

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Maaref Private School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Maaref Private School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	almaarefps.ae
Telephone	04 2988881
Address	PO Box 87823, Al Qusais, Oman Street, Dubai
Principal	Jamila Zein
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,454
Number of Emirati students	655 (45%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 13th to Thursday 16th February

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The context of the school

Al Maaref Private School, situated in Al Qusais 1, provides an education for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. Mathematics and science were taught in English, while Islamic Education and social studies were taught in Arabic and followed the Ministry of Education curriculum. At the time of inspection there were 1,454 students, almost half of whom were Emirati.

The school used a variety of externally generated tests to assess students' work, as well as the College Board SATs for high school students. Most of the school's 82 teachers, the majority of whom were expatriates from surrounding Arabic countries, had an appropriate teaching qualification. They were supported by 14 teaching assistants. Twenty two of the teaching staff were new to the school this year, including the Deputy Principal and two Heads of Department.

At the time of the inspection, the Principal was in her 25th year in the post.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Al Maaref Private School continued to provide an acceptable quality of education for its students. A key mission of the school was to prepare students to be independent leaders, informed decision-makers and strong representatives of their culture and heritage. While there had been some improvements in meeting this mission, overall there was considerable scope for greater improvement. The attitudes and behaviour of students was good; there were respectful relationships between staff and students, across the school. In almost all key subjects, students' attainment and progress was acceptable. In high school English, it was good. The quality of teaching was variable across the school and despite the efforts of senior managers, there had been little significant improvement in teaching, learning, and assessment in key areas of the curriculum. There was scope for improvement in the curriculum offered across the school. In particular, the curriculum for students with special educational required improvement to better meet their learning needs. Health and safety had improved. It was now good across all phases.

The recommendations in the previous inspection report focused on raising student attainment through improved lesson planning, teaching, student tracking and school development planning. The school had

provided professional development for staff using external consultants as well as additional resources and conducted a self-evaluation exercise with staff. These had yet to impact and lead to notable improvements in student achievement. Governance arrangements had not changed since last year's inspection. Overall, there was capacity in all levels of leadership to drive ongoing improvement. However, the school leadership lacked awareness of best international benchmarks and practice in a number of aspects of their work.

Key strengths

- Improved attainment and progress in high school English;
- The attractive, extensive displays of student's work around the school;
- High quality understanding of Islamic cultural and civic understanding across the school;
- The good attitudes and behavior of students;

Recommendations

- Further improve attainment and progress in all key subject areas by addressing shortcomings in teaching and learning;
- Ensure the curriculum better meets the needs and interests of all students, including those with special educational needs;
- Improve self-evaluation and improvement planning so that initiatives are embedded consistently across the school;
- The senior leaders should oversee the implementation of effective assessment procedures across all subjects and include appropriate international benchmarks at key points to monitor and track students' progress;
- Develop an effective governance structure that better reflects the needs and capacities of the entire school community.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Students' attainment was acceptable in the majority of subjects. Most students in the primary phase demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of Islamic key concepts and related this well to their lives. They had good memorization and recitation skills. In the secondary classes, students' skills reading and memorizing The Holy Qur'an were age-appropriate. In Arabic, in the primary classes, student's writing skill were age-appropriate and had few errors. In middle school a few students could write single paragraphs. In English, at Kindergarten phase, children were beginning to recognise basic words. Their handwriting skills were developing well. At all stages, listening skills were well extended. By high school, students could speak at length on a variety of subjects, using a wide vocabulary. They were able to read increasingly challenging texts. The quality of students' writing was inconsistent, as some in the elementary stage was poorly constructed, with weak presentation. In mathematics, basic number skills were effectively promoted in the kindergarten. The majority of children could count from 1 to 20 but their subject specific vocabulary was not consistently well developed. From Grades 10 to 12, students had a secure understanding of trigonometry and graphical work. Opportunities to develop mathematical and scientific thinking and critical thinking skills were not observed. Higher attaining children were not always identified and challenged.

Progress was generally acceptable. In English in high school, almost all students were increasingly confident and secure in all aspects of language learning, but especially in speaking. In science and mathematics, progress accelerated as student's progressed through the school. There were elements of good progress in senior classes in these subjects. Often, in all subjects, progress was limited because there was too much teacher talk in lessons and there were too few opportunities for students to contribute or practise their skills. Students with significant needs made variable progress. Too often, work was not suitably adapted to ensure their effective progress.

