



**Inspection report on
El Alsson School
Cairo, Egypt**

20th to 22nd November 2011

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This inspection was conducted against the standards introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) for British schools overseas. These standards are based on those for independent schools in England.

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1. Context

1.1 What are the key contextual factors?

El Alsson British and American International School was established in 1982, and is on a purpose-built 27,000 square metre site in Haraniya, in Giza, Cairo. It is proud of its reputation as one of the best international schools in Egypt, due to its heritage, quality of education, as well as qualified teachers. The school's philosophy is to provide quality and breadth of educational opportunities, in an environment that has high expectations of students and teachers.

The school offers a British section from Foundation Stage to GCSE, AS and A-Level, with a separate Sixth Form section and an American Section K - 12. The school has a reputation for successful quality education and dedicated customer care.

El Alsson encourages parents to enrol their children at the age of 3 years, when they enter the British Foundation Stage curriculum. All children entering the kindergarten (3, 4 and 5 year olds) follow the British curriculum. Before the children enter the primary school, parents are then asked to choose either the British International School or the American International School. This report focusses on the British section.

The school believe in praising students who show effort and improvement in work or attitude, as well as those who are attaining well. Through the pastoral care system, staff successfully encourage students to be considerate and helpful. Students develop self-discipline and self-confidence: they are expected to take responsibility for their own behaviour and to develop good working habits.

The quality of the facilities and the updating of equipment and resources are issues regarded by the school as vital to raising standards further. An on-going development programme ensures that students learn in the best possible surroundings.

The school has good facilities and is well-resourced: students have had success entering top universities and faculties in Egypt and abroad.



1.2 British nature of the school

Children beginning school enter the Early Years Department, either into Foundation Stage 1 (age 3+) or Foundation Stage 2 (age 4+). In line with the National Curriculum for England, children between the ages of 3 and 5 follow the Foundation Stage Curriculum. In Year 1, students follow the first year of the Key Stage 1 curriculum.

After Year 1, parents decide whether they want to continue in the British System (Key Stage 2) or join the American Elementary Section G1-5. The primary school consists of the British and American International departments which are co-located, and meet every morning for assembly.

The British International School for secondary-aged students follows the national curriculum of England, with some adaptations especially in history and geography, where Egypt and the Middle East feature strongly. The curriculum is balanced and meets the needs of a wide range of students. Students take GCSE, AS- and A-level exams. Those from expatriate families follow a course in Arabic as a Second Language, as part of their studies.

The school underpins its British nature in many facets of its work:

- The school is organized according to the structures used in English schools.
- The school house system is successfully implemented and students take a keen interest through assemblies, sporting activities, and house competitions.
- The school council, prefects and house captains contribute towards the whole school ethos.
- As well as fully implementing the curriculum for England, assessments are based on national standards from the UK.
- There is strong and successful welfare support.
- The management and administration terminology relates to British expectations.
- The school is well resourced, in line with UK practice.
- A range of educational visits are organized that support students to develop physically, emotionally and socially.
- There are many opportunities provided for extra-curricular activities.
- Specialist teachers teach information and communication technology (ICT), art, music, library studies, physical education (PE) and French according to the English National Curriculum.

2. Quality of learning

2.1 How effective are learning and teaching?

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some outstanding features. Subject knowledge and expertise of the teaching staff is good across the whole school. The students are engaged, highly motivated and effective independent learners.

In the primary school, learning objectives are clearly defined and detailed in the teachers' daily planning. Learning objectives and success criteria are displayed and discussed with the students at the introduction of each lesson. The school has adopted and embedded strategies to promote Assessment for Learning (AfL). The strategies, 'What I am looking for' (WILF) and 'We are learning to' (WALT) are consistently used from Early Years to Year 6.

AfL is introduced in Foundation Stage, developed further in Key Stage 1 and is fully embedded across Key Stage 2. For example:

- in a Foundation Stage 2 class, students accessed structured learning activities indoors and outside, demonstrating independent learning and self-responsibility;
- in a Key stage 1 lesson, the students were effectively involved in collaborative work;
- By Year 6, an effective range of AfL strategies were used, including Peer Assessment Talk Partners and collaborative group learning.

