



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



Inspection Report

Polaris Private Academy

Academic Year 2014 – 2015

Iqraa

Polaris Private Academy

Inspection Date	9 – 12 February 2015
School ID#	219
Licensed Curriculum	Ministry of Education (MoE)
Number of Students	1165
Age Range	4 to 18 years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Ismail Qahtan
School Address	Al Najda Street, Behind Shabia Police Station, Near Al Dana Government School, Abu Dhabi
Telephone Number	+971 (0)2 642 5117
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	10 – 13 November 2013

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:

- students' academic achievement in Arabic and social studies
- students' personal development and the improvements to their behaviour and attitudes
- the quality of care, guidance and support that enables students to settle quickly into school
- the positive school ethos, underpinned by the effective promotion of UAE values.

The main areas for improvement are:

- students' attainment and progress in English, mathematics, science, Islamic education and ICT
 - meeting students' individual academic needs, especially for the more able and those students identified as having special educational needs (SEN)
 - the level of participation and involvement of students in lessons to enable them to apply their skills and knowledge independently
 - enabling students to have a secure understanding of their learning and what they need to do next to improve
 - systems to track students' academic achievement regularly and accurately
 - the quality of self-evaluation and its impact in improving teaching and learning.
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Introduction

The school was evaluated by 5 inspectors who observed 89 lessons and conducted several meetings with the principal, senior staff, students and parents. Inspectors analysed test and assessment results, scrutinised students' work and collated the responses to 91 parents' questionnaires. They considered the school's policies, procedures and documentation and observed assemblies, and arrival and departure procedures. The principal and other school leaders were involved throughout the inspection and conducted 9 joint observations of lessons with inspectors.

Description of the School

The school is located in the centre of Abu Dhabi and opened in September 2011. The school's vision is: 'Through a sophisticated education system and community partnership ... to provide outstanding education in order to prepare a generation with a high sense of faith, loyalty and creativity of thinking and skills'.

There are 1165 students, 58% are boys. There are 167 children in KG and 998 in grades 1–12. All students are of Arabic heritage, well over 90% of them are Muslim and 3% are Emirati. The largest groups are 25% from Syria, 18% from Jordan, 14% from Egypt, and 12% Sudanese. There are 24 students identified as having special educational needs (SEN) including: behavioural, specific and complex difficulties, and speech and language needs; 212 students have difficulties with English and 395 students are identified as gifted and talented.

The school's admission policy is inclusive. Grade 11 and 12 students have an interview prior to admission. There is high mobility of the school population, with students arriving and leaving at different times of the year. School fees are low ranging from AED 9,150–14,500, not including books, uniforms and buses. All teachers are suitably qualified.

The school is led by the principal, with the support of 3 vice-principals, a senior leadership team (SLT) of 5 staff, 7 coordinators and an education adviser. There are 63 teachers, 27 support staff, 13 administrators, 3 security guards, a librarian and 3 technical staff. There are several staff new to the school this year.

The Effectiveness of the School

Evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of the school is unsatisfactory and it is in need of improvement. Attainment and progress are unsatisfactory; achievement is satisfactory in Arabic and social studies. The school has a positive ethos and there is an appropriate partnership with parents who have a reasonably supportive view of the school.

The school promotes inclusion, with students coming from a range of backgrounds and with some quite complex SENs. Most students behave quite well. They are accepting of each other, generally tolerant and usually help their peers. Classroom practice has been a key part of the school's focus for professional development; there have been some improvements but teaching and learning are still unsatisfactory. The delivery of the curriculum is unsatisfactory as modifications are not sufficient to meet the full spectrum of students' needs and abilities.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory, with a range of policies and procedures to keep students safe. The building and premises are adequate. Various improvements and adjustment have been made and there are plans to build a new school. Resources are not sufficient or always appropriate for the planned activities.

Students' attainment & progress

Attainment and progress are unsatisfactory. Students' attainment and progress in Arabic and social studies are satisfactory; in English, mathematics, science and information and communications technology (ICT) standards are below age-related expectations. Students' achievement in other subjects is unsatisfactory. Those students identified as having SEN make very unsatisfactory academic progress.

Children start school with very limited skills in English. Children's basic skills in KG are below those typically seen for this age group and their progress is unsatisfactory. The development of their physical, personal, social and emotional skills by the end of KG2 is satisfactory.

In English, speaking skills are not strong as students cannot express themselves verbally at length or use English readily in a variety of situations. Students' listening skills are more secure than their speaking and they readily follow instructions. Students find it difficult to improvise their use of language, paraphrase and openly discuss texts. Some are developing their English

vocabulary appropriately and the majority of Grade 6 students can correctly allocate phrases of time, such as ‘these days’, ‘at one time’ to the past, present or future. In Grade 12, they can insert active and passive verbs in short sentences when given multiple choices. These activities indicate students have some basic reading skills; writing is below age-related expectations. There is a focus on grammatical structure but this is at the expense of speaking and writing in a variety of contexts, across genres to develop 21st century skills.

