



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



Summary Inspection Report

Al Ittehad National Private School – Abu
Dhabi

Published in 2013

Iqraa

Al Ittehad National Private School – Abu Dhabi

Inspection Date	29 th April – 2 nd May, 2012
School ID#	091
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	American
Number of Students	994
Age Range	KG- Grade 11
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Fatima Ahmed Murshid
School Address	Khalifa City A, St 51
Telephone Number	(+971) 02 5562666
Fax Number	(+971) 02 5562600
Email (ADEC)	alittehadad@adec.ac.ae

Introduction

The school was inspected by four inspectors. They observed 74 lessons, held meetings with staff and students, and analysed a large quantity of data and documents supplied by the school. In addition, they analysed 370 questionnaires returned by parents.

Description of the School

The school opened six years ago and is part of the Al Arabia group, which has three partner schools in Al Ain and Dubai. Its board of governors includes the owner and other shareholders. The school's vision is 'to develop a generation that adapts to its future and preserves its heritage'. It aims to 'provide equal chances for all students in a rich learning environment which enables them to develop socially, cognitively and academically'.

The school was accredited last year by a US accrediting body, the NCA AdvancED. All of the students are Muslim and of Arab heritage. Most (95%) are Emirati, with small proportions from Jordan (2%), Yemen (1%) and less than 1% each from America, Oman, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, Britain and Somalia. Only one student has been identified as having special needs, related to language difficulty, and is provided with a support teacher. The school does not admit students with severe special needs. Admission is based on results from an entrance exam in Arabic, English and mathematics, together with records from previous schools. Teachers' salaries range from AED 5,000–12,500 per month. Apartments or allowances for accommodation are provided for teachers. Annual fees for the last two years range from AED 17,250 in KG to AED 35,362 in grade 11.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band B

Grade 4

Inspectors judged Al Ittehad National Private School – Abu Dhabi to be in Band B; that is a satisfactory school.

The school is clearly improving. Concerted efforts by the principal and senior leaders to address the recommendations of the last inspection are bearing fruit in improved teaching, learning and progress. Extensive professional development has broadened the range of teaching strategies used in classrooms. Lessons now have objectives, varied tasks in line with different needs, and collaborative group tasks to engage students. In the best lessons, these strategies are used well to ensure good progress. They are not yet fully embedded, and teaching quality varies across the school. The needs of the most able students are not fully met. The curriculum is enhanced by a substantial range of enrichment opportunities.

The school undertakes considerable analysis of internal test data to identify common weaknesses as well as individual learning needs, and takes appropriate action to address them. Other evaluation strategies, particularly lesson observations, are not yet rigorous enough to take the improvements to the next stage.

Attainment in the core subjects of Arabic, Islamic studies, social studies, English, mathematics and science is approaching international standards. Some key elements, such as experimental science and data handling and applications in mathematics, lag behind. Results in the Australian IBT examination, undertaken for the first time last year, were below international levels in English. Older students did better than the younger ones. In science, the investigational elements received particularly low scores. The school has since abandoned the IBT, because it was not happy with the nature and timing (November) of the examination. This year the school has started using the US IOWA test. This is appropriate, because it is based on the US core standards the school is intending to adopt. Some grade 11 students have undertaken the TOEFL test this year, but as the results go directly to individual students, the school does not yet have access to all of them.

Students' progress is good in social studies, and satisfactory but improving in the other core subjects. In Arabic, students' literacy skills are developing well but they make less progress in independent learning and critical thinking. In Islamic studies, students recite from the Holy Qura'n with confidence, and understand and show respect for Islamic culture and religion. In social studies, most students recognise the main events in UAE history and demonstrate knowledge and respect for their culture. They learn a lot about other cultures in English social studies. Practice and exposure to English start in the kindergarten (KG) and primary grades. This is helping to develop students' confidence in speaking, reading and writing in English. By grade 11, students are beginning to acquire the skills of critical analysis and to write discursive essays, but not yet at the depth expected internationally at this age. In mathematics, students are progressing well in their understanding of number, algebra and basic geometry. Their skills are weaker in mathematical reasoning and application because they have too few opportunities to practise them. In science, improved teaching is developing strong foundations of knowledge. Starting in KG and grade 1, students enjoy classifying matter, but a lack of opportunities to carry out laboratory-based practical investigations mean that their skills are not properly developed. Students are making good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) as a result of an enhanced curriculum. There are no marked differences in the progress of boys and girls. The least able students make satisfactory or better progress. The most able

underachieve in English, mathematics and science because they are not challenged enough in lessons.

