



مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم
Abu Dhabi Education Council
Education First **التعليم أولاً**



Summary Inspection Report

Al Dhafra Private School

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Iqraa

Al Dhafra Private School

Inspection Date	11 th – 14 th February, 2013
School ID#	017
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	American and British
Number of Students	1115
Age Range	3 – 18 years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Daniel Bokelman
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Introduction

The school was evaluated by a team of 6 inspectors who observed 83 lessons and other student activities, scrutinised students' written work, analysed student and school performance data, studied school documents, analysed the parents' questionnaire returns, met with a member of the Board and talked with staff, students and parents.

Description of the School

Al Dhafra Private School, Abu Dhabi was founded on 1st September 1983 to cater for students from over 30 countries worldwide. Initially the school offered education from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 6. Over time more grades were added and in 1995 the school was relocated to villa premises in Abu Dhabi. More recently, in September 2012 the school changed location again, moving from Abu Dhabi City to Mohammed Bin Zayed City into purpose built new premises. The school's mission is to: develop every student's full potential academically, socially and morally, regardless of gender, race, disability, creed or personal background; to create competent and responsible citizens of today's global society who will be good members of their society in the UAE or abroad, and to collaborate with students, parents and community members in the lifelong learning process.

The school has 1115 students with 18% Emarati, 72% from other Arab countries and the remaining 10% made up of other nationalities. The school is organised into four sections: Kindergarten (KG) 145 students; Elementary, Grades one to five 408 students; Middle school, Grades six and nine 328 students and High School Grades 10 and 12 234 students. There are roughly equal percentages of boys and girls. Approximately 2% of students are identified as having special needs including specific learning difficulties and physical disabilities. Students wishing to enter KG are invited to visit in order that their readiness for school can be assessed. Students in Grades one to eleven sit entrance assessment to ensure that they have the required levels of skills in English and mathematics for them to access the curriculum and that the school can adequately support any learning needs they may have. Students must also have a positive track record of work and behavior from their previous schools to be able to enroll.

For students who were at the school prior to September 2012 the school fees range from 11,880 AED in Kindergarten to 17,820 AED for Grade 12 students. For those students joining the school this academic year, fees range from 20,000 to 37,000 AED. Reflecting the new school fee levels, students are increasingly coming from relatively advantaged backgrounds. Teachers' annual salaries range from 90,000 to 168,000 AED with an average of 129,000 AED. There are four Board members, including the owner of the school and the Principal.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band C

Grade 6

Inspectors judged Al Dhafra Private School to be in Band C; that is a school in need of significant improvement.

The last inspection graded the school as in need of significant improvement. There were a substantial number of recommendations including: the development of students attainment and progress; the quality of teaching; the breadth and balance of the curriculum; the writing and implementation of a Child Protection policy; the need to radically improve the buildings and address the lack specialist facilities; dealing with safety and security and issues of overcrowding and the urgent need to resolve breaches of ADEC regulations.

Inspectors this time saw notable improvement in some areas. The buildings and facilities have gone from being inadequate to high quality with the final stages of the buildings programme to be completed by September 2013. Safety and security are of a very good standard and the school is no longer in breach of ADEC requirements. The curriculum is now satisfactory and improving; it has greater breadth and balance with the addition of art, music, physical education and computers. The school is benefiting from the positive impact of the new Principal and leadership team and its capacity to improve further is good. In order for the school to continue improving the curriculum needs to be further developed and the progress that is starting to be being made in improving the quality of teaching and learning needs to continue.

Many children start KG with age appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding, but they do not make satisfactory progress during their time in KG. Those with slightly higher starting points do not improve on their advantage so that by the end of KG children do not have the full range of skills necessary for the next stage of their learning. Their control of small objects, their fine-motor skills, is under developed. In Arabic and Islamic Studies children make acceptable progress. They start these subjects at an earlier than required age. In Arabic KG children are able to identify the sounds of letters and know the difference between long and short vowel sounds, in line with age expectations. This ensures that they are at the right starting point in their Arabic skills as they enter Grade one. Children demonstrate appropriate listening skills in both Arabic and English.

