

INSPECTION REPORT

Philadelphia Private School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Philadelphia Private School

Location	Al Muhaisnah
Type of school	Private
Website	www.ppsdubai.org
Telephone	04 2646202
Address	PO Box 185020, Muhaisnah 4, Qusais (Off Beirut St. and Halab St. Intersection)
Principal	Rose Al Qareh
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	800
Number of Emirati students	44 (6%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 28th November 2011 to Wednesday 30th November 2011

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The context of the school

Situated in Al Muhaisnah, Philadelphia Private School provides education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to high school, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, the number of students on roll was 800. The school followed a Florida (USA) curriculum. Students were entered for TOEFL exams at the end of Grade 12 and SAT1 exams for mathematics and English in Grades 11 and 12.

There were 69 teachers, including the Principal and senior leadership team. At the time of the inspection, the Principal was in her third year in office. Fifty eight teachers had teaching qualifications. Eight teaching assistants gave support to children in the Kindergarten and lower elementary grades. Students were grouped into 35 classes. Approximately six per cent were Emirati and 17 different nationalities were represented among the student population.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Philadelphia School provided an acceptable quality of education overall, but with some significant strengths. These included good attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language and English. Students' attitudes and behaviour and the cultural harmony evident throughout the school were also strengths. The quality of teaching and learning was inconsistent throughout all phases. The school's leaders had monitored lessons and encouraged teachers to focus on the quality of learning, but this remained an area for further improvement. Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding, ensuring that all in the school community remained safe and secure.

The school had made acceptable progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection. Most teachers were regularly using information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms. They made use of assessment to establish learning objectives in lessons, but less so in the Kindergarten. There were good procedures for identifying students with special educational needs, and the school had made good progress in implementing plans to support them.

Key strengths

- Students' good attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language and English across the school;
- The cultural harmony evident amongst students from many nations;
- The outstanding arrangements for health and safety;
- The good provision for students with special educational needs;
- The provision and effective use of ICT in almost all classes.

Recommendations

- Improve the attainment and progress of students in core subjects;
- Make teaching consistently good;
- Ensure that action planning is rigorously linked to student outcomes;
- Continue to improve the capacity of senior leaders to evaluate the school, especially regarding the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

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

In the Kindergarten, attainment in English was good and in mathematics and science it was acceptable. In the elementary grades, attainment in Islamic Education, mathematics and science was acceptable. In English and in Arabic as a first and second language, attainment was good. Students learning Arabic as a first language used correct sentences, but their writing skills were less developed. In the middle grades, attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education, Arabic as a second language, mathematics and science. In Arabic as a first language attainment was good. In the high school, attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education, Arabic as a second language, mathematics and science. In English and Arabic as a first language attainment was good. Students listened well, understood instructions and could read texts independently. In mathematics, younger students understood number bonds and by the time they reached high school they were able to solve problems using a range of mathematical skills. Science students in the middle and high grades investigated, experimented and were competent in laboratory procedures.

Progress throughout the school was acceptable in mathematics and science except in the high school grades where progress was good in mathematics. Older students were able to apply their knowledge and skills in different contexts. The good application of ICT in many lessons helped students visualise what they were learning. Progress was good in English and Arabic as a first language throughout the school. Students developed very good listening and speaking skills but made only acceptable progress in writing. In Islamic Education and Arabic as a second language, progress was better in the elementary grades than in the middle and high grades, where it was acceptable. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress overall. Their specific needs were known to the majority of teachers and as a result the expectations for them were realistic.

Overall the attainment and progress of Emirati students were acceptable. In the early years, lower levels of ability in English affected the attainment of some students. In later years, their oral attainment was generally acceptable but their written work was weaker. From their starting points in the English language, students' progress was good but overall attainment was weaker. Across the school, students' extended writing skills were underdeveloped. Attainment and progress in mathematics and science were broadly acceptable.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Relations between students and staff members were positive and students acted responsibly around school. Almost all students displayed good attitudes towards healthy living and made informed choices about their personal health and well-being. Attendance was acceptable in the last semester and during the inspection. Most students had an acceptable understanding of Islam and it was better amongst those in the high school. High school students were able to illustrate the impact of Islam on society in Dubai and the wider world. Students showed appreciation of the traditions, heritage and values of the UAE that influenced life in Dubai and provided good examples of them. Almost all students valued the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and viewed diversity as a source of knowledge. Most students had clear understanding of their civic responsibilities. They also demonstrated clear understanding of Dubai's economy and its main sources of income, such as tourism and real-estate. They also described the main attractions and landmarks in Dubai. Most students demonstrated good understanding of current environmental challenges such as air pollution, and described ways of reducing it.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

Teaching was of acceptable quality across the school, but slightly stronger in the elementary grades and slightly weaker in the Kindergarten. Although around half of the lessons were good, teaching was often just acceptable and at times unsatisfactory. Almost all teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge and understood how students learned. Lesson planning was consistently good, done to address the needs of students. In a few cases, the delivery of the lesson did not match what was planned. Teachers' skills in time management were generally good. Resources, including ICT, were mostly used by teachers to engage students. Teachers' interactions with students were almost always positive, and skills in questioning had improved since the previous inspection. A majority of teachers asked questions in ways that promoted thinking rather than the simple recall of facts. Although a few teachers dominated lessons by talking too much, more often teachers had a good balance of dialogue with their students. Teaching strategies met the needs of most, but not all students. Students who were high attainers were at times under-challenged in lessons.

