



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

**Horizon School
Dubai
UAE**

29th & 30th November 2010

Penta International
is a Department of Education approved inspection provider

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.

1. Context	page
1.1 Key contextual factors	2
1.2 British nature of the school	3
2. Quality of learning	
2.1 How effective are learning and teaching?	4
2.2 How well are pupils cared for, guided and supported?	
2.3 How well does the curriculum meet pupils' needs?	7
2.4 How well does the school work in partnership with parents, other schools and the community?	8
2.5 How well does the school prepare pupils for future learning?	9
3. Standards achieved by pupils	
3.1 How high are standards achieved in the areas of learning, subjects and courses of the curriculum?	10
3.2 How well are pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities developed?	12
4. Leadership and management of the school	
4.1 How well is the school led and managed?	13
5. Quality of provision	
5.1 How good are the accommodation, the staffing levels and the resources?	14
6. Overall effectiveness of the school	
6.1 How successful is the school?	15
6.2 What the school does well	16
6.3 What should the school do to improve further?	17
Evidence source/s	17

1. Context

1.1 What are the key contextual factors?

Horizon School Dubai is located in Al Safa, Dubai and is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to eleven years.

The school follows the English National Curriculum and undertakes standard assessment tasks and tests (SATs) at the end of Years 2 and 6. The English Curriculum is taught entirely in English to the international student body. In addition, the school teaches Arabic to children from Years 1 to Year 6.

The taught curriculum also covers Islamic Studies for Muslim children. Specialist teaching is provided in physical education, music, information and communication technology (ICT), Arabic and art/science.

Approximately 54% of children have English as their first language.

The majority of teachers are British, with UK teaching qualifications. Retention of staff is good. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked at the school for 15 and 14 years respectively. The school has established a highly effective management system that encourages and values the contribution of all stakeholders.

Three inspections by the Dubai government's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) have taken place in the last two years. Detailed action plans were drawn up by the school to address the recommendations made in these reports.

1.2 British nature of the school

Horizon School values and celebrates the British nature of the school within the context of being a truly international school.

The school has fully implemented the National Curriculum for England, paying due regard for the tradition and cultures of its host country, United Arab Emirates.

The majority of teaching staff are British qualified. They use their expertise to implement curriculum development and change in line with best UK practice. The school provides ongoing staff development opportunities that enable teaching and learning methods to be up-to-date, reflective and results in highly effective provision.

The school develops its British nature by ensuring its strong ethos is reflected 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 children take a keen interest through assemblies, sporting activities as well as 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.
- Teaching equips pupils with the skills and qualifications to enable them to enter (or re-enter) the UK education system with ease.
- There is a strong and successful welfare support.
- The management and administration terminology relates to British expectations.
- The school is well resourced, in line with best UK practice.
- Nearly all children at the end of Year 6 continue their education at 'British' style colleges.
- A range of educational visits are organized that support children to develop physically, emotionally and socially.
- Firm links are maintained with other British schools through British Schools of the Middle East association (BSME) activities.
- There are many opportunities provided for extra-curricular activities.
- Recent visitors to the school have included British education consultants, a UK head teacher, Barclays-sponsored football club coaches and a range of UK-based Educational organizations.
- Parents visiting the school appreciate and are reassured by the similarities in organization, classroom layout, topics and displays with schools in the UK.

2. Quality of learning

2.1 How effective are learning and teaching?

The quality of learning and teaching is consistently high across the school. Learning is exciting, innovative, thoroughly planned and children's interests are at the heart of everything that appears in the long- and short-term plans. As a result, children are highly motivated, conscientious and work with enthusiasm throughout the day.

Energy and effort by the pupils are maintained because of the clear direction given by teachers from the moment school begins to the end of the day. Children move calmly from task to task, and make good use of the available learning time.

Teachers and support staff follow the clear ethos and vision established by the headteacher and her senior team. As one girl said "I have been at Horizon school from Red Rockets to Year 6. Everyone is supportive and Mrs Sinclair is the key...".

