

# Islamic Primary Schools

W.A. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld

Published in W. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld:  
Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects.  
Kok Pharos, Kampen 1992, pp. 107-123

© No part of this article may be reproduced or copied without  
acknowledgement of the authors and source

The existing constitutional freedom of education allows for the foundation of confessional schools which are fully financed by the State, both Christian and Islamic ones. Islamic schools do not have, as some may think, a different curriculum taught in language other than Dutch. Just like the other confessional schools, they have to comply entirely with the requirements laid down by law, which, among others, implies that teaching should take place in Dutch\*.

There have been long discussions on the motives for parents to found these schools. The main motive seems to have been the wish to have their children educated, particularly at a primary school level, in a way contributing to a cultural-religious personality development in an Islamic spirit. The current situation in denominational and non-denominational schools, where children of an Islamic background hardly receive any religious Islamic education at all, is an additional factor stimulating the foundation of these schools. A third factor prompting the parents to opt for the solution of an Islamic school is their dissatisfaction with the poor level of education in the schools available, expressing itself in the low number of allochtonous pupils moving on to secondary and higher education, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of Pupils and Students in the Educational Sector

Type	Dutch	%	Turks	%	Moroc.	%
Primary <sup>1)</sup>	1.332.580	44.1	34.734	66.0	35.199	65.3
Secondary <sup>1)</sup>	672.252	22.2	6.866	13.1	6.591	12.2
Special <sup>2)</sup>	99.161	3.3	2.200	4.2	3.143	5.8
Lower occ. <sup>1)</sup>	233.927	7.7	6.490	12.3	7.667	14.2
Second. occ. <sup>1)</sup>	290.039	9.6	1.552	3.0	915	1.7
Higher occ. <sup>1)</sup>	219.812	7.3	533	1.0	278	.5
University <sup>3)</sup>	175.854	5.8	239	.5	122	.2
Total	3.023.625	100.0	52.614	100.0	53.915	100.0

Source: CBS

(1) 1989/90 (2) 1989/90; includes special forms of primary and secondary education for pupils with learning difficulties, mental and physical handicaps. (3) 1987/88.

From this table the arrears of Muslim pupils in the higher forms of education are at once clear. Whereas Muslim pupils are overrepresented in primary schools and at the lower levels of occupational education, they suffer from an outspoken underrepresentation at all secondary and higher levels, including university.

In a letter to the Lower Chamber about the "Foundation of primary schools based on Hindu or Islamic principles" the previous Secretary of State for Education pointed out that there are no reasons to assess the foundation of these schools in an essentially

different way from those of other denominations.(1) Apart from possible advantages she also pointed out a number of likely drawbacks of such denominational schools.

A likely gain is considered to be the strengthening of the pupils' self-confidence resulting in better social positions and integration into Dutch society. Drawbacks which could arise were an increased sense of isolation, the formation of groups based on separate languages and nationalities, and as a result of this an impeded knowledge of Dutch as a second language and diminished opportunities to develop socially within Dutch society.

At a preliminary discussion by the Central Board of Educational Consultations, on 19 December, 1988, the representatives from various umbrella organisations of the various types of schools found in The Netherlands criticized the first draft of this letter by the Secretary of State. According to these critical remarks the tendency to found such schools was an undesirable development, "a clear sign of the failure of the Dutch educational system at this moment". The philosophy underlying these schools was in a violation of the main goal of the Government's educational policy, entailing the "basic idea of intercultural education: the living and learning together of children of different backgrounds".(2)

This point of view first of all ignores the wish of the parents already referred to above to have their children educated in an Islamic spirit. The reason for the coming into being of the Islamic schools is not primarily to be found in the failure of the schools available to provide an adequate education. Secondly, it should be pointed out that intercultural education is intended for non-denominational as well as denominational schools, and so does not replace denominational education. It could be argued that denominational and intercultural education as such are mutually exclusive. However, within the existing constitutional freedom of education this can be no justification for denying Islamic parents the right to have their own schools, on a par with Christian parents. It is worth mentioning that the political discussion concerning the Islamic schools has been continuing up till the present day, with recent contributions by the leader of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) who opposed them, and the Dutch Prime Minister (who belongs to the Christian Democratic Party ,CDA), arguing in favour of denominational education in general, including Islamic schools.

