



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



Summary Inspection Report

Abu Dhabi Grammar School (Canada)

Published in 2013

Iqraa

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Inspection Date	3 rd – 6 th June, 2012
School ID#	049
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	Canadian (Nova Scotia)
Number of Students	780
Age Range	KG–Grade 12
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Annmarie MacInnes
School Address	PO Box 27161, Tourist Club Area, Abu Dhabi
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Introduction

The Inspection was conducted by a team of four inspectors, accompanied by a serving Emirati principal under the Irtiqa'a inspector training programme. The team observed 104 lessons. Inspectors held individual meetings with teachers, administrators, students and parents, and carefully considered appropriate school documents to evaluate how well it achieved its stated goal of maintaining a 'tradition of excellence'.

Description of the School

The school is located in the city centre. It was founded in 1994 and moved to its present location in 2008. In 2009, a major construction project included a new swimming pool, dance room, music room, science laboratory and 10 additional classrooms. Further additions in 2011 included another science laboratory and a film studio. The school has three sections. Elementary includes kindergarten (KG) to grade 6, junior high grades 7–9, and senior high grades 10–12. The school is owned and administered by the director who was also the principal until August 2011, when the principal was appointed on the basis of her Nova Scotia credentials and leadership experience.

There are 67 students in KG2, 360 in the primary grades, 219 middle, and 134 upper. Approximately 83% of the students are Muslim and 58% Arab. There are 441 boys and 339 girls. Enrolment for next year is anticipated at 826 students. The diverse population includes Canadian, Jordanian, Egyptian, Syrian, American, Lebanese, Palestinian, Malaysian and Sudanese students, with 82 UAE nationals. The school provides 37 identified students with support for special educational needs.

All of the 58 full-time teachers are qualified and licensed, and the majority of the 41 Canadian teachers are certified by the province of Nova Scotia. The teaching contract includes accommodation, an annual flight home, medical insurance, an end of service benefit. Monthly salaries range from AED 7,300–16,000. Annual fees are in the high to premium category: AED 19,236–40,656.

The school follows the Public School Program (PSP) set by the Nova Scotia Department of Education. Any student who accumulates 18 Nova Scotia education credits between grade 10 and grade 12 is eligible for the High School Graduation Diploma of Nova Scotia. The province grants one graduation credit for Arabic studies and 0.5 credits for Islamic studies. The Nova Scotia Diploma attests

to a high level of achievement at international standards. It is important for university entrance. The Nova Scotia Department of Education inspects the school annually.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band B

Grade 5

Inspectors judged Abu Dhabi Grammar School to be in Band B; that is a school judged to be satisfactory.

The last inspection in 2010 placed the school in the high-performing category. The report recommended the development of a more diverse management structure, with greater objectivity than could be expected from a principal who is also the owner. Academically, it recommended more rigorous assessment practices to track students' individual needs and achievement, better lesson planning and delivery to ensure development of higher-order thinking skills, greater variety in learning activities, and expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and skills development. These recommendations were consistent with those made in the 2010/11 Nova Scotia Department of Education annual inspection report, which also listed mandatory changes such as the engagement of a Nova Scotia-qualified principal.

In the current inspection, the team looked at the changes since the last inspection with a keen eye on their impact on learning. The appointment of a suitably qualified and experienced principal last year addresses the mandatory issue, but the team did not see enough evidence of progress on resolving the other recommendations, particularly in developing students' skills as effective independent learners, to warrant a repeat of the last grading. Some clear academic strengths are outweighed by limitations in teaching and organisation. Students at the high school level have the opportunity to achieve the highly regarded Nova Scotia Graduation Diploma. In 2010/11, 87% of the graduating class went on to first- and second-tier national and international universities. The younger grades have the benefit of fully certified Canadian educators trained in the latest and best practices. They attend a well-appointed school and are nurtured each day by caring, sincere adults. They benefit from a wide choice of extra-curricular opportunities, including overseas travel. However, the school cannot meet its aim of 'excellence' until it expands its leadership and management structure to encompass more professional development for its young staff.