In the secondary school, AfL is being piloted by a focus group in Key Stage 3. The teachers are applying a variety of different strategies. The positive impact has increased student engagement, contributing well to the school improvement drive to further raise standards of attainment. A good example of this was in a Year 7 English lesson, when students were encouraged to work collaboratively, support each other to complete the set task to a high standard.

The success of this pilot project has been recognised by teachers and school leaders, with more focus groups being established to pilot different aspects including e-learning, PLTS, and Literacy. Each group comprises of volunteer teachers representative of different phases. This thoughtful approach and initiative is empowering teachers to be creative and innovative. The senior leadership team need to ensure that these focus groups establish a baseline in order to demonstrate the impact on improving levels of attainment. These groups have not yet established strategic plans with identified milestones to monitor and evaluate their impact.

2.2 How well are pupils cared for, guided and supported?

The care, guidance and support are good and above the standards set by the DfE. The culture, ethos and recently revised mission statement ensure a high level of care, guidance and support for all stakeholders, particularly the students.

The site of the school is secure and well maintained. Guards patrol regularly and restrict access to authorised personnel. Visitors to the school have to provide evidence confirming their identity. The buildings meet the health and safety requirements of the host country.

Shaded areas are available for students during breaks. These periods are well supervised by teaching staff and an extensive number of ancillary staff. Teachers and a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) are timetabled to supervise the transport arrangements at the beginning and end of the day. The school has a fleet of buses which meet the local transport regulations. A member of the ancillary staff escorts the students during their transition to and from the premises. Teachers also use the school transport to travel to and from home: they support the ancillary staff supervising students to ensure their personal safety, welfare and conduct. The school has a reporting procedure for ancillary staff to record inappropriate behaviour. If this happens, a member of the SLT investigates and takes appropriate action. During the visit, one student was observed in the supervised isolation room as a consequence of inappropriate behaviour, completing set tasks on the dedicated computer.

Fire Drills are held twice a term. The time taken to evacuate the building is recorded and the Principal confirmed his disappointment that the last fire drill had fractionally exceeded the allocated three minutes.

The school has recently worked with the students on an anti-bullying policy. In Key Stage 2, the focus within a personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson was bullying – both direct and indirect. Students were challenged, actively engaged and reflective, each gaining valuable learning experiences and strategies from the role-playing activity. During an escorted tour of the premises, the school council president commented on the positive impact of the initiative: he was clearly highly motivated to ensure that students be safeguarded from unacceptable experiences.

The school promotes a healthy eating approach strongly. During snack time, a teacher was checking the contents of Key Stage 1 students' lunch boxes, and awarded a sticker to some students. Snack time is timetabled and 'Eat and Read' sessions provide the opportunity to reinforce these concepts. However, this practice was not applied consistently across the school, as secondary students were observed purchasing and consuming carbonated drinks and pizza during their break-times.



The sixth form students initiate and organise a range of different fund raising events for various local and international charities. The parents and students have established the Tulips Charity Foundation, organising events to raise money for the poor. The teachers and students regularly work with two local orphanages, special care homes and participate in Operation Smile. El Alsson is a centre of leadership for charities in Egypt. In August 2011, the school were awarded the 'International Club of the Year' at the Operation Smile conference in Beijing.

The school encourages students to develop their independence. This applies to nearly all: the after-school programme of enrichment activities is available for Year 2 students onwards.

Over the last three years, the school was closed for several weeks due to 'flu epidemics and to political unrest. During these closures, the teachers provided on-line learning opportunities for students.

2.3 How well does the curriculum meet pupils' needs?

The National Curriculum of England forms the basis of a rigorous, stimulating and engaging learning programme. In the Foundation Stage, students are assessed against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs). The curriculum across the school meets the needs and aspirations of students, ensuring continuity and progression.

In the primary school, provision of specialist teaching enhances and broadens the learning opportunities for all students. There are specialist teachers for Arabic, religious education French, art, ICT, PE and music, including peripatetic instrument teachers.

