



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

Victory Heights Primary School

Dubai

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1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

The Department for Education has put in place a voluntary scheme for the inspection of British schools overseas, whereby schools are inspected against a common set of standards that British schools overseas can choose to adopt.

The inspection and this report follow the Department for Education (DFE) schedule for the inspection of British Schools overseas.

The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's management on the overall effectiveness of the school, the standard of education it provides and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom.

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

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

During the inspection visit, 38 full or part lessons were observed by inspectors. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, a range of teachers, representatives of the governors and group of students. Three school days were monitored.

The Lead Inspector was John Cranfield. The team members were Stuart Dobson and Emma Shanahan.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

Victory Heights Primary School Dubai, meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

Victory Heights is a good school. It provides a good quality of education under-pinned by effective pastoral care. The quality of learning, teaching and leadership are good. The children, parents and staff are highly committed to the school and feel valued and appreciated. Nearly all children make expected or better progress throughout the key stages. The school has effectively implemented robust welfare, health and safety policies and procedures. The curriculum is broad and balanced; enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths. They include:

- The board are highly effective in supporting the school; securing resources including high quality staff, ensuring all local regulations are met and often exceeded, and holding the senior leadership to account.
- The principal is inspirational in ensuring a shared vision and a commitment from all staff to continue to move the school forward. She is well supported by a highly effective deputy and other members of the senior leadership team.
- The school is highly successful in enabling all pupils to develop their personal skills and qualities: pupils are thoughtful, well behaved, treat others with respect and have well-developed social skills.
- The high quality of the learning environment both inside and outside ensures pupils are happy, safe and secure.
- The school is held in high regard by parents. Children are proud to be members of the school and value the opportunities it provides.
- The whole school community, teaching, non-teaching and support staff work as a team to promote the school's vision: nurture, challenge, excel.
- Britishness is a strength.
- The commitment of year teams to ensure planning is comprehensive and creative.
- Teaching standards overall are good. Most are above the standard required for accreditation, none was unsatisfactory.
- The tracking of individual children, monitoring of underachievement and implementing effective intervention strategies is good.
- The range of extra-curricular activities enhances the learning of the children.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Raise expectations and the level of challenge in lessons to ensure accelerated value added.
- Embed good practice by :
 - reviewing the school's current initiatives and focusing on those which best promote high standards
 - further developing assessment for learning
 - strengthening the role of middle leaders in assuring the quality of teaching, learning and the raising of attainment.

4. The context of the school

Victory Heights is a privately owned purpose built school. It opened in September 2013 with 280 pupils. There are presently 515 pupils on roll. The school is co-educational and provides education for children from the ages of 3 to 11. 56% of pupils are from the UK and 1% are Emirati.

The school follows the National Curriculum for England, including Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, with accommodation for subjects required by the Ministry of Education; Arabic Studies, Islamic Studies and Social Studies. In Key Stages 1 and 2 the primary curriculum is enhanced by aspects of the 'Creative Curriculum'

English is the language of communication throughout the school, and in lessons.

4.1 British nature of the school

The ethos, nature and appearance of the school are recognisably British, and mirror what would be found in the independent sector in the UK. The school is organised according to the structures used in English schools. Classroom management, displays of work, three term year and age-related year groups contribute to a British feel of the school. Victory Heights follows the National Curriculum for England. In addition the house system and elected school council representatives are reflective of British practice. The majority of teaching staff are from the UK. Approaches to performance management, staff target setting and annual review meetings are in line with British practice. Victory Heights is developing strong links with St. Dunstan's school in the UK. Sixty B.Ed. students from Wolverhampton University spent 2 days in school as part of their professional development.

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

The school utilises a wide range of assessment methods comparable to best practice in the UK. Consequently children can join/re-join the UK education system without disadvantage. With the exception of Arabic Studies, Islamic Studies, Social Studies and Spanish, all teaching is in English. Throughout the school there are displays depicting the Royal Family. Royal events are frequently used to provide stimulus material in the taught curriculums. A royal family tree adorns a display area.

