



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

# **Inspection report The Aquila School**

Date **23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

Inspection number **20220223**

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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, care for pupils and pupils' 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, over 70 lesson observations took place, as well as a series of learning walks. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, and a range of teachers, parents and groups of pupils. The inspection team were in school for three days.

The lead inspector was Colin Dyson. The team members were Sharon Barr, Siobhan Brady and Nicola Walsh.

## 2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The Aquila School has shown that it meets the standards for British Schools Overseas, except for those that cannot be achieved legally in the host country. These pertain to aspects of the UK Equality Act 2010. The school actively promotes tolerance and a respect for all human differences, within the confines of the law. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school. This judgement is endorsed by the British Government and is valid for three years. The inspection process is quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

### 3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The Aquila School provides a very high quality education that meets the needs of its pupils. It has numerous outstanding features and is continuing to develop further through innovation.

The school provides an impressive quality of education supported by an outstanding level of pupil care. The school provides a robust and highly effective British education that meets the needs of its pupils. The school's curriculum is broad, balanced, and innovative: pupils are engaged in their learning. Teachers make good use of the wide range of resources and creative outdoor spaces, to plan interesting lessons across all subject areas. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they enjoy school. As a result, pupils make at least good progress across all key stages becoming highly confident and successful learners.

The school is supported by a board that is effective in providing strategic direction and support.

#### 3.1 What the school does well

The school has many strengths including:

- the ethos of the school which has encouraged the development of a harmonious learning community that enables pupils to feel fully valued
- there is highly effective leadership by the principal who is passionate in enabling all pupils to succeed
- outstanding spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development of the learners
- strong emphasis on the pupils' welfare, health and safety
- strong and positive relationships between staff, learners and parents
- outstanding day-to-day organisation and logistics
- strong relationships between teachers and learners, and learners and their peers
- excellent links with parents and the community
- confident sharing of school values and communication of these to stakeholders
- the commitment of staff, including administrative and support staff, to the well-being of pupils
- senior staff are effectively managing the rapid growth of the school
- the school has implemented a successful approach to language and reading across the whole school
- the effective partnership with the Hemam Centre ensures all pupils can access appropriate learning support
- robust and highly appropriate protocols to minimise the risk of infection during the pandemic

## 3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Further improve the quality of learning and teaching by sharing the best practices of the outstanding teachers to create even more memorable learning opportunities through highly engaging lessons for all pupils.
- Enable middle leaders to be fully supported in monitoring key aspects and holding others to account to ensure any inconsistencies in the quality of planning, teaching, and learning challenge are minimised.
- As the school grows even further, provide all staff with the development opportunities and resources to fully support an innovative curriculum and inspiring learning opportunities.

## 4. The context of the school

Full name of school	The Aquila School				
Address	Wadi Al Safa 5 Dubai Land Residence Complex Dubai United Arab Emirates				
Telephone Number/s	+971 4 586 2700				
Fax Number	+971 4 586 2700				
Website Address	<a href="http://www.theaquilaschool.com">www.theaquilaschool.com</a>				
Key Email Address/s	<a href="mailto:info@theaquilaschool.com">info@theaquilaschool.com</a>				
Principal	Wayne Howsen				
Chair of Board of Governors/ Proprietor	Dr Mark Evans				
Age Range	3 – 15 (FS1 to Year 9)				
Total number of pupils	858	Boys	490	Girls	368
Numbers by age	0-2 years	0	12-16 years	159	
	3-5 years	161	17-18 years	0	
	6-11 years	538	18+ years	0	
Total number of part-time children	1				

The Aquila School opened in September 2018, initially offering education from foundation stage (FS) 1 to year 6. It is growing by one year group each year. The school now has pupils up to year 9 and Key Stage 4 is due to open in September 2022.

The school is owned by a London-based company, International Schools Partnership. The company owns schools around the world. The Aquila School is their first new-build-from-scratch project. It is considered to be the flagship school of the company: it won 'Best Design Education Project of the Year' at the Design Middle East Awards 2018.

The Aquila school is a highly effective school due to strong leadership from the principal, board members and senior leaders. The quality of teaching is at least consistently good and as a result pupils achieve well in all aspects of their education and development. Pupils and their teachers enjoy school. Strong relationships based on mutual trust and understanding are evident throughout the school.

The word 'Aquila' comes from a constellation on the celestial equator. Its name is Latin for 'eagle' and represents the bird that carried Zeus/Jupiter's thunderbolts in Greco-Roman mythology. The school has a parrot named Aquila – and the parrot features on stickers all over the school. The Aquila school's mission is to ensure every child loves coming to school and makes as much progress as possible. The school actively tries to be as inclusive as possible and hosts the Hemam Centre providing 1-1 therapy for children with very complex needs. These pupils then integrate into class as and when appropriate.

