

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Safa Private School

Report published in April 2013

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Safa Private School

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Location | Al Qouz |
| Type of school | Private |
| Website | www.safaschooldubai.com |
| Telephone | 04 3884300 |
| Address | PO Box 71091, Dubai |
| Principal | Jane Knight |
| Curriculum | UK |
| Gender of students | Boys and Girls |
| Age / Grades or Year Groups | 3-11 / Foundation Stage 1 to Year 6 |
| Attendance | Good |
| Number of students on roll | 553 |
| Largest nationality group of students | UK |
| Number of Emirati students | 7 (1%) |
| Date of the inspection | 8th to 10th October 2012 |

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The context of the school

Al Safa Private School had relocated in September 2012 and was now situated in Al Quoz. At the time of the inspection, the school had risen to a total of 553 students, aged from three to 11 years. This showed an increase of around 230 students since the previous inspection.

Over 20 different nationalities were represented amongst the student population. Most were of UK origin and seven Foundation Stage children were Emirati. Approximately eight per cent of the students had been identified by the school as having a special educational need. Students with specific needs received learning support from staff members.

The school followed the English National Curriculum. Students sat internal tests at the end of Years 2 and 6.

There were 39 teachers, including four part-time, half of whom had recently joined the staff. Almost all teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by 20 teaching assistants, most of whom were recent appointments. Students were arranged into 26 classes. There was a single class in Year 6. At the time of the inspection, the Headteacher was in her eighth year in post.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Good

Key strengths

- Students' good attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science;
- Students' positive attitudes and behaviour, their strong work ethic and the caring ethos of the school;
- Much good and some outstanding teaching and the development of students' independent learning and enquiry skills;
- Leadership that provided a clear vision and sense of direction which was shared by the school community;
- A new campus that provided modern facilities for promoting good student learning experiences.

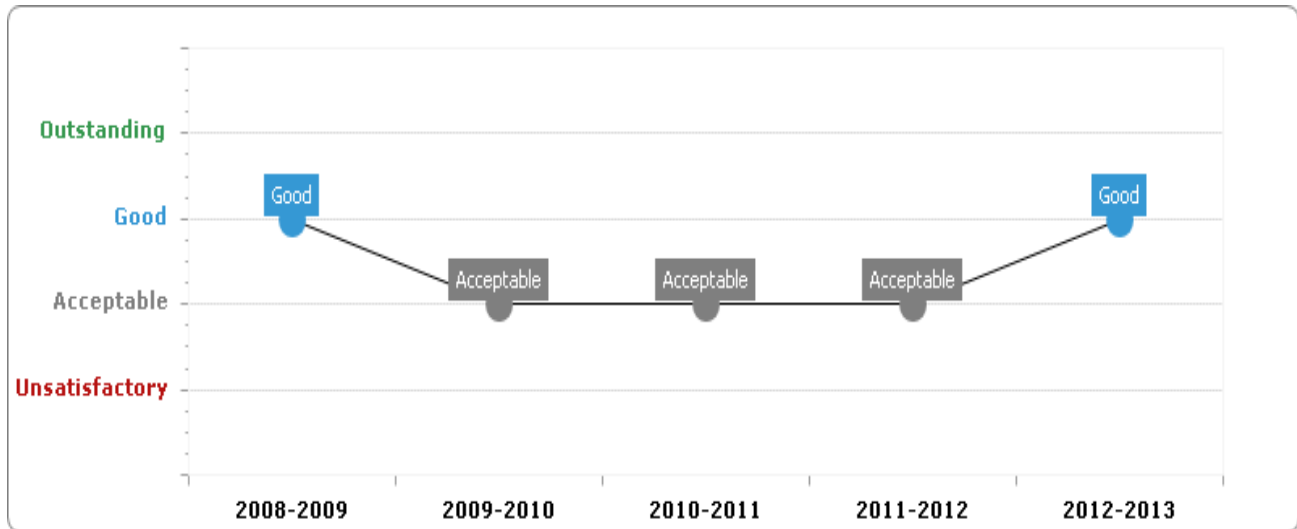
Recommendations

- Share existing good practice and extend monitoring by leaders to ensure consistency in teaching and learning;
- Improve students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Take steps to improve the safety of students outside the school gate because of dangerous parking of cars by those dropping off and picking up students;
- Support students with special educational needs more effectively and challenge higher achieving students more consistently to reach their full potential;
- Ensure the effective deployment of teaching assistants to support students' learning.