An effective entry process includes assessment of capability in literacy and numeracy, supplemented with a personal interview. Regular assessment is maintained through four reporting periods. The school is blending ADEC and Nova

Scotia reporting procedures to introduce a more international report that balances academic grades with personal development, and attempting to wean parents off their traditional dependence on percentage-based reporting. It has started to use Nova Scotia provincial assessments of numeracy and literacy in grades 3, 6, 8 and 9. Baseline data places Abu Dhabi students slightly below provincial expectations. Standards are broadly satisfactory in English, mathematics and science. It is similar in Arabic and Islamic studies although not enough time is devoted to study the deeper aspects of social studies related to the UAE. Regular social studies as part of the Nova Scotia curriculum are satisfactory particularly considering the focused Canadian history content. Progress in English, science and mathematics, while inconsistent, shows a better trend towards greater understanding and attainment in the senior grades. Significantly, the second year of testing in Grade 6 shows improvement in literature, with handwriting equal to or above Nova Scotia average standards. The school is encouraging the use of running records in elementary grades and tracks results using the Fountas and Pinnell assessment system. The timetable is being adjusted to increase English language training, and thus conform to the Nova Scotia 'Time to Learn' strategy.

Classroom teaching schedules have been adjusted to bring them more in line with international standards, increasing teaching load from 22/35 to 25/35 lessons per week. Planning teams are being formed to assist students with special educational needs, and annual professional growth plans and evaluation reports are being developed and implemented to monitor and assess teachers' competence. These are all positive plans and initiatives. However, they are taking time to develop and implement, and the school does not yet have a suitable management structure, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, to support their implementation.

Students' ICT skills have been identified as inadequate over the last two years. There is no ICT curriculum for KG through to grade 9, so standards in ICT are low and students are not developing their technical and related independent research skills. Recent action has been taken to improve resources, such as the provision of wireless internet in every classroom, and each teacher now has a computer. However, there is no computer lab and ICT skills are limited to occasional in-class research using personal computers. The school has been unsuccessful in applying to ADEC for a fee increase to fund improvements in its ICT resources. In contrast, a robust Arts programme at the senior level provides students with high-quality teaching in art, music, video production, drama and dance. This leads to good outcomes for the students in these areas.

The students are happy. There is a wide choice of activities, particularly at the senior level, and the space is used well considering the site restrictions. The climbing walls and swimming pool are a bonus. The inspection team did not observe any appreciable misbehaviour, although the principal is kept busy with minor altercations. A code of conduct is displayed prominently throughout the school and a parent/student contract is in place. Attendance is high (95%) and engagement in the classrooms was positive and industrious.

Some aspects of the formal, structured aspects of personal development are inadequate. There are no regular assemblies. The school has plans to hire a counsellor/social worker for next year, but at present there is no dedicated person to provide guidance or counseling. There is a child protection policy, but insufficient work has been done to ensure everybody understands the implications of it. Not enough attention has, in the past, been paid to UAE culture and values. The playing of the national anthem and flag-raising have only recently been introduced. There is an effort to include UAE cultural and historical sites in field trips and cultural nights, but cultural awareness is not yet sufficiently embedded in the daily life or curriculum of the school. The prayer area is neither clean nor sufficiently well cared for.

All teachers are ADEC licensed and the majority are Canadian qualified with university degrees. They deliver an internationally-recognized Canadian curriculum. Content knowledge is strong and classroom atmosphere is positive, supportive and friendly. Students at the senior level seem particularly highly motivated towards acquiring a Nova Scotia Graduation Diploma. However, there are some notable areas of weakness in teaching. The range of classroom activities is limited and there is a strong dependence on didactic teaching in the junior grades, where students have little opportunity for interactive learning. Planning typically takes no account of the full range of learning abilities in each class, and is focused firmly on activities from the set curriculum rather than what different groups of students need to learn. This all results in a mixed picture of improvement in the skills that students need for their later lives. There is insufficient progress being made by those students who find learning more difficult as well as those who are more able. For younger students, there is a gap in the development of higher order thinking skills because teaching is predominantly didactic whereas in the higher grades, students are challenged to reach conclusions and express opinions. Nevertheless, there is a friendly, busy atmosphere in classrooms even though students are not always achieving the deep knowledge and understanding that they should be.

The curriculum is well defined in Nova Scotia documents. It is age-appropriate and sufficiently motivational to graduate the majority of students with an international diploma. At the junior level, numeracy and literacy curriculum outcomes are defined and the recommended activities are engaging and well resourced. French is compulsory for students in grades 3– 9 although teaching time will be reduced next year in favour of the ‘Time to Learn’ strategy.

UAE social studies is under-represented at all levels. Health and safety education is only taught discretely in Grade 5. Healthy living is included in other grades through other subjects, but not enough to equate to a full subject. Support staff are available in KG and Grade 1 classrooms, but they are not trained in education and contribute little to the students’ learning. Overall weaknesses in implementing the curriculum to meet the range of different needs in the school and insufficient emphasis on key skills, such as ICT, limit its effectiveness.

