



مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم
Abu Dhabi Education Council
التعليم أولاً Education First



Inspection Report

Polaris Private Academy

Academic Year 2013 – 14

Iqraa

Polaris Private Academy

Inspection Date	10 – 13 November 2013
School ID#	219
Licensed Curriculum	Ministry of Education (MoE)
Number of Students	886
Age Range	3½ to 18 years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Ismail Kahtan
School Address	Al Nadja Street, Abu Dhabi
Telephone Number	+971 (0)2 442 2064
Fax Number	+971 (0)2 641 2247
Official Email (ADEC)	polaris.pvt@adec.ac.ae
School Website	www.polarisprivateacademy.com/index.html
Date of last inspection	5 – 8 November 2012

The overall effectiveness of the school

Inspectors considered the school in relation to 3 performance categories

Band A High performing (overall effectiveness grade 1, 2 or 3)

Band B Satisfactory (overall effectiveness grade 4 or 5)

Band C In need of significant improvement (overall effectiveness grade 6, 7 or 8)

The School was judged to be:	BAND C;	GRADE 6
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The main strengths of the school are the:

- positive attitudes, energy and commitment of teachers and staff
- quality of relationships and calm atmosphere of the school
- commitment and drive of the newly strengthened senior leadership team and Board to bring about improvement
- high attendance of students.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- quality of teaching, so that students make better progress and achieve higher standards
 - quality of the curriculum
 - level of resources to support all areas of the curriculum
 - role and responsibilities of middle managers
 - tracking and monitoring of students' academic and personal development.
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Introduction

The school was inspected by 4 inspectors who observed 86 lessons. They met with school leaders, teachers and students. They observed assemblies, break periods and students' arrival and departure. Inspectors analysed data and documents supplied by the school. In addition, 139 responses from parents to a questionnaire about the school were analysed.

Description of the School

The school opened in September 2011 in the former Al Dana school buildings and is located in the centre of Abu Dhabi city. Since opening there have been a series of Principals and acting Principals. The current Principal has been in post for a year. An academic advisor joined the school eight months ago. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has been strengthened this term by the addition of two Vice Principals. Additionally an academic development team of five has joined the SLT.

There are 886 students with 131 in Kindergarten (KG), 355 in Cycle 1, 227 in Cycle 2 and 173 in Cycle 3. There are 531 boys and 355 girls. Almost all students are Muslim and the vast majority are of Arab heritage with 4% Emirati, 24% Syrian, 18% Jordanian, 11% Sudanese, 8% Palestinian, 7% Yemini and 28% made up of a further nineteen different nationalities. The school's vision is: 'Through a sophisticated education system and community partnership, the school aims to provide outstanding education in order to prepare a generation with a high sense of faith, loyalty and creativity of thinking and skills'. The admissions policy is inclusive, except in Grades 11 and 12 where an interview is required.

The school follows the MoE curriculum in all grades except KG and in subjects except English where textbooks selected by the school provide the curriculum. The school identifies approximately 3% of students as having special educational needs (SEN), including learning disorders, speech impairment, hearing difficulties, and physical disabilities. There is a high turnover rate of students with 25% of the school population leaving and being replaced last academic year. A high proportion of students are Syrian refugees and some move on after a short time. A number of these students have not attended school for several years and their levels of Arabic can be well below age related expectations.

Fees range from AED 4,224 to AED 14,500 annually, excluding registration fees, books and transport. Teachers' salaries range from AED 42,000 to AED 84,000 per annum. Most are paid the lowest rates. School fees and salaries are in the range of being very affordable to low.

The Effectiveness of the School

Students' attainment & progress

Standards in Islamic studies Arabic, social studies, English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) are below curriculum expectations at all grade levels and well below best international expectations. Progress does not gather any momentum until grades 10-12, where it is at best broadly satisfactory. Students of all ages do not make the expected progress in gaining 21st century skills, such as critical and creative thinking and problem solving.

