be accepted by some Muslims though it must, if at all necessary, never be physically damaging and must be applied if only allowed within existing law. Whether the existence of a physical deterrent of some kind can play a part in maintaining order, we feel is a decision that as far as possible should be left to the discretion of each school in accordance with the teaching methodology that it has chosen. Transparency is, of course, vital here such that parents know what regime has been adopted at their child's school and can make their choices accordingly.

## 2.5 FUNDING

**2.5.1** In 1995, a survey by *The Further Education Development Agency*<sup>17</sup> found that a third of all state schools were Voluntary Maintained denominational schools, mainly Church of England and Roman Catholic. The only religious schools run by ethnic minority faiths and funded by the state were 22 Jewish schools in England and Wales. By 1998 a further 3 Jewish schools achieved state funding, as did the first 2 Muslim schools. To date, 5 Muslim schools have achieved maintained status. They are Islamia Primary School in London, al-Furqan Primary School in Birmingham, Eversham College in Bradford, Manchester Islamic High School for Girls, and Zakaria Muslim Girls' High School in Batley.

<sup>16</sup> The Ark Montessori Nursery in Thornton Heath, London, is a successful example of this trend. Within six months of opening it achieved full capacity and doubled its staffing level to cope with attendance

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in CRE Factsheet *Education and Training in Britain*, 1998

**2.5.2** In the meantime, there has been a mushrooming of independent Muslim schools, from less than 20 in 1990 to 58 in 1998 and more than 80 in 2002. At an annual seminar for Muslim schools organised by the Association of Muslim Schools in March 2001, a further 19 Muslim schools had been established or were in the process of being established. This rate of growth will continue until there is an improvement in state funded alternatives.

**2.5.3** There is a widely perceived imbalance in the provision of public funding for Muslim schools in the UK. With the Muslim population representing the country's largest minority religion, the existence of only 5 maintained Muslim schools is clearly inequitable. The CCRT Report comments:

there was a clear recognition that as faith based Christian schools were already supported, fairness demanded that the same facility should be available to Muslim and other communities.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *CCRT Report, 2001*, section 5.8.8

**2.5.4** Current requirements for clear local demand to exist before independent schools can opt-in to maintained status need to be reviewed. This requirement is seen to be rather vague and can encourage stalling by those LEA's who look upon Muslim schools unfavourably.

**2.5.5** Some Muslim schools will feel that they have not achieved the necessary basis to opt-in. As a result, the Islamia School was refused state funding in 1996, even though during the same month state funding was authorised for a proposed Jewish faith school in Enfield which was yet to attract a single pupil.<sup>19</sup> For smaller schools, financial assistance could be well directed towards a programme of second-tier capacity building, allowing some to be fast-tracked towards maintained status. Alternatively, minimum capacity criteria could be relaxed to encourage such schools to opt-in.

<sup>19</sup> *Muslim News*, December 1997

**2.5.6** We also recognise that the establishment of Voluntary Aided City Academies in the major areas of Muslim population is one existing means whereby the necessary financial support can be obtained.

**2.5.7** It should also be recognised that levels of resources in Muslim schools that remain within the independent sector may remain at a quite unsatisfactory level. One possible remedy would be to allow these schools easier access to Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) funding through their Local Authorities. We note in this regard that Trafford education authority has refused to pay SSA to an independent Muslim school within its jurisdiction, although it had previously done so in respect of Catholic children attending an independent Catholic school. It seems that Local Authorities need to be encouraged by central Government in the disbursement of SSA and also to encourage dispersal equally between the major faith groups.

**2.5.8** Many Muslim groups also have deep reservations where funding from the National Lottery is concerned. Where this source supports formal schemes,

such as the Family Learning Initiative, Government should identify other avenues for the funding of selected Muslim community projects. The Muslim Council of Britain has previously raised this issue.

## **2.6 PARENTAL CHOICE**

**2.6.1** Parents not only need to have rights, but also need to know what those rights are. Many parents will be unaware, for example, that they have the right to withdraw their children from sex education where it is not part of the NC and from RE lessons. We applaud the steps that have already been taken at both the national and local levels to inform and educate parents in essential matters of choice.

**2.6.2** As with the process of gaining good political representation, many Muslim parents seem to comparatively lack the same educational knowledge as other parents and this impacts upon the processes of selecting schools for their children. Entry to schools in the maintained sector therefore do cause some concern, although this is not replicated in the independent sector where the fee paying nature means that the entry process is much more transparent.

**2.6.3** In most cases the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 allows parents to express a preference to their LEA and governing board regarding selection. Exceptions occur where a school is wholly selective on ability, where it would compromise the religious character of the school or where it would prejudice efficient education (including use of resources). We agree that this is the correct format to follow for the Muslim community.

