



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

Ras Al Khaimah Academy

United Arab Emirates

Date 18th –20th October 2015
Inspection number 20151018

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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 pupils; 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 pupils and pupils' achievements.

This inspection was completed by Penta International UK. 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 accreditation visit, 106 full or part lessons were observed, school documentation and policies were analysed, pupils' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions, both formal and informal, were held with a member of the governing body, senior staff, middle managers and a range of teachers and a group of pupils from each of the key stages. A focus group of parents were consulted about their views of the school. The accreditation team were in school for three days.

The lead inspector was John Cranfield. The team members were Douglas Briggs, Matthew Burfield, Geraldine Cranfield, Craig Halsall, Kirsty Jacob, Penny Koutsantonis and John Nolan.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

Ras Al Khaimah Academy meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas accreditation.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

After a period of turbulence, Ras Al Khaimah Academy (RAKA) is now providing a satisfactory education, underpinned by good pupil care. Overall, the quality of learning and teaching are satisfactory or better. Most pupils make progress in line with their ability: a few do better than that. The senior leadership team has a sound understanding of the strengths of the school and areas requiring improvement. Parents interviewed are happy with their choice of school. The curriculum is broad and balanced, enhanced by a range of extra-curricular activities. The board has moved from providing operational to more strategic support. They are beginning to hold the executive principal to account.

3.1 What the school does well

Ras Al Khaimah Academy has many strengths which include:

- the support given by the board of governors;
- highly positive relationship between the Executive Principal and the board;
- the school is well managed and runs well on a day-to-day basis;
- the new leadership teams are beginning to successfully establish a culture in which staff are given the confidence and support to successfully implement change;
- the provision of resources both human and facilities which support pupils' learning;
- classrooms across the academy offering a positive learning environment;
- parental support of the school;
- positive pupil and staff relationships;
- pupils showing respect for each other in class and around the school;
- the care and pastoral guidance of the pupils is a strength;
- the school establishing a culture of openness and honesty as reflected in the self-study.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Implement and rigorously monitor a comprehensive marking, assessment and tracking process which provides all stakeholders with information that clearly indicates attainment, progress and future targets.
- Develop a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning practice to ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged.
- Equip middle and senior leaders with the essential skills and knowledge required to raise standards of teaching, learning and pupil attainment.

4. The context of the school

Ras Al Khaimah Academy (RAKA) is one of the oldest and largest international schools in the UAE.

The school was originally founded in 1975; opening under the name RAK English Speaking School with just 20 primary school, expatriate pupils. Since 1988 the school has been under the royal patronage of His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, the Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah. The Secondary School opened in 1994. IB Diploma and Primary Years Programme have been offered to pupils since 2006. A British Curriculum Primary School opened in 2007.

Today the school comprises two neighbouring campuses divided by a road. On one campus there are two primary schools. RAK Academy BC offers a British-style curriculum for primary age pupils (3-11 years). RAK Academy IB offers an International Primary Curriculum (IBPYP). The other campus comprises a secondary school offering IGCSE, IB Diploma and A/S Levels. UAE Ministry of Education requirements for the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies are fully met.

Collectively the school educates over 3,500 pupils from 75 nationalities. Emiratis make up 60% of the total.

Preceding the appointment of the current executive principal, there were several years of instability in the senior leadership, especially within the secondary school and executive principal level. The school is now stable after a period of rapid growth and turbulence.

4.1 British nature of the school

The British nature of the school meets the standard required.

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 is a member of British Schools in the Middle East (BSME).

The school is organised according to the structures used in English schools. Classroom management, displays of work, three term year, age-related year groups and the importance given to pastoral care, head boy and girl, prefects and school councils contribute to a British feel of the school. UK practice informs performance management, staff target setting and annual review meetings. The school uses a range of UK assessments in addition to data from the University of Durham's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) to track the progress of its pupils against those in the UK.

All communications from the school to families and pupils are provided in English, as are all school publications, reports, letters and the website. The importance of extra-curricular provision including clubs and school trips are in line with British practice.

Texts, materials, educational equipment and software are mainly UK sourced. Parents interviewed appreciated the British style of education on offer.

5. *Standard 1*

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided at RAK Academy is satisfactory, with aspects of good. It fully meets the requirements of the BSO Framework.

5.1 Curriculum

There is full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age, fully meeting Ras Al Khaimah regulatory requirements. In addition, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) pre-K curriculum provide an appropriate programme of activities for the youngest pupils. The principal language of instruction is English.

The curriculum is supported by policy documents and schemes of work which demonstrate how pupils of all ages are challenged and supported. There is evidence of planning for progression. Implementation enables pupils to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. The broad and balanced curriculum gives pupils experience in a wide range of areas of learning, including linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative education.

