

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Al Mizhar American Academy School

Report published in April, 2014

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Mizhar American Academy School

Location	Al Mizhar
Type of school	Private
Website	www.americanacademy.ae
Telephone	04-2887250
Address	P.O.Box 78484,11A Street Mizhar 1,Dubai
Principal	Delice Ann Scotto
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3 - 18 years
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	671
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	400 (60%)
Date of the inspection	18th to 20th November

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## The context of the school

The American Academy is situated in Al Mizhar. It is a private school providing education for girls, with some boys in the Kindergarten. It is part of the Taaleem group of school management. At the time of the inspection there were 671 students on the roll, aged from three to 18 years. Four hundred students were Emirati, and over twenty nationalities were represented, largely from GCC, Pakistan and Asian countries. Most students spoke Arabic as first language.

The school offered the US curriculum which had been adapted to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education and to reflect local culture. Students received a high school diploma on completion of Grade 12. External examinations included the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) test and SAT examinations for Grade 12 students. The school entered students for examinations which provided international comparisons in mathematics, science and aspects of English.

## Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

### Key strengths

- The behaviour and mature attitude of students at all stages throughout the school;
- Students' participation and involvement in a broad range of community and environmental activities;
- Students' understanding of Islamic values and their impact on the life and culture of Dubai;
- Partnerships with parents and the community.

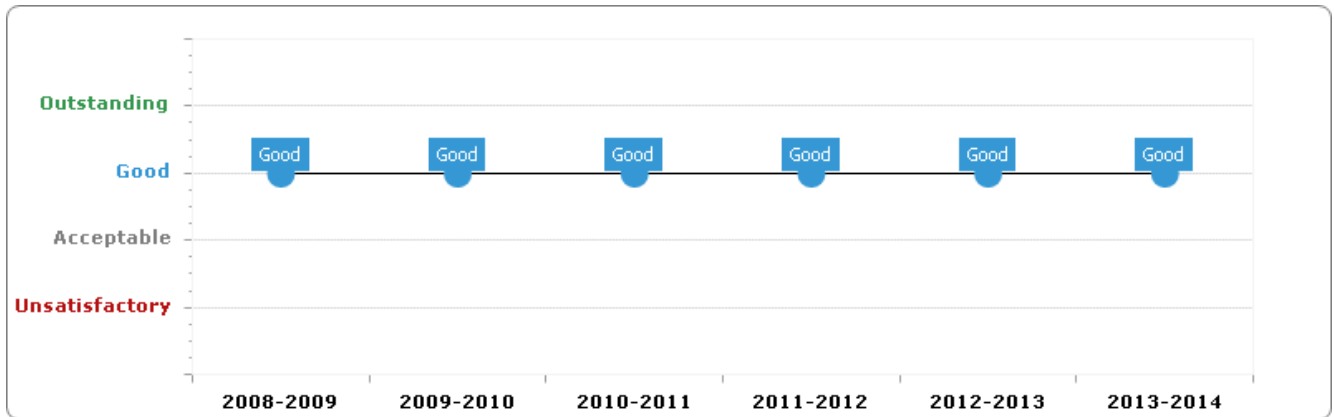
### Recommendations

- Ensure that the self-evaluation process is reflective, truly evaluative, informed by student outcomes, and used as a quality improvement tool;
- Ensure that everyone in the school is fully aware of child protection policies and procedures, and that training is provided immediately following appointment;
- Raise teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving;
- Improve assessment and its impact on teaching and learning;
- Use externally validated assessments to moderate the school's own assessments and to give staff, the students and their parents, a realistic view of students' attainment in an international context.
- Ensure that all classes start on time and proceed at a brisker pace in order to improve progress.

## Progress since the last inspection

- The deepening of students' understanding of Islamic values;
- The improvement of communication between school and home and the increasingly rapid response to parental concerns.

## 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	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>English</b>				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Mathematics</b>				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Science</b>				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

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

[Read paragraph](#)



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

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

[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	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[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?

In Islamic Education, most students in elementary school had a good knowledge of the pillars of Islam and faith. In middle and high schools, their understanding of Seerah, Hadeeth, Islamic morals and values was well developed. Most students across all phases had good attainment in Arabic as a first language. Listening was the strongest skill. Writing was weak in the elementary phase. In Arabic as an additional language, attainment in listening was good. The majority could read familiar topics with success. Speaking and writing skills were less secure. Attainment in English was good. Speaking and listening skills were well developed. Students enjoyed reading and made good use of literature to enhance the quality of their creative writing. In middle and high schools, speaking skills became more sophisticated. By Grade 12, students could read and appreciate American and English literary texts, both traditional and modern. Attainment in mathematics was good. Students in the lower years understood basic number skills and could explain their work to others. Middle school students were developing problem solving skills. In the high school, attainment in algebra, geometry and calculus was solid. Attainment in science was good. The majority of students acquired scientific knowledge through hands-on activities that demonstrated some features of the scientific method.

