

INSPECTION REPORT

American International 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 American International School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	www.aisch.ae
Telephone	04 2988666
Address	PO Box 87727, Dubai
Principal	Othman Abdalbari
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3 – 18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1,948
Number of Emirati students	161 (8%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 12th to Thursday 15th December 2011

Contents

The context of the school	3
Overall school performance 2011-2012	3
How has the school progressed since the last inspection?	3
Key strengths	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?	7
How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?	8
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?	9
How well does the school protect and support students?	10
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	11
What are the views of parents, teachers and students?	13
What happens next?	14
How to contact us	14
Our work with schools	15

The context of the school

The American International School, located in Al Qusais, is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 18 years, from Kindergarten to high school. Girls and boys attend different classes beginning in Grade 4.

The school followed an American curriculum and at the time of the inspection, there were 1948 students on the roll. Nearly 73 per cent of students spoke Arabic as their first language and instruction was both in English and in Arabic. The external assessments included the Burt Reading Test and SAT examinations in which only some students participated. The school policy was changed this year to insure full participation in the Measures of Academic Progress tests.

The number of classroom teachers and student supervisory staff had increased since the last inspection and the school reported that all of the teachers had teaching qualifications. The school population consisted of students from 63 different nationalities. Of these, about eight per cent were Emirati students.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The overall performance of the school was acceptable. The leaders and staff were working diligently to make recommended improvements to create an environment supportive of students' learning. Students' behaviour throughout the school was carefully monitored, with a good system in place to report back to parents. Safety procedures had been implemented inside and outside of the school with routine safety drills and a better organised dismissal plan. Parents and students noticed and appreciated these improvements but some still had concerns. The school had begun to strengthen its teaching and learning, with improvement initiatives in the early stage classes; quality was steadily improving. Senior leadership was competent but the number of leaders trained to specifically address improvement in teaching and learning was not sufficient for the size of the school. Assessment of students' progress was mainly accomplished through internal benchmarks. This gave the school an inflated picture of students' attainment and progress when compared to international standards. The school had strong Islamic Education and Kindergarten programmes. The development of English language skills in the school was

slow, not helped by a curriculum that did not fully meet the needs of a student population most of whose first language was Arabic.

The school had strategic and detailed improvement plans, but had made insufficient progress on these since the last inspection. The school had effective support from its Board of Directors who had appointed a liaison officer to work with the school in making the recommended improvements in health and safety. Other areas were in the early stages of implementation.

Key strengths

- The improved Islamic Education programme with good teaching and learning in elementary, and good respect for and appreciation of Islam by students in the middle and high school phases;
- The improvement in students' behaviour and attitudes due to a number of initiatives by leadership, with an increase in students' responsibility for a safe and orderly school;
- Good teaching, learning and curriculum in Kindergarten;
- Good improvements in health and safety, including child protection awareness by staff and students.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress across all key subjects, and particularly in English literacy across the curriculum;
- Improve assessments so that the school can accurately judge its performance internally and against international standards;
- Differentiate the curriculum and teaching to better meet the needs of all students, particularly those whose first language is Arabic and students with special educational needs;
- Ensure that there are sufficient senior staff to share a clear and unified approach to improve teaching and learning throughout the school;
- Provide leaders with suitable training and resources to ensure that they can analyse data more effectively and make accurate and valid judgements about teaching and learning.

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

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

Most of the students' attainment was acceptable. However, it was good in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first and as an additional language in elementary. Attainment in middle and high school English was unsatisfactory with poor performance in external assessments and low reading scores on tests. Mathematics was unsatisfactory in high school. Indicators include poor performance in external

assessments, as well as some insecurity in basic mathematics skills. This meant that students were unable to manage the more demanding course work.

