

REPORT

INSIDE MADRASSAS

UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING WITH
BRITISH-MUSLIM FAITH SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Madrassas are supplementary schools run for Muslim children that operate outside the mainstream education system. They have been placed under close scrutiny by the British media who have identified a number of issues within them. There is also a lack of evidence about how these institutions work and the impact they can have on children and communities. As a result, madrassas are not well understood outside of Muslim communities. Recent estimates suggest that there are around 2000 madrassas operating within the UK which are attended by around 250,000 Muslim children (Hayer 2009 and Abrams 2011). Madrassas are a significant feature of many British communities and it is important that their practices and impact are understood by policymakers and researchers.

This report presents research that has been undertaken by IPPR to generate a stronger evidence base on the operation and impact of madrassas in the UK. It identifies challenges that need to be addressed by policymakers, local communities and madrassas themselves. It also identifies ways in which madrassas can achieve their full potential as a positive influence in the lives of Muslim children and society as a whole.

This research is based on:

- a survey of 179 madrassas
- in-depth interviews and workshops with parents, madrassa teachers, madrassa pupils (past and present), interviews with other stakeholders such as local authority representatives.

It also draws on a review of the available literature and analysis of media coverage of madrassas from 2001 to 2010, which was published by IPPR earlier this year (Cherti et al 2011).

Many of our recommendations are aimed at madrassas themselves because they are private institutions that fall outside the state system. Nonetheless, in some cases, the improvements required can only be achieved if they are facilitated by local and national government, particularly where they relate to child safety.

Three important challenges emerged from the analysis of literature and media coverage surrounding madrassas in the UK:

1. The lack of evidence about what madrassas do and how they work

Very little of what features in public debates about madrassas has been generated through rigorous research. The main source of public information stems from the media, which is dominated by negative representations of madrassas (Cherti et al 2011). Madrassas are often portrayed as being 'hidden' from public view. This is supported to some extent by the fact that not all madrassas are registered formally, despite having opportunities to register with organisations such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB), the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRC) and, in some cases, local authorities. As a consequence, there are reportedly many informal madrassas, such as those operating in private homes. Very little robust research into the operation of madrassas in the UK has been conducted in academic or policymaking circles. This contributes to misunderstanding around what madrassas do and the impact they have. The results show that there is diversity among the sector and a distinction can be made between 'formal' and 'informal' madrassas based on whether they are registered with a relevant institution.

2. Concerns about the impact of madrassas on community cohesion and radicalisation

Madrassas have often been accused of having a negative impact on community integration and cohesion. Media coverage in the UK has suggested that madrassas have the potential to radicalise young Muslims, associating them with the foreign madrassas that have been connected to terrorist networks (ibid). It has also been argued that madrassas contribute to a split in the identities of Muslim children and that they can further divide communities (Ouseley 2001 and Community Cohesion Independent Review Team 2001). In contrast, a recent study has highlighted the potential for faith-based schools to promote community cohesion by engaging with the wider community. This is already happening within some communities where madrassas are working to increase integration within communities by building stronger networks with other faith and non-faith organisations (DCSF 2007).

3. The influence of madrassas on children's education and welfare

The quality of teaching within madrassas has been brought into question, with some studies showing that teaching is held back by the approach of imams (Islamic leaders often within mosques) who have been trained abroad (OSI 2005). But other studies have shown the potential benefits supplementary schools can have on a child's learning and development (Maylor et al 2010). An urgent issue identified by previous media coverage and research highlights cases of child abuse within madrassas. It has been argued that Muslim communities are fearful of bringing these issues to light (Muslim Parliament of Great Britain 2006) and that regulations do not fully protect children in supplementary schools (Singleton 2010).

Drawing on extensive fieldwork and desk research, we investigated the three challenges outlined above and provide new evidence to help policymakers understand how madrassas operate across the UK.

Lifting the lid on madrassas

1. Madrassas in Britain

Madrassas feature strongly in the lives of most British Muslim children. Our research shows that they attend madrassas for most of their young lives for up to two hours on evenings after school and weekends. This is the case for both female and male Muslim children, although classes are often divided according to gender. Many Muslim families place great importance on providing their children with an opportunity to expand their religious knowledge. This is reflected in the high demand for places within madrassas. Our survey of madrassas found that a quarter were oversubscribed, showing that this demand is sometimes left unmet.

Madrassas range in size, but a significant proportion of madrassas are very large – 26 per cent of the madrassas we surveyed had over 140 pupils attending each week. Despite the size of madrassas and high demand for places, their funding is relatively low – 38 per cent of the madrassas surveyed operated on an income of below £10,000 a year. They also tend to be highly dependent on pupil fees, with nearly 90 per cent of funding sourced from contributions by parents. With many madrassas surviving on such low levels of funding, it calls into question the ability of madrassas to operate effectively and deliver high-quality teaching.

Most madrassas are registered charities and often run through mosques. A large proportion are well established, with 70 per cent of those surveyed having been in existence for six years or more. Although the vast majority reported that they have child

protection policies and health and safety policies in place, the survey also found that it is important that these policies are accompanied by relevant information, procedures and monitoring of effective implementation.

Recommendation: Local authorities should facilitate access to madrassas so that demand is met. This could be achieved by registering madrassas on a local authority directory of supplementary schools so that parents can access details of local madrassas. Local councils could also support madrassas to locate on the sites of local state schools.

There is no single system of registration for madrassas, and no single body which regulates their activities, although many are attached to mosques. Informal madrassas are likely to lack the resources to become integrated into the wider supplementary school network, remaining invisible to the wider community. This has added to uncertainty about the total number of madrassas and makes them particularly difficult for local authorities and researchers to engage with. An effective system of registration which brings madrassas into a single system of self-regulation would help to ensure that minimum standards are met and best practice is shared. It would also help to ensure greater interaction between madrassas and increase their ability to network with other organisations.

Recommendation: MINAB should introduce a voluntary self-regulation scheme for madrassas. All members would then be subject to independent inspections by MINAB as part of its self-regulation organisational objectives. This would help to increase information on the number of madrassas and their needs, as well as support madrassas to build better connections.

Recommendation: MINAB should play an active role in maintaining good teaching and child safety standards by selecting annually a list of 'beacon madrassas' around the UK that would serve as model madrassas for the less-formal ones.

IPPR's survey found that teaching within madrassas is heavily focused on the Quran and Islamic education. Nearly two-thirds also taught languages other than English, including Arabic, Urdu and Bengali. However, a significant minority of madrassas teach traditional school subjects, with 28 per cent providing support for national curriculum subjects. Teachers' backgrounds also strengthen the role of madrassas as religious-focused institutions: over 75 per cent of those included in our survey use imams to teach; and the most popular requirement of teachers is that they undertake theological training.

The criteria used for employing teachers within madrassas seems to vary and is a matter of individual choice for each madrasa. Only 10 per cent of madrassas we surveyed require no minimum level of training from their teaching staff. However, only 14 per cent demand their teachers have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) which is the formal qualification needed to teach in mainstream state schools. Instead, the most common requirement for teachers was that they have received some form of theological training, with 57 per cent saying this was part of their criteria. IPPR's survey suggested that some madrassas depend on help from voluntary teachers, which limits the extent to which they can demand qualifications. Their low levels of funding also suggest that teacher training may be something madrassas cannot afford to fund themselves.

2. Identity development and community cohesion

Madrassas can be seen as a potentially positive feature of British society. They can offer a vehicle through which stronger community relationships can be developed, but this depends on a number of factors.

Madrassas can reinforce the cultural, linguistic and religious identities of pupils. This is supported by the content of teaching for many madrassas, with over 70 per cent of those included in the IPPR survey teaching about the values and culture of Islam. IPPR's qualitative research suggests that madrassas providing children with a deeper understanding of Islam are likely to strengthen children's religious identities. In many cases, this deeper knowledge and understanding can also give children confidence in explaining their religious practices and beliefs to non-Muslims.

Madrassas also have the potential to create or increase division between a child's religious and British identity. Although some provide a forum for discussing and reconciling these differences, some participants in our interviews raised concerns about the role of madrassas in reinforcing differences between British and Muslim identities. Overwhelmingly, the madrassa teacher was seen as the main factor influencing this. Non-British-born imams who were trained abroad were recognised as being less able to support children in understanding their dual British-Muslim identity. The IPPR survey suggests this is a significant issue for madrassas, with 40 per cent of respondents saying that their teachers were trained overseas.

Recommendation: MINAB should provide accredited training for madrassa teachers who are from overseas. This process would enable these madrassa teachers to improve their ability to teach within a British context, improve their level of English and get a better understanding of the legal framework under which madrassas need to operate.

Recommendation: A national training and recruitment programme for imams should be implemented through MINAB. There are already a number of institutions providing training for imams, including MINAB, but this could be expanded to encourage more British-born Muslims to become imams and madrassa teachers.

Although madrassas are often described by the media as places where children could be taught extremist values, research IPPR conducted for a previous report (Cherti et al 2011) identified an important role for madrassas in increasing children's understanding of their roles as British citizens. This led the government to fund the Islam and Citizenship Education (ICE) project which has introduced a citizenship curriculum into over 300 madrassas in the UK. A madrassa's ability to support children to become positive citizens was consistently stressed throughout the research. Many felt that the underlying principles and teachings of Islam were already aligned to the principles of good citizenship.

Recommendation: Madrassas should strive to support the personal development of their pupils. This could involve broadening the scope of teaching to include ethics, history and spirituality in an Islamic context, as well as personal development subjects pertaining to identity, British citizenship, integration and community relations.

Madrassas are often perceived by the media and policymakers as being disconnected and invisible to the wider communities in which they operate, but there is little evidence to confirm or dispel this idea. Our survey found that over 90 per cent of madrassas serve children from within a single local authority area, which may indicate the extent to which

they are rooted within their local community. Although some madrassas reach out to the wider community, for example by holding open days, this is not common practice among the madrassas in the survey. Despite this, our research identifies a strong appetite within the Muslim community to use madrassas to develop stronger links within the wider community. Use of the media by the Muslim community to promote their positive work more strongly was seen as an opportunity to improve perceptions of madrassas.

Our survey also found that many madrassas connect with other supplementary schools, mainly through an umbrella organisation (such as the NRC), and often share good practice, with 45 per cent reporting links with other supplementary schools. In addition, over 40 per cent reported being members of the NRC. These opportunities for building networks should be encouraged for all madrassas and offer a way for them to improve.

Our research was not able to address the issue of whether madrassas are radicalising young British Muslims. The issue was not raised by any of the research participants, despite their willingness to criticise madrassas in other areas. The only context in which the issue arose was in relation to the media coverage of madrassas, which was seen to wrongly associate madrassas with radicalisation. This issue is beyond the scope of our research and so we cannot draw any conclusions.

Recommendation: Partnerships between madrassas and other supplementary schools would support community cohesion and provide a forum for sharing knowledge and for the wider community to learn more about madrassas. Local schools can encourage this by involving madrassas in their religious education classes alongside other local, faith-based supplementary schools. Joint initiatives should be undertaken between different faith institutions and community centres to strengthen relationships.

3. Educational development and child welfare

The majority of madrassas included in our survey used at least some of the educational approaches employed in mainstream schools. For example, classes are often grouped according to ability, children are commonly given homework and pupils are often tested on their progress. Madrassas also work hard to involve parents, with 90 per cent of our survey respondents using formal channels for communicating with parents on their children's development – for example, by holding parents' evenings. Parental involvement in the education of children has been seen as a critical factor in their progress (Desforges and Abouchar 2003), already has been identified as a positive influence of supplementary school education (Tomlinson 1984 and Cousins 2006).

Our findings show that madrassas vary in their approach to teaching and in the content of lessons. A clear distinction was made by research participants between madrassas that teach through recitation and those that teach a broader and more in-depth curriculum. The quality of teachers is seen as a crucial factor affecting the ability of a madrasa to have a positive impact. In particular, the English language abilities of the teacher and their teaching methods are seen to strongly influence the learning potential of madrassas. As already discussed, teacher training was identified as a weakness of many madrassas which often rely on voluntary teachers and lack the resources to train staff.

Recommendation: MINAB should set up a National Resource Unit to develop and supply curricula for madrassas/mosques and Islamic centres. It could also provide guidelines for training madrassas teachers on broadening the content of their lessons.

Recommendation: The NRC should take the lead in providing teacher training opportunities for madrasa teachers, particularly through consortiums of supplementary schools. Improvements to teacher quality could also be achieved through training provided through MINAB.

Links between mainstream schools and madrassas were identified by research participants as a way to improve support for children's educational progress. They also have the added advantage of helping madrassas to become more strongly rooted within their communities. Our survey found that a third of madrassas had a link with their local mainstream school. Where madrassas and mainstream schools were successfully working together, it was seen to have significant advantages for children. Teachers in both contexts were able to share information on children's needs and understand them better as a result. For this reason, school links should be encouraged as a way for madrassas to improve their service.

Recommendation: Local authorities can use their contacts with madrassas to help madrassas and mainstream schools to network. They should play a brokerage role in order to foster relationships and partnership working.

Our research also explored the impact of madrassas on children's social and emotional development. In most cases, madrassas were seen to provide children with improved social skills and confidence. Examples were given of madrassas that worked hard to give children additional support and help them deal with the common issues affecting young people. However, madrassas were sometimes seen to use excessively strict approaches to discipline. Their narrow teaching content was seen to limit their positive influence on children. Also, the pressure of attending mainstream school meant that children and families needed to manage their time and work effectively.

Madrassas were consistently seen as centres for instilling discipline and a sense of duty in Muslim children. The majority of research participants who had attended a madrasa felt that the strict environment and religious context led them to monitor and control their own behaviour. Some felt that this instilled a sense of 'spiritual fear' which meant they would behave better in the madrasa than in their mainstream school. In a small number of cases, the discipline used within a madrasa was seen to be detrimental to the welfare of children.

In a few cases, examples of madrassas using corporal punishment were highlighted during the research. This is, arguably, perpetuated by the gap in regulatory measures for child protection in supplementary schools. Madrassas are not required to carry out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on their staff (a process which all staff who deal with children independently within mainstream school and early years settings must undergo). One in 10 of the madrassas who responded to our survey confirmed that they did not CRB check any of their staff. This figure is likely to be much higher when including the informal madrassas that our research did not reach.

Somewhat surprisingly, corporal punishment is not explicitly banned by law within supplementary schools, and madrasa staff are able to use 'reasonable punishment' as a legal defence for any physical actions against children. These issues were covered in the recent Singleton report (2010) which was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, now the Department for Education). It recommended that the law be changed in this area. Although the previous Labour government accepted the recommendation, the current government has not yet acted on implementation.

The current legal situation leaves children without sufficient protection in madrassas – and other supplementary schools – where they are likely to spend significant periods of time over a number of years. Although madrassas are private institutions, child protection is a vital area and the state has a role in regulating their activities.

Recommendation: All supplementary schools, including faith ones, should be required by law to CRB check all their staff in order to fully meet their legal obligations.

Recommendation: The current ban on physical punishment in schools and other children’s settings should be extended to include supplementary schools, including madrassas.

Recommendation: All madrassas should have child protection policies and health and safety policies. Madrassa staff should be trained on how to effectively implement policies, with training provided or supported by MINAB and the NRC. Local authorities can learn from the good practice that is happening in a number of areas, where training is encouraged through local supplementary school consortiums. MINAB and other Muslim organisations such as the Federation of Muslim Organisations (FMO) should also help to engage less-formal types of madrassas that are neither registered charities nor part of these consortiums.

Conclusions

The madrassas sector is a significant feature of many British communities and is strongly valued by Muslim families. However, relatively little is known about how they operate and the impact they may have on pupils and local communities. The research presented in this report attempts to fill this gap by providing new evidence about how British madrassas work, the impact they have on local communities, and their role in the educational, social and religious development of children.

Madrassas have the potential to positively influence Muslim children’s development, allow pupils to explore and understand their own identity and strengthen community cohesion. However, this is held back by poor teaching standards and narrow curricula in many madrassas. The low visibility of madrassas in many communities creates a vacuum where myths replace a proper evidence-based understanding of their role. Madrassas can help to support the learning and development of children but this is highly dependent on the skills and approach of teachers as well as the content of teaching.

Most of the recommendations made in this report are directed at local communities and the madrassa sector itself, but in the case of child protection, urgent action by the government is needed to ensure that madrassa pupils are not put at risk.

1. INTRODUCTION

Muslim supplementary schools or madrassas,¹ as they are more commonly referred to in the UK, have come under particular scrutiny for the part that they might play in facilitating the radicalisation of young Muslims. Recent media programmes such as Channel 4's *Dispatches: Lessons in Hate and Violence*, BBC's *Panorama: British Schools, Islamic Rules* and BBC Radio 4's *File on 4* have raised further concerns around the use of 'anti-western' teachings and use of violence against children in some madrassas. Consequently, the majority of information in the public domain about madrassas is generated by the media, rather than based on rigorous research. And, at present, there is a significant lack of understanding among policymakers and the wider public about madrassas, whether it is in relation to their numbers, their functions, their teaching curriculum, how they are governed, their sources of funding or the impact they have on the children who attend them. These are some of the key areas that this IPPR report seeks to address.

Our report aims to generate a more accurate and extensive evidence base on madrassas: to identify where they are performing well (and where they could improve); and to make recommendations about how they can be supported to deliver positive outcomes for the children and communities they serve. This is done from the perspective that madrassas are private institutions and, as such, should not be subject to state regulation – unless the safety of children is in question.

The report has three main empirical chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides a profile of madrassas in the UK
- Chapter 3 explores the impact that madrassas have on identity and community cohesion
- Chapter 4 explores the effect madrassas have on educational development and child welfare.

1.1 Key issues in the UK debate

Earlier IPPR research (Cherti et al 2011) analysed coverage on madrassas in the UK media for the past 10 years. It involved an analysis of 111 articles centred on madrassas, identifying the common storylines that run through them. A common issue for many was that of child abuse and child protection, the articles bringing to light cases of physical abuse occurring within madrassas. In this case the media has played an important role in uncovering a serious problem within some madrassas. A number of the articles also linked madrassas with promoting extremism and communicating anti-western messages, particularly within national newspapers. Other storylines were centred on the educational impact of madrassas, community relations, cohesion and conflict, and on the introduction of citizenship classes in madrassas. This reveals that the UK debate is essentially centred on two main issues:

- The impact that madrassas have on identity, integration, community cohesion and radicalisation.
- The impact madrasses have on educational development and child welfare.

In this section we review some of the existing literature on these two key issues in order to provide a context for the discussion of our research findings in later chapters.

¹ See chapter 2 for a more detailed definition of madrassas.