## 4.1 British nature of the school

The Aquila School has a strong British flavour and ethos:

- The school is organised in a typically British way, both academically and pastorally.
- The curriculum for Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) and for Key Stages (KS) 1-3 is strongly based on the English National Curriculum, adapted to the local context.
- The school provides a wide range of educational visits, after-school activities as well as musical and drama events, typical of good independent schools in the UK.
- Management and administration terminology used in school is British.
- All of the English National curriculum teachers are British/Irish qualified and trained or equivalent.
- Teachers' continuous professional development is based on UK developments and is often run by trainers from the UK.
- School resources are largely sourced from the UK.
- British culture is recognised in a variety of ways – the annual Poppy Appeal, seasonal concerts and events.
- Effective international links with schools and pupils across the world, such as pen pal links with the UK.
- Communications from the school to families and pupils are provided in English, as are all school publications, reports, letters and the website.
- Extra-curricular provision, including clubs and school trips, are very important in the life of the school, and in line with British best practice.
- The school is an active member of the British Schools in the Middle East.



## 5. Standard 1

### The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided is highly effective and there are significant outstanding features. The school fully meets the standards for BSO.

#### 5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum at The Aquila School is excellent.

The school provides a rich, broad and balanced curriculum. It offers appropriate frameworks for use in EYFS through to key stage 3. The school follows the National Curriculum for England and Wales and the principal language for instruction is English. The curriculum ensures that local requirements are fully met. Arabic language is taught to native and non-native speakers. A strength of the school is the scale of inclusivity that it generates and the range of ability levels for which it provides.

The EYFS follows the new Development Matters guidance from the DfE to implement the EYFS curriculum. Staff have received training in this.

There is a strong focus on literacy skills as this is identified as a weak area for children on entry to Aquila. Resources are very well used to promote language, for example in the Literacy Garden. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers secure pupils' curiosity and independence through a balance of teacher led, play based and child-initiated learning. Teachers plan topics and activities that are relevant and well matched to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils.

An outdoor learning area provides a safe and stimulating environment. Pupils in EYFS and key stage 1 are taught phonics through a range of strategies. The EYFS curriculum ensures that all pupils have access to a wide range of opportunities to encourage and support their learning needs. Detailed planning and high-quality support from teaching assistants in EYFS ensures that pupils, with a range of learning needs, can fully access the curriculum, including child-initiated play and outdoor learning experiences. Central areas for continuous provision are used to promote independence and allow children to lead their own learning. The curriculum is adapted to take the local context into account, for example when the children attended the Dubai Expo.

Children have specialist lessons for music, swimming and PE, and all children learn Arabic from FS1.

The school has an external provider, the Hemam Centre, which provides specialist teaching and therapy for children with more severe additional needs. These children join in with mainstream children, alongside a 1:1 assistant from Hemam, for some lessons.

Pupils entering the primary years enjoy British topics and themes that are studied in UK schools. Good quality English literature is shared with pupils such as *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. This was evident in displays and pupils' workbooks. The key stage 1 curriculum is well matched to the needs of the pupils and builds very effectively upon the learning in foundation stage. There is a strong focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills; phonics, handwriting and story time is delivered regularly across the key stage.

A wide range of high-quality resources are used effectively to engage pupils in the learning, become independent and embed concepts. Reading has a high profile within the curriculum, guided reading is delivered by teachers to groups of pupils at least weekly. Pupils also take home reading books each week that are chosen to develop fluency and offer a level of challenge.

The curriculum in key stage 2 offers a wide variety of subjects including specialist teachers for swimming, PE, Spanish, music, Arabic and Islamic. The curriculum has been adapted to ensure English and literacy is prominent within all subject areas.

Cross-curricula opportunities are embedded within core subjects to ensure pupils have a wide variety of topics including Human Rights and links to both the UK and UAE. The curriculum is supported by residential trips and opportunities to learn outside of the classroom. The curriculum is adapted for the children with specific learning needs through the partnership with the Hemam centre.

The ethos and high levels of pastoral care established in the primary school follows through to the secondary school, with young people's ability to develop resilience, approach challenges positively, and work collaboratively for the good of the whole community being central to their learning.

In key stage 3, while pupils are taught separately by subject specialists, the approach to teaching and learning is active, engaging and innovative.

