

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Philadelphia Private School

Report published in April 2014

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Philadelphia Private School

Location	Al Muhaisnah
Type of school	Private
Website	<a href="http://www.ppsdubai.org">www.ppsdubai.org</a>
Telephone	04-2646202
Address	Muhaisnah 4, Qusais , P.O.BOX 185020
Principal	Rose Al Qareh
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 years
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1256
Largest nationality group of Students	Arab
Number of Emirati students	40 (3%)
Date of the inspection	9th to 12th December

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## The context of the school

Philadelphia Private School is a private school located in Al Muhaisnah. It has been in operation for eight years. The school provided education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 1256 students on roll. This was up from 993, last year.

Nearly one third of the students were new to the school. Students were predominantly from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. Only 40 students were from the Emirates. Most students spoke English as an additional language. 39 students were receiving support for their special educational needs. Students were grouped into the Infant department (KG1 to Grade 2), Elementary (Grades 3 -5), Middle (Grades 6 – 8) and High (Grades 9 – 120).

The school followed a US Common Core State Standards for English and mathematics as well as the Florida State Standards for science. Islamic Education and Arabic as a first and as an additional language were also part of the core curriculum and the programmes of study follow the Ministry of Education requirements. A variety of elective subjects were taught at the High School level. French was mandatory up until the end of Grade 8.

The school employed 82 teachers and 14 support staff. Most of the teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. Teachers were employed mainly from the Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and the Philippines. Six teachers were US and Canadian nationals. Around 25% of the teachers were new to the school this year.

## Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

### Key strengths

- Strong relationships across the whole school;
- Students' positive attitudes and commitment to learning;
- The high quality of support for students' personal and social development;
- Outstanding provision for health and safety across the school;
- The effective partnership between the school, and parents;

### Recommendations

- Improve attainment and progress in all core subject areas through:
  - the use of accurate assessment data to plan effectively for the needs of students in both the short and medium term;
  - Raising expectations of all groups of students, particularly those with special educational needs;
  - Using appropriate resources and effective strategies to achieve differentiated learning objectives;
  - Modifying and applying the curriculum in the long, medium and short term to meet the needs of the identified groups of students.
- Improve school action planning by the use of aggregated assessment data to identify priorities and evaluate their effectiveness.
- 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
- Plan more effectively to accommodate the increased enrolment through:
  - Reducing the workload of staff with leadership responsibilities so that they can effectively undertake their role of improving learning;
  - Increasing the provision and widening the expertise of SEN support staff in the Middle and High school sections;

