



The Education of Muslims in Birmingham

Hewer C. T. R.

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The Education of Muslims in Birmingham

C. T. R. Hewer*

Introduction and Overview

The question of the education of Muslims in Britain serves as a case study which precipitates many of the issues involved in the debate on the relationship between religion and education. After a brief note on the Muslim population of Britain, the focus shifts to Birmingham, the second city of the nation and home to a large, stable and diverse Muslim population. Education does not exist in a vacuum and it will be argued that the social conditions of the Muslim population have an impact on their relationship to the world of education. Particular attention is placed on the education of Muslim children in the maintained sector with only passing reference to independent education, post-16 education and the training of Muslims as teachers.

In advance of the detailed examination of Muslims in Birmingham, attention should be focused on the overarching questions which are highlighted by this case study. Firstly, the question of who controls education. There is a certain tension between the rights and responsibilities of parents, educators, the religious community and government, both local and central. The particular way in which the school might be used by the religious community to compensate for poorly-educated parents in the nurturing of faith in their children should be noted and compared to the stress laid on church schools by the Roman Catholic Church in Britain. Secondly, consideration should be given to the role of education as a tool of social engineering, particularly in the debate between the integrational and divisive potential of education within society. Education is always an element on the political agenda. Thirdly, there is the question of equality under the law and the freedom of the individual. There is a clear right for Muslims to have state funding for faith-based schools which must be defended even by those who feel that this is not politically expedient, socially desirable or educationally commendable. This is part of the "liberal's dilemma." It includes a re-examination of the rights of the child (or young person) in contradistinction to those of the parents, religious community and state. Finally, attention must be drawn to a re-appraisal of the purpose, philosophy and particularly epistemology of education together with consideration of the role of the teacher as exemplar for the students.

* Sometime Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

Muslims in Britain

Space does not permit more than an identification of some of the most relevant aspects of the situation of Muslims in Britain.¹ No specific demographical data is collected on the question of religious affiliation throughout Britain but the 1991 census, for the first time, contained a question on ethnic origins. Based on this, extrapolations have been conducted to derive estimates for the total population of Muslims. One such extrapolation, arguably the most thorough, was conducted by Prof Muhammad Anwar of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick.² Anwar's estimate of some 1.5 millions is located towards the lower end of estimates which range from 1m to 3m. His figure will be accepted for the purpose of this paper which makes Muslims approximately 3% of the British population at present. An important piece of research on the Pakistani and Bangladeshi responses to the ethnic origins question in the 1991 census indicates that, because of the age profile of these groups, their populations will at least double before they reach demographic stability.³

Anwar drew some comparisons between what he identified as the Muslim population and the ethnically-speaking "white" population in terms of these age profiles. He indicated that 17% of the white population and 1.5% of the Muslim population was aged over 65 years. By contrast, 32% of the white population and 60% of Muslims were aged under 25 years. In the school-age population (5-16 years) the figures were 13% for the white population and 30% for Muslims. This would give a figure of some 450,000 Muslim school-age children in 1991 and ought to be read in conjunction with the findings of Ballard and Kalra noted above. The number of Muslim independent schools nationally fluctuates as schools open and close at short notice but the latest estimate would be around 42 such schools, many of which are small by British standards. It would be unlikely that such schools account for more than 1% of all Muslim pupils, which leaves 99% in the maintained sector.

The final national point to note is that the Muslim population is not evenly spread throughout the country but concentrated in London and the South East (60%) with the remainder being located in the industrial cities and towns of the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and South Lancashire.

¹ For a survey from within the Muslim community, see: Mohammad S. Raza, *Islam in Britain: past, present and future*, (Leicester: Volcano Press, 1991). For an insider-outsider case study of Bradford, see: Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: religion, politics and identity among British Muslims* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994). For a collection of data with analysis, see: "British Muslims Monthly Survey", *CSIC*, (Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham B29 6LQ).

² see: Muhammad Anwar, "Muslims in Britain: 1991 census and other statistical sources", *CSIC Papers: Europe*, 9 (September 1993), available from CSIC.

³ see: Ballard and Kalra, *The ethnic dimensions of the 1991 census: a preliminary report* (Manchester Census Group, University of Manchester, 1994).

