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# ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN THE UK

## AN ANALYSIS ON SOCIAL IDENTITY



Image: (Arshad, 2017)

# INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

- To explore the impact of Islamic schools on the social identity of young British Muslims
- To explain the background and purpose of Islamic schools
- To understand the connection between education and social identity
- To provide two case study examples of when Islamic schools have impacted upon the social identity of young British Muslims
- To present a range of perspectives on the topic of Islamic schools in the UK
- To explore the positive and negative aspects of Islamic schools





# SOCIAL IDENTITY AND EDUCATION

- Education is one of the main constructs of our social identity and self-concept.
- Communication and interaction during our formative years.
- **Self-concept** – the way we see ourselves in a social group and the relationship between that social group and wider society.
- The **extent**, **quality**, and **diversity** of our education predicates our attitudes towards other social groups.
- **Xenophobia** towards the Muslim community has emerged for a variety of reasons, one of which is the construction of Islamic faith schools.

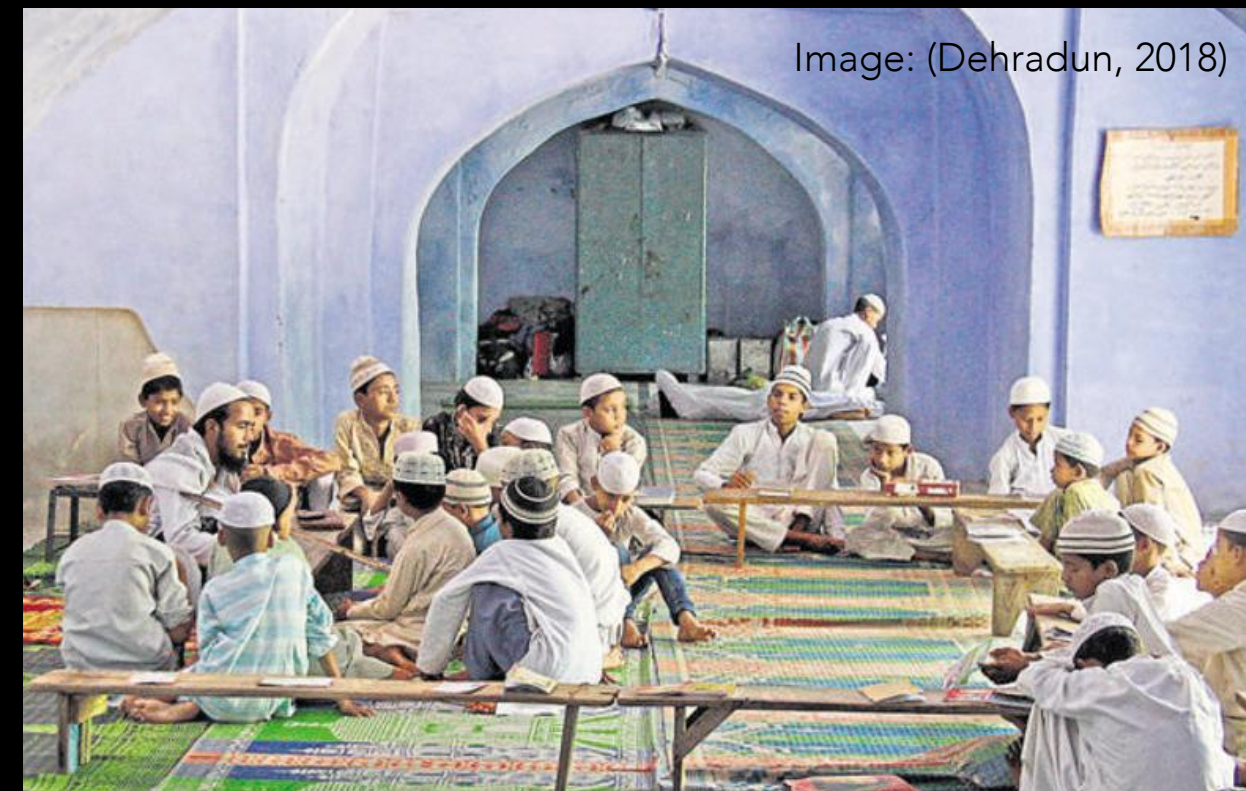
(Jackson, 2004) (Erricker et al., 2012, p197)



# BACKGROUND TO ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

## Historical

- Established since the time of Muhammad in the 7th century.
- Found throughout the Islamic World from Morocco to China.
- Used to ensure accurate teaching of the Islamic faith alongside secular subjects.
- Golden Age of Islam (8th to 14th century) was forged from the scholarly works emerging from madrasas.





