



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



Inspection Report

Al Dhafra Private Schools, Al Ain

Academic Year 2013 – 14

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Al Dhafra Private Schools, Al Ain

Inspection Date	9 – 12 March 2014
School ID#	139
Licensed Curriculum	English National Curriculum, American curriculum,
Number of Students	2,627
Age Range	3 to 18 years
Gender	Mixed (KG 1 – Grade 3) Separate (Grade 4 – Grade 12)
Principal	Elham Al Abed
School Address	PO Box 17814, Al Manaseer District, Al Ain
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School Website	www.dhafra-alain.sch.ae/
Date of last inspection	8 - 11 October 2012

The overall effectiveness of the school

Inspectors considered the school in relation to 3 performance categories

Band A High performing (overall effectiveness grade 1, 2 or 3)

Band B Satisfactory (overall effectiveness grade 4 or 5)

Band C In need of significant improvement (overall effectiveness grade 6, 7 or 8)

The School was judged to be:	BAND B;	GRADE 5
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The main strengths of the school are the:

- high attainment in UK-based external examinations in Grades 10 to 12
- students who show a high level of sensitivity and respect
- curriculum that is planned and implemented to meet the needs of students with different ability levels
- successful introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum
- positive atmosphere and protective attitude towards the health, care and safety of students
- quantity, quality and appeal of science resources and the provision of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) throughout the school
- well-prioritised and continuous professional development.

The main areas for improvement are:

- students' writing skills in English and Arabic
- increasing opportunities for students to ask questions in lessons
- understanding among Kindergarten (KG) teachers of how young children learn best
- use of assessment for learning by all teachers to plan lessons that challenge high ability students
- size of some classrooms and specialist facilities for the number of students and to support the curriculum
- the library with adequate provision of fiction and non-fiction books and information computer technology (ICT) resource to promote research and literacy skills
- the development of systems to accurately track student attainment and progress.

Introduction

The school was inspected by a team of 6 inspectors who observed 101 lessons as well as assemblies, break periods and students' arrival and departure. They met with school leaders, teachers, students and parents. Inspectors scrutinised students' written work, and analysed performance data and documents provided by the school. In addition, 552 responses from parents to a questionnaire about the school were analysed.

Description of the School

Al Dhafra Schools Al Ain opened as a villa school in 1989 and moved to its present location in Al Manaseer district in Al Ain in 2001. The school's vision is 'to provide outstanding education that inspires students to be self-disciplined and independent life-long learners, who are innovative leaders and critical thinkers. This is done within a supportive and advanced technological learning-focused environment'.

There are 2,627 students in total: 1,338 boys and 1,289 girls. They are organised into three sections and located in three adjacent buildings: KG to Grade 3; boys Grades 4 to 12; and girls Grades 4 to 12. There are 446 children in KG, 1,232 students in Grades 1 to 5, 616 students in Grades 6 to 9, and 333 students in Grades 10 to 12. Almost all students are Muslim; 92% are Arabs and 56% are Emirati. Of the remaining students, 10% are Jordanian, 8% Egyptian, 6% Syrian, 3% Omani and 3% Palestinian, small numbers are from 35 other nationalities. 27 students are identified with special educational needs (SEN); the range of learning needs include moderate learning difficulties and developmental delay. An additional 210 students between Grades 1 and 12 are identified with English language learning difficulties. Student admission procedures include an interview in KG and formal written assessments of performance levels in English and mathematics for entry into Grades 1 to 12.

The school provides the English National Curriculum (ENC) from KG to Grade 6. Grades 7 and 8 follow the ENC with American materials that integrate the Californian Curriculum and the American Common Core Standards. From Grade 9, students may choose to follow either the ENC curriculum or an American curriculum. The school follows the MoE curriculum for Arabic, Islamic education and UAE social studies. English and Arabic are the languages of instruction in Kindergarten.

The Board of Trustees is chaired by the owner and includes members with financial and educational experience, a parent representative, a teacher

representative and the Principal. There are 177 teaching staff, 34 teaching support staff, 39 administrative staff, 3 nurses, 2 security guards and 6 staff with other responsibilities. Staff turnover is low. The Principal is in her 13th year.

