BMSDemocracy

British Muslims for Secular Democracy

Advice for Schools

Brief guidance to support schools and parents in meeting the needs of young Muslim people.

Contents

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

~ Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet (1923)

Preface

The mission of British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSDemocracy) is to advocate and support secularism ('the separation of faith and state'), tolerance, and equal rights, in both general British and specifically Muslim contexts. We campaign for a secular British education system and encourage Muslim engagement within secular spaces. We also aim to combat Islamophobia and bring together progressive Muslim voices to promote secular democracy, social justice, and civic engagement. 2016 marked our 10th year of existence; since we were created by Nasreen Rehman and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown in 2006 and achieved charity status in 2008, we have established a strong and credible presence amongst advocates for democracy and human rights in Muslim communities. We have also developed links with policy-makers and opinion-formers.

In this 2018 revised edition of BMSDemocracy's *Advice for Schools* booklet, we have refined our focus on the issues faced due to the ongoing political crisis surrounding Brexit and the consequent rise in Islamophobia across the UK[1]. We focus on the rights of Muslim students vis-à-vis conservative parents, whilst also emphasising the inclusion and belongingness of Muslims in British contexts (given the dangerous potential for Islamophobic narratives to divide communities, foster mistrust and alienate Muslims from British society and identity). We hope that this booklet will help school leadership, education departments, and individual teachers respond sensitively to the needs of Muslim communities within a shared citizenship framework.

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[1] May Bulman, 'Brexit vote sees highest spike in religious and racial hate crimes ever recorded', the Independent (7th/July/2017): https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/racist-hate-crimes-surge-to-record-high-after-brexit-vote-new-figures-reveal-a7829551.html

Introduction

There has perhaps never been a more difficult time to be a young Muslim growing up in the UK than at present. Young Muslims have to navigate rising Islamophobia and hate crimes, crises of identity, debates over culture versus religion, debates over the place of religion in society, and much more besides. Set against this complex background, this booklet aims to offer parents, schools, and training institutions some clarity in terms of Muslim perspectives and aspects of educational law that impact upon meeting the needs of Muslim pupils. It is hoped all institutions and parents will find it useful as part of their social contract: a contract which upholds a responsibility to educate children and secure their future in the diverse, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multifaith society of modern Britain.

The education of a child in school must be entrusted to professionals. The education of a child at home is the role of families and parents. While teachers must inform and consult families in the education of their child, they must also remain independent and given the opportunity to use their expertise and curriculum without interference from family. There is a universal conflict between the views of the parents and the requirements of schools, regardless of ethnicity or beliefs. Navigating this conflict demands mutual understanding and trust, professional confidence and effective communication.

Too many Muslim children feel undermined and lose their confidence because of spoken and unspoken prejudices they suffer. This inevitably impacts the quality of their education, especially when teachers fail in their responsibilities by being too reluctant to seriously tackle low-level intimidation and exclusion.

At the heart of this guidance is a list of questions and detailed answers for schools, which detail requirements under legislative framework, as well as offering some Muslim and also secular perspectives. The guidance ends with a simple list of 'legitimate' questions that parents could use to understand the school provision. This booklet offers recommendations regarding the implementation of SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural) Development, Safeguarding policy, and the Equality Act. It provides responses to the following scenarios and questions that parents might ask about school policy and practice. Each individual child is, of course, unique and, family circumstances are different. This booklet provides guidelines not rules.

This booklet deals sensitively with issues that can impact upon the religious and cultural sensibilities of Muslims and aims to be easily read and understood by teachers, governors, and parents alike. This booklet will help parents understand

in what ways schools can meet the needs of their Muslim pupils and supports a new balance between the responsibilities of the school and parental demands. It further supports schools in meeting their statutory responsibilities and helps them in their preparation for Oftsed inspections. In short, this booklet will be of lasting value to Muslim and non-Muslim pupils, staff, and parents. We believe every child has the right to get an education that prepares her/him/them to fulfil his/her/their full potential, develop talents and succeed in a complex, diverse, modern world.

Until the year 2000, young Muslim children and teenagers from certain backgrounds (especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi) were being left behind in education. They weren't achieving their potential or going into higher education. In part, this was to do with how they felt about themselves and the education system/society, and in part it was because parents did not actively encourage the pursuit of Higher Education. Substantial research over several decades has shown that Pakistani and Bangladeshi children and young people do less well in education compared to, for example, Indian, East African Asian, and Chinese children and young people. This education gap continues to exist; impacting career prospects and income levels[2], but the picture has improved in recent years: Universities and Higher Education colleges now have a much higher intake of successful and eager young Muslim students, who now enjoy a far greater level of support from their families and communities. This extraordinary cultural change is particularly demonstrated in gender, where Muslim women are overtaking their male counterparts in numbers attending Higher Education.

Education is a gateway to life opportunities, and this applies just as much to Muslims: contemporary British society is replete with Muslim MPs, Muslim doctors, Muslim academics, Muslim authors, Muslim painters, and Muslim scientists who are smashing barriers in their fields. The Muslim Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, started from humble beginnings. His father was a bus driver but due to familial support, lofty ambitions and hard work, Sadiq is now the first Muslim mayor of London. There are many other outstanding Muslim MPs with similar stories—for example, Sajid Javed (the first Muslim home secretary), Baroness Sayeeda Warsi (the first Muslim woman to serve the Cabinet), and Rupa Huq (current MP of Ealing and Acton). Muslim parents are now beginning to realise that the future depends on their children achieving a top-level education in order to prepare them for the opportunities that await them in the future. With such trailblazing role models, it is increasingly becoming easier for Muslim children to find their place in British society. BMSDemocracy is fully committed to helping Muslim children in achieving these goals.

[2] See Tariq Modood et al., 'Ethnic Minorities in Britain', Policy Studies Institute (1997).

Past guidance literature

There is a range of documents that offers guidance to schools and colleges in meeting the needs of Muslim pupils. The best of these have always sought to (1) involve and educate Muslim parents whilst (2) supporting schools in their necessary endeavours to (2a) raise standards of attainment and achievement and (2b) encourage the personal development of their Muslim charges. Some guidance, like the City of Birmingham's, goes back as far as 1988. Others, such as those from the City of Leicester and Muslim Welfare House Trust, are from the early 21st century. British Muslims for Secular Democracy added their own 'Brief Guidance for Handling Muslim Parental Concern' in February 2010. Additionally, a number of extremely useful books have been published to offer more detailed and more nuanced advice, such as Richardson and Wood's 2004 *The Achievement of British Pakistani Learners* and Cole's 2008 *Every Muslim Child Matters.*

Politics, Faith, and Education

The structures and systems that underpin the school delivery have radically changed since 2010. The Education Act 2011, introduced by the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove during the 2010-2015 Coalition government, effectively required any new state school to be set up as a "free school", with central, not local, government deciding whether any proposed new school should be supported. They are all structured as 'academies', which operate independently of local authority control, funded through the Education Funding Agency. Many of them, around a third so far, are designed as faith schools, which have a 50% cap on the proportion of places they can offer on the basis of faith if they are over-subscribed. Since then, around half of the pre-existing state secondary schools, including many community schools and designated faith schools, have also switched from locally-maintained to academy status. Ofsted continue to be responsible for school inspection. Academies are not bound to follow the national curriculum. They can choose their own curriculum as long as it is "broad and balanced". Religious Education curricula are set at a local level for locally-maintained community schools, but academies (including all free schools) are not obliged to follow this guidance, and currently, there is no national RE curriculum. This makes any guidance offered to schools more complicated.

In the years since our original document was published, the climate surrounding British Muslims has worsened. Ongoing conflicts abroad and at home, and cases such as the 'Trojan Horse' controversy in Birmingham schools, have led

to a significant change of government policy. All schools, including those in the independent sector, are required to teach so-called 'British values', defined by Ofsted as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'. Schools are also bound by the controversial "PREVENT Duty" intended to 'prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', based on the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. These changes as well as the statutory guidance related to Safeguarding, the earlier narrowing of the National Curriculum, and the robust use of Ofsted as 'enforcer' have led to some confusion for both schools and Muslim parents as to what is required and what is legitimate. Additionally, there has been a shift in educational emphasis: from guidance for meeting the more physical needs of students like providing halal food, prayer rooms and permitting uniform changes, mixed with elements of curricular provision; to a greater desire to incorporate Muslim cultural aspects into much of the curriculum. Many secular schools responded positively to these changes.

Legal Requirements

Since 2002, schools have been required to meet the Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural (SMSC) needs of all their pupils. In spiritual terms, Ofsted describe this as their "ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values."[3] Similarly they argue that pupils' cultural development must incorporate "understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage and those of others."[4] It clearly follows, therefore, that schools, their workforce and their governors have to have some knowledge and understanding of the key religious and cultural drivers that Muslim parents and their children bring to the school. Similarly, parents must support the school in providing knowledge and understanding of the wider society in which we live. This, in turn, will provide a healthy symbiotic relationship with parents, schools, pupils, and teachers.

