

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Al Nibras International Private School

Report published in April 2014

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Nibras International Private School

Location	Green Community
Type of school	Private
Website	www.nisdubai.ae
Telephone	04-8853330
Address	Dubai Investment Park, P O Box 54084, Dubai
Principal	Agnes Shaw
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten-Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	886
Largest nationality group of students	Lebanese
Number of Emirati students	29 (3%)
Date of the inspection	10th to 12th March 2014

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## The context of the school

Al Nibras International School, located in The Green Community, provides education for girls and boys aged 3 to 18 years. At the time of the inspection it had 886 students, including 29 Emiratis. Over 200 new Arab students had been enrolled this year. A total of 85 nationalities were represented.

The school followed a US curriculum aligned to the Colorado Common Core State Standards. External assessments such as ISA, SAT and some AP examinations, along with PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS were administered in the school.

Most of the 70 teaching staff were appropriately qualified. Thirty four new teachers had been recruited during the academic year. There were 19 teaching assistants. The senior leadership team consisted of the Principal, the Assistant Principal Kindergarten/Elementary, the Assistant Principal Middle/High Schools, a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, a Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator and an Attainment, Progress & Curriculum Leader. A team of external consultants was in place for four days a week to support school development in a range of areas.

The Principal was in her second year of leadership in the school and had many years of previous school leadership experience. Two new grades for children had been added this year in Kindergarten 2 and there were five new grades in the Elementary phase.

## Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

### Key strengths

- Most aspects of the Kindergarten were strengths of the school.
- A welcoming and inclusive approach to the enrolment of students with special educational needs was a very commendable feature of the school.
- School leaders and governors were focused on continuing and supporting improvements.
- Parents contributed purposefully to ongoing initiatives.

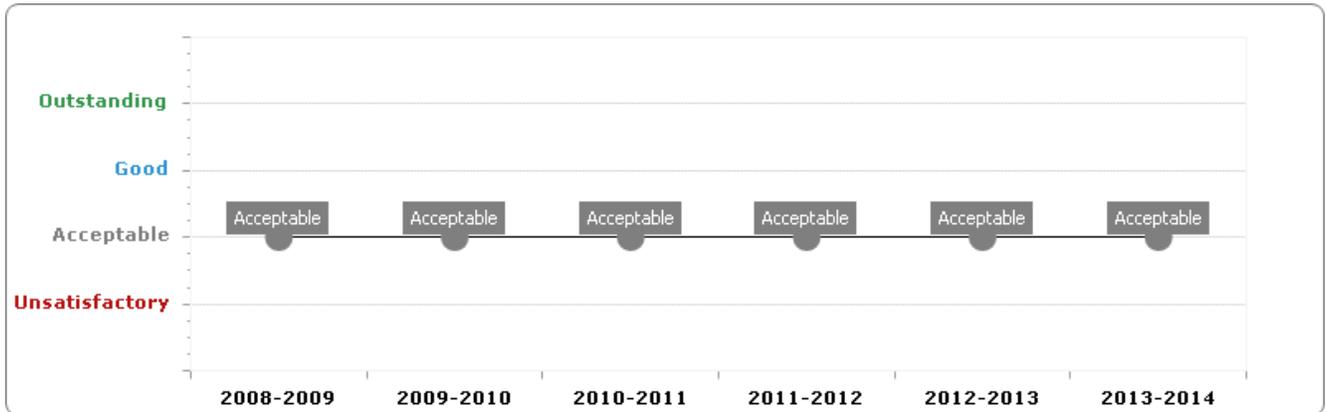
### Recommendations

- Make teaching and learning more consistently effective through:
  - more focused lesson plans;
  - better use of assessment data and understanding of students' needs and learning styles;
  - prioritising independent, critical thinking and the use of technology.
- Create whole-school long and short term strategies, derived from external evaluation, to measure accurately all groups of students' progress against the Colorado and Ministry of Education curricular frameworks.
- Ensure a broad range of credit-bearing elective courses are available to students in the High School.
- Broaden the leadership team to include more specific curriculum expertise in line with the school's chosen curriculum.
- Further develop accuracy in measuring the quality of teaching, learning and students' outcomes.

## Progress since the last inspection

- Attainment and progress in Elementary School English and progress in High School Islamic Education, math and science had improved.
- Attainment and progress in Middle School English and attainment in Middle School Islamic Education were lower and now acceptable.
- Understanding of Islamic values and local cultural and global awareness had improved.
- The school had begun a process to fill key, permanent appointments to align the curriculum more closely to the Colorado curriculum and to improve teaching and learning.