# BACKGROUND TO ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

## Contemporary

- Darul Uloom Al-Arabiya Al-Islamia in Bury, Lancashire. First Islamic school in the UK in 1979.
- Islamia Primary School in London. First school to be granted government funding in 1998.
- Segregation of sexes
- Emphasis on the education of the Islamic faith
- An ethos guided by Islamic values
- A faith academy does not need to follow the national curriculum
- Faith school must follow the national curriculum, but can choose to educate religious studies as they wish.

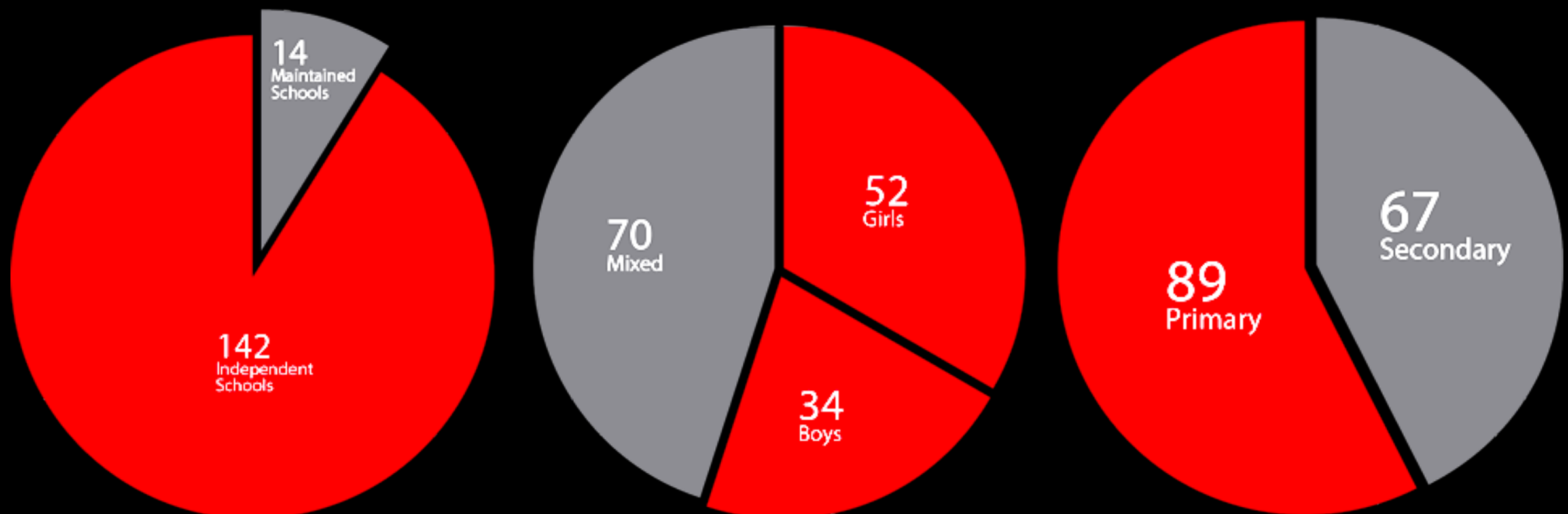
(GOV.UK, 2019)



# PREVALENCE OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

## Findings

- 5% of Muslim children (~24,700) attend Islamic schools.
- 156 Islamic schools in the UK out of a total of 25,000.
- 4 of the top 10 secondary school performances in the UK in 2019 were Islamic faith schools (TRTWorld, 2019).



# POSITIVES OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

- Assurance for Muslim parents that their children are attending a school whose ethos reflects their faith.
- Guaranteed in-depth study of Islam.
- Improvement of the qualifications of British Muslims.
- Success for religious pluralism.