[3] Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook: Handbook for inspecting schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005', Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, United Kingdom (April 2018):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/699810/School_inspection_handbook_section_5.pdf (p. 40).
[4] Ibid., p. 41.

Islam basics

The *Qur'an* is generally regarded by Muslims to be the word of God and the foundation of their religion. Most Muslims also draw upon the *Sunnah* (exemplary norms) of the Prophet as a source of theology and ritual, which is deemed to be preserved within *Hadith* (reports transmitted from the Prophet). The largest sect within Islam are the Sunnis, followed by various Shi'ite sects (including the Twelvers, the Zaydis, and the Isma'ilis) and the Ibadi sect. Another sect is the Ahmadiyyah, who are prominent in Britain: the first English Qur'an to be widely published was translated by an Ahmadi Muslim[5].

There are five practices or ritual observances that are generally accepted by Muslims to be fundamental, known as 'the Pillars of the Religion' (*Arkan al-Din*) or 'the Pillars of Worship' (*Arkan al-'Ibadah*):

1. **Shahadah**: reciting the profession of faith, 'there is no God but God and Muhammed is His Messenger.' (Shi'ite Muslims sometimes add: "And Ali is the friend of God.")

2. **Hajj**: the pilgrimage to Mecca to be undertaken at least once in a lifetime if finances permit.

3. **Salah**: performing ritual prayers five times each day at prescribed times.

4. **Sawm**: fasting during the month of Ramadan.

5. **Zakah**: charitable giving to benefit the poor and the needy.

Twelver Shi'ites often add some additional pillars, such as **Tawalla** (loving the Prophet's family) and **Al-Amr bi-al-Ma'ruf** (advocating righteous behaviour)[6]. Likewise, some Isma'ili Shi'ites add pillars such as **Walayah** (devotion to certain descendants of the Prophet) and **Taharah** (ritual purity)[7].

In addition to these fundamental practices or rituals, there are six theological beliefs, which are generally regarded by Sunnis to be fundamental, known as the Pillars of Faith (*Arkan al-Iman*):

1. Belief in **Tawhid** (monotheism)

2. Belief in **Mala'ikah** (angels)

3. Belief in **Kutub** (scriptures)

4. Belief in **Anbiya'** (prophets)

5. Belief in **Yawm al-Qiyamah** (the Day of Resurrection)

6. Belief in **Qadar** (predestination)

Twelver Shi'ites generally articulate five Pillars of Faith and instead call them 'the Roots of the Religion (*Usul al-Din*)[8], some of which overlap with the six Sunni pillars:

1. Belief in **Tawhid** (monotheism)

2. Belief in **'Adl** (justice)

3. Belief in **Nubuwwah** (prophethood)

4. Belief in **Imamah** (leadership of the Prophet's family)

5. Belief in **Ma'ad** (Resurrection)

A problem for schools, and indeed for Muslim youth, is that Islam—like all religions—is not a homogenous faith. It comprises a community of communities, and sometimes, sectarian divisions can be deep-rooted and complicated. Some issues are contested spaces, and what is considered acceptable by one group is disputed and prohibited by another. No parent should expect the school to become involved in resolving such divisions however, except within regards complying with equality legislation. They should also expect schools to provide the types of skills all pupils will require for effective preparation in adult life. These include critical thinking and research, informed decision-making, effective communication, conflict resolution, tolerance, and an understanding of democratic responsibilities, gender, race, sexual equality and human rights; especially their rights as children.

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[5] Zahid Aziz, A Survey of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement: History, Beliefs, Aims and Work (Wembley, UK: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, 2008), p. 30.
[6] Christoph Marcinkowski, Shi'ite Identities: Community and Culture in Changing Social Contexts (Zurich, Switzerland: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2010), pp. 37-38.
[7] Ismail K. Poonawala, 'Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān and Isma'ili jurisprudence', in Farhad Daftary (ed.), Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 127.
[8] Marcinkowski, Shi'ite Identities, p. 37.

Fulfilling SMSC Development

Much of this guidance has been subsumed under the key responsibility of fulfilling SMSC Development: the promotion of SMSC in state-funded schools has been a legal requirement since 2002. The government's definition of the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development of schools and of society is generally not contested, although the terms in question are quite broad and, in the case of education, there can be a big overlap between these areas. In November 2014, the DfE published new guidance, which enhanced SMSC's profile whilst altering its direction of travel:

Schools should promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. This can help schools to demonstrate how they are meeting the requirements of section 78 of the Education Act 2002, in their provision of SMSC.

Actively promoting the values means challenging opinions or behaviours in school that are contrary to fundamental British values. Attempts to promote systems that undermine fundamental British values would be completely at odds with schools' duties to provide SMSC. The Teachers' Standards expect teachers to uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school. This includes not undermining fundamental British values.[9]

Similar advice is offered to academies and free schools under standard 5a. In addition, (and for schools, of far more importance) Ofsted will robustly inspect their SMSC and "Fundamental British Values" (FBV) provision; leaders will be unable to achieve the coveted 'outstanding' or even the 'good' category unless SMSC/FBV "are at the heart of the school's work."[10]

Much controversy has surrounded the language of FBV, the lack of consultation preceding its hurried implementation, and the speed of the inspection changes. One big issue, which young people themselves could usefully debate as part of schools encouraging students to "respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic processes,"[11] is how exclusively British are these values? To many, they are shared democratic principles enshrined in both European and UN charters. There is a similar concern that the 'British' emphasis implies that some students are not British and do not share these values. That said, research from 2009 and 2011 demonstrates that Muslims are the group in the UK most likely to be proud of their British identity[12]. As such, this emphasis on 'British values' may not be alienating to British Muslims in particular.

It is important to remember that these are times when established post enlightenment values are being contested around the world. In the USA, Turkey, the Indian subcontinent, the UK, and Arab countries, conservative families and leaders are pushing back against what they perceive as threatening liberal, individualistic, modern ways. Children can feel caught between these culture battles. Educators must focus on the best interests of the child in this charged global environment. This is not easy, but more necessary than ever before.

9 DFE, 'Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools', Department for Education, United Kingdom (November 2014): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf (p. 5).
10 Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook', p. 46.
11 DFE, 'Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools', p. 5.
12 Doug Saunders, The Myth of the Muslim Tide: Do Immigrants Threaten the West? (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 2012), pp. 69-70.

ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS

Section 1: Spiritual Development

A precise definition of spiritual development has eluded educators since it first appeared as a school duty in the 1944 Education Act. It was its inclusion in the Ofsted framework for inspection in 1988 that persuaded schools to take spiritual development seriously. But schools (and inspectors) have always struggled to pin it down. Ofsted look for imagination and creativity, for enjoyment and fascination but they stress:

> The spiritual development of pupils is shown by their: ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values[13].

Spiritual self-reflection is a common theme within Islamic scripture and thought: the Qur'an urges humans to 'reflect', and in Sufism in particular, 'reflection' (*fikr*) or reflective meditation is a common ritual[14].

Spiritual development can, of course be also about faith, but it is much broader and increasingly people argue that they have no faith but are 'spiritual.' A major part of spiritual development however is focused on Religious Education, learning about other faiths, and understanding the different manifestations of religiosity and religious practice. These areas have led to tensions between some faith groups and schools in the past.

1.1. Learning about other faiths and beliefs

1.1.1. How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to learn about other faiths?

British children live in a multi-faith and multi-cultural environment. Islamic approaches to other religions are not monolithic, but there are strong traditions of tolerance towards other faiths: even non-monotheistic religions were often recognised as legitimate religious communities by Muslim scholars over time.[15] Indeed, there are certain famous passages within the Qur'an that lend themselves to a pluralistic interpretation, such as Surah 2:256 ("There is no compulsion in religion"). Young Muslims should acquire a broad spectrum

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[13] Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook', 40.

[14] Louis Gardet, 'Fikr', in Bernard Lewis, Charles Pellat, & Joseph F. Schacht (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume 2: C-G (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1965), p. 891.

[15] For example, various Muslim scholars recognised as 'People of Scripture' (ahl al-kitab) Zoroastrians (Shaul Shaked, 'Islam', in Michael Stausberg & Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (eds.), The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), p. 491) and even Buddhists (Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities', American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, Volume 34, Number 4 (2017), p. 101).

of knowledge. This should include religious and cultural information about their neighbours and members of the wider society, in order to deepen their understanding. This would develop their ability to think laterally and live harmoniously with their non-Muslim neighbours.

