Appendix J

‘Improving Participation of Muslim Girls in Physical Education and School Sport, Shared Practical Guidance from Birmingham Schools, 2008; Chp. 2 & 3 Changing and Swimming respectively

Many schools are already using different support approaches to the inclusion of Muslim girls. Each school offers different opportunities and constraints, mainly related to facilities available, for example there are primary schools with their own sports halls and secondary schools with their own swimming pools but this is uncommon. Headteachers and staff have shown creativity in finding positive local solutions to issues raised and characteristics of good practice are shared to further clarify and improve issues surrounding the inclusion of Muslim girls in physical education and school sport. Good practice is evident in schools that have an ethos based on inclusion and respect for diversity, and where leadership establishes a culture that promotes personalised learning, high expectations and high self-esteem.

Positive relationships enhance trust and ensure that learning and teaching takes place enabling every student to have equal opportunities to achieve their potential. The Leadership Teams of such schools set high standards and model best practice by ensuring that all school policies and practices are regularly monitored and evaluated to achieve their stated outcomes.

The Muslim Council of Britain Guidance (2007) “Meeting the Needs of Muslim pupils in state schools” starts with recognising the high importance of education in Islam and the need for all to pursue knowledge and learning. Inside the document there is much support for children’s participation in a broad and balanced physical education programme, with regard for Islamic requirements.

“Physical education is a very important part of school life and full participation is to be encouraged, in order to develop a healthier lifestyle. Physical education is a compulsory part of the national curriculum at all key stages. There are some basic Islamic requirements for modesty which need to be considered in order to remove any unnecessary barriers for Muslim pupils to participate fully in physical education and swimming in particular.” (Muslim Council of Britain (2007) “Towards greater understanding: Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools: Information and guidance for schools, London: MCB).

3. Swimming

Every possible avenue should be explored to find a solution to enable children to learn to swim for obvious lifesaving reasons.

Also because: “where it is a statutory experience in the national curriculum, and in order to ensure the development of a genuine life skill, the option for a pupil to be excused the activity cannot be implemented other than to place the school and possibly the individual teacher in contravention of laws of the land.”

(Health and Safety Project Manager, AfPE)

4 Education Acts 1996 and 2002 regarding schools’ and parents’ responsibilities to provide and ensure children’s participation in the national curriculum.
For Schools and Pools

- Allow flexibility in the wearing of costumes that cover the body more fully, when preferred. Sportswear designers have started to find attractive solutions,

- Encourage wearing of the swimming cap, it covers the hair and protects the pool,

- Reassure children who become anxious having accidentally swallowed water during Ramadan. This is never intentional and is indeed unpleasant and undesirable,

- Provide all-female environments where requested by parents and schools. This has proved highly successful in enabling Muslim children to learn to swim. Pool and school flexibility have brought solutions, for example amalgamation of classes or co-ordination with other schools.

Recommendations for Local Authority Pool Providers

Sometimes an impasse is reached where schools can do no more to meet the needs of Muslim pupils in swimming because of structures and systems beyond their control. In these cases, it is suggested that local authority personnel with responsibility for management of pools continue to work with schools and the local community to seek positive solutions, for example:

- Consider separating times for public access and schools’ access to pools. This would give schools greater control over the changing and swimming environments,

- Prioritise the recruitment, training and retention of female pool staff, and more creative ways of using current expertise. (Evidence indicates insufficient female staff to provide an all-female pool environment. Some good initiatives are starting with training in all-female environments enabling Muslim women to participate),

- Improve policy and practice on separate-sex swimming times where there is demand, and publicise with the help of schools to attract more members of the public,

- Involve stakeholders in problem solving, including city council staff, teachers, parents and pool staff, in order to share difficulties and seek solutions.