Muslims in Birmingham

The City of Birmingham has a total population of approximately one million of which members of ethnic minority communities account for around 21.5%, the largest groups being the Pakistanis (6.9%) and the Indians (5.3%) with an additional 1.3% from Bangladesh.⁴ It has therefore been suggested that Muslims represent about 10% of the city's total population, or 100,000 people. It is worth noting in passing that the minority communities (c. 20%) and the Muslim communities (c. 10%) have achieved parity of representation in terms of elected councillors.

The Muslims of Birmingham are widely regarded as being amongst the most socially diverse and stable Muslim groupings in Britain. Factors which contribute to this are the plurality of ethnic elements (the first group were probably Yemeni seamen brought in as munitions factory workers in 1940, now augmented by significant numbers from African and Arab countries and Europe as well as the more obvious communities from the Indian subcontinent), the diversity of employment (Muslims are well-represented in the professions and business communities as well as those who came as unskilled labourers), and the mixture of housing (which means that working people, the middle classes and wealthy individuals can live in close proximity, therefore worshipping in the same mosques and utilising the same schools). The product of these elements has meant that Muslims in Birmingham have benefited from strong and enlightened leadership which has generally been successful in promoting their causes in pursuit of social harmony and advancement. An example of this would be the Muslim Liaison Committee which has successfully represented the Muslim population in its dealings with the world of education.

Three particular social factors can be seen to have an impact on questions of education, viz. unemployment, distribution throughout the city and facility with the English language.

Unemployment

Based on the 1991 census, Anwar gives comparative national unemployment rates as 8.8% in the white population, 29% amongst those of Pakistani descent and 32% amongst Bangladeshis. Whilst this would partly reflect the shedding of unskilled labour with the advances in technology in the 1980's, it is important to note that such unemployment is not just amongst older workers whose skills are no longer in demand. The comparative figures for unemployment in the 16-24 age group are 14.6% in the white population compared to those of Pakistani (36%) and Bangladeshi (26%) heritage. Locally in Birmingham, in areas of heavy Muslim concentration, there is anecdotal evidence of adult male unemployment in the order of 45%. With so few openings for school leavers and adults in general, it is axiomatic that this has an impact on motivation in education.

⁴ General figures related to Birmingham are taken from: Birmingham City Council Environmental Services, *Cultural profile: communities of Asian origin in Birmingham* (1994), which are based on the 1991 census.

Muslim distribution

Birmingham is divided into 39 administrative units or wards. Of these, 22 have less than a 10% concentration of members of minority communities whilst seven have a concentration of more than 50%. Muslims tend to be concentrated in seven wards in the city, some of which record a minority population in excess of 60%. This has an obvious impact on school rolls. The most informative statistics would be for primary schools which tend to draw their pupils from a much smaller geographical catchment area than secondary schools. Five wards are seen to have more than 50% of their primary school rolls drawn from the communities of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage.⁵ Indeed seven wards are seen to draw more than 80% of their primary school pupils from ethnic minority communities as a whole.

The City of Birmingham has some 162,000 pupils in its schools with around 40% coming from minority communities.⁶ The official projection of school numbers suggests that by the year 2000, pupils from minority communities will marginally exceed 50%. Since 1990, the Education Department has asked parents registering their children in schools to indicate in which faith their children are being raised. Based on these figures, it is estimated that 21% of all children in primary schools (c. 20,600) and 23% in secondary schools (c. 10,600) are Muslim. This would indicate that Muslims, by a factor of four, are the largest minority religious group in Birmingham schools. Geographical distribution is important here. Of the city's 326 primary schools, 33 have 70%+ Muslim pupils, with 16 having more than 90%. Most of the Birmingham primary schools are of equal size but secondary schools vary considerably, therefore a percentage calculation of Muslims in secondary schools could be misleading. Of the city's 62 secondary schools, nine have more than 500 Muslim pupils. This picture would be supported by the number of live births to mothers resident in Birmingham which indicates that in the seven wards of Muslim concentration, the number of live births was in the order of double that in the other wards.⁷ Factors involved in these figures might be the tendency towards larger families amongst Muslims, religious sensibilities regarding birth control and the normal trends within families which are "recent" migrants.

