



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

# **Inspection report**

## **Scholars International Academy**

### **Sharjah United Arab Emirates**

Date:  
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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 academy's management on the overall effectiveness of the academy, the standard of education it provides and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom.

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

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

During the inspection visit, 61 full or part lessons were observed by inspectors. Academy documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, members of the board and a range of teachers, parents and groups of students.

The lead inspector was Colin Dyson, team members were Karen Hanratty, Edward Pearce and Sheila Smith.

## 2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

Scholars International Academy meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas accreditation.

## 3. Overall effectiveness of the school

Scholars International Academy (SIA) provides a satisfactory education for its students and is an improving institution.

Across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects current students are making progress, developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills, considering their different starting points.

The academy has recognised that current assessment practices do not provide a complete picture of individual student progress over time. Evidence from lesson observations show that in nearly all lessons students make gains in learning and progress is clearly evident from year to year. Nearly all students make progress at least in line with their ability, some better. In English, mathematics and science data demonstrates that student achieve above international averages. The academy has implemented an initial range of strategies to further develop the effectiveness of assessment

The students feel valued and display positive attitudes towards their learning and relationships with each other.

### 3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths:

- The high quality of the attitudes and behaviour of all the students. They are a real strength of the academy.
- Relationships with parents are strong and this results in a highly supportive commitment to their academy.
- The quality of support staff is good and as a result health and safety procedures are effective.
- The quality of students' spoken English is good throughout the academy.
- The majority of teaching is good.

- The positive impact of recent staff appointments and strategies to retain the ‘best’ has enhanced the quality of the teaching overall.
- The academy displays a strong commitment to being part of the community.
- The principal and senior leaders ensure the effective day-to-day management of the academy.
- The accommodation is well used and outdoor areas are effective in enhancing the learning environment.
- The academy is a welcoming place that provides good levels of security and students feel very safe.

## 3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Prepare and implement effective policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children/students and ensure these policies are shared with all stakeholders.
- Ensure that the senior leadership team analyse the current situation of the academy accurately and clearly identify the future developments that will move it forward in an inspirational and timely fashion.
- Implement effective assessment and tracking procedures to maximise the impact on students’ learning through a greater clarity of purpose.
- Maximise the advantage of being part of the SIG group of academies by collaborating with senior leadership teams on key areas of policy development.

## 4. The context of the school

Full name of school/college	Scholars International Academy				
Address	PO Box 47425 Sharjah, UAE				
Telephone number	+97165355033				
Fax number	+97165355034				
Website	www.scholarsinternationalacademy.com				
Email address	nmelen@scholarsinternationalacademy.com				
Head	Nigel Melen				
Chairman of Board of Governors	Aparna Verma				
Age range	4 to 18 years				
Total number of pupils	1,070	Boys	608	Girls	462
Numbers by age	0-2 years	0	11-16 years	89	
	3-5 years	324	16-18 years	0	
	5-11 years	657	18+ years	0	
Total number of part-time children	0				

Scholars International Academy was established in August 2007. It is licensed, registered and approved by the Sharjah Ministry of Education in the United Arab Emirates.

The academy is part of the Scholars International Group (SIG) with the mission to develop leading international academies across the Middle East.

Within the academy there are a total of 1,070 students made up from 57 nationalities.

The academy provides for children from the age of 3 to the age of 16 years.

The academy aims to create a safe and nurturing environment that supports and encourages each child's academic, personal, physical and social growth. It highlights its mission to develop a co-operative and proactive relationship with the parents, making them part of the educational process.

SIA has completed a self-evaluation and identifies the following as potential barriers to learning:

- The recruitment and retention of high quality staff.
- The challenge of meeting both ministry and international educational expectations.
- The development of effective monitoring and tracking progress of students over time.
- Many of the students are of a transient nature; only 400 present students have remained in the academy for at least 3 years.

## 4.1 British nature of the school

The ethos, nature and appearance of the academy are recognisably British, and mirror many aspects that would be found in the independent sector in the UK.

The language of instruction is English. The academy is organised according to the structures used in English independent academies. Classroom management, displays of work, three term year and age-related year groups contribute to a British feel to the academy.

An increasing number of teachers are UK qualified or hold qualifications recognised by the DfE in the UK.

All students wear school uniform.

The academy demonstrates a commitment to British education initiatives both in terms of curriculum and assessment.

