

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Safa Private School

Report published in April, 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Safa Private School

Location	Al Quoz
Type of school	Private
Website	www.safaschooldubai.com
Telephone	043884300
Address	Safa 1, P.O Box 71091,Dubai
Principal	Jane Knight
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-12 / KG 1 – Yr 7
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	702
Largest nationality group of Students	UK
Number of Emirati students	8 (1.1%)
Date of the inspection	21st October to 23rd October

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The context of the school

Al Safa Private School is situated in Al Quoz. At the time of the inspection, the school had 702 students, aged from three to 12 years. This was an increase of around 150 students since the previous inspection.

Over 50 different nationalities were represented among the student population. Approximately 40 per cent were of UK origin, 30 per cent were of other European origin and eight children were from UAE. Students were arranged into 32 classes. There were 12 classes at the Foundation Stage, 19 in Years 1 to 6 and a single class in Year 7. Approximately eight per cent of the students had been identified by the school as having special educational needs.

The school followed the English National Curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

Including the senior leaders, there were 49 teachers, nine of whom were part-time, and about one third had recently joined the staff. All teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by 27 teaching assistants, most of whom were recent appointments. At the time of the inspection, the Headteacher was in her ninth year in post.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- The welcoming and positive ethos of the school;
- The polite, courteous and hard-working children;
- The dedicated and skilful senior leadership team;
- The very effective links with parents;
- The high quality of the support and strategic leadership provided by the governing body;
- The good range of learning resources used in lessons.

Recommendations

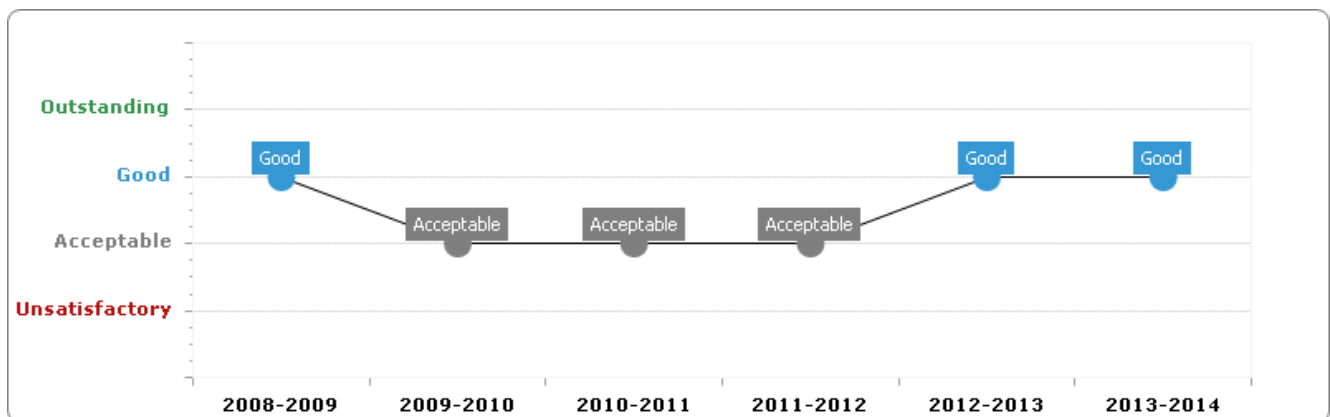
- Further improve attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Make better use of assessment to plan lessons more effectively to meet the full range of students' learning needs and ensure that students of all abilities make more rapid progress;
- Plan lessons to make learning more rigorous and to ensure that students can progressively develop their skills in core subjects;
- Develop middle management capacity to enable them to play a greater role in quality assurance and school improvement.

Progress since the last inspection

Overall, the school had responded well to the last inspection. Senior managers produced a very well-considered plan to address each of the recommendations and there were already signs of impact.

