



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



Summary Inspection Report

Polaris Private Academy

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Iqraa

Polaris Private Academy

Inspection Date	5 th – 8 th November, 2012
School ID#	219
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	Ministry of Education
Number of Students	808
Age Range	KG–Grade 11
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Mohamed Saad
School Address	Polaris Private Academy, Al Najdah Street, Abu Dhabi
Telephone Number	(+971) 02 6425117
Fax Number	(+971) 02 6412247
Email (ADEC)	polaris.pvt@adec.ac.ae

Introduction

The school was inspected by four inspectors. The inspectors observed 58 lessons. They held discussions with representatives from the school's owners, the administration team and teaching staff as well as students and parents. The inspectors considered the school ethos, the quality of students' learning, experiences, personal development, progress and the teaching they receive.

Description of the School

The school opened in September 2011 in the former Al Dana school buildings. It is owned by the Polaris Educational Consultancy and governed by the company's board members. The school's mission is to 'bring global awareness to students by providing an education that promotes an understanding of the world community while preserving the culture and traditions in the religion of Islam'. Since the previous inspection, the owners have appointed a new principal, who is currently going through the process of completing all of the necessary approval procedures. He has been in post since September 2012.

Nearly all of the students are Muslim and all are of Arab heritage. The main nationalities represented are Syrian (24%), Jordanian (23%), Egyptian (9%), Palestinian (8%), Sudanese (10%), Yemeni (5%), and Emirati (5%). There are 98 students in the kindergarten, 219 students in Grades 1 to 3 and 491 in Grades 4 to 11. The majority of students are boys. The school has started to identify students who may have special educational needs. The principal estimates that this is likely to be around 15% of the population when the process is complete. The school teaches the Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum in all grades, with the introduction of English from the beginning of the kindergarten (KG). There are no entry tests. Students have been admitted from the former 'villa' schools in the locality and an increasing number have joined the school from other establishments this year. Around 250 of the 600 students on roll during the last academic year left to go to other schools. The school admitted around 450 new students at the beginning of this academic year increasing the population to over 800.

The school operates four different fee schedules, one for each of the predecessor schools and one for new enrolments. Annual tuition fees range from AED 10,550 in KG to AED 16,450 in the upper grades. The school continues to maintain lower fees for students from the three predecessor schools. Teachers' monthly salaries range from AED 3,000 to AED 5,000.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band C

Grade 7

Inspectors judged Polaris Private Academy to be in Band C, that is a school in need of significant improvement.

In the few months since the previous inspection, the school has ensured that the safety concerns highlighted at that time have been addressed. The recent introduction of a code of conduct has started to have a noticeable effect on students' behaviour because it has been communicated effectively to staff, parents and students. Some progress has been made in improving the quality of leadership and management through work to establish a more distributed leadership team. Coordinators in key subjects have a clearer understanding than before about their role in leading teaching and driving school improvement. While the school is being guided in the right direction for further improvement, inadequate progress has been made since the previous inspection in raising students' achievement because the quality of teaching, the use of assessment and the resources available to teachers and students remain unsatisfactory.

The standards students reach and the progress that they make remains unsatisfactory. Attainment in Arabic and social studies is broadly average. In the other key subjects of Islamic studies, English, mathematics and science, attainment is below average. Students' basic literacy skills are satisfactory. Their information and communication technology (ICT) skills are underdeveloped because there are too few opportunities at school for them to practise and improve. Progress is unsatisfactory in all core subjects. The school has still not implemented the use of standardised tests or clear assessment criteria to provide an objective, standardised view of student performance. There are no established systems for tracking students' progress.

Most students develop satisfactory communication, language and literacy skills in Arabic although this is not consistent across the school. While students read well, their use of language for communication and self-expression is limited. Progress is slow in most lessons as the range of targeted skills is narrow. There is an excessive focus on knowledge rather than understanding and application in Islamic studies lessons. Most students in the primary section develop an age-appropriate knowledge about Islam. Secondary school students have weaker knowledge, as the curriculum is not challenging enough. Progress is limited across the school due to insufficient focus on linking Islam to real life. Most students develop basic knowledge about key people, events and places in the UAE and the wider gulf region during social studies lessons. Skills of effective citizenship are underdeveloped. Progress is slow as analytical and higher order skills are rarely incorporated into lessons.

Students' knowledge of mathematical techniques is limited because they are not taught to use different methods to check the accuracy of their work. Almost all work is theoretical and there are very few opportunities to apply the skills they learn in order to solve problems. Students' progress in science is held back for similar reasons. Too much emphasis is placed upon learning facts and too little time is given to practical experimentation and investigation. Progress in English is too slow throughout the school. In the kindergarten, new learning is restricted by the repetitive over-learning of vocabulary. Students do not use and apply their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in a variety of situations and this restricts the progress that they make.

The new code of conduct, which clearly sets out school and classroom rules and the consequences for breaking them, is displayed in classrooms. Students are familiar with its content. It has been recently established and communicated to staff and parents by the new principal. Even in this short time, students state that they have noticed some improvements in behaviour around the school. They are developing in self-confidence and self-awareness and understand the need to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and decision making. Students' inappropriate behaviour is still of concern in some lessons, where boys in older grades experience disruption to their learning because of a minority who are disrespectful to staff and disengaged with learning. Some of this poor behaviour is a response to dull and repetitive teaching or the inconsistent implementation of the school's behaviour policy. Classes for girls and younger students are typically better behaved. Students in these groups are attentive and have positive attitudes that are shown through their eager responses to teachers' questions and regular attendance. In a few lessons observed in the primary section, students' motivation was secured by some collaborative activities. In these lessons, students worked enthusiastically and interacted well with each other; learning was well paced and enjoyable in these lessons.

