



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

Aspen Heights British School

Abu Dhabi

United Arab Emirates

Date **4th – 6th November 2024**
Inspection number **20241104**

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1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

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

The inspection and this report follow the 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; the school's complaints procedures; and leadership and management. If appropriate, there is a separate section on the quality of boarding provision. 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. 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 DfE on the extent to which schools meet the standards for BSO.

During the inspection visit, 64 lesson observations took place. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were seen in lessons, and discussions were held with the staff, parents and informally with students. The inspection took place over three days.

The lead inspector was Ciprian Ghişă. The team members were Michelle France and Andrew Williams.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school has shown that it meets the standards for British Schools Overseas, except for those that cannot be achieved legally in the host country. These pertain to aspects of the UK Equality Act 2010. The relevant standards are:

Part 1 – ‘2(2)(d)(ii)- encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation as set out in the Equality Act 2010;’

and

Part 2 – ‘5(b)(vi)- encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.

The school actively promotes tolerance and a respect for all human differences, within the confines of the law. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school.

This judgement is endorsed by the British government and is valid for three years. The inspection process is quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

Aspen Heights British School offers a high-quality education to the students, who study in a safe and very well-resourced learning environment. The educational provision offers the possibility of progression from the Early Years level to the end of the high school, thus ensuring continuity in the educational paths of the students. The school successfully integrates students with a large variety of educational needs, focusing on the consistent progress of all. The school develops a British ethos, while respecting and promoting the values and the traditions of UAE.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including:

- The caring and positive relationships between the students and the staff.
- The consistent focus on the promotion of mental health, care and safeguarding across the school.
- The school is a genuinely fully inclusive community where all students feel safe, valued and are able to thrive.
- The Inclusion, SEN, Counselling, and EAL teams ensure that the needs of all individual students are met, while offering a solid support to the teaching staff across the school.
- A very dynamic Early Years section of the school, ensuring an effective access of students with different individual needs to the requirements of the curriculum.
- The proactive and inspirational senior leadership team steering the school to make constant progress.
- The links to ISP ensure excellent support, guidance and sharing of good practice and resources.
- Self-confident, positive and very well-behaved students.
- A very passionate, energetic and positive group of teachers and learning support staff.
- Students benefit from a large variety of leadership opportunities.
- Very supportive parents who trust in the school community to do the best for their children.
- A very effective admin, support and maintenance team, ensuring that all the safety and maintenance regulations and procedures are kept at a very high standard.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- i. Further develop the quality of teaching and learning across all divisions of the school, so that students are consistently challenged and have a memorable learning experience in every lesson and at all levels.
- ii. Further develop the inclusion team and the learning support assistant (LSA) team across all divisions of the school in order to be able to fully support the needs of all students in a continuously growing community.
- iii. Develop a whole school strategy for a comprehensive career advice programme, to ensure students are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

4. The context of the school

Full name of school	Aspen Heights British School				
Address	Al Bahia, Street 15, Abu Dhabi				
Telephone number/s	+971 025642229				
Website Address	www.ahbs.ae				
Key Email Address	principal@ahbs.ae				
Headteacher/ Principal	Emma Shanahan				
Chair of board/Proprietor	Rory Galvin				
Age Range	3-18 years				
Total number of pupils	1,238	Boys	641	Girls	597
Numbers by age	0-2 years	0	12-16 years	250	
	3-5 years	224	17-18 years	22	
	6-11 years	741	18+ years	0	
Total number of part-time children	0				

Aspen Heights British School is a private mixed all-through school that opened in 2017. It has grown year-on-year, and is now at over 1200 students. Almost all students are accessing English as an additional or second language (89%). The majority of students are UAE National (53%) with other nationalities comprising the remainder (UK 6%, India 5%).

It provides a supportive and engaging international environment for children from Nursery to Year 13. The school obtained its BSO accreditation in 2021, and became an IB world school in 2023. The school worked to achieve the “Quality Mark” for English and Maths teaching throughout 2022, and was awarded a 3-year accreditation in June 2022.

