



مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم  
Abu Dhabi Education Council  
Education First التعليم أولاً



# Inspection Report

American Community School

Academic Year 2014 – 2015

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American Community School

<b>Inspection Date</b>	26 – 29 January, 2015
<b>School ID#</b>	97
<b>Lead Inspector</b>	Bruce Berry
<b>Licensed Curriculum</b>	American
<b>Number of Students</b>	1,094
<b>Age Range</b>	4 to 18 years
<b>Gender</b>	Mixed
<b>Principal</b>	Robin Heslip
<b>Proprietor</b>	American Community School (ACS) Association Non-profit
<b>Chair of Governors</b>	Laura Puryear
<b>School Address</b>	P.O. Box 42114, Khalidyah Area, Abu Dhabi
<b>Telephone Number</b>	+971 (0)2 681 5115
<b>Fax Number</b>	+971 (0)2 681 6006
<b>Official Email (ADEC)</b>	<a href="mailto:americancomm.pvt@adec.ac.ae">americancomm.pvt@adec.ac.ae</a>
<b>School Website</b>	<a href="http://www.acs.sch.ae">www.acs.sch.ae</a>
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	21 – 24 April, 2013

## The overall effectiveness of the school

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Inspectors considered the school in relation to 3 performance categories

**Band A** High performing (overall effectiveness grade 1, 2 or 3)

**Band B** Satisfactory (overall effectiveness grade 4 or 5)

**Band C** In need of significant improvement (overall effectiveness grade 6, 7 or 8)

<b>The School was judged to be:</b>	<b>BAND A;</b>	<b>GRADE 2</b>
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### The main strengths of the school are:

- the superintendent's quality leadership provides clear direction and vision
- staff show high levels of commitment and passion for enriching students' personal and academic development
- students demonstrate great respect for others and high levels of motivation, self-discipline and ownership of their own learning
- parents are very positive about the high quality support and education the school provides and are very active in the life of the school
- the outstanding personal development, guidance and support structures create a caring and safe culture, where students thrive as happy and enthusiastic learners
- impressive extra-curricular activities, trips and community service opportunities enable students to develop as well-rounded, thoughtful and responsible global citizens of the future.

### The main areas for improvement are:

- more consistency in aligning lesson objectives to learning outcomes and use of agreed criteria for lesson planning to ensure consistency
- more pace and challenge in some lessons
- increased focus on inclusion of student outcomes in teacher appraisals
- further enhancement of the effectiveness of leadership and management through periodic data monitoring reviews across all sections
- focused lesson observations on the effectiveness of students' learning
- continued improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in subjects taught in Arabic.

## Introduction

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The school was evaluated by 5 inspectors. They observed 90 lessons, conducted several meetings with senior staff, heads of department, support staff, students and parents. They analysed test and assessment results, scrutinised students' work, analysed the 144 responses to the parents' questionnaire and considered many of the school's policies and other documents. The superintendent and senior leaders were involved throughout the inspection process and undertook 3 joint observations of lessons with inspectors.

## Description of the School

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American Community School (ACS) opened in 1972, in Khalidiyah district, as a non-profit organisation overseen by an elected Board of Parent Trustees. The school's vision is: 'Together, we are a compassionate, student-centred community of learners that engages, prepares and inspires'. The mission is: 'The American school of Abu Dhabi is a non-profit, college preparatory institution driven by student learning. Our American-based curriculum promotes excellence in academics, athletics and the arts. In a challenging learning environment and in partnership with parents we empower students to define and shape their futures. Our dynamic educational approach prepares a culturally diverse student body for a lifelong commitment to learning, service and global citizenship'.

The student population is 1,094, and 51% are boys. The school has students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12. There are 120 students in KG, 335 in Grades 1 to 5, 272 in Grades 6 to 8 and 367 in Grades 9 to 12. The school follows an American curriculum. The Ministry of Education (MOE) curriculum is used in Arabic, Islamic education and social studies. Students take a range of external standardised tests, including Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Writing Assessment Program (WrAP), Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and International Baccalaureate (IB).

The school caters for students from many different nationalities: 3% are Emirati, 53% American, 8% Canadian, 4% Korean, 2% British, 2% Indian and 28% from other nationalities. Of the total student number, 30% of students are Muslim and 8% are of Arab heritage. The school has identified 6% of students having special educational needs (SEN), with most having learning difficulties; no students are identified as gifted and talented (G&T). Admission to the school from Grade 1 to Grade 12 is determined by interview, data and information from the previous school and a screening MAP test, if needed.