5. Standard 1

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided at Victory Heights is good. It fully meets the requirements of the BSO Framework.

5.1 Curriculum

There is full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age. The school meets, or is in the process of meeting, all local Dubai regulations. The principal language of instruction is English. The curriculum is well organised and effectively supported by appropriate policy documents and schemes of work which demonstrate how children of all ages are challenged and supported. There is clear evidence of planning for progression. Effective implementation enables children to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. The broad and balanced curriculum gives children experience in a wide range of areas of learning, including linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative education.

Children in the Foundation Stage (FS) and Key Stage 1 enjoy a rich and varied curriculum. Children work towards the Early Years Goals as set out in the UK Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. In FS, children's progress is tracked using the Foundation Stage profile, with evidence collected from individual Learning Journeys and teachers' anecdotal observations. The school has been designed to offer a range of opportunities for children to learn inside and outside the building. All of the Foundation Stage classes have access to outdoor areas. Shared areas inside of the school are used well to provide many practical learning opportunities. The school has excellent links with nearby nursery provision and has taken the opportunity to ensure that any children who have additional learning needs are identified early and receive targeted support when they arrive in school. The school has begun to identify children who are gifted or talented. Staff promote the learning of Arabic from the beginning of the Foundation Stage. There is very good provision for gross motor and physical development, for example all children are taught swimming.

Key Stages 1 and 2 follow the National Curriculum guidelines for all appropriate subjects. The Primary Curriculum is enhanced with aspects of the Creative Curriculum. Scientific, historical and geographical learning is informed by the child's own interests and ideas, following an initial three week input. Planning and delivery aim to provide a rich and varied curriculum based around themes relevant to the children's needs. This helps to ensure children experience activities that encourage exploration and experiences of their world in a creative and personalized learning environment. Victory Heights takes into account the types of curriculum and external examinations commonly used in schools in the UK. This enables pupils to enter, or re-enter the UK educational system without disadvantage.

The school benefits from specialist teachers and resource rooms for music, PE, ICT, Spanish and Art. Teachers and learning assistants have a good knowledge of the learning and development and welfare requirements of the youngest children which promotes their learning, social, physical and economic well-being. The curriculum is enhanced by a planned PSHE programme and the opportunity to select from sporting, artistic and musical after school activities.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

Teaching and assessment are good and meet the standard required.

In the Foundation Stage, good classroom management encourages children to behave well and effectively underpins their learning. Shared planning brings a range of teacher expertise into weekly planning and this is further adapted by the class teachers. This inclusive approach gives teachers confidence in delivering lessons; many are able to adapt effectively the work to meet the learning needs of individuals and groups. The school is currently trialing a new approach to the teaching of phonic skills to address some of the issues of targeting learning more precisely. In most sessions, children are suitably challenged. This occurs particularly well in the 'activity' sessions where learning targets are approached through practical activities which challenge children's thinking and their abilities to find solutions, for example how to make toy cars go further. Children are very well supported in their learning by their teachers and learning assistants. The staff use a good range of resources both inside and outside the classroom.

Foundation Stage teaching has a strong focus on communication, language and literacy. In best practice, teachers link the language lessons into other areas of work, for example making predictions in science. Children are assessed regularly through observational assessment as well as tasks set. Completed tasks are recorded and stored in a portfolio. Observational records are kept and recorded in an electronic profile which the school has recently adopted. This further informs teachers' planning.

Overall the quality of teaching across Key Stages 1 and 2 is good or better. The best lessons were characterised by the effective use of finely honed teacher questioning to elicit in-depth responses from the children, and the skilled use of teaching assistants to support children's learning. In less effective lessons there is a lack of pace and challenge. The limited use of interactive white boards in nearly all lessons is a missed opportunity to motivate and challenge children in their learning. Children continue to enjoy their lessons throughout Key Stage 2. They are focused on the tasks set and actively work together to achieve learning objectives. They are particularly good at working in pairs or small groups, both independently and with the support of the teacher and teaching assistant. Although a range of assessment for learning techniques were observed, for example peer and self-assessment, use of plenaries and targeted high order questioning, are yet to be fully embedded across all subjects. Displays in most classrooms and around the school helped celebrate achievement and enhanced the learning environment.