The school teaches the English National Curriculum, together with the Ministry of Education curricular requirements. Teachers ensure that curriculum planning, and delivery builds upon what pupils have learnt in previous lessons. In year 7 PE pupils recalled what skill they learnt the previous week, when learning how to play badminton. Year 8 pupils recalled the previous weeks learning in a maths lesson on corresponding angles and made rapid gains in understanding. The curriculum is used creatively by teachers to plan lessons that engage pupils.

Teachers work hard to enable learners to shape parts of their own learning. The school follows a dedicated strategy to help learners become more independent. The Aquila school has actively created a culture of ownership for learners. In lessons, teachers are confident and offer lots of praise and encouragement. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. Teachers typically use a wide range of teaching techniques: group work, paired work, individual work and class learning. The pupils communicated confidently with each other and with the adults in the room. Classroom time is well managed, and pace is appropriate.

The Aquila school will expand to key stage 4 in the 2022/2023 academic year.

## 5.2 Teaching and assessment

Overall, the quality of teaching and assessment is highly effective with many outstanding features.

In FS1 and 2 the learning is often particularly effective because of the excellent balance of child-initiated and teacher-supported learning. The best lessons are based on a clear understanding of how young children learn effectively. The most effective teachers inspire and engage pupils through practical learning. Teachers use effective questioning and promote collaboration. Involvement in 'pupil voice' enables many to learn specific skills related to teamwork, communication, and leadership.

Teaching is at least good, with some excellent features. In the best lessons, children were given opportunities to explore, for example in an FS1 lesson when children had to look at different types of materials to make a coat for Humpty Dumpty

Behaviour is excellent, and teachers manage the children expertly. In FS1 and 2, the strong emphasis on personal and social development ensures learners are confident in the environment and ready to learn new skills. With the support of their teachers, pupils are encouraged to collaborate and share. Pupils are actively engaged in the activities available. There is a calm environment where pupils are playing and learning happily alongside each other. Independence is encouraged and pupils know teachers are there to support them. High quality resources are used in lessons, for example Numicon and where possible, resources made of natural materials.

Provision could be enhanced for the most able children and allow more opportunities for stretch and challenge. Children with additional needs are well supported by the phase inclusion teacher and are supported in accessing the curriculum as appropriate. Teachers use Classroom Monitor to track children's attainment, and this is updated weekly and monitored by the phase leader. *Wellcomm* is used to screen all children in EYFS for any speech and language delay, and action taken by the inclusion teacher if delays are identified. An example of this was when the inclusion teacher took a child with an identified speech delay to the hydroponics farm to feed the rabbits, providing an exciting opportunity for the child to produce language

In primary, teachers plan tasks that enable the pupils to learn at the appropriate level of the English National Curriculum. In lessons, teachers are confident and offer effective praise and encouragement. They manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. Time is well managed. Teachers have secure knowledge of the English National Curriculum and plan purposeful lessons which both sustain pupils' interest and often challenge their thinking. In one highly effective lesson, the teacher modelled the steps required to share 8 pineapples between 2 parrots.

As the pupils move through key stages 1 and 2, they are immersed in a language rich environment which supports their learning with the encouragement to 'up level' their language during discussion. Assessment for learning allows teachers to effectively establish pupils' progress within the lesson and target questions to move learning forward. In the most effective lessons additional intervention was given to various groups to provide further differentiated support and to extend their understanding. Good use of questioning prompts like 'why?' and 'tell me how you know that' were used.

Consistency is required to ensure activities allow for differentiation including challenge for the more able. In some lessons pupils did not make progress due to already being secure in the topic being taught. Pupils spoke with confidence about their learning. Resources are plentiful and used well by teachers to enable pupils to learn easily. The effective organisation by the teaching staff with the quality and range of resources they were able to use, supported high quality learning. Assessment policies and timetables are in place to monitor pupils' achievements. These are implemented effectively.

In key stage 3, behaviour for learning is a significant strength across the secondary school. Pupils make good progress in their lessons and demonstrate significant learning over time. Teachers plan lessons using assessment information and most routinely check that previous learning has been secured by a variety of methods. Positive teacher, pupil relationships foster trust and motivation. In the best lessons, teachers assessed understanding and offered challenge through skilful questioning. Lessons are well-planned, clear and focused. Teachers have secure knowledge of the English National Curriculum and learning objectives are set for all lessons and many of the learners are well aware of the purpose and direction of learning. Assessment policies and timetables are in place to monitor pupils' achievements. These are implemented effectively.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and most share their enthusiasm for their subject with the pupils and teaching is frequently outstanding. Nearly all teachers in the secondary school use a highly effective range of questioning to assess pupils' understanding in lessons. In a science lesson on monitoring heart rate changes, the teacher encouraged pupil interaction that was very supportive in the development of specific technical language. The use of partner talk in an English lesson on evaluating a text based on World War II was highly effective and pupils demonstrated a high level of empathy as they reviewed each other's contributions and understanding. A highly effective hybrid English lesson inspired pupils and led to most achieving outstanding progress as they discussed effective topic opening sentences for paragraphs.