Children who start school in KG have appropriate levels of Arabic and are broadly in line with age related expectations in social and physical skills. Few children have any experience of English prior to coming to school. They make slow progress in all areas of learning including communication and literacy skills, numeracy, creativity and thinking skills. By the time they leave KG both attainment and progress are below age related expectations.

In Islamic studies, students across the school acquire expected levels of knowledge but their understanding of the deep links between their learning and their everyday lives is weak. By Grade 12, recitation of the Holy Qur'an is unsatisfactory. In Arabic, students' speaking skills vary. In lower grades, many students struggle to express their thoughts in standard Arabic. Reading is not promoted well enough in the lower grades as there is no graded reading scheme. In the higher grades, students read fluently with good levels of comprehension. Writing skills and grammar remain below age related expectations and students in upper grades have too few opportunities to produce extended writing. Students develop the expected knowledge in social studies. Boys in Grades 9 and 10 were able to explain reasons for certain historical events. Too often information is simply memorized and students cannot link what they learn to their own experience and daily lives. Knowledge about the UAE, its values and heritage are generally limited.

In mathematics students develop calculation skills in line with curriculum expectations. The application of these skills to problem solving, reading and interpreting data and transferring mathematical knowledge to other curriculum areas is weak. Scientific knowledge is at an appropriate level. In Grade 3 for example, students can classify animals according to the type of teeth they have and food they eat. At all grade levels investigative skills and the ability to carry out experiments is underdeveloped.

Students' levels and experience of using English outside school are variable. For the majority, standards are well below the age related expectations of students learning English as an additional language. Many students do not speak English with confidence and their vocabulary is limited. By Grade 12, writing is still limited to short paragraphs and punctuation is not always accurate. Information and communications technology

(ICT) skills across the school are at an early stage of development as the ICT labs have only recently been set up. Students are starting to become familiar with some common software applications.

Students' personal development

Relationships between students and teachers are positive and respectful. Attendance is high. Punctuality at the start of the day is unsatisfactory but students arrive to lessons on time throughout the day. Most students behave well in lessons, when moving around the school and at break times. Behaviour deteriorates when lessons are not motivating and engaging or well matched to students' learning needs. Boys in upper grades are especially prone to this. Equally, when children in KG are expected to sit for too long, they become disengaged and lose concentration.

The majority of students are keen to learn and they participate with enthusiasm when they are actively involved in lessons. There are not enough opportunities for students to work collaboratively, problem solve or be creative. This negatively impacts on the development of students' social and interpersonal skills and their readiness for the next stages of education and employment. Students have limited roles of responsibility and this means that they do not develop leadership skills or self-confidence sufficiently. Students understanding of the values and moral viewpoints of the UAE are at a basic level. Students know how to live healthy lives but they do not demonstrate this with the food they eat.

The quality of teaching and learning

Teachers' subject knowledge is mostly secure enabling them to share accurate information. There are exceptions to this. Not all language teachers model Arabic or English to a high enough standard. Teachers in KG and the lower grades do not have sufficient understanding of how young children learn and so the teaching strategies they use are inappropriate and ineffective. In most lessons, adequate behaviour management ensures that learning is not interrupted.

The quality of teaching varies within subjects and across grades. Too often limited teaching methods and inadequate levels of resources fail to motivate students. Teachers talk for too much of the lesson restricting learning to the acquisition of knowledge at the expense of the development of necessary skills. Some teachers are starting to provide learning activities of varying levels to help support the least able and to provide sufficient challenge for the higher achieving students. This approach is not yet sufficiently consistent and impacts on the amount of progress that students make. Some collaborative learning is being offered to students, but the tasks are not always appropriate for the size of the group. This results in some students being passive observers rather than active and productive participants.

Better quality teaching occurs most often in the higher grades. The pace of delivery is swift, questioning is probing allowing students to share their thinking and students have more opportunities to work in groups. Assessment across the school is limited so that students do not know precisely how well they are doing or what they need to do next in order to improve.

