

Submission to the ‘Out-of-School Education Settings’ Call for evidence by the Department of Education

January 2016

Introduction

1. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) founded in 1997 is an inclusive umbrella body that represents the interest of Muslims in Britain. It is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole.
2. The MCB is made up of major national, regional and local organisations, specialist institutions and professional bodies. Its affiliates include mosques, educational and charitable bodies, cultural and relief agencies and women and youth groups and associations. At present it has over five hundred affiliates.
3. The MCB is a non-partisan organisation and does not endorse any political parties. It does encourage greater participation in the electoral and consultative processes, and in helping Muslims make informed choices.
4. The MCB welcomes this opportunity to respond to the call for evidence by the Out-of-School Education Settings consultation of the Department of Education.

Background

5. The 2011 Census shows that Muslims form 4.8% of the population of England and Wales with an age profile skewed to the younger age bands;33% of the Muslim population was aged 15 years or under. The faith needs, including religious education of the population, are mainly met by a civil society network of mosques (approximately 1500) and faith schools in about 50 towns and cities. Most of the out-of-school teaching is undertaken in mosques in addition to separately-run weekend schools. Thus there are about 2000 settings for the provision of supplementary schools education for approximately 250,000 children.
6. MCB welcomes the move by the government to strengthen, support and improve the quality of provisions and facilities in the out-of-school-setting often

known as supplementary schools. The MCB believes if done properly, a government supported initiative can add value, enrich provisions and enhance experience of those benefiting from these provisions. The MCB also believes that these supplementary schools will continue to provide and have capacity to strongly contribute to the building of a stronger and cohesive society, including strengthening relationship between communities and groups.

7. However, the MCB recognises that there are concerns, certainly within the wider Muslim communities, about how the arrangement will work and the short and long term implications of the proposed initiative.
8. There are also concerns about the real drivers behind this initiative as some feel that making it part of the counter-terrorism agenda means there are security concerns arising out of some of the supplementary schools without identifying evidence to support such perception.
9. Furthermore, as this initiative sits with PREVENT, which has caused significant concerns amongst many, it too treats Muslims as suspects by securitising an essential part of their religious and community life.
10. In this submission, we therefore seek to explore the concerns around the proposed framework, articulate what can be achieved through such initiative and suggest approaches which are necessary to achieve positive outcomes.
11. Our methodology has been as follows:
 - Following the announcement by the Department for Education (DFE) to bring in a framework for registration, inspection and regulation of the supplementary schools providing “intensive” education/instructions to children, the MCB called for views from the communities, aimed primarily at its affiliated organisations but were open to all and accessible online¹ to anyone interested in providing their views.

¹ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XYMSDCD>

- The MCB has also published a summary of the feedbacks received on its website.²
- In addition, the leadership of the MCB has also visited institutions across the UK and participated in discussions on the government proposal.
- This submission is therefore the result of the views, concerns and suggestions expressed by a number of Muslim organisations, individuals and groups up and down the country including those conveyed orally.
- The MCB leadership has also reached out to other faith groups in respect of these changes and the views expressed by them also contributed to the preparation of this submission.

Substantive Response

12. The Muslim supplementary schools sector has **a long and rich history**. It is estimated that around 2000 such schools cater for around 250,000 Muslim Children.³

13. Whilst the number of academic research into the provision of Muslim Supplementary schools is limited, there is a body of information available on the Supplementary schools sector generally.

14. The history of supplementary schools in the UK goes back at least a century and almost all of them cater for the Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BME). Muslims being about a third of the BME populations, it is assumed that at least a third of the supplementary schools are likely to be from the Muslim communities.

² <http://www.mcb.org.uk/feedback-received-on-governments-proposal-for-out-of-school-education-settings/>

³ Inside Madrassas, IPPR 2011 - http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/11/inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.pdf?noredirect=1

15. Therefore, it is appropriate to draw from the exercise some of the findings on the supplementary schools.

16. What all the reports show is that in the main, supplementary schools add value particularly in terms of children's cultural, religious and social identity. Contribution of the supplementary schools are therefore overall positive including in improving attainment in education, building bridges between communities and contributing to the cohesiveness of society.

17. Successive reports undertaken by a range of bodies including the University of Manchester⁴, The Royal Society of Arts⁵, The IPPR and others show that supplementary schools add **enormous benefit** including –

- Provide safe space for culture, language(s) and heritage of BME children –

“Supplementary schools are often considered safe spaces within which the culture, heritage and language(s) of BME children are nurtured. The notion of ‘creating space’ to foster the ambitions and nuanced identities of BME pupils in a diasporic context can build resilience and a sense of belonging. Supplementary schools can also be more flexible and responsive to the needs of BME students than mainstream schools and are often better placed to provide tailored support and guidance to pupils from the specific communities they serve.”⁶

- Raise attainment of those attending – supplementary schools have played significant role in raising attainment of BME children;

⁴ Gaiser L and Hughes P (2015) *Language Provisions in Manchester's Supplementary Schools*, The University of Manchester - <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Language-provisions-in-Manchester-supplementary-schools.pdf>

⁵ Nwulu S (2015) *Beyond Schools Gates*, The Royal Society of Arts - <https://www.thersa.org/about-us/media/2015/supplementary-schools-at-risk-of-isolation-and-decline-as-government-and-others-fail-to-reach-out/>;

⁶ *Ibid*, p8;

- Muslim supplementary schools promote community cohesion by instilling values of good citizenship and civic responsibility inherent in the Islamic faith⁷;
- Supplementary schools generally (operating mainly among the BME community) and the Muslim supplementary schools in particular instil in children a sense of confidence about their own identity and to explain their belief and culture to the wider society;

18. The announcement to bring in measure to require registration, inspection and regulation of the supplementary schools has raised concerns within a diverse range of people from cross section of the society. We however limit our submissions to the concerns expressed by the Muslim organisations and individuals to us.