Student fees per year range from AED 11,198 in KG to AED 23,624 in Grade 12; this includes a book fee. This places the school within the low to high category range.

The Effectiveness of the School

Students' attainment & progress

In most subjects and most lessons levels of attainment and progress in relation to students' starting points are satisfactory. Attainment in UK based external examinations by students in Grades 10 to 12 is high and above international averages. Attainment in American based external examinations by students in Grades 11 and 12 is lower and below international averages. Attainment by selected classes of students in Grades 4, 6 and 8 in external examinations is above international averages in mathematics and science and approaching international averages in English. In subjects taught in Arabic progress is satisfactory and improving.

Students develop satisfactory basic skills in literacy, numeracy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and apply these appropriately across subjects. Students develop appropriate 21st Century skills and work independently and collaboratively when given the opportunities, for example during research projects in older grades and sharing ideas in KG2. The attainment and progress of more able students are below expected levels. This is a result of low teacher expectations and activities that lack sufficient challenge.

In English and Arabic, students' listening comprehension and speaking skills are in line with international standards. For example, Grade 6 students share and discuss English spelling rules and use words appropriately in context. By Grade 12, students rationalise their thoughts and clearly express opinions. Reading skills are less fluent, and attainment in writing in Arabic and English is below international levels. Writing skills are developing at a slower rate as a result of insufficient opportunities to practise in lessons. Students are able to express appropriate understanding in Islamic education and show secure knowledge in UAE social studies.

Students' acquisition of scientific and mathematical knowledge is in line with international expectations. They confidently develop practical and investigative skills in science though they have limited opportunities to independently design experiments and select experimental methods. Students' ability to apply mathematical knowledge and skills is less well developed.

Results of assessment are not used sufficiently well to provide appropriate challenge for all students; in particular to plan lessons that enable higher ability students to make accelerated progress. The school does not yet have a system in place to set individual targets for all students.

Students' personal development

Above average attendance levels, approaching 96%, reflect students' enjoyment of school. Their behaviour and attitudes in lessons are positive and they show a high level of sensitivity and respect towards all members of the community. They are conscientious in taking care of their classrooms and outdoor areas. There are many nationalities represented in the school and students show appreciation of Emirati and other cultures and mix well with each other. They are reflective and open in sharing their opinions. Older students are developing a sense of community responsibility through participation in the student council, and helping younger students and leadership in group work. In lessons, they generally show less responsibility, and are less proactive in asking questions. Equally, KG children too frequently learn by listening and show limited curiosity, often as a result of the teaching approach. Students express strong practical awareness of how to lead healthy and safe lives.

The quality of teaching and learning

Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding of subjects. Teachers maintain very respectful and caring relationships with students that support their learning, and behaviour management is effective. They use a range of methods to engage students and most maintain appropriate pace. Lesson planning includes activities that have differentiated outcomes. Teachers are responding well to professional development by, for instance, creating 3-part lessons. Teachers routinely provide and explain learning objectives at the start of lessons so that learning is more purposeful. In the most effective lessons they return to these regularly so that students know how well they are progressing. Support staff are used well in science lessons. Their use in the KG is inconsistent; in the best lessons they help children with learning activities, yet too often are restricted to managing behaviour or arranging materials.

In the most effective lessons, teachers make effective use of assessment for learning: they use a range of questioning strategies, for example open and probing questions in science and English to stimulate discussion, develop understanding and encourage students to justify their responses. This is inconsistent across the school. In a highly effective French lesson for example, students enjoyed themselves and made good progress with the use of only the target language, employment of high quality resources, as they worked

individually and in timed group activities. Teachers make effective use of available resources, particularly interactive white boards (IWBs). These are rarely used by students. In effective KG lessons, teachers are using their initiative to create resources to motivate and promote understanding and progress amongst children.