Progress was acceptable in most subjects and most phases. Elementary students made good progress in Islamic Education and in Arabic as a first language. Progress in English was good in Kindergarten but it was unsatisfactory in middle and high schools. Progress in mathematics was unsatisfactory in high school. The progress of students with special educational needs was similar to those of their peers, except in Arabic, where there was insufficient space to meet the needs of these students.

The attainment and progress of Emirati students were similar to those of other students across all subjects in all phases of the school. Positive participation, behaviour and attitudes helped Emirati students to make adequate progress. Progress was well tracked by teachers, and parents were well informed about daily behaviour and class work on-line. Emirati students were further supported in making progress with opportunities to meet together as a group monthly under the guidance of a supportive adult.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

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

Students' personal and social development had improved since the last inspection. They and their parents confirmed that there had been improvements in behaviour. This had improved the culture and learning in the school. Students referred to changes in rules and in procedures which had resulted in a safer and calmer environment. Within classrooms, students were usually respectful to the teacher and to each other, though there were some instances in the middle and high school classes where students behaved less well. Students' pride and confidence in themselves, their culture and their school were evident in their behaviour with visitors and among each other in common gathering areas. In meetings, students representing elementary through high school spoke knowledgeably about Islam, its values, and its role in their lives and the larger community. Students had somewhat less knowledge about economic and environmental issues outside of Dubai, although high school students were able to speak with enthusiasm about local efforts to conserve and use alternative forms of energy. Attendance in the first trimester was good, and was good during the inspection.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

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

Teaching for effective learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable across the rest of the school. Most teachers knew their subjects well and in Kindergarten they had made good progress towards aligning their teaching approach with the learning needs of young children. In elementary through high school, the majority of lessons were well planned. Most lessons featured ample dialogue between teachers and students. In better lessons, questions were incisive and open-ended, and demanded thought from the students. This was not always the case. On some occasions, teachers asked too little, particularly of higher attaining students. They were unable to gauge the effectiveness of their lessons and adjust their teaching to meet the needs of all groups of students. Many lessons lacked the level of challenge that was needed to promote maximum progress.

Learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable elsewhere. In Kindergarten, the balance of teacher-led learning and independent exploration enabled children to grow quickly in confidence. Older students were also being offered increasing opportunities to work responsibly and collaboratively in lessons, such as when they measured the volume of solids in Grade 7 mathematics. Students responded with enthusiasm to those lessons that kept them busy with tasks relevant to the lesson objective. Lessons where teachers did most of the talking and the text book was the only resource resulted in passive responses. Students were able to make simple connections between subjects and relate learning to the real world although these links were sometimes tenuous. Research and critical thinking skills remained under-developed across all phases.

Assessment was unsatisfactory across the school. The school generated significant data on students' performance which was available to staff, students and parents. However, the majority of the data was from un-validated internal tests. This gave an inflated picture of attainment compared with international

standards. The school was steadily increasing the proportion of students taking standardised MAP tests at all key grades and SAT tests at Grades 11 and 12. These were a self-selecting sample and did not give the school sufficient information to judge its own performance in a wider context. While the school amended aspects of its teaching programme on the basis of results, and students' scores were tracked, the skills and effectiveness of staff to analyse results varied across phases and subjects. Students frequently had broad targets set instead of the specific skills and understanding they needed to improve. Most teachers checked progress in lessons well, but their marking of students' work did little to guide improvement.