English language skills

A facility with the English language is an obvious pre-requisite for making progress through the educational system. English is widely understood by men from the Muslim communities of Birmingham although many have a reduced facility in writing and speaking. The dependence on

⁵ Educational statistics are taken from the City of Birmingham Education Department's Research and Statistical Section based on 1994 figures.

⁶ This figure, and the estimates for the numbers of Muslim pupils in Birmingham schools which follow immediately and are based on it, is taken from the education statistics for January 1995.

⁷ Based on figures for 1994 supplied by the Office of Population Census and Statistics. Such figures can be indicative only as there is no correlation between the number of residents of child-bearing age in each ward.

community languages is much more marked amongst women who do not enter into congress outside the home or community to anything like the same extent as men. This is particularly relevant when considering that many marriage partners are direct immigrants from overseas. Starting from 1990, the Education Department began to collect figures from parents of children being registered at schools concerning the main language which was spoken at home or in the community. This indicates that English is the main language for only 70% of Birmingham pupils with the languages of the subcontinent figuring prominently (Urdu 14.1%, Punjabi 7.6% and Bengali 3.8%).

The reduced facility in English language has been addressed by the recruitment of language support staff funded partly by the Education Department and partly by the Home Office through "Section 11" funding. Currently, there are 400 language support staff engaged in educational work in Birmingham although this number is set to be reduced drastically through the termination of "Section 11" funding. This is an area of great concern both to the minority communities and to the educational establishment. There is a clear need to address the lack of facility with English amongst mothers and pre-school children, in particular, so as to enhance children's access to educational provision.

There is a general concern that Muslim children in particular and children from minority communities in general are failing to achieve their full potential in education. This is borne out by the figures for pupils achieving five or more passes grades A-C at GCSE.⁸ This indicates that the total Birmingham figure was 32% which compares to a national average of 44%. When analysed by ethnicity, the white pupils were seen to have a rate of 35% compared to those of Pakistani (20%) and Bangladeshi (29%) heritage. However, it is noteworthy that the Afro-Caribbean communities had worse figures (18%), whilst the Indian communities (40%) had the best figures of any group. These educational trends, when taken at the national level and combined with employment prospects, have led some commentators to speak of the development of a Muslim underclass.⁹

Maintained schools

The national figure of 99% of Muslim pupils being in maintained schools with only about 1% in Muslim independent schools is replicated in Birmingham. This category of maintained schools includes the voluntary schools which are mainly associated with particular religious bodies, although, to date, not Muslims. Many Muslim parents actually seek out a place for their children in church schools wherever possible on the understanding that in them they will find a greater emphasis placed on religious and moral values. Of Birmingham's 450 maintained schools,¹⁰ 91

⁸ Birmingham Education Department's Research and Statistics Section report for 1995 (throughout the city).

⁹ e.g. The infamous BBC TV *Panorama* documentary of 29 March 1993.

¹⁰ Including Special Schools and Nursery Schools.

are church schools but statistics for the number of Muslim children in these schools are unavailable.¹¹

In dealing with maintained schools, attention will be paid to four areas, viz. general accommodation of Muslim religious and cultural requirements, the ethos of schools, recent developments in the provision of collective worship and religious education.

Religious and cultural requirements

Modesty for both boys and girls is a central requirement of Islam. This has implications for school uniform, particularly for girls. In general, these requirements have been accommodated in Birmingham schools by uniform regulations being limited to specific colours whilst leaving the style of dress adaptable to parents' and pupils' choice. This means that a school might stipulate a particular shade of blue material for uniform which might be made up into skirts of varying lengths, trousers or the traditional subcontinent combination of long top and trousers (shalwar and kameez). In the same way, girls may incorporate a headscarf of the same colour (appropriately fastened from the point of view of safety), thus avoiding the controversies which have been associated with headscarfs in France. By this accommodation, pupils retain the corporate identity symbolised by uniform whilst being able to adapt it to their own religious and cultural norms.

