



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



Summary Inspection Report

Al Ittihad National Private School

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Al Ittihad National Private School

Inspection Date	20 th – 23 rd May 2012
School ID#	124
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	American
Number of Students	930
Age Range	KG – G12
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Director General: Najat Al Dhaheri Academic Director: Soulafa Al Khatib
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Introduction

The school was inspected by four inspectors. They observed 80 lessons as well as assemblies, playtimes and students' arrival at and departure from the school. They also held meetings with staff, students and the owner of the school. They analysed data and documents supplied by the school, and the responses from parents to a questionnaire about the school.

Description of the School

The school opened in the Falaj-Hazza district of Al Ain in 2004. It is one of four Al Ittihad Private Schools in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, owned by Al Arabia for Education Development. There are 288 students in the kindergarten (KG), 490 in the primary section (G1–G6), 102 in the middle school (G7–G9) and 50 in the upper school (G10–12). All of the students are Muslim and 97% are Arabic. There are 428 girls and 512 boys. The great majority of the students are of UAE heritage, with the 16% non-Emirati students representing 13 other nationalities. The largest minority groups are Jordanian, Egyptian and Omani. A small minority of students have identified special educational needs. Their needs relate mainly to dyslexia or behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. These students are mostly in the KG and primary sections.

A new principal, known as the academic director, was appointed within the last two years. A director general manages other whole-school affairs. The school's vision is to develop 'a generation which adapts to the demands of the modern age and preserves its cultural heritage'. Teachers' salaries range from AED 4,000–12,875 per year. The school has an open application policy, but prioritises siblings of existing students for admission. Annual fees range from AED 15,000 in KG to AED 25,800 in grade 12.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band B

Grade 5

Inspectors judged Al Ittihad National Private School to be in Band B; that is a school that is satisfactory and improving.

Since the Academic Director joined the school, the staff have become united in their commitment to its continuing development. Aspects of teaching have improved since the previous inspection as middle managers have become more effective in encouraging colleagues to use different techniques. For example, teachers in lower school classes, including those in the KG, often challenge students to discuss, think, predict and hypothesise for themselves. As a result, progress in lessons here is mostly good and attainment is in line with international expectations for these students who make up two thirds of the school

population. Improvements in teaching are taking place more slowly in the upper school so there are not enough lessons where students make good progress and consequently standards fall below international expectations. More positively, some students in the upper school are beginning to make better progress as teaching improves and there is a clearer focus on learning. In balancing these differences, there are effective developments in the lower section and when combined with some in the upper section, show that the school does have a satisfactory capacity to improve.

The small number of older students in Grades 10 – 12, have been entered for International tests, and last years' results showed that the students achieve average standards in TOEFL enabling them to qualify for higher education and university courses. Senior leaders have very recently introduced internationally validated USA testing procedures, which match the curriculum more closely than the previous tests, but the data on how successful this has been is not yet available. Professional judgements by the inspectors show that standards generally are in line with international expectations and improving in the lower grades. Standards in Arabic, Islamic studies, social studies and English are in line with International expectations across the school. In Arabic and English, students have made good progress in reading and analysing texts. Writing skills are weaker overall as too many boys have been slow to develop effective writing habits in the schools they attended before moving to Al Ittihad. Older students and particularly the more able, are not developing the ability to write extended prose because they do not have enough opportunities to express their thoughts in a variety of genre. The level of students' mathematical competence is typical of international averages but their reasoning is less good so their mental maths and problem solving skills are underdeveloped. Standards are below international expectations in science. Students have weak practical and experimental skills, which result in part from a lack of equipment and insufficient laboratory space.

Since standardised tests have only just been introduced, teachers have not been able to validate their assessments against international benchmarks so the grades awarded and then reported to parents have been over generous. The school measures its outcomes against its sister school in Abu Dhabi, but these comparisons are unreliable because testing methodologies differ.

Relationships between students are generally good and most students are respectful of others. They abide by the school's values and expectations. Their understanding of UAE culture and society is good, and they greatly respect the teachings of the Holy Qu'ran. They are less aware of other cultures and faiths because they have not had the opportunity to explore the differences. Behaviour management strategies are effective in most lower-grade classes so students

participate well and enjoy learning. Girls' progress through the school is good because their attitudes towards learning remain very positive. They follow instructions carefully and are diligent but this can mean that they do not use their initiative to learn independently. Some boys lose their earlier positive attitudes in the transition from lower grades to single-gender classes in the middle and upper school. They can become withdrawn when there is not enough variety or challenge in the learning activities.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers have clear expectations about students' levels of involvement so there is a serious approach to learning throughout the school. In the majority of lessons in the lower half of the school, teachers plan a variety of activities that sustain the students' interest and ensure that learning is consolidated. Students collaborate well during group tasks so they understand how to negotiate roles. Teachers are inventive with resources and they provide students with interesting ways to understand new ideas. A few teachers phrase questions in different ways so that higher attaining students have to think more deeply about their answers. The quality of teaching further up the school is less good because teachers do not plan the variety of activities necessary to help students learn in different ways. There are not enough opportunities for students to apply their knowledge for example in solving problems in mathematics. Teaching is often didactic, giving students little chance to ask questions. This limits the progress of those students who find the work difficult and would need support or too easy due to a lack of challenge. In some cases, teachers' command of written and spoken English is not good enough to provide good models for students to emulate. However, a positive feature is a consistent approach to the way in which lessons end. Students are called upon to reflect on the objectives and to talk about what they have learned. This allows some of them to voice their ideas about their own progress.

