

Fitrah Sips

55 Northumberland Road, Southampton, Hampshire SO14 0EJ

Inspection dates

21–23 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that the school has improved since the previous inspection. The newly appointed headteacher has increased the rate of progress since he returned in January.
- The school sits at the heart of the community that it serves. Parents are particularly happy with the breadth and quality of education their children receive.
- Teaching and support staff know pupils very well. The pastoral care of pupils is a great strength of the school. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are given the highest priority.
- Most pupils make good progress across the curriculum. Some pupils make outstanding progress after joining the school because of the high expectations of staff.
- Absence is monitored closely. Lateness is challenged and followed up by staff. As a result, rates of attendance are very high.
- Leaders and the proprietor have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils behave extremely well because adults' expectations are high. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning make classrooms happy and productive places in which to be.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. This is especially the case when subjects are taught by specialists, such as in physical education, computing and Arabic.
- Trustees know the school increasingly well. Although they maintain a clear strategic overview of the school, their understanding of what needs to improve in classrooms is less strong.
- Self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is generally accurate. However, improvement planning is not focused enough, nor is it understood well enough by staff or those in positions of governance.
- Most-able pupils do not always make the progress they are capable of. This is particularly the case in mathematics.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers plan learning that provides sufficient challenge for most-able pupils, especially in mathematics.
- Introduce an element of external and impartial monitoring of the quality of education the school delivers.
- Review systems to evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses and the way these inform improvement planning, so that:
 - improvement planning focuses more keenly on the key areas to develop the school
 - leaders and staff have a clearer understanding of the key priorities for improvement, particularly those relating to consolidating the good quality of teaching and learning
 - those in positions of governance are better equipped to hold leaders to account for improving the quality of education the school provides.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since returning to the school in January of this year, the headteacher has been relentless in his work to accelerate improvement in all aspects of provision. His priorities are the right ones and have injected fresh momentum into the good progress achieved since the last inspection.
- Staff are dedicated to their work. Many do so in a voluntary capacity, devoted to playing their own small, yet important, part in providing pupils with a good quality of education overall. Parents are extremely appreciative of the way staff support their children in becoming successful, confident learners.
- The headteacher has the full support of staff. Because of the size of the school, many aspects of the leadership of teaching and learning are shared, with experienced teachers playing an effective role in modelling good practice and supporting less-experienced teachers to improve.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. As an Islamic school, pupils study Arabic and the Koran, and also learn about the key aspects of their Muslim faith. These subjects are seen as core subjects in the school, along with English, mathematics and science.
- A unique feature of the school's topic-based curriculum is the fusion of Islamic references with contemporary knowledge and understanding to ensure that pupils receive a balanced view of the world around them. As a result, their books contain a wide variety of work, such as the study of fingerprints and DNA, comparisons between Islamic and European culture, the life and work of Sir David Attenborough, and using computers for presentations.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. They learn about world religions, tolerance and respect for others, including those with lifestyles that are different to pupils' own Islamic culture. The school is outward-looking. A recent visit by the Mayor of Southampton was greatly enjoyed by pupils. The school also values partnerships in projects with the local university and hospital, for instance.
- Pupils enjoy the additional visits and trips which the school provides. Most are linked to the topics they study. Trips to the zoo, or to local museums to learn about animals and local history are the norm. Pupils talked to the inspector with excitement about their recent visit to stables to ride and learn about horses as part of their work on extinction of equine species around the world.
- Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is broadly accurate. Recently, much of this work has been carried out by the headteacher, especially since his arrival earlier this year, throwing a fresh light on the key priorities to tackle.
- Improvement planning is less well developed. Crucially, key members of staff and trustees are not as well informed about the key priorities (those things that will really make a difference to improving the school) as they might be. Consequently, the most important aspects that need to be developed are not being given as high a profile as they might.
- The very small size of the school, and the limitations this puts on finances, means that the professional development of staff, including the headteacher, is restricted. While

leaders have rightly prioritised the welfare and safety of pupils, a degree of external challenge and support to improve the quality of teaching and learning further would be beneficial to staff and leaders alike. This will also provide trustees with an impartial overview of the quality of education which the school provides.

