



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



Summary Inspection Report

Raha International School

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Iqraa

Raha International School

Inspection Date	13 th – 16 th May, 2012
School ID#	113
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	International Baccalaureate (IB)
Number of Students	1155
Age Range	KG – Grade 12
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Wayne MacInnis
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Introduction

The school was inspected by 5 inspectors, who observed 82 lessons. During their time in school, inspectors met with school leaders, teachers, parents and students. They looked at school documentation about assessments, evaluation and planning in consideration of the quality of students' learning experiences.

Description of the School

Raha International School (RIS) is a part of the Taaleem group of schools, and its leaders are accountable to the Taaleem Board. It opened in 2006 in the Raha area of Abu Dhabi. It aims to be 'the school of choice in Abu Dhabi' through implementing International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes to a high level. RIS offers all three of the IB programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP). Between 2009 and 2010, RIS obtained authorisation for this and became the first school in Abu Dhabi to do so.

RIS has experienced steady growth, from 780 students in 2010. The 142 students in the kindergarten (KG) and 491 in grades 1–5 all follow the PYP. The 415 students in grades 6–10 study in the MYP, and the 107 students in grades 11–12 follow the DP. Approximately 55% of the students are boys; 25% are Arab, and 37% Muslim. The student body is highly diverse, with over 60 nationalities represented. The largest groups are Emirati (17.4%), USA (12.8%) and UK (9.6%). Around 3% have special educational needs, and 7% receive additional learning support for English as an additional language. School fees range from AED 35,000 to 55,200. Accordingly, students come from relatively advantaged backgrounds.

A new block for grade 11 and 12 students was completed in September 2011, and the first grade 12 class graduated in 2011. Building work is currently underway on a new KG facility, which will increase the capacity of the campus to 1600, so further growth is expected in the future. To manage this growth, a head of primary and head of senior school now work with the principal to lead KG–G5 and G6–G12 respectively.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band A

Grade 3

Inspectors judged Raha International School to be in Band A; that is a high performing school.

Students make good progress throughout the school. Standards are good or better (except in few parts of the secondary school), particularly in mathematics. Standards in the primary section and in English in all grades are predominantly

very good and in places outstanding. Across all subjects, students are able to think critically and make connections, and can carry out self-directed tasks well.

KG students make rapid progress in developing language and understanding number. They develop a broad knowledge of science and social studies for their age group through in-depth ‘units of inquiry’. They also develop well socially and become curious, motivated and confident learners who are well prepared for future learning. The rich learning environment continues into grade 1–5, where students make similar strong progress. Most have a firm grasp of all subjects and can apply them in practical contexts. Language and personal development remain particularly strong. Students take increasing responsibility for their learning, and are encouraged to regularly articulate their thoughts and understanding both orally and in writing. Students make good progress in mathematics through the primary section. They develop a strong understanding of mathematical concepts and good confidence in applying their numeracy skills in real-world contexts. The curriculum emphasises depth and not just breadth, so students are able to conduct scientific experiments and formulate hypotheses at a suitable level, and have a secure knowledge base around the areas that they have investigated. Good all-round progress is supported by the high-quality activities offered in art, music, drama and physical education.

Standards and progress develop less consistently through the MYP. In English students know how to think independently, and they express themselves creatively in a wide range of genres. Little emphasis is placed on handwriting and presentation of daily classwork, and so this is often untidy. Their information and technology (ICT) skills develop well and they produce a high level of presentation for major assessment assignments. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of physical and human geography, and history. Standards in Arabic are in line with expectations, with writing better than reading and comprehension of Arabic texts. Mathematical progress slows when students enter the MYP. An extended mathematics stream adds challenge for the more-able students in higher grades, but a lack of stimulating teaching means that most students make steady rather than good progress. Students cover the expected areas of study acceptably but with less mastery than in earlier grades. There are particular strengths in art, especially at the DP level, modern foreign languages and physical education (PE).