**2.6.4** Our concern is that the processes operating within the education system are too complicated and that combined with the large number of rules and conditions that must be considered, all but the most committed and socially connected parents are placed at a disadvantage. A simplification of the various processes and an increase in the transparency of the system as policy goals, with a particular focus on minority communities, would therefore be highly desirable. This could include the provision of trained advisers to discuss issues of concern to parents in various communities nationally.

**2.6.5** As the number of Muslim schools is relatively small, the Greenwich Judgement represents an important improvement in flexibility for parents who wish to opt out of borough schools. The opportunity afforded by the judgement should allow each new maintained Muslim school to benefit from a larger catchment area of Muslim parents.

The “Greenwich Judgement” of 1989 established that LEA-maintained schools may not give priority to children simply because of the fact that they live in the authority’s administrative area. This does not mean that admission authorities cannot use certain oversubscription criteria which have the effect of giving priority to some local children. Most importantly,

admission authorities must work closely with those in neighbouring LEA areas so that sensible planning can take place.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> DfES Circular  
Number 12/98 Annex A

**2.6.6** Given the constraints on availability of suitable Muslim education, we also welcome the Rotherham Judgement and moves by the Government to reflect parental preference through the Excellence in Cities programme.<sup>21</sup> This programme is particularly relevant when one considers the large concentrations of Muslims within the larger urban areas.

<sup>21</sup> *Education for All*,  
1985

In late 1997, the “Rotherham Judgement” confirmed that there was nothing unlawful with the principle of admission authorities operating catchment areas as part of their oversubscription criteria in allocating school places (providing of course that they do not also breach the Greenwich judgement). But the ruling drew attention to the LEA’s primary duty to allocate places at its schools to parents who have expressed a need for admission arrangements to make clear provision for expressions of parental preference. Local education authorities are required to make arrangements to enable parents to express a preference for the school to which they wish their child to be admitted, and to enable parents to give reasons for that preference.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> DfES Circular  
Number 12/98 Annex A

**2.6.7** Importantly, the legal requirement that children be provided with an education between the ages of 5 and 15 does not imply the requirement to attend formal school, since an adequate home tuition will be accepted by the local education inspector. This facility is of benefit to increasing numbers of Muslim parents and receives our warm support under current circumstances. We believe that home schooling families contribute to a reduction of pressure upon educational resources in the maintained sector and that this contribution should be recognised. This could take the form of tax relief or direct financial assistance in a manner similar to that in which SSA is allocated.

**2.6.8** The issue of female education in Islam also has a direct bearing upon the role of parental choice among many Muslim parents. The idea that Islam somehow discourages the education of females is of course quite bogus, however some Muslim women find it preferable to be treated by female doctors, taught by female teachers and advised by female advisors on all manner of issues. The role of women within Muslim society is nevertheless quite distinct to that of men, and this is something that Muslims wish to recognise within the provision of education. As such, even within the existing education system, the principle of segregation should not be seen as something out of the ordinary. Beacon schools, for example, already segregate by gender in certain areas of the curriculum.

**2.6.9** Though the Swann Committee recommended the retention of single-sex establishments<sup>23</sup> and despite the academic performance being generally better at single-sex schools, the trend towards co-education in British education

<sup>23</sup> *Education for All*,  
1985

has not abated. In fact, the number of single-sex establishments continues to decrease through merger or outright closure. On this issue some Muslims are in favour of reversing the decline in single-sex schools, particularly within the 10 to 16 age groups. Others are opposed to gender segregation in education. However, the issue of segregation does not apply to primary schools.

## 2.7 EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AMONG MUSLIMS

**2.7.1** A discussion of educational achievement among Muslims should not proceed without first reminding ourselves that the trend towards adopting quantitative assessment of performance needs to be better counterbalanced by qualitative measures of an individual's abilities.

**2.7.2** Key Stage assessments, inspector assessment, class sizes and examination pass rates can often hide positive aspects of a school's performance or of a child's ability unless a qualitative context is given to them. Other less quantitative qualities are also essential skills within a society, yet we have little means to account for them in education.