Modesty in boys' dress is not generally a problem in terms of uniform although there may be some Muslims who have a particular objection to the tie, seeing it as a specifically Christian symbol. Both boys and girls must preserve these customs of modesty during physical education. This has led some schools to segregate the sexes for PE and permit girls, in particular, to wear track suits rather than more revealing games attire. The difficulties of maintaining modesty whilst changing and showering have proved more difficult to surmount. Many schools have not been able to move away from the communal changing room and have to allow particular flexibility when both boys and girls object to using communal showers. The Muslim prescription on modesty requires that no Muslim appears naked in front of someone else other than a marriage partner, hence the requirement for cubicles for changing and individual, screened showers.

This concern for modesty includes a desire for the segregation of the sexes after puberty, thus Muslims exhibit an inclination towards single-sex schools at secondary level whenever possible. Of Birmingham's 62 secondary schools, ten are girls' schools and six for boys only. This provides 8,542 places for girls and 3,569 places for boys. Girls' school places are particularly in demand by Muslims who are heavily represented in such schools in the areas of Muslim concentration. In the case of girls' schools which are outside but accessible from such areas, many parents will arrange collective transportation to convey their girls to school thus ensuring their safety and propriety both inside school and whilst journeying to and fro. Statistics show that, in single-sex schools, 33% of girls and 16% of boys are Muslim. There is a demand for additional all-girls provision in the

¹¹ It should be noted that Grant Maintained schools in Birmingham are not included in these statistics with the exception of total number of pupils on roll.

city. One way that this might be effected, even without the active co-operation of the Education Department, is through parents deciding communally that they will send all their girls to one school and all their boys to another. This is a facet of "parent power" in action, made possible by government legislation laying emphasis on parental choice being paramount in their children's education.

The Muslim Liaison Committee, already mentioned, has been instrumental in bringing all Muslim groups within the city to decide in advance the dates on which the great festivals of Islam will be celebrated. Traditionally, these dates are decided according to an actual sighting of the moon; however, spurred on by the necessity of deciding dates in advance, Muslim scholars have agreed criteria based on astronomical data. Whilst these dates are not followed universally in Birmingham, the majority of Muslims are content to accept them and thus the schools are able to nominate these days as holidays in advance and make sure that important school events, like examinations or functions, do not clash.

Many schools have made provision for a room to be set aside for students of any or no religious persuasion who wish to pray or observe silence. This is of particular benefit during Ramadan when Muslims are fasting and concentrating on spiritual exercises. Similarly allowances are made for pupils who might be tired or having difficulties in concentrating whilst they are fasting. Such times in the Muslim calendar are made the subject of assemblies so that other pupils can increase their understanding and sensitivity, for example, by supporting those who are fasting and not offering them sweets! In schools with a significant concentration of Muslim pupils, the provision of halal food for school lunches is widely accepted.

As regards the recognition of Muslim sensitivities in the academic curriculum, progress has been limited and patchy. One issue is how to respect Islamic norms, such as the prohibition of figure-drawing in art or reservations over singing and musical instruments in music lessons. Another issue is how to ensure a balance in touching on questions concerning interaction with Muslims, such as in the history of the crusades or of colonialism. Again, there is the issue of affirming Muslim pupils through including culturally diverse materials in lessons, such as the use of literature from other cultures in English. Further, there is the need to address perceptions of Islam's and Muslims' contribution to knowledge, such as in the development of science or mathematics, as well as the natural holistic balance of Islam on questions of the environment. Finally, consideration needs to be given to including languages which are religiously or culturally important to Muslims in the modern languages provision.

School ethos

There has been much discussion in recent years of the role of education in advancing the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. This has taken place alongside discussion of the place of values in education and the possibility of a value-free educational philosophy. Islamic impulses have a contribution to make to this debate, centring as they do on the principle of integration of the individual as a spiritual and moral being who advances in knowledge and material wealth. There is an ethical

110 C. P. R. Hewer

dimension to every aspect of Islamic education; thus a high value is placed on the ethos of the school in terms of general conduct and relationships between the community, students and teachers. The role of the teacher is of particular importance. The teacher is expected to be an example of integrated living thus to serve as a role model for students to follow. This is based on the role of the Prophet Muhammad, who is seen as the best of examples and an exemplary teacher whose life was shaped in every detail by the truth of the message which he received in the Qur'an.