Students’ welfare is given a suitably high priority. Moral fitness checks have been completed on all staff. Good behaviour is expected and rewarded through the ‘Gotcha’ program – an informal but effective positive reinforcement initiative. Attendance is recorded appropriately, and there are suitable procedures to track and follow up any absent students within 30 minutes of the school opening each morning. Corporal punishment is banned and the school has a first-class clinic staffed every day with a qualified nurse.

There are also some weaker aspects of care. Bus maintenance is monitored but students are dropped off in areas accessed by the public, and are not adequately supervised to make sure they enter the school safely. Buses are equipped with seat belts but they are not used. Some examples of weak safety standards were noted and pointed out to the principal. These included for example, chemicals inappropriately stored within students’ reach. There is a published child protection policy, but teachers are not sufficiently aware of how to detect incidents of abuse and what procedures to follow in such cases. KG students are dismissed to adults without parental accreditation, and this dismissal procedure is chaotic and disruptive to the older grades. The provision of special care and learning support for students with special educational needs is not based on carefully detailed plans and procedures.

The school is restricted by its inner city location. It has made significant improvements to its facilities in the last few years. Sun shading, expanded play areas and fine arts classrooms illustrate a positive effort to offer students a rich learning environment. The school is generally kept clean and well maintained, supported by compliance records. Soft padding on the KG playground and completion of safety features for the climbing walls would make these areas more

useful and accessible. There are insufficient resources to support learning through purposeful play in KG classes. Resources for numeracy and literacy development have been increased over the last two years. The school is rich with displays of students' work and the classrooms have a range of reading resources to support literacy. The library is not used well enough to develop students' skills but does contain a suitable range of books in English, Arabic and French. The school cafeteria is licensed and has been moving towards healthier choices.

The owner has worked hard to improve the site, engage competent staff and has allocated significant funds to improve resources. The experienced Nova Scotia principal has ambitious plans to improve learning practices and meet ADEC's international standards. These developments have yet to make a significant impact on improving the effectiveness of the school. There are some systems in place to support self-evaluation but they are not used effectively to plan school improvement. The school's governing board does not yet hold the school sufficiently to account. A family council is being formed to facilitate communication between school and parents. A student council, formed this year at the high school level, is active in planning the social life of the school. Parents indicate satisfaction with the school, and 91% said in questionnaires that they are pleased with the education provided. Teachers are qualified and motivated. A representative group of staff confirmed satisfaction with the terms and application of their contracts.

However, far too much is expected of the principal who has insufficient senior management support. It falls on her to develop school improvement plans, develop and supervise professional development opportunities, educate young teachers about child protection issues, liaise with Nova Scotia to strengthen international connections, and run the school on a day-to-day basis. Administrative support is available to maintain attendance records, communicate with parents on routine matters, run off worksheets and co-ordinate standardised tests. However, there is insufficient co-ordination of all these activities and where they spill over into academic issues, the people responsible do not have enough of an educational background to be able to deal with them. The principal's unrealistic workload places significant constraints on the school's capacity for further improvement.

Fees are high and despite there being clear areas for improvement, student outcomes are satisfactory and value for money is therefore satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Raise the quality of teaching and learning in all grades, by:
 - i. ensuring teachers use assessment data, particularly in literacy and numeracy, to match teaching to students learning needs;
 - ii. ensure that children in the KG are able to learn through purposeful play based activities that match their development needs;
 - iii. linking what is taught within the curriculum between the junior and high school;
 - iv. monitoring and evaluating teaching and providing training based on the outcomes of this to raise the performance of individual teachers;
 - v. providing students across the school with opportunities to develop and use higher-order thinking skills and ICT skills; and
 - vi. ensure that teachers understand child protection issues so that they are able to properly care for their students.
2. Deepen students' exposure to, and understanding of, UAE culture and values through:
 - i. taking every opportunity to integrate these aspects across the curriculum while meeting the requirements of the MoE curriculum; and
 - ii. refurbishing and properly maintaining the prayers rooms.
3. Improve the effectiveness and impact of leadership and management, by:
 - i. establishing an effective leadership structure with clear roles and responsibilities; and
 - ii. training leaders so that they can full fill their roles, for example, in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and in helping teachers to improve.
4. Address the health and safety issues that were shared with the school.