

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Al Mizhar American Academy Private School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Mizhar American Academy Private School

Location	Al Mizhar
Type of school	Private
Website	<a href="http://www.americanacademy.ae">www.americanacademy.ae</a>
Telephone	04-2887250
Address	PO Box 78484, 11A Street, Mizhar 1, Dubai
Principal	Delicia Ann Scotto
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	627
Number of Emirati students	377 (62%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 31st October to Wednesday 2nd November 2011

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## The context of the school

Al Mizhar American Academy is a private school providing education for girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to eighteen years. At the time of the inspection the school had also admitted boys to its Kindergarten programme.

The school provided a comprehensive American curriculum and students received a high school diploma upon completion of Grade 12. External tests included the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Advanced Placement exams for Grade 12 students, Pre-SAT exams for Grade 11 and SAT exams for Grade 12. The school was fully accredited by the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

At the time of the inspection there were 627 students on roll. Just over 60 per cent of the students were Emirati. Over twenty nationalities were represented on the student roll. There were 56 teaching staff supported by 14 assistants. The Principal had been in post for seven years.

## Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

## How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The Al Mizhar American Academy Private School for Girls provided a good quality of education. The mission statement, objectives, and vision of the school were sound and were clearly understood by all students, staff and parents. Key features of the school included outstanding leadership and the outstanding attitudes and behaviour of the students. In addition, the school provided an outstanding programme of support for students with special educational needs. These students were served well, with support given both in class and in resource centres. Students' knowledge of Islam and civic responsibility was good, and their understanding of economic and environmental issues was outstanding.

The school offered an American curriculum and was using the common core standards, as well as Michigan and California standards for learning objectives. The school responded well to almost all of the recommendations from the previous inspection and was committed to school improvement at all levels. Improvements were clearly evident in the key subject areas of Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Students' attainment in external exams was very good. Students were well prepared in their academic programme to enter colleges and universities. Teachers were offered many opportunities to participate in professional development. The school displayed strong links with parents and community and a parent's advisory committee had been formed to develop communications between home and school. Parents, teachers and students were actively involved in communicating and keeping track of progress through the effective use of available technology.

## Key strengths

- Improvements in students' attainment and progress in Arabic, English, mathematics and science;
- Outstanding attitudes and behaviour of the students throughout the school;
- Outstanding support and integration for students with special educational needs;
- Outstanding leadership which demonstrated a clear vision, mission and commitment to continuous improvement.

## Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education, particularly in the high school, and Arabic as an additional language in the middle School;
- Develop further the students' enquiry skills, and their independence in learning, across the curriculum;
- Enhance the appreciation of traditions, heritage and values that underpin and influence life in Dubai;
- Continue to develop cross-curricular links throughout the school.

## How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
<b>Islamic Education</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
<b>English</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
<b>Mathematics</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good

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Attainment was good in most key subjects and outstanding in high school English. In Islamic Education attainment was good in the elementary and middle schools where students knew basic facts such as the oneness of Allah and the Pillars of Islam. In Arabic as a first language, students demonstrated good skills in explaining the pillars of Hajj. In Arabic as an additional language, a few students made writing errors and lacked extended writing skills. In English, students demonstrated good attainment, except in high school where attainment was outstanding, as fluency, confidence and accuracy were very well developed. In mathematics, a majority of senior students could demonstrate a range of mathematical skills, enabling them to apply their skills in the context of everyday situations including, for example, banking. Students used good mental mathematical strategies in elementary classes. Students' knowledge and skills in science were good across all phases. Most students collaborated well in groups and were able to carry out routine science investigations. External examination data indicated that attainment in science had continued to improve each year.

Student progress from their starting points was good in most subjects. In Islamic Education, as well as Arabic as a first language, speaking skills were well developed, but in Arabic as an additional language these skills were underdeveloped in middle school. In English, students developed increasing levels of skill throughout the Kindergarten, elementary and middle grades, and at the high school made better than expected progress. In mathematics, students made good progress in their ability to think critically when solving problems. In science classes and in laboratory sessions, students worked well in groups and most were able to grasp concepts during observations and while conducting experiments.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding in all phases. Almost all students enjoyed their life at school, had strong relationships with the teachers and support staff whom they agreed were caring and supportive. Students appreciated the value of a healthy lifestyle, and could describe how they personally made choices to support their well-being in areas of nutrition and exercise. Attendance was acceptable. Students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in the elementary, middle and high schools. Kindergarten children were able to show their understanding via their artistic work which reflected the artistic traditions of the United Arab Emirates. In the other stages most students showed a good understanding of Islam and duties as Muslims. They had a clear awareness of the multi-cultural society of Dubai. Most of the students demonstrated good knowledge about Islam and its impact on Dubai and the global community. Across all stages of the school students' demonstrated outstanding civic understanding and were actively involved in community action and development. Almost all students had a good knowledge of how Dubai has developed and showed understanding of economic concepts and sustainability. All students demonstrated a commitment to improving their school, community and the environment. They were articulate and proactive in describing their roles and responsibilities.



## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

Teaching for effective learning was good across the school. Teachers were knowledgeable in their subjects, well organised and taught to clearly defined objectives. Effective question and answer techniques were used to increase student comprehension and interest. Teachers used a variety of challenging tasks in most lessons, to address the variety of learning styles among students. In a few lessons, the pace of lessons was too slow and not all students were challenged sufficiently to reach their full potential. Some degree of information and communication technology (ICT) was used in most lessons, but full integration of subject and ICT outcomes was rare.