**2.7.3** With some validity, concerns over functional capabilities within the Muslim community tend to dominate discussions on achievement. Literacy remains a problem particularly in respect of the older age groups. As of 1997, those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent were the most likely to have no qualifications in both the 16 to 24 age bracket (24% have no qualifications) and also in the 25 to retirement age bracket (47% have no qualifications).<sup>24</sup> However, this underachievement cannot be explained by language factors alone, since 64% of Indian and 75% of Chinese pupils achieved this benchmark. Many educationalists, such as Robin Richardson, are highlighting the effect that Islamophobia plays in the underachievement of Muslim pupils.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> CRE, *Education and Training in Britain Factsheet*, 1998

**2.7.4** CRE data for 1996 on the 'Asian' racial group as a whole shows that 38% achieved 5 or more GCSE A to C grades (whites 45%, blacks 23% and 'other' 46%). The statistical trend among wider ethnic minorities however has been towards some improvement. For example, in Birmingham in 1988, 18% of ethnic minority pupils achieved an A to C grade in five or more subjects, whereas by 1994 this had improved to 30%.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson and Wood, *Inclusive Schools Inclusive Society*; Trentham Books, 2000

**2.7.5** Poor proficiency in the English language is another barrier to progress to some Muslim communities, both during school and subsequently in employment. There is also some evidence that language barriers affect parent-child relationships where first and second generation immigrants are concerned. Gaps in the understanding of English language among bilingual children in particular have been identified by OFSTED.

**2.7.6** Given that Section 11 funding for extra English language tuition is no longer available, it is suggested that Family Literacy programmes<sup>26</sup> and the Learning and Skills Council's 'Family Learning' initiative could be used to address some of the more severe language problems within some communities.

<sup>26</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 8.11

Family learning benefits both children and adults. The benefits for adults include that they are able to understand their child's development and their curriculum, and one of the spin-offs from this may be an enhanced wish on their own part to understand how to enhance their child's development and also to develop their own learning further.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> John Harwood,  
Chief Executive,  
*Learning & Skills  
Council News*, Issue 55,  
10 December 2001

**2.7.7** The inclusion agenda offers some hope in escaping the shortcomings of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant which is seen by some to have stigmatised children who participated in it. Instead, a broadly based training approach in which all children participate during the school day should be adopted in order to solve specific kinds of underachievement.

## NON-MUSLIM SCHOOLS

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### 3.1 INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

**3.1.1** There are still major Muslim populations within the UK that are not served by any suitable educational service, state or privately funded. A major sponsor of this situation is the lack of community representation at administrative level within relevant departments of many local authorities. Indeed, there are many areas of the country where a substantial ethnic, religiously or culturally defined population has no effective voice to represent itself in major decisions of relevance to its own community.

**3.1.2** In some cases planning permission for the establishment of a Muslim school has taken decades to achieve, if at all. Given the conclusions of the Lawrence Report, it is not unnatural to suspect that institutional racism could underlie any perpetuation of this situation. Institutional Islamophobia may also act to restrict the Muslim presence at higher levels of an organisation.

**3.1.3** On the topic of recruitment in education, further worries are relevant. Professor Alan Ross of the University of North London's Institute of Policy Studies finds that 21% of white teachers with 15 years or more experience had become heads or deputy heads whilst only 12% of black and 14% of Asian teachers had achieved the same.<sup>28</sup> Governing bodies and recruitment panels were not choosing ethnic minority candidates because they tended to misread their responses at interview, Ross says. To illustrate this, the CRE comments:

At the 1991 census, only 2.5% of working teachers and other educational professionals were from ethnic minority groups. Meanwhile, at 7%, ethnic minority groups are substantially over represented among unemployed educational professionals.<sup>29</sup>

However, in addition to this, many Muslim men are discouraged from taking up posts in state primary schools due to the fact that they are unable to obtain time off for Friday Prayers.

### 3.2 RELIGIOUS AWARENESS TRAINING

**3.2.1** The understanding of non-Muslim teachers towards the sensitivities of Muslim children and their parents has often been criticised. It is not uncom-

<sup>28</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 14th September 2001

<sup>29</sup> *Education and Training in Britain*, 1998

mon to find that non-Muslim staff are unaware of even the most basic of these sensitivities, in diet and in dress requirements for example.

During Ramadan, cooking and dancing classes were organised. Pork was served to Muslim children at lunchtime. Parents' written requests for children not to attend assembly went ignored. The parents are incensed. They have gone to meetings with teachers and come out crying. (Spokesperson for Muslim parents, Yorkshire).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia, A Challenge For Us All*, 1997, ch. 7, p.43

**3.2.2** In order to ensure the necessary level of understanding among non-Muslim staff, we recommend that schools should avail themselves of appropriate religious awareness training. Given the trends towards greater autonomy of school governance, we specifically recommend that such training is made available for all governing bodies. In this respect, one particularly relevant conduit would be the Islamic Foundation which has been recommended by the Home Office as a provider of Islamic Cultural Awareness Training.

**3.2.3** A successful example of religious awareness training is that of Faversham School in Bradford which ran an INSET on "Common Misconceptions of Islam". Approximately half of the staff at Faversham, including the head, are non-Muslim.

### **3.3 ACCOMMODATING MUSLIM NEEDS**

**3.3.1** Muslims give over to a school an implied responsibility for monitoring and enforcing their children's adherence to Islamic norms. An understanding of this responsibility is particularly important in schools where opportunities to engage in un-Islamic activities are freely available. Peer pressure can act heavily upon Muslim students, particularly with regard to dress, diet and the performance of prayer.