Where teaching is less effective, lessons are overly teacher-dominated and textbook-based and this results in passive learning and more limited development of 21st Century skills. In some grades and subjects, for example in KG, teachers have an inconsistent understanding of how children learn most successfully. In less effective lessons, children do not have sufficient opportunities to make choices and investigate through purposeful play activities both in classrooms and outdoors.

Meeting students' needs through the curriculum

The implementation of the curriculum offers an appropriate range of subjects, and is appropriately broad and balanced. The introduction of the EYFS curriculum and a thematic approach in primary grades has added relevance and balance to the curriculum for younger students. Planning and implementation provide too few opportunities for children in KG to make choices in enquiry-based independent learning and planned play activities. The choice of subjects offered for Grade 11 and 12 examinations is comparatively restricted.

Staff work in collaborative subject and age teams to plan the curriculum. The curriculum is increasingly differentiated to meet the needs of most students through careful planning, and is developing well to promote students' acquisition of 21st Century skills. The curriculum adequately meets the needs of lower ability students and provides additional interventions. It is not effectively meeting the needs of high achievers. In subjects taught in Arabic, planning and teaching is over-reliant on textbooks.

The school ensures a well-developed understanding of the values and history of the UAE. Each grade participates in curriculum-related field trips, and during the year a range of special events enhances the curriculum. The availability of extra-curricular activities is limited and girls miss the opportunity to participate in inter-school sports. The school has well-embedded links with universities that support student preparation for further education.

The protection, care, guidance and support of students

There is a positive atmosphere and a protective attitude towards the care and safety of students. With clear leadership by the Principal, staff cultivate and sustain encouraging and mutually respectful relationships with students, parents

and all staff members. Child protection procedures are in place and fully understood by staff. Staff provide close supervision during break-times. The pastoral system provides adequate support for academic progress and personal development. Academic achievement is regularly recorded and progress is tracked. In the lower grades, there is not sufficient detail to provide the focus needed to accelerate learning, particularly for high ability students. Systems encourage and maintain high attendance levels; these include prompt contact with parents and meetings with students.

Students and parents are given thorough guidance on curriculum options and subject choices, starting from Grade 9. Facility management systems effectively maintain a healthy, safe and secure campus. The nurses in the 3 clinics are qualified, and provision of first aid is prompt and appropriate.

The quality of the school's buildings and premises

The school ensures that buildings, premises and plot are sufficient in size to meet ADEC minimum standards. The buildings and campus are maintained in a safe condition. Vigilance by support staff and responsible use by students, ensure a high standard of hygiene throughout the day. KG classrooms are sizeable; other indoor and outdoor facilities do not provide enough access for children to take part in activity-based learning. Most classrooms and specialist facilities are adequate. Science facilities provide good access and the school makes good use of available space to provide outdoor, shaded physical education (PE) facilities to support the programme. Some classrooms and facilities for art and music do not provide sufficient space to appropriately support the curriculum. Security systems are good.

The school's resources to support its aims

Teachers and teacher assistants in lower grades are qualified and sufficient in number. A significant number of teachers in KG are not confident enough to use teaching methods that meet the range of children's learning needs. Professional development is focusing on identified whole school and individual needs to develop competence and confidence.

The quality and range of resources adequately supports the curriculum in most areas. The focus on providing IWBs in almost all classrooms and sufficient access to computers motivates students and gives support to the curriculum. Maintenance and repair of technical resources is prompt and allows effective use by teachers. The quantity, quality and appeal of science resources are good and they are well used. The library is small and the quantity and range of books and other printed material in Arabic and English do not adequately support the curriculum in all subjects; only 3 computers are provided for student use.

Resources in KG2 are adequate, particularly access to reading books, KG1 have more limited resources to support activity-based learning.

