



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



Summary Inspection Report

Al Najah Private School

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Iqraa

Al Najah Private School

Inspection Date	24 th -27 th September, 2012
School ID#	197
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	British – and some American and IB material
Number of Students	2270
Age Range	3 – 18 years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Baria Abu Zein
School Address	PO Box 284, Mohammed Bin Zayed City, M-9, Behind Safeer Mall, Abu Dhabi
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Introduction

The school was inspected by 5 inspectors. The inspectors observed 61 lessons, talked to staff at every level, talked to many groups of students, to parents and to the school's owner. They scrutinised policy documents, performance data and observed students and Kindergarten children arriving and leaving school as well as at play and moving between classrooms.

Description of the School

The entire school has been at its current location since 2008. Previously there had been two campuses. It continues to grow in numbers and is seeking permission to expand further. The school's central aim is to 'achieve excellent academic results and produce well-rounded individuals'.

Students are nearly all Muslim and Arab. Few are local: the seven per cent who are Emirati are joined by large numbers from outside the UAE, especially Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and North Sudan.

There are 1307 boys and 963 girls. Recent growth in numbers has raised primary numbers to 1216. The Kindergarten (KG) has also expanded, partly through building work on site, and now has 424 children. The secondary section has 630 students. The principal and vice-principal have been with the school for 18 years.

The curriculum uses English text books and some from the USA for its primary and secondary classes. In addition, it has International Baccalaureate (IB) materials for a small group of Grade 11 and 12 students. The KG uses texts produced by the school from a range of sources.

Admission is via an entrance examination. Fees are medium, ranging from AED 11,500 in KG to AED 24,700 in Grade 12. Teachers' salaries range from AED 8,000 to AED 23,000 a month, with most around AED 10,000. The principal is directly responsible to the owner and there is no board of governors in place.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band C

Grade 6

Inspectors judged Al Najah Private School to be in Band C, that is, a school in need of significant improvement.

The previous evaluation of much of the school's work was conducted by a two-day Curriculum Review in May 2011. It noted the academic success of older students but found shortcomings in many other aspects of the school's provision. There have been some improvements since that time but more needs to be done to ensure that all students receive a satisfactory quality of education.

The 2011 evaluation judged standards to be unsatisfactory. As a result of students' positive attitudes and the generally good teaching that they receive in upper grades, their progress accelerates and they achieve very highly in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and Advanced level examinations. However, progress for students lower down the school remain slow and many underachieve. The evaluation judged the curriculum to be very narrow. The IB is now operating successfully for a small number of students and several new subjects have been established including art, accounting, drama and French. However, the curriculum for lower grades remains narrow. Teaching, particularly in lower primary and KG, were judged unsatisfactory. While there is some good and very good teaching in lower grades, teaching remains unsatisfactory in over one-quarter of lessons.

Students' behaviour is consistently good and their attitudes extremely positive. Any lack of engagement is associated with dull, uninspiring teaching. Independence and creativity are not well developed, mirroring the lack of opportunity presented to them in these areas, including extra-curricular provision. However, there is evidence, particularly in upper school, of students grasping opportunities for learning independently; this, alongside their maturity and perseverance, means that personal development is now satisfactory.

The leadership and management of the school were found wanting in 2011 because of failure to provide breadth of opportunity and strong provision in KG and lower primary. The capacity to change was judged to be weak. Since the 2011 review, some changes have taken place though much more is required. The impact of the leaders on students' personal development is positive. The school continues to succeed academically and is popular with parents. It continues to expand in size. However, the monitoring and systematic improvement of teaching is still at an early stage, so that too much teaching remains inadequate. In lower primary and KG the quality is mixed, with some very good lessons but too many where the style of teaching leaves some students struggling or bored. In lessons across a range of subjects, resources are inadequate and this has a limiting effect on progress and standards. For these reasons, leadership is again judged to be unsatisfactory. Resource levels are unsatisfactory despite recent improvements. Buildings are very well maintained, but constrain the curriculum and the approaches to teaching.

Standards for students as they finish their education are very high. IGCSE results, A2 and AS, across the full cohort are all well in excess of international averages. For example, in Biology IGCSE, 84% of candidates gained A*-A grades in 2012, compared with 36% globally. Students also achieved very highly in English, mathematics, other science subjects and Arabic at both IGCSE and A level.