The school is a member of ISP (the *International Schools Partnership*), thus having access to excellent guidance, sharing of good practice and resources.

The school is a leading institution in the country in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing for children as well as for adults. In 2022, it was awarded a Silver at the School Mental Health Award supported by Leeds Beckett University.

4.1 British nature of the school

Aspen Heights British School has a strong British feel and ethos:

- The school delivers the English National Curriculum from 3-16, and follows the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance from the Department of Education in the UK.
- Post 16, students are prepared for IBDP examinations, as the school is an IB world school.
- With the exception of Arabic-medium subjects, all lessons are taught in English.
- The school is organised in a typically British way, both academically and pastorally.
- British practice is evident in approaches to performance management, staff target setting and annual review meetings.
- Many of the teachers within the school are British qualified and trained.
- Technology is used to enhance the curriculum offering, with interactive platforms from UK based companies, aligned with the ENC, e.g. *Accelerated Reader*, *Times Table Rockstar*, and *Century AI*.
- Regular CPD ensures approaches to teaching and learning are informed by best practice and up-to-date thinking, e.g. Greg Bottril training, *Century AI* implementation.
- The school delivers a variety of extracurricular activities, including creative arts, music, and drama, aligning with British cultural values.
- The school implements a house system similar to those seen in the UK independent schools.
- The school uniform reflects the British ethos of the school.
- UK universities are one of the main targets for the students in KS5.
- The school offers numerous opportunities for student leadership roles and teams.

5. Standard 1 The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided is outstanding.

5.1 Curriculum

The curriculum at Aspen Heights meets the standards for BSO and is outstanding. The curriculum is fully compliant with all local (ADEK) and national requirements (UAE Ministry of Education).

The curriculum at Aspen Heights is balanced and has depth and breadth to promote interest and engagement from students across all levels. The school has a clear curriculum policy.

The curriculum provides a strong values-based education and is fully aligned with the school's aims of 'Ready, Respectful, Safe.' Lessons are thoughtfully structured to prepare students not only academically but also to be responsible and well-prepared individuals. This readiness is reinforced through engaging activities that foster critical thinking and independence. The curriculum promotes respect by integrating collaborative work and emphasising positive relationships, encouraging students to value diversity and demonstrate empathy. Safety is prioritised through a curriculum that includes personal and social education, ensuring that students understand both physical and emotional safety.

The curriculum is fully aligned with UK national curriculum age related expectations across all phases and takes into full account the needs of their student body (89% with English as an additional or second language). Policies and plans are reviewed and adapted by senior leaders, middle leaders and subject leads to ensure that these meet the needs of all students. Short- and medium-term planning is comprehensive throughout the phases and shows continuity and progression. These show clear evidence to challenge the most able and support for those who have EAL needs and/or SEN. Planning in EYFS and primary also shows a strong focus on the development of reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills. Planning included 'Class Profiles', based on GL PT and CAT4 data and cross-curricular information about performance in core subject areas.

The EYFS curriculum follows the *Development Matters* framework (2020). It incorporates the 7 areas of learning by encouraging critical thinking and problem solving in a rich inquiry-based environment. The Early Years Curriculum is adaptive and comprehensively caters for the academic, social, physical, moral and creative development of all students. The learning environments throughout the Foundation Stages consistently promote language development, critical thinking, independence, creativity and choice. Adults in this section of the school actively and successfully

focus on engaging young students in making conversation, mark making and mathematics (3Ms).

The focus on literacy development is systematically developed from the Foundation Stage into the primary classrooms. Specifically, the planning, assessment and streamed delivery of strategies such as the *Read Write Inc* (RWI) phonics programme (FS2 – Y3) and the *Accelerated Reader* programme for Key Stage (KS)2 caters directly to the needs of all, including EAL students. The curriculum adaptations and interventions implemented provide the support and challenge for students to respond and thrive. In addition, *success pathway plans* are drawn up to support SEN and EAL students.