The superintendent has been in post for 2 years. The leadership team comprises the superintendent, elementary principal and assistant principal (AP), middle

school principal, high school principal and AP, director of curriculum and professional learning, director of technology and director of athletics and activities. The school has 121 teachers, and turnover of 2% last year was low. School fees range from AED 39,960 to AED 73,130, which places the school in the premium category.

## The Effectiveness of the School

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### Evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness

The American Community School (ACS) provides a very good quality of education and is outstanding in some areas. The superintendent and senior leaders are an effective team and provide very good strategic direction for continually improving students' learning opportunities and outcomes. Students demonstrate levels of attainment that are above international standards and most work well above age-related expectations. The school's resources, students' personal development and care and guidance are outstanding.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is very good in many lessons, with some outstanding lessons. This results in most students making very good progress. Attainment, progress and teaching in Arabic and Islamic education have improved. They are still some way behind the levels achieved in other subjects.

### Students' attainment & progress

Students' attainment and progress are very good in all phases of the school and in most lessons. In some lessons, they are outstanding. Very good attainment and progress are in evidence in English, mathematics, science and social studies. The integration of information, communication and technology (ICT) throughout the curriculum leads to outstanding technology skills development. In Arabic, attainment and progress are satisfactory and improving. They are satisfactory in Islamic education.

MAP standardised tests show attainment levels above international and United States (US) schools. Children in KG make rapid progress in their development of literacy and numeracy skills. Students maintain very good progress as they advance through the school. Some high school students demonstrate exceptional attainment, particularly those choosing the IB diploma enrichment course. Results of high school students in SAT and IB examinations are above world mean scores. Progress in Arabic and Islamic education is improving, but is still below other subjects.

The development of basic speaking, listening, reading, writing and thinking skills is very good. It is outstanding in numeracy and ICT. SEN students make very good

progress as a result of well-structured support. High achieving students make very good and, in some lessons, outstanding progress. In a few lessons, the lack of pace in the learning slows students' progress. Assessment is used well to maximise students' learning opportunities.

### **Students' personal development**

Students' personal development is outstanding. Attendance is well above average at 97%. The high levels of respect in evidence throughout the school create a happy and supportive learning environment. Students exhibit confidence, motivation, self-discipline and very positive attitudes to learning. They develop outstanding interpersonal skills and personal qualities through the various activities, leadership role opportunities and learning culture of the school. The community service programme empowers students with a sense of responsibility to the local and wider community. For example, a Grade 6 trip to Greece included the planting of trees to fight deforestation.

Students participate in a wide range of social, cultural, scientific, sporting and other activities. Leadership roles include leading assemblies, organising events, student council membership and older students coaching elementary students. The UAE heritage, traditions and values are recognised and celebrated daily with the playing of the national anthem, in assemblies, through the curriculum and in National Day celebrations. The richness and diversity of the many cultures in the school is celebrated on International day. Students are aware of how to live safe and healthy lives.

### **The quality of teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching and learning is very good in most lessons and outstanding in some. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is very good. Teaching has a very high impact on students' attainment, progress, engagement, and personal development. It is of a consistently high quality in most subjects and across the 3 phases of the school. In Arabic, teaching is satisfactory with some evidence of improvement, particularly in the primary age groups. Islamic education is satisfactory across all age groups.

Teachers use a variety of effective strategies and resources to interest and motivate students. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support learning. Students learn well by listening to teachers, interacting co-operatively, thinking for themselves, and asking questions. The KG programme utilises enquiry based programmes that enable children to rapidly develop basic literacy and numeracy skills. By elementary school, students can read, discuss and analyse books and stories. In outstanding lessons, students undertake high level challenges that utilise their well-developed 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. They collaborate well to undertake

research, solve problems, draw conclusions, design solutions and apply learning to real life situations. For example, high school mathematics students compare the exponential function to bacterial growth and radioactive decay.

Teachers use effective assessment strategies to plan learning activities aligned to students' needs. Students regularly undertake self and peer assessments and identify their targets for improvement. In a few lessons, learning objectives are not aligned to the expected learning outcomes and lesson plans sometimes lack clarity in how the objective will be achieved. Some lessons lack pace and challenge to maximise students' learning. Teachers have access to effective professional development to improve their knowledge and skills. Professional learning teams are used well to improve staff relationships, skills and competences.