Being a learner at Horizon school requires children to do more than achieve the learning objective of the lesson. High expectations of behaviour, personal responsibility and achievement underpin nearly all lessons. There are many opportunities for the children to apply their thinking skills, make decisions and select resources and materials. For instance, the youngest children touched, felt, explored and talked about the materials and tools needed, before making a caterpillar using a variety of paper circles. Older children explain that the opportunity to plan their own learning sometimes, helps them improve the quality and quantity of their work, and will support them in future lessons.

Children's efforts are always valued and celebrated, giving them confidence when acquiring new learning skills and knowledge.

The children's learning is successful because of the variety of teaching styles demonstrated and used. Children's own self assessments are used to inform and improve teaching plans. Children are not afraid to give an honest view if they have not fully understood and teacher's respond by simplifying concepts and providing individual challenges resulting in success and personal satisfaction. In lessons, most teachers review children's previous understanding and then move quickly on to new learning, maintaining good pace and high levels of child involvement. In independent tasks, children are able to make choices, select activities and are able to work in co-operation with others in the class.

Teaching assistants are well deployed in lessons to help individuals or groups of children. In whole class teaching sessions, they quietly intervene and help children to understand and concentrate. During group work, they support children with gentle guidance and prompting, so that they gain confidence. In an exciting Year 5 mathematics lesson for

example, the group of less able children were able to make progress in understanding flight timetables and calculating the arrival time of planes, because of the individual support given in the independent part of the lesson.

Most children are realising their potential at Horizon School and very good practice is seen in all phases. This could be shared more effectively by ensuring teachers' planning extends particularly the more able children in all classes. The school is already promoting this as a school improvement priority.

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

Health and safety procedures are securely in place. Clear plans and policies comply with local Ministry of Health requirements as a minimum standard. The school has, however, gone beyond the minimum in terms of pastoral care and personal and social development for the children.

The school nurse is actively involved in the treatment and care of children at regular intervals throughout the day. Teachers, assistants and administrative staff are particularly caring and understanding. During a PE lesson for example, particular care was taken by the teachers to ensure safety. All children are required to wear their school hat for sun protection when outdoors.

The school is very well maintained. Areas of potential risk are fenced or cordoned off, to restrict access to more hazardous parts of the site, for example the swimming pools and climbing apparatus. Children are well monitored during break times and after school.

The privately contracted school bus system operates efficiently and due care is taken to ensure children's safety. This was observed when children boarded the bus sensibly at the end of the school day.

Visitors to the school are signed in at the reception area and are provided with name badges. Appropriate and clear signage is used to indicate evacuation routes and assembly points for all children and staff. Children's attendance, at 98% overall, is very good. Late arrivals are recorded unobtrusively to ensure that lessons start promptly.

The relevant checks are in place for teachers recruited from the UK and elsewhere. Most recent UK Criminal Record Bureau records (or relevant national equivalent) are obtained. The verification of qualifications follows the required processes by the Ministry.

During an interview with a group of children, it was clear that all felt safe and were confident that any issue causing them concern would be dealt with sensitively by the school staff.

The high quality of care for the children is a particular strength of the school.

2.3 How well does the curriculum meet pupils' needs?

Lesson observation, planning documentation and children's work samples show that Horizon School successfully meets the curriculum needs of its children. The curriculum enables teaching and learning to be maximised through careful planning, allowing children to make good progress.

The school delivers a UK curriculum which is adapted to meet the cultural and local governmental expectations placed on the school. The school recognises that there are curriculum timetabling constraints regarding the teaching of Islamic Studies and Arabic. The school plans a creative thematic curriculum that maximises the learning time available. Curriculum management and implementation are strengths of the school.

In the Early Years, children work towards the Early Years Goals as set out in the UK Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Years 1 – 6 follow the Literacy and Numeracy frameworks, alongside a skills grid based on UK curriculum expectations. A broad and balanced curriculum is offered to the children. Transition to other UK curriculum schools does not present problems for the children.