The proprietor and board share a commitment to meeting the needs of all the students so that they 'have the flexible thinking and learning skills necessary to them as life-long learners of the twenty-first century.

Parents are highly supportive of the British nature of the curriculum. Interviews demonstrated they appreciate and value the UK style of education.



## 5. Standard 1

### The quality of education provided by the school

Overall the quality of education provided meets the standard for the BSO Framework fully.

#### 5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum meets the BSO standard.

The primary section delivers the Early years Foundation Stage framework in the Foundation Stage classes. The National Curriculum for England is taught in years 1 – 4, following the Cambridge Education International Curriculum for English, mathematics and science. In addition, Arabic language is taught to native speakers and foreigners, as well as Islamic Studies for Muslim students and local studies in accordance with local requirements. Sequences of learning are planned within year groups, with different members of staff taking responsibility for different areas of the curriculum. In the most successful lessons observed these plans were then annotated by individual teachers to meet the needs of children in their class. Adequately differentiated activities were evident in only a few lessons. In the majority of lessons children work in ability groups with support being provided by the teacher or by the teacher and teaching assistant in years 1 and 2. In Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) lessons are planned on a thematic basis, incorporating activities across a range of learning and development areas. There is a strong focus on literacy, including phonics.

Transitions from Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 and from year 4 into the Secondary section are an area of development. F2 children's books and EYFS profiles are passed to the year 1 teachers at the end of the year. Attempts are made to organise taster sessions with their new teacher but there are difficulties surrounding this regarding class groupings and turnover of staff. Similarly in year 4, there have been issues regarding assessments and data and a clear decision regarding the academy structure for next year has not yet been reached.

A range of extra-curricular activities are provided each term, some of which support or extend the curriculum. These are taken up by 59% of students across the academy; many other children are unable to take advantage of these due to problems regarding transport home following the activity.

Years 5 and 6 follow a secondary style curriculum model and the students remain in their class base for most of the subjects. Subject specialists teach these years and the academy recognises that where staff teach across the full age range 5-11, they are not always fully equipped with the required skills.

In Key Stage 3, the Cambridge course is supported by the National Curriculum courses for England for geography, history, PE, French and PSHE (for non-Muslim students only) while meeting the

ministry requirements for Arabic and Islamic Studies. Students also study performing arts subjects as well as art and design technology. Classes are split by gender from years 5 to 9.

The curriculum is supported by schemes of work. Generic planning was in evidence and whilst the academy recognises that these should be annotated to meet the needs of the students, this is not always the case.

In Key Stage 4, students work toward iGCSE in a minimum of 7 subjects but have the opportunity to study up to ten subjects. The core subjects of mathematics, English, Arabic, Islamic Studies and PE continue, and students are able to choose their other subjects from five option blocks.

The special education needs (SEN) department and class teachers have measures in place to enhance the learning outcomes of SEN students by offering additional support in group and individual sessions. Individual education plans (IEPs) are in place and parents are involved throughout the whole process.

There is a range of extra-curricular activities which enhance the experiences within the formal curriculum and supports the further development of individual's interests and talents.

The academy uses its 'all through' nature to facilitate smooth transitions for the students between the various stages. Students entering the academy at other points felt that support to help them integrate into the academy depended upon the form teacher they had rather than an official academy induction process.

## 5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment meets the standard required.

The quality of teaching is good and has been enhanced by the appointment of a significant number of staff with UK experience.

In the Foundation Stage, although there are the beginnings of a more child-initiated approach to learning, there is limited evidence of differentiation. Progress for some students was restricted to an expectation of average attainment. There was limited evidence of an enabling environment to stretch and challenge the more able students. The pitch of some of the lessons was at the general level of the class and delivered largely through whole class directed teacher talk. Opportunities were provided for children to break into smaller focused groups and child self-selecting activities.

In years 1-4, teachers mostly demonstrated a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. Lessons are well planned, however enhanced assessment arrangements would allow teachers to more effectively differentiate their planning to cater for their needs of the students. For example, in year 2 mathematics lessons the lesson objectives were shared effectively with the students, resources were prepared and support staff were deployed effectively. However, many students were unable to access the materials due to the level of language being used. Planning in year 3 English lessons was identical; however teachers demonstrated an ability to deliver the planning in a variety of ways. Students behaved responsibly across all primary year groups

The quality of teaching in the secondary section is good with some outstanding lessons. In the best, lessons students are able to work in pairs or groups, activities are engaging and well planned and students and teachers share an enthusiasm for the subject. An example of this was seen in a year 9 English lesson where, working in pairs, each student was required to peer-edit an examination paper (extended writing) based on a provided mark scheme. They then compared their results with their partner, reasoning why they had allocated marks as they had. The teacher asked them what they had learned from this exercise, as areas for their own development. Students were able to identify their own areas of weakness on which they needed to do further work.