Governance

- The model of governance of the school has evolved recently. The board of trustees has taken on the duties of the governing body. As a result, trustees have a more hands-on knowledge of the school, and are able to act quickly to address concerns, or approve the use of additional funding, for instance.
- While trustees' knowledge of areas such as finance, safeguarding, and the appointment of key staff is good, they lack detailed information about the quality of teaching and the impact this has on pupils' outcomes. This is mostly due to the lack of focus in improvement planning, and how it aligns with the headteacher's self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Trustees lack independent professional advice regarding the school's strengths and weaknesses, and rely solely on the headteacher for this. While the school is clearly on an upward trajectory, trustees would benefit from some form of impartial assessment of the quality of education which the school is providing over time. This will help them to hold the headteacher to account for improving the school, as well as providing the headteacher with his own professional development.
- School leaders and those responsible for governance are effective in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher and all staff make this their first priority. Staff know pupils well and are very well informed about the potential risks faced by pupils, both in and out of school. This includes national priorities highlighted in recent government guidance. As a consequence, the culture to keep pupils safe is strong.
- Policies, procedures and systems to keep pupils safe are fit for purpose. This includes the safeguarding policy, which follows current guidance and is published on the school's website.
- All staff, including the school's designated safeguarding leads, are trained appropriately. They know what to do if they have any concerns about the safety of pupils. Staff feel that pupils are safe at the school. Pupils who talked to the inspector said they feel that the school is a safe place for them to be in. Parents were particularly positive about the care that staff afford their children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Classrooms are happy and productive places. Relationships are strong and respectful due to teachers' high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school because staff plan learning that interests them. The topic-based approach to much that is taught enables pupils to make connections between subjects, as well as the themes within them. This includes the teaching of Islamic studies, where staff enable pupils to make links between different cultures, both in the past and in the present.
- Staff have good subject knowledge which they put to excellent use. This is also the case with subject specialists, some of whom are volunteers, delivering subjects such as physical education, computing and Arabic.
- The teaching of early reading skills is a strength of the school. Key staff understand that reading underpins much of what is taught. Phonics provision is sound and not just restricted to the English language. As a result, pupils learn to read well, both in English and in Arabic, neither of which are the first language of many pupils.
- Most teaching meets the needs of pupils well. Pupils benefit from small class and year group sizes. This means that staff are constantly assessing understanding, and that pupils can readily access additional help when required.
- Teachers mostly pitch learning at the right level for the majority of pupils across most subjects. This includes science, where older pupils learn about DNA, the periodic table of elements and how atoms are formed.
- On occasion, most-able pupils are not challenged enough by the work set for them by staff. When this is the case, their progress slows. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where not enough pupils exceed age-appropriate expectations by the end of Year 6.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The health and safety of pupils are given the highest priority by all staff. Supporting pupils' well-being and promoting their social and emotional development are key aspects of the wider curriculum, underpinned by the school's distinctive religious ethos.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very strong. Their motivation to do well is clear to see. Pupils new to the school quickly come to terms with what is expected of them because staff make their expectations clear.
- The curriculum supports pupils' personal development extremely well. They learn about healthy lifestyles and the importance of exercise through subject-specific learning in science and physical education, for instance.
- Pupils say that bullying does not exist at the school. They feel that staff would quickly spot and deal with it if it did. Pupils told the inspector that people work hard to be kind and supportive to each other because, 'That is the right thing to do.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are proud of their school and open and welcoming to visitors. Classrooms are calm and orderly places. No learning time is lost due to poor behaviour or disruptions of any kind.

- Pupils understand that they come to school to learn, and also to learn from and enjoy the company of their friends. The school has a culture of 'family', where all pupils feel they belong. Any action that would make others unhappy or feel unsafe is seen as unacceptable by pupils.
- Pupils' attendance is excellent. Absence is rare and, when it does occur, is mostly linked to illness. Leaders monitor attendance and deal with any concerns quickly and effectively. Rare cases of lateness are also dealt with swiftly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress because the quality of teaching has improved to be good or better across the curriculum. Leaders and staff are increasingly effective at tracking pupils' progress and attainment over time. This enables staff to intervene when pupils are in danger of falling behind.
- The scrutiny of pupils' work showed that staff have high expectations of the quality and amount of work that pupils complete. Feedback, both written and aural, is of good quality and enables pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Pupils take a pride in their books. A recent focus on improving spelling is helping improve the quality of pupils' writing, which is good across the school, particularly in upper key stage 2.
- Pupils make good or better progress in reading and mathematics. Some make accelerated progress on joining the school, due to high levels of supervision and carefully targeted work set by staff.
- Pupils enjoy reading in particular. They are able to articulate clearly who their favourite authors are, and why. They told the inspector that they enjoy their visits to the school library, although some expressed that they would like a wider choice of books to choose from.
- Pupils are well prepared for their move to secondary school when the time comes. Most leave the school and join local mainstream schools. Current parents talk positively about their older children who have already moved on at the end of Year 6. They feel that their children took the transition to Year 7 in their stride because the school had prepared them well, both emotionally and academically.

School details

Unique reference number	136210
DfE registration number	852/6011
Inspection number	10091649

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

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Sabir Amin
Chair	Sabir Amin
Headteacher	Anas Al-Korj
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,580
Telephone number	02380 193156
Website	fitrahschool.com
Email address	office@fitrahsips.com
Date of previous inspection	7–9 November 2017

Information about this school

- Fitrah Sips (Southampton Islamic Primary School) is an independent day school that was set up in 2010. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. All current pupils are Muslim, although the school admits pupils from any faith and none.
- Pupils are taught in three mixed-year-group classes of Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6. At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils in Year 1. Nor were there any pupils in key stage 3 or 4. There are currently 26 pupils on roll.
- The school is governed by a board of trustees. The chair is also the school's proprietor. The headteacher has recently returned to the school after leaving this position in 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a number of classroom visits during the inspection. Most were accompanied by the headteacher. The inspector also observed an off-site physical education lesson. During these observations, the inspector assessed the quality of pupils' work and talked to them about their learning.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, as they moved around the school, and at the start and finish of the school day.
- The inspector accompanied pupils during their visit to a park for their lunchtime break.
- A wide range of meetings was held during the inspection. These included meetings with: the headteacher; members of the teaching and support staff; pupils; parents; volunteers; and the chair of the trust board accompanied by one other trustee, who also represented the proprietorial body.
- The inspector talked to a representative of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on the telephone.
- Three responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire were taken into account, as well as the accompanying free-text messages.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, records and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards. Minutes of the trust board's meetings, the school's own self-evaluation, improvement planning, and information about pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance were also considered.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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