



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

**Inspection report**

**Al Basma British School**

**Abu Dhabi**

**United Arab Emirates**

Date  
Inspection number

2nd - 4th May 2016  
20160502

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## 1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

The Department for Education has put in place a voluntary scheme for the inspection of British schools overseas, whereby schools are inspected against a common set of standards that British schools overseas can choose to adopt.

The inspection and this report follow the Department for Education (DFE) schedule for the inspection of British Schools overseas.

The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's management on the overall effectiveness of the school, the standard of education it provides and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom.

The inspection and report will cover the key areas of quality of the curriculum; quality of teaching and learning; the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students; their welfare, health and safety; the suitability of the proprietor and staff; the school's premises and accommodation (including boarding); and the school's complaints procedures. An essential part of the inspection is considering the extent to which the British character of the school is evident in its ethos, curriculum, teaching and care for students and students' achievements.

This inspection was completed by Penta International. Penta International is approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools overseas. As one of the leading inspection providers, Penta International reports to the English Department for Education (DFE) on the extent to which schools meet the standards for British Schools Overseas.

During the inspection visit, 67 full or part lessons were observed by inspectors. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, members of the board and a range of teachers, parents and groups of students.

The lead inspector was Colin Dyson. The team members were Emma Bowie, Stuart Bradley, Sheila Smith and Nicola Walsh.

## 2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

Al Basma British School, Abu Dhabi meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas accreditation.

## 3. Overall effectiveness of the school

Al Basma British School Abu Dhabi is an improving school.

The school has only been in operation for a short time and has made significant progress as it establishes itself. The school fully complies with host country regulatory requirements. Teaching is at least satisfactory and there are a significant number of good lessons.

The students, parents and staff are highly committed to the school. Parents value the school's commitment to provide an education similar in character to typical independent school expectations. The senior leadership team has an understanding of the strengths of the school and the key areas for further development.

Nearly all students make progress at least in line with their ability, some do better. The national curriculum provides the framework for teaching and learning alongside host country requirements. The curriculum is enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities.

### 3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths, which include:

- The Principal has been effective in guiding the establishment of a new school that is well managed.
- The strong desire demonstrated by staff to continue to improve.
- The positivity of students, they feel safe and well cared for.
- The parent body is highly supportive.
- Behaviour of students is good and they are being given the opportunity to develop an effective 'voice' within the school.
- The high level of care demonstrated by the organisation of all students at the start and end of the day.
- The clear focus on health and safety procedures and the high quality maintenance of the campus.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in lessons. The teaching of English is good across the school.
- There is a clear focus on providing a good level of resources to enhance pastoral support.
- The school has a strong capacity for further improvement.

## 3.2 Points for improvement

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

1. Continue to develop assessment strategies to ensure they are manageable and have an impact on raising achievements.
2. Clarify a leadership structure that ensures all middle leaders have the skills and competencies to increase levels of accountability.
3. Develop further the staff's strengths to ensure that teaching and learning is at least good and consistent across the school.

## 4. The context of the school

Full name of school/college	Al Basma British School				
Address	PO Box 45994, Al Bahia, Abu Dhabi, UAE				
Telephone number	+971 2 562 3454				
Fax number	+971 2 563 9895				
Website	<a href="http://www.albasmaschool.ae">www.albasmaschool.ae</a>				
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@albasmaschool.ae">info@albasmaschool.ae</a>				
Head	Mrs Allison McDonald				
Chairman of Board of Governors	Mr KK Ashraf				
Age range	KG1 to Grade 8 (4 - 14 years)				
Total number of pupils	1,362	<i>Boys</i>	733	<i>Girls</i>	629
Numbers by age	<i>0-2 years</i>	0	<i>11-16 years</i>	169	
	<i>3-5 years</i>	201	<i>16-18 years</i>	0	
	<i>5-11 years</i>	974	<i>18+ years</i>	0	
Total number of part-time children	18				

Al Basma British School is a recently established school on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi.

The school believes in 'creating future citizens with high values, excelling in all dimensions of life, with full co-operation, transparency and support from parents.'

Students in KG1 follow the UK guidance for Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS). Students then follow a curriculum that is closely aligned to the National Curriculum for England. Ministry of Education requirements are fully met and the school was judged 100% compliant in February 2016.

The school has expanded rapidly in the last two years and now accommodates 1,362 students. Al Basma British School caters to the needs of a diverse student population from KG 1 to Grade 8 (Year 9) and the school aims to develop opportunities for students to continue in Grades 11 and 12. Some 96% of students are identified as English as additional language learners. Across the school, there are students from 54 nationalities. Emirati students are the single largest group (38%) followed by Pakistani (14%) and Indian (9%).