## 5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

The behaviour and attitudes of the pupils is outstanding and is a genuine strength of the whole school which enables learning to take place in a very positive environment. In lessons, pupils are mostly engaged in their learning and keen to achieve. This attitude is reflected around the school, where there is very little evidence of behaviour issues. The pupils are articulate, and their spoken English is of a very high standard. Pupil monitoring and tracking data demonstrates that nearly all make good progress and many make 'better' than good.

The majority of children entering EYFS do not have English as their native language, therefore baseline assessments identify their attainment in literacy and mathematics as weak.

In EYFS, teachers mark attainment on Classroom Monitor, which is reviewed weekly by phase leader and termly by SLT during pupil progress meetings. The phase leader identifies trends in Classroom Monitor data and actions change where necessary. Children make significant progress in all areas of learning. This is evidenced in data which is informed by teacher assessments.

The standard of pupils writing by the time they leave year 2 is good. Pupils write fluently using a cursive style and have a range of strategies to help them write independently at length. Reading is good across the key stage; most pupils read fluently and can talk about their reading. Pupils in year 1 were observed reading high frequency words on sight and using phonic attempts to write them. Pupil's behaviour and attitude are exemplary and where pupils need reminding of how to behave, this is appropriate and timely. In some lessons pupils did not make progress due to already being secure in the topic being taught consistency in planning is required to ensure activities allow for differentiation including challenge for the more able. Pupils are immersed in a language rich environment which supports their learning with the encouragement to 'up level' their language during discussion. Assessment for learning allows teachers to effectively establish pupils' progress within the lesson and target questions to move learning forward.

Well planned lessons ensured that very little time was lost and that resources were appropriate and well prepared.

The standards in pupils' workbooks and displays indicates pupils are working at an age-related expectation and above in English, and at the expected level in maths. Display work across the primary school was of a very high standard and work displayed is created and presented by the pupils. Displays included, work where pupils wrote letters at length to the classroom inspired by the book, 'The day the crayon quit', labelled diagrams of an Orca, investigated habitats in science, and wrote about a house in Arabic.

Across the secondary school, small class sizes combined with a clear teacher understanding of the learning needs of each pupil, ensure at least good and often excellent progress is made. Pupils were challenged in a maths lesson to problem solve angle sizes involved in a game construction. This provided a real-life activity that motivated and engaged learner's interest.

A range of assessment strategies were observed in lessons, with peer assessment and feedback effectively used. Marking is becoming more consistent with next steps and evidence of pupils responding to comments. This is a key focus for further development as cohorts and year groups expand across the school.

The provision for pupils with SEND is excellent. The department consists of a well-qualified Head of Inclusion, an inclusion teacher for each phase and a teacher who works with children in the Hemam centre. The department is very well resourced, with dedicated classrooms. The Hemam centre is an external provider and staff from Hemam work with Aquila children in a suite of rooms at school, delivering speech and language, occupational and behaviour therapies. The children attend mainstream classes with an assistant where appropriate throughout the day.

## 6. *Standard 2* Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils provided by The Aquila School fully meets and exceeds the requirements of the BSO standards.

The provision for pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupil's attitudes to school are exemplary and this is reflected in both their behaviour and attendance. In all lessons observed pupils were engaged and eager to learn. The relationships between the pupils and their teachers is very positive. Behaviour between lessons and at break times shows the courteous and sensible attitudes of the pupils.

The positive nature of teachers allows for feedback to be given and one pupil said that "Teachers always help and never shrug you off." The environment lends itself to pupils being confident to make mistakes. Pupils want to improve, and one pupil said they tell themselves, "I am good at this, I can do this".

The consistent use of the behaviour policy ensures positive praise is prevalent in every lesson. Pupils receive 'Golden Tickets' when they exceed the 'golden rules'. Aquila Awards are also awarded for amazing learning. During the weekly assembly, broadcast to the whole school, pupils who receive an Aquila Awards are individually celebrated. Those receiving golden tickets are chosen at random to win a prize. During the inspection 1525 golden tickets were achieved. Any negative behaviours are dealt with quickly and restorative practices are followed.

Pupils are given opportunities to be reflective about their perspectives on life and the perspectives of others. The use of imagination and creativity in their learning supports their well-being, fascination for the world around them and consequently their spiritual development. Reading, a demonstrable strength of the school, transports pupils to diverse cultures and allows them to learn about and reflect on the richness of human experience and the wonders of the physical world around them. The library offers a 'don't judge a book by its cover' option which allows pupils the opportunity to read something different.