Performance in Ministry of Education (MoE) tests are also well above expectations. Frequently, the school produces students who win prizes for the highest marks in the UAE. In IGCSE mathematics last year, an Al Najah student scored the highest marks in the world. All G12 leavers find university places. These results indicate good added-value, even for students starting school with average or above average standards. Inspectors observed examples of this high achievement in some of the lessons observed. For example, students in grade 12 conducted complex experiments completely independently of the teacher. Older students demonstrated excellent transfer of mathematical skills which they applied cleverly in science lessons. In English, students in Grade 11 were very effective in discussing complex texts and could identify themes about justice and the use of irony.

However, the standards attained in KG and the primary and lower secondary sections are lower than this and progress is often slow. In lower primary and KG in particular, standards are below average in English, mathematics and science. In part, this reflects the problems of learning in a language which is not one's own, but it also stems from weaknesses in teaching and educational resources, and in particular from too much formal whole-class teaching. In several lessons observed, consolidation of material that had already been covered left students bored and inattentive; and frequently students were not given opportunities to show their understanding through questioning or discussion. There are no discernible differences between the progress made by gender or ethnic groups. More-able students often make slower progress than they should because of insufficiently high expectations and a lack of challenge. Less-able students generally make satisfactory progress, although their progress is slow when whole-class work is too difficult for them. However, they make up some of the lost ground through additional, individual, support sessions.

Students' personal development is satisfactory with some very strong elements and some limitations. Across the school there is an orderliness and sense of enjoyment that produce a pleasant learning environment. Students and KG children behave very well. They are respectful and confident. It is greatly to their credit that students are keen to learn despite the dullness of many of their lessons. When lessons lose their interest they become disengaged but are passive rather than disruptive. They are intensely proud of their school and ambitious to do well at university and beyond. They are eager to engage visitors in conversation and have a mature relationship with their teachers. Some older students have chosen to devote time to helping younger students with their reading. The lack of extra-curricular provision means that there are few clubs for them to join or other activities to engage in. The volunteer helpers stand out

because they are the exception. In general, there is little opportunity to become involved, take responsibility and make a contribution to the community.

The high attainment associated with very strong examination success at age 16 and 18 cannot be taken for granted, as teaching is not ensuring that younger students make the progress necessary to follow this success. Although there is much good and very good teaching at upper grades, where subject knowledge is strongest, teaching overall is unsatisfactory. In KG and the lower school, the expectations of what children can achieve are too low and the resources and range of activities offered too limited. It is understandable that students lose interest and concentration when they are asked simply to copy or colour, or have to listen to the teacher for too long without any engagement in the lesson. They are not given opportunities to learn in a range of ways or to acquire skills such as exploration, independence, persistence or collaboration with others. The lack of challenge, combined with a failure on the part of the teacher to provide for students at different ability levels, was seen in a range of subjects including English, Arabic and mathematics. Some stronger teaching was seen in all Grades, but in a higher proportion in Grade 8 upwards. The best lessons, mainly but not entirely seen in Grades 11 and 12, demonstrate active participation by students. Extensive questioning kept students active and alert and tested their understanding, and provided opportunities for identifying and resolving misunderstandings early in a lesson. The very good and outstanding lessons seen also created scope for students to think for themselves or discuss ideas in groups. Here, their contributions became more secure and often more original. Learning was most rapid when students not only heard an explanation but were able to see a diagram, photograph or a map that confirmed this visually. Good lessons also moved at a rapid pace and kept all students on task throughout. Some good teaching was seen in all grades and subjects, so there is good practice for the school to build upon.

The strength of the curriculum is that it has underpinned the very high attainment and rapid progress of upper grade students in the subjects offered. The school's focus on Arabic, English, mathematics, Islamic studies, social studies and science has been successful over several years in enabling almost all school leavers to progress to university courses. To date, however, students have been offered a relatively narrow range of courses. English provision has expanded in upper grades but is not offered at AS /A2 despite its success at IGCSE. The school is tackling this narrowness with the introduction of the IB at diploma level as well as a range of additional subjects. For the majority of students in the school, however, the curriculum remains inadequate. It still does not provide sufficient breadth of experience in KG and for students in primary grades. In its delivery, the curriculum

relies too heavily on text books and is insufficiently well planned to ensure the good progress of individual students. Knowledge of the UAE is developed well in social studies but lacks prominence in the rest of the curriculum. Too many students have only a superficial understanding, for example, of the vital role played by Sheikh Zayed in the founding of the nation.