Around half of the students in the school were Emirati and the largest proportion was in the kindergarten and primary phases. Attainment and progress was broadly acceptable but there was considerable variation. In senior classes some Emirati, particularly girls, were attaining at high levels for example in physics. In other subjects there was little difference between Emiratis achievement and that of the other students. In English, in the upper secondary, girls' reading and writing skills were similar to those of boys. Overall, girl's classes tended to be more focused than boys. In Arabic, particularly in the middle years, Emirati students made good progress in speaking, listening and reading though writing required improvement. The presentation of students' work across all subjects required greater care and attention. In science and mathematics, Emirati students generally performed at expected levels but were often capable of much higher levels of achievement.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school. Students were respectful of one another, and co-operated well with their teachers and their fellow students. Almost always, there were good relationships between students and staff. A few disregarded the school's good advice on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. Attendance was only acceptable. At all stages students had a good understanding of Islam and a good appreciation of local traditions and culture. They showed a clear appreciation of the impact of Islam on contemporary society and the world. They held the values of the UAE in high esteem. Their civic, economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Although students were aware of their responsibilities, they had few opportunities to exercise them. They did not have an effective voice in supporting school improvement. The majority of students had an appropriate understanding of the economic success of Dubai and were aware of environmental issues which impacted on their lives.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The quality of teaching was acceptable overall, slightly stronger in the high school and slightly weaker in the Kindergarten. More than a few lessons were unsatisfactory. Most teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge and a majority knew how students learned them. Lessons were often carefully planned but teachers did not always follow the plans and did not meet the learning needs of students in their classes. Teachers' skills in time management were good, but a few dominated lessons by talking for too long and losing the attention of the students. The majority of teachers had a balance of dialogue and activities for their students. Various resources were effectively used by teachers, but insufficient resources limited students' learning in all key subjects. The use of information and communications technology (ICT) to help engage students was rare; it was seen only in science lessons. Teachers' interactions with students were usually positive and a majority of teachers asked questions in ways that required thinking rather than the recall of facts. The teachers did not use a sufficiently wide range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of different students. In other subjects, the quality of teaching ranged from acceptable to good. Teaching was observed in music, art, computer studies, history and physical education.

The quality of learning was acceptable across the school. In a minority of lessons learning was good. Students were eager to learn but activities did not provide sufficient opportunities for the students to learn independently. When given such opportunities, students worked well and made steady progress. Older students could explain their learning to others clearly but this skill was weak amongst younger students. Students' interactions were respectful and appropriate most of the time and they co-operated well. The application of learning to the real world was a part of learning in the better lessons, which was a goal of the school's leaders. Connections between areas of learning were observed and were part of a developing plan for integration. Students' enquiry and critical thinking skills were being developed in only a few lessons, mostly in science.

The quality of assessment was acceptable in all four phases. Kindergarten children had assessment portfolios kept for them that were based upon a range of tasks over time, but they were not used effectively to guide planning. External benchmarks were not used to establish students' attainment levels against international standards; consequently the school did not have accurate knowledge of attainment in the key subjects. A majority of teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses but ongoing assessment required further development in certain classes. Students did not assess their own work or that of their peers. Overall, the use of assessment data had insufficient influence upon the curriculum, planning and teaching.

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was broad and balanced and in line with Ministry of Education requirements. There was a clear rationale to the proportion of lessons but limited option choices. The curriculum was largely textbook driven. All students, including non-Arabic students, received the full entitlement to Islamic Education and Arabic. Transition arrangements were well considered with careers talks for students in Grades 10 to 12 and visits to and from local universities. Cross-curricular work included links between English, mathematics, science and ICT, as well as between Islamic Education and Arabic. The curriculum was regularly reviewed but the school acknowledged that it did not fully meet the needs of all students, especially those with additional learning needs and higher attaining students. Students actively engaged in voluntary and charity work including visits to the elderly. There were a range of extra-curricular classes covering art, music, drama, journalism, science and French as well as special days focussing on environmental, international and health-related themes including breast cancer, smoking and drugs.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The arrangements for health and safety across the school were good in all phases. Thorough procedures and detailed records were in place. The school environment was safe and secure and premises were