- Senior managers had improved their approach to monitoring learning and teaching by adopting a more rigorous approach, by carrying out joint observations of lessons, and by identifying the key areas of teaching which needed to be improved;
- Additional staff had been appointed for Arabic. The Arabic as an additional language curriculum had been improved and attainment of Arabic as an additional language had improved in the Primary Phase. Limited improvements had been made in Islamic Education;
- Immediate action was taken to improve the safety outside the school arising from parents bringing their children to school by car. The school deployed additional staff to manage the traffic and the Headteacher set out the school's expectations to parents on how they should safely drop off their children;
- The support provided to students with special education needs had improved, but teachers had not yet adjusted their planning sufficiently to meet the needs of higher attaining students.
- Additional training and a continuous programme for on-going support had been provided for the teaching assistants.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Good	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
Parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Most students in the primary phase had an appropriate knowledge of Islamic concepts. However they made limited links between what they were learning in class and real life situations. Most first language students in Primary could use basic standard Arabic when talking in lessons. The majority were not fluent readers. A few could write at length independently. Most primary students learning Arabic as an additional language recognised letter sounds correctly and understood familiar classroom instructions. Most students in Year 7 had weak language skills. Attainment in English was good in all phases and particularly strong in Year 6. At this stage students were confident and articulate speakers and could read and write with enjoyment and fluency. Attainment in writing was not as strong in the lower primary phase. Attainment in mathematics was good in foundation and the primary phase. Students had a secure understanding of number and were adept at mental calculations. However, their problem solving and investigative skills were underdeveloped. Secondary students could find the range, median and mean in a set of data. Attainment in science was good in all phases. The majority of students demonstrated a level of understanding and scientific skills beyond expectations for their age groups.

Most students in the primary phase made acceptable progress in understanding Islamic concepts and worship. Students' speaking skills in Arabic had improved as a result of the adoption of new teaching strategies. The progress of students learning Arabic as an additional language was limited mainly because the learning activities did not meet the different needs of students. From Foundation Stage, students made good progress in English, particularly in their speaking, listening and reading skills. Progress was strongest in the upper primary phase. In writing, progress was not as consistent. In Foundation Stage, children made good progress in developing a good understanding of number and mathematical language. Progress was less rapid in the lower primary phase as a result of learning activities which lacked rigour. However, students made good progress in upper primary and secondary phases in all aspects of number and measurement. In science, the majority of students made good progress when challenged and when they were given opportunities to make links to prior knowledge. In Secondary, students were able to use terminology from previous lessons to explain scientific concepts and make accurate predictions.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students demonstrated good learning skills. They had very positive attitudes, were engaged well in lessons and keen to participate. However, they did not readily take responsibility for their own learning and made too little use of their targets to improve their work. Most students could talk confidently about their learning

and showed that they understood the purpose of lessons. The high quality of their personal development and the very good relationships in the classroom meant that they could work well in groups towards a common goal. However, to make this way of learning even more effective, they needed better skills of organisation. Students usually made clear connections with other learning as a result of the school's integrated approach. They were able to relate learning to their own lives, particularly in mathematics and science. In the best lessons, students were highly motivated to use their developing skills of independence and critical thinking to access a range of research sources, including ICT, to support learning.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was outstanding in all phases of the school. They had very positive attitudes to school life and their approach clearly reflected the school's motto: "smile, strive and shine". Students were self-disciplined and behaviour was exemplary in almost all lessons. Relationships throughout the school were a real strength. Students demonstrated a good understanding of healthy eating and their attendance and punctuality were good.

From the Foundation Stage, students had a good, growing knowledge of the UAE, its heritage and culture. Older students had a clear understanding of how Islam affected everyday life in Dubai. They showed tolerance, friendship, and respect for all in the school community.

Students' community and environmental responsibility was outstanding. All students showed a strong commitment to the well-being of the school community. Members of the student council felt a particular responsibility for the school's good order and were proud of their own voice and initiatives in the school and the wider community. Students supported 'Senses' and took part in many other successful fund raising events. They had a very positive work ethic and enjoyed their independent projects. Students cared for the school environment. They were conscious of the need to conserve energy and their awareness of the need to sustain the environment was evident in their participation in the 'Clean up the Gulf' campaign.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching and assessment were good across the school. Almost all teachers knew their subjects well, set appropriate learning objectives and gave clear explanations to students. However, they did not always make suitable references to learning objectives during lessons to help students understand what constituted success and raise students' expectations of their own learning. Teachers questioned students well to confirm