The school successfully promotes the fundamental British values of democracy and the rule of law. All pupils have the opportunity to lead and based on pupil voice the school has now introduced a hoodie to their uniform. Pupils also take part in Model United Nations and a TEDx talk this academic year with the title 'Sometimes I Pretend to be Normal'. The PSHE curriculum is annually reviewed and adapted based on the cohort's needs. Human rights and tolerance is embedded within the curriculum and is taught in English through texts such as *The Boy at the Back of the Class*. Due to the challenge's pupils faced during the pandemic the school plans on upskilling the secondary teachers to receive training in Mental Health First Aid.

The intensely international and multicultural composition of the school's pupil and staff population underpins the understanding and celebration of cultural diversity. Pupils are



encouraged to participate in charitable activities such as raising money for the Red Crescent charity through dress up days. The local community receive food donations, gifts at Eid and the school also hosts a Ramadan Fridge. Connections with other organisations such as Sanad Village will allow further opportunities for pupils to have better understanding of differences within the community.

A wide range of school trips and residential visits, exploring the local communities and further afield, provide additional personal, social, and cultural enrichment opportunities. During the inspection, pupils were taking part in both a residential visit and a trip to the Dubai Expo. In years 7-9 pupils will be travelling to Kenya to volunteer in an orphanage. It is evident that the school is preparing its pupils well for the next stage of their life-long learning and citizenship in the global community. Pupils are surveyed to ask them what they wish to do during extra-curricular activities.

The Eco-warriors lead assemblies and host competitions to raise awareness of sustainability. Through these competitions trees have been planted in the school grounds on behalf of the winners. An ongoing initiative led by the Eco-warriors will introduce recycling bins across the school. The school's hydroponic farm allows pupils to grow fresh, natural produce using sustainable and environmentally friendly technology.

Opportunities to learn subjects in creative arts across the school, including options at KS4, allow all pupils to find their passion and supports their ambitious and various careers paths for the future. Pupils can showcase their talents in the school choir, during the termly music concerts, annual talent show and weekly assemblies which parents are invited to.

Pupils, and their families, stated that they have seen a marked improvement in their self-confidence and that they were happier at Aquila compared to their previous school. One parent said, 'Everybody is given a chance to shine'. Through the school's strong focus on pupils' welfare all pupils feel they are safe in school and know who to talk to if they were upset. Pupils are tolerant, open-minded young people who have good knowledge of and show respect for the beliefs, cultures, and views of other people.

## 7. Standard 3 The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding.

Aquila School puts the safety of its pupils at the centre of the school's ethos: posters around the school proudly state that, 'The safety of our pupils is our number one priority.' Robust systems regarding child protection are in place. All adults working in the school, including external providers, have annual child protection training, delivered both online and then followed up in person. Highly effective policies and procedures are in place, and the key staff benefit from network training through the International Schools Partnership and BSME. Weekly pastoral meetings ensure that any child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing issues are continually monitored and discussed on the weekly agenda. The school is tidy and clean. Pupil and staff toilets which provide adequate cubicles and washing facilities are regularly cleaned so that hygiene arrangements are always very good. This frequent maintenance ensures the health and safety for pupils, staff, and visitors.

Visitors to the school are logged and issued badges with coloured lanyards to denote the different roles of all adults on the premises. Pupils are able to differentiate between the coloured lanyards worn. Security staff are careful to check visitors asking for proof of ID and vaccination status. Start and end of day routines are carried out in a calm and well-organised manner. When children in primary leave the classroom, for example to use the bathroom, they are given a 'my teacher knows where I am' pass. The supervision of children throughout the school day is excellent.

Attendance registers are appropriately maintained. Whole school attendance is excellent, and attendance is tracked and analysed. Any issues are followed up by SLT following a clear procedure. Aquila is an inclusive school where a culture of empathy is clear to see, for example in the way that children work with children from the Hemam centre when they join class, in a supportive and kind way.

The school has a full-time doctor and two nurses, who work from a spacious and well-equipped clinic. Regular health and eye tests are carried out by these staff for specified year groups, and an external dental practice does dental checks. Care plans are kept up to date, and relevant staff are trained regarding any medications or accommodations that may be needed for a child they work with. The doctor delivers lessons to children, an excellent example was seen when she gave information to children regarding epilepsy in order for them to understand the needs of a peer. Clinic staff also gave basic first aid training to year 6 pupils.

Selected staff have first aid training delivered by an outside provider and accompany children on school trips. The clinic provides first aid bags and informs staff regarding any medical needs of children going on any trips or visits.