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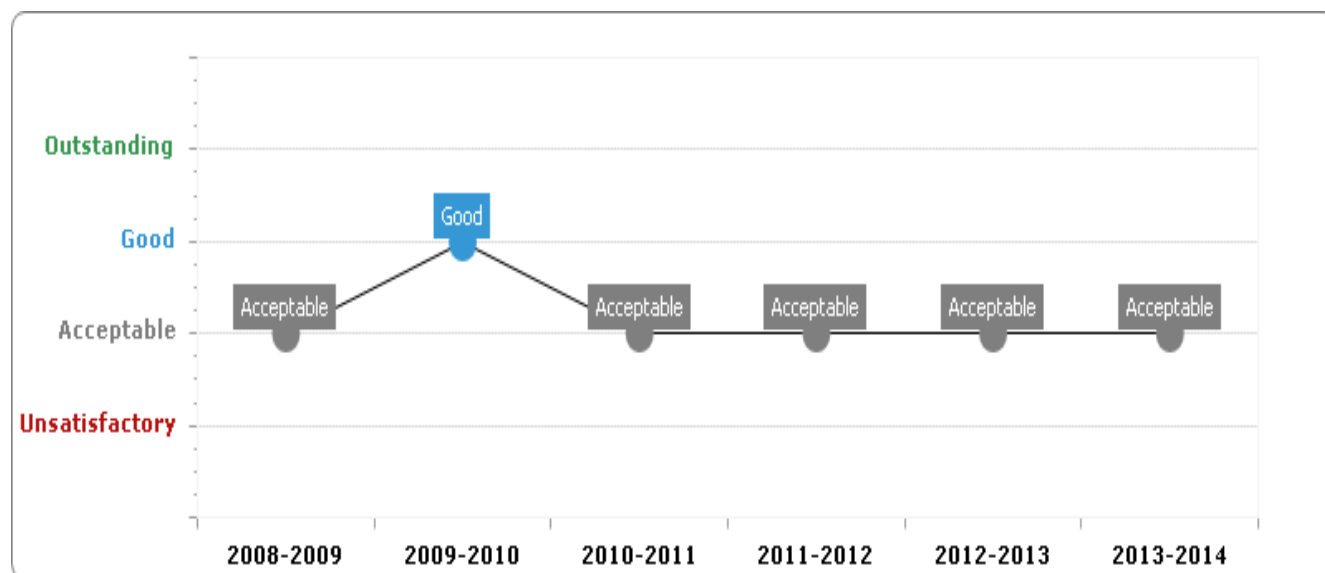
- Developing the role of the college and career counselor in order to ensure that students receive sufficient advice and guidance to make informed choices.
- Improving the effectiveness of the library by increasing the provision of Arabic, English and French language book stock;
- Ensure compliance with Ministry of Education requirements in Islamic Education.

## Progress since the last inspection

- As a result of improvements to teaching, attainment and rates of progress have risen in mathematics, in the Middle phase. Science attainment and progress has also improved in the High school phase as result of a greater emphasis on inquiry learning. The large numbers of students with English as an additional language entering the school this year impacted on the attainment and progress in English.
- A greater emphasis on differentiation resulting from continuous professional development for teachers, had produced some improvements in outcomes in mathematics and science. The quality of teaching was still inconsistent across classes, grades and phases of the school but this was not unexpected considering the high turnover of the teaching staff. There had been an increase in the amount of opportunities students had to collaborate and use IT but further guidance was required to achieve better implementation.
- Increasing the levels of challenge for all students had been a school priority and section heads and senior leadership had monitored teachers' planning. However the practice, along with expertise in differentiation and the accuracy of assessment information, was still in its early stages and little progress had been made.
- School self-evaluation had been widened to include all members of the school community and senior leaders had succeeded in prioritising appropriate improvement goals. Action plans had improved in their format, to include timescales and responsibilities, and goals were realistic and achievable. However, there was still insufficient detail regarding the actions needed to achieve the desired outcomes and there were limited objective criteria for measuring success.

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## Trend of overall performance



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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
<b>Quality of students' learning skills</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)



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## 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	Good	Good	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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## 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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment was acceptable in the majority of subjects. It was good in Arabic as a first language across all phases, as it was in the Middle and High school phases in mathematics and in the High school phase in science. In Islamic Education, most students had a basic knowledge of key concepts and showed appropriate knowledge of Seerah. A minority of students could recite only the short chapter of the Holy Qur'an with limited use of recitation rules. In Arabic, both as a first and an additional language and in English, speaking and listening were stronger than writing. Most students across the school had a good understanding of the concept of number. In the Middle school phase, most students could solve equations and in the High school phase, students understood calculus very well. The majority of children in Kindergarten, Elementary, and the Middle school phases possessed appropriate scientific skills and in high school the majority of students were able to synthesise complex information to solve problems.

Students' progress matched their attainment. In Islamic Education, students made rapid progress, particularly in Seerah. However students' knowledge of how to apply Islamic values in their daily lives developed less quickly. In Arabic as a first language, the development of the skills of listening and speaking was more rapid than those of reading. The development of writing was the weakest of the skills. In Arabic as an additional language, the majority of students in the Elementary phase were increasingly applying correct grammar when speaking. In English, most students made expected progress in their ability to read accurately and responded to questions in full sentences. Progress in mathematics, in almost all lessons across the school, was never less than acceptable. It was variable in the Kindergarten and Elementary grades especially with regard to more-able students, but became more consistent in the Middle and High school phases. In science, students were developing their inquiry skills in line with expectations, except in the High school where, because of strong teaching, it was more rapid.