their understanding but they did not often ask sufficiently probing questions to challenge and extend their thinking. Teachers' planning of lessons was consistent and comprehensive and they used a good range of high quality resources to support learning. However, they did not usually embed ICT in subjects. The interactions between teachers and students were very positive and encouraged good participation and dialogue in almost all lessons. Classes were generally well-organised and managed. Teachers had high expectations of students. They used a range of teaching methods and strategies to make learning interesting although these strategies did not always meet the individual needs of students or challenge the higher attainers. Good support was given to lower-attaining students to help them make progress. In the best lessons, teachers consciously developed students' skills of enquiry and critical thinking through, for example, researching the impact of the outbreak of World War 2. The school had rigorous and comprehensive assessment and tracking systems which thoroughly analysed and tracked students' attainment and progress. This analysis helped to drive school improvement, but teachers did not always use the assessment information to plan lessons well. This was recognised by senior managers as a priority for school improvement. The quality of feedback provided by teachers to support learning in lessons and in students' books was developing and was good in the best lessons. There were very comprehensive records in the Foundation Stage and the majority of teachers used this information well to plan group and individual tasks. The quality of teaching was high in art, ICT, music and PE.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good. It was broad, stimulating and based on the English National Curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The school had developed programmes to provide activities which were interesting, enjoyable and motivating. There was a strong emphasis on activity-based learning and developing creativity. In Foundation Stage, teachers planned topics thoughtfully and this helped children make connections among their learning experiences. Effective transition arrangements for children on entry to school ensured continuity in learning. Teachers did not always place enough emphasis on the progression of subject specific knowledge, understanding and skills within their thematic approaches to planning in Primary. Teachers had improved the programmes for Arabic and this helped students to develop their skills. A well-planned programme for developing ICT skills had recently been developed. Students had good opportunities to develop enquiry and research skills through individual topics. Staff enhanced the curriculum by a variety of well-planned extra-curricular activities including, residential visits, competitive sports and clubs, which supported students' personal development. Student's experiences were enriched further through the productive links with the local community.

Teachers suitably adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of most students. In Foundation Stage, they provided personalised plans and practical approaches to learning which enabled children to make good progress in all areas of learning. Specialist teachers modified the plans for students with specific needs and for those who were withdrawn for additional support. Students had good opportunities to develop specific talents in art, music and sport. The curriculum was less successful in providing extension and enrichment activities for more able students in other subjects. Most programmes offered opportunities for students to make choices and initiate their own learning. Students enjoyed the enterprise projects which enabled them to apply skills in real life contexts.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school had outstanding health and safety procedures. Senior managers and governors addressed the issue of car parking and traffic outside the school. The school building was well designed and well maintained. Staff kept comprehensive records of fire drills and they regularly reviewed evacuation procedures. The school's medical team was vigilant and proactive in their care of students and relevant medical information was shared with staff. Positive and healthy food options were promoted and included an emphasis on physical education to develop fitness for life. Child protection arrangements were comprehensive and the 'Stay Safe Programme' had been introduced.

Staff had fostered good relationships with students and this had created a genuine sense of mutual respect and trust. Staff managed attendance and punctuality well but as school numbers had increased a more systematic approach was required. The school was inclusive in its admission of students with special educational needs. The identification process was conducted by an independent group from outside the school and all new entrants were screened. When needs had been identified, support in literacy and numeracy was provided in the school through a Learning Enhancement Programme by a committed and caring staff. This team had developed individual education plans and timetabled a number of students for individual support. These students had made good progress but data on gifted and talented students was less secure. Visiting specialists provided occupational and speech therapy for specific students. Parents had covered the costs of all these supports. More effective procedures for dealing with a wider range of students personal issues were needed. There was not a dedicated time slot to access counselling and guidance personnel.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was good. The Headteacher and deputy headteacher were very effective at promoting the positive ethos of the school and sharing its vision. Senior leaders were highly visible throughout the school and very accessible to staff, parents and children. They had developed strong systems for managing the performance of the school. They were innovative and successful at developing staff as both teachers and future leaders. Changes in staffing had resulted in some shortcomings in leadership at subject level.

Self-evaluation was strong. Senior leaders knew the school very well through their sound procedures for monitoring the quality of lessons and by tracking the progress of students. Good practice was also shared by teachers observing each other in class. The school's improvement plan was a model of good practice. It focussed sharply on the key priorities.