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suitable for all students. The buildings were well maintained and the interior was also maintained to an extremely high standard. The medical clinic was effectively organised and equipped to deal with almost any emergency that arose. There were clear transport procedures which were followed by all. As a result, students who used the buses were well supported and kept safe on their journeys. Those who did not travel by bus arrived and left school in an orderly manner. School records showed that the few incidents of inappropriate behaviour were effectively dealt with. Posters and displays which focused on the importance of healthy eating encouraged students to make sensible choices. Most students could describe a healthy diet but a few older students stated they preferred unhealthy options. The medical staff worked with students to further develop a stronger awareness of healthy eating as well as personal fitness. All staff were conversant with appropriate child protection procedures and practices.

The quality of support was acceptable. Appropriate systems were in place to ensure that personal needs, including guidance of next steps in education, were catered for. Staff had started to identify students who required additional support. In a few lessons, such students made similar progress to their classmates, but on too many occasions planning did not address their individual needs. As a result, their progress was restricted. The management of behaviour was acceptable but there were a few instances of inappropriate behaviour during lessons in both the kindergarten and elementary classes. Relationships between staff and students were positive. There were clear systems to check attendance. Students generally arrived at lessons on time during the day but too many arrived after assembly had started, thus missing the national anthem and recitation of The Holy Qur'an.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

Leadership was acceptable. The Principal and the recently appointed Deputy Principal communicated a clear vision for the school. There has been some response by the staff and governors to this and a number of other recommendations in the previous inspection report, particularly in relation to health, safety and teaching. Resources have been purchased, staff training instigated and new leadership personnel

appointed. Most subject leaders had an improving understanding of the curriculum and were developing their expertise as evaluators of teaching quality, curriculum content and academic success. Despite these advances, senior leaders had not been fully successful in improving key aspects of the school. The quality of teaching, the level of students' attainment and progress and the tracking of student's performance had not improved significantly from the last inspection. The awareness of leaders regarding international attainment benchmarks was limited. The school needed to continue to make the required improvements to the quality of teaching for effective learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. School leaders consulted with teachers' committees, and used the information to develop strengths and weaknesses. However, a narrow range of data collection and analysis resulted in an insufficiently accurate understanding of a number of key aspects of the schools operations. There was a restricted understanding of student's levels of attainment against international standards. The ongoing tracking of student attainment and progress needed to be more effective. While the school recognised the need to place a greater focus upon student learning outcomes, school leaders had yet to evaluate the quality of classroom practice using such criteria.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Parents reported some improved systems of communication with the school and appreciated the access they had to senior staff as and when required. There were good arrangements in place to discuss children's progress including regular open evenings and end of semester written reports. The reports required further development to give parents more accurate information regarding achievement levels and next steps in learning. The recently formed Parents Committee was active and supportive.

The governance arrangements for the school had not changed significantly since the previous inspection. The governing body included representation from the owners as well as a member of the community. It had yet to include individuals with significant professional experience in education or those who were members of the wider school community. The group met periodically and received reports from school leaders regarding initiatives. It had provided resources such as improved medical facilities, science equipment, staffing and had employed consultants to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

Management including staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Day-to-day management was adequate and ensured effective operation of the school. A minority of teachers did not have teaching qualifications. The school had identified staff training as a priority and had employed external consultants to support this development. Despite the purchase of new science equipment, overall classroom resources for teaching were too limited. Few examples of lessons enriched with ICT were observed. A few classrooms were over-crowded. While playground space was adequate, the surface of the boys' play ground was not fit for purpose.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	116	9%
	Last year	103	8%
Teachers	40		48%
Students	19		15%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A minority of parents replied to the survey, slightly more than last year. Almost half of the teachers but a minority of students completed their surveys. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education available at the school, however a few students were not. Most parents thought that teachers had the necessary skills to teach the students, a view not shared by a few of students. Similarly most parents thought that school reports were regular and helpful, but a few students disagreed. Most teachers thought that the last inspection report had helped them to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They were generally positive about all aspects of the school.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

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How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:
inspection@khda.gov.ae

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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