

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Arqam Private School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

P.O. Box 500008, UAE, Tel: +971-4-3640000, Fax: +971-4-3640001, info@khda.gov.ae, www.khda.gov.ae

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Arqam Private School

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.alarqam.ae
Telephone	04.340.0888
Address	P.O. Box 25844 Al Barsha, Dubai
Principal	Abdulkader Ali Ateya
Curriculum	MOE
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3 - 18/ Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Unsatisfactory
Number of students on roll	955
Number of Emirati students	536 (56%)
Date of the inspection	5th to 7th March 2012

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The context of the school

Located in Al Barsha, Al Arqam Private School provides an education for boys and girls aged three to 18 years, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The school follows the Ministry of Education curriculum. At the time of inspection there were 955 students on the roll. About 56 per cent of the students were Emiratis.

A total of 68 teachers were employed in the school, with around 22 new teachers. Additionally, all of the heads of departments in the girls' section were newly appointed in the current term. Most teachers held an appropriate first degree in their subject, however, only a minority held a recognised teaching qualification.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Al Arqam Private School continued to provide an acceptable quality of education for its students. The school focused on providing a strong Islamic ethos and reflected the UAE's traditions and values. Girls' attainment, progress and behaviour were better than the boys' in all phases. Across the school, students' attainment and progress in English were acceptable. In Arabic, attainment and progress were acceptable in Cycles 2 and 3. In the Kindergarten, children's attainment in both mathematics and science were unsatisfactory. The attitudes and behaviour of students were acceptable overall, with some incidents of poor behaviour witnessed in the Cycle 2 boys' section. Across the school, students' understanding and appreciation of Islam and the traditions and culture of the UAE were good. Their civic, economic and environmental understanding was only acceptable. The quality of teaching was variable across the school, with unsatisfactory teaching in the Kindergarten and Cycle 2 sections. Despite the efforts of senior leaders, there had been little improvement in teaching, learning and assessment in key areas of the curriculum.

The recommendations in the previous inspection report focused on improving learning, assessment and appointing subject leaders in the girls' section. The school had made little progress toward meeting those recommendations, but had recently appointed subject heads in the girls' section.

Key strengths

- The school provided a learning environment based upon promoting the values of Islam;
- Students had good understanding of Islam and appreciation of local culture and traditions;
- There were positive student-teacher relations in the Kindergarten section.

Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment and progress across all phases of the school;
- Use varied teaching strategies that provide students with independent learning opportunities that are practical and relevant to their ages and interests;
- Analyse and use information from assessments and classroom observations to improve the quality of teaching, learning and students' progress;
- Establish a whole-school system for the early identification and in-class support of students with special educational needs, including the most able;
- Establish rigorous self-evaluation procedures that involve the school community, in order to identify priorities for development and implement changes accordingly.

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

	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Mathematics				
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science				
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Students' attainment was mostly acceptable across the key subjects in all four phases. Islamic Education was the strongest subject, wherein most students demonstrated knowledge and understanding that was good, except in the Kindergarten, where it was acceptable, due to the lack of opportunities for children to relate what they learnt to their lives. Most students' language skills in Arabic were in line with expectations; however, girls were more fluent speakers in standard Arabic and were better at analysing

complicated texts than the boys. In English, in the Kindergarten and Cycles 1 and 2, most students had age-appropriate skills in reading and writing English as an additional language. Students' writing was limited to answering questions when there were insufficient opportunities to write extended pieces for different purposes. Students' attainment in mathematics and science was mostly in line with expectations. However, attainment was limited at times due to weak teaching, a lack of relevant resources to use and an inability to solve problems independently.