Learning was good across all phases. Students were enthusiastic learners and almost all were fully engaged in lessons and school activities. Most students worked effectively both independently and in groups. Most students were able to apply concepts to real-life situations. While they were successful in completing routine activities assigned by the teacher, there was limited evidence that a majority of students could initiate an extended study and see it through to completion as fully independent learners.

Assessment was good overall. A variety of external examinations were used to measure student attainment and progress. In most subject areas, data from these tests and from internal assessment instruments were used by staff to improve curriculum and instructional approaches. Rubrics were used at the beginning of student assignments to provide clear assessment standards and student work was marked according to the descriptions on these rubrics. The use of student portfolios was increasingly being used in a way that enabled teachers, students and parents to track student progress. Teachers had started to use written formative comments on student assignments in order to help them improve their work.

## How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

The curriculum was good at all levels. This year the school had started to move from the Michigan standards to the United States common core curriculum standards as the rationale for their documents. Curriculum documents offered a variety of ways for students to achieve objectives. Curriculum review led by Kindergarten to Grade 12 department heads had led to a number of important improvements. These included the development of an humanities approach, improving curriculum articulation between Kindergarten and Grade 12, and incorporating authentic assessments. Cross-curricular links were built into some areas of the curriculum. Strategies to meet the needs of all learners were identified in daily written lesson plans. A range of enrichment opportunities that both complement and supplement the curriculum were available to students.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding. The school had very effective policies and procedures in place, including child protection arrangements, which were well-known by staff and students. The school transport buses and vehicle drop off zone were organised in a very efficient and safe manner; staff effectively co-ordinated the high level of private vehicle movements around the school perimeter. The premises and resources were very well maintained, clean and enhanced the students' learning experiences. Fire drills were held on a regular basis and such events were recorded, along with any aspects that required further action. The medical facilities and staff provided excellent support and maintained detailed records. Healthy living was promoted within the school through physical education and the broader curriculum, for example in science. The school canteen provided very good healthy food choices for students.

The quality of support provided by the school was outstanding. All staff had very good relationships with the students and responded in supportive ways. Teachers, and assigned support staff, were fully aware of

students' individual needs. The school had a clear ethos of care and consideration for other members of the school community. Behaviour was managed well, and students' views were welcomed. Students had access to staff for advice on issues such as future careers, academic progress and health matters. The school maintained records of attendance and punctuality, and strived to improve overall attendance. Parents received feedback and understood the action taken by the school, as required. There were outstanding arrangements for students with special educational needs. Trained and knowledgeable specialist teaching staff members were supported by an effective team of learning assistants. Support was provided both in the classroom and in specialist settings. Individual Education Plans were in place and regularly reviewed, involving parents and, as necessary, relevant external agencies.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

The quality of leadership was outstanding. The school director, the assistant principals, the department heads and co-ordinator shared responsibilities for leadership and were well respected and supported by the faculty and parents. Their vision was embedded in the mission and statement of philosophy and objectives. The leadership team was cohesive and displayed a strong capacity to innovate and improve. The creation of the child study team was an innovation which provided greater services to students with special educational needs and students with English as an additional language.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. School leaders were committed to monitoring and evaluating school performance, particularly student assessments and teacher performance. The team and some faculty were involved in completing a major self-study for the school's accreditation visit. School improvement plans were realistic and goal oriented. Peer assessment and evaluation were initiated as a result of self-evaluation. Professional development was embedded in the school improvement plans. Priorities from the last inspection report were addressed, though all had not yet been fully implemented.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents were kept well-informed about school issues through the use of an on-line portal for staff, students and parents. They communicated also

through e-mail, sms and conferencing. Three formal conferences were scheduled to discuss student progress and parents were able to schedule additional conferences when needed. A few parents were active in the Parents' Advisory Committee, which was initiated last year and included parents, community members, teachers and one student. There were links with the community which enhanced students' opportunities for internships and educational field trips.

Governance was good. The school was governed by two boards, one was the Taaleem Foundation Board, and the other was the Executive Board. The Executive Board was responsible for the implementation of the school's mission, strategic planning, and oversight of finance. Representatives from both Boards were knowledgeable about the school's needs, supportive of the school community and they often attended school events. They provided advice and ensured the accountability of the leadership. Governors demonstrated a commitment to improve services to students, including the recruitment of additional staff.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good, overall. The wide range of facilities and learning resources were outstanding. All staff were appropriately qualified and effectively deployed. However, there was no counsellor for the elementary phase. The school's procedures and routines were well established and effective. The library facilities were used extensively to support students' learning. In addition to a wide range of books, on-line resources were increasingly being used by staff and older students. Facilities were well-maintained, met students' needs and enhanced the learning opportunities that were provided by good and better teaching. Students had easy access to these materials and when they had the opportunities to do so, they used them well.

## What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	86	20%
	Last year	137	33%
Teachers	11		19%
Students	50		43%

\*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A small minority of parents responded to the survey, fewer than last year. Most parents were satisfied with the overall quality of education available at the school. Most agreed that their daughters were making good progress in English, mathematics and science, but only a majority agreed that progress was good in Islamic Education and Arabic. Senior girls concurred with these opinions on progress. Parents generally held positive views about school provision and believed that their daughters were safe and cared for. A small minority of teachers answered the survey. They held very positive views about the school. A large minority of senior students responded to the survey. They held largely positive views about the school, with a few exceptions.

## What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

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## How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:

[inspection@khda.gov.ae](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae)

## Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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