In all key subjects the attainment of students from Grade one to nine is lower than age related expectations and their progress is generally slower than expected. In English, students speak with confidence and fluency and use age appropriate levels of vocabulary. In both Arabic and English written work, particularly extended writing for a range of purposes, is under-developed. Reading skills in Arabic are below expected levels because students are confined to reading the textbook and attainment is based on memorisation of information. In mathematics, students' skills in problem solving and the application of their knowledge are below expected levels and many are insecure in their mental mathematical strategies. In the higher grades knowledge in science is strong but practical

and investigative skills are limited. Scientific knowledge is insufficiently linked to everyday experience.

Some students start to make better progress in Grades six to nine. Of the small proportion of students entering examinations in English, mathematics and science, IGCSE performance is above world averages. The pace of progress seen in Grades six to nine is not maintained beyond Middle School, so that by the time students are in Grades 10 to 12, their performance in mathematics and science barely meets international standards. The performance of students following the US curriculum from Grades nine to 12, is assessed through non-standardised, teacher assessments. The outcomes of these assessments show that their attainment is in line with US curriculum standards. Students' attainment, in developing critical thinking skills and using computers and other Information Communication Technology (ICT) within all subjects, is lower than expected.

Students enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good levels of attendance (94.75%) and their punctuality when arriving to the start of lessons. Students have positive attitudes in lessons and are respectful to their teachers and peers. They demonstrate self-discipline both in lessons and at times when they are less tightly supervised such as when they are moving between lessons, at break times and as they depart at the end of the school day. Students have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. For example, they initiated an increase in the range of healthy foods available in the canteen. There are too few opportunities for students to develop leadership skills by taking on roles of responsibility in lessons or around the school. Additionally, students are not yet able to demonstrate sufficient ability in cooperative learning, independent thinking and research skills because not enough of their lessons plan for this to happen.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge that ensures accurate learning and provides precise explanations in most lessons. Students are respectful to their teachers and in almost all lessons the positive relationships and good behaviour of students promotes appropriate attitudes to learning. Teachers enable individual students to share ideas with the class. Most teaching is enthusiastic and motivates students to stay on task and complete their activities. The majority of teachers do not use questioning effectively to probe students' thinking or to evaluate the understanding of the wider group. Teachers provide too much support and explanation, and this limits the development of independent learning. Limited use is made of the results of assessment to adjust planning and teaching in lessons. As a result, learning activities are not planned to meet the needs of different groups of students. This means that tasks do not sufficiently support students who need additional help or provide suitable challenge for the most able. There is an over-reliance on commercially produced textbooks and worksheets which limit interactive learning. There is limited use and development of ICT to support learning in all subjects. In KG, teachers' understanding of how young children learn best is insecure; there is an overemphasis on whole-class teaching, few opportunities are provided for children to explore and enjoy hands-on experiences, and tasks are too repetitive and lack progression.

The school offers an American curriculum, based on Virginia standards, from KG to Grade 12. In addition, from Grade nine students can opt to follow UK based IGCSE, AS and A Level examination courses. The curriculum also includes music, art, physical education, French and computer lessons, which add appropriate breadth and balance. The American curriculum is reviewed regularly and includes some planned modification and adaptation that add relevance and interest for students. The school offers Arabic and Islamic Studies to the children in KG, which is a positive addition. In too many subjects the curriculum delivery is over reliant on textbooks. There are too few opportunities for students to develop their computer skills across subjects. Curriculum implementation gives limited attention to developing practical investigative skills in science and there are not enough opportunities for application and problem-solving skills in mathematics. Curriculum planning and implementation in lessons does not adequately meet the learning needs of all students, particularly high achievers and students needing additional support with their learning. The school does not provide sufficient access to a range of out-of-school and extra-curricular activities.

The school provides a safe, secure and attractive learning environment and students feel well cared for and secure. The month long anti-bullying campaign very effectively reinforced understanding about appropriate behaviour. Staff are committed to supporting the personal development of students. The school responds quickly and positively to parental concerns and this ensures that the care and safety of students is a priority. Developing systems for tracking and supporting the academic progress of all students are not yet embedded. Teachers not are using assessment during lessons sufficiently in order to identify individual student needs, especially students with special educational needs, those who find learning difficult and high achievers. Students and parents receive helpful advice about whether to follow US or UK courses from Grade nine onwards. However, students in the Middle School are not given sufficient guidance about AS and A Level options to be able to make secure subject choices for their university places and future careers.

