



much time teaching the Koran, Islam's holy book. The newspaper claimed that the school was spending 45 minutes a day teaching religion, 15 minutes above Department of Education guidelines. However, subsequent reports revealed that the department's guidelines are not binding. The school has a slightly longer day to facilitate teaching of the Koran and Arabic. Nevertheless, these negative stories may have contributed to the drop in pupils from 185 to 147.

Along with Muslim-specific classes, both Islamic schools follow the same curriculum as other Irish primary schools. There are no Muslim secondary schools, though the Islamic Cultural Centre plans to develop one in the future. The patron for both schools is Imam Yahya al-Hussein of the South Circular Road Mosque in Dublin. There is nothing novel about this link between religion and education in Ireland: the Catholic Church runs 97 percent of

Ireland's primary schools and 50 percent of its post-primary schools.

A survey of the Clonskeagh school found that nearly 60 percent of the pupils do not speak English as the main language at home. The Department of Education provides a language support assistant teacher for every 14 non-English speaking children. However, the quota is capped at two teachers per school. The Muslim National School has over 200 children who need language assistance.

Zillur Rahman is the Vice-President of the voluntary Sunday School in South Circular Road Mosque. The mosque was the subject of racist threats in the aftermath of September 11th. Despite this, Rahman says Islamophobia is not as big a problem in Ireland as it is in larger countries, particularly the US and UK. Rahman says this is

partly because Ireland has not seen "any offence committed by radical Muslim groups."

Zillur Rahman's daughter, Shauna, is a journalist. She grew up in Ireland and attended Irish schools. She was used to being the only person of mixed race in her class and enjoyed the experience. "I loved it and learned so much about the Catholic religion and everyone was eager to learn about mine." Though there were some problems. "There was uproar in my school when a teacher excluded me from a class because of my religion," says Shauna. "She didn't last very long."

While she agrees with her father that Islamophobia is not a major problem in Ireland, she says "people are frightened and feel threatened when Islamic culture is displayed on our streets." After the September 11 attacks she noticed "Muslim people receiving racist taunts on the streets". As part of a news article Shauna wore the hijab (the Muslim head scarf) for a day

around Dublin. "I was extremely aware of suspicious eyes and even Muslim girls looking at me curiously," she says. "The only time I feel comfortable wearing it is in the mosque as you are one of many in there wearing the same."

Zillur points out that foreign nationals feel the need to retain their culture in a new country. "They do not approve of their children picking up Irish cultural habits which offend their own." At the same time their children are much more open to soaking up elements of their adopted culture. Shauna worries that "dedicated Muslim schools insulate young Muslims from Irish culture". Both father and daughter see mixed religion schools as viable alternatives.

Zillur is optimistic but cautious. "Let Muslims feel the Irish nationalism the same way as the Irish - and not feel themselves always as foreigners."

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Far photo: photobucket.com.
Clonskeagh mosque photo: flickr.com