In KS4, the curriculum is designed to meet the diverse needs of pupils. Compulsory core subjects were mathematics, English language, biology, chemistry and physics. Additional and mandatory subjects are Arabic, Islamic studies and social sciences. These are adjusted to take into account students who are native Arabic speakers.

Choice is offered in the form of two additional optional subjects from a wide selection, including art, design and technology, French, Spanish, geography, history, computing and economics. Students are able to take 7 IGCSE subjects at the end of Year 11. In PE, the school follows a skill-based curriculum which covers a variety of sports including swimming, rugby, football and gymnastics. The school is considering how the curriculum can be expanded even further, through looking at different timetable models, or combining classes where the enrolment is small.

The school has successfully introduced the IB Programme for the students in KS5, and it is now focusing on effectively supporting the students to access it at the right level and prepare for the final examinations. This decision was based on the global transferable skills being more useful to the school's cohort. All Year 12 and 13 teachers have received appropriate IB training. Subjects offered cover all segments of the Diploma programme. Where a student's preferred subjects are not offered by the school, online provision is available and is monitored by the IB Coordinator.

The Arabic curriculum is designed to preserve and promote the Arabic language, providing students with strong linguistic, cultural and academic foundations. It is tailored for both native and non-native speakers, ensuring that all students achieve proficiency according to their linguistic backgrounds. In addition to language skills, it is closely tied to the study of Islamic education, history, and Social Studies, helping students to build a deep connection with their cultural roots.

A diverse programme of extra-curricular activities (ECAs) is available, the school offer being supplemented by ISP International Learning Opportunities for Students (ILOS). Local and ISP competitions provide opportunities for students across the school to further explore and develop sporting, creative, technical and social skills and to engage with students from other schools.

The curriculum encourages and supports the development of leadership skills and students in every phase are invited to apply for these positions of responsibility.

Leadership opportunities that are available to students include joining the student council, wellbeing ambassadors, UAE ambassadors and prefects.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The school meets the standards of quality of teaching and assessment: they are considered to be good with many outstanding features.

The consistent improvement of teaching and learning across the school has been a constant priority for the school. Relationships between staff and students are strong, ensuring a positive learning environment, in which all students can thrive.

The use of technology is common across the secondary school curriculum. All students have access to *Chromebooks*. The extent to which they were called upon varied from lesson to lesson. In the better classes they were used for research and allowed for some differentiation. In both primary and secondary, learning is supported by students' access to relevant online educational platforms including *Accelerated Reader*, *MyOn*, *Times Tables Rock Stars*, *Numbots* – for primary; *Seneca* (Science), *Sparx* (mathematics), *InThink* (IB), *Kognity* (IB) and *Managebac* – for secondary. A significant resource the school has invested in for years 5-11 is *Century AI*.

Teaching and assessment in the Early Years demonstrates that teachers have a thorough knowledge of the EYFS curriculum and how to engage students through age-appropriate methodologies, to ensure they make exceptionally good progress from their starting points. Inputs, activities and provision are planned with consideration of individual needs and allows for a flexible approach in order to encourage students' creativity, independence and problem solving.

The standard for teaching and learning across Early Years, KS1 and KS2 is high and consistently applied. Assessment for Learning strategies are used, and are embedded well in most lessons, to ensure lessons are pitched appropriately to maximise learning. Most of the lessons are very well structured, with a clear link between the learning objectives and outcomes. Reflection against the learning objective and success criteria is evidenced as a very effective practice. Learning takes place at a very good pace, challenge tasks are set and differentiation is evidenced to support the different level groups identified as a result of the assessments. Self-assessment and formative assessment strategies are present in almost all lessons.

At the secondary levels, the school's philosophy is to plan for and to 'teach to the top'. The aim is to ensure that the higher ability students are challenged and stretched and that all other students receive the support (in some cases with Century software) they need to reach their own potential. This approach is reinforced by the use of 'challenge' and 'expected' targets. Given the inclusive nature of the school, the effective execution of the planning is extremely important. Further focus needs to be given so that learning is done at the right pace at all levels and the implementation of challenge and scaffolding strategies is consistent across all divisions of the school.