Across all the key subjects students' progress was limited. This was mainly due to dull teaching, lack of challenge and insufficient opportunities for them to learn independently. In Arabic and English, Cycle 1 students made evident progress over time in all their language skills in comparison to their starting points in Grade 1. However, progress in lessons for all cycles was limited, as the most able students were rarely challenged with work more suited to their abilities and interests. In mathematics and science students' progress was mainly knowledge-based with little progress made in their application of their knowledge to real-life situations or unfamiliar contexts. Most students were not developing their practical, investigative and research skills sufficiently.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable throughout the school. Relationships between students and adults were mostly positive, particularly in the Kindergarten. However, there were some incidences of poor behaviour in the boys' Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 sections. These were not always handled well by teachers. Most students across the school had good understanding of the need to keep healthy. However, they did not show a commitment to healthy eating by their choices. Students' attendance was unsatisfactory in the previous term. Most students had strong understanding of Islam and its effects upon their lives and society. They appreciated the UAE's local traditions, heritage and values. The students had limited responsibilities as members of the school and local community and their limited roles were most evident in the girls' section. A majority of students knew how Dubai had developed and understood some reasons for the changes in Dubai and the other emirates. They were aware of global environmental issues and understood the importance of environmental sustainability but lacked opportunities to apply their knowledge in a meaningful and productive manner.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Teaching was unsatisfactory in the Kindergarten and Cycle 2 and acceptable elsewhere. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects was not secure in Kindergarten. Most Kindergarten teachers had a limited understanding of how young children learn. In the other grades teachers did not regularly prioritise the needs of all groups of students in lessons. Questioning of students was often too simplistic. Teachers did not seek complex responses in English or probe for alternative solutions in mathematics and science. Teachers failed to challenge students in Arabic and consequently did not extend the four key language skills. Most teachers dominated their interactions with students. Activities in the Kindergarten and Cycle 2, in particular, did not support or challenge students according to their learning styles or needs. There was inconsistent understanding of the needs of young people to be active in their own learning. Teachers did not promote questions, investigations or the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as part of the teaching and learning process.

Students' learning was acceptable across all phases of the school. Students came to school with good intentions to learn. They were motivated and keen to learn. However, they took little responsibility for their learning because teachers often talked for too long in lessons. Collaboration, listening to other views and questioning opinions were not regular features of learning. There were too many restrictions placed on inquisitive and naturally curious children in the Kindergarten. Most students were unable to benefit from the infrequent group activities because of a lack of learning skills. They failed to develop responsibility for their own improvement. The majority of students were not critical thinkers and they did not seek to investigate or create their own hypotheses.

Assessment of learning was unsatisfactory across the school. Data was collected through regular school examinations and Ministry of Education tests. The data was collated into lists of the students who did not

pass the examinations. Most teachers were aware of their students' results but did not link them to how a topic was to be learned. Teachers displayed limited understanding of how to use assessment data to plan students' next steps. Kindergarten teachers did not measure or record any developmental outcomes of the children. Consequently, they were unable to set appropriate lesson objectives and teaching strategies; they simply followed a syllabus. In the other grades teachers did not alter practices or activities by using the data to identify areas for development. The marking of students' work was very inconsistent. Teachers rarely provided any guidance in notebooks for students or parents to know what was required. The school did not consider the assessment outcomes in its review of the curriculum, professional development programme or teaching methods.

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

	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was unsatisfactory in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other phases of the school. The school offered the Ministry of Education curriculum and the syllabus ensured the necessary progression of knowledge and understanding that led to high pass rates on Ministry of Education tests. However, important skills were not progressively developed, such as extended writing in Arabic and English, investigative and research skills in science and mathematics, and critical and higher order thinking skills in all subjects. Lessons and learning were closely aligned to the books. In the Kindergarten, there was too much focus on teaching the contents of the textbook and not enough opportunities for students to apply their learning independently in lessons. The activity room provided children with limited opportunities to learn actively once a week. Throughout the school, but particularly in Kindergarten, the curriculum was not sufficiently adapted to meet the varying needs and abilities of students. In almost all lessons across the school, the more able students were not challenged with work that went beyond the expectations of the textbook. The needs of the less able students were not addressed in the curriculum. The school had acceptable links with the community, whereby students participated in trips to factories and in competitions with other schools. Older male students were taken to visit career fairs and universities. Girls, however, were not always offered equal access to educational activities and trips, which undermined the quality of their learning and social development.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Health and Safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

Health and safety arrangements throughout the school were acceptable. Students were supervised on most occasions. Bus transport arrangements were mostly well-managed, particularly for the younger children and girls. The school building and facilities were suitable and safe, although parts of the school were in need of further repair and maintenance. However, at the time of the inspection the bathrooms for both boys and girls were not hygienic. There were regular maintenance checks and fire drills which were recorded and updated. The nurse and visiting doctor kept medical records and managed all health-related procedures and arrangements. The nurse followed up on students' health issues. The school ensured that most students brought healthy snacks to school. However, programmes to increase students' understanding of a healthy life style were lacking. There were established procedures to follow in case of emergencies, but there was no written child protection policy.