1.1.1 Identity, integration, community cohesion and radicalisation

Community cohesion

The argument that madrassas may be having a damaging effect on integration and community cohesion between different faith groups is made frequently, although it should be noted that these concerns are not limited to Muslim schools and also feature in the broader debate about the role of faith schools in society. Nevertheless, the previous government's focus on counter-terrorism meant that Muslim schools were frequently singled out for attention. In what was widely interpreted as a comment on Muslim-faith or Muslim-majority schools, the chief inspector of schools in England claimed in 2005:

'... many young people are being educated in faith-based schools, with little appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obligations to British society ... we must not allow our recognition of diversity to become apathy in the face of any challenge to our coherence as a nation.'

Quoted in Flint 2007

This followed earlier reports on ethnic riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley that highlighted the potential for 'mono-cultural' schools to add significantly to the separation of communities (Ouseley 2001, Community Cohesion Independent Review Team 2001). A recent Civitas paper also made this point, arguing that 'children brought up through a sequence of fundamentalist and mono-cultural primary and secondary schools are almost guaranteed not to possess the attitudes and skills necessary to an integrated life' (MacEoin 2009).

However, it is recognised by many that the ethos and practices of each individual school will determine how effective it will be in promoting integration and cohesion. In 2007, the DCSF released a report called *Faith in the System*, which studied the role of schools with a religious character in the UK. Looking at faith schools across the spectrum of denominations, it concluded that they were generally well-placed to make a positive contribution to community cohesion, and highlighted a number of religious schools (including a Muslim school) that were actively engaged in building bridges between faiths through developing strong community networks with leaders from different faith backgrounds (DCSF 2007).

Although there are no comprehensive national studies of whether, or how, madrassas are coordinating with local schools and other community organisations to promote integration, there are indications that this is taking place at a local level in some places. For example, a study of educational achievement among Muslim pupils in the Redbridge borough of outer London that formed part of the RAISE initiative² described a scheme designed to build links between the local education authority and madrassas in the area. The original purpose of the programme was to map the nature of Redbridge Muslim supplementary classes, to determine how these classes were organised and how child protection issues were handled. But its organisers noted that this contact led to a range of unanticipated and positive impacts, such as the emergence of a greater trust and a closer working relationship between Muslim leaders and local education authority officers, and the development of a network that more schools have been able to tap into (Abley et al 2004).

2 The RAISE project was set up in 2002 to address the fact that, in many parts of England, there is a substantial gap between national school attainment averages and those of pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. It aimed to demonstrate through a series of case studies that the attainment of Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils could be raised, and described how this could be achieved. See <http://www.insted.co.uk/raise.html> for more details.

Radicalisation

In recent years, the literature on radicalisation among young British Muslims has frequently focused on the training they receive in foreign madrassas – particularly those in countries in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa – and the potential this has to draw them into terrorist networks. Much less has been written on the issue of whether full-time Muslim schools or part-time madrassas are playing a similar role in the UK context, although some media articles suggest that they do (Phillips 2009).

However, a number of reports do consider the ways in which some UK mosques have acted as conduits for radical views (which is relevant to this study, since so many British madrassas are housed within mosques). For example, a paper by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at King's College London described how, after 2001, some mosques in the UK and elsewhere in Europe 'turned into magnets for radicalised individuals, who would actively seek out these places in order to meet like-minded individuals or get involved in violent extremism' (ICSR 2007). It noted that this pattern had changed as a result of increasing public and official interest concern about terrorism, and that extremists now tended to go to mosques in order to 'talent spot' potential recruits, but then attempt to engage with them privately and away from the scrutiny of the wider congregation.

A 2009 research report by the Quilliam Foundation highlighted the serious problem of extremism in some British mosques, arguing that there is a need for these institutions to exert better control over the individuals and groups allowed to gather and speak on their premises. However, it also acknowledged the potential for mosques to act as a hub for countering radical views, and suggested some policies and practices that could be implemented in order to achieve this (Hart-Dyke 2009).

1.1.2 Educational impacts and child welfare

Educational and social impacts of madrassas

Much of the debate about madrassas focuses on the impacts that they may be having on the educational and personal development of students who attend them. Evidence suggests that many Muslim parents send their children to supplementary schools because they feel that they are not receiving the attention or the facilities that they require within the mainstream educational sector (AMSS 2004). However, some of the literature shows that there are concerns about the quality of the teaching and curriculum received by children who attend madrassas. For example, imams (who provide teaching in most madrassas) are found to not be up to speed with current educational thinking and practices (OSI 2005). It has also been observed that the majority of imams receive their training outside of the UK (primarily in countries of the Indian subcontinent) and the Quilliam Foundation report described the 'deep malaise' in UK mosques resulting from the fact that many of their imams are 'physically in Britain, but psychologically in Pakistan or Bangladesh' (Hart-Dyke 2009). This is seen as problematic for a number of reasons, particularly because large numbers of UK congregants of mosques and madrassas are now British-born and may not be responsive to the language and ideas of spiritual leaders hired from overseas.

A 1997 publication by the Runnymede Trust reported that 'there is an increasingly widespread perception in Muslim communities that imams are not equipped by their own training to help young British Muslims cope with issues such as unemployment, racism and Islamophobia, drugs, and the attractions of Western youth culture'. It also claimed that: 'by and large mosques do not provide educational activities for young people over the age of 14, and are thus not well placed to support them if and when they question, as

many in their mid and late teens are inclined to do, the pedagogy which they encountered at the mosque school and the interpretations of Islam which were presented' (Runnymede Trust 1997).

This point was also raised in a 2006 publication by the Muslim Council of Britain, which stated that 'there is a feeling that not enough imams are being developed from Britain and the existing training is inadequate or has serious shortcomings' (Rahman et al 2006).

Linked to the issue of teaching, the literature on Muslim supplementary education frequently discusses the academic and social effects that attending these schools have on Muslim children, although the evidence here is mixed. A major report on supplementary education commissioned by the DCSF found that its impacts were generally very beneficial for children, and particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Such schools are seen as providing a secure environment for learning where children can develop a sense of belonging and increase their self-esteem (Maylor et al 2010). Pupils in a study by Francis et al (2008) on Chinese-British pupils liked their supplementary school environments because they were 'free from racism' and gave them opportunities to work with like-minded and educationally oriented individuals in smaller classes and with greater teacher involvement. Supplementary schools that act as 'homework clubs' have also been found to benefit children whose parents and families are not fluent in English (AMSS 2004).

However, it is clear that extensive programmes of supplementary education can also act as a source of stress for children. Many Muslim students attend some form of schooling for six or seven days a week and must spend longer evenings than their non-Muslim peers engaged in religious studies and homework (ibid). This reduces the time available for relaxation and socialising, and can also affect their ability to complete their homework. For example, the DSCF report highlighted a case where the headteacher of a mainstream school serving a large Muslim population experienced difficulties in arranging catch-up tuition for pupils since so many of them were required to attend local madrassas after school. Despite attempts to develop links with the madrassa to improve coordination, the headteacher and other organisations and local schools were unsuccessful in getting an exemption from the madrassa for children to attend classes after school (Maylor et al 2010).

Others describe the conflict that may be caused by the different style and content of classes in mainstream schools and madrassas. As discussed above, the majority of Muslim children attend non-Muslim schools where they are exposed to secular ideas and ways of teaching, and where critical thinking is usually (although not always) valued. Yet these are methods that may be criticised strongly in mosque schools and madrassas, which tend to instruct Muslim children in how to read (but not understand) the Quran by means of rote learning and do not always encourage questioning or debate. Similar issues may arise in relation to the use of language in madrassas. A consultation with imams and Muslim professionals coordinated by the Bradford Council for Mosques in 2009 highlighted the fact that, in some mosques (and presumably the madrassas attached to them) the use of English was seen as inferior, and that some young people felt 'belittled' for their reliance on English in this setting (Ahmed and Reid 2009). As the Open Society Institute (OSI) report noted: 'This exposure to diverse and incompatible values may create tensions in Muslim children, particularly in relation to their civic identity and loyalties' (OSI 2005). Other commentators have also raised the question of how easy it is for young people to reconcile being Muslim with being British, although little in-depth research on this issue has been carried out (Appleyard 2005).

Child welfare

While it is a very sensitive issue, the problem of child abuse within madrassas has been highlighted by a number of researchers, most notably in a 2006 publication by the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain. The report suggests that Muslims are currently in a state of denial about the fact that child abuse is taking place in both religious institutions and families. It suggests that a refusal to talk more openly about this subject is creating a vicious circle in which victims have no one to turn to and abusers are not being held accountable for their crimes. Using the example of revelations about child abuse within the Catholic church as a portent of what might happen if the Muslim community remains silent on this issue, it argues that an explicit child protection strategy should be implemented and monitored in all mosques and madrassas in the UK (Muslim Parliament of Great Britain 2006).

The Muslim Parliament document was supported by a later investigation on madrassas carried out by The Times which uncovered evidence of worryingly widespread use of violence against children attending madrassas in the Rochdale area (Kerbaj 2008a and 2008b). The report described instances of children being beaten, kicked, slapped, punched or subjected to other types of unacceptable force during Arabic lessons for mispronouncing words or forgetting verses of the Quran. Commentators noted that, for many madrassa teachers who ignore, or who are ignorant of, laws about corporal punishment in schools, beating children is regarded as a disciplinary tool rather than a form of abuse (Siddiqui 2008).

A more recent investigation by BBC Radio 4's *File on 4* programme asked more than 200 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales how many allegations of physical and sexual abuse had come to light in the past three years. One hundred and ninety-one local authorities agreed to provide information, disclosing a total of 421 cases of physical abuse in madrassas. But only 10 of those cases went to court, and the BBC was only able to identify two that led to convictions. The number of cases appeared to be rising – among those councils which broke down the figures by year, there were 89 allegations of physical abuse in 2009, 178 in 2010 and 146 in the first nine months of 2011.

Mohammad Shahid Raza, chairman of MINAB, set up by Muslim organisations to improve standards in mosques, said he would now treat the issue as a matter of urgency:

'These figures are very, very alarming and shocking. There is no justification for such punishments within our mosque schools ... I'm not sure how wide this unacceptable practice is, but our responsibility is to make those who run the mosques realise we live in a civilized society and this is not acceptable at any cost.'

Mr Raza said he wanted the issue to be dealt with through self-regulation, but there are calls for the government to take action. An official report published in 2010, which called for a legal ban on the use of corporal punishment, was accepted by the Labour government just before the general election, but it has not yet led to any action. The report's author, Sir Roger Singleton, chair of the Independent Safeguard Authority, said the BBC's figures were worrying and should be investigated further (Singleton 2010).

1.2 The government's (dis)engagement with madrassas

Since so many madrassas in the UK operate privately and are not subject to formal oversight, the government has a fairly limited ability to regulate the way in which they are run. However, the issue has still received some domestic policy attention in light of

concern about how these schools are managed and what is being taught in them. For example, a number of reports have been commissioned to improve understanding of supplementary education in general, and Muslim schooling in particular (Maylor et al 2010 and DCLG 2010). The government has also funded various initiatives that seek to raise the attainment of Muslim pupils who attend both mainstream and supplementary schools, to build bridges between madrassas and other local schools and organisations, or to promote better practice within madrassas. This latter goal has been a particular focus for councils in areas with large Muslim populations, seen, for example, in Kirklees Council's work with local mosques and madrassas to train staff, volunteers and trustees in a range of key skills and competencies.

In 2007, the then Department for Education and Skills (DFES) funded the Madrassa Children's Literacy Project run by QED-UK, a programme designed to create a more sustained dialogue between madrassas and mainstream schools, governors, staff, parents and children. It was initiated in order to foster understanding between different communities and to improve levels of literacy and overall educational attainment for 2,250 ethnic minority pupils (QED-UK 2008). And in 2009, an Open Madrasah Network was developed by Bradford Council and funded for three years by Yorkshire and Humber's regional development agency, Yorkshire Forward. This pilot programme, which may be rolled out in other parts of the country if it proves successful, pays local, qualified teachers to teach booster classes for 'borderline' primary and GCSE students in four Muslim supplementary schools in the Bradford area. It also gives pupils the opportunity to study for GCSEs in Arabic, Urdu and religious education (Stewart 2009).

Some projects have also been funded by the government to seek to improve the way in which citizenship is taught by teachers in Muslim schools and madrassas. One such programme is the ICE project which was created in 2009 by the Bradford Council for Mosques and developed in partnership with the Schools Development Support Agency (SDSA), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the DCSF. It was trialled in around 30 madrassas in London, Bristol, Bradford, Kirklees, Leicester, Oldham and Rochdale, and has recently been rolled out to 300 more Muslim schools and madrassas across the country. The ICE project aims to challenge the idea that there is any tension between being a good citizen and a good Muslim, and uses class discussions, role play and written exercises to teach children about tolerance and respect, and how to play a constructive role in their schools and broader communities (ICE 2009).

In general, government initiatives to engage with or support madrassas remain fragmented and often reactive to either child protection or security concerns. This reinforces the need for a more systematic and sustainable approach for engaging with these institutions, based on evidence rather than reactions to media coverage.

1.3 About the research

This pioneering research project was developed with the primary objective of filling the information gap that exists regarding madrassas in the UK which is currently covered entirely by the media. The research has three key questions:

1. What is the profile of madrassas that exist in the UK?
2. What impacts do madrassas have on the personal and social development as well as the educational achievement of children?
3. What are the present and future policy implications regarding madrassas in the UK?

Attempting to answer these questions against the backdrop of media coverage that has highlighted sensitive issues within madrassas was not an easy task. Several madrassas treated the research with a high level of suspicion which influenced the number of participating institutions, particularly the less-formal structures. And, despite extensive outreach and the use of community researchers, it must be acknowledged that more informal madrassas are not significantly represented in our sample, mainly because they are difficult to identify and engage with. We still believe, however, that the response rate of nearly 200 madrassas across the UK and the participation of over 100 Muslim participants make this research the most robust evidence-based study to date.

There are also some questions that this research is not able to answer conclusively. While we asked participants their views on the controversial issues surrounding madrassas, such as child abuse and radicalisation, it was beyond the scope of this research to investigate these issues fully. This is particularly important to highlight because of the more informal madrassas that we were unlikely to have reached. Instead, this study aims to present a more comprehensive and balanced insight into the madrassas operating across the UK.

1.3.1 Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, the following methods have been adopted:

Desk-based research

- Literature review: The literature review primarily focused on academic sources, local authorities' reports, policy documents and community organisations' reports relating to the establishment of madrassas. This included: reasons for their existence, location, the ethnic communities they serve, the range of provision offered, perceived benefits, and how they are funded and staffed.
- Media analysis: The media analysis had a key aim to explore the media representation of madrassas in the past 10 years (2001–10). It was based on a press sample of online national and local newspapers. This process generated a pool of 111 articles (70 national and 41 local). Each article was analysed in terms of its focus, wording and framing, in order to determine how British journalists approached reporting on madrassas, whether they tended to be positive, negative or neutral, and the extent to which they engaged with members of the Muslim community. The results from this part of the research were published as a briefing (Cherti et al 2011).

Primary data collection and analysis

This part of the research was completed jointly by the IPPR research team in London and three community field researchers based in Leicester, Bradford and Birmingham.

- Survey of madrassas across the UK: The survey was distributed by the research team to around 400 madrassas across the UK. A version of the survey was posted online and the link was distributed to various stakeholders and advertised through other field research activities (for example, deliberative workshops and interviews). We received a response rate of 44.75 per cent, with 179 surveys returned. The main aim of the survey was to map and profile madrassas in the UK, so as to better understand the type of provision offered by these institutions, the communities served, their sources of funding, organisational issues (including premises, the number of staff employed, the level of their qualifications, and links with mainstream schools).
- Deliberative workshops: Four deliberative workshops took place in London, Leicester, Bradford and Birmingham. The workshops included three main groups:

- Former and current madrassa pupils
- Imams, madrassa teachers and parents
- Mainstream school teachers, local authorities' representatives, and members of the public.

Participants took part in discussions within their respective groups first and then joined mixed groups around specific thematic discussions. A total of 72 participants took part in these workshops. The aim of the deliberative workshops was to disentangle and map out some of the areas of agreement and disagreement around the role and implications of madrassas on social cohesion and educational achievement.

- In-depth interviews: A total of 48 in-depth interviews were conducted by field researchers in each of the four research sites. They were completed with former and current madrassas students, parents, madrassas teachers and community and religious leaders (including imams). The primary aim of these interviews was to get a better understanding of madrassas from an insider's perspective and also to identify good practice and ongoing challenges from a community perspective.
- Stakeholder interviews: An additional 22 stakeholder interviews were conducted with academics, staff in education departments and mainstream schools, representatives from the local authorities in each of the research sites and representatives from the voluntary sector. These interviews aimed to help understand the nature of any initiatives which attempt to engage with madrassas, to identify factors that might limit the success of these initiatives and to learn about any plans for future policies.

2. MADRASSAS IN BRITAIN

2.1 Defining madrassas

The Arabic word *madrassa* (plural: *madaris*) generally has two meanings:

- in its more common literal and colloquial usage, it simply means ‘school’
- increasingly it has become the term used to describe an educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects including, but not limited to, the Quran, the sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and law.

Historically, madrassas were distinguished as institutions of higher studies and existed in contrast to more rudimentary schools called *kuttab* that taught only the Quran. Recently, ‘madrassa’ has been used as a catchall by many western observers to denote any school – primary, secondary, or advanced – that promotes an Islamic-based curriculum. In many countries, including Egypt and Lebanon, the word *madrassa* refers to any educational institution (state-sponsored, private, secular or religious). In Pakistan and Bangladesh, it commonly refers to Islamic religious schools. In the UK context, the word is most often used to refer to schools that have an Islamic frame of reference and that operate outside of the mainstream educational system. Various sources have described them as ‘unofficial Islamic schools’ (Hayer 2009), ‘mosque schools’ (Muslim Parliament of Great Britain 2006) and ‘evening and weekend classes intended to provide Muslim children with additional teaching in the Qur’an ... and related Islamic topics, including some instruction in Arabic’ (MacEoin 2009).

A more comprehensive definition from Rashid et al (2006) characterises madrassas as:

‘... supplementary schools for the Muslim community ... set up to deliver Islamic education in order to preserve religious, cultural and linguistic identities. They particularly deal with learning of the Quran. Muslim supplementary schools operate either from local mosques or are set up independently for the sole purpose of teaching the Quran and Islam ... Financial income for the schools is mainly generated through fees, funding and, mostly, donations from the local community.’

The Muslim Council of Britain has suggested that three main types of *madrassa* currently exist in the UK (Hayer 2009):

- the largest group are madrassas attached to mosques, with one survey suggesting that as many as 94 per cent of mosques in England and Wales are currently providing some kind of education for young people (Charity Commission 2009)
- those run by volunteers who teach Islamic classes in hired-out community centres or school halls
- informal classes held in people’s homes.