## Trend of overall performance



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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Personal responsibility	Good	Good	Good	Good
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Parents and the community	Good
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic Education and Arabic as a first Language attainment was good in Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High. Most elementary students recited and memorised significant numbers of short Surahs. Older students demonstrated skills and understanding of real-life links that were in line with expectations. In elementary Arabic as a first language, most students spoke and read clearly, understanding some complex meaning in texts. Older students understood appropriate grammar rules and literary texts but they did not speak fluently or write convincingly. Arabic as an additional language was acceptable across all phases. Students had an appropriate understanding of spoken and written words and could use them to converse with simple, short sentences. They could read a range of simple familiar texts. Attainment in English was good in Kindergarten and Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High. Some elementary English students did read expressively, while middle and high school students analysed literature well. Writing skills for most students were very limited. Attainment in Mathematics was good in Kindergarten and acceptable across all other phases. Kindergarten children applied their practical math skills as an integral part of classroom activities. They could create simple patterns, use everyday language to talk about and expand upon size, weight position and distance. In the Elementary, Middle and High schools students were able to solve problems, moving from real-life examples to more abstract content. However, this was variable across grades and phases. In science attainment for Kindergarten children and Elementary students was good. They explored and hypothesised with purpose and focus. Attainment for older students was acceptable. They had gaps in some key knowledge areas and some struggled with key vocabulary.

In Islamic Education, students made acceptable progress in the Middle phase. Students made good progress in the Elementary and High Schools, for example in their understanding of different Islamic concepts. Recitation and memorisation skills were improving for most groups of students. In Arabic as a first language progress was good in Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High. Older students steadily improved their understanding of grammar rules but only some could apply them independently in their speaking or writing. Arabic as an additional language was acceptable across all phases. Students made steady progress in learning vocabulary, and read and understood short familiar sentences. Their progress in writing was significantly slower. In English progress was acceptable in Middle and High and good in Kindergarten and Elementary. Kindergarten children made more rapid progress in speaking and listening than students in other phases. Older students explained their points of view clearly. Progress in writing was not yet strong. Overall, English progress was good in KG and elementary grades, before levelling off in the Middle and High Schools. Students' progress in math and in science was inconsistent because too many students did not connect their learning in order to build understanding of important ideas, concepts and skills. In Mathematics progress was good in Kindergarten and acceptable across all other phases. In Science it was good in Kindergarten, Elementary and High and acceptable in Middle.

## Quality of students' learning skills

Learning skills were good in the Kindergarten and acceptable elsewhere. Most students were enthusiastic and keen to learn. They were increasingly confident in explaining their ideas and justifying their answers. Relationships with their peers and teachers were positive. Collaboration was strong in most parts of the school and this led to greater engagement by students in their learning. In the upper grades, engagement was more effective when students discussed their learning with each other and the teacher. Students consolidated independent learning skills and sustained their concentration appropriately when the learning matched their interests and experiences. This was a strong feature of the Kindergarten when children were engaged in the Learning Zone activities. Good connections were being made to real life in the Kindergarten and elementary science and English but this was less developed in mathematics in the Middle and High schools. Learning through research and enquiry was a feature of some lessons. However, students did not display consistently strong capacities in the independent application of their skills in learning. This was particularly evident in the use of technology where students were, for the most part, just beginning to use ICT regularly and in a creative manner.

[View judgements](#)

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

Personal and social development was good across the school. Students were respectful, considerate and hard-working. Relationships between teachers and students were good and students felt safe in school. The challenging behaviour of a minority of students in Grade 7 had an unsettling effect on students in this and other grades. This issue was known by managers who were addressing this issue as a priority for the school. Attendance was improving but was still variable across and between grades. Almost all students arrived on time for lessons at the start of the day.

Cultural understanding and awareness was good across the school. Students had a clear understanding of Islamic values and discussed, in detail, the influence of Islam on life in Dubai. They appreciated local heritage and culture, recognising their value to the UAE. The school integrated local and global cultural awareness issues in areas such as social studies and history, as well as personal, social and health education lessons. Students celebrated Islamic events, UAE National and International Days. Weekly Islamic lessons and 'UAE Time' were attractive features of the Kindergarten program. Students could compare their culture with that of the UAE and other cultures.