In Arabic, students Grade 1 can identify the letters they have learned, link these to relevant illustrations and can write simple words, neatly and legibly. As they move through the grades they are given opportunities to write creatively and enhance the quality of their handwriting. In reading, some skills are underdeveloped as they cannot apply the correct grammar rules of ‘Tashkeel’. They are not always confident enough to demonstrate their skills in speaking standard Arabic. In Islamic education, younger students are able to understand the sayings of prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the qualities of Muslims, and to understand the concept of cooperation. Older students are not as knowledgeable and cannot link the history of the Islamic era to the present day or to their own lives. By Grade 12, students can express their opinions about character and strength of will. In social studies, students have a secure knowledge and understanding of history in the Middle East and beyond. They know about environmental issues and economic development. They are not able to use higher level thinking skills to analyse, synthesise or link historical events. They do not readily draw conclusions because their critical thinking skills are weak.

In mathematics, students in the lower grades understand how to count, calculate and use fractions to describe halves and quarters. They are not able to problem solve as the mathematical operations presented to them are over simplified. They are unable to apply what they know and understand in lessons and to relate what they have learned to their everyday lives. In Grade 10 and above there is more secure subject knowledge, but students are not sufficiently developing skills in hypothesizing, investigating or finding out for themselves. Progress in science is limited because students do not undertake investigations or experiments to develop their practical scientific skills. This leads to weak skills in developing tests to confirm or refute theories, especially as students rarely have enough access to equipment. Older students have some secure scientific knowledge, for example in Grade 10 they know about Newton’s Third Law in physics.

The school completes an appropriate range of assessment practices in line with MoE requirements. The evaluation and analysis of assessment data does not

accurately measure students' achievement, their progress over time or the quality of their learning.

Students' personal development

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Their behaviour around the school and in lessons is usually appropriate. Students are courteous and, as their confidence grows, will offer handshakes and greetings to visitors. When lessons are not interesting, some students do not engage and behaviour deteriorates. Older students have roles of responsibility to monitor and encourage positive behaviour. There are not enough of these opportunities in lessons for students to be responsible and to develop their leadership skills. The promotion of positive attitudes to UAE values, traditions and beliefs and the diversity of the school population have resulted in a settled learning environment. Attendance is above average at 94%. Punctuality for lessons is satisfactory; late bus arrivals mean some students do not arrive on time.

There is a lack of development of 21st century skills. Too often students sit passively in lessons, listening for too long and not being active participants in their own learning. In contrast, good practice was observed during 'zero period'; the range of activities engages and motivates. Not enough of this enthusiastic response to learning was observed in lessons. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is promoted regularly in the school. Students are generally active and energetic during break times. They are aware of nutrition, but older students do not always make the best choices.

The quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. The majority of lessons observed were unsatisfactory; some examples of better teaching were seen in most subjects, particularly in Arabic. The least effective lessons were in English, Islamic education, mathematics and science. The lack of differentiation, matching the lesson content to students' individual needs, is a feature of even the more effective lessons.

Teachers generally have secure subject knowledge; their ability to accurately model spoken English is variable. In KG, there is not enough understanding of the way in which young children learn best through play and exploration. Teachers do not use the classroom resources for role-play and discovery sufficiently well. The type of teaching observed in younger grades did not reflect best practice. It did not enable students to work through practical activities to give meaning and a sense of purpose to their learning.

Teaching tends to proceed at a slow pace and the lack of high quality classroom resources leads to a lack of engagement and motivation from students. They still usually behave fairly well in lessons, even when bored and disinterested. Students spend too much time listening to teachers, rather than engaging in discussion, to share ideas and find out for themselves. Attempts at group work are not thought through sufficiently and often mean that one individual has a task to complete while the others observe. In a Grade 2 mathematics lesson, students' learnt effectively through tasks that encouraged them to problem solve by using calculations to provide a given number. This type of activity is not common enough.

Assessment of learning is not rigorous. Students do not have sufficient information about what to do to improve their work, mainly because marking does not identify clearly what the next steps in their learning should be.

Meeting students' needs through the curriculum

The implementation of the curriculum is unsatisfactory. It meets the Ministry of Education requirements but is not sufficiently adapted to meet the full range of students' needs. Curriculum delivery does not enable students to be independent, explore ideas, discuss and hypothesise, particularly in science. There is an over reliance in using workbooks and worksheets, which do little to extend students' learning and skills. There is not enough practical work, especially for younger students to make sense of what they are learning. The curriculum for KG is unsatisfactory as it does not offer the type of breadth, balance and child initiated play that children of this age need if they are to thrive academically.

Extra-curricular activities, clubs and visits are developing. Promotion of the values of the UAE is secure. The provision for students with SEN is very unsatisfactory: there is very little adaptation made to the curriculum to meet their needs. Similarly, those students who are gifted and talented do not have the opportunities they should to extend their skills in an environment that embraces creativity.