We therefore strongly recommend schools to insist that pupils take part in all areas of the national curriculum, so that they may gain a wholesome experience of other faiths and belief systems. To bridge the relationship between parent and schools, it is important for communication channels to be open and when necessary for the schools to make the ultimate decision on what a child can be taught. This will remove any preconceived notions and myths about what pupils will be learning about other faiths and reassure uneasy parents. It should be noted that this is an issue with Christian parents as well, as the following case study illustrates.

🔍 CASE STUDY: Christian parents vs. religious education

In April of 2017, the Church of England reported that some Christian parents had removed their children from religious education lessons in a desire for them not to learn about Islam:

Some, Church officials said, hope to shield their children from learning about any faith but Christianity, and others have a particular intention to keep children from any knowledge of Islam.

They pointed towards far right political groups and some minority faith sects as activists who are trying to 'exploit' the legal right of parents to withdraw their children from school RE.[16]

Consequently, Church of England leaders "called for the right of withdrawal to be repealed" and for religious education to become compulsory, in order to encourage "pupils to learn to live with others from different backgrounds."[17]

1.1.2. How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to join other pupils in visiting other places of worship?

Gaining insight into other ways of life and beliefs is a treasure that leads to greater mutual understanding between communities. It serves to break down the barriers that exist as a result of prolonged disassociation and exclusion. All places of worship, regardless of creed, should be hubs of peace, of spiritual reflection and devotional sincerity. Experiencing and learning about different

faiths allows the mind to become tolerant. Knowledge of religious and non-religious beliefs besides your own fosters the promotion of philosophical inquiry and critical reflection. All of this is vital to the acquisition of knowledge that will contribute to the child's intellectual and spiritual development.

Attending other places of worship is very unlikely to make any Muslim desert their own faith. Visiting places of worship as well as inviting others to your own mosque, church, temple, or synagogue is encouraged. Muslims during the time of the Prophet took refuge in the Christian country of Ethiopia, and the Prophet reportedly praised the Ethiopian king for his hospitality[18] — episodes such as this from early Islamic history can be adduced to legitimise interacting with and understanding other faiths.

Due to rising levels of intolerance and Islamophobia, there have instances where non-Muslim parents do not wish for their children to attend certain places of worship such as Mosques. We advise that schools strongly insist that visits to places of worship are a compulsory part of the curriculum which will provide a usually rare and invaluable first-hand experience of how members of other faiths live and practice. Schools must reassure parents that all safeguarding measures will be adhered to and these visits are part and parcel of promoting essential British values. Emphasising and teaching about centuries of cooperation with historic Islamic civilisations might help to persuade parents to be more at ease about the visits, challenging the notion of 'them vs. us' (in regards to Britain and Muslims)[19].

1.2. Collective worship

1.2.1. How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to attend a daily act of Christian worship?

It is surprising that England and Wales are probably one of the few countries in the world where daily Christian worship is mandatory in all state funded schools. It was not always thus. The law requiring schools to have a daily act of worship that is "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" only came into effect in 1994; and perhaps equally surprisingly in such a diverse society, has never been repealed. Parents can opt out of the worship if they wish, or the school

[16] O Steve Doughty, 'How parents are removing their children from religious education classes because they do not want them to learn about Islam', Mail Online (27th/April/2017): https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4449828/Parents-refuse-let-children-learn-Islam-class.html
[17] Ibid.
[18] E.g., Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (translated by Michael Fishbein), The History of al-Tabarī, Volume 8: The Victory of Islam (Amhurst, USA: State University of New York, 1997), p. 108.
[19] E.g., Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Exotic England: The Making of a Curious Nation (London, UK: Portobello Books, 2016).

governors can apply to the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education) for what is called a 'determination', which allows the school to offer alternative worship.

Many schools have been reluctant to enforce the Act or to go for a determination, wishing to ensure that all pupils are together for assemblies. Some have simply used the term 'God' which is not offensive to any religious group. The National Secular Society however, in 2012 reported that a spokesperson for the Department for Education informed them that "The guidance has not been withdrawn, but we are now leaving it up to schools to interpret the law how they see fit."[20] A powerful voice has been added to the clamour to repeal this legislation. The Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (December 2015) recommended unequivocally that:

> *Governments should repeal requirements for schools to hold acts of collective worship or religious observance and issue new guidelines building on current best practice for inclusive assemblies and times for refection that draw upon a range of sources, that are appropriate for pupils and staff of all religions and beliefs, and that will contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.[21]*

Inclusion is key, and in a society where religiosity is becoming less organised and more personalised, we are fundamentally against collective worship. We encourage a neutral and inclusive assembly/gathering where all pupils can learn and participate together.

Where collective worship is still practiced, we recommend that schools accommodate parental requests to remove pupils from collective worship or at the very least consider a pluralistic and multi-faith approach to collective worship.

1.3. Friday Prayers

1.3.1 What provision should schools make for Friday prayers?

There is no legal requirement or expectation on schools to provide or cater for collective Friday prayer (jummah) offered in a congregation, which is traditionally regarded as compulsory for Muslim men. However, many secondary schools have done their best to accommodate the wishes of male and female pupils who wish to pray together on Fridays. Provisions for Friday congregational prayers should be made according to two basic principles: firstly, that it is for those pupils who wish to pray alone or together bearing in mind

that not all Muslim children will participate. Secondly, that Friday prayers must not interfere with the pupils' studies and lessons or disrupt the schools smooth running and timetable arrangements.

Schools are advised **not** to accede to the parental demands to allow the pupils to go out to a mosque (which may not be nearby) for the full duration of the khutbah (sermon) and prayers, which normally takes up to an hour; or to permitting an outside Imam (Muslim preacher) to lead the Friday service. We recommend that Muslim pupils be allowed to pray together if they express a collective wish to do so during a part of their regular lunch break, so as not to interfere with the normal school programme whilst also ensuring pupils do not compromise their lunch which is a vital part of their bodily requirements. Since such prayers and sermon will be conducted in a school environment, they can be truncated to less than half an hour. This way, the school's routine will not be unduly affected.

1.4. Meditation and mindfulness

1.4.1. How should schools respond to Muslim parents who express concern about the teaching of meditation/mindfulness?

An increasing number of schools are teaching the secular meditation techniques known as mindfulness. Students are taught how to be calm, how to listen carefully, and how to follow their breath. The educational and personal benefits are now well known and can be justified scientifically. Many argue that this is a key feature in the development of what is now called emotional and spiritual literacy. For concerned Muslim parents, it is important for schools to help them understand that mindfulness has no religious basis whatsoever. The techniques followed, however, are similar to Muslim practices (as they are to Buddhist, Hindu and Christian ones such as the Yoga techniques) where the breath is followed and the mind/ego stilled. As noted already, 'reflection' (*fikr*) is an established practice within the Sufi tradition.

Schools are encouraged to send educational information on the benefits of mindfulness to parents and reiterate that it has no basis in any religion. It is in fact prescribed by NHS doctors in some instances to help individuals cope with anxiety, stress, and depression.

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[20] Cited in: NSS, 'Government confirms school worship guidance can be ignored', National Secular Society (9th/November/2012): http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2012/11/government-confirms-collective-worship-guidance-can-be-ignored.

[21] The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 'Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good', The Woolf Institute, Cambridge (7th/December/2015): https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf (paragraphs 4.17 and 4.28).

We think mindfulness and wellbeing and meditation are invaluable to all children, including Muslim children. If parents object, teachers should assertively insist because the child will ultimately positively benefit from this practice.

1.5. Eid Festivals

1.5.1. How should schools respond if parents want their children to have a day off for the holy festivals of Eid?

Eid is Arabic for festival or holiday. There are two Eids which are annual events. The first, *Eid al-Fitr* (the festival of breaking the fast) celebrates the ending of the holy month of fasting, Ramadan, which is celebrated with prayers in the mosques, the exchange of gifts and new clothes for the children. The second, *Eid al-Adha* (the festival of sacrifice), is the festival marking the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and commemorating the sacrifice of Abraham. Schools with large numbers of Muslims are permitted to close the school on both days, as two of the occasional closure days that governors are allowed to allocate. Schools with few Muslim pupils are not expected to close the whole school. However, Department for Education advice for all schools – if parents chose to celebrate these events with their children – states that they should not be penalised. These absences would be counted as authorised absences, as they fit into the category of religious observance. It would, however, be excellent manners if parents let the school know in advance when the festivals are likely to be.

It should be noted that Eid is determined by moon sighting. There is no fixed date in the calendar. Muslims usually find out that Eid is happening the night before due to sighting the moon, or determining when moon sightings will occur in other countries such as: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Bangladesh etc. It is for this reason that Muslims celebrate Eid on various days due to the temperamental and last-minute nature of moon sightings. BMSDemocracy recommends that schools keep good communication with local mosques to determine potential days Eid may fall on so that the school can organise accordingly.