**3.3.2** Of British education, the CCRT Report states:

A rather Euro-centric curriculum and pervasive Christian worship (even in schools with few, if any, Christians), is still evident.

**3.3.3** Muslim parents wish to nurture children who are knowledgeable of their own heritage as well as its British counterpart, hence Arab, African and Asian history will each require a newfound focus within the existing curriculum. Indeed, members of other faiths and cultures will have similar desires for their children too. We therefore support moves to include material that focuses upon diverse cultures and religions within a broad range of curriculum topics for teaching to the entire spectrum of UK pupils. However, this move must be approached with much care as there is some concern that teaching materials too often focus on the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims rather than what they have in common. Taking the 'sarees and samosas' approach in

some text books to look at Muslim communities does little to inform the wider community of the reality of Muslim life in the U.K, nor does it take into consideration the increasing number of white converts and mixed race Muslim families, and thus can have the negative effect of reinforcing stereotypes of Muslim children as the ‘other’.

**3.3.4** Curricular changes cannot of course be divorced from the agenda of the examining boards and we therefore propose that attention continues to be given to developing examination options that coincide with the desires of the major cultures and faith groups. The establishment of a compulsory examination in RE or perhaps an approach in keeping with Butler’s ‘Change and Tradition’ course could support efforts in the realm of Citizenship.

**3.3.5** Furthermore, a multi-faceted curriculum in which more options are made available with regards to specific examination subjects.

**3.3.6** The Birchfield Primary case is instructive in creating an environment in a state school that is faith-accommodating rather than mono-faith. Here, Muslim children were withdrawn from collective worship (as allowed by the Education Act 1944) in order to worship on the school premises according to Islam in a non-sectarian fashion. Instead of undertaking the withdrawal without provision for alternative instruction, Mawlana Imran Mogra was appointed as a peripatetic teacher in Islam. Whilst this experiment aroused some opposition from the local education authority it transformed the children’s confidence as Muslims and attracted attention much further afield. Gillian Shepherd insisted on an HMI inspection, which was positive and showed that the school was inclusive. The arrangements were later dismantled when the scheme’s chief architect, Dr Muhammad Muqaddim left the school.

**3.3.7** There are various unpublished studies done on the Birchfield experiment which are available from the University of Birmingham. Professor Blaylock of the Central Council for RE argued that Birchfield was divisive. Dr Muhammad Muqaddim asks whether it was the fact of separate classes that caused division or whether it was the content of what was actually being taught. After all, state schools are full of de facto differences such as those by class, race and more deliberate ones, including streaming by ability and gender. In this respect, difference already exists in a myriad of ways, which all subsequently remain under the full control of the school.

**3.3.8** In conclusion here, since there is no prohibition upon providing a teacher of Islam for Muslim pupils who withdraw from collective worship, it is recommended that this be considered nationally for all state schools where Muslim pupils form the majority of the entire school's population. This would also be entirely allowable under the powers granted to local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) allowing them to determine that worship of a mainly Christian character is inappropriate in specific cases.

**3.3.9** It is necessary to reiterate the importance of ritual within the Muslim faith, where after the declaration of faith, prayer is the next most important aspect. It is suggested therefore that consideration may also be given to the provision of facilities for pupils over the age of ten to perform the daily prayers whilst at school. A sensible and open debate concerning this is encouraged.

**3.3.10** Educators should also be aware of the sensitivities of Muslims with regard to the issue of physical education. The mixing of males and females during physical exercise presents an obvious problem, as does the absence of privacy for older pupils. Communal showering for example is one such case in point. If a school operates a policy on such matters, it should be clear that facilities need to be made available to cater for Muslims or more appropriately, at least to allow exemptions in respect of that policy.

### **3.4 RESOURCING**

**3.4.1** We recognise that the approach adopted towards Muslims in the maintained sector will vary dependent upon the numbers and percentages of Muslim pupils within specific schools. There is a clear need to distinguish between those where the overwhelming majority of pupils are from a Muslim background (Muslim-majority) and those where the overwhelming majority of pupils are not from a Muslim background (Muslim-minority).

**3.4.2** Broadly speaking, in the case of Muslim-majority schools, we feel that it may be useful to begin to develop standard procedures suitable to all concerned. Such procedures could cover worship and religious education, but could also extend to other fields as determined by the relevant school authority.

**3.4.3** In Muslim-minority schools, the issue of resourcing becomes critical. We understand the pressures that act upon school budgets with the increasing demands of legislation. With this in mind it seems that *Schools Achieving Success* is sympathetic to a number of options that could be employed in meeting Muslim needs.