The quality of learning was good in the elementary grades and acceptable across the rest of the school. Children in the Kindergarten were eager learners but the activities often lacked learning, due to a mismatch with what they already knew. In the elementary grades, learning was usually good, as students were enthusiastic and responsible learners. In the middle and high grades, students had opportunities to learn independently but they were sometimes restricted by teachers' strategies. Interactions were mostly respectful and appropriate and students cooperated well. Students' collaboration on tasks was acceptable, although rarely interdependent. The application of learning to the real world was evident in all subjects, and was a strength in mathematics lessons. Enquiry skills were evident but not developed frequently enough. Research was mostly done outside the classrooms. Critical thinking skills were developed well, especially amongst the older students.

The assessment of learning was acceptable in the Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. Assessment systems and processes had improved significantly since the previous inspection, allowing subject leaders to analyse and compare term and year results in all subjects. Every student had assessment profiles that were based upon accurate data. Teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses well in all key subjects. Formative assessment was effectively done in most lessons. Support for students having difficulty was provided as a result of accurate assessment information. The use of assessment data had a clear influence upon curriculum planning and teaching, but less so in the Kindergarten classes. Target-setting based upon assessment information was done in some, but not all, subjects.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

The quality of the curriculum was good in all phases. Based on Florida (USA) standards, the curriculum was broad and well-balanced. Plans for skills and knowledge development supported good progression across grade levels. Students in Grades 11 and 12 could choose from a range of electives. The curriculum was reviewed each year and modified, based on needs identified in assessment results. The curriculum was adjusted again after formative testing. The curriculum contained options to meet the needs of a range of student needs. Textbooks provided modifications in each lesson for students with special educational needs and higher achieving students. Cross-curricular links were common. The curriculum provided good opportunities for independent research and recent curriculum improvements included a focus on critical thinking. A good number of extra-curricular activities were provided for students. The school had many productive links with local schools and outside organisations.

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	Good

The provision for students' health and safety was outstanding across all phases of the school. Students' safety on buses was a high priority and as a result all buses were equipped with security cameras. The

learning environment was well maintained and secure and play areas were safe and properly supervised. Site maintenance issues were quickly and effectively dealt with. The clinic nurse and part-time doctor recorded all visits and treatments and played a good part in the healthy living aspects of the curriculum. Chemicals and medicines were kept secure and eye-wash was available in the science laboratories. Evacuation procedures were clearly signed throughout the school. Fire equipment was well maintained and there were regular evacuation drills. The canteen made a significant contribution to healthy eating through its menu. Physical activity was encouraged and included in after school classes.

The quality of support for students was good. Teachers were aware of their students' progress and well-being. The occasional instances of student misbehaviour were well managed. Child protection issues were well understood and staff members had received relevant training. The advice and guidance for students on a range of issues was effective and most students were confident to ask adults for help. Students with special educational needs were supported through individualised plans, classroom accommodations and specific individual support when appropriate. The school had an effective policy of calling parents on the first day of a student's absence.

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	Good
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

The leadership of the school was acceptable. The Principal had communicated a vision that was clear to most staff members. She was well supported by other senior leaders, who were enthusiastic and wanted the best for all students. Clear responsibilities were delegated to the leaders in the various subjects and phases. Middle managers and teachers had responded well to improvement priorities and had raised attainment in Arabic as a first and second language in the elementary and middle grades. They had not had a significant effect on improving progress in all subjects.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Self-evaluation documents had been compiled but action plans were not detailed enough to bring about consistent progress across the school.

Senior leaders had ensured that all teaching staff and subject leaders had been involved. However, the interpretation of data and other evidence in order to reach individual judgements was inconsistent. Some data did not lead to school improvement in a number of key areas. The school had addressed the recommendations from the previous inspection report, but there was still considerable work to do in a few areas.

Partnership with parents and the community was good. There was generally good two-way communication between the school and individual parents and the school offered parents a good range of information about its work. A small number of parents said they didn't know what was happening in the school. Parents were involved in the life of the school and made presentations to students on Career Day. The school had received a DEWA certificate for reducing the consumption of water and electricity. Sports teams competed with other local schools and there was a campaign for better health in partnership with the local hospital.

Governance was good. The governors had a clear overview and a strong commitment to the school. The school's leaders presented regular progress reports during the academic year and the board of representatives held leaders accountable. Their monitoring of school development was good but did not focus enough on student outcomes. The community was well represented through the advisory council which included students, parents, teachers and members from the managing body.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good overall. The day-to-day life of the school was managed efficiently. All staff members were suitably qualified and a good programme of professional development was in place. The facilities and resources were sufficient to support the curriculum throughout the school and the library was well-stocked. The ICT resources had been improved and the science laboratories were well-equipped to facilitate investigation and experiments.

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	134	27%
	Last year	179	36%
Teachers	35		51%
Students	54		42%

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

A significant minority of parents responded to the survey, slightly less than last year. About half of the teachers and almost a half of the students responded to their surveys. Most parents and students were satisfied with the quality of education available at the school. Parents believed that their children were making good progress in English, mathematics and science. They were less positive in their views of progress in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language. Nearly half of the student's thought that they were not making sufficient progress in Arabic as a first language. Parents were broadly satisfied with the provision at the school across a range of aspects and indicated that they were involved in improving it. Teachers were positive in their views of the school and indicated that inspection had led to improvements. Students thought that most of their lessons were good but that they could have been given more choice in subjects.

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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