The atmosphere is very positive in all grades, and students are a credit to the school. Older boys and the girls are models of diligence and maturity. They make the most of the rich opportunities to show clear leadership qualities. Students have developed a very successful co-operative enterprise through which they run a shop in the boys' and girls' sections, generate income and sell shares. They donate much of the substantial profit to charity. The school has built on this very well by providing an annual 'future entrepreneur' event, when all students can explore a business idea of their own and have sponsors from industry and the community help them to assess its potential. The students interviewed for the inspection were exceedingly positive about the school. They said that bullying or 'picking on' is very rare, and is dealt with very effectively when it does occur. Behaviour is typically good in lessons. The majority of students value learning and do their best. Occasional low-level misbehaviour and restlessness by middle-grade boys is more indicative of boredom as a result of un-engaging teaching than bad attitudes. Students value the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, for example the robotics club. Participation in events such as the Model Arab League provides a very valuable 'future leader' experience. The school's data show a high level of absence, but lesson observations and calculations by inspectors based on class attendance data showed this to be based on a computational error by the school. Attendance is actually good, at around 94%.

The overall quality of teaching is improving as a result of focused professional development for teachers and leaders, and concerted efforts to extend the range of teaching strategies used in lessons. These strategies are not yet well enough embedded to make teaching consistently good. Teachers develop students' understanding of concepts and terminology effectively. Positive relationships encourage students to be willing and engaged learners. In the best lessons, imaginative teaching using open-ended tasks and good small group work really boosts students' confidence and motivation. In some lessons, low expectations hold back progress because students are not encouraged to think, ask questions, or work independently. Most teachers plan carefully, with appropriate objectives and varied activities for different ability groups. In some cases the objectives outline the activities to be undertaken rather than the knowledge, understanding or skills to be developed. The varied activities are often too easy for the most able students. The school has developed the use of peer learning (like talking partners) and co-operative or group activities. These can be very productive when done well, but sometimes there is not enough substance in the task to demand real joint effort and thinking, so learning slows as students mark time while waiting for

their 'turn'. There is limited marking of students' work and not enough which shows them how to improve. A few teachers provide rubrics to enable students to understand assessment criteria but overall both self and peer assessment are under-developed.

Currently, the curriculum is based on the US McRel standards as represented in the Harcourt 'Trophies' textbook series. This provides breadth and balance and is supplemented well by an extensive extra-curricular and enrichment programme. The school has augmented the textbooks with its own well-designed workbooks in English. It intends to start using the US core content standards, instead of McRel, and adapt the Harcourt 'Journeys' texts that embody them. A skills programme provided through CISCO and the ICDL qualification enhance the curriculum in ICT. The least able students and those with identified needs (mostly language acquisition) receive appropriate support through intervention programmes, ability grouping in classes and support teachers. Gifted and talented students are offered a range of enhancement opportunities such as robotics, graphic design, and computer programming. The curriculum provides many opportunities to celebrate and develop students' understanding of the UAE family and community. The school is developing partnerships and provides a range of activities to develop a fuller understanding of the pluralistic nature of Abu Dhabi society. There is a rapidly improving programme to ensure that students leave the school better prepared for future study and working life. Many of the activities of an entrepreneurial nature are designed to support students in the transition from school to the adult world.