1.6. Ramadan

1.6.1. What should schools do if their pupils want to fast during Ramadan?

In years prior to 2016, the observation of Ramadan fasts from pre-dawn to dusk was slowly becoming a contentious issue. The question is as simple as the answer is complicated. Should students refrain from drinking water and eating during their revision and examination periods? There is a diverse range of possible interpretations of Islamic law. Scholars differ in their opinions on

what age Muslims become obliged to fast, how long they should fast for and the legitimate exemptions.

The Association of School and Colleges and Leaders (ASCL) have produced an excellent paper on this subject, entitled 'Ramadan and Exams, 2016: information for schools and colleges.' In addition to extensive consultation with a range of imams, scholars, and education experts, they have presented various positions which parents, carers and young people can draw upon, rather than one homogenous answer. Schools and colleges will find this an invaluable resource.[22]

Children fasting during school time may find this negatively affects their performance. Whilst schools cannot force pupils to eat or drink, they should host a consultation evening open to Muslim parents and mosque-leaders prior to the Ramadan period. This will provide a transparent line of communication where schools can take into consideration the recommendations from Muslim parents and mosque-leaders, whilst also expressing a concern for Muslim pupils' academic attainment during Ramadan. Collectively, teachers, parents, and pupils can share best practice as to how they can help Muslim pupils not compromise on their academic achievements during the month of Ramadan. Some Muslim scholars permit students to skip fasting during Ramadan for exams if necessary,[23] and others allow for fasting days to be 'made up' after the official Ramadan period, among other options.

Section 2: Moral Development

Moral development in pupils includes both the recognition of the difference between right and wrong and how pupils "readily apply this understanding in their own lives."[24] Thus it is about both the discussion of moral issues and their application in society. Generally, because Islam is usually understood to have a clear moral compass, schools will find that Muslim parents will happily reinforce and welcome the school's stance on how to behave, how to treat each other and how to care for the planet. Muslim custom traditionally prescribes respect for parents, for teachers, for elders and for fellow human beings in general.

Most interpretations of Islam prohibit gambling, drug and alcohol taking, and sex outside of marriage. These strict behavioural codes are not followed by the majority of the British population, though there are other faith minorities – including some Christians – who are also expected to live by a set of 'clean living'

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[22] It can be downloaded online, at the following address: www.ascl.org.uk/download.E0E2BFF2-0DF2-4DF2-B89F7F4A4DF11D3B.html

[23] For example, this position is mentioned in the following fatwa: Ahmad Kutty, 'Can Muslim Footballers Skip Fasting in World Cup?', About Islam (25th/April/2018): http://aboutislam.net/Counseling/ask-the-scholar/fasting/can-muslim-footballers-skip-fasting-world-cup/

[24] Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook', p. 40.

rules. The challenge for teachers is to keep in mind the needs of pupils living in the wider society and also the demands of the parents. This is not easy. Teachers will need to tread sensitively when discussing sexual relationships. On top of the usual requirements regarding age-appropriate sex education, it is important to emphasise that consenting adults should not be stigmatised for having sexual relationships outside of wedlock. At the same time, teachers should ensure that pupils are never pressured into doing anything they don't want to do.

Other contentious issues are homosexuality and the teaching of evolution. These two areas have, in recent times, generated high-profile (and sometimes negative) press coverage, and there is a strong parallel between the stance taken by conservative Muslim groups and that taken by conservative Christian groups. Consequently, this booklet offers specific advice on such issues, emphasising both universal human rights and mutual respect between people of faith and no faith.

2.1. Sex and Relationship Education

2.1.1 How should schools respond if parents raise issues about the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education?

An important area of education—and one that has been controversial for parents of all backgrounds in the past—is that pertaining to sex and relationships, which is defined as follows:

> *Sex and relationship education is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health.*[25]

This can be an area of great sensitivity for some Muslim parents, who may be religiously or culturally conservative. Under section 405 of the Education Act 1996, any parent has the right to withdraw a child from sex education at a maintained school up to the age of 19, except to the extent that the subject is covered in a science lesson that forms part of the national curriculum. Maintained secondary schools are required to provide a programme of sex and relationships education (SRE) that includes work on sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. They are also required to have a sex and relationships education policy. The content of a school's SRE programme is up to each individual school and should reflect the school's own policy. There is no statutory requirement for independent schools, academies and free schools to provide a programme of sex and relationships education, although most recognise the vital importance of providing one, as such provision is fundamental when placed within the framework of clear moral guidance.

Ignorance of sex and relationship issues can lead young people to become involved in inappropriate and unsafe relationships, which may have very serious and long-term repercussions on their health and wellbeing. BMSDemocracy backs sex education, relationship and sexual health for every child universally.

Muslim parents might well express concern over sex education lessons, especially if taught in mixed classes. But sexual matters must not be swept to the side as a result of cultural inhibitions, parental embarrassment or social stigma. The human body undergoes various stages of changes during its lifetime. If parents and schools fail to address students' curiosity about sexual matters, young people may seek information from dubious sources. As they grow into adults and their bodies undergo profound changes, young people will inevitably have a number of sensitive issues they would like to discuss. It is crucial that the school addresses such issues so that ignorance based upon limited knowledge is redressed. These matters are often not discussed within the home.

It is more prudent for children to receive sex education from a reliable source, so that they can come to terms with their own bodies, and better understand the transition from childhood to adulthood. Teachers can agree to separate boys and girls for these sessions, but there should be a clear and assertive approach which argues that an opt out would not be in the best interest of the child. It is advisable to listen and respond to these concerns. Evidence demonstrates that the effective teaching of SRE enhances pupils understanding of themselves and of each other, and can have a positive impact upon their socialisation, learning and achievement.

Sex education is far more encompassing than simply 'sexual intercourse' and biology. Many schools are teaching the sex education from the perspective of safeguarding and identifying toxic and harmful behaviours. It is important for all children, irrespective of faith or gender to understand concepts like consent and are able to identify if they are being sexually or emotionally abused. Ultimately, sex education should be seen through the lens of safeguarding, which will equip students with invaluable knowledge to protect their bodies and their wellbeing. Muslims parents could be advised that without good sex and relationship education their children would be more vulnerable to exploitation. After all, child sexual abuse knows no race or faith boundaries[26].

[25] Simon Blake, Lucy Emmerson, Jane Lees, & Joe Hayman, 'Sex and relationships education (SRE) for the 21st century: Supplementary advice to the Sex and Relationship', PSHE Association (28th/ February/2014): http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/17706/sreadvice.pdf
[26] E.g., Fran Abrams, 'Child abuse claims at UK madrassas 'tip of iceberg'', BBC (18th/ October/2011): https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15256764

2.2. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT+) Issues

2.2.1. How should schools respond if parents raise issues about the teaching of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender issues?

Recent polls have indicated that religious groups in the UK are becoming more tolerant towards homosexuality.[27] Additionally, the UK currently holds the world record for having the most LGBT+ people in parliament, with 45 LGBT+ MP's elected on the 8th of June 2017.[28] This increased level of acceptance and visibility of the LGBT+ community has changed rapidly over recent years, and it is important that young LGBT+ Muslims are aware of their rights under British and European law.

Schools are encouraged to treat homophobic, biphobic and transphobic prejudice and bullying with the same degree of severity as other forms of bullying. It is important, however, that schools are aware of the sensitivity required around Muslims discussing their sexual orientation and gender identity – especially within the context of their faith and the opinions of their families and communities. A number of tools and organisations exist that aim to educate and assist LGBT+ Muslims in understanding themselves spiritually and emotionally, and public health campaigns are now tackling physical and mental health problems resulting from living in this isolated and secret world.

Male same-sex attraction and intercourse in particular is generally condemned within Islamic traditions and jurisprudence[29] (as in conservative Christianity and Judaism), and although these anti-same-sex prohibitions were famously disregarded in various pre-colonial Muslim societies (where homoeroticism flourished widely),[30] many modern majority-Muslim countries now actively persecute sexual and transgender minorities.[31] This was not always the case, as the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire decriminalised homosexuality in 1858, long before most European countries (including Britain), and Pakistan has a rich history of third gender identities known as *Hijra*.[32] In fact, it was the British Empire that first criminalised male homosexuality in much of world, an impact we continue to see today. The relationship between Islam and LGBT+ rights is long and complicated. Consequently, the reality of being LGBT+ is difficult for British Muslims, especially with incidents where parents have openly protested about its inclusion in the primary curriculum. Attitudes are slowly changing, however, and it is important that Muslim children from sexual and transgender minorities realise they have the same rights as the rest of the population. They must be allowed to take part in the wider debate about these sensitive topics, regardless of the views of the parents. Additionally, the celebration of homoeroticism in various pre-colonial Muslim societies helps set a clear

precedent for interpretations of Islam and Islamic law which are compatible with a LGBT+-tolerant society.