[View judgements](#)

## Quality of students' learning skills

Most students were eager to learn in most lessons. They were attentive, keen to answer questions, explain what they had learnt and, in the best lessons, why their learning was important. The majority could work well independently and enjoyed working in groups when given the opportunity especially when activities were of a practical nature and related to a real-life problem. In a significant number of lessons, students were too reliant on the teacher. Their options in approaching a task were limited. Consequently, they did not develop as confident, independent learners. Older students took more responsibility for their own learning and saw the benefits of sharing their knowledge and understanding with their classmates. They

were making good progress in thinking critically and discovering things for themselves. Their ability to make connections between abstract concepts and the real world was variable. Students across the school increasingly used technology to support their learning although, on occasion, this was a hindrance rather than an advantage.

[View judgements](#)

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

Personal and social development was good throughout the school. Positive and responsible attitudes were evident throughout the school. Students were respectful of others and benefited from interactions within a diverse school community. KG students cheerfully carried out responsibilities within the classroom. Elementary and Middle school students were well mannered, and helpful to their peers. High school students carried out leadership roles well, including school and student-driven initiatives led by the Student Council. Attendance was good.

Students demonstrated a clear understanding of Islamic values, the importance of Islam in modern society in Dubai and some were able to hold a discussion on Islamic values. Students in higher grades could identify and talk in depth about Emirati traditions and heritage, and could discuss in detail the development of the UAE and the changes that took place over time. Students had a clear understanding and appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. They were aware of and showed respect for different cultures around the world and the other cultures that made up Dubai's society,

Students, in all phases, took part in a range of activities within the school and outside their immediate community, including inter-school sports. There was a strong understanding of the need to work hard and to have goals in order to be successful, with education underpinning those aspirations. The older students appreciated the value of finding things out for themselves. At all levels of the school, students were aware of the environment and took part in recycling activities. High school students had an outstanding sense of community and environmental responsibility and understood the need for conservation in the context of Dubai.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was acceptable across the school. A significant number of lessons were good and a few had outstanding features. Most teachers knew their subjects well and understood their students' needs. In the best lessons they used a range of appropriate strategies and resources to engage and motivate

students. They established a relaxed and supportive climate for learning by fostering positive relationships and creating attractive learning environments. They had high expectations for all students and a clear understanding of what they wanted the students to learn. They planned for students to learn independently and in collaboration with their classmates. Their explanations were clear and their questions were designed to enable students to think deeply about their learning. In the less effective lessons, teachers did not have sufficiently high expectations for all students. There was confusion about what was to be learnt and the strategies and resources chosen were not conducive to effective learning. Questions required students merely to recall facts and information. Consequently, progress was hindered.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. Whilst a range of information was collected about students' achievements, it was not sufficiently analysed in detail. Consequently, school leaders did not have a clear view of how well the school was performing in comparison with international standards. Most teachers knew their students' well and in the best lessons they used this information to ensure that students made good progress from their starting points. They also provided some opportunities for students to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. In the majority of lessons, however, teachers' expectations of what students could achieve were not well-matched to the students' abilities. More-able students were not sufficiently challenged and students with additional learning needs sometimes struggled because their work was too difficult. Although teachers often gave useful verbal guidance to students during lessons, they rarely provided written feedback in workbooks. As a result, students were not always aware of how well they were doing and how to improve their work. Furthermore, students' were sometimes awarded test results that were too generous.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good in all phases. A team of staff members worked to align the curriculum and resources to the US Common Core and selected state standards. Initial steps were taken to build the skills needed to effectively use the curriculum to enhance learning. There was continuity across all phases of the school, and transitions between levels were smooth. The curriculum was examined several times during the year. Cross-curricular activities and projects were successfully undertaken and a series of field trips enabled students to connect what they were learning to real life experiences. Some provisions for independent learning took place. There were interesting and varied extra-curricular activities, including interschool athletic competitions and artistic presentations.