In general, Muslim youth who attend madrassas go from the age of about 4 or 5 until they are 14 or 15 (attendance tends to drop off after this due to the increased pressures created by schoolwork and exams). Most of these students will go to community or church primary and secondary schools during the daytime, and then attend madrassas for up to two hours every night in order to learn more about their religion (OSI 2005). However, the types of classes offered in extracurricular madrassas varies, with some giving information on the values and practices of the Islamic faith, some providing mother-tongue language instruction (for example, in Urdu or Bengali) and others supporting children who need help with homework or other basic skills. Some organisations act more like youth clubs and provide structured opportunities for Muslim children to socialise together (BMCS 2010).

2.2 Quantifying madrassas

In the absence of firm data on either the number of madrassas in the UK or the number of young Muslims that attend them, various reports have tried to estimate these figures. A 2006 report stated that there were around 700 madrassas in Britain teaching lessons about basic Islam to pupils of school-going age in after-school hours (Muslim Parliament of Great Britain 2006). A more recent estimate suggested that there were approximately 2,000 madrassas in the UK that were known to local councils and where staff had undergone the proper checks and procedures to allow them to work with children in a safe environment (Hayer 2009).

Some councils have also tried to quantify the number of students in their area likely to be attending madrassas. For example, a briefing by Leicester City Council indicated that as many as 80 to 90 per cent of Muslim students attend local madrassas, with another paper by the Local Government Association (LGA) putting the figure at 9,000 children aged 5 to 14 (Leicester City Council 2008). However, the high degree of informality in this sector makes it extremely difficult to estimate numbers with any accuracy. A recent estimate suggests that there were over 250,000 British Muslim children attending these institutions across the UK (Abrams 2011).

2.3 Building a profile of madrassas

This section draws mainly on the IPPR survey of madrassas and provides detail on the different types of madrassas that exist and how they operate. As already outlined, it is likely that this survey does not capture the informal madrassas whose details are not publically available.

2.3.1 Length of time established

A large proportion of madrassas appear to be well-established institutions. The survey results indicate that 70 per cent of madrassas in the sample have been in existence for more than six years and 45 per cent have been operating for more than 10 years. Our findings also show that a small number of new madrassas are entering the sector, with 3 per cent having started up within the last 12 months and 27 per cent being comparatively young institutions in existence for between one and five years. The finding that the majority of madrassas are well-established suggests that there is potential for them to have a positive impact on the communities in which they are situated.

2.3.2 Where do madrassas operate from?

While madrassas operate from a number of locations, our survey indicates that the majority of madrassas operate from a mosque, their own premises, or both. Many madrassas are connected to, or are part of, a mosque, as seen in table 2.1.³

Table 2.1
Where does your
madrassa operate from?

Location	
Its own premises	50%
Local mainstream school	8%
Community centre	11%
Mosque	53%
Private home or residence	3%
Library	0%
Somewhere else	2%

³ A total of 172 madrassas responded to this question. (Respondents were able to select more than one option.)

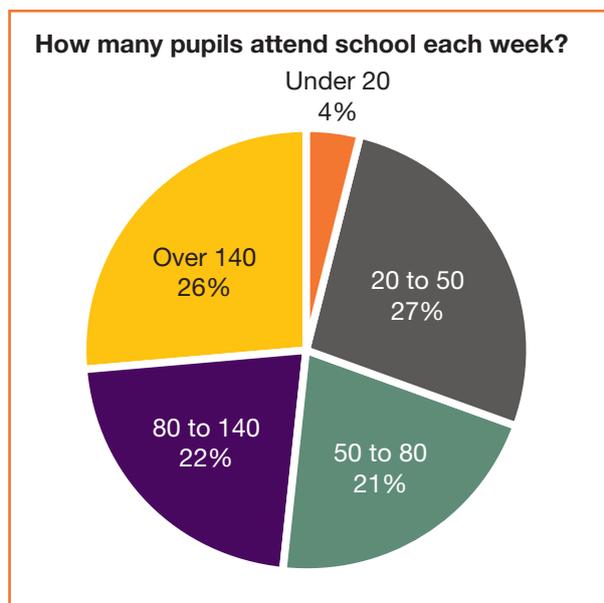
A far greater proportion of schools established for longer than 10 years operate from mosques, compared with schools established in the last 10 years. While almost three-quarters of madrassas (74 per cent) that have been established for longer than 10 years operate from a mosque, only 38 per cent of madrassas established within the last 10 years operate from a mosque. These newer madrassas are, instead, far more likely to be held in their own premises, a community centre or a school. This may show a greater integration and growing confidence of Muslim communities to use wider community spaces. It may also result from the significant demand for madrassa places (discussed below) which may have led to a growth in community-based organisations.

2.3.3 How do madrassas operate?

The size and organisation of classes provides practical information on how madrassas operate. The survey reveals that most classes in madrassas are a moderate size. The largest proportion has between 10 and 20 pupils per class, which suggests that teachers are potentially able to give high levels of personal support to the pupils in many madrassas.

The number of pupils attending a madrassa each week varies considerably. Figure 2.1 shows that only a small percentage of madrassas in our survey have fewer than 20 pupils. There is a fairly even spread of pupil numbers across the sector from madrassas that host between 20 to 40 pupils a week to those with over 140 a week. A sizeable proportion of madrassas are very large; 26 per cent of madrassas have more than 140 pupils.

Figure 2.1
Size of madrassas
classes



2.3.4 When do madrassas operate?

The vast majority of madrassas operate outside mainstream school hours, with only 5 per cent saying they are also active during mainstream school hours. Our survey asked all madrassas to list whether they held classes during weekdays, at the weekend or both. Table 2.2 shows these results.⁴

⁴ Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Table 2.2
Time of teaching

Time of teaching	
Weekdays before or after school	81.5%
Saturdays	54.9%
Sundays	39.3%

Students frequently attend madrassas for a sustained period of time, with 95 per cent of madrassas stating that pupils typically attend their school for more than two years and 45 per cent stating that pupils attend for more than five years. This indicates the importance placed on studying at a madrassa throughout childhood (with our research findings suggesting that parents’ sense of duty and community expectations seem to be contributing to this).

Our survey shows that over 80 per cent choose to hold classes before or after school on weekdays, but that weekends are also commonly used for lessons. By attending the lessons held on weekdays, children are spending more time in an educational environment over the school day. This may have a number of positive or negative effects. For example, children attending madrassas may be unable to concentrate in their supplementary classes after a full day in school, and may also experience higher levels of tiredness during the school day as a result of their madrassa commitment. However, the fact that madrassas offer children a place to go after school which keeps them occupied in a place where they are being supervised may have beneficial impacts on their development. These issues are discussed further in chapter 4.

2.4 Governance

2.4.1 Governance structures

The way madrassas are governed is influenced by a range of factors. With the majority of madrassas being run from mosques, it is likely that their arrangements are influenced by the committees operating these institutions. Another factor to consider is whether madrassas are legally registered as an organisation and the type of registration they have. Our survey results show that the majority of madrassas are registered charities (70 per cent) with only 6 per cent registered as a company. This highlights the ‘community’ rather than ‘profit-making’ orientation of many madrassas. It also means the majority are required to abide by the Charity Commission’s regulations and are likely to have a group of trustees who provide overall control and oversight of the charities’ affairs.

The majority of madrassas (63 per cent) report having a constitution, but 21 per cent of madrassas that said they were registered charities report that they do not have a constitution. This seems at odds with the rules on charity registration, which mandate that organisations must have submitted a constitution in order to register. This small discrepancy could be due to a lack of understanding by some of the respondents about what is meant by a constitution, as some of these surveys were likely to have been completed by staff members who do not have full understanding of governance-related issues. However, when looking in more detail at the results, larger schools are more likely to have constitution, 45 per cent of schools with fewer than 80 pupils had a constitution, compared with over 80 per cent of those with more than 80 pupils.

When asked how often parents were consulted on the organisational aspects of the madrassas, nearly 80 per cent said that this happened ‘not at all’ or ‘a little’ which suggests that the governance of madrassas is mainly limited to those directly employed to run the school. Despite this, many madrassas report consulting parents on issues

affecting their child, with 40 per cent saying they involved parents on this through formal consultation sessions ‘a lot’.

2.4.2 Policies

The survey found that 81 per cent of madrassas report having a child protection policy in place and 91 per cent state that they have a health and safety policy. These policies are necessary requirements for all madrassas registered by the Charity Commission. The nature and degree to which these policies are implemented by madrassas is not investigated by this survey. But our survey does reveal that there are a significant minority of madrassas that are not guided by such policies.

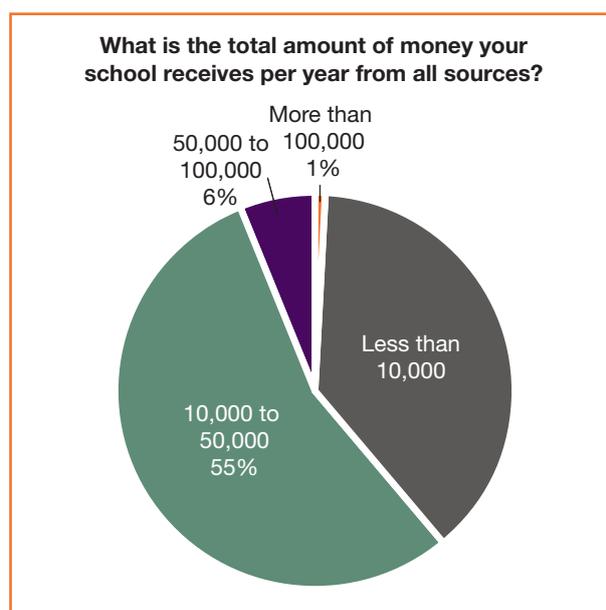
Our data indicates a loose link between the size of the madrassa and its likelihood of having a child protection policy, with smaller madrassas (those with fewer than 80 pupils) being less likely to have a policy in place. Small madrassas were more likely to respond that they do not carry out CRB checks on any of their teachers, with 18.8 per cent reporting that no CRBs were undertaken, compared with 6.6 per cent of larger madrassas (those with over 80 pupils). Despite this, there is no difference between the proportion of small and large madrassas who check all of their teachers. Larger madrassas are also more likely to have a health and safety policy.

2.5 Funding

2.5.1 Level of funding

Madrassas are generally operating on a small annual turnover, with 38 per cent of madrassas saying they receive less than £10,000 a year from all sources and a further 55 per cent receiving between £10,000 and £50,000 – see figure 2.2. This is particularly low when considering that many madrassas are quite large, with 69 per cent seeing more than 50 pupils a week.

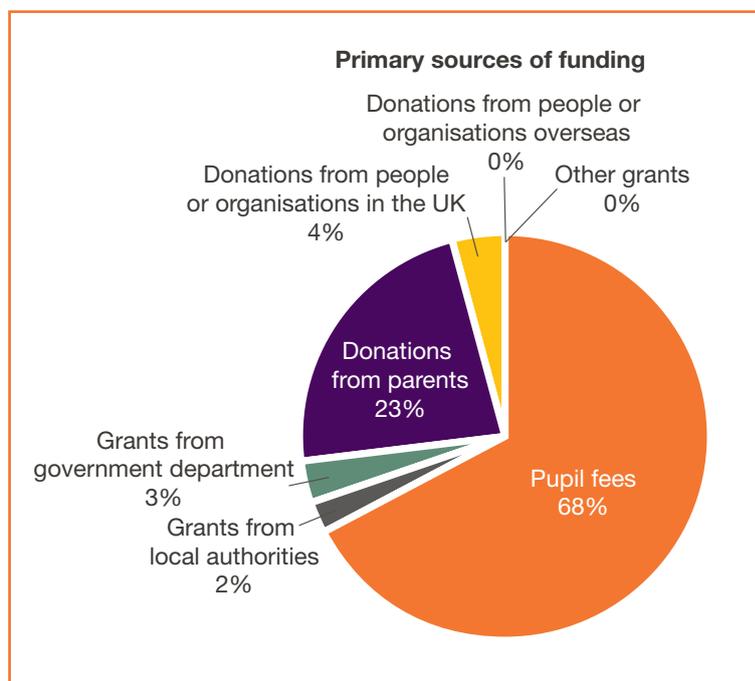
Figure 2.2
Madrassas funding



The research results also suggest that a sizeable proportion of madrassas operate on relatively low levels of funding, as discussed earlier. Figure 2.3 gives details of the source

of funding. The vast majority (90 per cent) of madrassas charge parental fees for classes.⁵ When asked about their main source of funding, the majority of madrassas said they received most from parental fees and parental donations, with just 2 per cent stating that grants from local authorities were their primary source of funding. This highlights the independence of most madrassas and strengthens their identity as community-based and supported institutions.

Figure 2.3
Primary source of funding



A quarter of madrassas are currently oversubscribed which shows the high level of demand that exists for places. This high demand calls into question whether current sources of funding are enough to accommodate all pupils. Over 70 per cent of madrassas subsidise parental fees if parents are having difficulty paying.

Our interviews with madrasa representatives revealed that inadequate funding is a common challenge across the sector and often limits the ability of madrassas to provide educational resources and pay qualified teachers.

‘The funding is not adequate at all ... we are struggling we are hand to mouth, we are asking parents to pay literally a nominal fee to be able to run on a very much volunteer basis.’

Chair of Madrasa Trust (London)

Despite these issues, madrasa interviewees were not enthusiastic about receiving financial support from local or national government, seeing it as ‘a double-edged sword’ which could threaten their independence and mean having to deliver prescribed activities.

⁵ 125 schools gave details of their funding sources.

2.6 Teaching and learning

2.6.1 Madrasa curriculums

The overwhelming majority of madrassas responding to the survey (97 per cent) reported teaching the Quran as a core purpose of a madrasa. Over 70 per cent of madrassas also provide teaching about 'culture and heritage'. As shown in table 2.3, of the madrassas that said they taught culture and heritage, nearly 95 per cent said this involved Islamic teaching and over 70 per cent said they taught about the values and culture of the community.⁶

Table 2.3
What kinds of teaching about culture and heritage does your school provide?

Subject	
Islamic teaching	94.8%
Values and culture of the community	72.4%
Political culture	4.3%
Contemporary culture	10.3%
Other	6.0%

While a small number of madrassas provided just 'Islamic teaching', the majority of madrassas taught a wider range of subjects. The most common combination of provision was 'Islamic teaching' and lessons in 'values and culture of the community'. A very small number provided teaching on political culture while under the 'other' option, a further three stated that they provided space for something similar to this such as 'discussion of political events' or 'citizenship'. A small number also taught about 'contemporary culture'. These findings reinforce the religious basis of madrasa teaching but also highlight the less-widely-known fact that many offer a broader curriculum than just study of the Quran.

Nearly two-thirds of madrassas (64 per cent) teach 'community or mother-tongue' languages other than English. Figure 2.4 (over) shows the range of languages taught in madrassas. These results show clearly that language and culture are strongly linked to the work of most madrassas. In the madrassas teaching community languages, Arabic is the most common language taught (39 per cent). This may be related to the cultural background of those involved in the madrasa but is also likely to be linked to the religious role of a madrasa (as Arabic supports the teaching of the Quran). But there are significant numbers of other languages taught – in particular, Punjabi and Bengali. This is likely to be related to the ethnic background of those attending the madrasa.

A significant minority of madrassas reported that they support mainstream subjects, with 28 per cent providing teaching in national curriculum subjects. This shows that some madrassas provide a broader educational curriculum and highlights that there are opportunities for madrassas to contribute to the mainstream education of their pupils. Table 2.4 (over) shows that, in those madrassas providing lessons in mainstream subjects, maths, science and English are the most commonly taught subjects.⁷

⁶ Respondents were able to select more than one option.

⁷ Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Figure 2.4
Languages taught in
madrassas

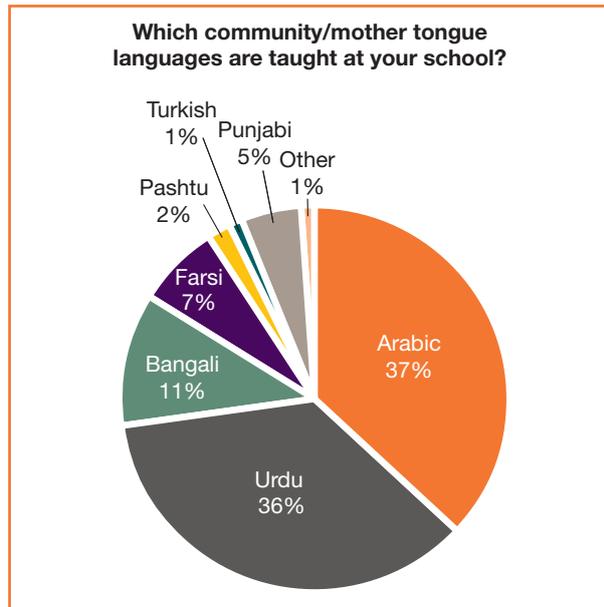


Table 2.4
What national curriculum
subjects does your
school teach?

Subject	Percentage
Maths	61.3%
English	54.8%
Science	41.9%
ICT	12.9%
Humanities	22.6%
Languages	35.5%
Expressive arts	12.9%
Other	19.4%

It is important to note that madrassas held in mosques, whether long-established or recently founded, seem to provide activities more focused on religion. Madrassas based outside of a mosque were more active in the provision of a wider curriculum. Our research found that a much lower proportion of mosque-based madrassas provide tuition in community languages than madrassas not held in mosques. A smaller proportion provide teaching in national curriculum subjects; 22 per cent of madrassas based in mosques, compared with 36 per cent of non-mosque-based madrassas. The greater focus on theological knowledge and traditional teaching methods is perhaps also demonstrated by far fewer mosque-based madrassas requiring teachers to have QTS; only 7 per cent of schools held in mosques require this, compared with 23 per cent of other schools.

2.6.2 Background of teaching staff

A complex picture emerges in relation to the background of teaching staff at madrassas. Table 2.5 shows that madrassas employ a combination of imams, teachers trained

within the UK and teachers trained abroad.⁸ Over 75 per cent of schools in our survey use imams to deliver lessons, but in many cases these madrassas also employ trained teachers (although it is possible that, in some cases, the imams are also trained teachers). Imams are the only teachers employed in around a third of the surveyed madrassas.

The results also suggest that a considerable proportion of madrassas employ teachers trained abroad. The same proportion employ teachers trained in the UK. Despite this, it is likely that UK-trained teachers may become more common as the next generation of British-born Muslims reach working age.

Table 2.5
What are the backgrounds of the teachers in your school?