## **Current Situation**

The first Islamic primary school was founded in 1988. In the course of the year 1989-1990 this number was increased to six. At present (1991-1992) there are twenty such schools, mainly concentrated in the larger urban centers with a considerable number of Muslims. Three of them have been founded on the initiative of the ISNO (Islamic Foundation in the Netherlands for Education and Upbringing). The ISNO is linked to the Turkish ISN (Islamic Foundation in the Netherlands), which runs a number of Turkish Islamic mosques and, among others, mediates in the appointment of imams in The Netherlands by the Turkish Government (the Presidium for Religious Affairs in Ankara).

In connection with this the ISNO, just like the schools associated with it, wants to stick deliberately to the interpretation of Islam as it is propagated by the Government in present-day secular Turkey. This also becomes clear in their policy with respect to the contents of the religious education, and their lenience with respect to the observance of an Islamic code of behaviour by staff and pupils within these schools. Consequently, these schools can be considered liberal.

Apart from these there are seventeen more Sunnite primary schools, which were

founded on the initiative of various *local* groups or organisations. Among them there are communities affiliated to the umbrella-organization of the *Milli Görüs* (a Turkish Sunnite religious-political movement of an outspoken orthodox character), a local branch of the multi-ethnic Islamic Women's Organization, *Al-Nisâ'*, and various Islamic-Moroccan communities(3). These autonomous schools can all be qualified all as "orthodox Sunnite", although on the basis of their statutes two different types can be distinguished among them.

The first type, represented by seven schools, was founded on the initiative of mainly orthodox Turkish groups. The specific ethnic origin of these schools can still be observed in the current ethnic composition of the pupils and the school boards, where, apart from pupils and governors from various ethnic groups, Turks occupy a predominant position. Apart from minor emendations and variations, the statutes of these seven schools are identical. Most of them speak about education in general, thus keeping the possibility open of taking steps towards the future foundation of secondary Islamic schools (1). As their goal they state the organization of the education for Muslim children (2). Education should be based on "the equality of all philosophies of life and social tendencies, in the sense that pupils will be able to adopt an attitude to life based on the Qoran and Sunnah by taking these two as points of departure in order to make a contribution of their own. All this, with due respect to the philosophies of life and society of others" (3). Islamic religious education within the broader context is mentioned as obligatory in all statutes (4). The statutes contain no further stipulations as to the composition of the boards (5) and the parents' associations (6), or as to the rules of conduct to be observed by the teaching staff (7). Finally, no mention is made of a religious institution which has the authority to decide in case of disputes of a theological nature (8).

The second type, represented by nine schools, was founded on the initiative of mainly orthodox Moroccan groups. This specific origin of these schools can still be observed in the current ethnic composition of the pupils and the school boards, where, apart from pupils and governors from various other ethnic groups, Moroccans occupy a predominant position. Apart from minor variations, these schools have identical statutes, as well. They explicitly concentrate their activities on the founding of Islamic primary schools (1), without specifying the religious background of the children the schools are primarily meant for (2). Most of the statutes mention that the starting-points, attitudes and goals of the schools, as well as the behavioral rules to be observed in them, are or will be mentioned in a separate appendix a copy of which is or will be attached (3,4,7). As an example the appendix of the statutes of the "Foundation for Islamic Primary Schools in 's-Hertogenbosch and Surroundings" may be mentioned. It states, among other things, that instruction will be given in accordance with the Qoran and Sunnah. There exists no affiliation of the schools with any specific current within Islam. The purpose of the schools is to guide the children in their various phases of development in such a way that a foundation will be laid enabling them to become adults who, in freedom and maturity, will be capable of participating up to the mark in Dutch society, while being loyal to Islam as their rule of conduct. A knowledge and an understanding, e.g. of all aspects of God's creation, will be developed in accordance with the normative views of Islam. Apart from the Qoran and Sunnah, attention will be paid to the history of Islam, to Islamic civilization and the Arabic language. Other philosophies of life will also be dealt with, in a respectful manner. The pupils will be trained to develop proper social behaviour and to develop various motorial skills, a.o. through classes in gymnastics and swimming. The schools will observe the Islamic feasts, prescriptions and customs. Instead of celebrating Christian holidays and