In Islamic Education, the majority of students made good progress in understanding Seerah and Islamic morals and values. Progress was inconsistent in developing recitation skills throughout all phases. Most students achieved good progress in Arabic as a first language. Most showed good progress in reading and understanding, and the majority in speaking and oral presentations. In Arabic as an additional language, progress was good in listening and basic reading skills. Progress in English was good. From a broadly average entry point, students learned to speak fluently using increasingly extensive vocabulary. Progress in reading and spelling was hampered due to limited phonic knowledge. Older students' skills, particularly in reading and writing, were developing appropriately. Progress in mathematics was good across all stages. Students' understanding was developing well in lessons as they learnt to apply their new knowledge. The majority of students made good progress in science when activities were strongly linked to theoretical understanding. In the middle and high schools, students were able to use advanced scientific terminology.

[View judgements](#)

## Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of learning skills across all phases was good. Students took learning seriously and were active partners in the learning process. They demonstrated ownership of their learning. They focused attentively on their work, and cared about the quality of what they produced. They reviewed their work and modified it to make it better, a learning skill that would serve them well in life. In many classes, there was high quality collaboration which manifested itself in a belief that all could succeed. Some students were able to

demonstrate the application of newly learned information to real life situations, more frequently in the upper grades. Older students played an active role in evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses, and could then employ additional strategies to improve their own learning.

[View judgements](#)

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

Personal responsibility was outstanding. Almost all students were self-disciplined and behaved with courtesy and mutual respect. Relationships were in the main supportive. Older students were very good role models for their younger colleagues, displaying diligence, self-sufficiency and independence. All made healthy choices, whether eating in the school canteen or bringing food from home. Overall attendance was acceptable. Across all phases, students' appreciation of the impact of Islamic values on modern life in Dubai was outstanding. Their sense of national identity and their understanding of local traditions and heritage were very strong. They showed an exceptionally positive attitude towards other cultures. Although they were very knowledgeable about the traditions and heritage of the UAE and the Arab region, their understanding of worldwide heritage was less well developed. Community and environmental responsibility was outstanding. The school council had significant influence on deciding activities related to students' social and personal development. Students participated in a wide range of environmental, conservation and community projects. Many of these were aimed specifically at caring for the school, but an equal number supported projects within and around Dubai. Students were actively engaged in a plan to conserve energy and water, to reduce waste and to increase sustainability through recycling. They also supported international enterprises.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching and assessment were good. Almost all teachers had a good knowledge of their subject matter, and some had a good understanding of the ways that students learned best. Most teachers planned lessons carefully and built time for questioning into their teaching. Lesson plans had been standardised across all curriculum areas. Opportunities for discovery and exploration were built into some lessons. In the main, teachers ensured that their students participated fully in the learning process. Teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) effectively as a teaching tool, but rarely offered students the use of this resource as an instrument for independent research.

The school used a variety of assessments to measure attainment and progress. It had recently adopted, as its main assessment device, a system which allowed analysis of attainment against international norms. The new assessment tool, the MAP test, provided attainment information linked to the Common Core State Standards. The data had provided useful information on the attainment of groups of students. It enabled teachers to retrieve information about class performance related to a particular standard, and also allowed them to examine individual students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers gave oral and written feedback to students, but did not often indicate exactly what they needed to do in order to improve. Analysis of assessment data did not greatly influence further teaching practices. Standardised tests for college admission were administered to a small number of older students.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in all phases of the school. It had a clear rationale and included a balanced range of core subjects as well as enrichment opportunities for all students. The Common Core State Standards, including the new science standards, provided the framework for the school's published curriculum. Students' progression through the phases of the school was assured. The social as well as the academic needs of students were met through enrichment of the curriculum, which was systematically reviewed and updated. There were some good cross-curricular links between Arabic, English, science and social studies. The curriculum included project and performance tasks in several subject areas to foster independent learning and research skills. It provided students with the opportunity to undertake volunteer projects or internships within the community. Curriculum design was good. The well-planned curriculum offered scope for students to develop. However, it was not used successfully to challenge and motivate all students, or to encourage them to have high expectations for their own success. Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) was made, but not applied consistently through all subjects or phases. Students in the secondary phase had some choices within core subject areas, although there was room for improvement in the distribution of those courses.

[View judgements](#)

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

The school's arrangements for health and safety were good. Effective safety procedures were in place to ensure that students were safe and supervised at all times. School premises, equipment, and resources were maintained in good condition. Emergency evacuation drills and transport arrangements were of high quality. The clinic provided students with an excellent medical service. Nurses kept detailed records and stored

medicines securely. Students with permanent health issues had their medicines stored in the clinic for emergency use. Healthy living was consistently promoted in school through appropriate awareness programmes that involved both students and parents. The school's child protection policy was not clear to all and was not followed closely enough to safeguard students. The quality of support was outstanding. Relationships between staff and students were extremely good. Most staff knew students very well and were aware of their individual needs, which were dealt with efficiently and in confidence. Students received helpful guidance on their future careers. Almost all felt comfortable in asking for help and advice. The school kept accurate records of attendance, and prompt action was taken should a student's absence be unexplained. The school had detailed procedures to identify SEN students on entry. In classes where students had support, progress was particularly good because in these cases, the needs of students were fully met. However, the outcomes of assessments were not always tightly linked to curriculum planning for SEN.