Progress since the last inspection

- Attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language had not improved. Progress in Islamic Education was now acceptable and remained acceptable in Arabic as an additional language;
- There had been some improvement in the consistency in students' learning though higher achieving students were still not being challenged consistently enough;
- The effectiveness of senior and middle leaders had improved and they had managed the changeover to a new school building very well and ensured continuity in students' learning;
- Self-evaluation was now being used more effectively to improve the school;
- The Board of Governors was supportive of the school and had taken effective action to upgrade resources and employ additional teachers.

Trend of overall performance



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

| | Foundation Stage | Primary |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Islamic Education | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Acceptable |
| Arabic as a first language | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Acceptable |
| Arabic as an additional language | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Unsatisfactory |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Acceptable |
| English | | |
| Attainment | Good | Good |
| Progress | Good | Good |
| Mathematics | | |
| Attainment | Good | Good |
| Progress | Good | Good |
| Science | | |
| Attainment | Good | Good |
| Progress | Good | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

| | Foundation Stage | Primary |
|--|------------------|-------------|
| Attitudes and behaviour | Outstanding | Outstanding |
| Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness | Good | Good |
| Community and environmental responsibility | Outstanding | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

| | Foundation Stage | Primary |
|---------------------------------|------------------|---------|
| Teaching for effective learning | Good | Good |
| Quality of students' learning | Good | Good |
| Assessment | Good | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

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

| | Foundation Stage | Primary |
|--------------------|------------------|---------|
| Curriculum quality | Good | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

| | Foundation Stage | Primary |
|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Health and Safety | Outstanding | Outstanding |
| Quality of Support | Good | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment was good in English, mathematics and science. In English, Foundation Stage children learned to talk with confidence. By Year 6, most were able readers and writers. In mathematics, students were confident in the use of number, showed a good understanding of shape and applied mathematical ideas in real life contexts. In science, most had good problem-solving and investigative skills and, by Years 5 and 6, students had an in-depth knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts. In Islamic Education, attainment was acceptable. Most students had clear knowledge of Islamic concepts and they also had good understanding of prayer and ablution. The attainment of most students learning Arabic as a first language was acceptable. They listened and spoke well and the majority could read sentences in Arabic with few errors. In writing, most merely copied text and only a few could write freely and at length. The attainment of those learning Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory. In both reading and writing, students' skills were poorly developed.

