

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Safa Private School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Safa Private School

Location	Al Safa
Type of school	Private
Website	www.safaschooldubai.com
Telephone	04 3947879
Address	P.O. Box 71091, Dubai
Principal	Jane Knight
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-11 / Kindergarten to Grade 6
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	327
Number of Emirati students	3 (1%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 5 th to Wednesday 7 th December 2011

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The context of the school

Al Safa Private School is situated in Al Safa. The school was opened in 2004. At the time of the inspection, the school had a total of 327 students, aged from three to 11 years. Forty different nationalities were represented amongst the student population; a few were Emirati. Approximately nine per cent of the students had been identified by the school as having some form of special educational need. A few students with particular needs received specific 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 17 full-time teachers, including the Headteacher and a senior management team. There were four part-time teachers. Almost all teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by nine teaching assistants. Students were arranged into 16 classes, two at each year group of the school from Foundation Stage to Year 5. There was a single class in Year 6. At the time of the inspection, the Headteacher was in her sixth year in post.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Al Safa Private School provided an acceptable quality of education. The quality of teaching was good in most subjects. It was particularly strong in the Foundation Stage and in Years 5 and 6. Since the previous inspection, the school had continued to develop its approaches to early writing and phonics in English, although students' writing remained a relatively weak area. Despite modification to the teaching and learning of Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language, students' attainment and progress remained well behind those of other subjects. Across both phases, the level of challenge in all key subjects was insufficient for the most able students. Students' attitudes and behaviour were exemplary. Excellent partnership with parents supported some innovative, interdisciplinary learning through, for example, architectural and book projects, which raised students' understanding of the UAE.

The school had made good progress towards addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection report. This included ensuring curriculum compliance with Ministry of Education (MoE) requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic. However, there were insufficient planning and teacher knowledge to support

the effective teaching of Islamic Education. The effects of school leaders upon teaching and learning were variable. Approaches to school self-evaluation were inconsistent.

Key strengths

- Students' outstanding behaviour, motivation and attitudes toward learning;
- Students' highly developed understanding of the civic, economic and environmental aspects of the UAE;
- The school's attention to health and safety, including students' approaches to healthy living;
- The strong multi-cultural school community within a family atmosphere, supported by tolerance and mutual respect;
- Outstanding partnerships with parents and the community.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic; and ensure appropriate progress, particularly in Islamic Education;
- Ensure consistently high levels of challenge for the most able students and greater consistency in students' learning and progress across the year groups;
- Increase the effectiveness of senior and middle managers through a more rigorous approach to managing change;
- Use self-evaluation more effectively to identify clear targets for improvement and address any weaknesses in teaching;
- Ensure that the governors support the school by taking appropriate and swift action to improve students' learning.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary
Islamic Education		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as a first language		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
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

Attainment was good in English, mathematics and science in both phases of the school. In the Foundation Stage, children's speaking and listening skills were well-developed. Writing was acceptable. Children could count up to and beyond 20 and knew the days of the week and months of the year. They developed investigative skills well through exploring their surroundings and the properties of materials. In the primary years, attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable because students had insufficient memorisation and recitation skills. Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory. Most students had limited speaking, reading and writing skills. In English, primary students showed developing independence and self-assurance in speaking and reading. Writing was less well-developed, except in Year 6. Students' arithmetic skills and understanding of shape and position were good throughout the school. Problem-solving skills were unevenly developed but were strongest in Year 5. Primary students' knowledge and understanding were good across all aspects of science.

Progress in English, mathematics and science was good across both phases, although there were variations, particularly for the most able students. In the primary phase, students' progress in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory. Most students' abilities to recite the Holy Qur'an were underdeveloped. They had insufficient knowledge of the history of early Islam. Progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable. Students' vocabulary and listening, reading and handwriting skills had improved. Students with special educational needs were making unsatisfactory progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Their progress was acceptable in English but good in mathematics and science.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding across the school. Relationships between students and staff members were caring and based on mutual respect. Students had excellent attitudes towards healthy living. They made positive choices about their own health and engaged in sport and exercise. Attendance over the last term was acceptable. Students understood UAE traditions and national identity and shared their own cultural experiences well. They had investigated their backgrounds and countries of origin to support their understanding of the multi-cultural context of Dubai. They had a highly developed sense of civic responsibility. The Student Council played an effective role in helping to support events both within the school and in the wider community. Students understood the Dubai economy and impact of pollution on the environment and how this might be addressed.

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

Teaching for effective learning was good in both phases of the school, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Most teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge, selected appropriate activities and raised students' understanding by asking insightful questions. In the Foundation Stage, teachers had established very good learning environments, which fully reflected the needs of young children. In both phases, many lessons involved an element of fun to help students learn. Teachers in most classes ensured that students participated fully in all tasks. The best teaching made frequent demands on the students to collaborate, discuss and reflect on their learning. The small amount of weaker teaching featured less secure subject knowledge and insufficiently interesting activities to motivate students. Whilst teaching usually met the needs of most students, the strongest students were not always stretched sufficiently.

Teaching seen in other subjects was good. It was particularly strong in drama and in an interdisciplinary architecture project which very successfully developed students' creative and problem-solving skills. Across the school, most teachers made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote students' learning.