Background of teachers	
Imam	75.6%
Trained as teacher in UK	40.5%
Trained as teacher overseas	40.5%
Other	14.9%

Figure 2.5 shows that the level of training required varied across madrassas, but the most common type of training expected was theological, with 57 per cent of madrassas citing this as the minimum level of qualification required for teachers. In contrast, a qualification in teaching was only required by 14 per cent of madrassas, reinforcing the fact that madrassas primarily provide religious rather than mainstream education.

Some madrassas do not have any qualification requirements for teachers, with 8 per cent saying that no minimum level of qualification was required. Madrassas not requiring qualifications represented 7 per cent of small madrassas (fewer than 80 pupils) and 13 per cent of large madrassas. Similarly, 12 per cent of schools with over five paid teachers had no minimum requirement compared to 8 per cent of schools with five or fewer paid teachers. This confirms an interesting pattern whereby schools employing more teachers are more likely to not require a minimum qualification. The survey results also suggest that madrassas employ a mixture of paid and voluntary teachers. Qualitative interviews also indicated that madrassas relied heavily on voluntary teachers, with one stakeholder saying:

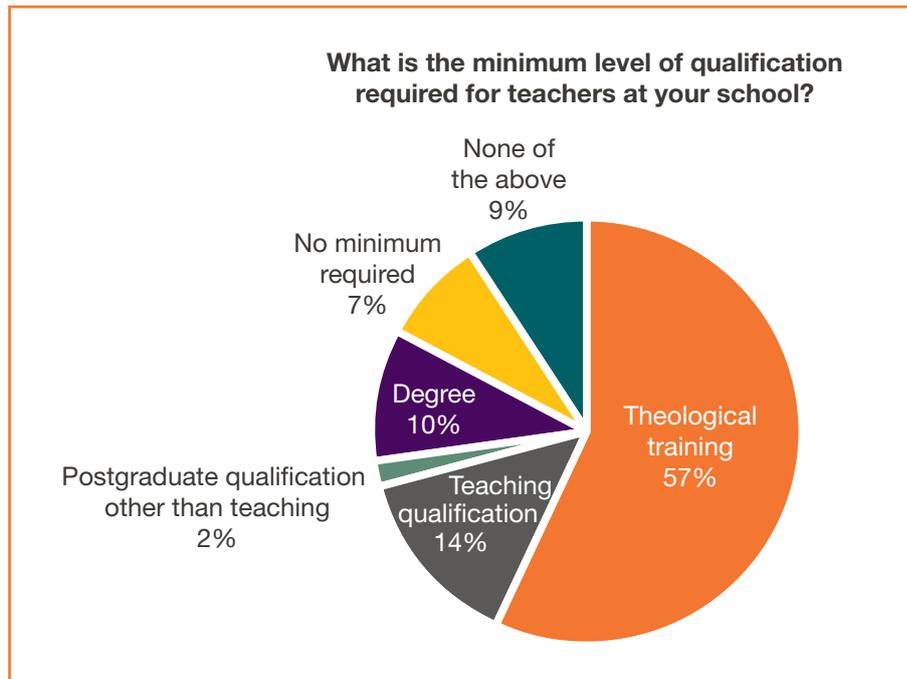
‘Most madrassas are run by volunteers hardly any would have paid staff I would say so there is only so much they can do.’

Stakeholder

Analysis of the data shows that teacher training also seems to be related to the type of curriculum taught at madrassas. Schools that require teachers to have theological training were found to be significantly less likely to provide tuition in national curriculum subjects. Twenty per cent of madrassas requiring theological training provide teaching on these subjects, compared with 41 per cent of schools that do not require theological training. They were also less likely to have links with mainstream schools (23 per cent of schools requiring teachers to have theological training have links with mainstream schools compared with 41 per cent of other schools).

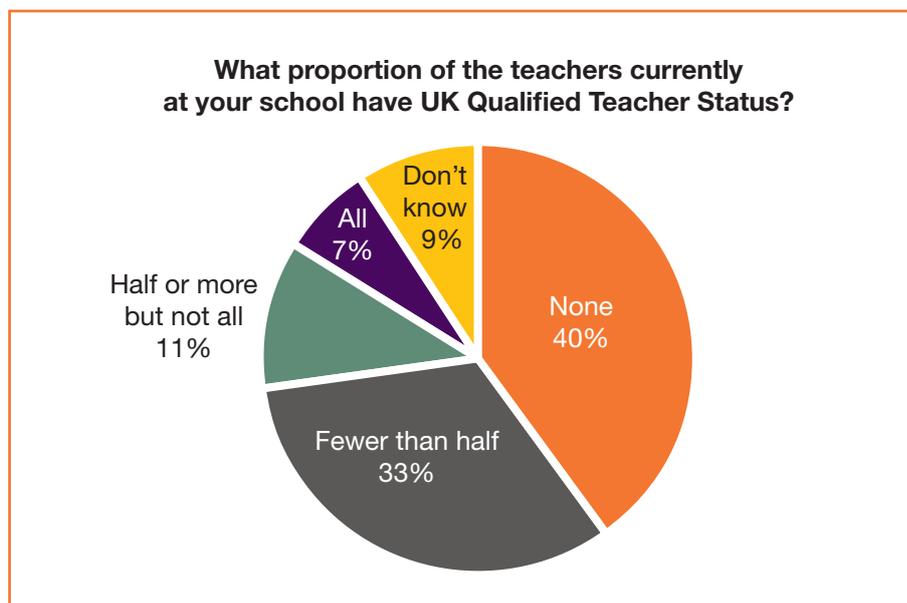
⁸ Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Figure 2.5
Minimum level of qualification required for teachers



Madrassas are also unlikely to require teachers to have QTS. Our survey showed that only 14 per cent said that they demand that teachers have UK qualified teacher status. Despite not being a requirement, over half of madrassas said that they have some teachers with QTS which shows that it is perhaps considered to be an important, if not compulsory, qualification. Whether a madrassa required theological qualifications did not influence whether they also required QTS.

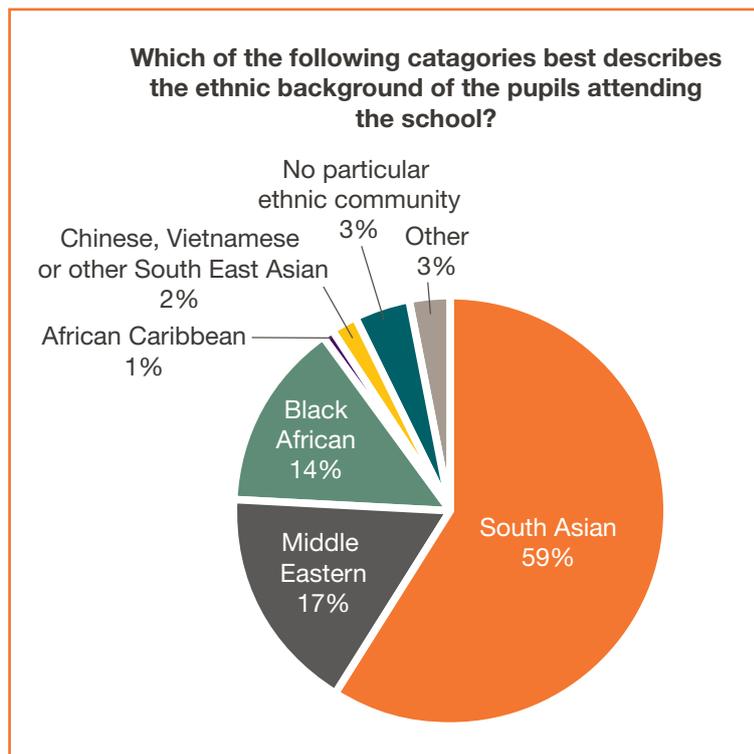
Figure 2.6
Proportion of teachers with QTS



2.7 Background of madrassa students

Over 80 per cent of madrassas serve Muslims from the Sunni denomination and 14 per cent serve children from the Shi'a denomination. While over 90 per cent of the madrassas that have Sunni pupils do not see any Shi'a pupils, half of schools with Shi'a pupils also see Sunni pupils. Madrassas also serve a range of ethnic backgrounds. Figure 2.7 shows that most madrassas have a majority of pupils from a South Asian background, with 59 per cent selecting this as the best description of their pupils' ethnic background. Middle Eastern and Black African also made up a significant percentage of responses. These findings broadly reflect the overall diversity among British Muslims although those from an Asian background are slightly underrepresented. In 2001, 74 per cent of British Muslims were from an Asian ethnic background, 67 per cent from a Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian background (ONS 2004).

Figure 2.7
Ethnic background of pupils



2.8 Summary

Madrassas are often well-established institutions and are in high demand within the Muslim community. This demand is not always met, with a quarter being oversubscribed. They rely heavily on parental fees and tend to operate on low levels of turnover. Current funding levels may limit the extent to which madrassas are able to meet demand and provide quality teaching.

Mosques are highly connected to the madrassas sector, with many being based from within a mosque. Most are registered charities. As a result, their governance is often based on these affiliations. But there is a group of madrassas that are not formally registered at all. It is likely that the survey did not access many of these institutions and therefore more research is needed to bring them into greater public visibility.

There is an opportunity for a number of madrassas to develop formal affiliations with an official organisation and for their details to become more accessible to families looking for a madrassa in their area.

Unsurprisingly, there is a strong religious focus in the teachings of madrassas which is dominated by teaching the Quran and Islamic education. Only a small proportion of madrassas provide teaching on mainstream subjects. The results of the survey show a need for greater teacher training. Only a small number of madrassas require their teachers to have an official teaching qualification and over a third have no teachers with UK qualified teacher status.

The survey results indicate that some madrassas are leaving children without adequate protection. Child protection and health and safety policies are in place in most madrassas but, the survey does not reveal the nature of these policies and the extent to which they are implemented. These issues are addressed in more detail in chapter 4.

2.9 Recommendations

1. Over a quarter of the madrassas surveyed were oversubscribed, which suggests this is a sector that is in demand. Local authorities could help facilitate access to madrassas in at least two ways:
 - adding all madrassas to their directory of supplementary schools for easier reference to parents
 - looking at the potential for madrassas to move to the site of their local state schools.
2. MINAB should introduce a voluntary self-regulation scheme for madrassas. This would enable better assessment of the numbers and needs of madrassas across the UK. All members would then be subject to independent inspections by MINAB, which it currently promotes as part of its self-regulation organisational objectives. The inspections should help achieve at least the objectives to:
 - provide madrassas with a framework for evaluating their education programmes
 - enable madrassas to satisfy statutory requirements.
3. MINAB can promote the spread of good practice by developing a list of 'beacon madrassas' that have successfully implemented quality teaching and high standards of child protection. This information could be used by informal madrassas to improve their practice.

3. IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY COHESION

Madrassas have been described as places that can create community divisions by emphasising the differences between a child's Muslim and British identity. In some cases, they have been cited as institutions that can teach radical views to pupils, increasing the likelihood of adopting an anti-western perspective. Despite this, there is little research exploring the extent to which this is the case. Madrassas have also been seen as having the potential to reconcile differences between a child's British and Muslim identity and to promote a deeper understanding of their role as British citizens. Our research uncovers the potential ways in which madrassas may have an impact in this area. The recommendations made in this chapter have been developed with the aim of promoting the independence of madrassas, which are privately funded and operated organisations.

3.1 Identity

Numerous studies have demonstrated the strong links between supplementary education and the transmission and maintenance of the cultural, linguistic and faith-based identities of minority ethnic communities. For example, a study of one Pakistani Muslim community in Bradford by Conteh (2003) found that language and identity were inextricably linked, with older generations, in particular, clearly associating the 'maintenance of their home language with the maintenance of their culture'. They believed that learning English and abandoning their mother-tongue language (Urdu) would eventually 'take away their culture' (ibid: 53). Similarly, government discourse has recognised that 'supplementary schools play a vital role in both cultivating and strengthening ... multiple identities' (Adonis 2006).

3.1.1 Reinforcing cultural values

Madrassas, like other religious supplementary schools, have a clear role to play in enabling students to develop and understand their religious and cultural identity. Findings from the survey give an insight into the ways in which attending a madrassa can influence this. The fact that the vast majority of madrassas teach the Quran may help pupils to develop a greater understanding of Islam, potentially strengthening their religious identity and giving them the confidence to communicate with others on the different practices and beliefs to which they subscribe. Many participants in both interviews and workshops spoke of the role madrassas played in increasing their sense of belonging within a community and the strength taken from being with others of the same religion. One student reflected on this, saying:

'I feel closer to everyone else because we're mostly the same race, same religion, we have the same (or) similar views ...'

Past student (London)

With over 70 per cent of madrassas teaching about the 'values and culture' of the community (90 per cent of which involves 'Islamic teaching') there is a large potential for madrassas to have influence in this area. One student spoke of how it gave them confidence in their ability to explain why they must eat Halal food to teachers in their mainstream school. Other past and present students spoke of the benefits of having a narrative with which to explain their religion. This point was also raised by madrassa teachers:

'When they go out of madrassa they are confident about it [their religion] and what are they supposed to know and [it] helps them to be confident as Muslim in the society'.

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

However, interviews showed that the ability of a madrassa to achieve a positive impact in terms of religious identity is seen to depend on whether children are taught the meaning of their religion, rather than just the ability to recite the Quran.

3.1.2 Reconciling multiple identities

It was acknowledged that Muslim children sometimes have difficulty reconciling their religious identity with their wider societal identity. Some teachers talked of differences in children's behaviour in the madrassa and in their mainstream school. One teacher said children can 'switch their identities' and another that they were involved in a 'tug-of-war' between these different identities.

In some cases the madrassa's influence was seen to extend to giving children a greater understanding of how their Muslim identity fits in with the wider British identity. For example, where madrassas provide pupils with the space to voice their concerns and converse on issues affecting them, they offer the potential to improve a child's understanding of their identity in relation to other non-Muslims and to help them make sense of the world around them. This is dependent on the approach of the madrassa teachers themselves, but it is a role that some of the teachers we spoke to took seriously. In the following quote, a madrassa teacher is reflecting on their role in helping children to understand the differences they perceive between themselves and non-Muslims:

'Sometimes it is confusing but the good thing is we have made it open for our children so when they go to school and colleges and they hear and see [something] they are not sure about, they bring it here to us and we talk about it.'

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

Some interviewees and workshop participants stressed that madrassas should teach Islamic culture and identity while putting less emphasis on the background of those attending it. One past student of a madrassa said:

'School was already diverse with people from different religions and languages, lots of different backgrounds, it just becomes second nature to you, you know to enquire about somebody's background and not feel that they are any different from you or any better than you. I think madrassa had an equality aspect to it ... you felt that you are all Muslims and that's it.'

Past student (Leicester)

Many parents and madrassa teachers felt that madrassas helped children to maintain their cultural identity. Again, the results from the survey emphasise the potential for madrassas to influence this, with over 70 per cent of parents questioned stating that their madrassa provides teaching on culture and heritage. One stakeholder felt that there was an overall benefit gained from children attending a supplementary school which connects them with their culture and heritage and strengthens their place within communities, saying:

'In general terms supplementary schools have a very high rate of success in terms of raising aspirations and raising a sense of individual identity which is often very important for children who are first generation or second generation in communities ... confidence, self-identity, self-worth and it can often mean they have much stronger, more tolerant communities in which the children are interacting.'

Stakeholder

Despite the range of benefits for identity that emerged during the research, some felt that the extent to which they could be achieved depended greatly on the teacher and the quality of the madrassa. One stakeholder voiced the opinion that madrassas can actually confuse students because of the vastly different approaches taken in madrassas where the imams are unable to identify with British society to the same extent as Muslims who had been brought up in the UK, saying that:

‘You find that the imams in the mosque have a very different understanding about what Britain is, compared to some of the students in the schools who have been brought up here. It’s quite challenging for students to relate to their imams, so what that, in turn, does is confuses the community.’

Stakeholder

The survey found that 40 per cent of respondents used teachers from overseas, which highlights the potential for madrassa teachers to carry out lessons that may not reflect the British context for their pupils.

Another stakeholder felt that the division in approaches used in madrassas when compared with mainstream schools could contribute to children feeling their religion was something separate from their British identity:

‘The children go there knowing that there is a divide, I’m talking about the mosque scenario now, they will go to school and learn subjects in English and then they will go to a mosque set-up and it will be very alien like, the language will be different, the method of learning will be different and the children see for themselves – a separateness, and I suppose the way they will make sense of it is thinking “well this is my religion” but I think what is sad about that is that they perceive their religion in a very separate, alien-like way.’

Stakeholder

The majority of interviewees acknowledged that the use of community and mother-tongue languages in madrassas as playing a central role in forging a stronger connection between children and their cultural and ethnic roots, especially since there are relatively few opportunities to pursue these languages in mainstream schools. With two-thirds of those surveyed saying they provided teaching in a range of community and mother-tongue languages other than English, there is significant potential for madrassas to strengthen this connection. This was also seen as valuable by participants in the qualitative research, as one representative from a madrassa teaching Urdu said:

‘In school they are being taught English at all times, which is a good thing. But at the same time to keep them in with their mother tongue, for them to be able to communicate in their own language, is also an advantage.’

Madrassa representative (Bradford)

In contrast to this, some emphasised the importance of teaching in English and using Arabic in order to strengthen the common Islamic identity. By using English, madrassas are inclusive of a wider base of ethnic groups, and by using the language of the Quran they are able to strengthen the religious orientation of their lessons.

This sentiment is reflected in the following quote from a madrasa teacher in Leicester:

‘We have children who come from east Africa, but we also have children from Asian background, children from other parts of Africa ... Islam should be accessible to all, it’s understanding that is important, what is important is for us to pass on the message, to implement that, in terms of language. We think if we use English as a main language, that has helped to be honest, it is a mosque for everyone.’

Madrasa teacher (Leicester)

This section emphasises the range of potential influences a madrasa can have on a child. There is a strong consensus that, under the right conditions, they can strengthen religious identity and help children make sense of their life as a Muslim and as a member of the wider society. They can give children a narrative with which they can explain their religious and lifestyle choices in a non-Muslim environment and this can bring them confidence and self-esteem.

Where there is less agreement is on the role of a madrasa in developing and maintaining a connection with a child’s ethnic and cultural background: some actively promote the idea of equality between Muslims and aim to build an inclusive Islamic environment, whereas others stress the importance of integrating aspects of cultural background into their teaching. These goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive, with some madrasahs teaching both the different cultural and religious backgrounds of children and to respect others from different backgrounds. The degree to which both can be achieved is discussed in the next section, which gives more in-depth analysis of a madrasah’s ability to achieve cohesion, both within the Muslim community and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

3.2 Cohesion

The *Guidance on Community Cohesion* published by the LGA in 2002 broadly defined a cohesive community as one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods (LGA, 2002:6).

According to the *Cohesion Delivery Framework* published by the DCLG in 2008:

‘Community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration ... to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.’