Children are taught from an early age how to keep themselves healthy, and this is woven into the curriculum. Children in the early years are aware of healthy foods in their lunch boxes and as children move through the school, they become more aware of healthy choices and keeping fit. Sessions from the PE staff also support this.

New children enter the school regularly throughout the school year. Children have an online meeting with their new teacher before joining and families with the leadership team of the school. Families are also sent an email welcoming them and their child to the school and relaying important information before they start.

The school provides its own bus services- staffed by Aquila school staff. There are clear procedures in place for children who travel by bus and the children are very well supervised. The pupils report that they feel safe and secure when moving from the school onto buses.

The school has animals on site, including rabbits, cats, fish and birds. There is a policy in place for the care of the animals, however a risk assessment should be considered as well.

The school's policies on pastoral care are robust and this is a key strength of the school. In primary, class teachers are aware of the importance of knowing their children well and acting quickly on any concerns. The secondary form tutors also play a key role, however there is also an emphasis on the importance of teachers across all subjects knowing the pupil and being a key part of the pupil's pastoral care. The school counsellor works across the school. She has 'time to talk' sessions, when children can pop in to talk to her about any anxieties they may have. She also holds 1:1 counselling sessions, as well as small group sessions. Children say that they know who they can talk to if they have a worry and feel that they are safe and listened to. Behaviour in the school is excellent, children are supportive and kind towards each other. This is as a result of the importance the school places on positive relationships, and the clear policies and procedures for this. Bullying is very rare in the school, as are examples of unacceptable behaviour. Such behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively, using restorative justice. An excellent example of this was when a form group in the secondary school made a presentation to peers about the dangers of vaping after a vaping device was found in school.

Overnight excursions and day trips have recently been reintroduced in the school. Careful risk assessments are carried out, and very safe levels of supervision are in place.

School facilities are excellent. The facilities manager ensures the school is a safe place for all. All staff demonstrated a high regard for health and safety. Staff use key passes to move around the school, and gates in outside areas, for example to enter the hydroponics farm are kept locked. The school is litter and obstacle free and high regard for cleanliness is evident throughout the large campus.

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils is clearly a priority for the school. Every pupil is happy, feels safe and well cared for.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff at The Aquila School meets in full the requirements of the BSO standards.

The school ensures that all required checks are carried out on all staff, parrots and volunteers who are employed to work at the school. The school also maintains a log of staff who have left the school in the past three years. All teachers at the school are qualified to teach in the UK and have English National Curriculum experience. All newly appointed staff undergo a rigorous recruitment process. The school employs safer recruitment processes to ensure all staff are suitable to work with children. Interview procedures are rigorous and led by senior leaders who understand and are trained in safer recruitment procedures.

References are taken from three referees one of whom is the applicants current principal. If any part of the reference causes concern, the school will make direct contact with the referee as a further check. All staff are given a probationary period so that safer recruitment is a continuing process from the interview and through the time of induction. The school's board members and leaders understand how important it is for these checks to be made and are vigilant in ensuring these are carried out especially for staff transferring from other overseas positions, which may not be their home country. The school puts a high regard on reviewing police clearance certificates from any country the applicant has lived in within the last ten years, and the UK International Child Protection Certificate to ensure all staff are suitable.

There is no evidence that any member of staff or volunteer carries out work at school in contravention of local, overseas or British disqualification, prohibition or restriction. All teaching staff have teaching qualifications and experience in teaching in British schools. The leadership structure is shared with all staff, and all are aware of their line manager and understand their roles. Job descriptions are provided for all roles. All staff are trained and/or experienced in the provision of age-appropriate education and support. The school keeps and made available to inspectors, a single comprehensive list of all staff and volunteers who currently work in the school, showing the dates when they commenced and ceased working in the school. It also keeps and made available for inspectors, records of all checks completed in respect of staff and volunteers who currently work at the school or who have worked at the school since the date of the last inspection.

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

The premises and accommodation are excellent.

The school's premises and accommodation at The Aquila School meets in full the requirements of the BSO standards and are excellent. The school's buildings and premises are excellent in providing a purposeful and stimulating environment well equipped for the delivery of a British curriculum. The school was purpose built in 2018 and received an award for the best educational building in the Middle East.

The site is secure with two main points of entry and exit for pupils. Two further gates allow staff and visitor access to the staff car park. A large area at the back of the school is clearly marked for school buses to pick-up and drop off at the end of the school day within the school site.