anniversaries, they will pay proper attention to the two annual Islamic feasts. During these feasts the schools will be closed for two and three days. During the week of Carnival the schools will, however, continue their lessons. Instead of the customary Wednesday afternoon, the schools will give Friday afternoons off. There will be no smoking in the schools, female teachers will wear headscarfs and wide clothes. In addition to these points the statutes stipulate that the governors of the schools must be practising Muslims, while the boards should be composed of as many nationalities as possible. Members of the boards or parents' councils should not be involved in any political or nationalistic activities on behalf of their countries of origin (5,6). Finally, in case of any dispute concerning the correct interpretation of Islam, a binding decision will have to be asked for from the theological committee of the Islamic Centre, "El Ouakf", (affiliated to the Muslim World League) which has its headquarters in Paris. Before the dispute is submitted to the centre in Paris, the matter should, however, be discussed with the Dutch member of the said committee.

Both types of schools aim at following the Qoran and Sunnah and at educating their pupils for a full participation in Dutch society. Nevertheless, the point of gravity in the orientation of the second type seems to be leaning rather towards the Islamic world, whereas the first type of school seems to orientate itself primarily towards Dutch society. It remains to be seen, however, in what way these different ways of orientation will be worked out in the future activities of these schools in a practical way. In contrast to the ISNO-schools mentioned before, the later seventeen schools can be characterised as conservative. This appears, among others, from the contents of their religious education and the observation of the Islamic rules of behaviour by staff and pupils within these schools.

#### *Ethnic Backgrounds of the Pupils*

In the table below one finds an overview of the numbers and ethnic backgrounds of the pupils in these schools in the autumn of 1991.

*Table 2. Numbers of Pupils and their Ethnic Origin\**

	Tur.	Mar.	Sur.	Tun.	Pak.	Oth.	Tot.
Alphen - An Noer	-	81	-	-	-	-	81
Amersfoort - Bilal	93	46	-	-	-	6	145
Amsterdam - As-Siddiqschool	211	188	-	-	-	71	470
Amsterdam - Mimar Sinan*	68	27	-	-	-	-	95
Amsterdam - El F.O.	61	33	-	-	-	19	113
Arnhem - Ibn-I Sina	53	15	-	-	-	1	69
Bergen op Zoom - El Feth	-	61	-	-	-	-	61
Ede - El Inkade	19	66	-	-	-	-	85
Eindhoven - Tariq I. Ziyad	39	90	9	-	-	9	147
Enschede - El Ummah	53	8	-	-	-	-	61
Helmond - S. Ayoubi	-	90	-	-	-	12	102
Leiden - Er Riseleh	2	106	-	5	-	9	122
Roosendaal - Assalaam	2	69	-	-	-	5	76
Rotterdam - Al Ghazali	139	86	5	2	19	2	253
Rotterdam - Ibni Sinaschool	90	9	-	-	4	-	103
The Hague - Y. Emre1)	20	99	-	7	6	-	132

\* No data available for the following schools: Almere - Al Imam, 's-Hertogenbosch - Imam Elbogari, Nijmegen - Abibakar, Schiedam - El Furkan.

Tun. in this table stands for Tunisian, Pak. for Pakistani and Oth. for remaining ethnic groups (Egyptian, Somalian, Sudanese, Lybian, Dutch, Indonesian, etc.).

(1) Data for 1988/1989

From these data it may be deduced that in one of the three ISNO-schools (the Yunus Emreschool in The Hague) the Moroccan pupils clearly are in the majority, even though this school was founded on a Turkish initiative.

The total number of pupils at the Islamic primary schools listed in table 2 is 2,092. The total number of them at all the Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands can be estimated at 2,612, yielding an average of 130 for the schools not listed in the table. Of these pupils 850 (32.5%) are Turks, 1,047 (41.1%) are Moroccans. Moreover, from tables 1 and 2 the conclusion may be drawn that only 3.7% of all the Muslim children in Dutch primary schools attend Islamic schools. From among the Turkish pupils 2.5%, whereas from among the Moroccan pupils 3.1% attend these schools.

At present, there are no non-Muslim children among the pupils at the Islamic schools. The headmasters of the autonomous schools are of the opinion that their schools are in principle open to all pupils, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, on the condition that their parents respect the Sunnitic-Islamic founding principles of the school and that these pupils attend the lessons in Islamic religious education. The ISNO-board of governors have argued that non-Muslim children may be exempted, if so desired, of the obligation to attend Islamic religious education, while possibly special facilities for religious education based on their own beliefs could be created for them.