Community and environmental responsibility was good in Kindergarten and acceptable across all other phases. Students were responsible for and contributed to many aspects of school life. Most applied significant effort to complete their work assignments, seeking to do their best in both effort and achievement. They enjoyed their work and were happy to engage with the range of activities available. A minority of students were able to explain environmental impact in the UAE context and identify some solutions but their involvement in specific aspects of Dubai's environmental landscape was limited.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the Elementary, Middle and High Schools. Teachers prepared bright learning environments that supported and celebrated students' achievements. The majority of teachers had good subject knowledge. There was a consistently good understanding of how children learn in the Kindergarten; this was more variable elsewhere. Planning followed a consistent format and was most effective when teams of teachers collaborated using specific assessment information. In too many elementary, middle and high school grades, learning objectives were too vague to ensure that an accurate assessment of individual progress emerged by the end of the lesson. Lessons included a variety of activities, except in the upper grades in Arabic as a first language where there was too much reliance on textbooks. Most teachers used technology as part of their lessons but, in many cases, merely as a presentation without using any interactive elements. Teachers used a U.S Learning Skills program in order to meet the learning needs of different groups of students but this is not so effective in the upper grades. Kindergarten teachers set high expectations and used searching and interesting questions to assess understanding. The resulting outcomes were key signposts for future learning experiences. Elsewhere in the school, questioning was often closed and did not establish prior knowledge or develop students' critical thinking skills.

Assessment was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other phases. Throughout the school, assessment data was collected and used with differing degrees of success to monitor students' progress, set targets and report to parents. This was used in the Kindergarten very effectively to plan tasks that constructively met the needs and learning styles of all groups. The use of assessment data had improved elsewhere but it was not yet consistent in quality or application. Too many teachers had not used assessment to help understand their students' specific needs. Consequently, differentiated planning for lessons to meet the learning needs of all students was variable in detail, challenge and interest levels. Better lessons included probing and open-ended tasks which enabled the most able students to work independently and creatively, Students were generally accurate and enthusiastic when assessing their own

learning. When conducted appropriately, self and peer review by students often enhanced their learning and progress. The marking of students' work and tests was inconsistent; teachers did not provide enough written guidance for students on how to improve.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable in the High School and good across all other phases. The school aligned its curriculum with the Colorado Common Core State Standards across phases and subjects and was beginning to extend the reach of technology in the learning process. Planning was clearly linked to the curriculum and grade level expectations. In Kindergarten and Elementary, the curriculum was organised around thematic units and there were ample opportunities to learn through play. The curriculum offered good opportunities for cross-curricular links and critical thinking. The school had a transition system in place to ensure that students were prepared for next phases. Revision courses were offered and preparation for SAT was embedded in the core subjects. Students had access to many extra-curricular activities, and teams participated in inter-school events. In the High School, the division between arts and science streams limited course options. There was a limited range of elective courses which did not help students gain academic credits.

Curriculum design was good in Kindergarten and acceptable across other phases. The Kindergarten curriculum was well planned to meet the needs of almost all children, particularly additional language learners and those with special educational needs. In other phases, the curriculum design allowed for some modifications to provide some groups of students with suitable learning opportunities. On occasion, these were limited in detail and individuality. The school was committed to providing as much as possible for all students. Curricular choices in the Kindergarten ensured ample opportunities for a holistic learning experience that fulfilled the interests and learning styles of children. The curriculum in upper phases included some choices of study to meet the interests and needs of students, for example in high school where standard and advanced levels of math were well managed.

[View judgements](#)

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

Health and safety was good across the school. School transport arrangements were very well organised and contributed to an overall culture of safety. Students reported that they felt safe in school citing prompt responses by administrative personnel to issues raised. The school premises were well maintained. Routine checks were carried out systematically. A safety officer, supported by a safety team, ensured that issues

were reported and appropriate remedial action taken. Medication was stored securely and specialized rooms such as science laboratories were safe environments. Healthy living was promoted for students and a majority made healthy choices. Child protection arrangements were consistently understood and applied. The teaching of how to use the internet safely was not yet established in the school. Ongoing issues for review by the school included students' over-exposure to the sun and efficient communication arrangements from the pool area in case of an emergency.

The quality of support was good in Kindergarten and Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High. The relationships amongst staff and students were very strong and evident in the caring attitudes, mutual respect and positive behaviours throughout the school. Effective systems to monitor attendance and punctuality were in place, with ongoing efforts to improve both. The school welcomed many students with a range of special educational needs into all phases of the school. This feature was a major driver in the school's improvement plans to know and provide support for each student as effectively as possible. Steps to identify each student's specific needs were developing well, and systems to track progress had been put in place. However, the school had not done enough to train teachers in strategies to best ensure the learning progress of each student. Most students felt comfortable turning to staff for advice and guidance on their personal aspirations or concerns. However, career guidance and effective support for older students who were considering their next steps were not yet sufficiently systematic, globally informed or timely.