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was good in Kindergarten where it had breadth, balance and challenge. The curriculum was acceptable in the other three phases. It was enhanced by good resources and a wide range of extra-curricular activities, but was not yet been fully embedded. Consequently, it had not had sufficient time to ensure high quality provision in all subjects. In Islamic Education, aspects of the curriculum were good; in science and Arabic, the curriculum was broadly acceptable. In mathematics, the curriculum was acceptable from Kindergarten to middle school but unsatisfactory in the high school. In English, the curriculum was unsatisfactory from elementary to high. It lacked focus on the specific needs of students for whom English was an additional language particularly in the development of writing skills. There was little differentiation for different students. As part of a drive to improve literacy at all grade levels there was a mandatory reading period at the start of each day. Cross-curricular links were rare though they had become a recent requirement in lesson planning. Overall, the curriculum provided few opportunities for independent learning and the development of critical thinking skills.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Health and safety was good in all phases of the school. The school had made a good response to the recommendations in the last report and good child protection procedures were now firmly in place and well known by staff. However, staff training remained a priority. Additional supervision and effective procedures were in place for the arrival and departure of buses and the orderly movement from classes at the end of the school day. Extra evacuation practices had been put in place particularly with young children. The facilities for students' health and medical needs were good with an on-site nurse and doctor on call. However, the school canteen was not supporting the school in its promotion of healthy eating.

The quality of support was acceptable. The school had made improvements in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. A new co-ordinator position had been created and recently filled. Students with special educational needs were identified and almost all staff were aware of them. Too few teachers adapted their lessons based on this information and additional adult support was only available in the Kindergarten. Improved careers guidance resulted from a recent appointment. A lunch-time club and a web-site had been introduced to support students in their university applications.

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

The quality of leadership was acceptable. Senior leaders were committed and well intentioned. The school was well managed but not all leaders have the skills necessary to improve teaching and learning. Some members of the staff and some phase leaders supported the assistant principal as she championed improvement. A number of leaders had multiple responsibilities. This had resulted in a fragmentation of the vision and of the implementation of the strategic initiatives for improvement. The leadership structure was not comprehensive, cohesive or clearly defined enough to develop effective teaching and learning throughout the school.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. Three of the five recommendations from the last inspection had not been fully met, though the school was working on addressing these. The assessment information that the school used to judge students' attainment and progress was unreliable as it was mainly internally generated; there were too few external assessments to evaluate programmes and students' improvement accurately. Where there were external assessments for older students, too few participated to provide sufficient guidance to the school in evaluating its progress.

The school had good relationships with parents and an active Parent Association. Two-way communication had improved according to the parents particularly now that they had access to daily information about their children's behaviour, test scores and homework on the website. There was improved reporting to parents. Some parents volunteered in the classroom to assist teachers and students. There were some productive links with the community.

Governance was acceptable. The board of directors had appointed a liaison officer to the school who was knowledgeable about the recommendations made in health and safety, and who advised and supported the school leaders in these areas. There was representation of parents on the board. There were no formal structures in place to seek the views of all stakeholders but the members were responsive to concerns raised regarding health and safety. While the board held the school leaders accountable for key aspects of

the school, it did not have sufficient training or knowledge about students' assessment results and attainment levels.

The management of the school was acceptable with improved day-to-day routines. There was a sufficient number of suitably qualified teachers. The premises were acceptable, but some classrooms were small for the number and size of the older students. Overall, there were good resources for learning, for example in the Kindergarten.

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	94	8%
	Last year	276	24%
Teachers	63		48%
Students	287		64%

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

Only a very few parents responded to the survey, much fewer than last year. About half of the teachers and a majority of senior students responded to their surveys. Parents generally believed that their children were making good progress in key subject areas, that children were developing knowledge and respect for Islam, and that communication with teachers was good. Some parents expressed concern about the quality of students' behaviour, and a desire that more parents should become involved with the school. A few believed that the school did not listening to parents enough. Teachers noted that their students had appreciation for all the different nationalities and cultures, and that the school provided good resources for learning. They believed that the school had good assessment systems. Teachers were less confident about the progress of non-Muslim students in understanding Islam, the behaviour of some students, the choice of subjects for some students and professional development for themselves. Senior students reported that they had good understanding of Islam and made good progress in Islamic Education. They also indicated that they made good progress in English and science. They thought the teachers taught well and that there were good resources for learning. Students wanted a greater choice of subjects and were keen for the school's leaders to listen to their opinions.

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.

Copyright © 2012

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school.
It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.