The school is in the process of better aligning the PYP and English National Curriculum in the primary school in order to ease transition into Key Stage 3 in the secondary school. Nearly all teachers and most teaching assistants have a good knowledge of the learning, development and welfare requirements of the youngest pupils which promotes their learning, social, physical and economic well-being.

Across Key Stages 1 and 2 there are specialist lessons for ICT, PE, music, art and modified design and technology. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is based on the National Curriculum of England and Wales. Pupils in Key Stage 4 follow courses of study leading to IGCSE qualifications. In Key Stage 5 pupils can study for AS/A2 qualifications or the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

Across the academy pupils with learning difficulties are supported through a combination of individual education plans, extra support and access to a school counsellor. Parents are involved in the process. The school is aware that policies and procedures are not consistently applied. The academy has recently established a student support services committee to provide a single point of contact.

The secondary school curriculum is enhanced by a planned PSHE programme. In the primary schools PSHE topics are covered during assemblies. The academy is presently reviewing provision for gifted and talented students. In the upper school, a member of

staff has responsibility for careers advice and university entrance. All pupils in primary and secondary have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of after school activities, including sporting and musical.

Pupils care and concern extends beyond the school. They are involved in fund raising for disaster hit regions around the world, supporting a local animal welfare centre and cleaning beaches.

RAK Academy takes into account the types of curriculum and external examinations commonly used in schools in the UK. This enables pupils to enter, or re-enter the UK educational system.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory or better, with a few lessons unsatisfactory. Teaching enables nearly all pupils to make satisfactory progress across the key stages according to their ability, thereby increasing their understanding and skill development in the subjects taught.

Across the academy, most lessons encourage pupils to apply intellectual, physical or creative efforts and show an interest in their work and think for themselves. The quality of lesson planning and teaching is better in the primary sections. In the secondary school, planning is weekly rather than for the individual lesson. Overall, suitable activities are planned and delivered; class time is generally well managed. Most teachers across the academy have a sound understanding of the aptitudes, cultural background, learning needs of pupils including EAL learners and prior pupil attainment. In an outstanding Year 11 biology lesson, effective pair work enabled pupils to reinforce their understanding of the functions of a kidney. Whilst lesson objectives signpost future learning, learning outcomes are rarely differentiated and too wide to easily assess during or at the end of the lesson. Differentiation is almost entirely by outcome. There is little evidence of specific planning and resourcing to better meet the needs of the more able. The absence of planned assessment for learning (AfL) techniques in many lessons is a missed opportunity for pupils to reflect on the extent to which they have mastered the learning outcomes, provide the teacher with additional assessment evidence to underpin future planning and target pupils requiring extra challenge and additional support.

Most teachers demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. Classroom resources are of a good quality, quantity and range. They are mainly used effectively. Across the academy however many pupils are not being given sufficient opportunities to master independent learning skills. In nearly all lessons behaviour is good. In some lessons, where additional adults were present their use was not effective; they did not interact constructively with individual or groups of pupils and received little or no guidance from the teacher. In a few lessons the youngest pupils spent too much time on the mat resulting in some restlessness.

Throughout the academy, teachers are developing the use of a range of tools including InCAS, MidYIS and Yellis, to provide baseline and age related diagnostic information. The academy carries out formal and informal assessment on a regular basis. The development of 'Common Assessments' across the secondary school has the potential to provide a more standardised approach to assessment and facilitate continuity across departments. The use of assessment data to inform lesson planning and reliably evidence value added for an individual and groups of pupils is less well established.

The quality of marking across the academy is inconsistent. Interviewed pupils reported that in many subjects they receive little or no written guidance in their exercise books on how to improve.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

Overall standards achieved meet those required for BSO.

Most pupils entering Foundation Stage 1, Pre-KG and KG1 are judged to be below age related expectations and have a minimum standard of functional English. Many pupils enter school with very little experience of social interaction beyond the home, and many have limited experience of language. Those with good language skills in other languages, pick up English relatively quickly. The language of play in Early Years, Pre-KG and KG is English, although in many Foundation Stage classes Arabic was used by many of the children. Throughout the Foundation Stage, pupils make sound progress in learning to speak English. Standards of social and personal development are good: pupils are respectful of each other and their teachers, and enjoy learning.

Key Stage 1 teacher assessments indicate that the percentage of pupils attaining level 2b+ in all areas except writing was largely in line with UK expectations. By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils are working broadly in line with UK expectations in mathematics and science and just below for English.