DCLG, 2008: 9

More recently, Ofsted defined community cohesion as:

‘... working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;

a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and the wider community.’

Ofsted 2009: 3

Since 2007, mainstream schools have been required to adhere to the government’s community cohesion duty. It would appear the government, through this duty, is keen to encourage mainstream schools to foster greater relationships with both supplementary schools and community groups, in the hope that better links will lead to: ‘... closer involvement with parents and the wider community as well as improving community cohesion and understanding of religious and cultural perspectives’ (Adonis 2006: 4). Some literature suggests that supplementary schools have the potential to assist in the realisation of community cohesion.⁹

The argument that supplementary schools can facilitate community cohesion is supported by a 2008 report by the Runnymede Trust, which explored the role of faith and supplementary schools across England in preparing young people to live in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society. The report concluded that ‘improving these partnerships may lead to better outcomes in terms of equality and diversity as well as community cohesion’ (Berkeley, 2008:58). It also argued that the potential role for supplementary schools to offer integration and community cohesion opportunities for new minority communities is currently underestimated.

3.2.1 Madrassas’ community links

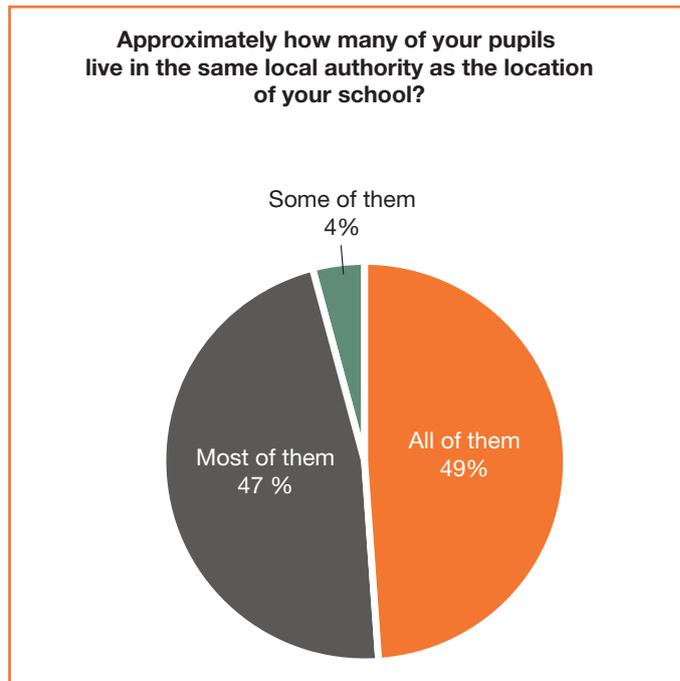
The lack of research on the role madrassas play in local communities has served to create a perception of madrassas as separate institutions that are disconnected from the communities in which they operate.

The depth of a madrassa’s connection to its local area is likely to be affected by the families it serves. If pupils are located within the same area then there is, arguably, more potential for madrassas to form close-knit relationships within their community. We found that most pupils do live in the same local authority as their madrassas, and 96 per cent of madrassas expressed that all or most of their pupils live in the same local authority as their school (see figure 3.1 over). This suggests that madrassas also serve a community function – acting as a meeting point for children in the same geographic as well as religious community. Over half are located within a mosque which also suggests they are strongly rooted within the Muslim communities in which they operate.

Another way for madrassas to build links within their community is to develop relationships with other supplementary schools. To assess the degree to which this takes place, the survey asked madrassas whether they had links with schools similar to themselves. Fifty-five per cent of madrassas stated that their school has no links with schools similar to themselves.

⁹ See, for example, C4EO 2010.

Figure 3.1
Proportion of pupils living within the same local authority as their madrassa



Madrassas were also asked whether they were registered with the NRC: nearly 60 per cent said that they were not members; under a third said they were members; 6 per cent said that they were in the process of registering; and 8 per cent said they did not know. This shows that a good proportion of madrassas have links with the wider supplementary school system but that there is significant scope for increasing these links. Out of the madrassas that reported having links with other similar schools, most said this was through their membership of NRC or by being part of another larger organisation. However, sharing experiences and good practice was also commonly cited as a reason for having links.

Table 3.1
Does your school have links with other similar schools for any of the following reasons?¹⁰

Reason for link	Percentage
Because run/ funded by same local authority	10%
Because part of larger organisation/ charity/ consortium	28%
Through the NRC	37%
To share experience and good practice on an informal basis	16%
Any other reason	18%

These results suggest that there is potential for madrassas to utilise links with other supplementary schools and further embed themselves within the supplementary school sector. Madrassas that do not have links may be held back by a lack of resources and networks or because they do not see it as a priority. Despite this (and it will be discussed further in this chapter) interfaith dialogue was pursued by some madrassas and some felt that making links with other supplementary schools would be a successful way to increase cohesion within the community.

¹⁰ Only 68 responses were given for this question. Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Some interviewees felt that there was an opportunity for madrassas to learn from other supplementary schools in developing stronger approaches to child protection. As one stakeholder said:

‘You could also think to build relationships between other faith-based youth groups ... the cross-over of learning is very similar and, I mean, certainly 10 years ago the church of England went through the same issue when child protection was introduced into churches and every church had to have child protection policies ... and they managed it and I’m sure they wouldn’t be averse to passing that learning on.’

Stakeholder

This indicates that there is an appetite for increasing links with other supplementary schools. One madrasa representative spoke of their efforts to increase these links:

‘Minhaj-ul-Qur’an itself now has set up something called the Peace Integration Council and what we try to do is build links with a local church, for example, and having an exchange dialogue with them as well, where they can come to visit us here and we go to visit them there as well, and that’s something that’s key as well. We want to build on that. That’s just initial steps as well so it works both ways.’

Madrasa representative (Bradford)

Links between madrassas and the wider community were discussed during workshops and interviews. Many of the participants felt that madrassas were poorly linked in to the wider community for a range of reasons. In particular, madrassas were seen as independent organisations, something confirmed by the fact that they are funded mostly through parental fees. There was a strong feeling that increasing links with the wider community would be beneficial to pupils, madrassas and the community as a whole, but that there were challenges to developing these links. Efforts were being made – for example, some madrassas talked about holding open days where the public, including non-Muslims, could visit and learn more about them:

‘We hold a bazaars and fairgrounds as well ... we have a summer fair at the end of every year ... organised and run by the students themselves ... we invite people from the local community as well as non-Muslims so it’s a good form of [fostering link]. Introducing Islam to the wider community ... is ... needed, especially in the climate we’re living [in] and the fear that is obviously surrounding us.’

Madrasa teacher (London)

This was also suggested by another madrasa teacher who felt it would help to improve the perceptions the wider community have of madrassas:

‘If we have an open day on a Saturday, invite all the neighbours, invite all the school and the parents ... introduce them to what we are doing ... open the books, what is in the books ... I think people would definitely see us in different light ... we would not be in the “suspicious madrasa” teaching how to, I don’t know, “how to kill others”, seriously because this is the perspective of people ... when they see us on Saturday morning ... they are like ... “what are these Muslims up to today?”’

Madrasa teacher (London)

Participants voiced a strong desire to be open to the wider community and make their activities more visible. Some participants felt that they were already doing what they could to increase links with the wider community:

‘I think it’s always had an open-door policy. I don’t think anybody has ever said you can’t see what we’re doing. I don’t think society is not interested, they’re just too busy and, you know, people just make their own minds up that this is what they want to believe and ... this is what they understand it to be.’

Parent (Bradford)

The lack of positive stories about madrassas found in the media was seen as a barrier to achieving greater links with the wider community. This came across strongly in all the workshops, where participants were asked to read through a positive and a negative media article about madrassas and to discuss the impact. The opinion that madrassas were covered in the media in a biased way was widely shared, and it was felt that there were many misconceptions around them. Although this provoked anger, some participants felt it was the role of the Muslim community to publicise their activities and present an open picture of their activities to tackle these misconceptions.

3.2.2 Madrassas and citizenship

The portrayal of madrassas as very distinct organisations that are more likely to work against cohesion than for it was not just reflected in the media. It was also reflected in the previous government’s framing of madrassas as places where the root causes of extremism could be addressed. And also by its Prevent programme, which funded projects that aimed to counter extremist sentiments in Muslim children (HM Government 2011). Under this programme, the ICE project was established, a scheme which helped to develop a citizenship curriculum for madrassas to teach children how to engage positively with the wider community. More details are provided in box 3.1 below.

Box 3.1: The Islam and Citizenship Education (ICE) project

Funded by the DCSF, and DCLG, ICE is a project which supports the development of a citizenship curriculum for use in madrassas. The project is based on the belief that citizenship and Islamic values are broadly compatible. ICE works with madrassas teachers, Muslim scholars, pupils, parents and educational professionals to develop online resources and materials for teachers and pupils that teach citizenship values through the Islamic perspective.

The project is based on the national citizenship programme of study, with added Islamic guidance. The materials aim to educate pupils in Islamic tradition, values and their roles and responsibilities in society as good Muslims. Teaching materials are designed to be easily adaptable, so that mainstream schools can relate Islamic values to the citizenship curriculum.

Forty-four lesson plans were developed for key stage 2 and 3 pupils. These pull together and build on the existing work by British Muslim communities in teaching citizenship.

BOX 3.1 CONTINUED

In April 2011, ICE announced that in their teaching resources had been used in 338 madrassas and 100 full-time independent Muslim schools in England.

More information on the ICE project can be found on their website:
<http://www.theiceproject.sdsa.net/welcome>

Workshop participants and interviewees were divided on whether a curriculum on citizenship is appropriate for madrassas. Some felt it is an extremely valuable idea which offers an opportunity for madrassas in the future, but others highlighted a range of obstacles which would diminish its effectiveness, including the difficulty in reaching a consensus on what citizenship actually means and how it should be taught to pupils. Many participants also felt that good citizenship is already central to the teachings of a madrasa and that there is no need to provide additional instruction:

‘We always teach them to obey the rules, but in community, in home ... to be a lawful ... citizens [and] have purpose in life, they have to have action and consequence, they have to realise what they do will have consequences, both here [and] in life after.’

Madrassa representative (Birmingham)

A commonly held view was that citizenship material might be helpful for some, but that in many madrassas there is an underlying objective to help children become good citizens – so if madrassas have high standards this will be delivered regardless of whether there is a single citizenship curriculum.

A wealth of feedback was given in relation to the underlying principles and lessons of madrassas and how they support children to live and engage with the wider community. The qualitative evidence suggests that there is a positive and active role for madrassas in supporting cohesion. In the Leicester workshop, a group of past and present students spoke of how their madrassas came together with the wider community to face the demonstrations by the English Defence League. The whole city was said to have put up a united front which prevented violence and maintained positive community relations.

A clear finding was that madrassas are perceived by teachers, parents and pupils as a place to help develop positive citizens who treat others equally, including Muslims from different denominations and backgrounds, as well as non-Muslims. This is reflected in the following quotes:

‘The whole ethos of this supplementary school is for them to understand their own religion and what is required of them as a human being, not only as a Muslim, within here but in society as well.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

‘We’re looking at subjects that are etiquettes and looking after your neighbour and friendships and how to integrate with non-Muslims, and respecting people from different denominations, different cultures – faith

or no faith – so yes, of course this will impact on them as a sort of positive citizen in their community.’

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

Some madrassas reportedly used ‘twinning’ with other madrassas to help increase cohesion between different Muslims. The teachings within the madrassa were also seen to have the potential to encourage greater cohesion between Muslims. As one madrassa teacher said:

‘We teach first of all that we do not, or should not, have any racism in us, because whether we are Afghanis, Pakistanis, Somalis, Sri Lankans, etcetera, we are all Muslims, and so we should not have any divides amongst us, we are all one.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

There was also an emphasis placed on the ability of madrassas to help encourage a greater understanding and respect of other cultures and backgrounds which, in turn, helps them to develop stronger links with non-Muslims:

‘What they learn at madrassa is to respect other people’s culture, and not to hurt people’s feelings and like, you know, looking after other people’s properties.’

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

‘It’s allowed me to reach out to the community, and I was at first scared about what people would think about me being a Muslim, but coming to the Madrassa I found out that it doesn’t matter what religion you are or what race you are ... everyone is a good person and you can go and talk to them ... in my community. I used to just play in my house but now I play with other people as well, not just Muslims but people of other backgrounds.’

Madrassa student (Bradford)

In some cases, participants gave examples of how madrassas could encourage cohesion within the community as a whole and between different faiths. Good practice was put forward and many acknowledged the need for madrassas to do more in this area. This is highlighted in the following quote:

‘We also have interfaith relations, we speak to members of the church, we speak to temples, it also provides a social function, and I think we can improve in that aspect, because at the moment it’s quite [a] negative inference by people about Islam, so I think we could change that ... [with] more community cohesion.’

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

Other examples of ways in which madrassas help to engage with the wider community were given. In one case a madrassa uses open days to invite non-Muslims into the premises and similar ideas came up in other interviews. The main constraints to this are seen to be funding and time, which prevents some madrassas from taking on a more prominent role in the community.

3.3 Summary

Madrassas can provide students with a strong sense of religious identity, giving them confidence in their Muslim faith. In some cases madrassas set out to help children to define their place within society as a whole. They can also help children develop a better understanding of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds and offer an opportunity to study community languages.

Despite this, there are still cases where madrassa teachers are contributing to children having a ‘split’ identity. Some imams and religious teachers lack an understanding of the context in which young British Muslims grow up and there are issues of language which hold back the applicability of their teaching. On the other hand, madrassas offer a forum for children to reconcile differences in these identities and to benefit from additional support their teachers can provide outside of the mainstream school context.

Although madrassas are perceived to be strongly independent institutions they have a potential role to play in increasing cohesion within communities, either directly through specific measures to engage with the wider society or indirectly through the underlying values they teach. There are distinctions made in our findings between madrassas that promote a unified Islamic service and those that are more specifically based on the denominational or cultural background of the pupils.

This research was not able to conclude that madrassas have not promoted radical views to young Muslims – this is beyond the scope of the research methodology. Radicalisation was not raised as an issue during the research and often madrassas were discussed as forums for children to strengthen their understanding of citizenship. Our findings indicate that it is unlikely for this to be an issue for the vast majority madrassas and that there is no role for government to intervene on the activities of madrassas. The research does highlight the potential for madrassas to increase their connections within the local community and use them to strengthen community relations.

3.4 Recommendations

1. An accredited training programme for madrassa teachers who were originally trained overseas should be promoted through MINAB. This training could help madrassa teachers to improve their understanding of British culture and help them to teach within a British context. It could also be used to assist madrassa teachers to improve their English-speaking skills and gain a better understanding of the legal framework under which madrassas need to operate.
2. MINAB should be supported to implement and promote a national training and recruitment programme that encourages the next generation of British Muslims to become imams. There are a number of institutions that already provide this training but a visible national scheme would help to increase the number of British born Muslims becoming involved in madrassa teaching.
3. How children see their role in the wider society is important and madrassas have a huge potential for positively or negatively influencing this. Therefore, in addition to learning to recite the Quran, madrassas should put equal emphasis on the personal development of the children and teenagers who come to them. This could be achieved by developing a curriculum that covers a much wider range of Islamic subjects, related and personal development subjects pertaining to identity, citizenship, integration and communal relations.

4. Mosques and madrassas should also develop working relationships with other supplementary schools and local faith forums to encourage knowledge sharing. It would also help madrassas become more visible within their communities. Such intercommunity and interfaith forums would also provide people of other faiths with an ideal opportunity to ask questions and learn about Islam and the Muslim community. Inviting local schools to visit mosques and madrassas as part of their religious education classes could cement relationships and help to improve community cohesion.

4. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD WELFARE

The impact of madrassas on the education of those who attend is a hugely under-researched area. Our survey data and qualitative findings have allowed us to explore the potential impacts that madrassas could have on educational development and attainment.

Our research has given us valuable insights into the role a madrassa should take in the lives of those attending, the frequency and duration of lessons and the content and activities undertaken during lessons. This is particularly important in light of studies showing that British Muslims perform less well in education and employment compared with other religious groups, even when taking account of the other factors that may affect their outcomes, such as socio-economic status (JRF 2005). The research is also useful as a means of addressing the argument that madrassas have little educational value because teaching methods focus on rote learning and because the additional time commitment involved can be burdensome for students.

As already outlined, there are serious child protection issues surrounding madrassas that have, importantly, been uncovered through investigative journalism. They have brought to light a number of cases where children have been mistreated within madrassas and this is a serious issue facing the sector. The IPPR survey and qualitative research provides further insight into the extent to which safeguarding is prioritised within madrassas and the improvements that are required.

4.1 Learning

An analysis of classroom dynamics is a first step in understanding the way children learn in madrassas. Table 4.1 shows the criteria used for grouping students in classes – the most common characteristics are age, general ability and gender.¹¹ Only seven madrassas (4 per cent) in our survey used no form of grouping. This shows that madrassas do take the stages of development of pupils into consideration and are likely to take some note of a child's ability. It also highlights the gendered nature of madrassa education, with many madrassas splitting classes according to sex.

Table 4.1
Criteria for allocating classes

Criteria for allocating classes	
Ability	57%
Age	58%
Gender	50%
Language competence	11%
Other	0.2%
No criteria	4%

4.1.1 Teaching methods and content

The ability for a madrassa to help a child learn and develop academically depends greatly on the content and effectiveness of the teaching. As discussed in chapter 2, madrassas are strongly oriented towards teaching material that is relevant to the Islamic religion, with 97 per cent of madrassas reporting that they teach the Quran and over 90 per cent of those teaching on culture and heritage reporting that this involved Islamic teaching.

¹¹ 168 schools responded to this question. (Respondents were able to select more than one option.)

Findings from the qualitative research confirmed this religious focus. A former madrassa pupil stressed this by saying:

‘At the madrassa it was strictly Islamic tuition. We learnt about the Prophet ... as well there were stories told about the times and also just learning how to read the Quran.’

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

A clear distinction is made in the research findings between madrassas that teach the Quran through memorisation techniques and those that encourage more critical thinking about the material being taught. A significant number of people had attended madrassas that only used recitation and rote learning. One student said: ‘We just had to learn how to recite things off by heart’ and a madrassa teacher reported that he had a tick sheet ‘... with 124 things that they have to memorise by heart.’ A former student experienced the same approach to learning but also noted that there are efforts to change this:

‘Everything centred around Quranic teaching and mainly recitation and not absorbing and understanding, which is something that is being addressed now.’

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

Despite the religious focus of most madrassas, we identified some that taught classes on broader subject areas, such as literacy, other community languages, citizenship and mainstream subjects. This is strengthened by the survey results that showed 28 per cent of madrassas were supporting national curriculum subjects such as English and maths. The skills developed through learning and using a community language are often seen as transferable to other aspects of a pupil’s education, and many interviewees felt that there were indirect benefits of spending additional time in a learning environment. For example, one parent said:

‘I know it’s had [an] impact on my little boys, you know on concentration ... following instructions, simple things like that.’