In the past year, the school has embarked on ensuring all students are in age-appropriate classes. The new admission policy requires all students to be placed in classes now aligned to regulatory requirements.



## 4.1 British nature of the school

The ethos, nature and appearance of the school are recognisably British, and mirror what would be found in the independent sector in the UK.

The school uses the National Curriculum (NC) of England which ensures that students can join/re-join the UK education system without disadvantage, at any stage. The school has implemented a broad, balanced curriculum. As well as implementing the NC for England, a range of assessments and student progress checks are based on national standards from the UK.

Al Basma British School has worked hard to create a clear British ethos, with the Board of Governors and senior staff adopting many of the most recent strategies and practices from the UK. An example of this is the school's planning to track students' progress without levels.

The school uses EYFS guidance and the 2014 National Curriculum, and keeps teachers up to date through regular staff development and cascading the latest developments from the Department for Education. Teachers are actively recruited from the UK to strengthen the effectiveness of curriculum delivery.

The school has AQA and Edexcel exam board approval and is in the process of achieving accreditation with Cambridge. Senior staff retain strong links with the UK.

The organisation of the day, classroom management practices, key resources, the three-term year and a formal school uniform, adapted to the age and activity of the children, all contribute to the British feel.

Pastoral systems mirror those found in many British schools. Parents receive all the school's letters, reports, and its publications in English. The range of extra-curricular activities is developing in line with best UK practice.

## 5. Standard 1

### The quality of education provided by the school

Overall the quality of education provided is good, fully meeting the standard for accreditation.

#### 5.1 Curriculum

The school's curriculum meets the standard.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum delivering all of the elements of the English National Curriculum acceptable in the Muslim context.

The curriculum meets the needs of the EYFS. Resources are well matched to the needs of the students and are used effectively. The building is adequate but to ensure effective delivery of the EYFS curriculum it could be better adapted. There is no opportunity for free flow from inside to outdoor areas and water play and sand play are restricted to the outdoor learning area which is shared with KG2. The curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of children who are arriving at school with little or no preschool experiences and in some cases are younger than expected; 43% under age 4 on entry. The EYFS leader has correctly identified the needs of the students and there is a clear focus on phonics teaching and physical development in the curriculum.

English National Curriculum is being used effectively across much of Key Stage 1 and 2. Work in the English lessons observed supported students' needs very effectively. It was not as consistent in other subjects. Specialist lessons broaden the opportunities for students. Targets are shared with students to develop their learning and many students could explain these clearly and knew what they had to do to achieve them.

There is the opportunity for involvement in extra-curricular activities. The parents and students spoken with during the inspection were keen for these to be extended, both for the age range of students who could be involved and for the frequency of activities.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is based on the National Curriculum for England while meeting the ministry requirements for Arabic and Islamic Studies. Students also study subjects in French, art and design technology. Classes are split by gender from Grade 5 up.

Generic planning was in evidence and whilst the school recognises that these should be annotated to meet the needs of the students, this is not always the case.

Students interviewed highlighted some inconsistencies in their provision, and inspectors confirmed these, such as:

- boys have swimming, but not the girls
- the range of PE activities on offer in one boys' class did not match the wide range on offer in another
- the lack of practical work in science

Students in Grade 8 have made their choices for Key Stage 4 where they will study a compulsory core of subjects, which includes the Ministry of Education compulsory curriculum, and two, selected, optional subjects. These will lead to IGCSE qualifications.

All teaching staff are involved in the enrichment programme which is offered, through 'Golden Time' once a week as part of the timetable to all students from Grade 5 to Grade 8. In addition a range of extra-curricular activities are provided for children from Grade 1 to Grade 8 once a week after school, which support or extend the curriculum. These are taken up by 300-400 students across the school; many other children are unable to take advantage of these due to problems regarding transport home following the activity.

A range of strategies are being developed to support students with learning difficulties and or disabilities.

## 5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching meets the standards required for BSO with a significant number of lessons deemed good or better. The teaching of English throughout the school is a strength.

Teachers plan effectively for lessons, ensuring a wide range of activities. Teachers' planning is closely monitored by the EYFS grade leader and all teachers contribute to the planning attending planning meetings weekly. This is overseen by the EYFS leader. However the activities planned do not consistently match the needs of all the students. In some lessons observed the work was too difficult for the children and there was little challenge in others to maintain a level of engagement.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, teaching is satisfactory overall, with a significant number of good or better lessons.