Students in the DP make good progress through a challenging programme. The results of the first Diploma year in 2011 were on a par with other good IB schools, which are generally among the highest achieving schools globally, and are often reached after careful selection of academic students. Performance is strong in most areas, but a relative weakness remains in mathematics. This leads to most

students selecting the mathematical studies option, which has a significant but lower level of challenge. Diploma students have strong research and independent study skills. They are well prepared for university, and last year students successfully gained admission to leading international universities on graduation. There is no significant difference between the standards and progress of boys, girls or other groups of students.

Students' personal development is a key strength of the school. Students of all ages enjoy school and develop a broad range of skills and personal qualities to support independent and co-operative learning.

They are motivated to learn and are confident, articulate, and respectful, with a strong sense of commitment to ethics and global citizenship. Students behave well around the school and in and out of classes. They occasionally lose interest in the least engaging lessons, but are still diligent and committed to their learning. The small number of students with behavioural difficulties are monitored carefully and well supported.

There is a strong value of international mindedness throughout the school community. Students are almost always respectful and tolerant of viewpoints, religions, and cultures that differ from their own. The UAE was a major school focus during National Day celebrations. Several aspects of UAE culture are being integrated into the PYP curriculum and used for field trips. They are not widespread in other areas of the school, so the UAE identity plays a less prominent part than international diversity in the school. Service learning is a widespread feature of the school, through the 'Action' element of the PYP, 'Community and Service' in the MYP, and the CAS programme at the diploma stage. Students have been involved in fundraising, overseas trips and supporting linked communities in Rwanda and Tanzania, and in several local initiatives. Students also have opportunities to develop as leaders, including through the student council, the ambassadors programme for supporting students new to the school, the Model United Nations Conference, and the Global Young Leaders conference.

IB approaches to learning and teaching are evident throughout the school, with an emphasis on developing students as reflective learners with a broad range of capacities that reflect the IB Learner Profile. This student-centred approach develops critical thinking and reflection, and involves students actively in their learning. Teachers plan a wide variety of purposeful activities for their students. They explain the objectives of each unit and provide students with clear criteria for success, mostly with different levels to provide for students' differing needs. This approach predominates at every stage in the school, although its

effectiveness is more variable in the secondary sections, where didactic lesson are common in a few subjects, such as mathematics.

Students are very aware of their learning through ongoing reflection. Self-assessment is an integral part of the life of the school, from student-led conferences to written evaluations of their progress and ways to improve, leading to individual goals and addressing individual needs and interests. Students have regular opportunities for collaborative learning, with positive interactions underpinned by supportive relationships. Teachers are almost always attentive and committed to their students' needs. Gifted and talented students are identified, and receive additional challenges. The many students who are learning English an additional language are supported effectively. Teaching assistants in the primary section are used well to work with groups of students to support the learning process. They often provide extra help to those who need it, both within and outside classrooms. Because of the individualised approach, more teaching assistants in upper primary grades would help to support relatively large classes. Teachers benefit from high-quality professional development opportunities throughout the school, which reflect its commitment to implementing the IB programmes successfully.

The three IB programmes take a holistic view of learners and so include a broad range of learning opportunities and requirements. They cover all essential skills, with an emphasis on developing higher-order elements, applying learning and developing students as learners. The resulting broad and balanced curriculum has clear progression in all subjects within each programme. In addition to core subjects, students enjoy high-quality provision in PE, art, music and ICT. A significant amount of the curriculum has been developed internally, especially within the PYP and the MYP. This places high demands on the school but provides flexibility to address local circumstances and students' individual needs. Many links are made between subjects, with primary students investigating units of inquiry that span several subjects, planned Areas of Interaction and Interdisciplinary Units in the MYP, and Theory of Knowledge (TOK) in the DP. Overall the curriculum in the school compares favourably with other IB schools and is in line with the highest international expectations.

The DP is very challenging. It requires success in six different subject areas, a 4000-word extended essay, study of the Theory of Knowledge, and regular participation in creative arts, physical activity or expeditions, and community service as part of the 'creativity, action, service' (CAS) programme. Less academic students may study some diploma courses, rather than completing the full diploma, but success with diploma courses is not yet fully recognised in the UAE. The school is seeking to have its own school diploma recognised through

accreditation with New England Association of Schools and Colleges, to provide a more flexible qualification to support those for whom the full IB diploma is too great a challenge.