Meeting students' needs through the curriculum

The school complies with the requirements of the Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum. It has not been sufficiently adjusted or enhanced to ensure that it meets the needs of all students including those with SEN, lower attaining students or high achievers. The curriculum enables students to become knowledgeable, but does not promote the development of independent learning skills and personal qualities that are needed by students in their future learning and working lives.

Too much of the curriculum is driven by textbooks and worksheets and does not excite, motivate or stimulate students. In science, students are not involved in enough practical experiments. In mathematics, calculations are not linked enough to solving real life problems. In KG, children do not learn through independent play and investigation. There is an emerging programme of extra-curricular activities, school trips and visitors to the school. These remain underdeveloped and involve only a small percentage of the school population. The promotion of UAE culture, family and community values through the curriculum is still at a basic level.

The protection, care, guidance and support of students

The protection and care of students is a priority. A harmonious school culture has been nurtured, resulting in a calm and caring atmosphere. There is a written child protection policy, staff are trained in its application, and procedures for reporting any incidents are known and understood. The school is virtually free of any bullying or intimidation and no corporal punishment was reported or evident during the inspection. As a result students say they feel safe and secure. Daily attendance is monitored and any absences followed up the same day.

The school nurse is appropriately qualified and first aid provision is effective. Arrival and departure from school is supervised to ensure the safety of students using school transportation. A shared policy and whole school focus on improving behaviour has largely been successful. Occasionally, there are inconsistencies in the delivery of the policy and some missed opportunities to praise and promote positive behaviour. Student guidance is less strong. The tracking and monitoring of students' academic and personal development is underdeveloped. The identification of, and support for, students with SEN is at an early stage. There is limited support for students joining the school, moving from one phase of the school to the next and leaving the school. With

students in Grade 12 for the first time this academic year, some basic guidance to support students' choices for higher education has been provided.

The quality of the school's buildings and premises

The school is of sufficient size to be able to meet the needs of the curriculum. Most classrooms are big enough to allow for flexible seating arrangements and varying approaches to teaching and learning. Recent improvements include the painting of the school, the setting up of two ICT labs and the science labs to a functioning level and the replacement of a number of air-conditioning units. Facilities also include a small library, small auditorium, prayer rooms and a clinic. Sporting facilities are outdoors and therefore limited during the hottest months of the year. Outside areas are sufficiently shaded. There have been a few basic adjustments to cater for students with physical disabilities but they remain limited. There have been sufficient improvements to ensure that the premises are now acceptable.

Security of the school is effective because security guards control entry to the site. All visitors are required to sign in and CCTV has been installed. The building and facilities are clean and cared for. Hazardous materials are stored appropriately and regular checks are carried out on fire fighting equipment and electrical appliances. Exits are well signed and evacuation procedures are in place. The poor quality of displays in many classrooms is not conducive to creating a stimulating or inspiring learning environment.

The school's resources to support its aims

There are insufficient resources to adequately support the needs of the curriculum. This adversely impacts on the quality of teaching and learning, affecting student's motivation and engagement and ultimately attainment and progress. The school has recently invested in enough computers for two ICT labs. Beyond this, access to computers to support teachers and students are limited. Only a few classrooms have data projectors. There are three computers and a small stock of new books in the library but these do not adequately support the development of students' research and 21st century skills. Books to promote the development of reading in Arabic or English remain insufficient. The youngest students do not have any access to modern ICT. Resources in the KG are inadequate. In most lessons across the school, there are too few resources used to support effective learning. Resources to support curriculum delivery in science and sports are minimal as are resources to support students identified as having SEN.

Due to circumstances beyond the control of the school, there was a turn over of more than fifty percent of teachers last academic year. All vacancies have been filled with qualified teachers. A number of these teachers are more recently qualified and few have specific training to meet the learning needs of students in KG. School transport meets the expected levels of maintenance and safety and there are sufficient resources to meet requirements for evacuation procedures.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has been in operation for a little over two years. During that time there have been changes in the leadership but this is now more established and has been further strengthened this year with an academic development team. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and the development plan is appropriately detailed.