Lessons are well planned and the better lesson plans were annotated in light of daily events. In an encouraging number of lessons observed, the teachers had high expectations and progress was strong. They knew their students' strengths and weaknesses, and challenged them appropriately. The majority of teachers displayed strong curriculum knowledge and used it highly effectively in their classroom. Weaker students were well supported and the more able challenged. In less successful lessons, pace was slower and learning intentions less focused, students played a more passive role and attention wavered. In many lessons there was an over emphasis on worksheets. In the best lessons students are able to work in pairs or groups, activities are engaging and well planned and students and teachers share an enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers demonstrated appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Teachers encouraged students to behave responsibly. Examples of this were seen in a Grade 8 Geography lesson where girls were able to work in groups to analyse information presented to them. The pace of the lesson was maintained by good use of a clock ticking down on the whiteboard.

Students' books are well marked with constructive feedback given.

In a Grade 6 class boys were asked to calculate the surface area of a cuboid. At the end of this activity, the assessment for learning strategy of 'thumbs up, down or horizontal' was used to identify learning needs. Differentiated work sheets were distributed appropriately and those who had indicated that they were still not confident gathered together with the teacher for further tuition. For those more confident a challenging extension task was made available. The boys were fully engaged and enjoying the task.

A detailed framework for assessment and tracking has been established this year and the small amount of the school's data available would indicate that many students make progress. However, the lack of historical data makes it impossible to identify trends.

## 5.3 Standards achieved by students

Overall the standards achieved by students meet the standard required for accreditation. Progress is satisfactory overall and good in English. Attainment is below National Curriculum expectations on entry and the school recognises the need to further raise attainment.

Due to the lack of historic comparative data the school recognise that they have not secured effective monitoring over time.

The school has recently introduced the NFER Reading test and the Vernon spelling test. Using this data the school has identified differences in attainment between numbers of groups. The school does not yet have students in Key Stages 4 or 5.

Students enjoy attending school and participate in lessons enthusiastically. Support staff in each classroom closely supervise the behaviour of students both in the classroom and in the EYFS area.

Students are encouraged to think for themselves and make choices regarding learning activities however this needs developing to ensure that they are making an appropriate choice. In all the lessons observed students made a free choice of activities, however there was at times little evidence that the task was well matched to the needs of the individual. Assessment of students using the Early Years Outcomes has been recorded and tracked this year. This is not yet routine practice and staff in EYFS are aware of needing further support to ensure the data is accurate and reliable.

In lessons observed in Key Stages 1 and 2, the majority of students worked with enthusiasm. Those spoken with commented on their enjoyment of school, particularly in those classes where they could be actively involved. In the best lessons, progress was good or better. Students showed independence, self-motivation and an ability to apply themselves to the task set. Teachers knew their students' abilities well and challenged them appropriately. Results provided by the school showed attainment at the end of the Key Stage 2 are currently below National Curriculum expectations.

In the most successful lessons in Key Stage 3, students work with enthusiasm and interest. They are able to work positively in pairs and groups. They are willing and able to contribute to their lessons and do so in an articulate and thoughtful way. Their behaviour is good. Most students have positive attitudes to school and to their learning and those interviewed were positive about being in school.

The emergence this year of the Young Leaders group and School Council offer opportunities for students to have a voice within the school.

Attendance is running at 95% for KG1-Grade 8. On two days of the inspection the attendance was 94.5% and 93.86%. The BRIC school management system has been introduced and this generates attendance reports on a daily basis. It is being developed as a management system and a learning platform to enhance student learning opportunities.

## 6. Standard 2

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of the students is good.

Students have opportunities to develop their awareness of SMSC elements both within and outside of the classroom. This provision can be seen in lessons, assemblies, tutor time and extra-curricular activities (ECAs) and leadership opportunities, as well as through rewards and sanctions based behaviour strategies.

The majority of students are clear on expectations in terms of behaviour and are well mannered. The students are polite, enjoy learning and are keen to demonstrate their achievements. Students are supported in distinguishing right from wrong and are encouraged to show respect for the rules of the school. A number of parents made reference to clear improvements in student behaviour in recent terms. Students were similarly aware, and were able to articulate clearly what was expected of them in terms of conduct. This includes clear rules and effective monitoring of behaviour on the buses. A number of students are in fact keen for more rules to be put in place. The school recognises the need to support students in developing skills in areas such as independent learning and conflict resolution.

For Muslim students, the core principles of right and wrong are supported through Islamic Studies and Quran lessons. A PSHE programme is delivered to non-Muslim students. The demographic of the school population is diverse, with students from over 50 nationalities currently on roll. Most students show appreciation and respect for each other. This was evident in lessons in which students worked collaboratively, for instance in a Grade 5 mathematics lesson where peer to peer support was used effectively.