Across both phases, students of all abilities and backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, made good progress in English, mathematics and science. Occasionally, a lack of challenge in activities impeded the progress of able students. A minority of students made very good progress in making inferences and linking mathematical concepts to solve problems. In science, a minority made outstanding progress in evaluating and improving the quality of their investigative work. Most students made acceptable progress in understanding key Islamic concepts. They made acceptable progress in learning Arabic as a first language and as an additional language. Progress in reading and writing was weaker than the development of their speaking and listening skills. Those with special educational needs made unsatisfactory progress in learning Arabic.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati children were only present in the school in the Foundation Stage where good provision was made for them. The children were very well behaved and contributed significantly to the very positive ethos of the school. Their attendance was very good. They were highly motivated to work and learn; their work ethic was excellent. Consequently, the children made the same good progress as other children in English, mathematics and science. As their starting points were lower, especially in English, their attainment in these subjects was broadly acceptable. When homework was given, children completed this diligently and on time. The assessment of their work was accurate and enabled teachers to gain a clear understanding of their progress and so set suitable work.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The behaviour of students was outstanding, creating a positive ethos throughout the school. Students moved calmly around the school, with a keen sense of purpose. They willingly took on responsibilities, particularly in Years 5 and 6, and contributed enthusiastically to additional curriculum activities. Staff were effective role models for students in their politeness and kindness. Students were sensitive to the needs of others; for example, children helped each other tidy their lunch boxes. The school successively encouraged all students to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including nutrition and physical activities. Attendance was good and all students were keen to arrive at lessons on time. Almost all students in the school demonstrated a strong understanding of Islamic values and the impact of these on contemporary society in Dubai. They could give examples of how they appreciated the compassion and respect promoted by Islam. Most students showed respect for the culture and tradition of the UAE and they could list and discuss some of the local traditions, games and foods. Students were able to talk about the positive and negative aspects of the nature of Dubai's multi-language and multi-cultural society, and make comparisons with the wider world. Students had a real pride in their school, and in looking after its environment. Children in Foundation Stages were community-minded within school, keeping their work and play areas tidy and clean. Students behaved well as a community, looking after one another. Older students were developing a sense of responsibility through small leadership tasks. They also had a good grasp of the economic situation that brought people to live and work in Dubai.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was good overall, with examples of excellent teaching evident in both phases of the school. Teachers knew their subjects well and lessons were effectively planned, with clear learning intentions. Most used a variety of strategies to support the different learning styles of students. To this end, good quality resources were a feature of many lessons which gave an appropriate emphasis to hands-on learning experiences, particularly for younger children. Technology was used creatively to stimulate students' interest and support them in learning. Effective questioning skills engaged most students well in order to consolidate and develop ideas. In most lessons teachers provided carefully selected activities to accommodate the range of abilities in classes. In the best lessons, there were challenge, pace and opportunities for independent learning. Occasionally, in some subjects, there was not enough challenge for the most able students. Teaching was more effective in English, mathematics and science than in Islamic Education and Arabic because, in these subjects, teachers did not provide activities to cater for different ability levels in classes. Teaching seen in music, physical education and swimming was good.

The quality of students' learning was good. Students were keen to learn and interacted well with their teachers. Most students were conscientious and were prepared to work hard. They took responsibility for their learning, reflected on what they did and set targets to improve. These positive attitudes resulted in a willingness to engage in activities in lessons and planned events after school. The supportive collaboration between students was a strength which had been fostered by the school. When students had to work together, they were respectful of each other's point of view. The effective focus on topic work provided good opportunities for students to develop independence and promoted research skills. The outcomes from their topics showed high levels of creativity through the use of computers and the imaginative inclusion of cross-curricular themes. In some Arabic lessons, there was insufficient opportunity for independent learning and this impeded progress.

The quality of assessment systems and practice was good. The profiles on children in the Foundation Stage were of a particularly high standard. The comprehensive collation of data provided an informative analysis of attainment and progress. Teachers used the extensive tracking and targeting procedures well to ensure that most students continued to make above expected progress. High quality data was the basis of detailed progress reports for parents. Students were provided with good opportunities to engage in self-assessment in their topic work but this process was not consistently adhered to in some classes. In science, there was inconsistent practice in the setting of learning targets for students. Teachers corrected students' work regularly, provided encouraging comments and clarified misunderstandings.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good in both phases. Leaders worked well together to review and improve the curriculum in key subjects and other areas of the curriculum. There was particularly good provision for basic skills in English, mathematics and science which ensured that students were well prepared for the next stage of their education. However, the curriculum for Arabic for non-native speakers was underdeveloped. Through lessons and other activities, the school promoted Islamic values strongly and involved key aspects of the local community. Generally, the curriculum was devised to address the needs of students of different abilities, although more able students were not routinely given enough opportunity to develop in their own way and at their own pace. Enrichment activities, often built around the school house system, boosted students' engagement and success in their learning. These involved a significant number of students of all ages.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school's arrangements to ensure students' health and safety were outstanding. The new building was secure, clean and tidy. Resources and facilities were well maintained. The school doctor and nurse provided excellent care for students and supported their well-being. Healthy lifestyles were promoted through regular physical education, including swimming, and by enabling students to make healthy food choices. The parking of cars outside the school at the start and end of the school day was a hazard and presented a danger to young children. The school had an appropriate child protection policy and each member of staff had received training in the safeguarding of children.