The protection, care, guidance and support of students

Protection, care, guidance and support of students are satisfactory. The school has cultivated a positive ethos and students from a range of backgrounds are settled and work and play together in an appropriate way. There are various policies to support the students' pastoral care needs. Staff are aware of child protection procedures and what to do if they have a concern. Students feel there is some bullying, but were satisfied it is dealt with appropriately and incidents did not tend to reoccur.

There are clear procedures to ensure students attend regularly. There is a designated person to deal with any concerns students might have; some said they would like to have more positive responses from staff if they approached a teacher with a concern. The school makes the required checks of staff suitability to work with children. The arrangements for first aid and administering any medicines are appropriate and the clinic is organised. Students have a sense of loyalty and several said they enjoy school, but do not always know what to do to improve their work. Some students in older grades, especially girls were not as positive about this aspect of support and guidance.

The quality of the school's buildings and premises

The quality of the buildings and premises are satisfactory. The school is on a reasonable sized plot of land and classrooms are usually of an appropriate size for the number of students and range of activities. There are 2 ICT rooms, 3 science laboratories, a library, auditorium, prayer facilities for boys and girls, a clinic and a small art room. There is no gymnasium, most sporting activities take place outdoors, with the auditorium used in the summer months. Most outdoor areas have adequate shade provided. There is effective security, visitors sign in on arrival, identification is checked by security personnel, and there is a CCTV system. Classrooms and toilets are reasonably clean. Storage of hazardous materials is secure. Fire equipment is checked and there are exit signs around the school.

The school's resources to support its aims

The quality of resources is unsatisfactory. This is particularly the case in KG where resources are not sufficient to offer all children a range of activities to meet their needs. The school has systematically improved resources since the last inspection. The deficiencies at that time were such that despite these improvements, the range of classroom equipment remains inadequate. There is now better access to technology and more books in the library; the stock is still limited for the number of students. Resources in science laboratories are minimal; those for sport are limited and not used appropriately.

In recent years there has been a high turnover of staff. Transportation arrangements meet requirements and there is adequate provision for evacuation in case of emergency.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There is a positive atmosphere underpinned by the values and beliefs of the UAE. The school has worked hard to ensure students of all backgrounds are safe and secure and are able to get along together. This is a significant achievement, given students' diverse circumstances

and the high numbers that leave and start during the school year. The principal has a genuine rapport with the students and a generosity of spirit that has helped this process. Many students, particularly the younger children, greet him warmly.

The proprietor is supportive, but does not have a sufficiently accurate view of the quality of the school's work. The judgments contained in the self-evaluation form (SEF) are too optimistic about the school's current position. The school development plan (SDP) clearly focuses on the recommendations from the previous report; it only covers the current academic year. Monitoring of lessons by middle managers does not provide an accurate picture of achievement and progress that would effectively inform the senior team's decisions. Feedback to staff is not specific enough to identify exactly what needs to be done to take learning forward. During the inspection, senior and middle leaders joined the inspection team in lessons. This provided them with a more realistic picture of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. Continual professional development (CPD) sessions have been provided and have covered relevant and useful topics to improve teaching and learning. These have not had enough impact on what students learn. Analysis of academic achievement has not been introduced.

The school has a clear complaints procedure for parents. Some parents and a minority of students in the upper grades feel their concerns and views are not taken into account. Overall, responses from parents were positive, especially in the younger year groups.

Progress since the last inspection

Progress since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory as the school's undoubted efforts have not had sufficient impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements have been made to the personal development of students, the care they receive, and their achievement in Arabic and social studies. In addition, the health and safety recommendations from the last inspection have been tackled effectively. A key area that remains vital for the school to address is the introduction of an effective system to track and monitor the academic progress of students.

The roles and responsibilities of middle managers have been extended to the monitoring of lessons. Their observations do not accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. There has been limited improvement in learning and progress and these remain unsatisfactory in Islamic education, English, mathematics, science and ICT. The regular CPD sessions have not had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have not demonstrated the secure capacity to ensure the school provides at least a satisfactory standard of education across all performance standards. They have made some significant gains in establishing the right environment for the school to move forward. Senior leaders will require some focused external support to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning now improves at the same pace as other aspects of the school.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Improve the impact of leadership and management by conducting an accurate and realistic self-evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning and constructing a costed, measurable development plan to rapidly improve it.
2. Introduce and establish systems to track students' progress by:
 - i. analysing learning, progress and achievements in core subjects by senior staff to inform improvement targets for all groups of students, especially the more able or those with SEN
 - ii. identifying when students are coasting or falling behind and taking remedial action to support progress
 - iii. using the system to track students' progress to hold teachers to account for their academic progress, especially students who are identified as having SEN.
3. Improve attainment and progress in Islamic education, English, mathematics, science and ICT by:
 - i. establishing a consistent approach to providing differentiation, pace and challenge in lessons to ensure students' needs are met, especially for the more able and those identified with SEN
 - ii. ensuring that assessment for learning makes clear what the next steps in learning are for students based on what they know, can do, and understand
 - iii. ensuring students are active participants in the learning process and are fully involved in practical work, especially in applying their knowledge in a variety of situations.

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 buildings 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								