BMSDemocracy therefore recommends that schools teach LGBT+ rights and issues as part of the discussion on wider human rights, with an emphasis on the intersectionality of minority identities. Plenty of individuals who identify as Muslim also identify as LGBT+, and so schools need to showcase opinions that reflect this diversity, therefore challenging the anti-LGBT+ stance that many conservative Muslims hold.

🔍 CASE STUDY: The struggles of a gay Muslim

Mansur H. is gay, and he's 23. His family forced him to marry a young woman from his home-country, which is India. He did it to please them, and because his mother threatened suicide. He is incredibly unhappy and suicidal himself. His wife, he says, has been brought over and knows nothing about him, or family, or the country she's now living in. He lives his life as a gay man at night, and at other times pretends to be a heterosexual. He says that the worst thing about being a Muslim is that nobody understands what it is like not to be a heterosexual Muslim, and you feel like a sinner until you die.[33]

[27] British Social Attitudes, 'Homosexuality', NatCen Social Research (2013): http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx

[28] Andrew Reynolds, 'The UK just elected a record number of LGBTQ people to Parliament', Pink News (9th/June/2017): https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/06/09/the-uk-just-elected-a-record-number-of-lgbtq-people-to-parliament/

[29] Charles Pellat, 'Liwā ', in Clifford E. Bosworth, Emeri J. van Donzel, Bernard Lewis, & Charles Pellat (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume 5: Khe–Mahi (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1986), p. 777.

[30] For example: Elyse Semerdjian, 'Islam', in Jeffrey S. Siker (ed.), Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia (Westport, USA: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 129, 131-133; Samar Habib, Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations (New York, USA: Routledge, 2007), p. 63; Daniel Eisenberg, 'Introduction', in David W. Foster (ed.), Spanish Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook (Westport, USA: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 4; Frédéric Lagrange, 'Mukhannath', in George E. Haggerty (ed.), Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia, Volume 2 (New York, U.S.A: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 616; etc.

[31] For a summary of LGBT rights in various Muslim countries, see: HRW, 'Human Rights Watch Country Profiles: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity', Human Rights Watch (last updated: 16th/April/2018): https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2018/04/16/sexual-orientation-gender-identity-country-profiles (s.v. 'Middle East and North Africa', etc.).

[32] B Helmut Graupner, 'Sexual Consent: The Criminal Law in Europe and Overseas', Archives of Sexual Behavior, Volume 29, Number 5 (2000), pp. 427 (n. 28), 428, 433 (n. 73); note that this source anachronistically refers to the Ottoman Empire as "Turkey".

[33] This story was obtained by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Director of BMSDemocracy.

2.3. The teaching of evolution

2.3.1. What should teachers do if parents object to the teaching of the Evolution Theory?

This is, in fact, about wider issues about the role of religion and politics in society. In the school context, this debate should not be repressed but explored, where it is practical. Some Muslims, like some Christians, interpret scripture literally. This is particularly true when it comes to the creation of the universe, which can be interpreted as conflicting with evolutionary theory. It is advisable to have an open debate about this possible controversy, as young people need to have an understanding of the differences and also possible compatibility of religion and science. Some modern scientists view science and religion as "nonoverlapping magisteria,"[34] whilst certain famous Muslim philosophers and scientists from the Middle Ages (such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina) argued that science is compatible with religion and revelation, and that the latter is simply "formulated in figurative and symbolic terms."[35] Some modern Muslim intellectuals argue that science helps humans to better understand God's creation, and thus, that evolution can be seen as part of God's plan.[36] Indeed, some have suggested that certain precursors to components of the theory of evolution were articulated by some Muslim scholars during the Middle Ages.[37] Meanwhile, the national scientific academies of various majority-Muslim countries (including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Turkey) have affirmed the theory of evolution.[38] In the end teachers do have to firmly back and teach evolution. Relativism is not an option.

A detailed and nuanced exposition of the main arguments surrounding this and the wider debate about Islam and Science can be found in the Muslim World Science Initiative final report of the Task Force on Science and Islam, chaired by Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (former Secretary General of the OIC), which was published in 2016 and seeks to lay out the contentious issues at the intersection of Islamic theology and modern science.[39] It attempts to construct a framework for bringing about reconciliation between science and faith and outlines certain general principles of how Muslims (or any people of faith) may approach issues at the intersection of Islam and Science. The chapter on Evolution and Islam by Rana Dajani (Associate Professor of Molecular Cell Biology at the Hashemite University, Jordan) is particularly relevant and helpful.

BMSDemocracy recommends that schools encourage Muslim students to treat evolution as a scientific fact that is compulsory to learn. The school must do its best to express that Islam need not treat Evolution as a contentious theory but as part of understanding the world around us (as exemplified by the

interpretations mentioned above). It would be ideal to showcase examples of prominent scientific discoveries and impacts Muslims have had in this field to promote positive role models for Muslim pupils.[40]

[34] Famously articulated by the scientist Stephen J. Gould, available online: 'Nonoverlapping Magisteria', Unofficial Stephen Jay Gould: http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html

[35] Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth, 'Double Truth', in Ian R. Netton (ed.), Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), p. 148.

[36] E.g., Salman Hameed, 'Muslim thought on evolution takes a step forward', the Guardian (11th/January/2013): https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/jan/11/muslim-thought-on-evolution-debate

[37] Paul S. Braterman, 'Islamic Foreshadowing of Evolution', Muslim Heritage: http://muslimheritage.com/article/islamic-foreshadowing-evolution

[38] Ibid. (citing an IAP statement on the teaching of evolution).

[39] Available online: 'Task Force on Islam and Science', Muslim Science (launched on March 14, 2016): http://www.muslim-science.com/Islam-and-Science-Report

[40] E.g., Ehsan Masood, Science and Islam: A History (London, UK: Icon Books, 2009).

Section 3: Social & Cultural Development

Social development includes volunteering, co-operating well with others, and being able to resolve conflicts effectively, in a variety of social settings. Islamic thought and injunctions emphasise the bonds between people and social obligations and the welfare of others. Many British Muslims follow this and get involved in helping those who are poor, needy or leading isolated lives across all the communities of Britain. Social development serves as a nexus for citizenship, positive Muslim identity, and productive civic engagement: Muslim students can be proactive in developing the social skills and values, so long as schools are an open and diverse space for them. Islamophobia and other anxieties (such as a lack of sense of belonging) could harm the social development of Muslim students, so it's important for schools to be aware and sensitive to these current pressures and controversies.

Although certain conservative strains within Islam discourage or even condemn music and art, Muslim societies past and present have always maintained vibrant artistic and musical traditions, with which British Muslim communities are undoubtedly linked. Given this rich cultural heritage, there is no reason for Muslim students to be excluded from this kind of cultural development, even if conservative parents object. In a diverse multicultural Britain, it is essential for children to have a shared experience of many cultures and cultural assets. Teachers may need to remain firm on this point.

3.1. The Arts

Creativity in a person—whether adult or child—is understood by some Muslims to be a divine gift in Islam.[41] To harness natural talent is to maximise that gift, both for oneself, and for the betterment of others. This talent may not be obvious until it is discovered. Every child must be enabled to release personal creativity for it has a profoundly humanising effect. There are many avenues which unleash an individual's capacity to tap into the different forms of intelligence in the human brain.

History furnishes us with numerous examples of Muslim innovation and heritage in the world today, including architecture, calligraphy, art, and other artistic forms.[42] Such artistic traditions continue in our contemporary age, with more and more talented British Muslims coming to the fore. For example, Mogul artists would paint both men and women in a more open and artistic form than is accepted in many Muslim lands today.

Robert Bunting's 'Islamic Arts in the Curriculum' provides a detailed descriptive list of contemporary artists and sensitively discusses the issues of concerns for some Muslim parents.[43] His lists include Khayaal Theatre Company which is a charitable enterprise dedicated to developing and presenting "wisdom-oriented performing arts entertainment with the aim of exploring literature, culture heritage and the diverse arts of the Muslim world."[44] In doing so, the theatre company seeks to enhance the strength of community relations and foster better inter-community understanding and artistic appreciation. Furthermore, young minds are encouraged to explore their creativity and productive ways of looking at the world by rejecting malevolent alternatives such as crime, disaffection and extremism, all of which are ills in contemporary British society.