The quality of support for students was acceptable in all phases of the school except in Cycle 2, where it was unsatisfactory. In general, teacher-student relationships were of an acceptable quality, but not all teachers knew their students well. In some classes relationships lacked mutual respect, which impeded students' participation and their learning. Careers guidance for the students was acceptable but unsatisfactory for the girls. Overall, support arrangements and procedures for identifying students with special educational needs were lacking. A few students received additional support but generally, teachers were not aware of their roles in supporting students, or the type of support some students needed. The school had adequate arrangements for managing attendance and punctuality, but a number of students arrived late for school regularly.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

The quality of leadership in the school was acceptable. The school principal and other leaders communicated most of the school's aims. For example, they communicated the school's Islamic-Arabic ethos well. However, they did not consistently communicate the other aspects, such as providing all students with opportunities to develop investigative and independent learning skills. In response to one of last year's inspection recommendations, the school had recently appointed heads of subjects in the girls' school. However, they had not had sufficient time in their roles to implement changes. In the boys' section there was insufficient collaboration between heads of subjects to develop better learning or cross-curricular links. The school's senior leaders had established systems of monitoring teachers. The capacity for improvement and development was limited. Leaders did not understand current best international practices in leadership, teaching, learning and assessment of learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. The school had not completed a formal self-evaluation that was accurate and reliable. Senior school leaders were aware of the general strengths and weaknesses, but this was not based upon accurate and informative evidence. There was only limited understanding of how to collect and use information to create change and improve student outcomes. Consequently, both the governors and school leaders did not have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school. In particular, they lacked an accurate understanding of students' attainment and progress. The leaders recognised the need to place greater focus upon student outcomes and more robust self-evaluation and school improvement planning.

Partnership with parents and the community was acceptable. Most parents interviewed reported good systems of communication and appreciated the access they had to the principal. The school used a range of methods to communicate with parents, including parent-teacher meetings and reports. However, communication was largely one-way. Parents requested more information regarding the next steps in learning for their children and more information on their personal and social development.

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The governance of the school was acceptable. The Board of Governors was established but did not include wide representation of the school community. The Board had assigned one member to be present in the school full-time, who had established positive relations with the senior leaders. This situation allowed a daily and direct contact with a board representative. Nevertheless, the board did not have formal systems and procedures to hold the school leaders to account. Due to the inaccurate self-evaluation of the school, the Board did not have a clear picture of the current strengths and the most important areas for development.

The day-to-day management of the school was acceptable. The school had invested in new ICT resources that were yet to be used effectively to improve teaching, learning and student achievement. Despite these positive developments, the school had a large number of teachers who did not understand and appreciate how students learn, especially children in the Kindergarten and in the Cycle 2 and 3 boys' sections. Most teachers had appropriate academic qualifications, although only a few had appropriate teaching qualifications.

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	87	12%
	Last year	86	15%
Teachers	46		61%
Students	107		63%

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

A few parents completed the on-line survey. Majorities of teachers and senior students responded to their surveys. A majority of parents were satisfied with the overall quality of education available at the school, but about a fifth were not. Most stated that their children were making good progress in Islamic Education and science, but a few were concerned about progress in Arabic and mathematics. A third of parents indicated that their children's progress in English was not good. Most parents and students believed that behaviour at the school was good, but more than a few of each group disagreed. About half of the senior students reported that they enjoyed life at school, but more than a quarter reported that they did not. Only about half of the students agreed that they took on responsibilities at the school. While a majority of students believed that most of their lessons were good and enjoyable, about a quarter of them disagreed. Similar numbers of parents and students believed that there was a good range of subjects, clubs and activities available at the school. Only half of the students reported that they felt safe on school buses, and only a third reported that they chose healthy lifestyles. A number of students reported hitting and few incidences of bullying that were not handled well by members of staff. Both parents and students indicated that they were concerned about the cleanliness of the toilets in both the boys' and girls' sections. Parents commented on the positive relationships they had with the school leader. A few were concerned about the limited range of resources used in classrooms by students. Both parents and teachers agreed that the regular meetings were useful. While most parents reported that school leaders listened to their opinions, fewer than half of the students agreed that they were listened to. Teachers were largely positive in their views about the school. Most believed that inspection had led to improvements and a

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majority reported that inspection had helped them improve their teaching practices. Senior students were generally less positive in their views about the school than their parents. Parents expressed their satisfaction with the Islamic and cultural values that were promoted in the school, but were concerned that certain academic aspects were not as well developed. A few parents also indicated that there were not enough learning opportunities for the girls outside the school in the form of educational trips and school visits.

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.

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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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