The school is making consistent effort to ensure specific professional development, learning support and educational resources to allow the teachers to implement these strategies effectively.

Across KSs 3 - 5, teachers displayed strong subject knowledge and the planning produced in every case was excellent. Learning objectives were clear in all lessons. In the best lessons, teachers showed an excellent understanding of their students' learning needs; the planned tasks were engaging and students were clearly enjoying their learning; levels of participation were high and the atmosphere was conducive to very good learning for all; questioning was excellent, targeted at individual students to stretch and challenge. Teachers were giving useful, immediate verbal feedback in class.

In KS4 and KS5 the better lessons were closely tied to the needs of the public examination. Teachers had shared marking rubrics, objectives or schemes. In some cases, students were encouraged to evaluate their own work, in others peer marking was being used very effectively. The requirements of the IGCSE examination were frequently referenced; class questions were timed, which focussed minds on examination preparation and created a stimulating intensity to the class.

Exercise books were marked and feedback was positive and constructive. All classrooms carried displays of the students work. In the better classes, such as a Year 10 English class, students were encouraged to take note of displays of their work, which were evolving alongside their learning.

Aspen Heights British School is committed to inclusion and diversity. The provision of, and access to, the curriculum matched to the needs of pupils who require extra support is assisted by the additional learning needs and the EAL and Multilingualism teams. Though comparatively small, these teams work hard to make a significant impact on teaching and student learning throughout the school.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

The standards achieved by students at Aspen Heights British School are outstanding.

The school implements a rigorous and regular system of internal and external assessments. The internal data is triangulated with standardised testing in English, Mathematics, and Science. Students make excellent progress against their starting points, which is measured against Autumn 1 internal assessment data and through CAT4 assessments.

The rigorous tracking documents and the assessments provide a wealth of data about students' academic progress, learning needs and potential. Teachers work very effectively with students of varying backgrounds and with a wide range of needs. Progress made by students with special educational needs is especially impressive across the whole school.

The standard of attainment on entry into the school is frequently below UK national levels. But during their progression in the school, all students make constantly good or outstanding progress and by the end of the primary years, most students achieve at or above UK national averages.

Students in the Early Years Foundation Stage are formatively assessed against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELG). Due to the high-quality provision that is put in place, students make noteworthy progress, from their starting points in Nursery, to the end of FS2. Key areas of focus to ensure more students achieve GLD are Writing and Word reading, and provision has been adjusted to facilitate this.

As a result, in June 2024, at the end of the EYFS, 100% of students made expected progress in literacy, mathematics and The Natural World, with 61% making better than expected progress from their starting points in English, 64% in Maths and 77% in the Natural World. At the same time, 100% of students with SEND made expected progress in all three areas, with 50% of them making better than expected progress in English, 25% in mathematics and 100% in science.

The students continue to make excellent progress in primary as well. At the end of KS1, in June 2024, 79% of students made better than expected progress in English, and 44% in maths, whereas at the end of KS2, 86% of students made better than expected progress in English, 78% in maths and 56% in science. The internal assessments indicate that 100% reached their targets and made progress across the primary, considering their starting points. At the same time, at the end of KS2, all students with SEND made expected progress, with 54% exceeding expectations in English, 69% in Maths and 69% in Science.

At the end of KS3, the external assessments indicate that 96% of students made better than expected progress in English, 89% in maths and 100% in science.

In KS4 attainment can be measured by IGCSE examination results. To date, these are especially strong among those students overcoming academic disadvantages. These

might include learning difficulties as well as English being an additional language for them. The SEND and the EAL and Multilingualism teams make a significant impact on teaching and student learning in KS4 and help to produce impressive levels of value-added in IGCSE examinations. More broadly, the IGCSE results are well above UK national averages and continue to improve as the school works hard to cope with its rapid growth. This involves the intake of new students in KS4, who are coming late to the help that a school such as Aspen Heights can provide.