The quality of curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students was acceptable in all phases. There was some recognition of the different learning needs and abilities of students with special educational needs but the needs of the gifted and talented students were neglected. When modifying the curriculum, the

majority of teachers did not always specify the minimum learning needed and the purpose of the range of extended activities. The provision of a range of electives was not based on an in-depth analysis of student choices or university requirements. English as a first Language option may suit some students currently enrolled in the school.

[View judgements](#)

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

The provision for health and safety was outstanding across the school. The school took a comprehensive approach to the health, safety and security of its students, staff, and visitors. Appointment procedures ensured that all staff members were subjected to medical and background checks. Procedures for travelling on the leased buses, the well-staffed health clinic, and security added to the students' feelings of safety. Fire drill exercises were effective. Appropriate records of maintenance and safety issues were kept up to date and processes for storing medications and hazardous materials were thorough. A Health and Safety Committee had recently been formed and initiatives such as Health Week were designed to involve all students. The school canteen offered healthy food choices, the curriculum embedded healthy diet considerations into class work and medical staff reinforced these efforts with one-on-one consultation as and when needed. All members of staff were updated annually regarding child protection arrangements.

The quality of support was good in KG, Elementary and Middle and acceptable in the High school phase. Teachers knew their students well and built positive and supportive relationships with them. A more concerted whole-school approach was required to improve punctuality so that students benefitted from a full school day. There was a very committed and caring team including teachers and counselors that supported students with special educational needs. The identification of students began at admission and teachers were aware of the referral procedures and the provision of special accommodations. Gifted and talented students were not identified. Students in the High school phase needed more comprehensive individual support, including both college and career guidance in order to make more informed choices.

[View judgements](#)

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

Leadership and management of the school were good. Senior leaders were hardworking and committed to continuous improvement. They had a clear view of the school's vision, which had been shared with teachers and parents. Leadership was effective at many levels and it had resulted in some success in improving aspects of the school. Most roles and responsibilities were clear and appropriately delegated although the principal's key duty of ensuring quality outcomes needed to be given greater prominence. Lines of

communication were clear and relationships were strong and professional. There was sufficient capacity to improve the school further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were still acceptable. Annual self-evaluation took account of the views of students, parents and external agencies. A number of appropriate priorities, linked to the school's vision, had been identified and shared with the school community. Although the goals in the improvement plan were realistic and achievable, there was insufficient detail regarding the actions and limited objective criteria for measuring success. As a result, progress towards the recommendations of the previous DSIB report was slow. The goals relating to improvements to teaching and learning were monitored through visits to classrooms and in-school staff training was linked to aspects of the action plan. As yet, there was no performance management system.

Communication with parents and links with the community were good. The school was proactive in providing information for parents to support learning at home. There were regular student progress reports, which were followed by parent/teacher meetings. The value of the reports cards was limited, with neither opportunities for family and student involvement nor suggestions as to how students might improve. However, parents reported that teachers were proactive when students were experiencing difficulties and were accessible when parents had a concern. There was an impressive and productive range of links with the wider community, which included involvement with other schools. A school Parent Teacher association had been established and it provided good feedback on day-to-day operations.

Governance of the school was good. The Board of Trustees included members with an appropriate range of expertise. The Executive Director of the Board met monthly with the school leaders and compiled reports for the Board. In addition, an Advisory Board, comprising of alumni, parents and senior students, had been created and it provided a further opportunity for the Board of Trustees to communicate with stakeholders. Governance had ensured that the strong culture of a caring community had been maintained during a period of rapid growth and high student mobility, however some areas of the school's expanding needs required further investment. The Board of Trustees had not ensured full compliance with the Ministry's requirements for Islamic Education.

