

# INSPECTION REPORT

## American International School

Report published in April, 2014

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT American International School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	www.aisch.net
Telephone	04-2988666
Address	Dubai Al Qusais P.O.Box 87727Community 232 Street 6
Principal	عثمان حلمي عبدالباري, OTHMAN ABDALBARI
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / KG 1-Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2312
Largest nationality group of Students	Arabs
Number of Emirati students	139 (6%)
Date of the inspection	20th to 23rd January

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## The context of the school

The American International School, located in Al Qusais, provides education for girls and boys from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection there were 2312 students on roll.

Students in the school were mainly Arabs with smaller numbers of Asian, Iranian, Pakistani students. About 6% of the students were Emirati. About three-quarters of the students studied Arabic as a first language. The school had identified a small number of students as having some form of special educational need.

The school had a Kindergarten (KG) with English as the language of instruction, an elementary phase (Grades 1 to 5), a middle phase (Grades 6 to 8) and a high school phase (Grades 9 to 12). The school offered a US curriculum based on the State of Indiana standards. A small number of students sat the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests in 2012.

There were 144 teachers including the principal and 17 teaching assistants. Teachers had a range of academic and teaching qualifications, and most were suitably qualified for the subjects and age groups they were teaching. The school roll had increased slightly since the last inspection.

## Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

### Key strengths

- Positive attitudes of teachers to improving teaching and learning and an understanding of what needs to be done to improve;
- Progress in Arabic as a first language;
- Students' personal responsibility, their understanding of culture and Islamic values and the strong leadership programme in the upper school.

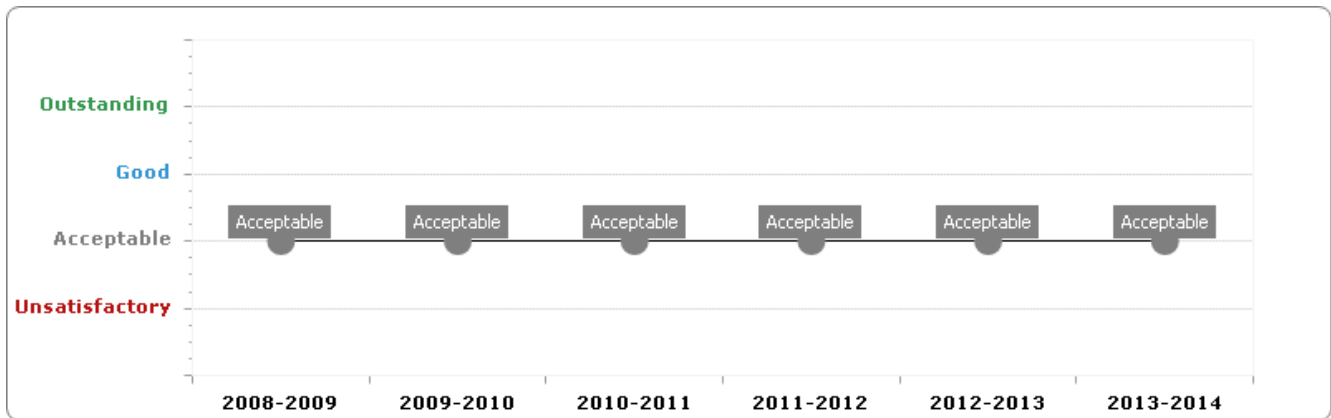
### Recommendations

- Raise the attainment and progress of students in all subjects, and improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - giving a greater focus to students' learning and progress;
  - actively involving students more in their learning;
  - ensuring planning is more personalised to students in the class;
  - developing students' literacy skills to include more extended writing;
  - providing quality feedback to students on how to improve;
  - improving the accuracy of school assessment information;
  - using external examinations to validate internal assessments;
  - sharing good practice across the school;
  - Introduce more rigorous procedures for the early identification and support of students with special educational needs, including more able students.