In the June 2024 examination session, 55% of students achieved 9-5 grades in maths, compared to 42,4% in the UK, and 67% in English, compared to 46,4% in the UK. Considering the added-value, at the end of KS4, in June 2024, based on the GCSE English Language results, 100% of students passed at 3+, 75% passed at 4+, and 17% passed at 6+; based on the GCSE maths results, 82% of students passed at 3+, 73% at 4+ and 9% at 6+.

This year's cohort of IB diploma students is the school's first. In Years 12 and 13 students are very much aware of their IB Learner Profiles and their standing measured against IB expectations. Their IB coordinator works closely with the diploma students on this self-assessment and self-awareness. Year 13 students are ambitious in their applications to universities at home in the UAE as well as abroad. One such student already has an offer from Bristol University and is awaiting a decision from Queen's College, Oxford.

Outside the classroom, students enjoy competing in a wide range of tournaments, such as UKMT and swimming galas, in which they perform well.

Student attendance is excellent, and in line with the high expectations of UK independent schools. The school has worked especially hard, and successfully, to help families adjust to the change from Friday-Saturday to Saturday-Sunday weekend.

6. *Standard 2* Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students meets the standard for BSO and is outstanding; it is a particular strength of the school.

The school's values are embedded and lived by the students and the staff. Students implicitly trust adults in school and express that they feel safe and heard. Students are positive and enthusiastic and very proud of their school.

Behaviour in lessons and attitudes to peers, staff and visitors is exemplary. A positive, productive and happy atmosphere prevails in classrooms and among the students. Kindness and respect are recognised and relationships between staff and students and between students are characterised by empathy and inclusiveness. Student successes are rewarded and celebrated. The students' attitudes to school are outstanding. Students spoke very highly of the school and of their teachers. It is one of the great strengths of the school. Between students and teachers there was a great deal of trust. Between students, there was an acknowledgement of occasional bullying but respect for the alacrity with which the school tackles such issues. Preventative measures are taken in regular PSHE classes.

Wellbeing initiatives provide support for all stakeholders in the school community. The school counsellor in conjunction with the Inclusion Department have been instrumental in this process. The strong commitment to the moral and social development of students is reflected in recent introduction of the PSHE curriculum (Nursery to Year 9) and the moral education programme which emphasise the importance of tolerance, respect, and inclusion. Students develop a growth mindset, understand their emotions, are open-minded, considerate, polite and well-mannered. The school's efforts in achieving the Silver Mental Health Award from Leeds Carnegie University is indicative of their commitment to the wellbeing of their community. Students in the school council and the Mental Health Ambassadors are understand their role in supporting the personal, social and emotional development of their peers.

Students gain an excellent understanding of their own and other cultures through events such as national and international day.

The school's commitment to being positively and practically inclusive is seen in the successful operation of the Oasis class. School staff and external support specialists courageously promote and secure holistic provision for ten SEN students at any given time. The transition of five students into mainstream classrooms further evidences the positive impact and success of this unique provision on the school and within the school community.

Links with and contributions to the wider community further enhance respect, understanding and pride in student's own culture and that of the UAE.

There are many opportunities for student leadership and voice. The student council is quite large with representatives from all classes. Members are elected by their peers. The council has been rejuvenated since COVID, and this year's head girl and boy are determined to make it even more active, effective and successful. The school has a house system, with strong loyalties. A secondary school assembly was based around the system, and leadership opportunities. Students were engaged and participation was enthusiastic. The students' eagerness to take part and to speak up was, once again, reflective of the environment of 'fearlessness' that exists within the school.

Students were pleased to be heard, but responsible in the use of their collective voice. One example, of the value of student voice was their wish for the uniform rules to be relaxed. The school responded by making ties optional throughout the secondary school and removing the uniform requirement from the sixth form – although retaining the need for 'business-style' attire.

7. *Standard 3* The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health, and safety of the pupils at Aspen Heights British School meets the requirements of the BSO standards and are outstanding.

The welfare, health and safety of students is a high priority for the school. The interpretation of welfare is wide, stretching beyond the pupils on roll to the whole school community and beyond. The school's values are displayed prominently around the school.