#### *Ethnic and Religious Backgrounds of the Teachers*

The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the teachers of these schools show a completely different picture, which is mainly caused by the lack of sufficiently qualified Islamic teachers in The Netherlands.

*Table 3. Ethnic Origins and Religious Beliefs of the Teachers\**

	Tur.	Mor.	Sur/ Ant.	Mol/ Ind.	Du.	Tot.	Of whom muslim
Alphen - An Noer	-	1	3	1	3	8	2
Amersfoort - Bilal	-	2	-	-	9	11	2
Amsterdam - As-Siddiq	3	3	14	1	17	38	14
Amsterdam - M. Sinan	-	-	2	-	7	9	-
Amsterdam - El F.O.	1	2	11	-	1	15	10
Arnhem - Ibn-I Sina	1	1	1	-	4	7	-
Bergen op Z. - El Feth	-	-	1	-	3	4	1
Ede - El Inkade	-	-	-	-	6	6	-
Eindhoven - Tariq I.Z.	1	2	2	-	10	15	4
Enschede - El Ummah	1	-	1	-	4	6	1
Helmond - S. Ayoubi	-	-	1	-	6	7	-
Leiden - Er Riseleh	-	1	1	-	9	11	2
Roosendaal - Assalaam	-	-	-	-	6	6	1
Rotterdam - Al Ghazali	2	1	10	-	10	23	9
Rotterdam - Ibni Sina	1	-	5	-	2	8	5
The Hague - Y. Emre1)	-	-	4	-	4	8	1
Total	10	13	56	02	101	182	52

\* No data available for the following schools: Almere - Al Imam, 's-Hertogenbosch - Imam Elbogari, Nijmegen - Abibakar, Schiedam - El Furkan.

Teachers of the so-called "languages and cultures of their own" are not included.

(1) Data for 1988/1989

From these data it appears that the vast majority of the staff members of these schools have non-Islamic backgrounds (71.4 v 28.6%). It is worth mentioning that the percentage of Turkish and Moroccan teachers at these schools is very low, 5.5% and 7.1% respectively, and at four of the schools Muslim teachers are even completely lacking. Furthermore, the relatively high number of Surinam-Antillian teachers (30.8%) is striking.

The reasons for this situation are: (1) a deliberate policy of Islamic schools to prefer non-native teachers, as they are better able to cope with the problems arising in educating non-native children; (2) a greater readiness on the part of these teachers, as compared to native Dutch teachers, to work in these schools; (3) a smaller chance for these teachers to find a position at a Dutch primary school.

The fact that most teachers are not Muslims and consequently know little or nothing about Islam is admitted to be a handicap. Several schemes offer a solution. In the ISNO-schools one day in every two months is devoted to discussions between the teachers and the headmasters of the schools on Islam and on the problems arising between teachers, on the one hand, and pupils and their parents, on the other hand. Apart from this teachers are stimulated to study Islam. In some of the other schools special in-service training-courses in Islam for non-Islamic teachers are being organised.

One problem which deserves special attention is finding adequately qualified Islamic teachers to teach religious instruction. The law presupposes that in denominational schools class-tutors are responsible for religious education. Special teachers of religious instruction are not being subsidized, which is different from the policy of many of the local authorities with respect to religious education in non-denominational primary schools.

As has been pointed out before by far most of the class-tutors at these schools are non-Muslims. Until these schools have at least a majority of staff members of an Islamic background at their disposal, it will only be possible to solve this problem if the Government, at least temporarily, should be prepared to subsidize the appointment of special teachers or Islamic religious education. We recommend that the Government should take positive steps here.

### *School Boards*

There are a number of differences in the ways the three ISNO-schools, on the one hand, and the thirteen autonomous schools interviewed, on the other, are governed. The ISNO coordinates and supports local initiatives to found schools and during a trial-period its central governing body also functions as governing body for the newly founded schools. At present this is still the case. In the near future local governing boards are however meant to be created, in concurrence with the statutes of local foundations.

A close link between the local schools and the ISNO will however be maintained in these statutes. Thus, the first local governing board has been appointed entirely by the ISNO (for a period of four years) and, just like any other of the future boards, cannot conclude any financial transactions without the approval of the ISNO.