## Progress since the last inspection

- There had been some improvements in the attainment and progress of all groups of students;
- The school was still not using assessment information to plan lessons that challenged students at their levels of development;
- The school was at an early stage of developing effective practices for the identification and support of students with special educational needs, including more able students;
- Self-evaluation and improvement planning had improved but had not yet had sufficient influence on the qualities of teaching and learning.

## 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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	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	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

[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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

[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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

In Islamic Education, most students had appropriate memorisation skills, particularly in the elementary phase, and a clear understanding of key concepts, values and Islamic practice. In Arabic as a first language, most students had secure reading and fluent speaking skills. Students' understanding of grammatical rules was better than when applying the rules in extended speaking or writing. Throughout the school, writing skills were less well developed. In Arabic as an additional language, speaking and basic spelling skills were within the expected levels. Independent reading and writing were limited. Attainment in English, mathematics and science was acceptable. In the Kindergarten speaking in English was underdeveloped but reading and writing was acceptable. By Grade 12, most students read fluently with expression and good understanding. A few older students demonstrated an ability to express themselves and share their emotions and thoughts through their personal writing. In Kindergarten children worked well with practical materials to develop their mathematical skills. Older students were confident with geometry, algebra and calculus but their investigative and problem solving skills were not as strong. In science practical work contributed to the students' understanding.

Students made adequate progress in understanding basic Islamic practice and manners and, in the upper grades, showed a growing understanding of family law. However, in some grades their understanding of the significance and purposes of some of these practices was developing slowly. Although progress in Arabic as a first language was good overall, it was limited in extended writing. In Arabic as an additional language, students made adequate progress in understanding grammar and in their reading. Progress was acceptable in English, mathematics and science across the school. Kindergarten children made acceptable progress from low starting points in English. Limitations in the quality of students' writing restricted their progress across the rest of the school. Writing was inhibited by a lack of planned opportunities and challenge in many lessons. In mathematics in the Kindergarten, children progressed from recognising numbers to adding two digits together. When given opportunities to connect mathematical concepts to real world situations, students in all phases were able to make reasonable progress. Through practical work, students improved their progress in developing their understanding of science but they lacked opportunities to develop their knowledge of scientific method.

[View judgements](#)

## Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of students' learning skills was acceptable across all phases. Students were very enthusiastic and keen to do well. They were able to work independently when given the chance. Many students could explain clearly what they were doing but few could share how well they were doing or what they had to do to improve. Opportunities to collaborate were given in the majority of classes, benefiting the students' development of language and understanding. In the better lessons, students were able to consolidate and build on previous learning. This was a strength of the Kindergarten. Much of the learning was themed and related to the experiences and needs of very young children. Some students had been provided with a computer tablet but this innovations was not leading to improved learning. Critical thinking and the acquisition of higher order thinking skills were still underdeveloped. This was related to the lack of challenge for the more able students and the quality of teachers' questioning.

[View judgements](#)

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

Positive attitudes and behaviour were evident across the school. Students had good relationships with their peers and respectful relationships with their teachers. They had sensible and confident attitudes towards learning. Students appreciated critical feedback on the few occasions it was given. Students were fully aware of what constituted healthy lifestyles. Attendance was good.

Students' understanding of Islamic values was good across all phases. Throughout the school, students had an age-appropriate understanding of Islamic values. They could talk about some of the local traditions and heritages such as the dress-code and the customs. They had a strong sense of their own culture and were able to compare and contrast different cultures. They could explain the uniqueness of Dubai and talk about its multi-cultural society. In assemblies, girls demonstrated strong respect during Qur'an recitation and prayers.

Students understood their responsibilities well but their responsibilities within the school and with the wider community were limited. The student leadership programme successfully involved many older students. Most students could discuss confidently the concept of environmental sustainability and how they could help conserve energy.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable across the school. Teacher knowledge varied and some teachers had insufficient understanding of how younger students learn. Planning in the majority of lessons contained activities and resources. It identified groups of learners and gave opportunities for students to interact. However, approaches and activities were not always effective in improving learning. Group work and opportunities for students to learn through interactions with others were a feature of many lessons. However, the teaching was aimed predominantly towards middle attaining students and this set a ceiling for student progress. There was some support for students who were experiencing difficulties but high achieving students were rarely extended through an adapted curriculum or through more open ended tasks, for example to develop higher order thinking skills. Curriculum links to real life, other curricular areas and previous learning were variable across subjects, grades and phases. Teachers were using technology in their lessons but not consistently well enough.