This emphasis on the exalted role of the teacher has led to some concerns amongst Muslims when teachers' actions have been perceived to be less than exemplary. Incidents might be a lack of respect for students wishing to pray or fast, insensitivity about the way in which Muslims or Islam are depicted in lessons and an absence of empathy in sensitive areas such as sex education. Knowledge of "unexemplary" elements from teachers' private lives might also give cause for concern. Schools have tried to improve their communication with parents through parent governors, home-school liaison teachers, meeting community leaders and even such practical issues as sending home school letters translated into community languages. Similarly, schools have taken stock of their welcoming ambience by putting up notices for parents in community languages, celebrating important events in the community and making additional provision to facilitate communication between parents and teachers concerning students' progress. As the Muslim community grows older and more parents are drawn from second and third generation residents in Britain, the interaction between parents and schools becomes more marked and demands a certain mutual respect.

Collective worship

Ever since the 1944 Education Act, the requirement for an act of collective worship in all schools daily, which existed earlier by custom and practice, has been enshrined in law. Progressively over the decades, the "worship" dimension diminished to be replaced by an act of corporate identity in the school assembly, which generally took up a social or moral theme which led participants to, although not across, the threshold of worship. Parents always had the absolute right to withdraw any pupil from any act of worship but the transition towards a morally based assembly resulted in this happening rarely. The legislators of the 1988 Education Reform Act made a conscious effort to redress this movement and insist that acts of worship take place daily and that, over a period of time, they may be seen to be broadly or mainly Christian in character. Whilst Muslims generally welcomed this re-introduction of a more overtly spiritual dimension to school life, it brought with it fresh concerns about Muslim pupils being expected to take part in Christian acts of worship.

In 1993, two primary schools in the City of Birmingham were brought to radically re-consider their provision through the actions of Muslim parents and parent governors. They were in the same district of the city and concerned Muslims, who were active in educational matters, were able to share their expertise between both schools. One school, Birchfield, drew 72% of its children from the Muslim communities, whilst its neighbour,

Canterbury, had 73% of Muslim pupils on roll. An important factor in the movement was the emphasis placed on parent governors and responding to the demands of parental choice by the Education Reform Act (1988), which also started the trend towards devolved authority being vested in governing bodies rather than the Local Education Authority together with the delegation of budgets under provisions for Local Management of Schools.

The two different ways in which these schools resolved the question are worthy of attention. A school with a large number of adherents of faiths other than Christianity can apply to the Local Education Authority's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for a partial or whole-school determination to set aside the requirement for collective worship to be broadly or mainly Christian. A partial determination allows for the school to retain broadly or mainly Christian worship for part of the school body whilst allowing another part to have worship according to the rites of another religion. A whole-school determination allows the whole school to move away from the requirement for broadly or mainly Christian worship so that acts of worship for all pupils can draw materials from other faith communities whilst maintaining the unity of all pupils attending collective worship together.

Parents and their representatives on the governing body of Birchfield school attempted to resolve this question by negotiating with the school administration with a view to permitting Islamic collective worship to take place. When negotiations failed, the parents organised a mass withdrawal from collective worship thus exercising parental rights under the law. With some 70+% of the pupils being withdrawn from collective worship, the school authorities found it necessary to make alternative provision. A partial determination was applied for and granted by the Birmingham SACRE which allowed for Islamic acts of worship to be conducted by volunteer leaders provided by the local Muslim communities.

Parents were then given the choice to send their children to an Islamic act of collective worship or to send them to the general school assembly which remained broadly Christian in character. When presented with this choice, the parents of 70% of the pupils opted for the Islamic worship. In the course of time, the school recruited first one and then a second Muslim teacher who assumed responsibility for these acts of worship. The ideal of the whole school expressing its corporate identity in a united assembly once per week was maintained. Such assemblies, stopping at the threshold of worship, are preceded by a short period of silence in classrooms when those who wish may engage in prayer.

The solution in Canterbury school was different in that the school authorities decided to apply to the Birmingham SACRE for a whole-school determination, which involves everyone coming together for acts of collective worship which draw 80% of their religious input from Islamic sources and 20% from other religious material. This satisfied the requirements of the parents of 65% of the Muslim pupils but left the parents of 35% who insisted on their right to withdraw their children and opt for an act of specifically Islamic worship instead. These acts of Islamic worship are led by members of the local Muslim communities who are now remunerated by the governors who now have total responsibility for the school's budget.