### **Meeting students' needs through the curriculum**

The school's broad and balanced curriculum provides a very good vehicle for meeting the students' needs. It follows the guidelines of Common Core State Standards. It has a clear rationale, makes effective provision for all groups of students and includes cross-curricular links and enrichment opportunities. It is reviewed regularly by the administrators and subject leaders. In KG, the curriculum creates very good opportunities for children to develop their academic, social, personal and communication skills through activities and play. Senior students extend and enhance their learning experiences through enrichments and electives. A wide variety of exciting clubs and courses augment the core curriculum, including IB, TV production, architectural design, robotics, drama, music and instrumental classes. Teachers plan curriculum modifications and well-targeted support to provide SEN students with very good access to learning. High achieving students have outstanding opportunities within and beyond the subject curriculum to extend and develop their high order skills.

The outstanding program of extra-curricular activities, trips and community service opportunities are highly effective in developing students' academic and personal qualities. They include band, student council, drama, lego club, model United Nations, public speaking, arts and crafts, sports and martial arts.

### **The protection, care, guidance and support of students**

The outstanding protection, care, guidance and support procedures create a safe and caring culture for students to develop their academic and personal qualities. The pastoral team provides highly effective support. The 5 counsellors regularly monitor students' personal and academic development. They, along with teachers, design intervention and support plans for all identified at-risk students. They strengthen that support by fully engaging parents in the process. Highly effective academic support is provided through challenging enrichment activities

for high achievers and structured support for students who find learning more challenging.

Students demonstrate impressive levels of self-discipline. The school behaviour policy promotes a positive ethos where students show care and compassion for each other. The anti-bullying policy provides guidance for students, including how to deal with cyber bullying incidents. Incidents are very few in number and are always resolved. The school has a child protection policy. Staff have been fully trained and understand their responsibilities. Procedures for monitoring attendance are robust, leading to high levels of attendance. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They receive high quality guidance, and many visitors from educational and vocational providers enhance students' opportunities to make well-informed choices. The school clinic, with qualified staff, offers very high quality first aid provision for students. There are separate facilities for prayer for boys and girls.

#### **The quality of the school's buildings and premises**

The school maximises use of the buildings and facilities to provide a very good environment for learning. Buildings are clean and very well-maintained. Classrooms are spacious, allowing teachers to use them flexibly to provide variety in learning activities. Classrooms and hallways are adorned with displays, many of which celebrate students' achievements. Outdoor gardens and seating areas provide a pleasant area for break time relaxation. The 6 well-equipped science laboratories have all the required safety equipment.

The sports facilities include 3 large indoor gyms, fitness centre, swimming pool and 2 large outside areas, one grass and one synthetic. There are shaded outdoor designated play areas for the different grade levels. KG children have a covered large equipped area, providing very good opportunities to learn through play. The auditorium is spacious and well-designed to accommodate a variety of activities and events. There are two spacious and attractive library and media centres, which are used well by students to undertake research and private studies.

There are very effective security procedures in place at the main gate and throughout the campus. The health and safety officer ensures that all aspects of school maintenance are dealt with promptly. All major equipment is checked regularly. Evacuation procedures are regularly practised and recorded.

#### **The school's resources to support its aims**

The outstanding range of resources fully supports the school's aims and provides students with exciting learning opportunities. The school is fully staffed to deliver the curriculum. Teachers are well qualified to teach their assigned specialisms. The



teaching assistants and specialist support teachers provide excellent extra support for teachers and students. SEN students have highly structured support, resulting in them making very good progress. Teachers make excellent use of the resources to provide imaginative and varied activities to make learning interesting and exciting. The well-resourced KG classrooms and play areas create a stimulating and creative learning environment that reflects best practice.

The well-equipped science laboratories are used very well to enable students to apply their knowledge and skills in practical ways. ACS is rapidly moving to become a digital campus. It has a strong commitment to infuse technology into all lessons from KG to Grade 12. This enables students to embed, enhance and extend their learning. All classrooms have smart boards, which are used imaginatively to stimulate learning. The 3 full-time technology coaches ensure that teachers and students have excellent support for integrating technology in their learning. The television production studio can accommodate up to 16 cameras and enables students to work imaginatively and creatively on their own productions. The opportunities to become an outstanding 21<sup>st</sup> century learner are extended and enhanced by the school wide commitment to technology. The library-media centres are very well resourced and are vibrant learning environments.