Assessment was acceptable across all phases. Results of a range of assessments were recorded electronically. There was a student progress tracking system, which was linked to rubrics of learning. However this did not show clearly the relative strengths and weaknesses of individual students against specific areas for progress. The progress of students with special educational needs was not tracked. Some end-of-term tests were not accurate indicators of attainment and data was not analysed for gender, ethnicity or ability. The school was in the process of changing the type of externally validated testing. In class, most teachers used closed questioning to assess students. Oral and written feedback was mainly to acknowledge tasks had been completed rather than appraised. Although teachers had a good general understanding of the students' individual strengths and weaknesses, most were not using the information to plan appropriate activities that would support or challenge students in the classroom.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable in all phases. It was broad and balanced, and included enrichment subjects such as art, and French. Teachers and senior leaders reviewed the curriculum regularly, and made appropriate modifications. However, the curriculum did not include enough opportunities to promote independent research and critical thinking. A few cross curricular activities and community events took place, as well as competitions to interest students and promote their learning. The use of technology had expanded through the introduction of tablets for students but the use of these to enhance learning was underdeveloped.

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The curriculum was planned to cater for individual needs but in practice this did not always take place. Students of differing abilities were sometimes named on plans but classroom activities were not always appropriate for them. Students with special educational needs were supported by their peers and a few had individual one-to-one support outside the classroom. Individual plans were in their infancy and not generally used. Gifted students and more able students were given the same activities as all students in the class. They were not sufficiently challenged. There were limited extra activities and few subject choices.

[View judgements](#)

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

Requirements for maintaining the health and safety of students were acceptable. Transport and pedestrian traffic arrangements were efficiently implemented although seatbelts on buses were not consistently used. School facilities were well-maintained and adequately staffed to address students' needs. Students said they felt safe at school and were comfortable approaching teachers to raise concerns. The school canteen offered healthy eating choices and the school clinic reinforced healthy living while providing appropriate medical care to students. Fire drills took place twice each year and steps were in place to streamline evacuation procedures; some doors and secondary gates were secured in a manner that made rapid exit difficult. A lift was being installed in the school to accommodate the use of wheelchairs. Most staff and students were aware of child protection requirements but there was no written policy in place.

The quality of support was acceptable. Relationships between staff and students were courteous and, in most classrooms, created an effective learning environment. Attendance was well managed. Lateness was documented and letters were sent to parents of persistently late students. The school admitted students with special educational needs and relied on external assessments to identify their needs. Systems and procedures for early identification were not well developed because teachers were not sufficiently trained. Students' needs were not identified with enough detail. Consequently their personal learning needs were not always met. Students could seek advice and support on academic or personal issues. Most students felt confident that concerns would be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The principal, supported by the board of governors, was determined that the school would improve. He was highly regarded by staff, parents, students and the community. With the support of the governing board, he provided a clear direction for the school.

Nevertheless, leadership provided by senior staff, supervisors and coordinators was variable. All leaders provided committed support for the school but their understanding of their roles did not extend to their taking responsibility for improving teaching and raising attainment. Leadership at this level was well intentioned but unrealistic and there was too much variability in terms of practices and procedures across subjects, grades and phases. Relationships between leaders and staff were professional and supportive.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school, including the board of governors, had a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation was realistic and mostly accurate but documentation lacked a real focus on improving teaching and raising attainment. Internal examinations in English, mathematics and science were narrowly focused and not fit for purpose. Lesson observations were regular and made good use of proforma which were now more focused on skills rather than behaviours. Professional development was suitably linked to areas for improvement including planning, differentiation and questioning. Recommendations raised in the last inspection were being addressed but remained as work in progress.