**3.4.4** One option includes the secondment of resources from Muslim schools and the use of private Muslim teachers for special classes on Islamic subjects in selected maintained schools (we again refer to the Birchfield example). This approach could extend to the use of further education teachers in schools, as outlined in Section 8 of *Schools Achieving Success*. Muslim-minority Schools in particular, which might not otherwise have appropriate resources available, could benefit from such innovative practices.

**3.4.5** If twinning of schools is to be promoted, then this would be another useful approach allowing Muslim schools to form closer relationships with their Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority counterparts.<sup>51</sup> The Government's wish to encourage schools to seek partnerships amongst one another could

<sup>51</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 2.5

allow examples of best practice to spread and help generate income within the Muslim education sector.<sup>32</sup> We warmly support this proposal, however we are against any legislative compulsion in these matters especially with regard to the selection of partner schools for twinning. Faith schools should be allowed to decide what policies sustain or jeopardise the essential religious character of their institution unimpeded.

<sup>32</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 5.27

**3.4.6** Since Muslim schools have traditionally suffered from an inability to source or purchase required resources, a chain of suppliers who are able to satisfy Muslim educational needs (text books and teaching aids, for example) has been slow to develop. The Jewish community provides a striking contrast, having devoted substantial time towards the development of a curriculum framework for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. In 1994 it sourced £31 million of funding for the establishment of a centre for research and quality development in Jewish education.<sup>33</sup> It is suggested that a similar framework is begun to be worked on within Muslim communities as soon as possible.

<sup>33</sup> Judy Keiner, "Jewish Schools in the UK", Department of Education Studies and Management, University of Reading

**3.4.7** Despite its constituency of state funded faith schools, even the Jewish community have had many financing concerns over the years. In Muslim education, where this well-funded constituency does not exist, it should be clear that similar problems regarding teaching resources are far greater.

**3.4.8** We propose that appropriate Muslim institutions should be provided with a greater financial assistance in order to fulfil the role of content provision.

# MUSLIM SCHOOLS

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## **4.1 ADDRESSING THE RECENT CRITICISM OF FAITH SCHOOLS**

**4.1.1** In some quarters the existence of the ‘faith school’ label is seen to disguise the operation of discriminatory policies, where religious affiliations protect existing cultural and ethnic divisions. Hence the Ouseley Report asserted that it is necessary to confront all-white and all-Muslim schools about their lack of contribution to social and racial integration.

**4.1.2** The point should be made at once that separate schooling does not necessarily imply divisiveness in society. To argue that social division lies entirely at the door of faith schools is a tenuous assertion.

**4.1.3** As a result, the CCRT Report argues that new faith schools should be all-inclusive. They recommend a variety of measures, including that new faith schools should limit their intake from any one culture or ethnicity and should offer at least 25% of places to reflect other cultures or ethnicities within the local area.

**4.1.4** Our position is that, by focusing the debate about segregation onto faith schools, the equally important issue of racial segregation within state schools is subsequently ignored. If policy is to be aligned upon differences in faith, then it should be realised that a requirement for a fixed proportion of non-faith pupils may meet resistance. This is not because of the principle of mixing per se but rather because of the fact of compulsion. Such a policy would be especially unworkable in areas where the culture is highly homogeneous.

**4.1.5** We feel that the objective of mainstreaming – the fostering of multi-culturally aware children who can engage with non-Muslim society in later life – can still be achieved within a methodology that emphasises a separate cultural and religious identity. The key is not respect for the beliefs of others but rather respect for the rights of others to choose their beliefs.

## **4.2 MAINTAINING THE SCHOOL’S RELIGIOUS CHARACTER**

**4.2.1** Among the criticisms specific to Muslim schools that regularly appear in media discussion and political discourse are those which portray Muslim

schools as being seed-beds where individuals grow to become incompatible with wider society. There is a certain inconsistency in some of these criticisms, based as they are upon a denunciation of separate schools for Muslims. Rarely is the word 'separate' used negatively in respect of Christian or Jewish faith schools. The parallel concern among many Muslim parents is that the assimilationist model proposed by some commentators is a long term attack on the survival of their faith and heritage.

**4.2.2** This situation raises a number of questions for concerned Muslim parents. First it should be reiterated that the reality of Muslim education is far less threatening than some media commentators have suggested. It is not entirely flippant to remind ourselves that none of the Asians arrested following the Oldham disturbances attended Muslim schools nor indeed were those British Muslims held captive at Guantanamo Bay. Typical of the revelation awaiting those who wish to see for themselves was the experience of Ken Livingstone who, whilst serving as an MP, visited Islamia Primary School, where he famously entered with the expectation of finding “trainee ayatollahs”, but departed having seen a happy and ordinary school with an Islamic ethos.<sup>34</sup>

**4.2.3** Other Muslim parents however favour engagement with the non-Muslim community, arguing that Islamic teaching does not seek to create a society that is ignorant of other cultures and religions. Knowledge of other faiths – Christianity and Judaism in particular – is an essential part of Islamic knowledge.