A typical act of Islamic worship would have a fivefold shape. It would begin with a greeting to establish a prayerful atmosphere. This would be followed by everyone being asked to join together in the recitation of the opening surah of the Qur'an (the Fatihah) in Arabic with occasional translations into English to ensure that the children are aware of its meaning. This follows the Islamic pattern of worship in which this surah forms part of each of the five daily prayers. The school sets a series of themes which are taken up in all acts of worship of whatever tradition. This theme would then be developed by the leader of the Islamic worship drawing material from the Qur'an and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) giving emphasis to developing an Islamic mode of life for the pupils. This would be followed by the unaccompanied singing of Islamic songs, e.g. those in praise of the Prophet. The act of worship concludes with supplicatory prayers (du'a) which might be directed by the leader, often with the assistance of pupils who have been prepared in advance. Based on the experiences in these two schools, materials are being prepared for use by other schools who might wish to adopt a similar pattern of worship.

Religious Education

The 1944 Education Act again made the requirement that every pupil in maintained schools should follow a syllabus of Religious Education. The content of this syllabus was to be worked out in each Local Education Authority and enshrined in what became known as the Agreed Syllabus of RE. This had to be followed in all County schools and to be available upon parental request in all Voluntary Controlled schools. Voluntary Aided and Controlled schools (usually religiously affiliated) were free to determine their own syllabuses. Originally, it was assumed that the Agreed Syllabus would be exclusively Christian in content although care was taken to ensure that it was broadly Christian and not associated with any Christian denomination. In the decades which followed, the content of such Agreed Syllabuses was adapted to reflect the growing multi-faith nature of particular sections of British society. The fact that each LEA was able to draw up its own Agreed Syllabus meant that there was a wide variation across the country as each area responded to the needs of the communities which it served. A seminal step in this process was taken by the City of Birmingham in its Agreed Syllabus of 1975 which required that all pupils study at least two and no more than three religions, one of which must be Christianity.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 and subsequent directives from central government required that every LEA should introduce a new Agreed Syllabus which must be reviewed every five years and which should be predominantly Christian in content whilst reflecting the presence of other world faiths in contemporary Britain. This led to the new Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of 1995 which is currently in use throughout the city.

Muslim parents and their representatives on the governing body of Birchfield school were unhappy with this "multi-faith" approach to religious education and argued that it led to confusion in the minds of children and ultimately promoted unbelief. They brought pressure on the governing body to introduce Islamic religious education as an option for pupils whose parents elected for it. The governors were asked to respond to the particular

needs of the pupils in the school and agreed to employ an additional teacher who would not have responsibility for any particular class but rather be responsible for delivering a syllabus of Islamic RE for all classes (and leading the Islamic worship of the school). Such a teacher was recruited in January 1996 as an additional expense on the school budget which the governors now controlled. A timetable was drawn up for the whole school which allowed for one hour's discrete religious education for every class. With 23 classes in the school, this made up a full timetable for the specialist Islamic RE teacher. Parents were then given the (annually renewable) choice of which syllabus of RE they wanted their children to follow.

The school has developed a single thematic approach to religious education across the school. Each particular theme is developed in the Islamic syllabus and also in the general school syllabus based on the Agreed Syllabus. The parents of 98% of the Muslim pupils opted for them to follow the Islamic syllabus. These children from each class are removed from the remainder of the class for the hour-long RE lesson each week. The remainder of the class, amounting to some 30% of the total school population, are then taught according to the school's general RE syllabus by the usual class teacher.

The consequences of this regime are that the integrated curriculum which is generally followed in primary schools has been divided to provide for discrete RE timetabled periods, although it must be noted that such divisions into discrete subject elements are becoming more common across the curriculum in response to the demands of the National Curriculum in primary schools. Such a division into discrete RE lessons is not in keeping with Islamic educational thinking which would want to see Islamic impulses permeating the entire curriculum. It also means that the school has had to take on an additional member of staff to cover the Islamic RE timetable in addition to its usual staffing quota with the concomitant implications for budgetary provision. Muslim observers would note that it has had a significant effect on the feeling of belonging within the school on the part of Muslim pupils who are affirmed in their identity and strengthened in their beliefs, which has shown results in terms of improved conduct in school, a more Islamic ethos and a greater application to studies across the curriculum.