Parent (Birmingham)

Our findings also showed the importance some teachers placed on capturing a child’s attention and helping them to understand the meaning behind the text. Examples were provided of madrassas that were successfully encouraging pupils to gain a deeper understanding of the material covered during lessons. A parent also discussed the importance of developing their child’s understanding:

‘For me [the] madrassa has done a superb job, in the fact that they teach the understanding behind Islam, why Islam does these things. Give you one example – *eidul adha*. They were taught obviously why do we sacrifice animals for Eid ... because they understand the reasons.’

Parent (Birmingham)

A variety of teaching methods beyond recitation were identified throughout the research, although some criticised madrassas that still used rote forms of teaching. Overall, teaching methods are seen to be improving but this is seen to depend on factors such as the abilities of the teacher – for example, whether they are able to speak English well, and the resources available, such as suitable text books. Some madrassa teachers

gave examples of how they are trying to improve the teaching methods they use to help children learn, and understand what they are being taught. In one case a teacher was trying visual methods of teaching by using a projector, another spoke of using kinaesthetic methods where students learn through physical activity rather than just listening to the teacher.

‘We obviously knew that we couldn’t use traditional teaching methods – we needed to use a more modern approach, a contemporary approach, towards teaching styles, addressing learning styles as well [as] having the awareness that some pupils respond to kinaesthetic learning ...’

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

Research participants were also asked about the extent to which madrassas used formal syllabuses to determine the lessons structure and content. In a small number of cases, the use of a syllabus was seen as unnecessary. For example, one teacher felt that the syllabus should be in the teacher’s mind but that there was no need for a formal written syllabus. Other responses around syllabuses were more receptive, with many seeing them as an important means of being able to cover the material in an organised way. The main point that emerged was that there is an appetite for improving the syllabuses within madrassas, to improve the structure and consistency of the teaching as well as introducing more current teaching methods that pupils are familiar with through the mainstream schooling system:

‘There’s been a lot of change within the running of the madrassa, the policies and the teaching syllabuses, how they used to be taught. Since I’ve been there we’ve now got split syllabuses instead of just one thing all the time.’

Parent (Bradford)

Some felt that there was a ‘split system’ between formal and informal madrassas where the approach to teaching varies, as one stakeholder said:

‘It’s a misnomer to say there is a [system] – there are schemes in place, we can certainly see some organised forms of teaching but when you cast the net far and wide, very often they are ad hoc individual projects.’

Stakeholder

Despite this, there was also a strong feeling that the content of teaching should be determined by madrassas independently. The importance of maintaining their independence was consistently voiced by madrassa representatives and others, and there was little enthusiasm for the idea of developing a uniform syllabus to be taught in every madrassa. This highlights the importance of recognising madrassas as private institutions that should be responsible for determining their own activities.

The extent to which madrassas monitor and test the progress of their pupils was also explored by the research. Tests, competitions and rewards were commonly cited as methods of motivating children attending madrassas. In particular, madrassa representatives spoke of testing children on sections of the Quran, often giving them lines to learn for homework. Some madrassas used grading and incentives to motivate students to do well:

‘When they get “excellent”, they go show it to their parents and they feel, like, successful.’

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

‘Praise elevates them [to] make sure the other children in the class see ... what they are doing and that sends a message.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

Overall, it is clear from our research that there is an appetite for madrassas to develop effective teaching methods and to support rewarding and encouraging the progress of their pupils. However, the degree to which they have been able to achieve this is varied.

4.2 Madrassa teachers

The ability of a teacher to deliver and manage lessons effectively is key to the educational impact of madrassas. This depends on their skills, experience and training as well as their ability to communicate to pupils in a way they understand clearly. One stakeholder felt that there are cases where madrassa teachers achieve good results but that the outside perspective is shaped by negative information:

‘When it works well it’s brilliant but we just hear about the strict or incompetent teachers.’

Stakeholder

The need for well-trained teachers was emphasised throughout the research. Training was seen as extremely important but also lacking in many cases, limited by either resources or capacity. As discussed in chapter 2, madrassa teachers have a range of backgrounds. Over two-thirds of the madrassas in our survey employ imams and a third use teachers that have no training abroad or in the UK. The most common form of training required by madrassas is theological training, whereas only 14 per cent require a qualification in teaching. This indicates that, in many cases, madrassas are lacking teachers that have been formally trained to manage classrooms and deliver effective lessons. Teacher training was discussed in both the workshops and interviews. For some madrassas, the level of qualifications held by teachers is unimportant. As one madrassa representative said:

‘We look for people who have a passion to teach but they are not necessarily teachers in terms of qualifications.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

The quality of the teacher is seen as crucial in terms of having a positive impact on pupils and achieving the aims of the madrassa:

‘A good teacher and good madrassa then definitely that would encourage them, because you will give them [an] aim in life where maybe the mainstream school doesn’t ... when this person excels in the madrassa, definitely they can excel in their own school and do something in their own community. If you can inspire, they can excel.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

A strong finding from the qualitative research was that teacher training is lacking within madrassas and that this is having a negative impact on both the delivery of lessons and classroom management. Some suggested that teachers with only theological training do

not always have the skills to be able to manage classrooms effectively and support pupils to learn.

Others mentioned that a lack of funding and support was preventing madrassas from employing more qualified staff. For example, one teacher said:

'We have a number of teachers who are qualified teachers themselves. So we can use their ability, use their skills and we can take that on board here as well ... But I'd say the biggest challenge will be resources and the funding as well. Yes, we would like our teachers to have the proper professional training that they can have as well, but again it's the cost really.'

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

The importance of being able to communicate effectively with pupils was also emphasised throughout the research, and particularly the need for teachers to be able to speak English. As one workshop participant in Birmingham said, 'English is fundamental'. Many of the teachers that were interviewed were trained or had worked abroad. One madrassa student:

'Some of the students, they speak English at home and they don't understand our own languages so it's beneficial for them that the teacher speaks English.'

Madrassa pupil (Bradford)

These results are also relevant to the findings in the previous chapter. Madrassa teachers who were trained abroad are seen in some cases as being less able to conduct lessons that are relevant to the British context in which they teach.

Encouraging younger generations to become madrassa teachers is seen as one way to address this. One madrassa teacher drew comparisons between a previous teacher who was from abroad, and their replacement from the UK:

'The communication was better because he speaks [fluent] English, if you understand what I mean. Before it wasn't. I mean, you bring the "back home" mentality here because there's a lot of problems ... I put my recommendations forward to the teachers – I think we should get teachers from, our young lads here, make sure they learn properly ... that they become teachers, from this country ... that's why my kids are getting better now.'

Parent (Birmingham)

Some felt that the extent to which teaching could be improved was held back by how much madrassas rely on voluntary teachers – something also mentioned in the chapter on the profile of madrassas. One stakeholder felt that:

'In order to provide quality education in English, with a broader outlook, by teachers that are more connected to British society, you have to pay people. And the madrassas system is essentially reliant upon volunteers.'

Stakeholder

Lines were regularly drawn between madrassas that use older generation Muslim teachers, who may originate from abroad, to the next generation of Muslims. One stakeholder reflected on his time in two different madrassas, saying:

'I went to a madrassa with a Pakistani imam for a couple of years when I was 10 or 11 years old, but also I went further on actually a few years after that. I started attending, it was like a Saturday school, where the focus of it was a lot broader actually, so it was more instilling of a community and the people that taught at the school were indigenous Muslims in the sense that they were born here, and that was something I took more from in terms of starting to value Islam in its applicability in a British context.'

Stakeholder

Participants highlighted the positive changes occurring within some madrassas, providing examples where teacher training is being improved. One past madrassa student spoke of the increasing influence of younger madrassa teachers who often have a more developed set of teaching skills:

'More and more we're seeing younger teachers with a much broader range of skills and subjects at their disposal. Often they come with teaching backgrounds, having taught within schools. So they understand classroom management, they understand delivery and they have a wide range of different subjects.'

Past madrassa pupil (Bradford)

Many felt that approaches to teaching were changing and evolving naturally and without external involvement. One workshop participant felt that the change should happen from within the Muslim community and that it was not the government's role to monitor or regulate teaching standards:

'Change is starting to happen. We are different to the generation that is before us. It's not down to government to change it, it's just a matter of time for me.'

Workshop participant, Leicester.

Overall, the degree to which learning takes place within a madrassa strongly depends on the training and skills of the teachers, as well as the lesson material and its delivery. While madrassas are still strongly focused on delivering religious material, the extent to which they include contextual information, and help children develop a deeper understanding of their religion, varies. In some cases, madrassas can be seen to go beyond their religious role to deliver a broader curriculum which has the potential to improve a child's capacity to learn. This is seen to be an area in which madrassas need to improve.

4.2.1 Impact on confidence and skills

Participants shared stories that demonstrated the influence of madrassas on students' personal development. Where madrassas provided an open environment for children to interact, greater benefits were perceived. This was highlighted in the following quotes by pupils:

‘By coming to madrassa, my confidence has really grown, and in madrassa we do speeches ... in front of all the students and like that, my confidence has really grown and I’m really proud of myself.’

Madrassa student (Bradford)

‘It’s a wonderful atmosphere for students to come and learn. Not only [do] they teach you about Islamic stuff, they teach you about confidence and that and speaking in crowds, because it helps build up your confidence when they ask you to read something out loud to the rest of the class. Basically, [it] helps you build up your self-esteem and confidence as well.’

Madrassa student (Leicester)

A strongly voiced opinion was that madrassas could improve the social skills of pupils and provide an environment where friendships could flourish. Madrassas were also seen as a secure environment where children could be supervised, keeping them occupied outside of mainstream school hours:

‘You also develop your social skills, you talking to people that you growing up with, so helps to develop your social skills. It’s an activity you know, something that you do, makes your teenage years a little bit easy as well, because you have somewhere to go, people to talk to of your age.’

Past madrassa student (Leicester)

Some less encouraging impacts on social and emotional development were also raised during the research. One past student describes his time in a madrassa as being like ‘jail’ because of the strict discipline and restrictive approach to teaching. Factors which led to these less favourable experiences included: madrassa teachers restricting lessons to the recitation of the Quran; having too few breaks during the class; in some cases, having to sit uncomfortably on the floor for long periods of time; and the use of strict classroom management techniques (such as not being able to talk). It was also acknowledged that children would be tired while at a madrassa because of attending after a long school day. Our interviews revealed that the majority of madrassas give pupils a small amount of homework which is usually something to memorise for the next lesson. Despite the time pressures on children, many learn to adapt to this daily routine. One pupil said:

‘It’s hard for me to concentrate on the madrassa stuff, but eventually, if you work out, if you do your time management correctly, then you still have time to do your madrassa homework.’

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

In a few cases, madrassa teachers voiced their sense of responsibility for helping students to develop socially and emotionally. In one madrassa, they work hard to pick up on any personal issues faced by the children they work with by linking up with mainstream schools and using outreach workers to engage with the family. They hold classes that take on some of the traditional ‘personal, social and health education’ topics such as drugs and family planning. Madrassa teachers also take on a pastoral role, in some cases seeing themselves as someone children can talk to about their problems and to increase their confidence. The quotes below reflect this:

‘He doesn’t want to try, but with me I don’t put his self-esteem down, I keep on encouraging him.’

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

‘You really need to be like almost a father figure for the students, take them under your wing and so what is playing into effect there as well is the emotion of the students ... some students might not be responsive but one needs to assess that and what are the reasons for that.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

These findings highlight the range of responses around the impact of madrassas on children’s personal development. Many of the findings were encouraging and highlighted their role as confidence-building institutions that enable children to develop socially.

4.3 Parental involvement

Some researchers have argued that supplementary schools can foster more ‘parental choice and participation in the education process’ (Tomlinson 1984: 68 and Cousins 2006), particularly among those who are hard to reach. Millat-e-mustafa and Begum (2005) reported a massive increase in Bangladeshi parental involvement through their children’s madrassa.

The links madrassas have with parents is an important indicator of their ability to have a positive impact on the education and development of the pupils. A range of studies show that parental involvement and links between the home and other learning environments is significantly and positively related to the attainment of children across a range of areas (Desforges and Abouchar 2003). Something that came out strongly within our research was the importance and value placed on parents by madrassas.

The research revealed a close dynamic between madrassas and pupils’ families. It suggests that madrassas promote inclusion by offering support to families who would struggle to afford to let their children attend. The survey showed that over a quarter of madrassas reduce the fees for parents who have difficulty paying. Similarly, a family’s ability to pay fees was named by madrassas as the most common factor affecting the fees charged, which suggests that madrassas prioritise inclusion as opposed to profit-making.

The findings also revealed a market for madrassas – parents choose where to send their children by assessing a range of factors, including quality of teaching, content of teaching, convenience of location and cost. The survey also showed that the majority of funding for madrassas comes from parental fees, which further confirms the interest parents have in the quality of service provided. Stakeholders put forward the view that raising fees slightly can improve the level of involvement parents have in madrassa and can raise their expectations, which would have the effect of driving up standards. One madrassa teacher reflected on this:

‘I think the fact that the parents pay £100 a month each, you have to bear in mind some of these parents have maybe two or three children so they’re paying £200/300 a month in comparison to maybe say £15 a month in other madrassas. So I think ... to realise that – look I’m putting lots of money in this, so I’m going to take this seriously.’

Madrassa teacher (Birmingham).

Much of the qualitative research suggested there is a high commitment by madrassas to involve parents and engage with them. Many madrassa teachers outlined their efforts to try to get parents involved in their children's madrassa experience. One emphasised the importance of this for children's overall education:

'I think that it's absolutely important that parents understand what their children do here. They have to equally respect the madrassa and the teachers here as well, like they do in school because I think if the parents have that same kind of respect, then their children will ultimately.'

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

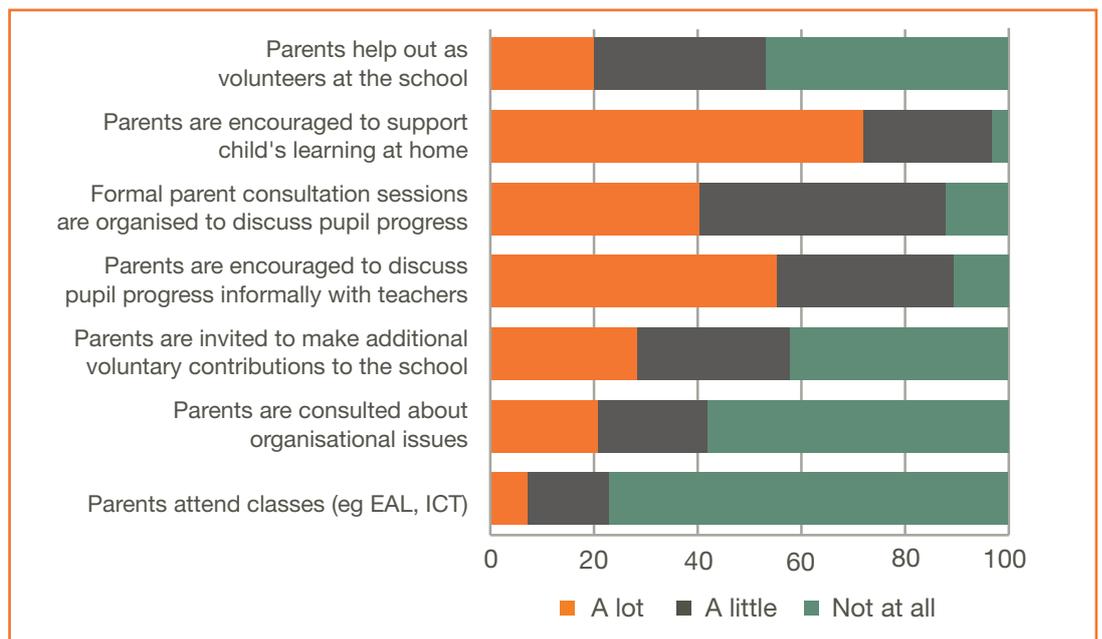
'I think situations have changed now people's views and ideologies have changed. They know they've got a say. They can say things, answer, challenge and question and we're open for that.'

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

The survey results show that almost 90 per cent of madrassas have formal channels for informing parents about their child's progress, and over 70 per cent of madrassas encourage parents to support their children's learning, as seen in figure 4.1. This shows there is potential for madrassas to contribute to the future outcomes of children, particularly if they can encourage parents to also take an interest in the mainstream education of their children.

The survey also shows that over half of parents are encouraged to discuss their child's progress with teachers; this is positive, but there is obviously room for improvement. Despite parents being encouraged to get involved in their children's learning, there is less room for parents to be involved in the actual organisation of a madrassa, with only 42 per cent of madrassas consulting parents on organisational issues.

Figure 4.1
Parental involvement in
madrassas



Although the survey showed that a small proportion of parents were consulted on organisational issues, there were some examples given in the qualitative element of the research where parental voices had resulted in changes to the way their madrassa operated. For example, the quote below describes a case where parental involvement contributed to the introduction of a new Urdu lesson:

‘The largest minority community in Bradford is Mirpur (region in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan) as well. And, even at home, they’re not speaking Urdu; at home they’re speaking Mirpuri ... as well [as] Patwari (dialect of Punjabi) language... So we were thinking that maybe not necessary. But [a] handful of parents did say that’s what they want. So when we’ve had our parents’ evenings, consultation evenings, parents did express an interest. So, because they’ve expressed an interest, when we write to parents homes, we asked them the question, what do you think about this? Parents have expressed an interest ... as well. And Alhamdulillah (praise be to God) we took their views on board and now we’ve started Urdu classes as well.’

Madrassa representative (Bradford)

Challenges to parental involvement were also outlined during the research, and in some cases parents and teachers highlighted the barriers to maintaining links. Teachers sometimes felt that there would always be parents that are difficult to engage, regardless of the efforts they make, while parents spoke of time pressures which prevent them from engaging fully. This is reflected in the following quotes by a teacher and a parent:

‘I have tried all sorts but unfortunately some have worked, some haven’t, you know. I’ve done loads of mini-projects, you know, recitation [to] get the parents in, done other little things to get them in ... the last one, after we done test and exams, there was actually prize-giving and certifications that were given, and out of my 40 children, there were 10 parents, so I was disappointed.’

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

‘[I] work full time you know, I just don’t have that time to give to the madrassa. I think they do have quite a lot of parental involvement, but I simply don’t have the time to give it to them really.’

Parent (Birmingham)

Some parents felt they were less able to get involved in their child’s madrassa experience due to gender. This was voiced in a workshop and also some interviews, as one parent said:

‘They do have parent evenings. Because mine are boys, my husband attends them, because its male teacher teaching the boys and its female teacher teaching the girls, so my husband mostly tends to go, so get feedback from them.’