A particularly effective two teacher role-play energised Year 3 and 4 children in applying their mathematical skills to plan for a party. Whilst the needs of most children are well met, planning to specifically meet the needs of the most able is

under-developed. In lessons where teaching assistants are effectively used to support learning, children make good progress. The quality of support however is not consistent across the school.

Across the key stages, all children are acquiring new knowledge, making progress, increasing their understanding and developing their skills, according to their ability. Teachers encourage children to apply intellectual, physical and creative effort, to show interest in their work, and to think and learn for themselves. Classroom management is effective, enabling all children to behave well and show a readiness for, and enjoyment in learning. Teachers plan collaboratively ensuring staff are motivated and empowered, and expertise is fully utilised. Individual teachers then tailor the planning to meet the particular needs of their class. Throughout the school, teachers are developing the use of a range of tracking and monitoring systems to provide more accurate baseline data, including CAT testing. The identification of underachievement and implementation of intervention strategies is effective. The use of assessment data to inform lesson planning and reliably evidence value added for individuals and groups is less well established. Oral feedback and marking across the school is evident, and in some instances effective in highlighting to children the next steps in their learning. This is however not consistent across the school.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

Overall the standards achieved are broadly in line with UK national expectations. Most children meet the Foundation Stage expected outcomes. A significant number of the remainder are English as an additional language speakers; some have learning difficulties. Reading skills are developing well supported by the children's growing phonic knowledge. They are given strategies to help with their spelling and support their writing which is not as advanced as reading. Most children, including those with EAL, are developing good speaking and listening skills.

Many children who enter throughout the primary phase come from a wide range of educational backgrounds and experiences, often with levels of attainment below age related expectations. For example, 50% of the present Year 2 did not start at the school. Throughout Key Stage 1 most children make expected progress, some make better progress. Over the last year, 87% made 2 sub-levels of progress or better in English; 44% made 3 sub-levels progress or better. Most EAL children made 2 sub-levels progress or better with a majority making 3 sub-levels progress in reading and writing. Most SEN children made 2 sub-levels progress, or even better in reading; 50% made 3 sub-levels or better progress in writing. At the end of the key stage, attainment in English and mathematics is broadly in line with UK expectations. In science, the majority of pupils are working towards UK averages.

Throughout Key Stage 2, children continue to make expected or better progress, particularly in mathematics. Over the last year 80% of children made 2 sub-levels of progress or better in English; 31% made 3 sub-levels progress or more. In reading, 82% of EAL children made 2 sub-levels or better progress, 27% 3 sub-levels or better. In writing 55% made 2 sub-levels or better progress, 18% made 3 sub-levels or better progress. 66% of SEN children made 2 sub-levels or better progress, 33% made 3 sub-levels or better progress. In mathematics, 90% of children made 2 sub-levels or better progress; 64% made 3 or more sub-levels of progress. 73% of EAL children made 2 sub-levels or better progress, 46% made 3 or more sub-level progress. 83% of SEN children made 2 sub-levels or better progress; 50% made 3 or more sub-levels progress. In science 67% of pupils are working at or above age related expectations. At the end of the key stage, attainment is broadly in line with UK expectations.

Behaviour is very good in classrooms and around the school. Children co-operate well with each other, their teachers and others in the school. In general, minor misdemeanours are dealt with effectively and appropriately. Classroom observations confirmed an enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. Nearly all are positive and highly motivated. They have a well-developed sense of social responsibility and belonging. Children are kind, considerate and thoughtful towards each other. Most children are articulate and confident when speaking to visitors about their school.