Attainment data for Key Stage 4 indicates that most pupils make progress in line with their ability, some better. Yellis data indicates 49% of the cohort are in band C or D. 44% of pupils gained 5 A*-C grades, including English and mathematics.

At Key Stage 5, 46% of pupils achieved A - C grades at AS level compared to 37% in 2014. Eight of the 15 subjects studied demonstrated value-added. Only 7 pupils sat A2 examinations. From the 9 pupils following the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme, 8 achieved the diploma with an average point score of 30. The highest score was 39 points. The average grade was 4.93, compared to a UAE average of 5.05 and a world average of 4.99. Results were in line with or above expectations in all but one subject.

The school is successful in helping pupils to develop their personal skills and qualities: pupils are thoughtful and well behaved. By the time they leave school, nearly all have the personal and social skills needed to move successfully to the next stage of their lives.

6. *Standard 2* The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good.

Across the academy, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good in all respects and they have, or are improving in, self-confidence. They develop their understanding of spirituality; moral, social and cultural awareness through a combination of assemblies, PSHE lessons and the informal curriculum as they move through the school. Awe and wonder is evident, especially in the early years where moments of discovery provide opportunities for children to reflect on the world around them. For Muslim students, the principles of right and wrong are supported through Islamic studies and the Quran.

Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to work in pairs in order to reinforce the necessary social skills that underpin effective pair and small group work. Pupils' views are valued and praise is used effectively to motivate and acknowledge achievements. They are respectful of others' views and cultures and are strongly committed to promote good relationships between people regardless of age, cultural background, social class, race or gender. Teachers or classroom assistants quickly address any rare instances of unacceptable behavior to safeguard the well-being of the other children.

Tolerance, democracy, respect for freedom of expression and other human rights are developed throughout the school. As pupils progress through the school, rich curriculum experiences ensure they broaden and deepen their understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship not only in the UAE but also the UK and internationally. Participation in International Charity Day and UAE National Day enhance their understanding

A spirit of internationalism is embedded in the curriculum. The school shares information about Britain to support their pupils and parents should they wish to relocate to live or study in the UK.

7. *Standard 3*

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils at RAK Academy are good.

The school doctor and counsellor are well established and operate with clear policies and guidelines, effectively managing links to the Ministries of Health and Ministry of Education. There are appropriate referral and reporting systems. Liaison with pastoral staff and management is planned and regular. The counsellor is the child protection officer, and has undergone training and established links with outside agencies. The counsellor and doctor stated they felt well supported and resourced; their rooms are spacious and welcoming for pupils. Information on pupil medical conditions is distributed through relevant pastoral staff. Arrangements to promote good behaviour are very effective and result in a calm learning environment. In the early years, adults are well deployed to ensure pupil safety.

The school promotes healthy eating and lifestyles, through oversight of the canteen provision, the availability of healthy lunchboxes and involvement with the RAKA 'Sahi' programme. First aid boxes, water dispensers and evacuation procedure notices are distributed throughout the school. 50 staff have received first aid training, are known to all staff and distributed across the campus.

Arrivals and departures by bus and car are managed well. Inappropriate parking is challenged by duty and security staff. Bus attendants check pupils on and off buses as well as insisting on the wearing of seat-belts. The three schools are on two large adjoining sites. Access is controlled with a sign-in and visitor pass system. During the visit some side gates were open and unmanned. This was addressed during the visit.

Fire drills are held regularly, and pupils across the academy are familiar with procedures and expectations. An emergency evacuation during the accreditation visit was orderly and quick, although two disabled students on an upper floor in primary were not catered for. Planning for lockdown procedures is underway, and there are displays for earthquake drills throughout the school.

There been a concerted drive to improve attendance. Attendance during the accreditation visit was 94% and 91% for the term to date

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

The chairman of the board, His Highness Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qassimi, and all board members are of high standing and well regarded in the local community. The board oversee school policies and the strategic direction of the school. They do not interfere with the management of the school; there are clear lines of demarcation. All local requirements are met, including the right to work in the host country; suitability to work with children and appropriate certificates of suitability. The board ensures the school fulfils the safety, care and guidance requirements for all pupils. In addition they take responsibility for the checking of staff credentials.

Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks, including police checks in the country of origin, are carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in the UAE and their previous employment activity.

There is a list of all staff who currently work in the school. This is regularly updated and shows when they started and stopped working in the school. The school does not employ supply teachers.

Staffing levels are more than adequate for the successful delivery of the curriculum. All teaching staff have qualifications appropriate to their role; some staff have further academic or teaching qualifications that enhance school development.

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The quality of the premises and accommodation are outstanding.