The quality of partnerships with parents and the community was acceptable. Parents were appreciative of the improvements in communication through the on-line portal and the opportunities it presented to remain in contact with the school and stay informed. They were reassured that their concerns received immediate feedback. Reliable information to make parents aware of the next steps in their children's progress was limited. There were a few productive links with the community.

Governance was acceptable. The governing board included a range of stakeholders including teachers and parents. Governors visited the school and had a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors actively sought parents' views and responded to any concerns raised. Statutory duties were met but the governors had not ensured that the school was improving quickly enough and recommendations from the last inspection report had not been fully implemented.

Management including staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. The school operated smoothly and was fully staffed with well-qualified teachers, some of whom were supported by teaching assistants. School buildings were clean and safe. The school grounds included adequate games areas. The number of books in the school library was low but the school had made some progress in the use of technology.

[View judgements](#)

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

Attainment of Emirati students was generally lower in all subjects when compared with the attainment of other students. In some subjects and phases their attainment was much lower, for example in high school

mathematics and science. In the high school phase, there were significant gaps in Emirati students' knowledge in English, mathematics and science but these students performed better in Islamic Education and Arabic. Nevertheless, attainment and progress of Emirati students were broadly acceptable across the core subjects although progress was good in Arabic.

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

Despite some major shortcomings in provision, progress of students with special educational needs was acceptable. In almost all lessons there was limited support for students with special educational needs (SEN). Consequently, they were unable to understand what they were expected to do. Despite guidance on ways to address the learning needs of these students, most teachers remained unclear. Assessments were not analysed to help devise individual education plans (IEPs). Some planning showed differentiation but, in reality, the worksheets and activities were not matched to ensure that students made progress. Their progress was not monitored and targets were not set. The school did not identify its gifted students using effective criteria.

Some parents were hesitant about acknowledging that their children had specific needs. However, parents of those identified, were involved at all stages. Meetings were arranged regularly with them to discuss their children's progress. The school offered advice to try to provide a consistent approach between home and school.

The school admitted students with SEN but early identification was not in place. Ramps provided access for students with physical disabilities and arrangements for a lift were underway. Teachers used sound amplification for students with hearing impairment. These measures provided opportunities for full inclusion of students with SEN in all aspects of the curriculum. Leaders had some experience and expertise in special educational needs and had begun to offer advice and guidance to teachers. However teachers were insufficiently trained to make accurate curriculum modifications to address special educational needs effectively.

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

The teaching of Arabic was acceptable and had improved in the elementary since last inspection. Most teachers had secure knowledge, especially in the middle and high school. They sometimes used open-ended



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questions and occasionally made links to the real world. The use of students' prior knowledge to introduce topics, and plenaries to check understanding, was a feature of most lessons. In a few lessons, teacher talk dominated and the range of stimulating activities was limited. The teaching of writing was the weakest aspect across all phases. In the high school, analysis of literary texts lacked depth. In a few lessons, teachers did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to show, orally or in writing, what they had learned.

The curriculum for Arabic as a first language fulfilled MoE requirements. Most lesson plans included differentiated methods but the teaching was variable in quality. In middle and secondary grades, the curriculum was heavily focused on the teaching of grammar and language analysis and there was less focus on developing extended writing skills. Additional resources were used effectively in lessons but the use of technology to enhance learning was rarely seen.



## 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	95	7%
	Last year	149	12%
Teachers	120		83%
Students	290		67%

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

Only a small proportion of parents responded to the survey. In contrast, the majority of students and most teachers responded. Parents were generally positive about the school. The majority were satisfied with the quality of education but a quarter were not. Parents felt their children were making good progress in English and mathematics but were concerned about progress in Islamic Education. Almost all parents agreed that their children enjoyed school, were looked after and kept safe. However, a minority of parents did not feel that the school was led well and were concerned that school leaders did not listen to their opinions. Most teachers were satisfied with the quality of education and the majority thought that the school was led well. They agreed that there needed to be a greater focus on learning and classroom management. Most students felt they made good progress in their subjects and made use of a range of technology. About a third considered that students in the school were not well behaved and did not feel that school leaders listened to their opinions. Feedback from student meetings commented positively on recent improvements in the school.

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

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