6. Standard 2

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

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

Children enjoy positive relationships with their teachers and each other. They listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. Older children buddy up with younger children to promote social development. 'Golden Rules' are displayed in every classroom, with a 'rocket to success' enabling children to achieve rewards for maintaining and exceeding expected standards of behaviour. 'ELLI' animals exemplify the different behaviours exhibited in successful learning. These are referred to in lessons and displayed around the school. There is mutual respect and a concern for the values and beliefs of others throughout the school. The PSHE programme in particular provides opportunities for exploring these issues. There is a clear and comprehensive anti-bullying policy. Care and concern for others extends beyond the school: last year children raised money for charity. Children are friendly and welcoming to visitors. They are happy to talk about their school, their work and their interests. The principles of right and wrong are reinforced through the behaviour code, PSHE lessons and assemblies. Tolerance, democracy, respect for freedom of expression and other human rights are developed through rich curriculum experiences. Children deepen their understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship not only in Dubai but also the UK and internationally. A spirit of internationalism is firmly embedded in the curriculum.

The school encourages responsibility and provides opportunities for children to show initiative. School council representatives are elected by their peers. There are regular meetings. Overall, attendance throughout the school is good. The attendance for the Autumn Term was 93%. Punctuality to school and lessons is very good. Robust procedures are in place to monitor attendance and punctuality and ensure they remain high. The school shares information about Britain to support their children and parents should they wish to relocate to live or study in the UK.

7. Standard 3

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The quality of the welfare, health and safety of the children is good.

The school has a comprehensive range of policies to guide staff, children and parents on issues of health and safety. The policies are clear, easy to read and regularly reviewed. There are regular site checks and key staff are fully aware of potential hazards from the adjacent building site. Fire safety procedures are tested regularly. The school has very good procedures in place to ensure the security of the perimeter at all times including overnight. The school is a clean, tidy and hygienic environment. The outdoor learning areas for the youngest children are currently insufficiently shaded which restricts their use, though staff do not let this pose a risk to children. Children are supervised very well from arrival at school until departure. There are on- and off-site physical activities procedures; risk assessments are fully implemented. The school's swimming pool is maintained to a very high standard, is secure and well supervised. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained. Daily attendance is recorded on the school's information system. Tracking of absences is rigorous. Written records of sanctions imposed on children for disciplinary offences are securely stored.

The school has excellent medical facilities. The school nurse is present throughout the day. There are thorough and secure processes and procedures to keep children healthy and for child protection. In addition to supporting individuals, the school nurse is proactive in supporting children's learning about health issues. The school promotes healthy eating but does not provide any food on the premises.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff is of a high order. The board oversees school policies, ensuring all local requirements are met or are in the process of being met. They do not interfere with the management of the school; there are clear lines of demarcation. The board ensures the school meets the safety, care and guidance requirements for all children. In addition they take responsibility for the recruitment and checking of staff credentials.

Owners must meet stringent local criteria in order to open and run a school. Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks, including police checks in the country of origin, are carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in UAE and their previous employment activity. The Ministry of Education must approve the qualifications and status of teachers employed by the school before issuing work visas. This process requires the checking of original certification including the attestation of degree certificates and teaching qualifications held by teachers.

There is a list maintained of all staff and volunteers who currently work in the school. This shows when they started and stopped working in the school.

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

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are of a high quality.

The school buildings are well designed and well maintained. The leadership team are proactive in ensuring the environment is both attractive and safe. Classrooms are arranged to facilitate teaching and learning. Furniture and fittings are appropriately designed for the age and needs of all children. The central areas, corridors and classrooms are bright and conducive to learning. Sound insulation and acoustics allow effective teaching and communication. Lighting, heating and ventilation are highly effective. Flooring throughout the site is well maintained and is in excellent condition. Outdoor areas facilitate a wide range of play opportunities, support physical development and enhance the PE provision. Access to the swimming pool is only possible under supervision. Washroom facilities are plentiful, hygienic and easily accessible. Water and drainage systems meet local requirements and are tested regularly. Emergency evacuations are held on two occasions per term and monitored for effectiveness. Site security is good. The main access point is well manned and the school is surrounded by secure boundary walls. Security staff monitor the main entrance, ensure all visitors are checked and security badges issued.