All staff had a keen awareness of students' personal needs and worked hard to help students to do their best. Relationships between staff and students were characterised by mutual respect and teachers managed behaviour very well. The promotion of attendance and punctuality was excellent. Teachers and other staff provided excellent advice and guidance to students on a range of issues, including their transition to a secondary school. Parents rightly valued the 'family' atmosphere of the school and students had a trusted adult to turn to in school when they had problems.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school had good procedures for identifying students with special educational needs. Mostly, students' needs were identified before starting school and so support was in place when they joined. Teachers' support for students with special educational needs in and out of class lessons broadly met their needs but varied in quality. For example, support for students in Arabic lessons was unsatisfactory. Teachers had recently identified gifted and talented students, but their planning to meet these students' needs was at an early stage.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership of the school was good. The Headteacher had led her staff well through a potentially difficult time as the school moved to a new campus. In this she had been ably assisted by her deputy and together they made an effective team which provided a clear vision and direction for the school. These concepts were shared by the staff who worked well together to ensure a happy and caring school ethos where good teaching and learning were the order of the day. Other post-holders supported school improvement effectively. Middle leaders now carried out their responsibilities well and were having an increasingly positive impact on developments. Subject co-ordinators did not meet as a team and this was a

missed opportunity to promote further corporate leadership. School leaders were not proactive enough in ensuring that the good teaching and learning for students in English, mathematics and science applied equally to Islamic Education and Arabic. Nevertheless, the leadership team was now demonstrating the capacity to develop the school further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Staff had been involved in identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses, and in most instances they had made accurate judgements. This helped to ensure that action plans to bring about improvement were based on good evidence. Leaders carried out classroom observations and provided helpful feedback to teachers. In turn, teachers carried out peer observations in order to share identified good practice.

Partnerships with parents were outstanding. Links with the new community in which the school was now based were developing positively. Communications with parents were of a high quality and included an excellent home-school diary system, parent-teacher-child meetings to review regular progress reports, parental surveys and an informative school website, plus Facebook and Twitter exchanges. The Parent Teacher Association gave good support to the school, including organising a 'class mum' system to provide an avenue for important information to be relayed promptly to other year-group parents.

Governance was good. The new school owners played an important role in helping to set the vision for the school. The Governors held the school to account and took a considerable interest in ensuring that students' learning experiences and the learning environment had priority in developing the new school campus.

The management of the school, including staffing, facilities and resources, was good. The new campus provided a very attractive and appropriate learning environment. Resources were plentiful and included attractive areas for art, computer technology, library, music, physical education and science. Teachers benefited from relevant professional development but leaders did not maximise the use of good in-house practice. Not all teaching assistants had received sufficient training to support students' learning effectively. Displays of students' work were used to good effect to support and extend learning.

[View judgements](#)

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 | 58 | 28% |
| | Last year | 74 | 36% |
| Teachers | 4 | | 17% |
| Students | There were no senior students in the school | | |

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

All parents thought their children enjoyed school and almost all felt that their children were cared for and safe in school. Most parents felt their children's progress in Arabic as an additional language was good and almost all thought this to be true for English; most thought it was good in mathematics and science. Most parents said that teaching, learning and behaviour were good in school. Over half of parents felt that the school could do more to deal well with complaints. All parents and teachers thought that the school welcomed students with special educational needs. A third of parents wanted to be more involved in planning how they can support their children's learning and said they wished their views to be taken into account more effectively.

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.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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

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