Parent (Leicester)

Madrassa representatives and teachers highlighted a range of techniques used to build strong links with parents. This included getting them involved in competitions and test result ceremonies (to motivate children and show parents their progress) and

also asking parents to volunteer in the madrassa. The vast majority of madrassas held parents' evenings and some spoke of their efforts to offer flexible consultation times over weekends so that working parents could also be involved.

Madrassas also use a wide range of communication methods to maintain dialogue with parents, with text messaging suggested as a potentially effective method of communication. Some madrassas provide training and workshops for parents to take part in and learn more about their children's madrassa education and also to develop new skills themselves, such as being able to use social networking tools. Strategies used to develop a regular form of contact with parents were also discussed. For example:

'We do have parents' evenings. Not only that, every week we have the signing and comments book for the parents, and whenever we think we need to see the parents, we will just see them. However, we have parents' evenings and whenever we need to contact the parent at home or anything, we ring them or send them a letter, and they can contact us any time as well, even outside madrassa times.'

Madrassa teacher (Leicester)

Madrassa teachers also showed enthusiasm for developing new ways to engage with parents. One idea was to ask parents to come into the madrassa and share their skills and knowledge. As one teacher said:

'We do have a lot of young parents, professional parents, who ... can ... give back to the community. They're all professionals, perfect English, loads of knowledge – why don't we bring them in and ... give them one Saturday a month or a semester to do an activity, to do a training ... workshop?'

Madrassa teacher (London)

These findings show that madrassas are often highly committed to developing and maintaining links with parents but that they are not always successful in doing so. They use a range of ways to engage with parents and have ideas on how this could be improved. Despite their recognition of the role parents should play in their child's learning, they seem to have less commitment to enabling parents to have an impact on the way madrassas are run, although there are cases where this is happening. Fees are an important way of generating parental commitment. Madrassas can also be seen to contribute to fairness within the community, by helping parents who are unable to afford the fees.

4.4 Madrassas and mainstream teaching

4.4.1 Building links with mainstream schools

Developing links between mainstream schools and madrassas can have a range of benefits for the children attending and offer an opportunity for madrassas to become better integrated with the community as a whole. By developing a partnership, both institutions can better respond to the needs of their pupils – for example, by sharing information on issues affecting children so they can be prepared to support them. The survey undertaken for this project showed that the majority of madrassas do not engage with mainstream schools: over two-thirds (71 per cent) do not have any links. Most madrassas reported having links with only one school but some reported as many as eight.

This lack of networking is also reflected in the small number of madrassas who keep records of their Special Education Needs (SEN) status and mainstream school progress (as will be further discussed later in this chapter). These results show that madrassas and mainstream schools are failing to take advantage of important opportunities for supporting their pupils more effectively.

Almost a third of madrassas reported that they did have a relationship with mainstream schools. The survey also asked the purpose of these links, and a range of reasons were reported. Over a third of those madrassas who have links to mainstream schools do so to discuss the progress of individual pupils, while a fifth exchange information about exams, showing that supporting individual pupils and their educational progress is the purpose of some links. Others collaborate for more practical reasons, such as sharing facilities or publicising services. The results for each response are shown in table 4.2.¹²

Table 4.2
Reasons for partnerships
between madrassas and
mainstream schools

Purpose of the partnership	
Arrange exams	21%
Discuss progress of individual pupils	38%
For schools to nominate or refer pupils to you	19%
To publicise your services to young people and parents	34%
To share facilities or resources	21%
Other	28%

Just under half of schools that state they provide support for national curriculum subjects (15 out of 31) have links with mainstream schools, which shows that there is not a significant overlap between national curriculum teaching and mainstream school links. Thirteen of the schools that provide support for national curriculum subjects keep records on students' test or exam results and eight on what subjects they study at their mainstream schools. The findings show that schools that have links with mainstream schools are also more likely to provide support for mainstream school subjects. Over a third (34 per cent) of the schools that have links with mainstream schools provide teaching to support national curriculum subjects. Less than one-sixth (14 per cent) of schools who do not have links with mainstream schools provide this support.

Qualitative findings also show that there are madrassas that have successfully engaged and worked in partnership with schools for mutual benefits. Examples were given on how madrassas use links with the mainstream school to gain a greater knowledge of their pupil's education:

'Every six months I go to school and I check their report – how is my student in school? I check all the lessons: maths, English, science, geography ... I check how is my student in main school. Because we work together, main school and here, and then we happy tutor, main school is happy and student very happy.'

Madrassa teacher (London)

Other examples include holding award ceremonies, religious ceremonies and assemblies on madrassas in mainstream schools and inviting teachers and non-madrassa pupils

¹² Respondents were able to select more than one option.

to attend. One madrassa representative described how they could use their links with parents to improve attendance in mainstream school:

‘We’ve addressed these particular problems where local schools have said to us that you know this child is forever late, he goes to your mosque, how is he there? So we look at the attendance. He’s OK, no problem, and so we speak to the parents as well. It’s because of the different lifestyle and the pattern at home. The child might be sleeping late. The parents themselves might be getting up late as well thus impacting on the youngster who is coming in late. So we talk to them as well about how important education is ...’

Madrassa representative (Bradford)

The value of building links between madrassas and mainstream schools has been recognised and the vast majority of participants felt that a partnership approach would be beneficial. For example, some felt that madrassas could use their partnerships to improve their teaching methods:

‘If there is a relationship between madrassas and teachers and mainstream schools then there is a great advantage for madrassa teachers – they can, in fact, learn teaching methods and thereby improve ... this could lead to improving teaching methods in madrassas.’

Stakeholder

Participants in the workshops also put forward a range of benefits which can be taken from greater coordination and sharing knowledge between madrassas and mainstream schools. One participant felt that this would help madrassas and mainstream school meet higher level needs:

‘Communication, especially in terms of special needs, because that’s one area ... where the schools don’t tell madrassas and madrassas don’t tell the schools, it’s just basic communication.’

Workshop participant (Bradford)

Another stakeholder who had been involved in facilitating links between madrassas and mainstream schools has witnessed improvements in attendance and teaching quality:

‘When the children saw their headteacher visiting the madrassa, and having a better relationship with their imam who is running the madrassa, then that has an impact – it improved attendance, their behaviour was better they couldn’t make excuses to each other. [It was]... more transparent ... and another thing teachers were also able to tell the madrassa people about some of the curriculum they were discussing, like environmental issues or health issues which madrassa teachers could use in an Islamic context.’

Stakeholder

There are examples of initiatives which have tried to drive through this agenda. The government has been involved in supporting schemes that aim to better connect madrassas with mainstream schools and communities, demonstrated by the case study below.

Box 4.1: QED-UK's Madrassa Children's Literacy Project

The Madrassa Children's Literacy Project was run by QED-UK until 2010. The project was funded by the DFES Children, Young People and Families Grant Programme. It was initiated to help build links between mainstream schools and madrassas, using literacy as a way to develop a shared objective as well as other themes such as religion, social development and education. This involved working with teachers, governors, parents and children from different communities to increase understanding and overcome negative perceptions of madrassas in the area.

It created stronger links between 45 madrassas and 145 mainstream primary schools and improved understanding and ways of joint working for the benefit of pupils and helped madrassas to contribute to the mainstream education of their pupils. Mainstream schools also benefited through gaining a better understanding of madrassas, and their partnership working helped to improve the educational attainment of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The communities in which the project operated were also seen to benefit, becoming stronger and more tolerant. Interfaith dialogue was also greater as a result of the scheme and it provided supplementary schools with the skills and resources to work collaboratively to improve the educational and economic wellbeing of ethnic minority communities. Madrassas involved in the project also benefited from good publicity in the local press, resulting in invitations to attend conferences in London on community partnerships. The madrassas also received additional educational resources to support their work on faith and religion.

Despite there being a lack of links with mainstream schools, there was a large amount of enthusiasm from many of those who engaged with the research. Many put forward ways in which they could develop better links, and some feel this is partly the responsibility of the local authority. But participants also stressed the importance of maintaining independence, stating that there needs to be clear 'demarcation' of influence and control between both organisations. A range of benefits are seen to having stronger links between mainstream schools and madrassas. Some stakeholders highlighted the cross-over of learning between madrassas and mainstream schools, and felt that they have a number of common aims and objectives. One stakeholder highlighted the importance of these links in helping to give students a clear identity, saying:

'The sustainable impact is bringing these two identities together and showing that they are not incompatible. This can also impact children in later life.'

Stakeholder

Madrassa teachers also recognised the potential for sharing pupil information with mainstream schools, which could assist them in gaining a deeper knowledge of their pupils' needs and to be more sensitive to religious practices and beliefs. One teacher recognised their role in providing support to children who are observing Ramadan by communicating with their teachers:

'[During] Ramadan most of the students ... fast ... sometimes the teachers force them 'you have to eat' when they say ... "[!] don't want to

eat, I want to be fasting.” So they come here and ask us to write a letter ... [or] call and speak to them.’

Madrassa teacher (London)

There are also a range of perceived benefits for the madrassas who develop links with mainstream schools. In particular, sharing information on children so that each can work in partnership to ensure they develop and that their work complements each other. Developing links can also help madrassas to train teachers and implement and understand policies such as child protection. There are examples where these links have shown significant benefits for pupils and the community.

Box 4.2: Links with mainstream schools – Newby Primary School, Bradford

In Bradford, Newby Primary School has an outstanding record in its Ofsted inspection. Links between the school and their local madrassas have improved relations and achieved some positive benefits. Local madrassas suspend classes to support the local schools when key stage tests are being conducted, allowing children to spend time with revision. And local schools close at Eid in order that families are able to celebrate together. These are not the only benefits; attendance and behaviour has also improved as a result, all contributing to higher levels of attainment.

4.4.2 Impact of madrassas on mainstream education

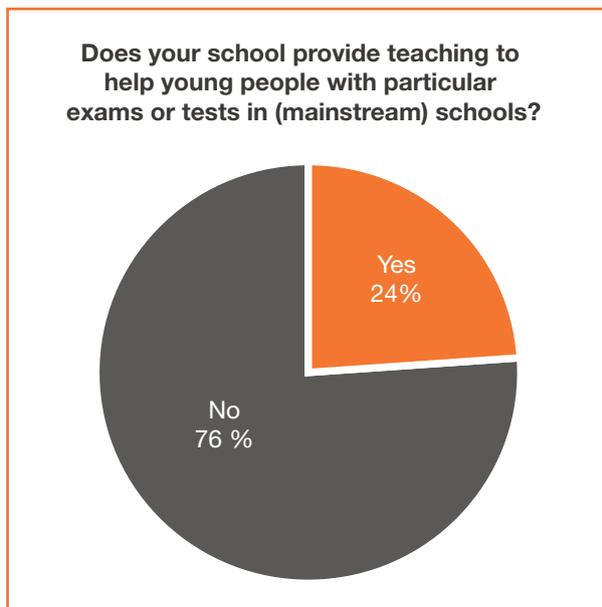
Although there is little data on the impact that madrassas have on mainstream education, research by the London Metropolitan University and the National Centre for Social Research on the impact of supplementary schools provides a useful starting point for this study. Their findings showed that a positive impact on pupil’s attainment was perceived where supplementary schools provided support for mainstream subjects. Parents reported increased attainment levels; and improved concentration was reported by both parents and teachers of pupils attending supplementary school. Supplementary schools were also seen to have a beneficial impact on attendees’ attitudes towards education.

Our survey of madrassas gives an indication of the extent to which madrassas provide lessons in mainstream subjects. With 28 per cent reporting that they teach national curriculum subjects, the impact is arguably limited. But this does show that there is a group of madrassas who see themselves as fulfilling a broader role within the academic as well as religious lives of their pupils. Teaching national curriculum subjects is not the only way a madrassa might affect the mainstream education of a pupil.

Another way some madrassas support children academically is through additional tutoring for exams and tests in their mainstream school. Table 4.3 shows that this occurs in a small number of cases and that the most common exams madrassas support are GCSEs as well as the key stage 1 to 3 tests.¹³

13 There were 37 responses to this question.

Figure 4.2
Support for exams and tests



Broader initiatives have also been developed to increase the impact that madrasahs have on the educational attainment of their pupils, such as the Open Madrasah Network (see box 4.3).

Table 4.3
Support for exams or tests

Exam or test	Percentage
Key stage 1	38%
Key stage 2	51%
Key stage 3	35%
GCSEs	62%
A levels (AS and A2 exams)	24%
School entrance exams	2%
Other	11%

Box 4.3: Open Madrasah Network

Launched in 2009, the Open Madrasah Network is a project to improve educational attainment in Islamic supplementary schools in Bradford and Keighley, where the Muslim communities have tended to struggle academically. By improving GCSE grades in an underprivileged community, the project aims to increase employment prospects for students.

The participating students receive English and maths tutoring (for primary and GCSE pupils), supplementary GCSE courses in Arabic, Urdu and religious education, careers advice and jobs fairs. The Open Madrasah Network brings in local, qualified teachers to provide these classes, and pupils are recruited from the supplementary schools themselves, the local community and local state schools.

Teachers from supplementary schools have also been given informal training as part of the project. The scheme builds on existing relationships between mainstream schools and supplementary schools. Through this project, 147 students have been supported in additional classes, with over 70 GCSE successes in Urdu and Arabic over the last two years.

The project is being funded for three years by Yorkshire Forward, a regional development agency, and has been delivered by Bradford Council in partnership with the ATL. The funding provides support for Jamiyat Tabligh Ul Islam, Madania Tahfeezul Quran, Abu Zahra Foundation, Islamic Cultural and Educational Foundation.

The qualitative research provides an insight into the less-formalised ways in which a madrasa can affect a pupil's ability to progress within their mainstream school. For example, some madrassas set aside some time in which pupils can do their homework for mainstream school, as the following quote by a madrasa teacher highlights:

'We will be helping the children to have homework classes over the weekend mainly with the core subjects maths, English and science ... so we are working on that. It will help them not only to be in the house of Allah but also to improve the mainstream education.'

Madrassa representative (Bradford)

Others spoke of the connections they made within their classes to the mainstream topics children cover in their schools, as reflected in the following quote by a madrasa teacher:

'They've done world war one, world war two, they've done a bit of America, they've done a bit of Europe [and] Britain and you would link it to ... the time of the Prophet and find it fascinating because it ... makes sense building that bridge between modern history and our own Islamic history.'

Madrassa teacher (London)

Survey results indicate some limitations on the degree to which madrassas can support and positively affect a child's education. Very few madrassas (9 per cent) keep academic records on the achievement of their pupils outside of the madrasa setting and only 10 per cent keep records of pupils' SEN. This raises questions about the capacity of most madrassas to provide tailored support to students and to address any areas in which pupils might be struggling with in their mainstream school.

A mixed response was received when participants were asked about whether a madrasa's role should be to support mainstream education. Past and present pupils spoke of how they could benefit from a greater overlap between their madrasa and mainstream education, although not all felt it was the role of the madrasa to teach mainstream school subjects and believed that there was adequate time devoted to mainstream subjects during those school hours. In contrast, others felt that there would be a significant benefit for supporting mainstream education within madrasa lessons.

‘I think if I was being taught a similar set of subjects within the Madrassa system that complemented my teaching within the school system, then absolutely I would have continued with this because it would have helped to reinforce my learning within the schooling system. But other than that, I just didn’t see it benefiting my immediate future.’

Past madrassa pupil (Bradford)

As our survey results show, the vast majority of madrassa classes take place before or after school or at weekends, and the qualitative interviews reveal that many pupils attend madrassas on a daily basis or several times per week. When asked about whether they give homework, most madrassas report giving pupils a small number of tasks for completion outside of the madrassa classes. This potentially limits the time that pupils spend on their mainstream education, though the same argument would be valid for any type of out-of-school activity.

Participants were asked whether the time and commitment involved in attending madrassa affected their ability to fulfil their mainstream school obligations. The view that was often expressed was that balancing school commitments and madrassa commitments was challenging, and that it was important to manage time and plan effectively to ensure it did not have a negative impact. Some pupils, parents and teachers felt that children could be tired or lack concentration but the general sense was that it was possible to organise their time in a way that ensured they could do both. In a small number of cases, students were clear about prioritising their mainstream education:

‘It’s hard for me to concentrate on the madrassa stuff but eventually, if you work out, if you do your time management correctly then you still have time to do your madrassa homework. I mean sometimes if I get too much then I won’t. I’d leave the madrassa stuff out and just concentrate on my studies but when I have time for everything then I’ll go back to the madrassa and go back to where I left from.’

Madrassa pupil (Bradford)

There was awareness among some of the madrassa teacher interviewees of the need to fit in with a child’s mainstream education, and some spoke of their efforts to ensure children did not have conflicting commitments and timetables. This involved knowing when a pupil was undergoing examinations for mainstream school and adjusting the intensity of the madrassa work accordingly. Another spoke of the need to time lessons appropriately:

‘We have adopted such a timing so the children are able to give all their attention at mainstream school.’

Madrassa teacher (Bradford)

These findings show that there is potential for madrassas to support children in their academic as well as religious lives. Although there is not a strong drive for madrassas to teach national curriculum subjects, there is a desire for them to provide a broad base of support, a joined-up approach and, in some cases, direct involvement in mainstream education. The ability of a madrassa to support mainstream education is highly dependent upon the relationship that exists between both institutions.

4.5 Child welfare

Our research explored the impact that attending a madrassa has on the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children. The range of responses highlighted areas in which madrassas need to urgently change, areas where they could improve, and areas where they offer some real benefits for those attending.

Madrassas are primarily seen as places where children are taught to lead an Islamic life and to be a practising Muslim. Research participants spoke of their role in strongly promoting the adoption of Islamic etiquette and learning ‘right from wrong’. Madrassa activities were seen to build discipline into students’ lives – something that gives them an advantage over Muslims who do not attend.

‘When you look at other students who haven’t been to madrassas there’s a different attitude towards them in society. Rather to sticking to the grounds of Islam, they tend to vary. So me being at the madrassa does keep me strong towards my faith.’

Madrassa student (Bradford)

‘I would say that if they didn’t attend the madrassa, I would say that they would lack a lot of things.’

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

Some also spoke of the obligation parents had to send their children to a madrassa and how it was part of their duty as a Muslim. This was accepted as beneficial by some, but there were others who thought that there was considerable peer pressure on families to use a madrassa in some communities which limited parents’ ability to exercise their own judgement on what would be best for their children.