Although the school was completed just over two years ago it is already being extended to cope with the rapidly rising numbers and enhance present provision. This will include a new library which already has an allocation of funding for additional resources. The school has an appropriate number of well-qualified and experienced teachers and support staff. There are specialist teachers for subjects such as physical education, music, art and ICT. There is a generous budget for staff professional development. The school is well resourced; resources are mostly of good quality. Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard and the new extensions will be fully equipped for ICT support. Displays are well presented. Many celebrate the work of the children, whilst others give good prompts and information to support learning.

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is good.

Contact details of the school and the board are readily available. Victory Heights' mission, vision and core values are prominently featured in relevant documents and publications and referenced as a key driver of school improvement.

Parents whose children are presently in EYFS were complimentary about the support they received prior to their child starting at the school. Each class in Primary is linked to a parent representative who ensures there is a parent voice contributing to school improvement and development. Parents stated that their children loved coming to school and that they had seen great progress since they started. Home-school communication with teaching staff is highly effective. Teachers are approachable and ensure they respond to any parental concern as a matter of urgency. The quality of communication from administration was raised as an issue of concern. The school publishes detailed academic results which are easily accessible to both existing and prospective parents. The school is presently uploading key policies onto the website. A parent portal keeps parents well informed about forthcoming events as well as homework set. Key policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, the sanctions the school adopts in the event of children misbehaving and the complaints procedure are available on request. The school actively seeks feedback from parents and works proactively to address identified issues. The school has detailed records of staff employed by the school, including qualifications.

Regular informative written reports and consultation meetings with teachers keep parents well informed about their child's progress, level of attainment and attitudes to learning. Subject coordinators run training for families on aspects of their work, for example the writing team is running family training on Alan Peat sentences and Pie Corbett, in order to help parents support their children at home. There is an active parent volunteer group which meet regularly and co-ordinate the school's Spring Fayre and Christmas Carol concert. The local Rainbows meet at the school. The school is actively involved in a range of sporting activities with local schools. The sport's kit is sponsored by local businesses.

11. *Standard 7*

The school's procedure for handling complaints

Complaints are rare but the school has effective procedures in place that meet both local requirements and reflect best practice in the U.K. Parents and carers are kept well informed about the process through school documents and the website. This information is regularly updated.

The procedures for handling complaints mirror the management structure of the school. The class or subject teacher is the first port of call. Should an issue not be resolved, progression through the management structure follows. Provision is made for an independent appeals panel and for the complainant to be accompanied. Parents should they wish may appeal to the Dubai education department (KHDA). Appropriate written records are kept and confidentiality is assured.

Parents, who were interviewed, stated they felt confident with the way the school deals with concerns.

12. *Standard 8*

The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

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

The board is highly effective in ensuring the school meets the safety, care and guidance requirements for all children. In addition they take responsibility for the recruitment and checking of staff credentials. The Senior Leadership Team is held to account by the Board.

The principal is inspirational and provides strong strategic leadership through a clear, articulated and shared vision that encourages all to strive for educational excellence. She is well supported by a highly effective deputy and other members of the senior leadership team. Through effective self-evaluation processes, clear priorities have been identified that involved wide scale involvement and evidence gathering. Accurate analysis has enabled the school to implement clear priorities for development. The regular monitoring of development plans ensures all staff are aware and involved in the implementation of effective change. Leaders at all levels take responsibility for areas of school development ensuring that the school is moving forward at a rapid pace. They are empowered to innovate and trial new ideas in order to raise standards; there is a culture of professional reflection and striving for excellence. Middle leaders receive quality training to equip them with the skills to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise attainment in their area of responsibility.

The school leadership team values highly the contribution made by all staff in ensuring each and every child succeeds. Both teaching and non-teaching staff are recognized as valued members of the school team. This has created a strong community of professionals who support, encourage and work highly effectively. The school actively seeks to recruit staff of the highest calibre and ensures all safeguarding procedures are in place.