**4.2.4** Of course, *all* religion can also be used as a cloak for bigotry, although we also believe that bigotry can be a two-way process where religion can be equally deployed as a means or justification for discrimination.

**4.2.5** Despite all of the above, it is our contention that decisions on the selection and proportion of non-faith pupils in a given faith school should be left for the school in question. Certainly such decisions can operate within the context of non-binding guidelines but compulsion should not become necessity. In this respect it is comforting to encounter the Government’s belief that “diversity should be catered for by each school according to the requirements of its pupils”.<sup>35</sup> The promotion of greater consumer choice also sits well within this vision.<sup>36</sup>

### **4.3 FUNDING AND RESOURCES**

**4.3.1** We welcome the Government’s encouragement for the expansion of faith schools in the maintained sector “where there is clear local agreement”.<sup>37</sup> Given the high concentration of Muslims in urban areas, there will be substantial demand for new maintained Muslim schools in appropriate locations.

**4.3.2** The exceptional performance of many independent Muslim schools is all the more marked when one considers the relatively low levels of funding and

<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim Hewitt, “The Case for Muslim Schools”, in *Issues in Islamic Education*, Muslim Educational Trust, 1996

<sup>35</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 1.5

<sup>36</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 1.8

<sup>37</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 5.30

resources available to most of them. What is being achieved is in most cases due to the dedication of staff and the commitment of parents. Given the levels of income available to average Muslim families, it has also become common for independent Muslim schools to rely on charitable donations. Bank borrowing is particularly inappropriate due to Islamic teachings about interest and in any case would probably not be forthcoming due to the lack of sufficient cash-flow or collateral.

**4.3.3** Frequently, Muslim schools rely upon a dedicated core team of underpaid teachers many of whom are younger women in the case of primary and supplementary schools and therefore suffer a high staff turnover. It is without doubt that performance improvements would result if the level of resources available to maintained schools was made available to the independent Muslim schools.

**4.3.4** Previously, we recognised the importance of developing a support industry in content provision for curriculum topics that are of relevance to Islam. This issue is of course most pressing within Muslim schools where the entire curriculum will require content that is specifically designed with Muslim children in mind.

**4.3.5** The importance of giving due consideration to the resource implications of any policy decisions that require schools to cater for non-faith members is a final, but important, note here. The physical and human resources required to cater for even one such pupil will in some cases necessitate substantial expenditure on the part of a faith school.

#### **4.4 CURRICULUM**

**4.4.1** Though not mandatory for independent schools, many Muslim schools follow the NC in its core aspects with modifications in order to accord with the teachings of Islam. In some cases the NC needs little modification, as with Mathematics and Information Technology. In the Science subjects (Physics, Biology and Chemistry) however there is likely to be a change in emphasis so that the processes of elevating deductive logic is de-emphasised and other forms of receiving knowledge are given their respective emphasis. In the Humanities, a more substantial change to the NC may be apparent. As with the teaching of History, a less 'Eurocentric' approach might be in evidence with Islamic history given special emphasis. In addition Qur'an studies, Arabic and other Islamic subjects may become major elements within the curriculum.

**4.4.2** Within other subjects, there lie some problems. For example, the teaching of Arts & Crafts may bring the student into contact with inappropriate forms of sculpture or with paintings whose subject matter is similarly in conflict with Islamic values. Some literature might encompass material that promotes inappropriate morality. In addition the use of certain musical instruments may be looked upon unfavourably by some Muslim parents.

**4.4.3** Perhaps the broadest question is the one that addresses the need to balance Islamic teachings and practices with the beliefs and practices of the British culture. Here we inevitably return to the multi-cultural agenda and the principle that respect for freedom of choice should not imply a need to respect the substance of that choice.

**4.4.4** However, some on the right of the political spectrum say that instruction in alien languages and cultures is contrary to the spirit of a multi-cultural society. Of course this is only a matter of focus, since instruction in other cultures and languages continues unabated within the mainstream curriculum (French and German for example). Indeed, since the teaching of other European languages was in the past established with one eye to a Europe free of war, the same parallel might now be applied in a more global perspective to the teaching of Arabic, Urdu, Bengali or Chinese.

**4.4.5** If there is one restraint on the achievement of a multi-cultural education from the perspective of Muslim schools it is, as we have seen, the limitation imposed by a lack of resources. We have proposed the use of Muslim peripatetic teachers as a means of delivering knowledge of Islam into non-Muslim Schools. There is no reason why a reciprocal approach should not be adopted by Muslim schools who wish to broaden their curriculum. Thus, a peripatetic teacher specialising in the Christian and Jewish tradition could quite adequately be employed.

