



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



Summary Inspection Report

American Community School

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Iqraa

American Community School

Inspection Date	21 st – 24 th April, 2013
School ID#	097
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	American
Number of Students	1048
Age Range	4- 17 years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Bob Gross
School Address	P.O. box 42114, Khalidyah Area, Abu Dhabi
Telephone Number	(+971) 02 681 5115
Fax Number	(+971) 02 681 6006
Email (ADEC)	Americancomm.pvt@adec.ac.ae

Introduction

The school was inspected by five inspectors who observed 65 lessons, conducted 29 interviews including those with students, parents and staff, analyzed the results of 100 parent surveys, reviewed students' work, analyzed data and documents supplied by the school and attended activities such as homeroom, assembly, College Fair and Tutorial. Inspectors also observed breaks, lunch, and the arrival and departure of students.

Description of the School

The American Community School (ACS) was founded in 1972 as a non-profit educational institution operated by an elected Board of Trustees, all of whom are parents. Its mission is to provide a challenging learning environment and prepare a culturally diverse student body for a lifelong commitment to learning, service, and global citizenship. ACS follows an American curriculum. The Board currently has nine members who are responsible for overseeing the work of the Superintendent. He in turn is responsible for the work of three principals, one each for the Elementary School which houses KG1-Grade 5, the Middle School for Grades 6 to 9 and the High School for students in Grades 9 to 12.

There are 1048 students at ACS; the elementary school has 441 students, the middle school 255 and the high school 352. There is a diverse student body with 50 nationalities represented: American 57%, European 13%, Canadian 8%, Asian 7%, Oceanic 4%, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Emirati 3% and African 1%. There are 95 students identified as having special needs with mostly mild learning difficulties. There are 28 students in the elementary school identified as having language difficulties. There are 150 on the payroll, 115 of whom are teachers. Of the 115 teachers 88 are overseas hired, 91 hold a teaching certificate or credential, 49 have a Bachelor's degree, 60 hold a Master's and 6 have Doctorates. ACS hires teachers with at least a Bachelor's degree and a minimum of two years experience.

The school only admits those students who it believes will be successful in the ACS environment. For younger students an assessment is made of their individual skills and aptitudes. Older students are assessed on their reading and mathematical skills and are required to present records of achievement from their previous school. Students with limited skills in English are not permitted to remain after Grade 5 if they have not gained proficiency. Fees range from AED 39,960 for KG1, to AED 73,130 for high school students, which is in the high band. There is also a non-refundable application fee of AED 300 and a one-time facility fee of AED 18,700.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band A

Grade 3

Inspectors judged the American Community School to be in Band A; that is a high performing school.

Attainment in almost all subjects is at or above international standards. Students perform well on internationally normed tests as well as internal tests measuring achievement. They progress at a good pace from year to year. However, in some classes high achieving students do not make progress commensurate with their ability. Students demonstrate well-developed 21st Century skills and are very comfortable with ICT and understand its value in their education.

Attainment and progress in Arabic for both native and non-native speakers is satisfactory but varies between Arabic and non-Arabic speakers. Students' skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking were limited and below expectations for similar age groups. Non-Arabic speakers performed better than first language Arabic speakers. In the lower grades, students are able to identify letters and write words and simple, short sentences. In Islamic Studies, attainment and progress is below expectations for similar age students as they lack an understanding of the basic practices of Islam. In a Grade 10 class students were not able to articulate basic information about Islam or recite from the Holy Qur'an. Informal meetings with students demonstrated some understanding of the UAE but this is inconsistent across the school.

Students were very well behaved and demonstrated a high level of self-discipline. They care for each other and respect all adults on campus. They enjoy attending ACS and appreciate the rich cultural diversity it affords. They are confident about themselves and feel free to express their own thoughts and opinions. They are articulate and creative and show initiative both in and out of the classroom. Students are active in the life of the school and participate in various clubs, student council, volunteer activities and athletics.

Teachers are well qualified and know their subjects well. They enjoy their role as teachers and mentors to students and have a good rapport with them. They create a learning culture that helps to develop independent students with ever improving critical thinking skills. They often engage and challenge students to "think outside the box." Many lessons are creative and interesting. For example, in a 7th grade social studies class, students were working on a project with their laptops about immigration. They could choose one of five projects to extend their understanding including writing a diary about the experience of being an immigrant. In an 11th Grade Spanish class, the teacher was teaching by skilfully engaging students in high-level conversation. Teachers in the elementary school

used a variety of teaching strategies like games, play and discussion and often encouraged collaborative work.