The extensive range of musical equipment offers students the chance to learn to play instruments and join the school band. The students' use of the extensive art resources are seen around the school in displays of their outstanding work. Sports facilities are extremely well resourced and include a fitness room with high quality equipment. Procedures are followed to ensure that school transport is maintained to the highest standards of safety and reliability. The canteen is clean and hygienic.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the school have improved significantly since the previous inspection and are now very good. The superintendent provides high quality leadership and clear direction for driving the school improvement agenda. She is ably supported by an energetic, committed and highly focussed senior team. The board of trustees is very effective in providing challenge and support for the school. The board members have clearly defined roles. They ensure senior leaders' accountability goals and school development plan (SDP) targets are regularly monitored to ensure they are successfully achieved. The self-evaluation form (SEF) and SDP are well structured and accurately identify key areas for development.

The school operates very well on a daily basis. It is extremely calm and students demonstrate high levels of maturity as they move around the building with little

need for supervision. Leaders and staff create a culture and environment where students are enthusiastic and display confidence in sharing their thoughts and ideas. The school operates an effective appraisal system. Student performance outcomes are not presently used in the teacher appraisal process. Lesson observations are regularly undertaken by the principals and assistant principals of the 3 school sections. They follow up and, if needed, create improvement plans for teachers. There is some inconsistency in the observation process, with some observations focussing more on the compliance of teachers in undertaking tasks rather than analysing the effectiveness of students' learning. Assessments of students' progress are regular and are used well to make adjustments to the curriculum and teaching strategies. Standardised test outcomes are used well by the leadership team to track year-on-year progress. They do not have sufficient in-year strategic monitoring reviews of student progress data to ensure individual students, classes, grades and subjects are at expected levels to achieve their long-term goals.

The school's relationships and communications with parents are very strong. Responses to the questionnaire demonstrate that parents are very supportive of the school and value the high quality of education and care provided. There are appropriate procedures in place for dealing with parental complaints.

### **Progress since the last inspection**

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Strategic leadership has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now very good. The SDP is well structured, has all the appropriate components and is reviewed regularly. The SEF provides a coherent review of the school's present performance. The judgements in some areas are very accurate and reasonably near in others. Lesson observations and follow up are now a consistent part of the teacher appraisal process.

Teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now very good in most subject areas. Students in most lessons have work that is appropriate, challenging and matched with their achievement levels. Teaching has improved in Arabic and Islamic education, but is still not at the level in other subjects.

The school does not fully comply with ADEC regulations in the areas of course requirements in Islamic studies. It does not provide social studies in Arabic for first language students.

The school and the senior leadership team have demonstrated a very good capacity for sustained improvement.

### What the school should do to improve further:

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1. Further refine the high quality teaching and learning practices and procedures by:
  - i. establishing more consistency when setting learning objectives aligned to expected outcomes for each lesson
  - ii. defining specific criteria for inclusion in individual lesson plans
  - iii. reviewing the pace and challenge in some lessons to maximise students' learning opportunities.
2. Continue to enhance the very effective leadership and management strategies by:
  - i. including student performance outcomes as a key component of the teacher appraisal process
  - ii. regularly analysing data outcomes to review progress of individual students, classes, grades and subjects
  - iii. reviewing lesson observation procedures to ensure a greater focus on the effectiveness of students' learning.
3. Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning in subjects taught in Arabic to raise attainment levels to match those achieved in other subjects.

## Inspection Grades

Performance Standard	Band A High performing			Band B Satisfactory		Band C In need of significant improvement		
	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory & Improving	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Poor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Standard 1: Students' attainment and progress								
Standard 2: Students' personal development								
Standard 3: The quality of teaching and learning								
Standard 4: The meeting of students' needs through the curriculum								
Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students								
Standard 6: The quality of the school's buildings and premises								
Standard 7: The school's resources to support its aims								
Standard 8: The effectiveness of leadership and management								
Summary Evaluation: <b>The school's overall effectiveness</b>								

## Possible breaches of regulations and health & safety concerns

### American Community School

Regulations	
1. <b>Islamic education</b> - does not comply with the minimum time allocation for Grades 1 to 8.	
2. <b>Social studies</b> – does not comply with the required language of instruction, which should be Arabic for Native Arabs.	
The UAE Flag is raised/ flown every day?	Yes
Is playing of the UAE National Anthem a daily feature at the morning assembly?	Yes

Fees:
1.
2.
3.

Health and Safety Concerns:
1.
2.
3.

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	Bruce Berry	<b>Date</b>	30 January 2015
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