There is satisfactory and improving protection, care, guidance and support for students and KG children. This is promoted by the strongly caring attitude of all staff. They see themselves and the children as part of a family and are extremely protective. This translates into many areas of good care and protection through the consistent implementation of policies. Safeguarding and health and safety checks are carried out efficiently. The arrangements for delivery and collection of KG children are exemplary. There is a lack of clarity about the coordination of personal development at senior level so that the guidance and advice sought by students or parents can be inconsistently handled. Students say they feel very safe and well cared for. Few instances of bullying are known and those reported are dealt with swiftly.

The school's buildings and premises are unsatisfactory. They are very well maintained and provide a secure environment for learning. Although outdoor space is limited, the proportion of hard surface and Astroturf under cover is high. Since the last inspection, the rapid expansion of the school has resulted in overcrowded classes, with 35 in rooms that can only contain such numbers in tightly packed rows. This leaves little chance for circulation by the teacher to check the work of individuals. It also makes it very hard for students to sit in groups together and work collaboratively. For the school as a whole, the absence of key facilities such as an indoor gymnasium or assembly hall and a tiny library space limits their experience. For a wider curriculum to flourish, more specialist facilities are needed.

The school's resources are unsatisfactory, being in short supply and narrow in range, and so limiting students' progress. It is to the credit of the teachers of some of the best lessons observed that they were successful despite inadequate resources. As well as failing to provide students with an exciting range of materials, the narrowness of resources used means that there is little opportunity for activities such as independent research or group work. Outside Information and Communications Technology (ICT) lessons in the laboratory, there is no access to computers for the vast majority of lessons. The library is inadequate for the size of school. On the rare occasion that students have an interactive whiteboard in the classroom they use it well and play a large part in the lesson.

The principal and vice-principal have established the conditions to deliver exceptional academic success for cohorts of students taking external examinations. They have also sustained an orderly school with a very constructive ethos during a time of rapid expansion. Most students and parents are happy with the school; staff morale is high and, with the exception of KG, turnover is low. Personal development is not given the same prominence as academic study but is still satisfactory and manages to promote maturity, positive attitudes and good behaviour. Given these areas of strength, there remain significant areas of weakness where leadership is unsatisfactory. In particular, the inconsistency of teaching, the extent of inadequate teaching, the narrowness of the curriculum and the lack of resources reflect badly on school leaders. The slow rate of improvement indicates limitations in the leadership structure. Too much responsibility for gathering of intelligence and implementing change lies with the principal. This impacts negatively on the school's capacity for improvement. Capable colleagues operate in their own subjects and grades but not as part of a team that works systematically to constantly evaluate and upgrade provision. The highly successful examination outcomes and the satisfactory personal development for students mean that the school offers satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further:

In order to raise its effectiveness even further, the school should focus on:

1. improving provision in KG and primary grades. Do this by:
 - i. changing the curriculum and teaching approaches in these grades to focus on all aspects of a child's development, with time for child initiated learning, group work and attention to social, physical and creative development;
 - ii. giving support assistants an educational role in the classroom; and
 - iii. giving substantial authority to the head of KG to implement such changes.
2. Raising teaching quality further so that more lessons are outstanding and unsatisfactory practice is eliminated. Do this by:
 - i. ensuring all lessons contain effective differentiation;
 - ii. giving students more opportunity for independent learning, group and paired work and making active contributions to lessons; and

- iii. enriching the experience of all students by using a wider range of resources, especially visual and interactive ones such as Interactive White Boards.
3. Broadening the curriculum in secondary education, especially that offered at examination level. Do this by:
 - i. creating a place in the Grade 10 -12 curriculum for those subjects already enjoying popularity in lower grades, such as art, drama, accounting and French and by offering English at As and A2;
 - ii. giving a more significant place to the IB programme and promoting an understanding of its benefits to students; and
 - iii. greatly expanding the range of extra-curricular activities and creating a more influential role for older students, for instance by introducing a prefect system or expanding their work in helping younger children read.
4. Radically improving resource levels by:
 - i. installing interactive whiteboards in all classrooms;
 - ii. encouraging staff to exploit a wider range of text books and other published materials;
 - iii. ensuring that the student white boards in lower grade classes are used regularly; and
 - iv. making classroom and corridor walls stimulating and informative through extensive display of students work.
5. Taking the necessary steps to expand buildings and premises so that they offer students an indoor gymnasium, a suitably large library, social areas and classrooms that can accommodate classes effectively.
6. Changing leadership and management structures so that:
 - i. the principal is supported by a team of senior colleagues each of whom has a clearly defined whole school responsibility. This team shapes policy together and monitors practice systematically; and
 - ii. monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out using Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) criteria for success and all observations focus on the progress being made.