Students show respect for the local culture of the UAE, singing the national anthem as part of morning assemblies and through following the UAE Studies curriculum. Opportunities to celebrate other cultures are present in events such as International Day.

The Dojo reward system is linked to core competencies of which the students are aware, and the Golden Time rewards system is very popular with the students. This is complemented by other less formal initiatives, such as the Wonder Wall used in the Secondary phase of the school, which provides an opportunity for students and teachers to recognise desired competencies.

Students are able to participate in extra-curricular activities (ECAs) both during and after the school day. The Golden Time session which takes place is very popular with students, who appreciate the recognition and the fact that they have a choice of activities. Students and parents spoke positively about the provision in place already, expressing a desire for this to be broadened and for the issue of transportation (an issue for those living some distance from the school) to be considered for the future.

Students have opportunities to acquire, through initiatives such as the School Council, knowledge of British values such as democracy and freedom of expression. Key Stage 3 students spoke highly of the leadership opportunities afforded by the introduction of the Young Leaders, Sports Leaders and School Council initiatives and were keen to take on and develop these roles. Students also show empathy and a desire to help others. For instance in a Grade 2 literacy lesson, students were very keen to assist a classmate who had been absent in catching up on their work. Outside of the classroom, two Grade 7 students took the initiative to propose a fundraising initiative for a local orphanage.



## 7. Standard 3

### The welfare, health and safety of the students

The welfare, health and safety of students throughout the school is good: they are a strength of the school.

The safety of students is closely monitored by the Health and Safety Officer and the Facilities Manager. At all times, ADEC policies and procedures are closely adhered to. Health and safety meetings take place four times a year. All meetings have minutes. Attendance registers are maintained and conform to local regulatory requirements.

A bullying policy is in place and a pastoral social worker deals effectively with all instances of bullying. CCTV coverage supports the school to minimise incidents of bullying. This is closely monitored by security staff.

Safeguarding of students is ensured through the vigilance of all staff and the appointment of a Child Protection Officer. All staff have police checks, visitor's sign into school and contractors are only allowed to work at weekends unless it is an emergency. Secured access points are monitored by CCTV cameras and security guards.

Fire safety meets ADEC requirements and the Civil Defence have recently visited the school to demonstrate fire safety awareness with students.

Supervision of students is carefully controlled, particularly with regard to the transportation of students at the beginning and end of the school day and the use of the schools swimming pool. Visits off site have a written risk assessment and obtain ADEC approval.

First aid is administered by the school nurse based in the licensed clinic. Serious injuries are notified to ADEC, meeting all local legal requirements; however these are low in number. Regular visits by ADEC officials to the school's cafeteria ensure all local requirements are met. Children are encouraged to bring into school healthy lunchboxes and awards are given to children with healthy lunchboxes in the lower school.

The school recognises the need to increase the shaded areas in play area and the use of sun hats for the younger children.

Target setting is embedded; students know their targets and these are shared with parents.

## 8. *Standard 4* The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The suitability of the proprietor and staff is of a high order.

The school has implemented effective systems for safe recruitment all of all personnel. The owner and governors ensure all local employment checks are made regarding the staffs right to work in the host country.

There is a list of all staff who currently work in the school. This is regularly updated when they started and stopped working in the school.

Staffing levels are adequate for the delivery of the curriculum. The school has been proactive in recruiting further staff to ensure that all have qualifications appropriate to their role.

The owner and Board have established highly effective working strategies with the Principal and Senior Leadership Team. The vision of the proprietor is clearly defined and over time provides a clear strategy for Al Basma British School to further raise its standing within the community.

The implementation of the policies and procedures and monitoring by the Board is developing and the Board is ensuring it develops its effectiveness as 'critical friends'. Board members clearly expressed their desire to ensure Al Basma British School becomes a high quality school and that they have the commitment and drive to become a leading international school.

## 9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation at Al Basma British School are good.

The school occupies new and well-equipped facilities. Accommodation for each phase is well-designed and resourced with appropriate furniture and equipment. There are currently sufficient teaching rooms and specialist areas to accommodate all the learning programmes and curricular needs of the students.

Decoration is in good order and floorings are appropriate to the current use of each room. The central library is a developing resource. There is adequate natural, and where appropriate, artificial lighting and temperature in all rooms is controlled by air conditioning.

There are good, safe outdoor areas for sport and for students to play, although access to the outdoor play areas for KG children is limited. The whole school is well maintained to a high level. Fire evacuation drills are conducted regularly. No health and safety incidents have been reported since September 2015.