Composer, singer and an accomplished musician, Yusuf Islam has sold over a million copies of his debut album 'al-Mu'allim,' while his second album 'My Ummah' has exceeded sales of three million copies worldwide. Yusuf is a devout Muslim for whom music and songs are a means of promoting a message of love, compassion, peace and tolerance whilst simultaneously encouraging young people to be proud of their religion and identity. The truth is there is no specific Quranic proscription of music and songs, although some Hadiths prohibit them and some seem to allow them.[45]

Similarly, the Islamic Artist, Mohammed Ali has taken graffiti and infused it with the Arabic script of the Quran to create vibrant art forms that reflect the energy of urban Muslims living in the West. For example, he took his message of peace to New York where he helped inner city American children to paint a mural depicting the universal ethical values.

Schools exist to provide a wholesome education that is supplemented by the home environment and wider society itself. A substantial proportion of this education should be devoted to areas that encourage artistic expression. Every child has a right to discover and explore such freedom of artistic expression and individual creativity. There may be some difficult situations, such as visits to art galleries where nudes are on display; this has also caused recent controversy in

[41] E.g., Samih Mahmoud Al-Karasneh & Ali Mohammad Jubran Saleh, 'Islamic perspective of creativity: A model for teachers of social studies as leaders', Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences, Volume 2, Issue 2 (2010), available online: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042810000765

[42] For example, see the 1001 Inventions organisation: www.1001inventions.com

[43] Robert Bunting, 'Islamic Arts in the Curriculum', in Maurice I. Coles (ed.), Every Muslim Child Matters: Practical Guidance for Schools and Children's Services (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2008).

[44] Ibid.

[45] Kenneth S. Habib, 'Music', in Juan E. Campo (ed.), Encyclopedia of Islam (New York, USA: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), p. 504.

America, where the complaints of parents have resulted in teachers being fired.[46] It may be noted that works of art—including nude art—are part of European cultural heritage, which is now shared by European Muslims. Teachers may want to introduce debates on art in the West and East, and debates over whether to depict the human form. Again, to unthinkingly give in to Muslim parents on this is to fail as an educator.

In general, BMSDemocracy would recommend that pupils ought to be required to participate in art classes as it has benefits beyond simply learning. Creativity is an essential part to the development of a young person and a tool for expression. Schools must take the stance of compulsory art lessons with no opportunity for parents to remove their child from an art lesson. Music and art are a big part of cultural development, and conservative religious taboos shouldn't stymie the prospective development of children.

🔍 CASE STUDY: A Muslim student's artistic aspirations

Mona wants to be an artist. She's 13 years old. She's been drawing and painting since she was in a refugee camp in Jordan. She came over with her family. Teachers say that she's an extremely gifted artist already, and that they've never quite seen this kind of work. Her parents are now insisting that she stop art, and the school is trying to persuade them, but at the moment, communication has broken down and they're threatening to take Mona out of school.[47]

Section 4: Safeguarding

Feeling safe (and valued) in school is a principle that every group would sign up to. Every parent wants their child to understand and counter the evils of grooming, of sexual abuse, and of bullying (both actual and cyber). They want them to enjoy their time in school and enjoy their learning and achievements. As they mature, they need to understand and counter the negative forces that might assail them. For some young people, the problem arises when there is dissonance between the view of the school and wider society, and the view of their parents. For Muslims, there are two areas: female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, which could lead to some young people being vulnerable. Some feel torn between loyalty to parents and their own desires and choices, both of which have received a lot of press coverage. BMSDemocracy guidance is unequivocal and is as follows:

4.1. Forced marriages

4.1.1. What should schools do if a girl or a boy confides in them that they are being forced into marriage?

Forced marriages are not only against the law, but also generally prohibited within traditional Islamic jurisprudence.[48] Forced marriage is domestic violence and child abuse and should be treated as such by all professionals.

Schools should seek guidance from the government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) as a first port of call, and generally only involve parents at a later stage. This is a highly sensitive issue and involving parents immediately may only serve to aggravate the situation. Family members are likely to resent the public airing of the family's private affairs. This may also lead to abduction of the child and being taken abroad to facilitate the forced marriage, before the British authorities have a chance to intervene.

It is part of the school's duty of care to watch out for and report any suspicion of forced marriage. Schools should also display the helpline service that young women can access privately. At least one member of the teaching staff should also seek specialist training and/or work closely with the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) so that s/he is best equipped with the necessary skills and understanding

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[46] E.g., AP, 'Art teacher fired after showing nudes from classical paintings to children', the Independent (30th/December/2017): https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/art-teacher-fired-after-showing-classical-nudes-to-children-a8134561.html. Also see: Ralph Blumenthal, 'Museum Field Trip Deemed Too Revealing', the New York Times (30th/September/2006): https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/30/education/30teacher.html
[47] This story was obtained by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Chair of BMSDemocracy.
[48] Andrea Büchler, Islamic Law in Europe?: Legal Pluralism and its Limits in European Family Laws (Abington, UK: Routledge, 2016), pp. 42-43.

of the psychological, social and cultural impact of the forced marriage for each individual child. This member of staff should preferably be someone who is also the school counsellor. In the absence of such an individual, this task should be assigned to a member of the teaching staff who has undergone diversity training in order to prepare themselves for such issues.

When government leaflets are provided they must be distributed, despite any objection from school governors and parents. In the past, there have been reported cases of Muslim parent governors (especially of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin) who have started campaigns to discourage the distribution of such leaflets. They claimed that the information being circulated was a negative and offensive portrayal of their communities and their specific cultural practices. By giving in to the demands of these governors, the schools serve to deprive youngsters of necessary information that is their right. When to marry, where to marry, and—most importantly—whom to marry are decisions every Muslim should be able to make. Furthermore parental dictates to enforce matrimony upon their children have no Islamic justification. Schools should view these issues through the lens of human rights—in particular, safeguarding the rights of Muslim students who could be vulnerable.

4.2. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

4.2.1. What should schools do if they suspect one of their pupils is about to be subjected to – or already has been subjected to FGM?

FGM comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is also sometimes referred to as female genital cutting or female circumcision. FGM is practiced in many parts of the world and in some areas especially in Northern Africa. It is practiced by Christians and Muslims alike. Its extent is not known, but it is thought to be widespread in certain Muslim communities. It is illegal in the UK and carries a maximum sentence of 14 years, as it is a form of child abuse. The long-term harm the practice can cause—both physically and psychologically—is incalculable. FGM has been condemned by the Islamic Shari'ah Council, the Muslim College, and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

The government has provided some excellent Multi Agency Guidelines (20) which tackle its origin, effects, what to look for if you have concerns and what responses to take. BMSDemocracy endorses this advice. In summary, it recommends that any teacher who suspects this might be an issue for one of their female pupils should first speak to the designated safeguarding officer. This

person will then decide if social services should be involved. There is additionally a specific legal duty for teachers. If any teacher discovers that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under the age of 18, the teacher must report this to the police themselves. This is independent of actions taken by the designated safeguarding officer. Schools are advised to follow this procedure initially without alerting the parents, as this could lead to the girl being removed from school, and then disappearing off the radar.

4.3. Radicalisation

The issue of radicalisation is at the heart of many of the deep problems faced by Muslim communities: the question of why some young men and women are radicalised, where the ideas come from, and what leads some to join extremist organisations is complex and involved. The anger ignited by local and global issues and the alienation and also family dynamics and community pressures as well as brain washing by radicals, and the spread of Islamism. Radicalisation has no single cause and is a complex issue. None of this is easy for the teachers. Government policies and counter-terrorism laws are making open debates about it difficult.[49]

There is no clear consensus on how one counters the terrorist and militant narrative. There are those that argue that schools should be dealing with these as controversial issues, placing them within the geopolitical debates relating to foreign policy and its effect on Muslim communities. There are others who argue that Islam is inherently the problem and that it needs a reform to counter the threat of extremism, although this is a poorly evidenced position: the last decade of counterterrorism research has definitively shown that Muslim terrorists in the West are usually not religious fundamentalists per se, despite their slogans; they tend to be impious and motivated more by political narratives.[50] Others are concerned about the spread of separatist Islamic doctrines and the role played by the hard-line ideological Muslim state and close British ally Saudi Arabia. Regardless, Muslim communities themselves—both in the mosques and in the madrasahs—have attempted to demonstrate to young people how the perpetrators have twisted the overall Quranic message by taking sections out of the context of time and place and purpose. The present government has further widened the definition from promoting violent acts of extremism to a new category of non-violent extremism.

[49] See Yasmin Alibhai-Brown & Peter Morey, 'Democracy, Integration and Freedom in the Age of Prevent', British Muslims for Secular Democracy (2017): http://bmsd.org.uk/index.php/democracy-integration-and-freedom-in-the-age-of-prevent-report/
[50] Saunders, The Myth of the Muslim Tide, p. 101-105 (summarising the state of the field).