Pupils past and present tended to view madrassas as somewhere that they would behave well – either because of the strict environment or because they felt more obliged to behave within their religious school compared with their mainstream environment. They also described the higher level of obedience they would have within the madrassa compared with their mainstream school and the reasons for this. With the vast majority attending madrassas as part of their commitment to Islam, there was a feeling that their behaviour was particularly important, with the respect for their religious teachers and fear of the consequences of not being obedient leading to greater conformity:

‘I think it’s the fear of Allah as well and I honestly believe that when you’re praying and you’re learning ... my Mum, she’s teaching the children, she’s like: “If I can’t see, you Allah is watching you” and it’s that spiritual fear. I think that’s been instilled in us as well.’

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

‘Madrassa is a place where you don’t get time to mess about, basically. And if you do, you either get kicked out or a warning, or a phone call home to your parents.’

Madrassa student (Leicester)

‘There was a cultural obedience you felt you had to adhere to. So, in terms of discipline, I think it was easier for the mosque teacher to discipline the child than a school teacher.’

Past madrasa student (Bradford)

A range of approaches to disciplining children within a madrasa were discussed. A method used by one madrasa involves asking children to discuss and develop their own rules for the madrasa which means they are more likely to abide by them. Another works closely with parents to ensure a joined-up approach to discipline in the home and the madrasa. As one madrasa teacher said:

‘We have our rules. When the parents send their children here, they sign this agreement with us. Whenever there’s something serious, then we have a word with the parents and if we think the child is not controlled, we send them home. We are so strict on that.’

Madrasa teacher (Leicester)

In a small number of cases, however, more extreme methods of discipline, such as corporal punishment, were highlighted by participants, suggesting that there are some madrasas who use methods that pose a risk to child welfare.

4.5.1 Safeguarding children

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the problem of child abuse within madrasas has drawn a lot of media attention. Probably the most alarming is the recent BBC Radio 4 investigation where 191 responding local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales confirmed allegations of physical and sexual abuse in the past three years, making a total of 421 cases of physical abuse in madrasas. Even more concerning was the fact that only 10 of those cases went to court, and only two led to convictions.

Box 4.4: Development of legislation on corporal punishment

Since 1986, parliament has increasingly restricted the use of corporal punishment. It was prohibited in all maintained schools in 1987 and in full-time independent schools in 1999. Its use ended in children’s homes in 2001, local authority foster care in 2002 and early years provision in 2007. The Education and Skills Act 2008 amended the Education Act 1996 so that the ban on corporal punishment was extended to certain part-time independent educational institutions.

However, this provision has not yet been implemented and there are a wide set of circumstances – ranging from part-time education and learning settings to evening and weekend faith schools and home learning – where this is no statutory prohibition on physical punishment. In these cases, adults may rely on the defence of ‘reasonable punishment’ if they were charged with common assault for smacking a child in their care.

Some of the concerns about the use of physical punishment have arisen because of allegations about the treatment of children in part-time religious and supplementary schools. Ann Cryer MP argued in the House of Commons that ‘teachers in madrasas or in other religious schools’ should not be exempt from the ban on corporal punishment. It was argued that, while some parents may not object to

such physical punishment, there are others who do not approve but are reluctant to stand up to the power and authority of religious leaders. This applies also in some Christian churches including 'new' and independent churches and those which are popular in African and other ethnic minority communities.

The views of a representative sample of 1,006 general public respondents (aged 18 years and over) were surveyed by Omnibus Agencies on behalf of the independent review for the DCSF. For example, 7 per cent favoured allowing smacking by family friends and 3 per cent agreed that a person giving religious instruction outside of school, in evenings or weekends, should be allowed to smack a child. Fifty-four per cent of respondents agree that someone other than a parent or guardian should be legally banned from smacking a child in their care, while 31 per cent disagree with a legal ban, and 14 per cent neither agree nor disagree.

This issue of the 'reasonable punishment' defence was raised in parliament. In January 2010 David Laws MP and Annette Brooke MP proposed a new clause for inclusion in the Children, Schools and Families Bill to change the law so that only parents and people with parental responsibility could rely on the 'reasonable punishment' defence if charged with common assault for smacking a child.

Since then, an official report¹⁴ was published in 2010 calling for a legal ban on the practice. This was accepted by the Labour government just before the general election. It has not yet led to any action.

The findings of this study suggest that the welfare of children within madrassas is strongly dependent on the quality and approach of the teachers who work in madrassas. As shown in our survey, many madrassas are registered charities which means they are required to have child protection policies in place – although some have said that these rules are easily ignored because of the random nature of checks made by the commission.

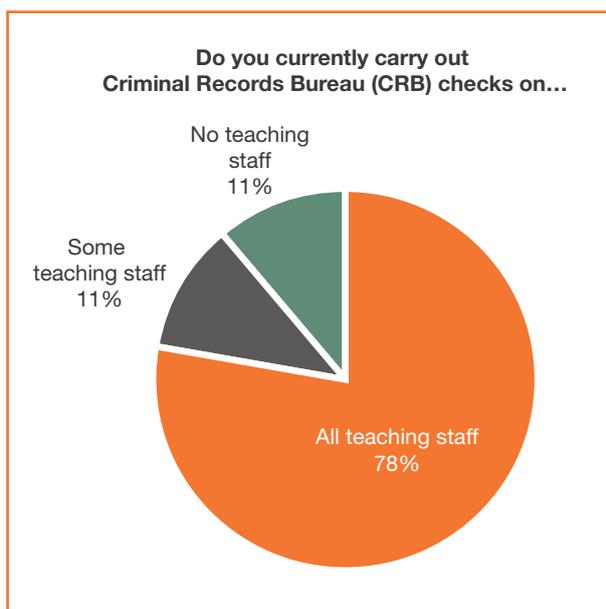
A survey of mosques by the Charity Commission for England and Wales found that, although 94 per cent reported offering educational programmes for children and young people, only 71 per cent had child protection policies in place and 70 per cent gave CRB checks to their teaching staff and volunteers (BMG Research and the Charity Commission 2009). Our survey paints a slightly more positive picture for madrassas but still highlights a need for change. Eighty-one per cent said they had a child protection policy in place and 78 per cent carried out CRB checks on all of their teachers. This leaves 11 per cent of our survey respondents who do not undertake CRBs checks on any of their staff, as shown in figure 4.3 (over).

The qualitative research confirmed that safeguarding was an issue in a small number of madrassas. Some of the interviewees mentioned that physical punishment was used within the madrassas they had been involved in. Specifically, one teacher reported the actions of a previous teacher who would hit the children with a belt. Another previous madrassa pupil spoke of getting hit when they attended a madrassa. Yet another pupil

14 See <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/dcsf-00282-2010>.

said that they were threatened with a stick. This issue was also raised in the workshops. Some parents and previous students spoke of being smacked. In some cases, parents said there was acceptance that force may be used to discipline pupils at madrassas.

Figure 4.3
CRB checks in
madrassas



Six of the stakeholders called for greater regulation and pressure on madrassas to implement CRB checks and one stakeholder felt that child protection was still a significant issue in madrassas. Despite this, the majority of participants recognised the need to ensure children are protected and that positive work was being done. The following quote was representative of many of the sentiments expressed in relation to this issue:

'I don't think that's [child protection] an issue that's commonplace. I think it's certainly something that needs to be dealt with quite forcefully because smacking children is completely and utterly out of order. It's completely against the teachings of Islam. And it just defeats the entire purpose.'

Past madrassa student (Bradford)

There is reason to be optimistic about the ability of madrassas to adopt a stricter approach to safeguarding. There are a range of organisations trying to address the issue and many madrassas have undergone, or are currently undergoing, training in the area of child protection. Many local authorities, charities and Muslim organisations have been undertaking work with madrassas to help them develop safeguarding measures. This is demonstrated in the case study in box 4.5 (over).

Guidance has also been produced by a number of local authorities where there are large Muslim populations – for example, in 2003, Kirklees Council produced a document called *Safe Children Sound Learning: Guidance for Madressahs* as part of an initiative which aimed to: improve child protection policies and awareness within the area's network of madrassas; provide training in positive behaviour management for teachers in madrassas; and promote positive parenting (Kirklees Metropolitan Council Education and Social Services 2003).

Box 4.5: Safeguarding in Madrasahs project

The Safeguarding in Madrasahs Project was set up in 2007 by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the FMO in Leicestershire to create safer working practices in Muslim supplementary schools in their area. The project ran until March 2009.

The project identified 65 Muslim supplementary schools in the county, with over 10,000 children attending. Safeguarding in Madrasahs aimed to address the need for better safeguarding standards in these schools, especially in relation to discipline and behaviour management.

The project aimed to promote standards for a safe environment for children, raise awareness, enhance joint working between agencies, and build capacity of supplementary school staff and volunteers.

The project's main activities involved visiting supplementary schools to identify support needs, providing training, resources, advice and support, CRB checking, and providing sample policies. Madrasahs were assisted in developing guidance, policies and procedures for dealing with concerns about children and young people. The project also aimed to enhance joint working with investigative agencies.

More information is on the project's website: <http://www.fmo.org.uk/component/projects/7> and Leicester City Council website: <http://leicester.gov.uk>

A number of other local councils have since adapted these lessons to produce guidance notes on safeguarding children for madrasahs, mosques and supplementary schools in their own areas. This is demonstrated by the example in box 4.6.

Box 4.6: Bradford Council child protection requirements

Bradford Council requires that all supplementary schools (including madrasahs) receiving their support must comply with their conditions. These include: all staff working with children undergoing an enhanced CRB disclosure; a fully operational child protection policy; a designated person for child protection; and attendance at child protection training.

To encourage supplementary schools, the council, through its Diversity and Cohesion Service, working with its Local Safeguarding Board produced a model Child Protection Policy in 2007. This was translated into various community languages including Urdu and Bengali, to ensure staff working with children in faith-based organisations fully understand their roles and responsibilities when it comes to safeguarding of children and young people. This is further backed up with enhanced CRB checks and child protection training by the council. Positive Behaviour Management courses were introduced in 2009 to support supplementary schools to address challenging behaviour.

Also in 2011, the Council for Mosques and the Local Safeguarding Board jointly funded a child protection social work post, based in the Council for Mosques to advise madrasahs on safe childcare practices.

Despite signs of progress, it is important to highlight the fact that it is unacceptable for any madrassa or other supplementary school to ignore the issue of child protection. As discussed above, there is currently ambiguity around current child protection rules for madrassas. The present legislation on both CRB checks and corporal punishment do not extend to supplementary schools, which is arguably in need of amendment.

If there is reluctance on the part of the Muslim community to voice their concerns around child protection, it is even more important that there are clear guidelines for madrassas to follow and greater awareness around the issue. A number of the people we engaged with raised this as an issue and felt that it is an area where continued work is required. Reassuringly, child abuse is an issue that many organisations have pledged to eradicate but there is a significant gap in terms of legislation which needs to be filled.

4.6 Summary

In some cases, teachers lack training on how to support the social and emotional development of children. But some madrassas are committed to taking a supportive role in the development of children – for example, by providing a pastoral service for issues affecting children. Madrassas can also play a role in increasing children’s confidence and self-esteem where they offer good support.

The value of madrassas in supporting education is mixed. Most madrassas focus on teaching material related to Islam and the Quran which, at times, was limited to teaching based on recitation and rote learning. But there are examples where madrassas provide a broader curriculum, either through increasing children’s understanding of religion or covering mainstream subject areas. But the impact is limited by a number of factors. Only a small proportion support children in their mainstream school subjects and very few madrassas keep formal records on a child’s achievements at their mainstream school or of their SEN status.

There are a number of ways in which madrassas are able to support the educational development of children. Madrassas have strong links with parents, which have the potential to improve the individualised support for children. Increased sharing of information and knowledge between mainstream schools and madrassas is also a way to improve the educational development of children.

The ability of a madrassa to support learning is strongly affected by the skills and knowledge of the teachers. This has been identified as an area in which madrassas can improve, with some teachers lacking the skills and experience to provide effective lessons. In some cases, poor communication between the teacher and students was seen to restrict the learning potential in madrassas. Teachers who are unable to speak English to a high standard were seen as a particular problem in some cases. Despite this, there are some madrassas using innovative methods to help their children learn and develop.

Madrassas are underpinned by a strong sense of discipline, which manifests itself in the lessons they teach to children, the way they are structured as institutions, and the way they are perceived within the community. In some cases, this discipline can be seen to help children become ‘good citizens’ and treat others with respect but this also risks limiting children and parents to a restrictive environment where they are obliged to conform to external pressures.

Some madrassa teachers feel that they have a role to support the emotional and social development of children and there are cases of good practice where this is happening.

Despite this, there are some cases where teachers are not well trained on how to support children in this way. There are also madrassas that risk damaging the wellbeing of children through insufficiently stringent approaches to child protection. One in 10 madrassas do not carry out CRB checks on their staff and there are gaps within child protection regulations that urgently need addressing.

4.7 Recommendations

1. The NRC provides an extremely valuable resource for all supplementary schools – from training and funding opportunities to teaching material. However, there is still a gap in relation to curriculum material for madrassas. One of the DCLG's recommendations for the training and development of Muslim faith leaders (2010) was to establish a National Resource Unit to fill this gap by focusing on the development of curricula in madrassas and mosques and Islamic centres. This recommendation is still valid and matches our previous recommendation regarding the broadening of the curriculum for madrassas. A National Resource Unit should be part of MINAB to also enable developing programmes and guidelines for the teaching of staff that function within these institutions. These programmes and guidelines could also be developed with respect to, and in compliance with, the diversity and school of thought in the Muslim community overall.
2. Better provision for teacher training opportunities offered by consortiums of supplementary schools or other bodies such as NRC. MINAB could play a leading role in accrediting madrassas teachers from overseas. This accreditation process would enable these madrassas teachers to improve their level of English and get a better understanding of the legal framework madrassas need to operate under.
3. Local authorities should use their contacts to help facilitate relationships between mainstream schools and madrassas. Partnerships between mainstream schools and madrassas could be used to help both institutions in a number of ways, for example by:
 - improving madrassas' governance, whereby mainstream schools provide mentoring opportunities for madrassas trustees
 - raising Muslim children's educational standards in mainstream schools by offering community language GCSEs
 - improving teaching methods by developing mentoring or shadowing opportunities in mainstream schools for madrassas teachers
 - responding better to the needs of pupils by enhancing communication between mainstream schools and madrassas, particularly in relation to children with special needs
 - enhancing parental involvement in mainstream schools by building on their high level of participation in madrassas.
4. Under the current regulations, madrassas and other supplementary schools are encouraged, but not required, to have CRB checks for all their staff members. It is up to individual organisations to decide. This leaves a massive loophole in relation to safeguarding children in the supplementary school sector in general, and the madrassas in particular. All supplementary schools, including faith ones, should be required by law to CRB check their staff in order to fully meet their legal obligations, as required by the Children Act 1989.
5. The current ban on physical punishment in schools and other children's settings should be extended to include supplementary schools. A straightforward ban on the smacking of all children engaged in activities outside the context of the family will be

easy to understand and send an unambiguous message of what is not permitted to those organisations and settings where doubt exists or latitude is sought.

6. All madrassas should have child protection policies and health and safety policies. Madrassa staff should not just develop these policies but should be given training and literature on how to properly implement them. A number of local authorities, particularly in the north of England are playing a key role in this area across the supplementary school sector and particularly among madrassas. Local authorities should maintain and build on the progress made in this area, particularly among madrassas that are part of local authorities' supplementary school consortiums. MINAB and other Muslim organisations such as the FMO should play a complementary role by reaching out to less-formal types of madrassas that are neither registered charities nor part of these consortiums.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Madrassas are a greatly valued institution for the vast majority of Muslim families and the sector is thriving within the UK. Despite the strength of the madrassas, the sector is still largely misunderstood, which limits the public understanding of the way they work, their purpose and their effect. This lack of understanding might explain why madrassas are often treated outside the realm of supplementary schools.

This research has provided much needed evidence on the profile and nature of madrassas in the UK. It has explored their potential impact on a range of areas, including identity, community cohesion, educational development of children and child welfare.

Key conclusions stemming from this are:

- Madrassas tend to be well-established institutions, often connected to a mosque and often registered as a charity. The Muslim community perceives madrassas as hugely important and influential institutions. They are well attended and there is a high and sometimes unmet demand within the Muslim community for places in madrassas. But it has been difficult to engage with the less-formal madrassas. Many are not registered in any formal way and it is important to make these informal institutions more visible within communities.
- Madrassas have an important role to play in strengthening the cultural, religious and linguistic identity of their pupils. The teaching of community languages is an important element of many madrassas and this helps children to maintain connection to their cultural background. Despite this, there are cases where teachers may contribute to a division between children's identity between their lives as a Muslim and their lives within the wider community. Imams originating from outside of the UK are sometimes unable to connect with students on the issues that affect the lives of young people.
- Their teaching has a highly religious focus, with the Quran and Islamic education being the core subject areas and imams still playing a dominant role in the teaching within madrassas. Our research shows that, where teaching provides the deeper meaning of the Quran and religious practices, more value is gained by pupils. This is happening in many madrassas but, for some, 'rote' learning is preventing them from providing children with a richer appreciation of their religion.
- Success has been achieved by madrassas who have broadened their curriculum and worked with other faith and mainstream schools to strengthen their provision. The availability of teaching materials, resources and support are central to implementing quality teaching practices. There are many opportunities for madrassas to increase their connections and support networks to improve the way they operate and their teaching quality.
- Some madrassas are failing to provide children with adequate protection and there is a gap in regulatory measures that has the potential to put children at risk. In particular, supplementary schools are not explicitly banned from using corporal punishment and this sends out the wrong message. It is important that more is done to ensure environments where children are supervised by an adult are covered by child protection laws. Increased awareness among the local community and parents on the importance of child protection within any supplementary school environment is also required. This issue needs addressing in an open and informed way. This could be facilitated by strengthening madrassas' governance and bringing them into a more visible forum.

An overarching conclusion of this research is that madrassas are changing as new practices and a new generation of teachers is entering the sector. As a large sector, it is understandable that standards vary. This research suggests that the vast majority of madrassas are striving to provide their pupils with the highest-quality service their funding allows. There are a number of organisations and initiatives which are working hard to improve the quality of madrassas in the UK. It is important that madrassas have access to the good practice that currently exists. Despite this, there are an unknown number of informal madrassas whose standards remain unknown. This research has successfully engaged with a significant proportion of formalised madrassas whose details are publically available, but there is a need for further research to explore the number and needs of informal madrassas.

Throughout the research, the independence of madrassas was seen as extremely important. They are community-based organisations which embody the cultural and religious backgrounds of the families who attend them. It is clear from our findings that any central government initiatives which target madrassas for addressing specific problems may further isolate the Muslim community. For this reason, our recommendations are founded on the principle that change should happen from within the Muslim community and not be externally imposed. Where there is a need for greater regulation, it should not be seen to single madrassas out. But madrassas are having a potentially huge impact on British children and young people, so it is important that more is known about them within wider society, and there is clearly a need for further research to address this.

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