Learning was good in both the Foundation Stage and primary years. Most students enjoyed learning and were responsive participants. Learning was most effective when students worked regularly to solve problems or complete projects as a group. Students' attention was fully engaged through the rich variety of tasks and experiences provided in many lessons. One class, for example, had to identify the writer of a 'mystery note' using chromatography. Regular integrated topic-based work enhanced students' learning, helping them make connections between subjects and the real world. Students were expected to take more responsibility through research and investigation as they progressed through the school. In most lessons, they were encouraged to make predictions and learn from their mistakes. However, the most able students often completed tasks without having to think critically or work to their full capacity. Students studying Islamic Education were given insufficient opportunities to be active in their learning.

Assessment was good across the school. In Islamic Education, assessment did not link appropriately to learning outcomes. Teachers regularly assessed Foundation Stage children's progress through careful ongoing observation and making notes. Some made imaginative use of photographs to record children's work. In the primary classes, teachers generally used skillful questioning to gauge students' understanding. Teachers carefully marked students' workbooks but did not indicate sufficiently how students could improve. They carefully tracked students' progress through regular end-of-topic and half-term tests. External tests were appropriately administered, but the analysis and use of students' results were inconsistent and did not influence teachers' short and long-term planning enough.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

The curriculum was good throughout, with some outstanding features in the Foundation Stage. It was based on a clear rationale and ensured continuity of experience, although there was some inconsistency in Islamic Education and Arabic. Overall, there was a good balance of skills and subjects. Well-planned topics offered students opportunities to choose areas of knowledge. Transition arrangements to secondary school were of high quality and were outstanding between the Foundation Stage and Year 1. The curriculum met the needs of almost all students. There was insufficient attention to meet the needs of the most able and students with special educational needs. Some excellent cross-curricular links added a further dimension to students' learning and enabled them to see greater relevance in their studies. Students had uneven opportunities for independent learning and research. The curriculum had a strong focus on helping others and on understanding their needs. The school offered a good variety of extra-curricular activities.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding

Arrangements for students' health and safety were outstanding in both phases. The school was very clean. Equipment and resources were excellently maintained and provided very well for the educational and personal development of students. Arrangements to protect students were highly efficient. Record keeping was thorough and comprehensive. Medical staff members took great care over the health and well-being of students. Staff members worked with parents to encourage healthy living through promoting healthy food choices and through physical education and sports programmes. The policy and procedures for child protection were clear and known to staff members.

The quality of support for students was outstanding in both phases. Staff-student relationships were very good. Teachers knew their students very well. Behaviour was managed sensitively and teachers encouraged students to reflect and take responsibility. High-quality guidance, such as next steps in education, was provided for Year 6 students. Class teachers kept regular and updated documents regarding

care and support for their students. The school's management system tracked attendance and punctuality well. There was very effective communication between class teachers, specialist support staff members and parents for students with special educational needs. Individual learning plans were appropriate and showed targets, but evidence of progress was not always clearly recorded. Most classroom teachers appropriately modified their teaching strategies to support students with special educational needs in lessons.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

The leadership of the school was acceptable. The Headteacher had effectively promoted an inclusive, caring ethos resulting in a positive, collegiate atmosphere. Increased staff consultation had helped to identify school priorities. Middle managers' job descriptions had been revised to help to clarify roles and responsibilities. However, leadership quality varied across the school. The strongest leadership was in the Foundation Stage and in middle management at Years 5 and 6. Teachers were strongly committed to helping the school achieve its aims. They eagerly participated in curriculum pilot activities and school working groups. The school's vision had led to the development of a positive multi-cultural school community. The Headteacher had not ensured a rigorous enough focus on achieving agreed priorities or pace of change. The skills of senior and middle managers were not consistently developed to ensure that they carried out their responsibilities effectively or to help them build their capacity for further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Recent improvements to monitoring and evaluation had identified a wide range of school improvement objectives. Senior managers had yet to prioritise these sufficiently or identify specific enough timelines, roles, responsibilities and criteria against which success could be measured. Improvements had taken place, and these included adjustments to the

curriculum structure to ensure compliance with MoE requirements. Classroom observation was variable in identifying weaknesses and strengths or sharing best practice in teaching and learning.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. High-quality communication with parents included frequent parent-teacher meetings, regular reports on students' progress and informative daily reports on the work of the Foundation Stage children. Regular updates to parents included strategies to support their children's learning. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provided extensive support to the school. Volunteers contributed very positively to students' pastoral care as class mothers. Links with the community were strong.

Governance was good. The governors had supported and held the school accountable through regular meetings and analyses of students' attainment and progress. They had made a positive contribution to the school's response to the recommendations of the previous inspection report. The governors had supported curricular developments such as the 'Big Write' initiative and the development of phonics in English. They had recently included parental and community representation to help with the gathering of the wider views of parents.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was good. The school responded positively to teachers' requests for their professional development. It had a stimulating range of resources, including the music and library areas. Teachers and students made very good use of display and teaching areas.

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	51	20%
	Last year	129	65%
Teachers	7		41%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

About one fifth of parents responded to the survey, a significantly lower rate than last year. Nearly half the teachers responded to their survey. Almost all parents indicated they were very happy with the work of the school. All teachers reported that they were happy with the quality of education provided by the school. Most parents believed that progress was good in English, mathematics and science. In contrast, more than a few parents indicated that progress was less than good in Islamic Education and Arabic. They were particularly involved in supporting their children's education within a multi-cultural and caring environment for learning. A majority of parents also indicated that they had received insufficient information from the school on the improvements made following the last inspection. Teachers considered that students were treated with respect and that the positive ethos of the school supported their self-esteem and independent learning. However, they did indicate that they would like greater clarification of the role of senior leaders and more specific feedback on their teaching to help develop students' learning.

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

Our work with schools

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

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

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

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