Curriculum plans have been carefully structured so that the sequence of learning is logical. Teacher assessments link to US teaching materials so there is a fair degree of coordination in the way student outcomes are monitored. This has yet to be fully standardised as the school awaits results from the first submission to the Iowa test programme. Planning is meticulous, particularly in KG where students are provided with purposeful sessions and a good mix of activities. These include routine opportunities for students to combine letters and sounds, in addition to learning at 'centres' and during reading time. This all gives them the basics of good literacy and prepares them socially for school. Students are also encouraged to explore new ideas themselves and so develop independence. Learning activities are limited for older students and there are not enough practical tasks where they can apply their understanding. This is having an impact

on their progress in science particularly. The curriculum has been adequately developed to include a modest range of extracurricular activities that support the students' social development and their interest in drama and art. Students have opportunities to mix with those from other schools through sports fixtures and academic competitions.

Students receive adequate protection, care, guidance and support. The levels of care are consistent and the positive ethos means students feel they are part of a considerate community. The clinic and the cafeteria are both well run and hygienic. Arrangements to protect students are understood but have yet to be fully documented to ensure they are consistently applied. For example, there is no formal child protection policy. The school is diligent in vetting new staff but this information has not been transferred to a single record. Students in the lower school are motivated by the reward system but there is no comparable system for older students. Academic support for students is improving in the KG and lower grades, where teaching assistants are becoming more involved in supporting learning. The appointment of special needs staff for next year will go some way to improving support for students with particular learning needs. The roles of the two new social workers are developing so that students receive more individual guidance but these discussions are not yet fully effective. For example, students attend an annual careers fair in Dubai but they are not well enough prepared to find out the best options available to them personally.

Spacious, well-maintained buildings and classrooms provide suitable accommodation for learning. In the KG and primary school areas, exciting and stimulating displays in classrooms and public spaces celebrate younger students' achievements very effectively. The sports hall and play areas provide good opportunities for students' physical development. The school is in the process of appointing a lifeguard so that it can make full use of the swimming pool. The library is an inviting space but a lack of stock means that it does not promote students' research skills well. There are not enough science laboratories for the number of students in the school so teachers resort to demonstrating experiments in classrooms. This poses an unacceptable risk to the students. Systems for storing other hazardous materials and for monitoring health and safety procedures are rigorous.

There have been some staffing difficulties because of visa and residency issues. Parents expressed concerns about the number of changes, particularly in grade 2 for example but the school has overcome these problems and staffing numbers are now adequate. There has been notable instability in the science department and this lack of continuity has had an adverse impact on standards in science. There are sufficient learning and technological resources throughout the school,

although students do not have enough access to scientific equipment. Students in the KG are encouraged to learn by the range of equipment they can manipulate and explore in lessons. Teachers are developing the skills required to make better use of the data shows and projectors in the senior school classrooms.

The school's owners have a good knowledge of current educational priorities. They visit the school regularly and provide appropriate support for leaders as they evaluate the work of the school. Although there are no objective systems to validate this process, it is broadly accurate and leaders share a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have identified appropriate priorities for improvement and subsequent in-school training has been effective in improving the quality of teaching. Teachers are keen to provide modified lesson activities for students at different ability levels, which is leading to the improving practice evident in the lower school. Senior and middle leaders are now properly involved in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, for instance, with the exception of the head of science. Leaders use their links with the other schools in the group to reinforce their knowledge of current practice. Parents of younger students are quite involved with their children's learning and there is good support for what the school is doing. There are increasing numbers applying for admission to the KG but leaders have yet to map out an appropriate strategic plan for the school as it continues to grow.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Make full use of the results of standardised testing by:
 - i. using the data to measure and track students' progress, and to make comparisons with international and national standards; and
 - ii. Using the outcomes and teachers' own professional judgement about the prior attainment of individuals and groups to set ambitious targets for students' progress.
2. Use the existing models of improved teaching, particularly those in the lower school, to raise the quality of all teaching by:
 - i. increasing the range of teaching approaches, particularly planning for interesting activities which enable students to apply their learning and relate theoretical understanding to real-life situations, particularly in mathematics;
 - ii. using existing simple resources more imaginatively to support such activities where other resources are limited;

- iii. ensuring that teachers plan to challenge more-able students and support less-able students in all lessons, so that all progress equally well;
 - iv. ensuring that teachers have the training they need to present accurate examples of written and spoken English that provide good models for students; and
 - v. using classroom space consistently well across the school to display and celebrate all students' work.
3. Make sure that writing develops as well as students' other language skills in English and Arabic by:
 - i. ensuring that younger students learn the mechanical, technical skills of writing more effectively;
 - ii. Providing a greater range of opportunities, for more-able students in particular, to produce extended writing in all subjects.
 4. Develop the curriculum so that each subject gives sufficient emphasis to the improvement of independent learning skills such as discussion, analysis and ICT research, particularly to challenge and stretch the more-able students.
 5. Make sure that the better behaviour and learning habits of boys now evident in KG and the lower grades continue into the upper school.
 6. Improve staffing, resources, laboratory space and other provision in science to promote higher standards and faster progress, particularly in the practical, experimental aspects of the subject.