Muslim schools

No survey of the education of Muslims in Birmingham would be complete without mention of the Muslim independent schools and the supplementary schools.

Day schools

There are three established Muslim independent schools in Birmingham which are run by dint of a great deal of community support and acts of supererogation by staff and helpers.¹² They have been founded by concerned parents, teachers and Muslim leaders who want to integrate the

¹² There are, in addition, two or three embryonic schools which are struggling to become established and a boys' academy specialising in the religious sciences.

spirit of Islam into every aspect of school life and work. Each is small, catering for no more than 100 to 140 pupils. One is for secondary girls only, another for girls in the secondary department but mixed at primary level, whilst the third has two separate units for boys and girls of all ages in the same building but on different floors sharing specialist facilities at different times.

Although, as private schools, they are not bound to follow the National Curriculum, in practice they tend to do so as far as they are able. They have to be registered with the Department for Education and Employment and thus subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools. Obviously, the National Curriculum now sets a benchmark in education and if these schools want to show that they can compete with maintained schools then they must be judged by its standards. The schools are fortunate to have Muslim staffs made up in the main of qualified teachers. These teachers need to be highly committed to the ideals of a Muslim education as they have to cope with limited facilities and significantly reduced remuneration compared with their colleagues in maintained schools.

Even though the fees for these schools are modest by the standards of most independent day schools, they are nevertheless beyond the reach of the poorer members of society and thus tend to attract the children of professional people especially where the mother has also received an extended education. Parental support and commitment to the schools and the education they offer goes well beyond the writing of a termly cheque! The numbers of children who are entered for public examination are still relatively small but they tend to do well by comparison with Muslim children in maintained schools and compare favourably (when expressed as a percentage) with the local and national averages at GCSE. The small numbers, dedicated staff and parental support and circumstances obviously contribute to this level of success.

What is particular about the schools is the way in which the whole ethos reflects Islamic principles. Great attention is paid to showing concern for others, for conduct and accepting a share in responsibility for the smooth running of the school community. Pupils and staff clean and tidy the school, they treat one another with mutual respect and join as equals in their religious duties. Prayers which fall during the school day are observed together, emphasis is laid upon Qur'anic recitation and Islamic teachings are integrated into every aspect of the common life.

Obviously, such schools would benefit from the injection of money which would come with public funding. Indeed, one of the schools has begun the long process of making application to opt into Grant Maintained status. In others there is a concern that public funding would bring with it constraints which would restrict the ability of the school to fulfil its Islamic ideals and such schools will not be seeking public funding. Although the schools can become exemplars of what can be achieved when sacrificial effort and high ideals are combined in the education of Muslims, the sheer size of the number of Muslims in Birmingham means that independent Muslim schools can play no more than a small logistical part in addressing it, whilst at the same time serving an important function as a testbed for new ideas and the development of curriculum.

Supplementary schools

Several thousand Muslim children in Birmingham attend supplementary schools after day school and at weekends. These schools cater for children as young as four years but the number dwindles rapidly in the classes for children over the age of eleven until it fades into insignificance by the age of fourteen. These schools are located in mosques, teaching centres and houses. Numbers in any one school vary from perhaps twenty to three hundred. Teachers usually come from the community as volunteers and few have any professional training in education. Typically, these schools meet for two to three hours each evening and during school holidays, thus giving a total throughout the year of perhaps 500 hours tuition.

The curriculum of such schools falls broadly into three categories. Children are taught to read phonetically the Qur'an in Arabic and memorise sections to be recited in prayer. A small number go on to memorise the whole book. They are given basic instruction in Islamic religious thought and practice with emphasis being placed on correctly following the rubrics of prayer, fasting and moral conduct. In the best of these schools, there are classes in Arabic language and Islamic history and some schools and pupils make significant advances in acquiring knowledge. The third element within the curriculum is the teaching of the language, culture and history of the community from which the parents originally came. This establishes a sense of belonging and keeps the younger generation in touch with the family elders whether they be in Britain or overseas.