The provision of learning support throughout the primary school caters well for identified special educational needs/additional educational needs (SEN/AEN). The extensive range of targeted intervention strategies and support programmes are delivered by specialist learning support staff. These colleagues attend year group planning meetings to ensure that they are aware of curriculum coverage, and able to support the referred students effectively. These interventions include support for core subjects, the development of fine and gross motor skills and speech therapy. 'The EFL Foundation' operates an outreach programme in the primary school to support specific students.

There is a planned transition programme to prepare Year 6 students for the demands and challenges of the secondary school. During the last academic year, the school introduced an attitudinal survey of the students to determine the effectiveness of the planned transition arrangements.

The school fully complies with the Egyptian Ministry of Education regulations with regard to Arabic and Religion covering Islamic Studies and Christianity.

The secondary curriculum is embellished by the 'Learning to Lead' programme, equipping students with the skills and competencies to raise their standards of attainment. The SLT have high expectations for the GCSE and 'A' level students who are expected to progress to university, either in Egypt or overseas.

Last year's academic results confirmed high attainment:

- 96% of Key Stage 4 students achieved 5 GCSE's at A*- C
- 95% of Key Stage 5 students achieved 3 'A' levels at A – C

2.4 How well does the school work in partnership with parents, other colleges and the community?

The results of the annual parents' survey confirm that 86% of parents are satisfied with the performance of the school. During the inspection, a meeting with a sample of parents confirmed the following:

- parents choose the school because of its good reputation;
- their students are happy at the school;
- the students are well-prepared for the transition and challenges of the secondary school;
- parents are encouraged to enter into an active dialogue and establish a beneficial home-school partnership;
- parents received regular reports and attended progress meetings;
- parents are enthusiastic about the planned initiative to establish a Parent School Association (PSA);
- discipline across the school is good.

Parents expressed concerns about their ability to continue to pay school fees in the current political climate.

The school helped to establish a consortium of Cairo schools to provide continuous professional development (CPD). The school has developed sporting and informal links with other international schools in Cairo, facilitating transfer when appropriate, for the benefit of identified students.

The Principal is a UK embassy warden, liaising with colleagues in other schools about the potential impact of current political developments.

The school's links to the local community are predominantly through local business and charity work, for example the Tulip Foundation and Operation Smile. The owners and directors have strong links with other international schools and co-operation with the British – Egyptian Businesses Association or the American Chamber of Commerce.



2.5 How well does the school prepare pupils for future learning?

The culture and ethos of the school encourage students to be global citizens and to make a positive contribution to society, from Foundation Stage to the Sixth Form. The management of transitions involves parents and students as well as teachers and the SLT. There is a clear and effective Progression and Transition Policy, which references specific levels of attainment and standards of behaviour. The processes are open, clear and fair. Transitions are planned monitored and reviewed. This includes liaison with next key stage and/or with the American section of the school.

Two alumni students spoke to the Sixth Form about their shared experiences in the school and how well they were prepared for university life and the world of work. They offered advice to the current sixth form students: this stressed the importance of taking advantage of the opportunities and high quality teaching and support provided by the school to be successful, secure a place at university and to gain future employment.

The school is considering developing an 'El Alsson Students Abroad Society' to formalise the current support network for students attending UK universities.

3. Standards achieved by pupils

3.1 How high are standards achieved in the areas of learning, subjects and courses of the curriculum?

The attainment standards are good and above those required to meet the DfE requirements. The lesson observations demonstrated good student progress in all subjects across all key stages.

The school operates a sophisticated student target setting process with targets revised on a regular basis. This further supports the attainment levels.

In 2008, the Key Stages 2 to Key Stage 3 progression policy was changed from a minimum of Level 3 to Level 4, for English and mathematics. In 2008, 71% of Year 6 students met this requirement. In 2009, booster classes were introduced and 82% achieved Level 4+. In 2010, 94% achieved Level 4+, demonstrating a good development.

The 2010-11 attainment results for the primary school confirm that:

- the progress and achievement of Foundation Stage students recorded on EYFS profile and Target Tracker, which is in line with national curriculum expectations;
- in Year 2, 100% of students achieved Level 2+ in English, mathematics and science;
- in Year 6, 100% of students achieved Level 4+ in English, mathematics and science.