School transport is maintained in a safe and reliable condition. Canteen facilities are hygienic and offer healthy options.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The expansion of leadership positions provides growing capacity. This allows the delegation of responsibility to heads of departments to focus attention on the quality of the curriculum, and on teaching and learning. The new Board of Trustees has an appropriately experienced and knowledgeable membership, and offers informed support and guidance as well as holding the Principal accountable for continuous improvement in the school's performance. Leadership and staff show determination and drive towards continuous improvement and work as cohesive teams within the strategic direction and caring leadership provided by the Principal. The commitment of the owner to improvement is further highlighted by effective use of a range of consultants. The school takes appropriate account of the views of parents and older students in decision-making, and students are particularly appreciative of the fact that their opinions matter.

The self-evaluation form (SEF) is thoroughly completed and gives considerable attention to providing evidence to support judgments. The school development plan (SDP) has clear links to the self-evaluation and 5-year strategic plans, and includes input from all members of the community. The targets and strategies are well focused on improving provision and outcomes, especially student achievement and the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Extensive, continuous and well-prioritised professional development is provided for all staff members. Middle leaders are appropriately involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of teaching. This does not sufficiently focus on effective use of assessment for learning in order to inform planning and to make adjustments to teaching which better meet the needs of all students, particularly high achievers. Baseline assessments are not used in order to monitor and track student progress and influence improvement planning. Standardized testing is not used with sufficient impact from KG to Grade 9 to ensure accurate and consistent moderation of teacher assessments.

Responses to the parent questionnaire were generally positive. Concerns in KG are mostly in regard to the value given to parental opinion and how well parents are informed about their children's progress. There is concern by some parents about how well the new curriculum approach will maintain the successes achieved by students in previous years. The school has been proactive in holding

parent information meetings throughout the year and also meets with individual parents regarding specific issues.

Progress since the last inspection

The school was last inspected in October 2012 and has made significant progress on most inspection recommendations, and developments in provision are having a positive impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and on student outcomes.

Health and safety issues have been successfully tackled. Developments in regard to leadership and management include a substantially enlarged leadership team; professional development that is building competency; establishment of parent and student councils, and regular staff meetings. Curriculum provision successfully promotes an increased emphasis on collaborative and independent learning skills and a move away from the overuse of textbooks. There is an increased focus on more activity-based learning in KG. Developments in teaching and learning are leading to more effective use of assessment for learning and planning in order to identify and meet the full range of learning needs. In the most effective lessons improvements in curriculum planning and the quality of teaching are leading to high levels of student engagement and progress; this is not yet consistent throughout the school.

The senior leadership team and school demonstrate satisfactory and improving capacity for sustained improvement.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Raise the levels of students' writing in English and Arabic, so that they are at or above best international standards.
2. Improve curriculum planning and implementation in order to provide adequate opportunities for children in KG to make choices in enquiry-based independent learning and purposeful play activities.
3. Further develop teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - i. teachers consistently use a range of questioning strategies including probing questions that require students to justify responses, and assist them to develop critical thinking skills
 - ii. results of assessment are used to plan and deliver lessons that meet the learning needs of all students
 - iii. all students are set targets for improvement and are supported in achieving those targets, and more able students are consistently challenged.

4. Continue to develop the availability of resources by:
 - i. increasing resources in KG in order to enhance age-appropriate learning opportunities
 - ii. increasing the quality, quantity and range of printed reading material in the library and classrooms, to promote literacy and research skills
 - iii. increasing access to a range of art and music resources to adequately support those areas of the curriculum.
5. Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - i. more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the use of assessment results in planning and in making adjustments to teaching so as to meet the needs of all students
 - ii. ensuring baseline assessments are used to monitor and track student progress from their starting points
 - iii. using standardised testing to support moderation of internal assessment in order to accurately track student attainment and progress.

Inspection Grades

	Band A High performing			Band B Satisfactory		Band C In need of significant improvement		
Performance Standard	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory & Improving	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Poor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Standard 1: Students' attainment and progress								
Standard 2: Students' personal development								
Standard 3: The quality of teaching and learning								
Standard 4: The meeting of students' needs through the curriculum								
Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students								
Standard 6: The quality of the school's buildings and premises								
Standard 7: The school's resources to support its aims								
Standard 8: The effectiveness of leadership and management								
Summary Evaluation: The school's overall effectiveness								