Links with parents and the community were outstanding. The Headteacher, other senior managers and governors were accessible to parents every day. Communication between the school and parents was very effective. The school organised seminars for parents to let them know how reading and numeracy were taught at Foundation Stage. These and other initiatives showed how parents could contribute to their children's education. Two reports were provided each year on students' progress and helpfully, these included a detailed pen-portrait of each child's progress and indicated the next steps in learning. Both the school and the community benefited from the links with local businesses, charities and other organisations.

Governance was good. The governing board had a wide range of stakeholders, which included parents. The views of parents were regularly sought through an annual survey and through informal means from the owners, who were in the school almost every day. The board responded well to parental concerns such as traffic management in the mornings and the timetabling of Islamic Education and Arabic. The board monitored the performance of the school through regular reports from senior leaders. Through these they held the Headteacher to account. The board provided sound strategic direction for the school and had a good impact on its improvement. For example, it had provided additional staffing and resources to meet the growing demands of the school. However, the board could have done more to report to parents on its work.

The school operated smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers were well qualified but the induction of new staff was not organised systematically. There was an over reliance on a range of external supports for students with special education needs. Teaching assistants were not used effectively enough in all classrooms. The building had some outstanding specialist facilities but, at the Foundation Stage, some provision was not always age appropriate. The building was safe and very well maintained. Disabled access

was limited by not having a lift for the upper floor. The school had invested in an excellent range of learning resources, especially in ICT, science equipment and library stock.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati children were in the Foundation Stage and Lower Primary. Their attainment and progress was generally in line with that of their peers. Attainment in English was in line with other children in the early stages of learning English. Emirati children made good progress in most subjects. They developed their listening and speaking skills in English rapidly. Many could understand questions, follow instructions and the teacher's explanations. They communicated in a simple way through phrases and short sentences after only a short time in school. Emirati children responded well to their teachers and had positive attitudes to learning. The thematic approaches to learning helped them to extend their vocabulary, their knowledge and understanding of the world around them and develop their sense of curiosity. As a result, children enjoyed their learning and engaged readily with all of the activities. They persevered with tasks and were supported by their parents who had high aspirations for them.

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

The school had an inclusive admissions policy, was positive towards SEN provision and had ensured that those students in receipt of specific support made progress. All children at Foundation Stage are screened on entry into the school by external specialists. From those screenings, some students are then offered specialist support and therapies. This early intervention was very effective. The in-school SEN team had put in place good procedures and interventions in literacy and numeracy for twenty three students and they had made good progress. However, the adaptations to provision required for gifted and talented students had not been included as part of SEN policy. Parents paid extra to provide the specialist interventions available, including those provided by the in-school SEN team. The provision for students with special education needs did not fully involve all class teachers, school based SEN specialists or external specialist therapists.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Teaching strategies used in Arabic as a first language had a sharp focus on developing speaking skills. Students in all primary phase classes were developing their abilities to use standard Arabic when interacting

with the teacher or with each other in Arabic lessons. Teachers used ICT and picture cards to enhance students' learning. Lessons usually included many activities from text-books which introduced reasonable variety in learning. Long- and short-term planning of the curriculum was adequate with purposeful activities aimed at developing appropriate skills in Arabic. The planning of the curriculum ensured meaningful contexts and appropriate opportunities for progression with grammar. However, the delivered curriculum did not always take into account the needs of all students: in too many cases, lessons lacked appropriate modification and were driven by the content of textbooks. In addition, the opportunities for students to develop advanced reading skills were not always sufficient, and there were limited opportunities for extended and creative free writing.

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	99	15%
	Last year	58	28%
Teachers	2		4%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

Only a small minority of parents responded to the survey. No teachers responded. Of the parents who responded most were satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school. They thought that their children's work was interesting and challenging and that there was a good range of subjects and activities. Almost all said that teaching was good and that their children were safe and well cared for. Most thought that their children received sufficient homework and almost all said that they could supervise and help their children with it. Almost all parents felt that their children made good progress in English. Most felt that good progress was made in mathematics and science. The majority thought that good progress was being made in Arabic as a second language but only a minority thought that good progress was made in Islamic Education. Most parents thought that reports and meetings with teachers were helpful and that the school was led well.

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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