Key Stage 3 moderated results confirmed the following for students achieving level 5a:

- mathematics increased from 85% to 98%
- science increased from 67% to 82% and
- English decreased from 69% to 65%.

In Key Stage 4, 96% of students achieved 5+ A* – C GCSE grades. At A-level, 86% achieved 3+ A-C grades and 95% achieved A-E grades.

During the 2009-10, Year 9 students took the MIDYIS tests. This year, the school will be able to compare the students' prior attainment and their predicted grades with their actual achievements in their GCSE.



The extensive student performance evidence records lack consistency. Data management and processing is under further development. The senior leaders are looking at ways to ensure that the student records accurately reflect attainment, in each subject. For example, in mathematics the students' attainment is aggregated, and not recorded for each aspect.

The majority of students speak English as an additional language. The school principal, directors and owners are currently discussing the possibility of establishing an English as a second language department, to provide additional support for identified students.

3.2 How well are pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities developed?

El Alsson has a positive atmosphere which helps to foster good attitudes and values, as the students move through the school. High expectations with respect to behaviour and caring for others are emphasised, and are strengths of the school. Students confirmed that they enjoy attending school.

Attendance rates exceed the Ministry of Education's expectation of 85%. In the current political climate, the school has managed to maintain good attendance levels across all phases from Foundation to Sixth form.

Classroom observations confirmed an enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. The students are positive and highly motivated. They have a well-developed sense of social responsibility and belonging. The students are kind, considerate and thoughtful towards each other and are respectful to adults.

Students are articulate and confident when speaking to visitors about their school. They are proud of and have shared responsibility for the effective operation and successes of their school.

The school has plans to extend the use of the house system beyond sports day, to provide opportunities to recognise and celebrate students' excellent behaviour, exemplary conduct and noteworthy academic achievements, whenever appropriate.

4. Leadership and management of the school

4.1 How well is the school led and managed?

Leadership across the school is good: the leadership team (the head of secondary and head of primary) guides the school effectively. They have devised a sound organisational structure with distributed leadership and shared responsibilities. Staff roles are carefully defined, with detailed job descriptions and clear reporting lines.

The current political changes and the diverse range of other challenges, including two epidemics resulting in school closures, have been admirably managed. Shrewd strategic leadership of the school has been effective in minimising the impact on students, and on staff. Both school leaders manage whole school operations and resources well, to ensure a safe, caring and effective learning environment.

Staff are encouraged to initiate change and pilot different projects, as a means of driving continuous school improvement. A number of focus groups have been established by staff interested in professional development and improving the quality of provision, to raise standards across the school further. For example, focused groups are trialling e-learning, AfL and Literacy initiatives. The groups are looking for ways to establish accurate baselines, to be able to determine the impact of these initiatives across the different phases of the school.

The owners undertake their roles and responsibilities with care. They seek to ensure that they are effective guardians of the school's purpose and direction, and communicate with the senior leaders effectively. Documentation highlights that they have overseen the implementation of effective strategies to clarify and underpin their roles as the final authority within the school. This has enabled the school to establish clear roles and responsibilities for senior staff.

The owners ensure the financial strategy of the school is successful. They monitor the employment and health aspects of the school at regular intervals. They also seek to ensure the continued high standing of the school within the community, by representing and celebrating the school's achievements.

The owners undertake the role of supporting the senior leaders within the school and have a highly positive impact on the continued development of El Alsson.

5. Quality of provision

5.1 How good are the accommodation, the staffing levels and the resources?

The quality of provision is above the required standard.

The site of the school is well maintained and secure. Classrooms are equipped with suitable resources that can be accessed independently by the students. Classroom displays reflect current curriculum topics, with keywords and curriculum posters to reinforce vocabulary, reflecting the agreed School Improvement Priority. All entrances and exits have security guards.

There are shaded areas in both the primary and senior sections of the grounds, with a playground area and two canteen stations for the secondary students. Within the primary school, there are two fields, a rubberised basketball court and play area timetabled for eight different breaks, to maximise the use of the available space during play times.