#### **4.5 PERFORMANCE, SECTION 10 AND SECTION 23 INSPECTIONS**

**4.5.1** It should be clear that if a definition of a school's performance from the Islamic perspective includes a spiritual dimension, then so too a definition of failure should encompass a lack of it. Efforts should be made to identify suitable qualitative measures here.

**4.5.2** Whilst examination results should not be the sole yardstick of worth in education, in terms of academic performance there are several Muslim schools that achieve high standards compared to their counterparts in the non-faith sector. According to the AMS (2000):

Islamia Girls' School in London was the top school in the Borough of Brent in 1994 and 1995 for GCSE results. Since then it has never been placed lower than seventh (often higher) in the league tables out of sixteen schools. In 1996 and 1997, non-selective Zakaria Muslim Girls' School in Batley, West Yorkshire, was third (out of thirteen) in the immediate area. Al-Furqan School (Birmingham), Tayyibah Girls' School (London) and Leicester Islamic Academy have also all had excellent results in recent years.

**4.5.3** Whilst poor educational performance is sometimes a result of poor teaching, unhelpful attitudes on the part of some Muslim parents also need to be faced squarely. One of these is the tendency for long periods of withdrawal from school during term-time which affects the child concerned when the child returns. Some attendance figures are often dreadful as a result. A suitable policy of dealing with this problem may be an approach in which parents commit to no absence at all.

**4.5.4** These problems aside, where a Muslim school is performing poorly, we strongly urge that inspectors take into account the impact of inadequate resources. This issue takes on greater significance given the explicit objective of intervention in poorly performing schools.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Schools Achieving Success*, 2001, section 1.6

**4.5.5** Several Education Acts impact upon the undertaking of OFSTED inspections for Voluntary and Foundation schools which have been designated by the Secretary of State as having a religious character. Section 23 inspections deal with standards in religious education and worship, whilst Section 10 relates to the broadly secular aspects of schools' activities but includes an assessment of adherence to the School's Ethos Statement.

**4.5.6** We would like to see a larger number of experienced Muslims as qualified inspectors undertaking Section 10 and Section 23 inspections, in order to provide the necessary sensitivity and familiarity with Muslim issues.

**4.5.7** We would also like to see the development by a suitable Muslim body of clearer benchmarks in this area, in common with moves made by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Diocesan authorities, and also by the Board of Jewish Deputies. Such action would assist in promoting consistency amongst Muslim schools, subject to the availability of sufficient resources.

## SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

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### 5.1 'FAITH AND PRACTICE' EDUCATION

**5.1.1** A lack of appropriate and accessible facilities for Muslim children in the mainstream sector has in many cases spawned a heavy reliance upon supplementary education. This is often organised on a mosque by mosque basis. There is also an increasing provision of supplementary education through operations that are independent of mosques and which are established specifically for the purpose of providing such education.

**5.1.2** It is widely recognised that substantial programmes of supplementary education can result in stress upon children, some of whom spend seven days a week attending schools of various descriptions or who study in the evening when other children are relaxing at home with their parents. Parents too suffer, transporting their children between two schools and bearing various extra costs.

**5.1.3** It is probably also true that supplementary education in the Muslim community has been the stamping ground for some unscrupulous practices, often stemming from concerns that are more commercial than educational.

**5.1.4** The answer to many of the problems facing us lies not so much in regulation of supplementary education, but rather in the removal of those factors that are leading to its over-use. Where supplementary education is relied upon, we should aim to synchronise its curriculum with that of the basic education system so as to avoid duplication of effort and waste of resources.

**5.1.5** The issues facing Muslims in supplementary education have of course changed since the 1960's, and those mosque-based educational organisations must also learn to change. The best will understand the pressures and influences acting upon the children of state schools, and will appreciate that they are no longer dealing with a first wave of immigrant worker families. Problems of a very different moral and spiritual nature now arise in society. Permissiveness has taken on an entirely new meaning since the 1960's and new responses must be developed to face these problems.

**5.1.6** Today, supplementary education may find itself being best directed towards the fulfilment of a few basic objectives rather than addressing the

grand designs of a holistic education. These objectives probably include three main areas: religious education; instruction in the mother tongue of the children's parents; and homework clubs which allow for children to catch up with the academic performance of their peers. There are subsidiary areas too in which specific gaps can be plugged, physical education for girls being one example.

**5.1.7** There seems to be little empirical evidence about the attitudes of young people towards mosque based educational organisations nor an estimation of their effectiveness. Proper research is therefore required in such matters, firstly in order that available resources are marshalled in the most effective manner and secondly so that the direction of national policy in supplementary education can be made relevant to Muslim requirements.