Separate designated areas of the school are secure. The swimming pool and specialist areas for physical education and the auditorium are locked and can only be accessed by staff. A wall clearly defines the perimeter of the site. Signage is clear throughout the school. There are three floors with the older pupils on mainly based on the second floor. An adjacent separate building accommodates the school's sports facilities, clinic and auditorium. Outdoor areas are spacious and demarcated into separate zones by low level fencing. Picnic tables are available throughout the school's outdoor areas and are well used at break times. Shaded areas are appropriate and offer suitable protection from the sun. Shared areas, including indoor spaces, outdoor spaces, and the outdoor football pitch and enclosed games area are fully utilised by pupils operating on a rota system for break times. Early years and year one classes have separate outdoor areas accessed directly from the classrooms, these contain permanently installed, age-appropriate play equipment, including large sand pits and climbing frames. The sand pits are covered at the end of each day.

There are plans in place to extend the schools accommodation further with the addition of another building at the back of the school to include school canteens, additional changing areas, outdoor sports and recreational areas and specialist facilities for secondary.

Classrooms are clearly marked by year group and class name in primary and in secondary by subject. Fire exits are signposted, and first aid boxes located strategically throughout the school. Wide staircases provide access to the first and second floors and have adequate handrails. Classrooms across the school are well lit, lighting is provided by a sensor that detects movement so that lighting only operates when rooms are in use. Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard, and these are in regular use. All areas have appropriate ventilation and are very well furnished with age-appropriate tables and chairs. Communal spaces are used well and supplied with a high quality of resources and displays that engage children in their learning. Early years foundation stage areas have classrooms that are very well equipped with a separate entrance area that is safe and gated and contain age-appropriate washrooms, indoor and outdoor facilities. Trikes, construction resources, water trays and sand pits and a

range of different indoor spaces, such as the literacy garden and the sensory room enhance the quality of provision in EYFS. The floor markings across EYFS inspires imaginative play. The outdoor areas are fenced to ensure pupils are safe and the area is clearly marked.

The school has a wealth of specialist facilities. A large auditorium with excellent staging, sound and lighting systems, adjacent visitor toilets and access to the car park and appropriate fire exits. A large well equipped swimming pool centre with two pools (beginner and advanced) and adjacent changing facilities, a dance studio, an equipped gymnasium, designated secondary and primary sport halls with provision for changing rooms for 'home' and 'away' teams, and a roof top tennis court enable the delivery of a good quality broad PE curriculum well matched to the age and stage of pupil's physical development. There are suitable changing and showering facilities for boys and girls. In addition, there are well equipped science laboratories, food technology, design technology, music rooms, drama rooms and three well stocked libraries, in use by the pupils at the school. An outdoor hydroponics area is located at the back of the school and hosts a garden supplied by an underground water source. There are rabbits, fish, and birds within the enclosed area and together the growing of plants and understanding the responsibilities around keeping a pet, enhance the provision of a broad curriculum for the pupils in the school.

Provisions for people with disabilities is excellent. Lifts to each floor and ramps allow easy access to all areas. A school canteen, the Parrot café, operates in the school's main reception area for staff and visitors. Aquila the parrot also lives in this area. Dubai Municipality have awarded the Parrot Café with a gold level standard for food hygiene. Pupils currently bring packed lunches that they eat either in their classrooms or on picnic benches in outdoor areas, due to the restrictions around Covid.

The facilities manager is regularly active in ensuring the schools site is well maintained, that the site is safe and provides a positive environment for learning. Regular daily health and safety walks, along with an online system of reporting allows the relevant maintenance teams to be responsive in ensuring that the premises and accommodation are well-maintained. An annual visit by the ISP health and safety team further ensures that the relevant policies and checks are made on equipment and facilities at the school. Fire, water electrical and PE equipment checks meet the required standards and are checked at least annually by external contractors. There is adequate external lighting around the perimeter of the school.

Adequate and well used storage of pupils' personal belongings was evident throughout the school. Even in the key stage 1 and early years pupils had personal areas to store personal belongings. These were used well to keep the classroom and corridor areas tidy. The school clinic is very well equipped with separate rooms for the treatment of boys and girls, and a central consultation room for the school's doctor. During the Covid-19 restrictions, a separate isolation room is available close to the clinic if needed, with toilet facilities adjacent. As the medical centre is located close to the schools swimming pool area and not central to the school, a further first aid room is located within the key stage 1 area.

## 10. Standard 6

### The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is excellent. The Aquila School provides a highly British educational experience for families living in Dubai. They have built up their model over time to ensure that they meet the needs and demands of learner and parent cohorts. They embrace the country and culture that they are in whilst upholding the British nature of provision. The school has scheduled parental meetings to discuss learner progress, as well as parent support events; parents have found them to be helpful and informative. The school publishes a weekly newsletter to celebrate events and achievements and inform families about what their children are learning. The school website is clear, informative and easy to navigate. Contact details of the school and details about the governing board are provided to parents and prospective parents on the website. Details are also displayed in the school, in promotional information and letters.