Staffing facilities and resources were acceptable. The management of the school was effective. The existing staff, 25 percent of whom were new, was hard working and dedicated to the students' well-being and academic progress. However, the high teaching workload of some leaders and the lack of appropriate training prevented them from carrying out their roles effectively. The premises were generous for the current number of students and the specialist facilities were adequate. The library facility enabled self-study and research however the number of books was insufficient. The school had invested considerably in IT hardware



and infrastructure but not the training to maximise its potential for learning. Some areas of the school were not accessible for students with mobility problems.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of attainment and progress for Emirati students was no different from the range exhibited by their peers, at each grade level. The attainment and progress of Emirati students in Arabic as a first language and mathematics was good, while attainment and progress in Islamic Education, English and science was judged to be acceptable. The quality of support provided for Emirati students in their written work was usually good, or at a minimum on par with that provided to other students. Emirati students were from a full range of ability levels but all of them fully participated in their classroom activities. With regard to the oral language development in English, there was a wide range of proficiency, unrelated to age. All students said how much they valued school and enjoyed learning. In a few cases, Emirati girls were high achievers, giving many answers to the teacher's questions in class discussions. The school did not track the progress of Emirati students, nor were attendance records for this group available. To enhance the curriculum, the school developed a National Education course, specifically related to local social studies for the UAE. Other curricular modifications for Emirati students included the use of real world examples based on local scenarios.

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

The school had a partially inclusive admissions policy. Some students were not enrolled because the school lacked expertise to support students with autism and physical disabilities. The school had ramps but no lift was available for adults or children. There was a very committed and caring team including teachers and counselors that supported students with special educational needs. The identification of students began at Kindergarten and teachers were aware of the referral procedures and the provision of special accommodations. Individual education plans had been created for a small group of students to support learning in the withdrawal groups however the plans were less effectively used when the students were reintegrated into their classes. Acceptable progress was demonstrated during classroom observations in all core subject areas across all phases however, the rigour of the assessments to measure progress needed development. There was a commitment to modify the curriculum that was evident in school planning documents but it was not implemented successfully in the majority of lessons. The school did not identify gifted or talented students.



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

Most Arabic teachers had secure subject knowledge. They were confident and had the ability to teach Arabic as a first language well. Teachers used a range of teaching strategies to enhance learning, however strategies to cater for the needs of the less able were not always effective and expectations were not always sufficiently high. When teaching was effective, there was good facilitation of lessons and good monitoring of students' progress. In the upper grades, good quality of teaching and questioning were the main features of better lessons. In the Elementary and Middle phases, there was ineffective use of ICT and students took a long time to do low level activities. In the less effective lessons, activities were not always purposeful and did not have clear language objectives. The Arabic curriculum was compliant with the Ministry of Education requirement and was based on its text book. Although the curriculum was modified regularly, adaptations were not always successful. The curriculum lacked effective enhancement to address weaknesses in students' language skills such as writing.

## What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgments. 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	277	36%
	Last year	182	28%
Teachers	71		86%
Students	166		82%

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

Most of the parents, teachers and students were happy with the school. Most parents and students agreed that good progress was being made in all the core subjects, although students were less positive about progress in Arabic and mathematics. Nearly all parents believed that their children enjoyed school and that they were well looked after and safe. A majority of the students reported that behaviour was good and that they were well supported by their teachers, receiving good feedback on how to improve further. Most parents and teachers felt that the provision for SEN was good and that students were accurately identified and monitored. Most parents and teachers reported that the school communicated well with them and sought their views. The response from students was not quite so strong; many believed that their voice was not heard. Most teachers valued the professional development opportunities provided by the school but a minority felt that they had sufficient time to prepare and plan for 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.

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

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