[View judgements](#)

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

Leadership was good. Led by a very committed and energetic leader, senior personnel were focused on developing a vision and mission based on best international education practice in a US context. They worked extremely hard to manage the implementation of these aspirations so that an inclusive, caring, student-centred and improving learning environment was in place. An increasing number of teachers were showing understanding of the key instructional messages across all phases. Relationships, communication and delegation of responsibilities were all strong. A systematic approach was being taken to the development of a professional and competent middle management team. Significant capacity existed within the school's senior leadership team to develop teaching innovatively across the school.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Processes for the school to know itself were largely sound, if at times overly positive. This was particularly noticeable with regard to judgements about teacher quality, curriculum development and the extent to which recommendations had been fully addressed. Self-review documentation indicated that judgments in the Elementary, Middle and High Schools did not accurately track how well different groups of students were taught. In addition, it did not identify

unsuitable learning objectives and ensure that all activities had purpose and potential. Action planning was detailed but success criteria were vague and difficult to link to performance management indicators. The school's improvement over time was constrained.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents were very involved in leading some school events, giving feedback to senior leaders on an ongoing basis regarding both individual and collective issues and supporting the strong positive relationships that were in place. Through a broad range of communication media, the school and home were well informed of ongoing issues as required. Parents felt that the school's informal and formal reports helped them to help their children, provided them with a sense of security for their welfare and built a confidence in their children's future learning. Community links, of a sporting, business and charitable nature, were regular, distributed across all phases and in some cases reflective of students' future work intentions. Where the links were less focused on learning outcomes for the students, especially across the Elementary and Middle Schools, the impact was less effective.

Governance was good. The owners were committed to the pastoral and academic well-being of each student, supported senior leaders and teachers with professional development opportunities and had resourced the school according to the identified needs of the students. They were focused on future expansion, but in a measured way, keen to maintain the school's community spirit. Very well informed of the students' and teachers' performance outcomes, leaders were held to account in practical and fair ways. A new advisory body, reflective of the school community, was now in place but it was too early to see its tangible impact upon the school's strategic direction.

Management of staffing, facilities and resources was good. Day-to-day life was efficiently managed with clear routines and expectations. Faculty numbers had stabilised and most teachers were appropriately qualified and working diligently. Roles were clear, communication of relevant information was effective and all systems worked well. The premises were attractive and well appointed. Facilities were well resourced and well used, and an ongoing replacement of material requirements ensured that, for the most part, all students had ready access to what they needed. The innovative use of these materials, particularly technology, was beginning to become routine for teachers and learners in some parts of the school.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

The performance of Emirati students in terms of attainment and progress was varied across the key subjects. They made good progress in Islamic Education, Arabic as a first language and science but acceptable progress in English and math. Their progress was hindered by the lack of independent learning opportunities and

differentiated tasks to meet their individual needs. Their personal responsibility, Islamic understanding and their cultural and global awareness were good across all phases of the school.

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

The school had an open and welcoming admissions policy for students with special educational needs. Identification processes began upon admission to school and parents were involved at the earliest stage. All students with special educational needs were placed in mainstream classes, with a minority also having occasional pull-out sessions for specialized support. This nurturing school environment supported most students' progress. Teachers monitored this work formally with individual education plans (IEPs) or informally with trackers that included learning targets. In some grades, teaching assistants gave additional reinforcement and attention, particularly for the younger students. Curriculum modification was a challenge for some teachers who did not always achieve the specific target for these students. This variability was evident across subjects and phases. Some teachers had not developed the required skills to ensure the IEP targets were met in lessons. However, all students with special educational needs were happy in school, integrated successfully into school life and made adequate progress.

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

Most lessons of Arabic as a first language were well planned and followed the prescribed Ministry of Education curriculum although learning objectives and differentiation for different groups were not clearly defined. Teachers used technology appropriately in lessons and deployed additional resources to enhance learning. They checked students' understanding regularly through Objective Charts and Assessment Scales. Elementary teachers used effective questioning and a good range of activities to develop speaking and writing skills. They used role-play and collaborative group work to enable students to express ideas based on sound understanding of the text. In Middle School, many teachers provided ample time for students to comprehend with depth and purpose. However, in a minority of lessons, teaching was didactic and classroom management skills were limited, affecting students' learning and behavior. High school teachers linked learning with the heritage of the UAE. However, they did not routinely promote individual writing skills and expression. While teachers made great efforts to engage reluctant students, their modest expectations did not ensure students learned independently.

## 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	73	13%
	Last year	40	9%
Teachers	25		39%
Students	30		34%

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

Parents were very supportive of the school. They overwhelmingly felt their children were well taught, cared for, supported in their learning and that they made good progress overall. They expressed some minor concerns about teacher retention but generally reflected a confidence in the school to meet the needs of their children. Teachers were strong in their contentment with support from leaders, conditions of work and school provision of the necessary resources to meet students' needs. They felt the school was inclusive for students with special needs, was delivering an effective curriculum and were pleased with the level of inclusion they felt in programme design, professional development and performance management. Students expressed very positive views on teacher quality, programmes suited to their needs and a broad range of options for them to study. They made a few exceptional references to some poor teaching and the range of sports available but, overall, were very positive about their daily experience in the school.

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

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