The board of governors is actively involved in the school, observing lessons and meeting in various combinations on a weekly basis. Together they conduct monthly reviews on the progress reached against targets that have been identified in the school development plan. From the start of this school year a far greater focus has been placed on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising student attainment and progress. There has been no discernible impact of this work on outcomes for students.

The management of the school on a day-to-day basis is effective and as a result the school runs smoothly. Links with parents and other organisations are still at a basic level. Parent councils have been elected and the mothers' council is actively involved in supporting social events. Parents are occasionally invited to join Board meetings but they are not yet involved in any decision making. Responses from parents' questionnaires were varied with the majority positive and supportive of the school.

Teachers are keen to improve, are energetic and motivated. Weekly professional development is well received and teachers welcome the feedback after lessons have been observed. Small elements of the training are emerging in a growing number of lessons but are not yet embedded.

The roles of middle management are at an early stage of development. Responsibilities are limited and they do not have sufficient release time from teaching commitments to be able to develop their roles or become involved in the robust monitoring of teaching.

Assessments in KG and at other key points are not yet adequate enough to provide a firm baseline to be able to measure students' progress. Assessment data is limited and not yet analysed and used to inform planning at all levels including lesson planning and school improvement planning. Tracking and monitoring of students' academic and personal development is not carried out at a whole school level and does not help to identify and set individual student targets in order to raise standards.

The school has made satisfactory progress in some aspects of school development. The strengthened senior leadership team, the commitment of the Board, enthusiasm of teachers and a desire by all concerned to move the school forward are all positive signs. It has not demonstrated any secure improvement in raising academic standards so far.

The school has not yet demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to improve without external support.

Progress since the last inspection

The school has recently responded to the last inspection report in a number of ways:

- two additional new VPs and a professional development team of five have been appointed to strengthen the SLT
- the school has been painted and maintenance issues addressed
- behaviour has greatly improved
- the science labs and ICT labs are now functioning
- a small quantity of library books and computers for the labs have been purchased
- some data projectors have been installed and A/Cs replaced
- child protection training has taken place
- CCTV cameras have been installed

A weekly programme of professional development continues; it is too soon to see the impact of this on raising attainment and progress. Curriculum coordinators have been identified but their roles are limited. Resources are still not sufficient to meet requirements. Improvements in the care, protection and personal development of students and buildings have been satisfactory. Progress in the critical areas of strengthening the quality of the curriculum, improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising students' attainment and progress have been too slow.

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. continuing to ensure that teachers are trained to deliver high-quality lessons that focus on the needs of all students
 - ii. rigorously monitoring the impact that training has on raising student attainment and progress
 - iii. ensuring that training includes a focus on how young children learn and how to baseline assess young children in order to be able to measure their progress
2. Improve the quality of the curriculum by:
 - i. adjusting it to meet the needs of students with SENs, those needing additional support and the more able students

- ii. making learning active and student centred
 - iii. enriching the curriculum with a programme of clubs and activities
3. Urgently provide adequate resources to support all areas of the curriculum so that teachers can teach more effectively and students can learn through practical activity.
 4. Strengthen the roles of middle leaders, involving them in monitoring how effectively teachers promote students' learning and progress.
 5. Establish whole school systems for the tracking and monitoring of students' academic and personal development in order to raise standards.

Inspection Grades

	Band A High performing			Band B Satisfactory		Band C In need of significant improvement		
Performance Standard	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory & Improving	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Poor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Standard 1: Students' attainment and progress								
Standard 2: Students' personal development								
Standard 3: The quality of teaching and learning								
Standard 4: The meeting of students' needs through the curriculum								
Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students								
Standard 6: The quality of the school's building and premises								
Standard 7: The school's resources to support its aims								
Standard 8: The effectiveness of leadership and management								
Summary Evaluation: The school's overall effectiveness								