The school is newly built, is an impressive facility and would be the envy of many school communities. It provides a safe, clean and hygienic environment suitably supporting the curriculum in all areas. It boasts an indoor swimming pool, 7 science laboratories and a growing number of dedicated ICT rooms. It provides a high quality and pleasurable environment for both students and their teachers to learn and work in. Corridors and stairs are wide enough for students to circulate safely. All hazardous materials are stored safely and electrical equipment is regularly tested. The KG provides good facilities for children to use large play equipment and develop their gross-motor skills. The facilities for science, ICT and PE are already of a high quality and are continuing to improve. The second floor of the building is not yet in operation, but is intended to provide further ICT capacity. The multi-purpose sports hall, squash court, further outdoor sports spaces and the large auditorium are due to be completed and fully operational by September 2013.

The school now has a reasonable and improving level of resources to support the curriculum and to promote better learning. The quality and quantity of science equipment is of a high standard. All classrooms are equipped with top of the range

Interactive whiteboards and data projectors and all classrooms have wi-fi access in place. The quality of ICT resources in the computer laboratories is another strong feature. Some elements of resources need to be enhanced further. For example, the amount of books and other resources in the school's library are not yet adequate to support the learning needs of students. To their credit the school already has plans to address this. Resources in KG for young learners are not yet sufficient, especially to develop manipulative skills and promote creative, independent learning and play.

The Principal joined in May 2011 and a new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was created to lead and manage the school. Together they have established a positive ethos and built strong links with all stakeholders. Highly positive and effective relations have been developed with parents: they reported excellent levels of communication with the school and almost all were satisfied with the way it handles complaints. Responses to questionnaires sent to parents were also extremely positive: they are enjoying opportunities to play an increasingly active part in a multi-national school community.

Similarly, students were fully committed to, and proud of, their school. They know that they are listened to and their ideas contribute to the continuing improvements. The Board are supportive, have clearly defined roles, and provide sound financial planning but as yet do not provide governance to the school as 'critical friends' of the Principal and other senior managers. The transition from the old villa buildings to the new school premises was an enormous challenge. With strong leadership the school managed the move effectively and efficiently. In doing so, they ensured that the momentum for school improvement was maintained.

The process of self-evaluation involved the whole school and the outcome was realistic, giving the school an accurate picture of the key strengths and aspects needing further development. Areas for improvement were prioritised and focused on the need to improve students' performance and develop the quality of teaching and learning. A programme of professional development is underway. Not all teachers, especially those for whom English is not their first language, are able to access the training adequately. Staff are loyal and retention of teachers is high. This ensures the stability of staff and allows professional development to potentially have long-term impact on raising students' attainment and progress.

The middle management structure has been more recently put in place and is at a very early stage of development. The roles of the middle leaders are not yet fully understood by all and there is inconsistency in the way subject coordinators manage their subject, monitor teaching and learning, analyse data, review the curriculum and the development of their subject areas. Whilst a variety of data is collected, the analysis of this is at a very early stage. It is not yet being used to help inform curriculum changes and to identify

professional development priorities in order to raise standards and progress. Tracking and monitoring of students' academic and personal development is at an early stage of development.

Systems and processes have been put in place and management structures introduced to give a solid base from which the school can develop further. These initiatives are very much in their infancy and it is too soon to be able to judge the impact of them on students' performance. The Principal provides strong leadership and clear direction. SLT have a shared vision, the energy and commitment and the combined skills to drive further development. Consequently, there is good capacity for the school to continue to improve. The school provides satisfactory and improving value for money.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Continue to develop the quality of teaching and learning through targeted training opportunities, which meets the needs of all teachers.
2. Support rapid student progress by:
 - i. ensuring that teaching and learning in all subjects and at all stages is of a high quality; and
 - ii. providing students with clear and specific learning targets so that they are well informed about what they need to know, understand or be able to do next in order to improve.
3. Further develop the curriculum to:
 - i. meet the learning needs of all students, including those students who need additional support and the high achievers who need greater challenge;
 - ii. provide greater opportunities for students to develop ICT skills, research and critical thinking skills;
 - iii. enable students to develop their investigative and practical skills; and
 - iv. provide more opportunities for students to participate in a greater range of out-of-school and extra-curricular activities.