This led to legislation in July 2015 stating that all schools and childcare providers are subject to a duty under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism."[51] Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation is now seen as part of schools' and childcare providers' wider safeguarding duties. This has not been uniformly welcomed by schools or Muslim communities, as there is some potential to harm the relationship between school and parents. A major problem is that the government now expects teachers to identify a young person who is susceptible. They offer the following guidance:

> *There is no single way of identifying an individual who is likely to be susceptible to a terrorist ideology. As with managing other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children's behaviour, which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection. Children at risk of radicalisation may display different signs or seek to hide their views. School staff should use their professional judgement in identifying children who might be at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately.[52]*

School staff and childcare providers are now expected to understand when it is appropriate to make a referral to the Channel programme. Channel is a programme that focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It provides a mechanism for schools to make referrals if they are concerned that an individual might be vulnerable to radicalisation. An individual's engagement with the programme is entirely voluntary at all stages. In addition, in areas where there are large numbers of Muslims, schools can refer to their local Prevent officer. However, it should be noted that over a third of the "6,093 individuals were referred to the government's Prevent programme, and of those who received support from Channel," between April 2016 and March 2017, "were as a result of far-right concerns."[53]

BMSDemocracy acknowledges that the school's options are very limited but, if an atmosphere of trust exists between the school and the local community, this will help to reduce any tension. Indeed, local Muslim communities and mosques can be and have been key in alerting police about potential terrorists and radicalisation.[54] If the school has serious concerns about the potential radicalisation of one of its pupils, it is advisable to refer to the appropriate authorities. It will be for the Prevent team, or Social Services, or local police to take action. It is important to note that although Prevent does not exclusively focus on Muslims (for example, it also includes far-right ideologies), it does not have the trust of the Muslim community. For a critical evaluation of the

effectiveness and drawbacks of Prevent, see BMSDemocracy's 2018 report 'Democracy, Integration and Freedom in the Age of Prevent'.

4.4. Islamophobia

The race equality think tank Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as "anti-Muslim racism" in shorthand, which is elaborated—on the basis of the UN definition of racism—as follows:

> *Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.*[55]

BMSDemocracy adheres to this definition of Islamophobia, and advises schools to do the same.

🔍 **CASE STUDY:** Muslim parents self-segregate in response to bigotry

Let's call them Mina and Faruq Khan. They're both young doctors, and married to each other. They are completely and happily integrated into British society, and yet, neither of them has had the opportunities that they feel they deserved in the profession. Both of them feel that they've been ghettoised after doing years and years of training and after proving themselves—and these are two doctors working in London. As a result of this alienation they are now self-segregated and have decided to send their children to faith-based Muslim schools. They told me that there is no point in being educated or trying to integrate into this society because they will never let you be one of them.

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[51] Home Office, 'Prevent duty guidance', GOV.UK (last updated: 23th/March/2016): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance

[52] Department for Education, 'The Prevent duty: Departmental advice for schools and childcare providers', GOV.UK (June/2015): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439598/prevent-duty-departmental-advice-v6.pdf (page 6).

[53] Home Office, 'New figures show improved referrals to Prevent and a rise in far-right concerns', GOV.UK (27th/March/2018): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-figures-show-improved-referrals-to-prevent-and-a-rise-in-far-right-concerns

[54] E.g., ICNY, 'A Short List of Terror Plots Disrupted by Muslim Community Assistance', Interfaith Center of New York (8th/June/2012): http://interfaithcenter.org/a-short-list-of-terror-plots-disrupted-by-muslim-community-assistance/ (summarising American incidents); also see Kevin Dunn, 'Mosques, Muslims and myths: overcoming fear in our suburbs', the Conversation (18th/September/2014): http://theconversation.com/mosques-muslims-and-myths-overcoming-fear-in-our-suburbs-31822 (summarising the situation in Australia).

[55] Farah Elahi & Omar Khan (eds.), 'Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all', Runnymede (November/2017): https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf (page 7).

[56] This story was obtained by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Director of BMSDemocracy.

4.4.1. What should schools do to counter Islamophobia and racism against Muslim pupils?

Evidence from the UK, Europe, and the USA charts the worrying increase in Islamophobic incidents (up to and including terrorism against Muslims) since 9/11, 7/7, etc. Within schools, Islamophobia is seen as another form of serious bullying, and must be treated and recorded as such. Name-calling and using terms like 'terrorist' must now be logged as racist (or hate crime) incidents, and reported to the governing body of the school in question. Schools are advised to address the causes of Islamophobic behaviour through their relevant curriculum provision, and to offer help and guidance to Muslim pupils as to how they can cope psychologically and emotionally if they suffer such indignities.

BMSDemocracy believes that all schools, not simply schools where there are a large number of Muslims, must place shared citizenship work with all children at the heart of their agenda; and must make Muslim pupils feel that they are British and have a future in this country. As such, schools must enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards Islamophobia, hate crime, and discrimination.

Section 5: The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 and Muslim practices related to dress and dietary habits

This act brought together all equalities legislation under one overarching banner. Muslims are one group who are considered to have 'protected characteristics,' and schools obviously do not want to contravene this legislation. The problem, however, is that it is very complicated. If any parent makes a complaint using this legislation, BMSDemocracy advises seeking expert legal advice to ensure that the school is not in breach of the equality act.

It is important to note that this legislation does not cover Muslim practices related to dress and diet. There are an increasing number of challenges to the law and to school rules and often this creates an uncomfortable atmosphere in many schools. Schools have a right to decide upon uniform policy without being unfairly or unjustly stigmatised and organised against.

🔍 CASE STUDY: St. Stephen's Primary School

In February of 2018, Neena Lall, the headteacher at St. Stephen's Primary School in Newham, "banned Muslim pupils aged eight and under... from wearing hijabs or fasting during Ramadan for health and safety reasons."[57] The majority of the students in this school are Muslim (from Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi backgrounds), and many parents were upset by Lall's hijab-ban and pressured her to retract it—which she did subsequently. According to The Sun, Lall saw herself as locked in a battle with "fundamentalist Muslims" who are "hell-bent on putting their cultural and religious wishes ahead of the academic excellence of St Stephen's."[58] BMSDemocracy holds that the final decision must be left to the school. Sometimes taking a stand is more important than taking an easy road.

5.1. Diet

The eating of pork is almost always regarded as forbidden (haram), and most religious Muslims (like most religious Jews) insist upon food that has been ritually slaughtered (halal). Many schools now make excellent provision for halal meals and where this is not possible, a vegetarian or pescatarian option should be provided. Indeed, a vegetarian option is often sufficient to cover Halal, since Islamic dietary prohibitions mostly apply to meat and alcohol.

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[57] Miles Goslett, ''LIVING IN FEAR' Head teacher who resurrected a failing school now fears for her life after banning hijab and enraging fundamentalists', the Sun (3rd/February/2018): https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/5489322/hijab-ban-resurrection-school-fears-for-life-london/
[58] Ibid.

5.2. Dress and Modesty

The principle of modesty (haya') is important in Islamic thought but is contested and open to interpretation. It is the application of this principle that has previously led to disputes, and sometimes litigation. It is vital to note that both men and women have a duty to dress modestly. Men are also required to lower their gaze. Although head-coverings and veils of one kind or another are widespread, it would be essentialist to assume that a 'real' Muslim female must wear at least one of the aforementioned garments. There is no particular Quranic injunction to cover the hair or face, but there is to cover the bosom. Over the course of the last century, the wearing of headscarves and veils has varied dramatically in Muslim societies,[59] with certain majority-Muslim countries (such as Turkey and Tunisia) even banning some of them at various points in time.[60] Body and face coverings are controversial across the world, it's not a given.

While some adult women who adopt these modes of dress are doing so through informed choice (as the result of personal reflection or an identitarian commitment), we must not ignore the situation for women who are coerced into wearing them; choice itself becomes questionable when group behaviour pushes certain norms. Head-covering is a cultural practice that can be found in other faiths and traditions all over the world. Historically, women from the Jewish and Christian traditions also covered their heads, but over time social trends have resulted in this custom largely becoming obsolete. For some Muslim women, this is still something that is variously embraced voluntarily or enforced by parents or community, in line with a distinctive visual identity. However, there has not been any substantial research undertaken in this country exploring the reasons why women wear various forms of veiling, so generalisations either way are unwarranted.

If students do desire to wear religious clothing, it is acceptable for schools to require said clothing to conform to the colours and regulations of the school uniform. When disputes arise, both sides need to be understanding: students must conform to school rules, but at the same time, schools should not discriminate in their clothing prohibitions (for example, unfairly prohibiting Muslim garb but not others). It should be noted that disputes over uniform arise with families of all backgrounds, including conservative non-Muslim families. In the end, the school's rules must prevail.

As a secular organisation BMSDemocracy is against prescribed veiling uniform policies.