The Foundation Stage has a shaded outdoor area that provides opportunities for a range of engaging practical experiences, which promote independent learning.

The teachers have dedicated workrooms available throughout the school for marking, planning and developing resources.

Two qualified nurses and a school clinic are available for students and staff.

The school has a limited expansion possibility, because of lack of space, but refurbishment plans have been drawn up to maximise and improve the current facilities.

The staffing levels are appropriate to match the curriculum provided. Staff are well qualified and have relevant degrees and teaching qualifications. The teachers demonstrated a high level of subject knowledge and professional competencies, which is a strength of the school. They are committed to school improvement, and this was evident in meetings held with staff during the inspection visit.

The number of ancillary and administrative staff employed within the school is extensive. Staff qualifications are checked by the relevant authorities. New staff must have a minimum of 3 years' experience.



Teacher assistants are provided with training to assist in the delivery of the curriculum across Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2.

Learning resources are well managed. There are centralised storage areas of resources, with ancillary staff to assist in the allocation and monitoring of school stock.

There are sufficient computers for all students within the school. Further plans to develop and embed ICT within the curriculum and increase interactive provision are currently underway. Wireless internet has improved communication, further developing the online learning environment.

6. Overall effectiveness of the school

6.1 How successful is the school?

El Alsson offers a safe, calm learning environment for students and staff. The high level of care was illustrated by the effective leadership shown during the period of civil unrest and the key priority of ensuring students safety.

The school is successful in providing good quality teaching and learning to students across all phases. It successfully delivers a British curriculum whilst incorporating the teaching of the national language and culture. It is justly proud of the supportive family atmosphere and ethos.

The school has many strengths:

- Standards of attainment are good across all stages.
- Parents and alumni praise the support the school gives to its students.
- It is successful in fostering a real sense of belonging throughout the school community.
- The school development plan and all policies and practices are linked effectively with the mission and vision of the school.
- Students across all key stages are involved and consulted about their learning, through strategies such as Assessment for Learning.
- There are outstanding relationships between staff and students:
- The school is working with CPD, and through parental and student surveys, to develop rigorous and meaningful self-evaluation.
- The leadership team have successfully encouraged sensible risk taking and innovation, leading the school to a position of strength.

6.2 What the school does well

El Alsson is a good school with some outstanding features.

- The quality of the leadership in the primary and secondary school is good. This is demonstrated by skilled management of change and effective communication.
- High quality relationships between students and staff are underpinned by the quality of the induction programme and transition arrangements.
- The subject knowledge and expertise of the teaching staff is very good, and they are applied well when planning effective learning activities.
- Evidence from monitoring highlights that the school is successfully implementing Assessment for learning and recognises the need to develop this further.
- The strong sense of involvement and identity of all students is outstanding.
- The care, guidance and support for all students are outstanding.
- The culture and ethos of the school encourages student involvement to be global citizens and to make a positive contribution to society from KG to Sixth Form.
- Teachers are encouraged by the senior leadership team to be creative and innovative in their teaching and curriculum delivery.
- The standards of teaching and learning, and student attainment are good throughout the school.
- The senior management team demonstrate a thoughtful approach to school improvement, such as the development of focus groups to trial assessment for learning and assessing student progress.



6.3 What should the school do to improve further?

The school has developed an effective school improvement plan that highlights the key areas for future development. The key targets in the plan are appropriate, and will enable the school to develop its effectiveness even further.

As a result of the monitoring visit, the school should consider the following additional points:

- develop further the use of data management and student achievement tracking to support higher standards of student attainment
- consider a period of consolidation to ensure that initiatives are fully embedded and having positive impact, for example introducing appropriate challenging activities, strengthening the impact of assessment for learning, and further developing a focussed professional development programme.

6.4 Does the school meet the DfE standards?

El Alsson School is a good school, with some outstanding features: it provides education that is above the standard required by the DfE.

Evidence source/s

During the inspection, 43 full- or part- lessons were observed, documentation and policies were analysed, students' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with senior staff, middle managers, and with a range of teachers, parents and students. Two whole school days were monitored.