[View judgements](#)

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

Leadership was good. The principal had a clear vision for the school, shared among senior colleagues. However, the aims lacked academic focus. The principal was supported very ably by the heads of elementary and high school. They provided strong leadership but this was not yet mirrored by all subject leaders. Many senior staff lacked the critical acumen and professional detachment needed to make rigorous objective judgements about the success of attempts to change classroom practice. Communication was effective.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had made progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous report but none of them had yet been addressed fully. The principal had involved departmental heads and team leaders in the writing of the self-evaluation document, which told the story of the school but did not offer a rigorous analysis. The writers had not interpreted data from external examinations accurately, presenting an over-optimistic picture of attainment. Senior leaders monitored classroom practice but had not seen that some teachers had been unable to put into practice what they had learned in theory.

Partnership with parents was outstanding. Many parents participated in the life and work of the school to good effect. They received very helpful advice on how to support the development of early literacy and numeracy. The school's website published weekly information on teaching, enabling parents to monitor their daughters' progress. Regular reports gave parents good information. The school's open-door policy and its consultation evenings led to productive exchanges. Good links with other schools within the management group and visits to private and public businesses enhanced students' intellectual and social development. The school had organised a valuable programme of community service and work experience.

Governance was good. The management organisation ensured that the teachers' and students' voices were represented. It sought the opinions of parents and acted upon their suggestions. Board members regularly visited classrooms. They had taken a particular interest in the development of Arabic. Although they strongly supported the pursuit of academic excellence, they had not sufficiently held the school to account for its inability to raise attainment.

Overall management was good. Teachers were academically well qualified but though sometimes lacking in methodological skills. Training of new recruits had happened but in some cases had not been rigorous enough. Deployment of teachers on occasion led to relationship difficulties. The library was well stocked, but texts in Arabic were in the minority. The school had provided extensive resources but these were not always used to full potential. A number of classes started late, leading to considerable cumulative loss of teaching time.

[View judgements](#)

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

Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) made good progress overall throughout the school. Progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science was good. Progress in Arabic and Islamic Education was acceptable because teachers did not meet students' needs appropriately. There was some inconsistency in levels of support. Progress was best in classes where students were supported by assistants or shadow teachers who were clear about the learning outcomes and expected achievements. Most staff were developing an increased understanding of SEN students' needs. This was mainly due to detailed individual education plans which were written following assessment analysis for each student. The school recognised its gifted students. Progress was monitored through tests in key subjects on a termly basis. This information was analysed, but there was limited evidence of it being used fully in curriculum plans to ensure that detailed learning targets were set for SEN students. The school had effective policies for admissions and SEN. Students were assessed and accepted if the school could ensure provision for their emotional and academic needs. Students with SEN were fully included and took part in all aspects of the curriculum. Parents were involved at all stages through the referral system. The school arranged regular meetings between teachers and parents to discuss their child's progress. The school also offered advice and guidance to parents to ensure a consistent approach between home and school. Leadership of SEN had good expertise. Staff had been trained and as a result were better informed. However, teachers continued to need guidance on how curriculum modifications could be made to address SEN issues.

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

Across all phases, almost all teachers of Arabic as a first language had good subject knowledge. They planned well for their lessons, providing clear learning objectives for their students. They were good role models for their students in the use of accurate standard Arabic. Dialogue was well used in most lessons to engage students and motivate them to think critically. In most cases, resources, including ICT, were effectively used as a teaching tool. Teachers benefited from the small number of students in many classes and used oral questioning effectively to check the understanding of almost all students and ensured all were focused on their learning objectives.

The school's curriculum was based on the UAE Ministry of Education standards and expectations. It was soundly planned and a few of its elements were enhanced by additional material created by the school teachers. It provided sufficient opportunity for linguistic progression for most students across most grades.

## 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	127	19%
	Last year	119	23%
Teachers	9		12%
Students	133		89%

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

Overall, responses to the surveys indicated high levels of satisfaction. Parents were less positive in their views of attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. They overwhelmingly indicated their children's enjoyment of school. About a quarter felt that homework was inappropriate but did not say in what way. Although health and safety issues in the school were rated very highly, some raised the issue of safety on buses, as did some students. Only half of parents considered that the school dealt adequately with bullying. Responses concerning SEN were positive. Communication was rated highly, but there was a little disagreement on whether parents' opinions were valued. Fifty seven per cent claimed not to be aware of the school's rating in international comparisons. More than half of students felt that the school did not listen to their opinions. Those teachers who responded were very positive about all aspects of the life and work of 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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