The use of discussion groups and well structured question and answer sessions supports the students' acquisition of language skills and develops personal confidence and self esteem.

High quality marking and constructive feedback from teachers was seen in some students' books but this was not consistent across the curriculum. In the best practice clear praise is given and targets set for individual learning. Students interviewed confirmed that they knew their levels of achievement and what needs to be done to improve.

Assessment across the academy is at an embryonic stage. Internal assessments have traditionally been used to measure progress. These were not standardised.

In Foundation classes, the teaching staff have embraced the EYFS curriculum. The academy has recognised the need to move away from templates and worksheets, and to ensure that what is produced is child-initiated.

At the end of primary academy, students now sit examinations in English, mathematics and science. The academy has identified the mismatch between these scores and National Curriculum levels, which are still used. To that end, the current year 7 were given Key Stage 2 SATs papers in English, mathematics and science, when they were in year 6, marked by secondary academy subject specialists to better inform the target setting progress. year 9 also take the Cambridge checkpoint examinations. In Key Stage 4, past papers and mark schemes are used to indicate progress towards iGCSE.

The academy is actively exploring more informative ways of measuring both individual and cohort progress and attainment across the key stages, and to evidence value added more effectively.

## 5.3 Standards achieved by students

The quality of standards achieved by students meet the standards.

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

The academy introduced the Cambridge checkpoint examinations into year 6 and over 85% of students achieved an average score or better, with 40% achieving the highest scores.

Cambridge Checkpoint results at year 9 indicate that students achieve well when compared to worldwide averages. There were no students entered for iGCSE.

Students work in class with enthusiasm and interest. They are able to work positively in pairs and groups . They are willing and able to contribute to their lessons and do so in an articulate and thoughtful way. Their behaviour is impeccable. Lessons observed confirmed that students are well focused and demonstrate an outstanding attitude towards learning.

Throughout the academy, there is a community feel. Students and staff have excellent relationships as can be seen by the interaction throughout the academy.

Students are generally proud of the academy and feel that they are listened to. The emergence this year of both Senior and Junior Student Councils aims to strengthen the student voice.

Daily attendance averages around 86% with figures of 82% and 86% on the first two days of the inspection. Through robust initiatives the academy is seeking to improve attendance rates.

## 6. *Standard 2*

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good. It is a key strength of the academy.

Relationships between students and staff and within the student body are a very positive aspect of the academy. There is mutual respect and kindness evident in interactions; when students are given the opportunity they work well in a group. The academy population is made up of 57 diverse nationalities. There is a strong atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration, students accepting one another as individuals without regard to cultural differences.

Behaviour of the students is another very positive aspect of the academy, with students showing responsibility and maturity in their movements around the academy and dealings with others. Students have an understanding of appropriate codes of conduct and many classes have their own class rules or behaviour contracts, created at the start of each year. In interviews, students reported that behaviour is generally good with minimal serious incidences. A year 9 anti-bullying display was referenced.

Students have a good understanding of right and wrong. The PSHE programme and year group assemblies help to support student's personal and social development, as witnessed in a year 4 PSHE lesson on decisions and consequences and the year 3 assembly. Rewards and sanctions are understood by students and considered fair, there being a heavy bias towards positive behaviour approaches. 'Golden Time' is a popular feature of this with the Primary students interviewed. In the secondary classes, a year 9 Islamic Studies lesson about male/female relationships demonstrated the students' mature attitude to this sensitive subject.

Students are confident and friendly, often initiating conversations with visitors and expressing themselves well. In the F2 classrooms, students learning about the solar system were eager to share their knowledge. The vast majority engage in their lessons in a positive manner and are eager to contribute their thoughts and ideas. There is a strong work ethic amongst the student body, with most tackling tasks set diligently.

A structure for student leaders is in place which allows students to become involved in aspects of academy life and beyond. The Primary Student Council has representatives from each class in years 1 to 4. It has a role in raising concerns from the student body as well as supporting charity fund-raising. The posts of house captain and vice-captain offer another opportunity for students to rise to the challenge of leadership.