Two particular efforts have been made to widen the impact of such schools to cover more of the curriculum. The Yemeni community receives help from the Yemen to run an impressive education and community centre in which Arabic-speaking children are given additional support across the curriculum through the medium of Arabic. This not only enhances their understanding of the material but also grounds and expands their appreciation of their cultural and linguistic heritage. Inspired by a concern for the poor achievement of Muslim pupils in maintained schools, a few tutorial schools have been established which offer additional help in core curriculum subjects on Sunday mornings. Here the language of instruction is English and teachers are volunteers from the community, some of whom are practising teachers in maintained schools during the week.

There is the potential for significant linking and partnerships to be formed between these supplementary schools and maintained schools. Buildings and elements of the curriculum might be shared. Teaching methodologies might be compared and mutually improved. The support of the communities would benefit the maintained schools whilst supplementary schools could take advantage of the wider professionalism of trained educators. The pupils would benefit from not having to operate in two educational worlds each day and spend long additional hours at the end of a demanding school day. The importance of improving the standard of English amongst Muslim women and pre-school-age children has already been noted. A partnership between community-based educational activities and infants' departments might be of particular benefit here.

Post-sixteen education

Birmingham has maintained a number of 11-18 secondary schools but the bulk of 16+ students are in Sixth Form and Further Education Colleges. No statistical evidence is available but anecdotal evidence would suggest that Muslims are over-represented in this sector of education. This would appear to be particularly true of Muslim girls. Four reasons might be advanced for this. Firstly, there is a general inclination towards education amongst Muslims and this is enhanced by the traditional route of all migrant communities of using education as a means of social advancement. Secondly, the higher incidence of unemployment has already been noticed and therefore "staying on" in education is a default option when no job can be found. Thirdly, there is considerable family support to assist young people who want to stay on in education. It is by no means unusual, for example, for older brothers and sisters to make financial contributions to enable a younger sibling to stay on at college. Finally, because Muslim young people tend not to be engaged in the "clubs and drinking" scene of many of their peer group in the wider society, their demand for spending money is significantly reduced.

Two points for reflection are worth noting. This trend will inevitably lead to a greater social division within the Muslim population between those who have made progress through education and those who have "failed." With the emergence of an educated corps seeking better jobs, there is the potential for a racial backlash if they succeed and social unrest if they are unable to find suitable employment. In the case of young women, the "primary purpose clause" in immigration legislation means that a Muslim woman seeking permission to bring a potential marriage partner into the country must show that she is established in employment and able to support him without his becoming a burden on the state. This is leading to more young Muslim women entering employment, often after further or higher education, and then securing financial and logistical stability through having a home of their own.

Teacher education

Commencing in 1991, a B.Ed. course for primary school teachers with a specialism in RE through the vehicle of Islamic Studies was created at Westhill College in Birmingham. This was the product of a creative partnership between leaders of the Muslim communities in the city, the then DES and Westhill as an affiliated college of the University of Birmingham. The course was created by taking the Christian theology components in the existing B.Ed. profile and replacing them with equal and parallel courses in Islamic Studies with the addition of a compulsory course in Christian Studies. The course recruited up to twenty students each year, mainly young Muslim women from the city who lived at home and travelled to the college each day. It has now expanded to a department of 3.5 staff with the addition of Islamic Studies strands in several other first degree programmes. Muslim students now make up some 10% of the college's roll and, with the demise of the B.Ed. in the latest re-organisation, have the potential to take a first degree with an Islamic Studies component and then enter teaching through the college's PGCE courses at both primary and secondary level. It is worth

remarking that every teacher who has graduated from the course to date has been offered a job immediately upon completion.

Conclusion

By way of concluding this positive survey, it is worth noting what is not yet happening in the education of Muslims in Birmingham. The re-appraisal of the Islamic traditions brought from the countries of origin to address the question of how to live as a Muslim in the West has hardly begun. One result of this is that many are drifting away from what the elders regard as important aspects of Islam and others are being lost in confusion or falling prey to radicals. Little attention has yet been paid to reconciling the contributions which Islamic and post-Enlightenment western philosophies of education can contribute one to the other. There is little sign yet emerging of the development of a "theology" of living as a relatively powerless Muslim minority amidst a plurality of religious and secular traditions.