CASE STUDY: Shabina Begum and the jilbab

In September of 2002, a British Muslim student named Shabina Begum was sent home from Denbigh Highschool in Luton for wearing a jilbab. This sparked a legal battle in the High Court, which Begum lost in June of 2004, as reported in The Guardian:

Shabina's claim that she had been "constructively excluded" from her school was dismissed by Mr Justice Bennett. He said the school's refusal to let her wear the jilbab did not breach her right to education and freedom of religion as laid down in the European convention on human rights.

The school, a 1,000-pupil comprehensive where almost 80% of pupils are Muslim, said it had a flexible uniform policy to ensure that the religious and cultural sensitivities of its students were respected. Girls have the option of wearing trousers, skirts, or a shalwar kameez (trousers and a tunic).

Simon Birks, appearing for the school, said Shabina had never been excluded but had stayed away. He said Denbigh did not let pupils wear the jilbab because it could create the impression that those who wore one might be regarded as "better Muslims" than those who wore the shalwar kameez, and because pupils wearing the jilbab ran the risk of "tripping and slipping".[61]

The following year (in March of 2005), the Court of Appeal ruled in Begum's favour that the wearing of the jilbab should be allowed, and that "Denbigh High had unlawfully excluded Miss Begum."[62] Another year on (in March of 2006), the Law Lords overturned this ruling in favour of the high school: "Lord Bingham ruled that the two-year interruption of her schooling was the result of her "unwillingness to comply with a rule to which the school was entitled to adhere"," according to the BBC.[63]

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[59] For example, the veil and even headscarves became uncommon in Egypt under Nasser: Yusuf M. Sidani, Muslim Women at Work: Religious Discourses in Arab Society (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 38.

[60] Mohja Kahf, 'From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East', in Jennifer Heath (ed.), The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 2008), p. 31.

[61] Sam Jones, 'Muslim pupil loses legal battle to wear jilbab', the Guardian (16th/June/2004): https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/jun/16/schools.humanrights

[62] Joshua Rozenberg, 'Schoolgirl wins right to wear Muslim gown', the Telegraph (3rd/March/2005): https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1484810/Schoolgirl-wins-right-to-wear-Muslim-gown.html

[63] 'School wins Muslim dress appeal', the BBC (22nd/March/2006): http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4832072.stm
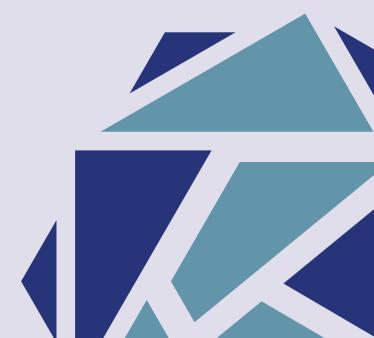
5.2.2. Swimming and PE

Owing to a lack of space, some primary schools require pupils to change into their PE kit in the same classroom. Every effort should be made to ensure the provision of single-sex changing facilities where possible to encourage Muslim girls to participate in sporting activities. Teachers need to listen to the concerns of parents to foster an environment of mutual understanding. Most often, these concerns relate to personal modesty. For example, there are some parents who object to their girls swimming in public baths. This can be overcome by offering parents the option for their daughters to wear swimsuits with greater coverage, if they feel more comfortable in these. Schools need to explain the medical benefits of swimming and the positive effect it will have on their daughter's health. The importance of swimming ought to be highlighted, as well as the potential dangers to personal safety if one is not able to swim, or not able to swim competently. The only exemptions that should be allowed from swimming and PE are illness, justified leave, and menstruation.

Conclusion

Young people growing up as Muslims in the UK are faced with many challenges that relate to their faith, identity, and culture. These issues are exacerbated by a world order dominated by conflict, refugees and seekers of asylum, many of whom come from Muslim countries and are innocent victims of geopolitical forces completely beyond their control. Add to this growing islamophobia and you have the potential for a very toxic mix that could lead to the alienation and segregation of young Muslims from mainstream society. Many feel they are living dual conflicted lives, negotiating community expectations and societal demands. Some can cope well enough with this situation, but others find it difficult and can become emotionally and mentally vulnerable.

Schools are in the frontline of helping young people of all faiths and backgrounds to navigate the difficulties of growing and to emerge as confident, aspirational, good citizens—citizens clear in their values and proud of their faith and cultural backgrounds. Schools are not alone in this endeavour. They need to work with parents and wider communities to help build an inclusive society where all citizens are active participants in the social contract that binds the nation. BMSDemocracy aims for these guidelines to help schools and parents achieve this aim, through the lens of shared citizenship, human rights, and mutual understanding.

Education is crucial for the maintenance and health of any society, and given the challenges facing Muslims in contemporary Britain, the development of Muslim students in particular is important. BMSDemocracy believes that education through the lens of secular-democratic principles offers the best way for the lives of Muslim students to be enhanced, and for the inclusion of Muslims in British contexts to succeed.

Appendix: FAQ

What follows is a list of frequently asked questions pertaining to Muslim students and secular education, including those asked by Muslim parents, and those asked by schools.

Questions that Muslim parents might ask of a school

- Does your uniform policy permit the wearing of hijab? (See page 38)

- Do you have a Sex and Relationship Policy? How do you promote individual autonomy, safeguarding and self-knowledge, particularly in terms of how Muslim pupils relate to others? (See pages 21 and 31)

- Please talk me though your SMSC policy. How do you meet the cultural and spiritual needs of Muslim pupils? (See sections 6 and 8)

- What is your R.E. policy? How does it cover the teaching of Islam and other faiths? (See page 15)

- Does your Behaviour Policy tackle Islamophobia? (See page 35)

- What should my child do if they are being bullied on account of their religious beliefs or practices, faith identity or Muslim dress? (See page 35)

- Do you celebrate Eid? (See page 19)

- Do you have a policy concerning fasting during Ramadan? (See page 20)

- What is your policy and practice concerning collective worship? (See page 17)

- Do you utilise materials from the "Golden Age of Islam" and from contemporary Islamic artists and scientists? (See pages 25-26)

- What is the school policy concerning possible radicalisation? (See page 33)

Questions that might be asked by schools in relation to Muslim students

- How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to learn about other faiths? (See page 15)

- How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to join other pupils in visiting other places of worship? (See page 16)

- How should schools respond to Muslim parents who do not want their children to attend a daily act of Christian worship? (See page 17)

- What provision should schools make for Friday prayers? (See page 18)

- How should schools respond to Muslim parents who express concern about the teaching of meditation/mindfulness? (See page 19)

- What should schools do when Muslim pupils are bullied because of their faith? (See page 35)

- How should schools respond if parents want their children to have a day off for the holy festivals of Eid? (See page 19)

- What should schools do if their pupils want to fast during Ramadan? (See page 20)

- How should schools respond if parents raise issues about the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education? (See page 22)

- How should schools respond if parents raise issues about the teaching of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender issues? (See page 23)

- What should teachers do if parents object to the teaching of Evolution? (See page 25)

- What should schools do when parents object to their children participating in curriculum areas like drama, music, and art? (See page 28)

- What should schools do if a girl or a boy confides in them that they are being forced into marriage or has similar fears? (See page 31)

- What should schools do if they suspect one of their pupils is about to be subjected to—or already has been subjected to—FGM? (See page 32)

- What should schools do if they believe one of their pupils is in danger of being radicalised? (See page 33)

- What should schools do when parents ask that their daughters wear a hijab, a jilbab, or a niqab as part of school uniform? (See page 38)

- What should schools do when Muslim children are bullies and pick on specifically because of their faith? (35)

Glossary of Islamic terms

Adab: correct behaviour, good manners

Ahmadiyyah: A small sect within Islam, mostly concentrated in India and Pakistan; most Muslims view the Ahmadiyyah in the same way that most Christians view Mormons

Eid: Holiday

Fikr: Reflection/Meditation

Hadith: Narrations based upon the sayings and deeds of the Prophet

Halal: Permitted

Haram: Forbidden

Haya': The principle of modesty

Hijab: A veil that covers the head and the chest that emphasises modesty

Ibadi: A member of a minority sect within Islam, mostly located in Oman.

Jilbab: Any long and loose-fit coat or garment worn by some Muslim women

Jummah: Friday Prayers

Niqab: A veil or cloth that covers the face

Quran: The Holy Book of Islam, traditionally viewed as the literal Word of God.

Ramadan: The month of fasting to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad, according to Islamic belief

Shi'i: A member of a minority tendency within Islam (known as Shi'ah Ali), which venerates the Prophet's cousin Ali and his descendants; Shi'ism is comprised of several difference sects, including the Twelvers, the Isma'ilis, and the Zaydis

Sunnah: The exemplary norms of the Prophet

Sunni: A member of the largest sect within Islam (known as Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jama'ah), which prioritises the Sunnah as recorded in Hadith

Surah: A chapter in the Quran.

Ummah: the worldwide Muslim body

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