## 7. Standard 3

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

The academy meets the standard for the welfare, health and safety of students.

Good quality care for students is seen in the high level of commitment of staff and their competence in promoting students' health and safety. Arrangements to promote good behaviour are very effective and result in a calm environment for learning. The academy has appropriate written policies supporting the welfare, health and safety of students. These documents ensure the children feel and are well protected and supported in the academy. However, the safeguarding procedures are new and not embedded: they do not form part of the annual induction process for all staff, for example.

Students' behaviour in class and around the academy is excellent. They are enthusiastic and fully engaged in lessons, concentrate and apply themselves fully to tasks set, work well together and volunteer ideas readily. Lessons proceed without disruption and student's consistently thoughtful behaviour creates an extremely positive academy ethos.

Fire drills are conducted each term and evacuation routes are clearly displayed in each room. A file including feedback from staff and actions taken is kept. Evacuation routes are displayed in each room.

Transport safety is a high priority for the academy and the arrival and dismissal procedures for children using the bus service reflect this. All buses are fitted with seatbelts and the use of these is strictly enforced. Incidents of bad behaviour on the bus are escalated to the Head of Phase.

The academy site is inspected each day with a full health and safety checklist being completed fortnightly. Procedures are in place to ensure any health and safety issues are addressed promptly and staff are fully aware of these. There are two academy nurses (as per Sharjah Law) and a visiting doctor who are responsible for the onsite care and support for all students. The medical team liaises closely with parents on any medical issues.

Every attention is given to ensuring the premises are secure and that any potential concerns are addressed immediately. The site security ensures that visitors to the academy are logged on entry and exit. The academy has 24 hour security with a single entry point during the academy day. Access to Foundation Stage and upstairs teaching areas are limited to staff and students and gates are in place. The academy cleaning staff ensure the site is regularly well cleaned.

There is a limited canteen service onsite providing light meal options for students.

The academy complies with the Sharjah Ministry of Education, which inspects the academy on a regular basis.

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

The suitability of the proprietor, board members and staff meets the standard.

The Board has established positive relationships with the principal and his staff which ensures the smooth day to day operation of the academy. All local requirements are met, including the right to work in the host country; suitability to work with children and appropriate certificates of suitability. The Board ensures through the Director-General that the academy fulfils the safety, care and guidance requirements for all students based on host country requirements. Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks, including police checks are carried out by the Ministry of Education.

Leaders and the Board are ambitious for all students: they are beginning to use more robust self-evaluation to identify key areas for future development. The Board is committed to supporting the leaders in developing an outstanding international school.

The effective collective contribution of the board members is adding significantly to the continual process of improvement. They have recognised the need to increase professional development opportunities to further enhance the impact of teaching and assessment.

Staffing levels are mostly appropriate for the successful delivery of the curriculum. The Board needs to evaluate the impact of some specialist teaching in years 5 and 6 to ensure all teachers have the educational experience to deliver a suitable Key Stage 2 curriculum.



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

The premises and accommodation are good and provide an effective learning environment.

The academy has been in operation since August 2007. It is licensed, approved and registered by the Sharjah Ministry of Education.

The main building accommodates the administration staff, classrooms from Foundation Stage 1 through to year 11, specialist teaching areas and canteen. From years 5-11 the classes are split according to gender and are accommodated in separate wings of the main building. There is a separate structure for the swimming pool which is secure and accessible through a 'child proof' gate. There are two main shaded and well-resourced play areas for Foundation Stage as well as a large shaded play area in the centre of the main build. The large open sports field is not currently covered. The academy is generally clean and tidy, with students reporting the environment is appropriate for learning. Washroom facilities are plentiful and hygienic.

The maintenance staff are highly effective in their work and ensure that high standards are met, through daily site walks and health and safety checks (fortnightly). Staff contact the facilities team with any concerns regarding health and safety. This ensures that all members of the academy are involved in looking after the academy grounds. The local regulatory authority conducts frequent inspections to ensure the academy complies with all requirements for an educational establishment. The academy successfully meets all Sharjah requirements regarding the safety and maintenance of the facilities.

There is a security station at the main access point and the academy is surrounded by secure boundary walls. The security staff monitor the main entrance and ensure all visitors are checked and issued with the appropriate visitor's badge. The leadership team and staff monitor at the start and the end of the day. There are currently two full time academy nurses and 7 members of staff who have accredited First Aid training. In house training is provided by the academy nurse for all teaching assistants. First Aid training is not compulsory for all staff.