The school is diligent in the protection, care and support of students. Parents who returned questionnaires strongly indicated their confidence in the care and safety of their children. Clear policies and procedures underpin health, safety and security, including a clear and accessible child protection policy. Staff have been trained in procedures for referring concerns about students. There are effective, comprehensive, checks on all adults. The records are well organised and diligently compiled. Guidance is given to students in how to be safe and responsible. Counsellors and supervisors provide good guidance and support for students in grades 10 and 11 when considering their post-school destinations. This is being extended to include careers preparation for grade 9. The school keeps comprehensive records on the attendance of individual students, and has effective procedures to phone or text parents in cases of unexplained absence. The register for each class is completed by an administrator, rather than the class teacher. This is inappropriate because the class teacher does not have an overview of the students' welfare and the potential impact on their academic development. The school does not analyse attendance data properly to secure

overall figures, which it can use to compile comparative data over time, or for different classes, grades and sections, to compare against other schools.

The clean and attractive premises provide very good accommodation and an environment that is conducive to learning. The classrooms are appropriate in size, and an adequate range of good specialist rooms includes science and computer laboratories, art rooms, a library, two swimming pools, a gym and other facilities. Three prayer rooms, a clinic and a spacious cafeteria provide well for students' non-academic needs. The corridors, open spaces and classrooms are made vibrant by copious bright displays of students' work. The buildings are checked and secured well to ensure students' health and safety. The range of material and other resources is good. The specialist rooms and laboratories are equipped with appropriate equipment, tools and materials. The KG section has a good range of age-appropriate and play-based learning resources. The library is bright, well organised and equipped with plentiful fiction books for English and Arabic, but less so for non-fiction. Classrooms have a projector, computer and internet access, but not computers for students use. The four computer labs, science labs and some of the halls have recently been provided with interactive SMART boards. Three computers are available to students in the library. There are enough teachers to cover the curriculum. They have suitable qualifications and good subject knowledge. There are enough support staff in the KG section, and some teachers support extra intervention classes in the primary grades.

The principal and senior leadership team demonstrate a strong drive to improve the school. They have motivated teachers to share a vision for becoming one of the best schools in Abu Dhabi, and to work enthusiastically to make it a reality. Morale is high. Teachers not only feel well supported, but are also developing their skills and expertise. Standards and progress are improving as a result of focused and concerted action to improve. Extensive ongoing professional development is enhancing teachers' skills and their awareness of what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Middle leader roles are well developed and planning meetings are used in the best traditions of US Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as opportunities to develop shared practice. Considerable opportunities are provided for teachers to observe each other and share best practice. Inspection showed that the focus strategies are making a difference to learning in the best lessons, but are not yet consistently producing high-quality teaching. The school carries out considerable analyses of test and assessment data to identify weaknesses in learning and provide action plans to address them for individuals and groups. This is not yet strategically focused to identify trends over time or for key groups. Lesson observations by both senior and middle leaders are not rigorous enough to identify when learning and progress are not

good enough for individuals, groups or whole classes. Informal improvement planning is well developed, but the school improvement plan does not show costings or measurable impact. A high proportion (96%) of parents who responded to the questionnaire are confident that the principal and senior team do a good job, and that the school values their opinions.

Fees are in line with what is expected of schools of this type. However, given that students do not yet have access to internationally recognised standardised tests, the school is providing only satisfactory value for money. Nevertheless, the capacity for further improvement is good, and the principal and senior leaders enjoy the strong support of the whole community.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - i. making every effort to ensure that the plans to implement internationally standardised tests go ahead on schedule;
 - ii. routinely analysing data to identify trends in performance, both internally for subjects, grades and key groups, and externally against partner schools and beyond;
 - iii. sharpening lesson observations to ensure clarity about the impact of the teaching on the learning of individuals, groups and classes, addressing the question, 'Is the learning good enough?'; and
 - iv. improving the systems for registering attendance, and regularly analysing attendance and absence data to monitor trends at whole-school level and for key groups.
2. Raise the quality of teaching and learning so it is consistently good, by:
 - i. providing more challenge for more-able students in lesson activities;
 - ii. sharing assessment criteria with students, to enable them to assess their own work and set specific targets for improvement; and
 - iii. providing more detailed feedback to students on how to improve their work.