The school ethos, mission, vision, core values and aims are clearly communicated in documents, the school website and the learning environment. This is supported by displays in classrooms and corridor areas. Many of the bright and informative displays are created by the pupils and clearly celebrate the outcomes of the teaching and learning. The school vision is highly visible. Parents are able to access information about key school policies on the website. This includes information about the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, behaviour, bullying, health and safety and first aid. The complaints procedure and most recent inspection report and key curriculum information is available on the website. This includes information about curriculum organisation, curriculum overviews, and the education and welfare provision for pupils with special educational needs, or for whom English is an additional language.

Parents feel that the school staff know their children well and use words such as 'welcoming', 'positive' and 'safe' to describe the way the school cares. Parents stated that they felt like the school was like a family, embracing, welcoming and inclusive and that it has allowed their children to flourish. Parents were very appreciative of the opportunities and support available for their children and valued its desire to continue as a BSO school.



## 11. Standard 7

### The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling complaints at The Aquila School meets in full the requirements of the BSO standards.

A written complaints policy is available on the school's website and on request to the school. The policy sets out clear timescales for the management of a complaint at an informal level and at a formal level. The school expects that complaints raised by parents are first raised informally with their child's class teacher or form tutor. If a parent of any pupil has a complaint, they contact one of the following in the first instance:

- the pupil's class teacher (or in the case of a child in secondary, their form tutor)
- the pupil's phase leader
- the pupil's head of school

If the matter is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, they are advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with the formal resolution complaints process. If the matter is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction by the informal process, the complainant can write to the principal giving details of the complaint and the outcome they are seeking. The school leader/s meet the concerned parent, if necessary, within three working days, to further investigate the concern. The aim is to respond within five working days of the meeting. If there are still concerns, the school has appropriate measures for the issue to be resolved.



## 12. Standard 8

### Leadership and management of the school

The leadership and management at the Aquila school meets in full the requirements of the BSO standards, and has many outstanding features.

The school is led by a leadership team of the school's principal, the head of primary and head of secondary. They together articulate a clear vision for the school based upon the school mission, 'to ensure every child loves coming to school and makes as much progress as possible'. The principal leads the drive for 'amazing learning', very effectively.

The principal and the heads know the school very well. They use a range of information on which to evaluate the school's performance. Technology is used well to store data on pupil's achievements academically and their character development. They can access information quickly regarding behaviour and attendance. They are in regular, daily contact with parents, at the school gate at the beginning and end of the school day.

The school's leaders have been successful in recruiting and retaining staff who are proud of the personal contribution they make to the school's success. Around the school there is a palpable happy, kind and inclusive atmosphere amongst the staff and learners. The school development plan is based upon a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The school runs very efficiently on a day-to-day basis, in no small part because of the quality and abundance of administrative and support staff. Their skill and work allow teachers to concentrate on teaching.

Effective policies ensure that most pupils make good or better progress at least in line with their ability in literacy. The school has a positive impact on pupil behaviour, in addition to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. The governing body is successful in securing, supporting and developing sufficient high-quality staff and ensuring their suitability to work with children. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. The school works highly effectively with parents and carers.

The senior leadership team have a clear focus on school improvement. All the recommendations from the previous inspection report have been implemented. Significant steps have been taken to further improve teaching, learning and assessment with tangible results. The school's performance management structure and programme of continuous professional development have been instrumental in these improvements. As the school has grown so have procedures to ensure each child is treated as an individual. The school development plan is ambitious, centred around pupil outcomes. Leaders at all levels contribute to the creation of the development plan and to its fulfilment. In the primary school the leader knows her staff well, she works closely with teachers and the newly appointed phase leaders. The challenge is to ensure that working together, standards are consistent and effectively monitored. They monitor performance through regular meetings focussed on

pupil outcomes and support where it is needed. Overall there is a feeling of strong collegiality amongst staff. Leaders work hard to induct new teachers into the school and as a result new teachers quickly settle into established routines. In the secondary school, the leader also knows his staff well and is focused on securing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom in order to meet the needs of all the pupils. Evaluation and development of current practices ensure that performance management systems and in- service training are in place. The school positively encourages the professional development of staff, taking pride in devolving leadership.

As the school grows in size, this structure will grow with it, in order to maintain its level of effectiveness. There is a very positive relationship between the head of school and the staff with a strong culture of professionalism and striving for further improvement.