Curriculum documentation is well planned, clear and concise. It includes long- and medium-term planning. Documentation is consistent in style and presentation. In particular, there is clear evidence of detailed weekly planning being used to implement the curriculum. Children are involved in the planning process through "thought showering", giving the children a degree of ownership in terms of their learning. This supports the school's ethos. Content continuity and progression of skills within subjects, classes and phases of the school, are evident. There are no transition issues between the key stages in terms of repetition of topics. Thinking skills feature prominently in the planning. Most activities are differentiated to three levels, with opportunities for assessment (teacher- and child-led) highlighted. There is less evidence in the planning to indicate that the most able children are always being sufficiently challenged. Learning enhancement is available for those children who need support to access the curriculum. The system for identification of particular needs is clear and effective.

The curriculum is enriched through celebrations (local and international), sporting competitions and a wide range of cultural opportunities. Role play areas were evident throughout the school from Foundation Stage up to Year Six.

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

The school is justifiably proud of the strong links it has developed with parents and the wider community. This achievement has been recognized during KHDA inspections over the past three years that have deemed the school 'Outstanding'.

Parents feel welcome in the school and appreciate the ethos and environment which they report contributes greatly to their child's enjoyment of school and learning.

The school has developed a wide range of strong communication links with parents:

- The school website is up to date and well maintained.
- Opportunities for parents and teachers to meet during the year are carefully planned. They value these as times to discuss their child's progress.
- Communications are enhanced by strong two-way interaction between parents and teachers through personal books, target setting, monitoring and written reports.
- Educational meetings for parents are hosted regularly by the school, providing clear opportunities for them to be updated on developments.
- Parents' views are sought through questionnaires and surveys, and acted upon.
- Parents are invited into school to assemblies, sports days and international days.
- Many parents volunteer to support the school, and take an active role in daily events that enhance teaching and learning.

The school has an active PTA that arranges functions throughout the year. The school encourages the involvement of parents, and teachers value the contribution they make across a wide range of areas. Data for 2009 – 2010 show that there were over three thousand visits to Horizon School by parent helpers.

The school is very successful in promoting links with the local community. Speakers are encouraged, and children have the opportunity to take part in a range of excursions to important locations in Dubai.

The Student Council encourages their fellow students in the raising of considerable amounts of money to support local and international charities. This includes a chocolate sale that raised over AED20,000, and AED113,000 being raised to support the 'All as One Children's Centre.'

Close links are maintained with other schools in Dubai. The school has a longstanding relationship with Dubai Women's College which has supported the professional development of many final year Emirati student teachers. Professional dialogue is enhanced through BSME conferences and staff training opportunities.

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

The work scrutiny shows that teachers are providing clear guidance on the next step in learning for each child. They personalise comments so that each child knows that their efforts are valued. Constructive comments inform the children on how they could improve their work. There are good examples of consistent marking in all subjects, and teachers mark against the learning objective of the lesson. Older children use success criteria, particularly in literacy, as they write in a range of genres and for different purposes. Written comments are positive and celebrate achievements. The quality of presentation is very good. Children write their own responses back to the teacher, so that learning becomes a day-to-day dialogue between teacher and learner.

The whole school focus on thinking skills prepares children well for the future. Older children regularly work alongside younger children. This was seen in a “buddy lesson” within a Foundation Stage class. Year 6 children demonstrate the skills of patience, listening, creativity and planning skills as they support the younger children in a practical task to create a model caterpillar. Through informal discussions with the children, it is clear that they know such skills are relevant in helping them in their future learning.

3. Standards achieved by pupils

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

The school has a robust system in place to track the progress of all children in every class. The senior management team analyse test results and where any under achievement is identified, they take action to ensure that future learning will be focussed on improving attainment. This information is also used to teach more effective lessons, so improving achievement is an on-going process, reflecting the vision of the school.

In the Foundation Stage, regular assessment through observation, discussion and photographs show that nearly all children reach the expected standard. Teachers record underachievement and deploy extra support in the learning activities to help individual children succeed in the next activity, building the children's personal confidence.

Children are able to make choices, and select their own learning materials. This was observed as they devised a picture of the life cycle of the butterfly, independently using a variety of media and tools. The focus on literacy in Foundation Stage 2 means that children are beginning to write simple sentences and read and accurately spell key words.