The other schools, on the contrary, are the result of local initiatives without the interference of any national coordinating organ, and they, consequently, are autonomous. Nevertheless, the group of schools qualified by us, on the basis of their statutes, as being "oriented towards the countries of origin", mention a religious authority which has decisive power in cases there are theological disputes. In the statutes of the other schools no such organ is mentioned. Although at present by far most of the boards are of a multi-ethnic composition, one can still deduce from which (ethnic) community the initiative has mainly come. The multi-ethnic composition of

these boards seems to reveal pragmatical rather than ideological motives, viz. the desire to increase the possibilities for recruiting pupils. This is illustrated in the table below:

*Table 4. Ethnic Backgrounds of the school boards<sup>1)</sup>*

	Tur.	Mor.	Others	Tot.
Alphen - An Noer	-	7	-	7
Amersfoort - Bilal	3	3	1	7
Amsterdam - As-Siddiqschool	2	-	2	4
Amsterdam - Mimar Sinan	3	-	2	5
Amsterdam - El F.O.	-	3	1	4
Arnhem - Ibn-I Sina	2	1	-	3
Bergen op Zoom - El Feth	-	5	-	5
Ede - El Inkade	2	5	-	7
Eindhoven - Tariq I. Ziyad	1	3	1	5
Enschede - El Ummah	3	1	1	5
Helmond - S. Ayoubi	-	5	2	7
Leiden - Er Riseleh	-	2	1	3
Roosendaal - Assalaam	1	5	-	6
Rotterdam - Al Ghazali	3	1	1	5
Rotterdam - Ibni Sina'school	4	-	1	5
The Hague - Y. Emre <sup>2)</sup>	2	-	5	7

<sup>1)</sup> No data available for the following schools: Almere - Al Imam, 's-Hertogenbosch - Imam Elbogari, Nijmegen - Abibakar, Schiedam - El Furkan.

<sup>2)</sup> Data for 1988/1989

#### *Umbrella Organizations*

The Law on Primary Education (WBO) requires, in Article 40, that the proper authorities of a denominational school, particularly with respect to the legal protection of the teaching staff, should be associated with a Committee of Appeal. Article 42 stipulates that the work of the Committee of Appeal should extend to at least 50 denominational schools. Apart from this, denominational schools are obliged, by virtue of the Resolution of Payment, to deposit a sum as security before the authorities will agree to bear the costs for founding and managing the school.

For these and similar matters there exist, for denominational schools, so-called umbrella organisations. Until recently the Islamic primary schools had been associated temporarily with one of the existing native umbrella organisations, as they had been unable to fulfil the minimum requirement of 50 schools necessary to establish their own umbrella organization(4).

The former State Secretary of Education reduced the required number of 50 schools laid down in Article 42, of the WBO, to a minimum of 10 schools (5). Consequently, the six schools existing in 1989, in cooperation with the schools which were then in the course of being set up, together founded the Islamitische Scholen Besturen Organisatie (ISBO) as their umbrella organisation from 27 February, 1990, onwards. They assumed that the total number of Islamic schools in operation in the schoolyear 1990/1991 would be 14 (6 existing + 8 newly to be opened schools) (6).

Considering the widely divergent character of the schools united in the ISBO conflicts were likely to occur. In fact, the three ISNO-schools were expelled from ISBO in 1991 a decision which is disputed by ISNO. At the same time ISNO approached the national umbrella-organization for Catholic primary schools in order to study the

possibility of an eventual affiliation. Whether it will be possible to keep the two remaining types of orthodox-conservative Islamic schools permanently united in one umbrella-organization remains to be seen. After all, in particular in the case of labour conflicts the (diverging) standards and values of these schools will be put to the test. It cannot be denied that it is not unlikely that once one of the other of the two orthodox groups has reached the required minimum of ten schools it will decide to establish its own umbrella-organization.