(Ali, 2015) (Erricker et al., 2012, p198, p285)





# NEGATIVES OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

- Lack of integration with people of non-Muslim religious and ethnic backgrounds.
- Segregation of sexes in Islamic schools.
- No obligation to teach other religions – in alignment with Community Cohesion policy?
- Radicalisation remains a concern in Islamic schools.

(Coughlan, 2016) (Weale, 2017)



Image: (Xiao, 2015)



# RESPONSES

## CRITICISM AND PRAISE

- 2002 – Frank Dobson and the Education Bill amendment (BBC News, 2002)
- 2005 – David Bell, head of the Office of Standards in Education, criticised Islamic schools as “demonstrating a threat to national identity.” (Smithers, 2005)
- 2006 – Ofsted criticised the Hijrah School for its sex segregation - (Turner, 2019)
- 2006 – Leader of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain called for the then 700 unregulated madrasas to be subject to government inspection due to reports of widespread physical and sexual abuse. (Smith, 2006)
- 2015 – Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life commented that faith schools are “socially divisive”. (Bingham & Swinford, 2015)
- 2017 – Theresa May pledged to remove the 50% rule which limits the places that free schools with a faith designation can allocate with reference to faith. This led to much campaigning on both sides of the debate.



**Frank Dobson**, former  
Labour health secretary



**Theresa May**, former  
Conservative Prime Minister



**David Bell**, former head in  
Office for Standards of  
Education



**Ghayasuddin Siddiqui**, head  
of the Muslim Parliament of  
Great Britain

# RESPONSES

## IMPACT & CONCLUSIONS

### Impact

- Some critics have only lead to the deepening of divisions between Muslims and other communities
- Alienation of the Muslim community from the rest of British society – particular comments only served to exacerbate the “us and them” mentality.

### Conclusions

- Three distinct groups that play a role in the dialogue on Islamic schools – Faith school supporters – individuals and organisations who present a case for the role of faith schools in society that support religious pluralism and achieve high grade performance for their pupils.
- Faith school opponents – genuine secularist organisations with strong cases for the dissolution of faith schools – they do not utilise the wider political context to their own advantage.
- Fear-mongers – politicians and secularists that are using the “us and them” mentality and the narrative towards Muslims in the political sphere to their own advantage in order to exacerbate hatred and to further incentivise the negative social identity of Muslims.



# CASE STUDY 1

## JAMEAH ISLAMEAH SCHOOL

- School closed down and struck from the Register of Independent Schools.
- Evidence of Islamic radicalisation and terrorist recruitment.
- Another school was caught operating illegally and was subsequently fined.

(Ross, 2007) (Johnson, 2018)





# IMPACT OF CASE STUDY 1 ON SOCIAL IDENTITY

- Demonstrates the issue of radicalisation.
- Demonstrates how extremists will take advantage of pluralism.
- Played into the hands of the far-right.
- Allowed for greater suspicion to fester.





## CASE STUDY 2

### TAUHEEDUL ISLAM GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

- Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School:
- (The Economist, 2019)
- (Butler, 2019)
- (Ofsted, 2014) - Ofsted report for Tauheedul





# IMPACT OF CASE STUDY 2 ON SOCIAL IDENTITY

- Demonstrates that an Islamic school is committed to teaching secular schools to the highest standard.
- Demonstrates that sex segregation isn't an obstacle to achieving high exam performance.
- Demonstrates the success of an Islamic school





# ACCEPTANCE FOR ALL MINORITIES

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# CONCLUSION AND QUESTIONS

- Extremists taking advantage of plurality and diversity.
- Islamic schools have not been positive contributors towards integration of young British Muslims - resolved through inter-school visits. (Erricker et al., 2012, p222-223)
- They should be able to exist just as other religious schools exist e.g. Catholic and Jewish schools. (Jackson, 2004, p47)
- Greater regulation required to ensure the diversity of religious education in order to promote critical thinking. (Jackson, 2004, p56)

Thank you for listening and please feel free to ask me any questions about the research I have presented today.



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