Teachers know the children well and the progress made is regularly shared with the parents. From Key Stage 1 onwards, individual targets are set and progress towards achieving them is monitored by the class teacher and senior managers. As a result, nearly all children achieve the expected levels in relation to the English National Curriculum standards.

In Key Stage 2, the trend is that standards are consistently high in English, mathematics and science when compared to schools in the UK. The high attainment is evident in the lessons observed. Monitoring the progress to achieve such high standards is a shared responsibility. It involves class teachers and curriculum leaders, as well as the senior management team. Every member of staff has a responsibility to ensure that every child achieves their targets.

The older children are using self-evaluation and success criteria to plan their work. This is helping them to recognise themselves how they could further improve. The discussion group of children explained that time was given in class to amend errors and respond to teacher's advice. Younger children reported that they are given oral feedback and time to practice or correct errors. This is helping them learn that it is important to review, evaluate and improve their work continually, to achieve their potential.

The achievements of the children at Horizon School reflect more than just the test results and high standards in all subjects; it is the aspiration of the whole school. In physical education, for example, 100% of children are able to swim 25 metres by the end of Year 6. Progress and attainment in music, art and ICT are monitored by the curriculum leaders, so that high achievement is a goal for all children in all subjects.

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

Priority is placed on developing the 'whole child', and this is evident in the school's ethos and practice. SMART references are displayed in most classrooms; some include references to individual children. Planning indicates that some year groups dedicate curriculum time to developing an understanding of SMART at the start of the year. The use of Flow Time and Block Time enables children to develop further areas of individual strength and interest.

It is clear that the children's attitudes are very good, both towards their learning and to those people around them. Children are well motivated and there were very few observed off-task during lessons. Expectations of behaviour are high. The school has instigated 'Golden Rules' which are displayed and promoted around school. When asked, the children were clear about how important it is to follow the rules and understood the need for those rules to be in place. Behaviour is very good, both in the classroom and in the playground. Children respond well to praise and are polite and courteous. This was evident during discussions with the children and throughout lesson observations. In nearly all classes, the children work effectively with each other and demonstrate the use of initiative and independent learning skills.

Children are encouraged to reflect on their performance and learning, and to set their own targets for future development. This was evident for example, during physical education. Many of the children represent the school in sports, music and art related activities. Many opportunities are made available for children to assume roles of responsibility through the student council and prefect roles. A "buddy" system allows all children to work in partnership with older or younger pupils. Evidence sources indicate that the children are involved in regular charitable work.

A collective assembly takes place on a weekly basis.

4. Leadership and management of the school

4.1 How well is the school led and managed?

The management and governance of Horizon School are highly effective and ensure the school's aims are met. Clear expectations on the role of governors assure they take their responsibility to act as supportive and critical friends of the school seriously. They are kept well informed about the school, and clear guidance supports them in their role.

Horizon School gains a great deal from the headteacher's clear vision and commitment to ensuring the school achieves high standards and a total commitment to celebrating the achievements of each and every child. The senior management team, comprising of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and two assistant deputies provide a high level of monitoring and support for all aspects of the school's activities. They are very effective. Well established systems are in place that have had a highly beneficial impact on developing a clear understanding of effective teaching and learning. The leadership team monitors achievement levels across the whole school, setting high expectations and encouraging staff to be highly successful professionals'.

Effective systems of tracking ensure all staff clearly understand the child's next stage in learning. Horizon School has promoted the importance of the development of the whole child. Along with the careful monitoring of academic standards, equal care is taken to ensure the children have the opportunities to develop across the whole range of personal and social skills.

The school leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and, with the middle managers, are keen to further develop their effectiveness. Whole school staff meetings stimulate a positive collegiate approach. The school has established a staff ethos that focuses on a continual process of improvement.

The headteacher and her leadership team have implemented an effective school development plan that is a whole school approach to drive achievement levels even further forward. The school community is aware of and supports the progress the school is making. Effective systems are in place to collect a wide range of staff, children, parents and the wider community's views on school development.