In the primary school, student welfare is the responsibility of class teachers; in the secondary school the role is taken by the form tutor. Students and parents were impressed by the alacrity with which the school acted in cases of bullying. Students were well aware of the dangers of online bullying and strategies to effectively combat it.

The school counsellor is very actively building rapport with both primary and secondary students and parents to provide support for mental health issues and parenting issues. They are supported by staff members who are trained as Mental Health First Aiders – able to spot signs of difficulty in pupils and colleagues.

The school is proud to have achieved the 'Silver School Mental Health award' from the Carnegie centre of excellence for mental health in schools in 2022 and is in the process of applying attaining the 'Gold School mental Health award'. The school is the BSME Network Lead School for Wellbeing, and co-ordinate webinars and meetings within the BSME and Abu Dhabi Counsellors network. Furthermore, the school has taken the initiative to incorporate senior students into its well-being programme through its Mental Health Ambassadors who have been following appropriate mental health training.

The school has a safeguarding policy and a safeguarding committee. Members of the committee are all qualified to level 3. The Principal currently chairs the Safeguarding Committee as the school's Safeguarding Lead, but intends to step-back from this role shortly. The school has taken the important initiative to ensure there is an Arabic speaker on the Safeguarding Committee and that parent meetings are also conducted in English and in Arabic. Safeguarding training is mandatory for all school staff. All school staff take part in refresher training at the beginning of the academic year, followed by at least three more training sessions during the course of the academic year – often reflecting the priorities of the moment.

Ancillary staff, outside contractors and extra-curricular coaches all need to undertake the school's own safeguarding training prior to working with the school.

A safeguarding log is maintained. The safeguarding committee shared their view that they would make every effort to ensure that safeguarding issues were resolved within the school

community, where possible. They do so by working closely with students, parents, school counsellor and outside practitioners.

Within the school community the safeguarding systems enable all staff to communicate promptly any concerns they may have about students. Information regarding safeguarding is recorded using 'My Concerns' software, which also enables effective recording of follow-up. The value of the training and the software is illustrated by a member of the ancillary staff who noticed that a student was skipping meals and reported it to allow constructive follow-up.

For students and staff feeling unwell or for accidents that take place during the school day, two clinics operate on site. The main clinic is open to both primary and secondary students staffed by two full-time, qualified nurses. The clinic is divided into a facility for boys and another for girls.

The school has an effective first aid policy. Both nurses were familiar with it, and with the procedures to be followed following a student reporting to the clinic.

The clinic is operated in a professional manner, adhering to UK standards. Medicines are not dispensed without parental consent, which is sought by phone and followed-up by email or text message. A small stock of medicines is stored on site securely in a locked cabinet. Logs are maintained for pupil visits and medicines dispensed. The clinics hold central records of students with allergies or on-going conditions. They are clean and well-maintained. Bed sheets are disposable and changed after each visit. The nurses are aware of frequent pupil visitors to the clinic and follow-up with parents and class/form tutors.

The behaviour of students moving around the school was largely excellent. During break times and at home time students were effectively supervised, with sufficient members of the teaching staff on duty in play areas, in the dining hall and on critical corridors. Indeed, some corridors were supervised throughout the day, by the bus supervisors.

Play areas were well-supervised by teaching staff. Students were also involved as door monitors to ensure that doors to the teaching blocks were not left open. This is a security and sustainability initiative.

All staff wear a lanyard with photo identification. Visitors to the school have different coloured lanyards so that visitors and staff can easily be identified. Parents who come onto site at the start and end of the school day wear lanyards. Parents without lanyards are not allowed to enter.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff meets the standard for BSO.

As part of the ISP group, the school follows the policies and the procedures applied at the group level, making sure that all the safety, care and guidance requirements for all students and staff are met with full respect for the local standards as well.

The HR department is well organised, overseeing all the processes required for safe recruitment and monitoring. Everyone working at Aspen Heights British School- teaching, non-teaching and externally contracted staff have an ADEK PASS approval. 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 the United Arab Emirates and their previous employment activity. The school maintains detailed and updated records of all staff.