The academy buildings are purpose built and well maintained. Facilities include 196 classrooms, 12 science laboratories, three libraries, a three-storey media centre, two theatres, two gymnasiums, two swimming pools, two grass soccer fields, four tennis courts and outside covered play areas, and three cafeterias. The two campuses cover over 23 acres in total. There are extensive IT suites on both sites, including over 700 networked computers school-wide and Smart Board technology in most classrooms. Classrooms are arranged to facilitate highly effective teaching and learning. Furniture and fittings are appropriately designed for the age and needs of all children. The central areas, corridors and classrooms are bright and conducive to learning. This was more apparent in the primary sections and pockets of the secondary school.

Sound insulation and acoustics allow effective teaching and communication. Lighting, heating and ventilation are effective. Flooring throughout the site is well maintained and is in excellent condition

Outdoor areas facilitate a wide range of play opportunities, support physical development and enhance the PE provision. Washroom facilities are plentiful, hygienic and easily accessible. Medical facilities on site are good with designated facilities for students with health issues.

The site has sufficient access to ensure emergency evacuations can be accomplished safely and speedily. All pupils are able to enter and leave the school in safety and comfort. Policy and procedures provide clear detail and guidance for relevant staff.

Water and drainage systems meet local requirements and are tested regularly. Parents and other visitors sign in and are given ID badges on entry into the building. Security teams are on duty 24/7. The school is aware of the need to ensure all side gates remain locked during the school day. There are plentiful areas for shade during non-contact time. Appropriate provision is made for religious observations.

The school has appropriate recruitment policies and procedures designed to attract and retain highly qualified and committed staff.

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others meets the standard required.

Contact details of the school and the proprietor are readily available. RAK Academy vision and ethos are featured in relevant documents and publications. However, it has yet to become an effective driving force for school improvement.

Prospective parents are given the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions. Key school policies and the curriculum on offer are available on a parent portal, part of the school's website. Particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year are waiting to be uploaded onto the school's web site. The complaints procedure is available on request.

The school communicates with parents through emails, school website, scheduled parent-teacher meetings and informal meetings with parents. Pupils are provided with a diary that can also be used as a home-school communication tool. Whilst parents are invited to the annual Options Evening for Year 9 pupils, this did not extend to Year 6 - 7 transition arrangements. The school calendar depicts key dates, for example, national holidays. Workshops are run for parents and feedback is given through the website, for example, Family Day or Literacy Workshop. Newsletters in the PYP and secondary school provide additional information.

A parent handbook provides information about the school and its staff, basic information about school processes, means of communication between home and school, as well as the school policy on lateness and absence. A blog is used in PYP to enhance communication. Some parents were concerned with the amount of 'screen' time that was now required of their children.

Whilst the school issues reports at the end of term, module and year, some interviewed parents stated they were unclear about the progress of their children during the term and had to wait for parent teacher meetings.

Following the inspection, a copy of the full report will be placed on the school's website.

11. *Standard 7*

The school's procedure for handling complaints

Complaints are rare and nearly always resolved informally. The class or subject teacher is consulted first, but if an issue is not resolved, it can be raised with the subject, year and senior leaders. All parents have easy access to class teachers and senior leaders at the start and end of the school day.

Parents have the opportunity to present their case to the executive principal and if unresolved to the Board of Governors. Confidentiality is assured by all parties involved in the complaints process. All records are stored in the central offices where they can be accessed by the appropriate bodies at a later date if required. In discussion with inspectors, parents stated they felt confident about raising concerns, should they have any.

12. *Standard 8*

The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

13. Standard 9 Leadership and management of the school

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory.

There is a very positive relationship between the executive headteacher and the board who ensure sufficiency of resources through robust financial management. The school runs well on a day-to-day basis. The executive principal is well supported by his senior leadership team. Through its recent self-evaluation, which takes into account the views of all major stakeholders, the senior leadership team is developing a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There has been significant development of academy wide policies and procedures. Not all policies are fully embedded as yet. The executive principal has recognised the need to ensure that all senior leaders and middle managers have the skills to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Teaching is improving as a result of monitoring but this needs to be more rigorous and sustained. The academy's curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn and make progress. The academy has identified the need for a more consistent and rigorous approach to monitoring, tracking and assessment. Behaviour in class and around the school is good. Whilst all teachers undergo performance management reviews, the absence of pupil attainment targets is a missed opportunity to continue to raise standards. The outcomes of performance management and whole school priorities have yet to impact fully on the school's programme for continuous professional development.

The academy actively seeks to recruit quality staff and ensures safeguarding procedures are in place. The leadership team is developing strategies for engaging more effectively with parents and carers.