## **5.2 MOTHER TONGUE CLASSES**

**5.2.1** The adoption of more appropriate curricular material within the mainstream education sector would allow supplementary education outlets to focus upon their core objectives of instilling religious knowledge. For example, if the teaching of mother tongues was to be incorporated as an option within mainstream curricula – as suggested previously – then substantial pressures would be removed from the shoulders of the supplementary system. Additionally, the provision of mother tongue classes by Local Authorities under the Life Long Learning Programme could also be of assistance.

**5.2.2** As also discussed beforehand, we feel that there is some merit in adopting initiatives to promote Family Learning. This approach could, for the first time, allow those involved in supplementary education direct access to state funding with all the benefits that this might accrue in terms of quality of service. It is probably true to say that the most willing recipients of state assistance in this regard will be the independent supplementary education institutions.

## **5.3 HOMEWORK CLUBS AND SCHOOLS**

**5.3.1** Homework clubs and schools have been of great assistance to children whose home environment has not adopted English as its mother tongue.

**5.3.2** Homework clubs and schools can play a major part in the effective integration of minority groups at the academic level, and therefore in due course at the employment level. Support should be given where necessary to attain a sufficient level of resources for these academic aims to be achieved. The cost element involved may not be as high as it first seems, of course, because with improved English literacy the burden upon mainstream teachers could be substantially reduced.

## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

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- A suitable A level curriculum in Islamic Studies currently does not exist. Co-operation between Muslim groups and the relevant authorities should be encouraged in order to promote such a syllabus.
- As there is no prohibition upon the provision of a teacher of Islam for Muslim pupils who withdraw from RE, we recommend that this suggestion be considered more widely in all Muslim-majority state schools.
- Religious Education should become compulsory at Key Stage 4.
- Greater attention should be given to developing examination options that cater to the desires of the major cultures and faith groups. This might include the establishment of a compulsory examination in Religious Education or in the realm of Citizenship.
- The trend towards adopting quantitative measures of performance needs to be better counterbalanced by qualitative assessments of the school's and the individual's abilities.
- Efforts should be made to synchronise the supplementary curriculum with that of the basic education system so as to avoid duplication of effort and waste of resources.
- The secondment of resources from Muslim schools and the use of private Muslim teachers for special classes on Islamic subjects in selected maintained schools is to be encouraged. This approach could extend to the use of further education teachers in schools.
- The decline in the availability of single-sex education should be halted and reversed. Muslim parents are particularly in favour of single-sex schools in the 11-16 age group.
- Appropriate Muslim institutions should be provided with financial assistance in order to fulfil the role of content provision for the education of Muslims.
- Resourcing for Muslim schools can be improved if Muslim schools are allowed to access Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) funding through their Local Authorities.

- Parents who wish to home educate their children should be given access to tax incentives and other financial assistance in recognition of the reduction in resource requirements that results in the maintained sector.
- Homework clubs and schools can play a major part in the effective integration of minority groups at the academic level, and support should be given where necessary to make a sufficient level of resources here.
- The Learning and Skills Council's Family Learning Initiative should be used to address some of the more severe language problems affecting Muslim pupils.
- Consideration should be given to addressing the democratic deficit in order to allow greater engagement between members of the political executive and interested Muslim representatives. A formal consultation system in which people of all faiths meet to represent their views at a national level and on an on-going basis may fulfil this objective.
- The processes operating within the education system are not sufficiently transparent to parents. A simplification of the various processes and an increase in the transparency of the system is highly desirable.
- We encourage the appointment of Muslim observers to Local Authority meetings where matters of relevance to the Muslim community are concerned.
- We recommend that schools should avail themselves of appropriate religious awareness training. Given the trends towards greater autonomy of school governance, we specifically recommend that such training is made available for all governing bodies.
- The needs of Muslim pupils in physical education, particular with regard to changing facilities and privacy for who participate in physical education need to be addressed.
- Citizenship should not be given lip service in the same way that RE often is. Education containing Citizenship should be made compulsory.
- Detailed inter-faith discussions should be initiated forthwith in order to discuss pertinent issues relating to faith schools on a cross-religious basis.
- Increased efforts must be made to undertake empirical research into the Muslim community itself. This would extend to such matters as demographics and post-school achievement. Support should be given by Government for such endeavours.
- Decisions on the selection and proportion of non-faith pupils in a given faith school should be left for the school in question.

- Where a Muslim school is performing poorly, inspectors should take into account the impact of funding restrictions. This issue takes on greater significance given the explicit policy objective of intervention in poorly performing schools.
- In order to provide a greater sensitivity and familiarity with the Muslim issues, a larger number of experienced Muslims should be recruited as qualified inspectors to undertake Section 10 and Section 23 inspections.