Broad extra-curricular programmes include a wide variety of options facilitated by school staff and external provider in sport, art and music. Sporting options emphasise participation, and provide relatively few opportunities for students to take part in competitive teams. There are successful transition arrangements for passing on information about students and preparing students to move to new sections of the school. The curriculum is not fully aligned yet. There are discontinuities in learning in some subjects, and work is ongoing to ensure that MYP students are fully prepared for all aspects of the DP.

All students are well cared for. Pastoral care is responsive to students' needs and underpinned by caring and supportive student-teacher relationships. Class teachers, guidance staff and the nurse are available and approachable. The school monitors students at risk of underachieving academically, emotionally and socially. These students are observed in class, meet with counsellors, and are provided with ongoing support that involves target-setting and curricular modifications where appropriate. The support for students with special educational needs will need to continue to develop systematically as the school grows.

RIS provides students with good advice in selecting diploma course options, and with university admissions. The use of assemblies is underdeveloped throughout the school, partly because it lacks a sufficiently large indoor area for whole sections of the school to meet in. Parents are involved in other ways, such as through end-of-unit celebrations. Following a recent student survey indicating a few instances of bullying, the school has introduced an anti-bullying course for grade 5. Teachers reinforce positive attitudes, tolerance and respect, as per the IB Learner Profile attributes. Staff monitor most elements of students' health and well-being, but measures to address obesity and reduce exposure to sun are not yet sufficiently well developed. As the school continues to grow, clinic staffing should also be reviewed.

The spacious, high-quality buildings provide a stimulating environment that is conducive to active learning, particularly in the primary school. High-quality artwork by students is displayed around the school to good effect. The campus includes a range of sporting facilities, two libraries, science laboratories, a clinic, and specialist areas for art and music. There are prayer rooms for girls and boys. All area areas are safe and well maintained. Shaded areas and indoor areas are available to students during recess. Additional shading would be beneficial,

particularly to protect students and staff who walk regularly between buildings in the campus, and in the sports areas.

The curriculum is well resourced, and the primary classrooms in particular are highly stimulating learning environments. Staff are well qualified, and have received the appropriate professional development to run IB programmes. A good number of specialist staff provide a high overall teacher-student ratio, although there are 25 students in most classes, which is relatively high for a premium school. The level of ICT provision is adequate but variable throughout the school. It is very good in some areas, but underdeveloped to support learning in some secondary subjects. The primary and secondary libraries are both spacious and well stocked, and librarians have the flexibility to support research work in classes.

Leadership is given a clear strategic direction by Taaleem and its educational officers, who know the school well and provide support in their areas of expertise. An advisory board composed of parents, Taaleem executives and a teacher representative has recently been formed to support this work. Senior leaders maintain an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through regular surveys of staff, parents and students, and through classroom visits. They have worked effectively to develop the school to its currently high level, and an approach in which teachers collaborate to continually improve learning. This is a strong feature of their approach to the curriculum. Leaders have many plans to improve the school, including developing middle management in the secondary school. This will be crucial in ensuring that learning is consistently good or better across the secondary section. Other plans for the future include developing the performing arts, supported by an additional building, addressing weaknesses in secondary mathematics teaching, and gaining accreditation by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). These appropriate measures should support the school in continuing to develop in quality as it grows in size.

The school fees fall within the premium price range. Students receive a good education, with a high level of personal care, and generally make good academic progress. Raha International School therefore provides appropriate value for money.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Ensure that teaching and learning are of a consistently high quality, particularly in the secondary school, so that all lessons have the pace, energy and sense of challenge seen in the best lessons.
2. Improve the quality of transitional planning as students move through the different IB programmes, to ensure greater continuity in learning.
3. Provide additional shade, guidance and supervision, to ensure students and staff are not overly exposed to the sun.
4. Further develop students' understanding and appreciation of UAE culture and heritage.