Some lessons, however, are teacher directed and consist of lecture and worksheets without much input from students. Classroom management across the school is very effective. Although almost all teachers understand the theory underlying learning objectives, most do not use them appropriately. Activities are often listed on the board but not shared with students. Students are not always sure what they are to learn and why. Although almost all students perform at a high level there is infrequent provision for the most able, not always allowing them to progress at a pace commensurate with their ability. Students are eager and enthusiastic and relish the opportunity to work collaboratively and participate in class. Almost all students are very comfortable with technology, from younger ones using iPads to older ones using their own laptops. Students' critical thinking skills are well developed and they demonstrate strong 21st Century skills. They understand how what they learn connects to the real world and could apply it well.

The curriculum is broad and balanced with optional subjects available in the middle and high school. They include art, drama, music, ICT, Spanish and French. The curriculum offers students the opportunity to enrich their experience through extra and co-curricular activities like sports and subject linked clubs. It is designed to develop independent, articulate thinkers and learners. Students have good opportunities to participate in the community as volunteers and travel both in the UAE and abroad. The provision for Arabic and Islamic Studies is not as well planned as for other subjects and relies on the MOE curriculum with little enrichment. There is insufficient planned time for Islamic studies and this has an adverse impact on student's progress in this subject.

Students receive very effective pastoral care through the work of the school counsellors and teachers in each division. This care is based on well constructed systems for care, support, advice and guidance. For example, high school students had an opportunity to attend an on-site college fair and receive very good guidance as to college requirements and admissions criteria. There is a procedure in the faculty handbook about child protection, but no detailed policy and many staff members are not aware of the procedures.

The ACS buildings and grounds are very attractive and well maintained and enhance the learning experience. Classrooms and auxiliary areas are of adequate size and contain age-appropriate furniture. The play areas are covered and have safe equipment for use during breaks and lunch. The school has clearly defined written safety and emergency procedures which are distributed and displayed

throughout the campus. Signage for evacuation is clear and well marked. All medicines and laboratory chemicals and equipment are well protected. Although there are clear procedures for accounting for children during an evacuation, the procedure for doing this with adults, is not fully communicated or understood.

The school is well resourced, especially in the area of technology. Each teacher is provided with a new laptop every three years and computers can be found in the two media centers, classrooms and dedicated computer labs. Each classroom has an interactive projector and digital and video cameras are available for loan by students. Both media centers have an extensive collection of current books, periodicals and reference materials. The science laboratories have appropriate equipment and are well supplied. Sports, music and art classes have new and ample resources. The teaching staff is well qualified and the number is high enough to ensure a very good student to teacher ratio. Food preparation and consumption areas are clean, free of debris and inspected regularly by outside agencies.

ACS has experienced a very high turnover in superintendents since the last inspection in 2011, after the retirement of the last permanent one. During this period there were also some issues with the Board of Trustees. There was not a clear understanding that a Board's role does not include the day to day administration of the school. This caused instability and uncertainty on the campus. Senior leaders, to their credit, effectively maintained consistency and the smooth day-to-day running of the school. The current interim superintendent has initiated targeted changes to position the school to drive improvement forward once the new permanent superintendent arrives in August 2013. Some of the targeted changes included stabilizing and training the Board in its role, improving trust and communication with parents, enhancing the physical environment and making appropriate staffing changes. The school has not, however, shown sufficient commitment to fully address ADEC requirements and does not offer the full number of minutes in Islamic Studies or maintain a current, fully detailed central register of staff. The school leadership has not overseen the development of a rigorous enough school improvement plan nor has it focused adequate enough attention on self-evaluation and performance management.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Improve strategic leadership by:
 - i. ensuring that school improvement planning includes agreed priorities, measurable success criteria, personnel responsibilities, timelines for monitoring progress with audited outcomes and action points following each review;

- ii. establishing a more robust process for creating and maintaining the self-evaluation plan which is regularly reviewed and updated to capture and measure the impact of all key school activities that have an impact on the improvement of student learning; and
 - iii. creating procedures for more formally monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in order to further improve the learning opportunities for all students and provide more focused, individualised professional development for teachers.
2. Improve teaching and learning by reviewing instructional planning to establish more differentiated learning opportunities for students in all classrooms, with a particular focus on providing higher achieving students with challenging activities more closely matched to their achievement levels.
3. Ensure that all ADEC regulations are fully complied with in the areas of course requirements in Islamic studies, and the availability of an up-to-date and complete central register of staff.