## **The Special Character of Islamic Primary Schools**

### *Religious Education and OETC*

One or two hours of religious instruction per week are taught at all the schools mentioned above. At the same time two hours of OETC per week are taught as part of the curriculum. With respect to the language in which religious education is provided we can say that this normally happens in the language of the children's parents. Where there are significant numbers of children from different Islamic groups religious education is provided at different hours in the language of each of the groups. So, at one and the same school religious instruction is taught in Turkish, Arabic and Urdu. A remarkable exception is constituted by the two largest schools of all, the Al-Ghazali school in Rotterdam and the As Siddieq school in Amsterdam, where significant numbers of Turkish and Moroccan pupils attend the classes and which provide religious education in Dutch with occasional references to quotations from Qoran and Hadith in Arabic. This confirms the above-mentioned attitude of these schools towards Dutch society. Both schools are in the process of developing their own methods and materials for Islamic religious education, in contrast to the schools of type 2 and of the ISNO, which mainly use materials from the countries of origin.

In the ISNO-schools Turkish, and sometimes also Moroccan imams, are in charge of (religious) education. In the other schools instruction is provided by imams, volunteers, OETC-teachers or Islamic class-tutors. Experience has shown that, for the sake of the continuity of religious education, volunteers will have to be replaced by better structured provisions.

In the mean time initiatives are being taken to establish an Islamic Pedagogical Study Centre which, among others, aims at preparing the necessary educational materials to be used in the classes in religious education, in the Dutch language. Recently, a group of Muslims of various ethnic origins has prepared a report containing elements for a teaching plan, "Islamic religious education at primary schools", published with state subsidies (*Aanzetten*, 1991). After a theoretical discussion of the problems to be solved in developing a teaching plan for Islamic Religious Education (IRE), the report discusses the Islamic image of man, the pedagogical concept to be adopted in IRE, the general goals of IRE, its didactical goals and approaches and the spreading out of the subject-matter over the various stages of the primary schools. The actual introduction of these and of comparable materials to be produced by an Islamic Pedagogical Study Centre in the near future may considerably change the practices existing in IRE as described above.

### *The Carrying out of Islamic Rules*

Apart from religious education the denominational character of a school can also be revealed in all sorts of aspects having to do with the contents of education itself, and in the observation of various other Islamic rules of behaviour. With respect to the contents of the educational material, particularly at the autonomous schools, the books to be

used, such as books on biology and history, are tested whether or not they are compatible with Islamic standards. Thus in one of these schools, for example, a story in which a youthful pangs of love occurred was removed from the book to be used.

At all of the schools boys and girls of groups 1 through 4 sit in separate rows in the class-room. At some of the schools this pattern is continued in the remaining groups. Only at two of the schools boys and girls are placed in separate classrooms from groups 5 onwards (so from the age of 9 or 10). Three factors seem to determine these patterns, viz. the degree of orthodoxy of the school board, the number of pupils and the number of class rooms available. The same pattern holds true for physical education. In many cases there are no swimming lessons, because the municipal authorities do not make their swimming pools available for such lessons, which last twice as long as those of mixed classes. Occasionally, at an ISNO-school, the higher groups take part in mixed physical education or swimming (depending on the parents' permission), on the occasion of which the parents are free to determine their children's outfits. Furthermore, at the orthodox schools girls are strongly advised to wear a scarf, which, in fact, they almost always do.

#### *Halls of Prayer, or not*

With respect to performing the salat (prayer) there is also a clear difference to be perceived between the autonomous schools, on the one hand, and the ISNO-schools, on the other. In the former schools prayers are normally held at lunch-time by the older children (from group 5 onwards). In these schools the necessary arrangements have been made to this purpose, such as a prayer-hall and facilities for the ritual ablutions (wudu). In the ISNO-schools only within the framework of religious education are instruction given in how to perform the salat, while the central board of governors has up till now rejected all the requests from the parents' council to have a room set aside permanently, to be used as a prayer-hall. This way the ISNO-board of governors thinks it will lend the school as much a lay character as possible, which is in keeping with the current situation at schools in Turkey.

#### *Festivals of their own*

Instead of celebrating Christian festivals and anniversaries, all Islamic primary schools pay special attention to the Islamic festivals, Id al-Adha ('Festival of Sacrifice') and Id al-Fitr ('Festival of the breaking of the fast', at the end of the month of Ramadan). During and around these two festivals these schools are closed for a few days. To decide about the exact time of the daily prayer and of Id al-Fitr the autonomous schools are mainly guided by the information obtained from the Islamic World League in Saudi-Arabia.