Through its excellent and highly effective leadership, Horizon School has established outstandingly high expectations. It achieves strong outcomes in developing the whole range of competencies that contribute to the education of the whole child.

5. Quality of provision

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

The school is well resourced, and has up-to-date facilities and equipment. There are currently sufficient teaching rooms and specialist areas to accommodate all the learning programmes and curricular needs of the children. These areas are used well throughout the school day. All common areas are creatively utilised for relevant and attractive displays. Floor space has been used to create additional learning areas and interactive displays in foyers and corridors.

Specialist areas include 2 swimming pools (for infants and juniors), a multi-purpose hall and gymnasium, library, music, art and ICT rooms. All of these facilities are well equipped to meet learning and curricular needs. In addition, the school has a grassed playing field and shaded areas with seating.

The management team, through careful planning and forethought ensure that they maintain high quality of provision for the future. In key areas such as ICT, plans are in place to extend the wireless network capabilities across the school. In addition to the fully equipped ICT suite, additional computers are located in some of the shared areas and in the library. This is enabling the children further opportunities to develop and practice ICT skills.

Classrooms are light and spacious, allowing room for movement when required. All teachers observed make good use of the carpeted areas for both whole class and small group discussions. The interactive whiteboards and writing boards are well utilised.

Staffing provision is satisfactory with all key positions occupied by well qualified people. This ensures all teaching groups are of a suitable size for effective learning. The headteacher and deputy head have served at the school for long periods, which provides a sense of stability and continuity to the environment and ethos.

Although the school's self evaluation form refers to the concerns over the possible negative impact of staff mobility, there are sufficient long-serving members of staff to ensure that there is a strong measure of continuity for the future.

The school is keen to expand the number of teaching assistants employed to support learning. Currently, there are shared assistants in Years 5 and 6.

6. Overall effectiveness of the school

6.1 How successful is the school?

Horizon School is a highly effective school that ensures children are at the heart of all its decisions. Each child is valued and cherished as an individual learner, and respected as an important part of the harmonious school community. As a result, the children's attitudes, values, behavior and aspirations are excellent. Children are very positive about the important contribution that the school makes to their lives. They respond well to the needs of others, and are keen to succeed for themselves.

Parents fully support the vision and direction of the school. They recognize the important contribution the school makes towards the development of their children. They value the efforts of the school to involve and inform them at each stage of development.

The headteacher has developed a highly effective management team that share and value a common vision and set of expectations. Routines and procedures are followed, and clearly understood by all. Teachers value the support they are given, and the opportunities they have to develop their professional competencies in a supportive learning environment.

The school is well resourced. It provides a clear and enlightened curriculum that is broad and balanced with an appropriate focus on the 'Britishness' of the school.

The school supports and celebrates the achievements of all of its children and recognizes the education of the whole child is essential. The children achieve high standards in SATs results, but also develop as highly effective learners who understand and respond to the needs of others.

6.2 What the school does well

Horizon School, Dubai meets all the standards for British Schools overseas, as published by the DfE.

The school has strengths in many important areas:

- The children are at the heart of everything at Horizon. They are truly valued and recognize that they contribute to the school's success.
- The leadership of the head teacher has a highly positive impact on all areas of the school.
- The school has a clear understanding of its present and future priorities, and ensures these are monitored and developed.
- The clearly stated vision is shared and understood by all stake holders and drives the development of the school.
- All staff value the strong co-operative ethos of the school and recognize they contribute to its success.
- The school is strongly supported by its stakeholders. Its environment reflects the partnership approach that values the contribution made by all.
- Levels of attainment are high in both academic and wider creative capacities that enable children to be effective learners.
- There is an atmosphere of calm throughout the school.
- The accommodation and resources are used imaginatively to ensure high quality learning opportunities are provided.
- Teams of specialist teachers have an effective and positive impact on the quality and range of learning opportunities.

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:

- develop further opportunities for high achieving students to excel.

Evidence source/s

During the accreditation visit, 27 full or part lessons were observed, school documentation and policies were analysed, children's' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with senior staff, middle managers, a range of teachers and groups of children. Some parents were also asked for their views on the school.