The teaching areas are resourced with interactive whiteboards in most classrooms. The furniture and fittings are mostly appropriate for the majority of age and needs of all students registered at the academy, although the academy recognizes that the Foundation Stage rooms impose restrictions on the variety of activities that the children can independently access. It is currently being proposed by the academy that an additional EYFS development be built towards the rear of the academy property, leading to enhanced provision for EYFS and freeing space for further expansion in lower Primary to support growth in student numbers.

Science (physics, chemistry and biology) is adequately accommodated, with three laboratories. Art, and design and technology have two specialist areas and performing arts (music, dance and drama) have three; ICT has two dedicated spaces. PE have sufficient space (gym, swimming pools, green fields and auditorium). There is one library space for the entire academy that is in need of renovation.

## 10. Standard 6

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

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

The role of the parents as partners in their children's education is a key aspiration of the academy. The parents interviewed were very positive about the education that their children are receiving at the academy and the support that is provided to them. They felt that the teachers know each child as an individual and are keen to support each child as needed. Parents stated that the academy is ready to listen to any concerns that they may have. They suggested they feel able to approach the principal and other senior leaders as well as teachers; when raising issues they felt they had been heard and that actions and resolutions were swift and appropriate. There is a fledgling PTA which the academy hopes will grow and develop.

The academy communicates with parents through a variety of means. The Communicator system and 'Primary Dojo' give parents online access to up to date information regarding their child and various academy matters. These are tools which are still developing; whilst used to good effect in some year groups and subjects, it is not used well in all, leading to a lack of information. The academy website contains basic information which may be useful to prospective parents, although it is not sufficiently inclusion. The academy's vision and mission are clearly stated. Detailed safeguarding information and information regarding staffing are not provided to parents. Children's communication diaries are a tool of communication throughout primary, but they are not used consistently.

Twice yearly written reports which comment on children's progress and attitudes to learning, as well as targets for future development are issued to parents. These are consolidated with individual parent teacher consultations. Improvements on effective reporting to parents can be made when assessment procedures become more rigorous.

Links with other schools are at an early stage. There has recently been involvement in a number of inter-school sporting events which the academy hopes to build on.

## 11. *Standard 7*

### **The school's procedure for handling complaints**

There is a formal complaints procedure that is transparent, open and effective. It takes into account UAE and Sharjah requirements and regulations.

The procedures for handling complaints mirror the management structure of the academy. The class or subject teacher is the first 'responsive' person. Should an issue not be resolved, progression through the management structure follows. Provision is made for an independent hearing with designated Board members.

Clear and detailed records are kept of any complaints and parents are confident that any complaint will be dealt with effectively. There is a high degree of satisfaction by parents with both the speed of response and the resolution of any complaint.

Parents are aware that if a complaint remains unresolved then the Ministry of Education will act on their behalf as final arbitrators.

## 12. *Standard 8*

### **The quality of provision for boarding**

Not applicable.

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

Leadership and management of the academy meet the standard.

The principal is ambitious for all students and has been successful in implementing a range of improvement strategies.

The senior leadership team has collectively identified a vision for the development of the academy. Through its recent self-evaluation, which takes into account the views of all major stakeholders, they have a developing understanding of the academies' strengths and areas for development.

In a short space of time, staff have been identified as middle leaders to take an increasing role in delegated responsibility for school improvement. The senior leadership team needs to ensure all leaders and managers are equipped with the skills, knowledge and time to support the academy in successfully implementing and completing key strategic developments.

The academy leaders are focused on securing and motivating high quality staff and have ensured recent appointments have the necessary qualifications and experience to deliver the English National Curriculum.

The development and implementation of a range of performance management practices has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The senior leadership team has a good understanding of their teachers' strengths and areas for development. Teaching is improving as a result of monitoring and professional development this needs to be rigorously maintained. The academy has identified the need for a more rigorous approach to monitoring, tracking and assessment. This needs to be clearly understood by all staff so that established routines and practices can be more consistently applied once a clear rationale has been established.

Strategic planning for the future is realistic: senior leaders are aware that they need to monitor outcomes fully, to ensure success criteria are met within an agreed timescale.

The Board are not currently fully informed with high quality information about the academy's progress and current educational issues: meetings are not regular, with sometimes limited opportunity for the principal and senior staff to make presentations.