The ISNO-schools, on the other hand, get their information on the Islamic calendar via the official guidelines from Turkey. Moreover, these schools together, with some of the autonomous schools also have one day off per year on the occasion of the birthdayfestival of the Prophet. In most of the autonomous schools the Wednesday afternoon off has been replaced by the Friday afternoon, as a consequence of which the special significance of the Friday for Muslims as a day for the weekly joint prayerservice is emphasized.

The headmaster of an ISNO-school, on the other hand, argued that they had deliberately chosen to have Wednesday afternoons off, so that their children would have the same afternoon off as the Dutch children of the district. In the Islamic primary schools information about the meaning of non-Islamic festivals such as, for example, St. Nicholas is transmitted though, but they are not celebrated.

### *Dress of the Teachers*

With respect to clothing and conduct of the teachers the rules in the autonomous schools are stricter than those in the ISNO-schools. Thus, women teachers are expected to wear loose-fitting clothes and some kinds of headcovering. Furthermore, no physical contact between teachers and older pupils of the opposite sex is allowed. In some schools it is also not allowed for teachers to be together with pupils or parents of the opposite sex in a separate room or without others present.

### *Contacts with the Government*

Although the Constitution, in principle, allows the foundation of Islamic primary schools it appears, in practice, that the local governments have to overcome much resistance to this process, in the municipal councils as well as in educational circles. The resistance within the municipal councils has been commented upon by us elsewhere (7).

As an example of the feelings of resistance existing within educational circles we can mention the letter of protest, sent by fourteen primary schools to the Councilcommittee of Education in Rotterdam on 12 February, 1990, to react against the decision to incorporate an Islamic school in the district of Crooswijk in the Educational Planning Scheme for 1990-1993. The undersigned expressed their fear that the educational aspects, such as fluency in Dutch in a group with a concentration of non-native Dutch pupils, should not be underestimated. The coming into being in the recent past of so-called "black" and "white" schools has already led to such a concentration, along with the related educational problems. The setting-up of an Islamic school would only exacerbate the problems, the undersigned, claimed. It is significant that, even though a considerable number of those having signed belong to denominational schools, not a single word was said about the positive aspects of the initiative to set up an Islamic school.

Moreover, some of the protesting schools are already predominantly populated by pupils from the non-native groups and so the feared concentration with its accompanying educational problems is already a matter of fact there. It is difficult not to get the feeling that this is a case of selective indignation, a phenomenon which has also been detected by us elsewhere in denominational schools with a high percentage of Islamic pupils (8).

### *Two Case Histories*

Serious administrative disputes about the setting up of Islamic primary schools have taken place in two cases so far. First of all in Utrecht, where the local authority refused to cooperate because the school concerned would not only have a religious but also a purely national (Turkish) basis, for which reason it would be incompatible with the Primary Education Law. This case is now to be decided upon in the final instance by the Council of State (9).

In 's Hertogenbosch the ISNO appealed to the Provincial Executive of Noord-Brabant against the decision of the local authorities not to accept an ISNO-school in the Scheme of new primary schools for 1990-1993. The argument of the Local Authorities was that in the scheme mentioned a denominational school of general Islamic character had already been included and that it, moreover, had not become evident that the school the ISNO had applied for was of a different character. By the ISNO it was argued that, as a matter of fact, they were applying for a school of a different character within Islam. When asked, the ISNO pointed out that the school they were applying for would be guided by the Hanafite School, while the other school, already included in the scheme,

would be guided by the Malikite School. The difference between the two law schools could be compared with the difference between 'liberal' and 'conservative'. This difference would manifest itself in the manner of teaching, the manner of approaching pupils and parents, and particularly in the instructions on how to dress at school. The Provincial Executive decided in the ISNO's favour (10), but its decision was annulled by the Council of State on February 22, 1991.

The decision taken by the Provincial Executive is to be considered correct, but the grounds on which the decision was based are not sound. Between the two schools there indeed exists a difference in 'persuasion'. As it appears from her statutes, the 'Stichting Islamitische Basisscholen in 's-Hertogenbosch en Omgeving' does aim at promoting Sunnite education, but does not expressly want to be associated with any movement or law school within Islam. These statutes also require women teachers - pupils are not mentioned - to wear scarfs and long and wide clothes (11).