CCTV and security guards are in place and all visitors, parents and staff have passes to enter the building. There are sufficient washrooms for both staff and students with disabled toilets available. A lift enables access to all floors for those unable to use the stairs.

The school's accommodation is effectively used to support students' learning and they respond positively to their environment.

## 10. *Standard 6* The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information provided by the school for parents, prospective parents, carers and others is good.

Appropriate contact information is made available to parents and stakeholders. The email addresses of the Principal and the Board of Governors feature on the school website. Contact information for other staff feature in school newsletters, monthly curriculum guides and other sources.

The ethos of the school is stated on the school website, with the aim being the creation of ‘a happy, positive and respectful environment’ from which ‘a global community of thinkers, creators, innovators and leaders who will have a positive impact on the world of tomorrow’ can emerge. This is also communicated via the student organisers.

The school communicates with parents through a variety of channels, including the school website, newsletters, LCD displays in the reception area, the online Class Dojo application and 2Simple software. The Parent Liaison Officer is a particular strength in ensuring school and home links are developed well.

The school website is starting to become an important source of information for parents. Policy information relating to student admissions, behavioural expectations, bullying, child protection and health and safety are made available to parents. Details regarding the provision for students with special educational needs are also available on the website.

During interviews, parents spoke positively about the school. In particular they made reference to the accessibility of teaching staff and their responsiveness to parent initiated contact. Information relating to the curriculum is made available to parents on the school website, as well as via monthly curriculum newsletters. Parents spoke highly of the newsletters as a resource to support their children’s learning at home.

As the school does not yet have Key Stage 4 or Key Stage 5 classes, no particulars on academic performance in public examinations are available.

A number of parent-teacher meetings, target review sessions and information evenings are held throughout the year and are well attended by parents, many of whom are eager to learn more about the curriculum their children are following and to gain a greater understanding of their role in the process. Some parents with students in EYFS felt that whilst the report cards issued contain a lot of useful information they are difficult to understand and require further explanation.

The provision of information at the start of each academic year is good, with the welcome packs, induction sessions and meet-the-teacher events providing parents with important information. Each year group has specific monthly newsletters to provide further information throughout the course of the academic year.

## 11. *Standard 7*

### The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedures for handling complaints fully meet host country requirements and reflect practices commonly seen in UK independent schools.

There is a formal complaints procedure that is transparent, open and effective. The school has ensured local laws and regulations are rigorously adhered to. The complaints procedure is available to parents and its procedures are rigorously adhered to. Written records of any complaint are kept and clear time scales are set out for the management and resolution of any complaint.

Through its open approach to parents most concerns are resolved through direct contact between a parent and class teacher. Any complaints that are unresolved through initial contact are referred to the Principal. If a complaint is unresolved parents are aware they can contact the School Board in writing for further consideration of any outstanding issues.

Parents are aware that if a complaint remains unresolved then the Ministry of Education will act on their behalf as final arbitrators. Parent feedback indicates a high degree of satisfaction with both the speed of response and the outcome of any complaint.

## 12. *Standard 8*

### The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

## 13. Standard 9 Leadership and management of the school

Overall, leadership and management meet the standard for accreditation.

The school has a clear mission that informs the future direction of the school and over time this vision is being reinforced to all parents and students.

The proprietor and board are aware of the need to monitor the educational outcomes of the school and are gaining a greater insight through the development of self evaluation and school development planning.

In a short space of time the Principal and senior leadership team has implemented a range of key policies and procedures to enable the school to establish itself securely. The school has used self-evaluation to enable them to develop a clearer picture of strengths and areas for development. As yet the school has not had the opportunity to demonstrate sustained progress over time due to its newness. The leadership team ensures the school operates smoothly on a day to day basis.

The school has been through a significant period of change in its short history. Teaching is improving through monitoring and systems of performance management are having a positive impact. Evidence of sustained long term development is not yet clear due to the short operation time of the school.

The school has been successful in developing an ethos that promotes positive behaviour and attitudes amongst all students and this has been a major accomplishment during the past year. Parents also identify this improvement as a key achievement of their school.

Delegation of leadership has been undertaken; however there is a lack of clarity regarding some roles and responsibilities. Procedures for holding staff truly accountable for the desired outcomes are at an early stage and an area for further professional development. The school has identified the need for a more rigorous approach to monitoring, tracking and assessment. This will be a key area of responsibility for middle leaders as the school moves from an initial period of 'set-up' to a focus on maintaining high standards.

The school leadership team recognises and values the contribution made by both teaching and non-teaching staff in ensuring all students are well cared for and have the opportunity to learn.