All staff involved in recruitment have undertaken safer recruitment training, and all applications are received through *Jobvite*. Completing the application form on the platform ensures any gaps in employment are identified and can be raised at interview.

The single central record meets all the requirements of the BSO. It is rigorous, clear and constantly updated. All the information is on an ISP recommended database - SAI 360.

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation of Aspen Heights British School meet the BSO criteria and are outstanding.

The classrooms and specialist facilities were very good and appropriate for the age-group of students and for their purpose. Classrooms were well-lit, air conditioned, as well as safely and appropriately furnished to a high standard.

In the secondary school specialist teaching areas were spacious to allow safe circulation of teacher and students in practical work. This was the case with well-equipped specialist science laboratories, which all had static and mobile eye wash stations. In the chemistry prep room, dangerous chemicals were stored in locked, metal cabinets.

The large design and technology lab was recently physically divided into theory and practical areas, an innovation that was proving popular and helpful with students' learning. The secondary school has an art room, which seems a little on the cramped side, but student art work was on display.

The common areas around the school (corridors, hall, gym, indoor swimming pool and outdoor play areas) were all well-maintained. Movement around the school was further secured by access to teaching blocks being restricted by automatically locking doors. Access was by appropriate pass card only.

The dining hall was quite small, but used on a rota basis by all of the classes. An appropriate number of teachers were on duty throughout. An external contractor provides hot lunches as well as sandwiches and snacks. Food is prepared off-site and transported appropriately – in either heated trollies or refrigerated vehicles. It is similarly stored on the canteen premises. The provision of bathrooms and toilets is good, with a ratio of one toilet to every ten students. Bathrooms were clean.

The parent group, ISP, is committed to a philosophy of sustainability. The school's air-conditioning system is especially energy efficient with an in-built cooling system to reduce energy consumption. Motion activated lights are in evidence in common areas. The company is committed to reducing its carbon footprint by 25% by 2027. With this in mind, energy consumption is monitored on a monthly basis (and shows a clear declining trend). There is a plan to introduce 'misting taps' to all bathrooms, which will reduce water consumption.

The ISP group pays close heed to external recommendations and to opportunities to improve sustainability. For example, it is considering converting the indoor pool to an outdoor facility in view of the high levels of humidity currently experienced, in turn this will reduce the energy required to ventilate it.

The school promotes the safety of its students through regular emergency (x5 per year) and lockdown (x2) drills per year. A log of the time it takes for the school to be evacuated is maintained.

Arrivals and departures are orderly and efficient – being supervised by security guards/traffic wardens and by members of the teaching staff. Some students use school buses for travel to and from school. The buses are run by an external provider. Each bus was well-equipped to appropriate safety standards, all pupils were observed to be wearing seatbelts and, in every case, a bus supervisor was on duty. In the parking area buses always occupied the same station to ensure smooth and speedy exit.

Security guards monitor entrance points to the school's site throughout the school day. There are two gates which are closely monitored at the start and end of the school day. The security team maintained a clear record of people on the premises – for security and in case of an emergency. Staff entering and leaving the school were logged. Processes for monitoring and recording of visitors entering the school were thorough.

The building management company undertakes annual risk assessments of the areas in which children work and play. This includes risks that are beyond the control of the school, such as rising temperatures. However, it was observed that the wearing of hats at break time was enforced inconsistently, and that the school might benefit by cover for one more of the play and sports areas.

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information provided by the school to parents, and others at Aspen Heights British School meets the standard and is outstanding.

Communication between parents and the school is rich, relevant and appropriate. Parents and class teachers have direct, daily access to each other via effective parent apps across the school - Class Dojo (with translation features) is used in foundation stage and primary classrooms and iSams in the secondary school. Parents are also able to contact teachers via email. Guidelines for the effective use of these platforms by parents and staff have been set by the school. Although new, parent feedback suggests that these streamlined platforms are easy to use and highly effective.