Teaching is often characterised by methods which are instructional rather than student-focused. Teachers deliver lessons to the whole class. Little regard is given to differences in students' prior attainment. This is because assessment practices are poorly developed. Teachers do not have information about what students already know and can do. Lessons, therefore, are not planned to build on students' strengths and focus on areas of weakness. Students rarely get opportunities to work independently because teachers dominate lessons and talk too much. In classes for older students, teachers maintain a traditional layout of desks in rows which prevents students actively collaborating with each other. In some primary classes, teachers have reorganised the learning environment and grouped desks together. These arrangements were only rarely observed to be

used for students to work together. In most lessons, teachers identified the activities that were to take place as the objectives for the session. Teachers do not consistently have a sound understanding of how to communicate learning objectives because they have yet to participate in a programme of training that the new principal has devised to teach them these skills. This is also preventing staff from making best use of the school's new lesson planning proforma which is appropriately focused on identifying the intended learning outcomes.

The curriculum is unsatisfactory because it is too reliant on textbooks. Teachers deliver lessons based entirely upon their content and students derive the answers to teachers' generic questions directly from the text. This supports students' recall of facts and knowledge, but does not give them sufficient opportunities to develop skills in investigation, problem solving and higher order thinking. The material in these books does not meet the needs of all students because the tasks that are provided do not extend the learning of more able students. In the kindergarten, students' progress in literacy and numeracy is limited by a curriculum which is based upon copying and tracing from worksheets. Such closed activities constrain and hamper learning and, as a result, students are not enabled to be independent learners making choices and extending their developing skills through exploration and play. They have insufficient opportunities for child-initiated learning and purposeful play activities that reflect the developmental needs of young children and the best international practice.

The principal and vice principal have high expectations of students and have started to set consistently high standards regarding their protection, care, guidance and support and are role models for school staff. The school has in place a child protection policy, which provides staff with clear advice regarding safeguarding issues. Further training is needed before school staff are fully prepared to undertake their roles and responsibilities in this area. Relationships between staff and students are largely positive. There is the beginning of a rewards system to recognise achievement and encourage good behaviour which is urgently needed to counter-balance the current over-reliance on sanctions. Attendance registers are taken daily and effective action is being taken to reduce the number of students who are late in arriving at school. Older students do not receive the important advice and guidance regarding the courses they need to take in order to achieve personal goals and ambitions.

The buildings and outdoor areas are adequate for the school's current needs. Surfaces around the school, including the playground areas, no longer present the significant hazard identified previously; appropriate action has been taken to improve them. Classrooms are of appropriate size for the groups of students that have been allocated to them. The school has addressed the hygiene issues

identified in the previous report by ensuring that students' toilets are cleaned after each break. The latest school improvement plan has identified that the school intends to introduce dedicated classrooms for subjects rather than sections. Part of the rationale for that plan is to overcome the drab and uninspiring environments evident in many secondary classrooms by giving teachers responsibility for their teaching base.

Material resources available in classrooms, laboratories and the library do not support learning effectively. The textbooks used continue to limit the curriculum rather than enhance it. Staff and students in some classes supplement the resources provided with their own to make lessons more interesting, such as in science lessons where an older student brought in a kidney for dissection and where the laboratory assistant made visual aids to reinforce younger students' developing knowledge of the parts of plants. The school relies upon donations of books for its library stock. Consequently, the range and condition of the few books that are available are inadequate.

In the short period that the acting principal has been in post, he has clarified the actions that need to be taken to secure increasingly rapid change in the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the school's leadership and management. As a result, the school improvement plan he has written is now better focused on the most important priorities for raising students' achievement. Some of the actions identified have been initiated. For example, the structure of the leadership team has been reviewed and subject coordinators have been selected. These middle leaders generally have a positive attitude towards the required changes. In some cases, such as in mathematics, they bring some skills from other schools that they are beginning to use to help their departments. Their involvement in training and monitoring their staff is in its infancy and therefore has not yet had an impact on the quality of teaching. The actions that have been taken so far give some confidence and credibility in the leadership of the school to be successful in developing the school further, but there has not yet been sufficient time to establish a clear trend of sustained improvement. The school currently provides an unsatisfactory level of education for its students and for this reason it offers unsatisfactory value for money. Parents who responded to the questionnaire and who met with inspectors were generally positive about the school. They were concerned about not having enough information about the progress their children were making at school. The school does not yet have a system for formally gathering the views of parents.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Improve the quality of teaching, so that students make better progress and achieve higher standards, by:
 - i. using high quality standardised tests together with other relevant forms of baseline and on-going assessment to ensure that teachers know the starting points of their students;
 - ii. ensuring teachers receive training in identifying and communicating the learning objectives in every lesson, based on what students already know and can do and the next steps they need to take in their learning; and
 - iii. providing appropriate learning resources in classrooms, science laboratories and the library, that stimulate and motivate students and extend their learning beyond the basic curriculum.
2. Improve the leadership and management by:
 - i. training subject coordinators to monitor the effectiveness and impact of improved lesson planning on students' learning and progress;
 - ii. ensuring that senior leaders evaluate teaching more rigorously, focusing on how well students learn and progress in lessons; and
 - iii. developing purposeful communication with parents to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of how well their children are learning and making progress.
3. Improve the quality of the curriculum by ensuring teachers enhance the material provided in the text books with other resources and learning activities that:
 - i. extend the learning of more able students;
 - ii. give all students regular opportunities to use and apply the facts and skills they have learned; and
 - iii. promote learning through play in the kindergarten.