- It comes as part of the PREVENT and the broader counter terrorism strategy which is based on securitisation. We strongly feel it should not be a security concern;

“the failure of government to recognise the contribution of supplementary schools, increased resentment when the spotlight was extremism and the Prevent agenda”⁸

- Singling out Muslims when evidence suggests that whatever concerns there may be around out-of-school setting, they are not unique to the Muslim community⁹;

⁷ Inside Madrassas, IPPR 2011 - http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/11/inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.pdf?noredirect=1, in particulars see page 6;

⁸ Nwulu S (2015) Beyond Schools Gates, The Royal Society of Arts - <https://www.thersa.org/about-us/media/2015/supplementary-schools-at-risk-of-isolation-and-decline-as-government-and-others-fail-to-reach-out/>

⁹ *The PM must crack down on Madrassas, but it's not just Muslim schools that breed intolerance*, The Independent, 8 October 2015 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/ignore-david-cameron-its-not-just-muslim-faith-schools-that-breed-intolerance-a6686121.html>

- Increased bureaucratic and regulatory burden on a sector which is underfunded, ill-resourced¹⁰ and often run by volunteers, which may ultimately lead to closure of some of these provisions; this will result in the weakening of an invaluable service within the community.
- There are existing initiatives, mechanisms and arrangements which if properly supported can achieve better results¹¹

Suggestions and Conclusions

19. The MCB believes that the evidence points to the fact that Muslim supplementary schools provide a positive impact to the community with significant potential to improve children's life chances; If efficiently managed, they can even provide a safety net against the scourge of extremism.

20. The MCB recognises that there are significant challenges – lack of resources, concerns around expertise of some teachers, broadness of curriculum, limited funding, inadequate physical infrastructure and absence of robust and comprehensive quality assurance process.

21. However, the MCB notes that there is no evidence to suggest that the Muslim supplementary schools present risk of radicalisation and extremism.

22. There are good models of successful partnership between Muslim supplementary schools with the statutory, voluntary faith and non-faith bodies

¹⁰ Supplementary Schools, a New Approach, John Leyon's Charity, June 2012 - <http://jlc.london/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/supplementary-schools-a-new-approach.pdf>

¹¹ See for example National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education's quality assurance framework <http://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk/quality-framework/>; Partnership between Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester <http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/resources/mfsh/islam/Pages/examples-good-practice.aspx>; Association of Muslim Supplementary Schools (AMSS) www.amss.org.uk

which has improved quality of education that has contributed to bridging gaps amongst communities.

23. The MCB has invested and continues to strive to invest in building capacity to improve governance, accountability and transparency of Muslim organisations including supplementary schools to work for the common good.¹²

24. There are examples of partnership work where Muslim institutions have welcomed funding and collaboration from local governments and business to improve quality, when done so through mutual respect and discussion.¹³

25. The MCB launched a 2-year project in 2007, 'Mosques 100 Project, Capacity Building Programme for Mosques & Imams', which originated from an earlier MCB report 'Voices from the Minaret'. The project's scope included an audit of status, governing instrument and structure, a 'needs analysis' and provision of good governance documentation. The MCB is also a founding member of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB)¹⁴, providing this body with essential know-how in the development of standards for compliance and governance, an inspection regime, to ensure better safeguarding of welfare of children.

26. In view of the above, the MCB submits

- Supplementary schools are vital and they need improvement in their quality, but de-link this sector from PREVENT and counter-terrorism agenda, unless of course the government can provide a compelling

¹² Capacity Building of Mosques and Islamic Organisations
https://web.archive.org/web/20110111080834/http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=features-140

¹³ The RAISE project - <http://www.insted.co.uk/leicester.pdf>

¹⁴ Muslim Council of Britain welcome the launch of MIANB -
https://web.archive.org/web/20120827093906/http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=1653

and credible evidence to suggest these schools present a real and sufficient risk of radicalisation and extremism;

- Recognise the contribution and good practice within the sector and to support existing models/mechanisms e.g. the National Resource Centre for the Supplementary Education, MINAB, the AMSS and others to have sustainable and adequate resources to continue with their work.
- Work with existing institutions such as University of East London, Markfield Institute of Higher Education and others who have been working to develop effective programmes for training teachers in Muslim supplementary schools. One or more of these institutions could be supported to become a "centre of excellence for supplementary schools";
- Provide funding and support supplementary schools to improve expertise including improving capacity, understanding and awareness to ensure child welfare, deliver quality lessons and to promote cohesion and citizenship;
- Support initiative to gather evidence to improve our understanding of the sector to enable harnessing full potential of the sector;

27. The MCB has consistently argued that to build a stronger, more cohesive and peaceful society, we must work to build trust and confidence and to promote engagement. Since its inception the MCB has been working constructively with the local and central governments to improve the educational standards of our children, irrespective of their background.

We believe that if we are able to work in the spirit of trust and respect we can bring the intended benefit in the Supplementary schooling sector.