Regular in person and online workshops which cover a range of curriculum and parenting topics are supported by parents. Parents have access to school leaders through monthly coffee morning and learning walk tours of the school. Feedback from parents after events and any other time is invited and posters with the required QR Code are displayed around the school for easy parent access. There is evidence that parent feedback has been acted upon by the school.

Reporting of student attainment and progress is regular and effective through termly reports and opportunities to participate in family conferencing events to discuss student progress, next steps and additional support as required.

The school's website contains all the required information for existing and prospective parents including contact information, mission and values of the school and links to relevant updated policies are easily found. The school is active on social media to engage parents, prospective parents and the wider community.

Parents are pleased with the informative, clear and regular communication they receive through the systems in place and in-school publications adequately provide supplementary information as required to the parent community.

The school is an inclusive school and promotes equal opportunities to all groups of students. There is a culture of respect. Parents feel that their children are in a safe environment. Parents spoke very highly of the principal and the EXLT. They trust the school to work in the best interests of all students. Positive relationships were observed throughout the inspection visit.

11. Standard 7

The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling complaints meets the standard for BSO.

The school effectively implements a clear policy for handling complaints, which meets local requirements and reflects UK practice.

Class teachers are available at the beginning and end of day to respond to parental concerns and meetings with other teachers are made at mutually convenient times. Senior leaders are available throughout the day to meet parents and answer any questions they may have in a prompt and efficient manner. Parents spoke positively of the willingness of the school to respond to their requests for information and appreciated the daily (the start and end of the day) visibility and accessibility of the ELT. They felt that this went some way to stopping any minor concerns becoming larger.

The school encourages parents to communicate queries and concerns directly with relevant staff. To this end, class teachers are available in person at the beginning and the end of the day and parents are able to use online platforms such as *Class Dojo* (FS1-Y6) and *iSAMS* to directly contact teachers during the school day. The effectiveness of communication channels and prompt attention by staff in listening and responding to requests was praised by parents. Complaints records show that there was no escalation of complaints this school year.

Parents reported valuing the very good communications with the school ensuring that all issues and concerns are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner.

12. Standard 8 Leadership and management of the school

Leadership and management meet the requirements of the BSO standards and are outstanding.

The school's senior leadership team and board of governors have a sound understanding of where the school is on its journey. They talk openly and honestly about their eight-year journey. There is a keen awareness of where the school is coming from, how it has progressed and where it is going to. The school has maintained its own identity and ethos inside the International Schools Partnership group, whilst the board of governors represents an active Critical Friend, guiding the school to make constant and consistent progress.

The senior team of principal, head of primary and head of secondary is strong and united. Together they articulate a clear vision and mission for the school and evince the passion to see it delivered. The team acknowledges a contingent approach to leadership that is in line with the school's journey. There is a dispersed leadership style that allows for the vision to be delivered in a cooperative manner, incorporating creative contributions from all.

The founding principal of the school is the catalyst for progress at the school. Her passion and ambition are clear to see, and she is able to utilise these to inspire and motivate the staff.

A critical aspect of this stage of the school's leadership journey is the successful incorporation of a largely new team of middle leaders as part of the school's rapid growth. The school is committed to appropriate CPD and performance management to facilitate its new teams and to embed its vision and values. The support given by the school and the ISP for the development of teachers' career paths has effectively contributed to the very positive attitude of the teachers towards the school.

These middle leadership teams are potentially a strength of the school. Within its ranks, in both the primary and secondary schools, there are some outstanding practitioners and leaders. Often it is in their classrooms that we see the very best of the school, and we are offered a glimpse of where the whole school has the potential to be. In the secondary school, the leaders of the mathematics and English departments were especially compelling in this regard, this is already reflected in pupil performance data, which with stronger supporting casts, could be improved still further.

The retention rate of teachers in the school is good, and the rapid integration of the new members of staff is an illustration of the effective induction, mentoring and coaching capacity of the leadership teams at all levels.

The school runs smoothly with a clear focus given to the well-being and security of staff and students.