As has been pointed out before the ISNO, on the contrary, is guided by a particular movement within Sunnite Islam, namely the one supported by the Turkish Government. It is, however, incorrect to explain this difference in 'persuasion' on the basis of the Hanafite and Malikite schools of law. Among the adherents to both persuasions one finds liberally, respectively conservatively, orientated Muslims. So it is not so much the Hanafite or the Malikite school of law, but rather the desire whether or not to be guided by one particular movement within Islam, which determines the real difference in 'persuasion' between the two schools.

#### *Schools Advisory Service and Inspection*

Apparently, the schools' advisory services have assisted the schools in getting started. The assistance above all entailed advice on the acquisition of methods and material for the teaching of Dutch, which, especially in these schools is of crucial importance. Some people argue that to improve the linguistic skills of the pupils an individual approach would be preferable to class or group education. In the present set-up this is however impossible.

Remedial educationalists of the schools' advisory services concerned appeared to have been consulted by a relatively high number of children from Islamic primary schools. The explanation given, also by the inspectors, was the non-selective admission by the Islamic primary schools, in particular during the starting period. Consequently, a relatively high number of 'problem-children' were admitted to these schools.

The second reason has to do with the different standards between the various schools from which the first few generations of new pupils of the Islamic primary schools had come. Consequently great differences in development and level of knowledge within one form could occur there where groups of pupils were formed with age as the only criterium. Both phenomena mentioned before were characterised by inspectors as well as school advisers as the 'growing pains' of Islamic primary schools.

#### *Participation of Parents*

Those in favour of Islamic schools have repeatedly argued that these schools would be more accessible to non-native parents. This is only partly true. From the involvement of the parents in the parents' associations it is evident that they are indeed more involved in what is going on at school than is often the case elsewhere. At the same time the schools' advisory services have pointed out that the participation of the parents leaves much to be desired. This could also have to do with the fact that in most schools the form teachers are predominantly Dutch-speaking.

The critical question was raised by the schools advisors and inspectors to what extent

some of these schools really succeed in transferring an Islamic identity to the pupils. The school governors sometimes fail to issue clear guidelines about which aspects of Islam should be taught and which rules should be observed, which, particularly for non-Islamic teachers, could raise problems. But even if they did, it would still remain doubtful whether one would be able to create an Islamic atmosphere at a school where the majority of the teaching staff are not familiar with Islam from within. As long as this situation prevails tension will continue to exist between the expectations of the parents, on the one hand, and the pedagogic-didactic perceptions of the teachers, on the other.

### *High Expectations*

The schools inspectorate issued two official reports on the functioning of Islamic primary schools, on July 3, 1989, and February 28, 1990, respectively. The second report concluded that education in these schools hardly differed from that in other Dutch primary schools. The inspectors had high expectations of the performance of the Islamic primary schools in terms of a higher number of pupils moving on to a higher education in future. They however also mentioned the strong prejudices against Islamic primary schools. Even Dutch primary schools harbour such prejudice. They often consider Islamic primary schools to be competitors and have little or no contact with them.

### **Notes**

\* This chapter is an updated version of the authors' initial research paper on the Islamic schools in The Netherlands, published in *Samenwijs*, September 1990, pp.19-23. Other publications on this topic are Wagendonk, in: Shadid-Van Koningsveld (eds.), 1991; Theunissen, 1990.

(01) Tweede Kamer 1988-1989, 21 110, nr 1

(02) Account of the 157th meeting of the CCOO, Zoetermeer December 19 1988, 16-28.

(03) Cf. Shadid-van Koningsveld: 1990, 24, 36.

(04) Cf. Shadid-van Koningsveld: 1990, 125-6.

(05) Letter of 13/10/1989 no. BSG/SP-89017631

(06) Letter ISBO to the State Secretary of Education d.d. 19/3/1990

(07) "Bijzondere scholen voor etnische groepen in de lokale politiek" SAMENWIJS, januari (1989), 155-157.

(08) "Een numerus clausus voor islamitische leerlingen op p.c.-basisscholen?" SAMENWIJS 10 (1990), 303-304.

(09) See also: Shadid en van Koningsveld, Moslims in Nederland (1990), 127.

(10) Letter of the Provincie Noord-Brabant No. 94965/111684 d.d. 29 January 1990.

(11) Statutes d.d. 15 February 1989 passed by notary T.F.J.C. van Lotringen in 's-Hertogenbosch and appendix of the same date.