

Teaching, Learning and Management

Rawabi English Academy

**Rawabi
Palestine**

A Review for

Massar International

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Introduction

The Context of the School

Rawabi English Academy (REA) was founded as in August 2016. It has been developed as a bilingual school which meets the educational requirements of the Ministry of Education.

The school currently offers education for children from Kindergarten to Year 5. There are currently 108 pupils attending the school with projections that indicate a possible increase to 185 by the start of the next academic year (2017-18). The pupils attending the Academy are mainly Palestinian and are non-native speakers of English.

The Academy is housed in a first class, brand new, purpose built facility located in an elevated position in the new City of Rawabi. The building is excellent and provides spacious, bright, air-conditioned classrooms together with specialist rooms for Science, Library, Art and a fully equipped Information Technology room. The classrooms are also equipped with interactive whiteboards.

Rawabi is located 9 kilometres (5.6 mi) northwest of Ramallah, 3.5 kilometres (2.2 mi) north of Birzeit and 25 kilometres (16 mi) south of Nablus. The majority of the children attending the school come from Ramallah and the surrounding areas. The school has an outsourced arrangement for bussing which enables those parents who are not able to bring their children to school to access transport.

The curriculum reflects the local requirements of the Ministry in terms of the teaching of Arabic, Religion and aspects of Social Studies. REA incorporates an international dimension through use of IEYC (International Early Year Curriculum) in the Early Years and CIE International Primary Curriculum from Year 1 to 5.

REA has been funded from the outset by Massar International who have borne the capital cost of construction, development of the Academy's facilities, the equipping of the school and all staff costs. Massar International continue to fund the operational costs of the school.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the school is thus:

'To create a world class education for our students who will learn through innovative teaching which blends the very best of Palestinian, International, and English education.

Our students will become intellectually independent, learn tolerance and respect for others and develop leadership skills that will equip them to work in a global community.

Our school seeks the excellence in all of us, with passion and compassion. We are a community shaped by the pursuit of truth and goodness, providing outstanding preparation for higher learning and for life.'

Methodology

The review was scheduled for three days from the 6th to 8th of June inclusive.

A total of 24 meetings and classroom observations were undertaken which included meetings with key administrators, teachers and support teachers. All classroom observations were conducted in the primary school as Kindergarten were preparing for Graduation so observations of class teaching were not possible. However, a meeting was arranged with the Kindergarten staff the results of which are noted later in the report.

It should be noted that Years 3 to 5 were engaged in revision for end of year examinations therefore normal lesson plans were neither necessary nor appropriate. In these instances, the organisation of the lesson, the management of behaviour and the learning outcomes were the focus of the observation.

Discussions were held with The Principal, Admissions Manager, Business Manager, Personal Assistant (School Secretary) and School Counsellor.

A discussion was held with the leadership and teaching team responsible for the Kindergarten.

Two panel sessions were held with children from Years 1 and 2 and Years 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

Completed Teacher Evaluation documents were provided and subsequently reviewed. In addition, summative data from CEM and Grading sheets were also provided.

The observations followed the pattern outlined below:

- A classroom observation lasting approximately 20 minutes
- Observations focused on classroom management, organisation and learning outcomes

Findings

General Observations

Rawabi English Academy was opened in August 2016. This is the school's first full year of operation. The achievements of the institution in this short space of time are very notable. The Academy feels and functions as if it is a school that has been established for many years. Policies and practices are clear, embedded, shared and generally understood.

There is little evidence of the teething problems that many schools experience in the first year of operation. In the reviewers' opinion, this is exceptional and is due to the hard work, focus and dedication of the management team and staff. All of those involved are to be congratulated.

Management and Organisation

At the time of the review the current management team consists of The Principal, Head of Kindergarten, Business Manager, Admission Manager, Personal Assistant to the Principal (who fulfils the role of School Secretary) a Counsellor and a temporary Receptionist (Intern).

The management team, except for the temporary Receptionist, were interviewed as part of the review.

As a result of the interviews and interactions observed during the review process the management team can be characterised thus:

- *Responsive*
- *Efficient*
- *Organised*
- *Capable*
- *Hard working*
- *Knowledgeable*
- *Dedicated*
- *Cooperative*
- *Supportive of each other*
- *Open*
- *Demonstrated 'can do' attitudes*
- *Respectful of each other*

The team is extremely well led by the Principal who commands both the respect and loyalty of his team. There is a clarity of purpose which is impressive and a cooperative approach to managing tasks and situations. This is an effective team that works well together and that is determined to do their best for the Academy.

Communication within the team is good with high levels of awareness of both needs and tasks that are being undertaken. There is a sense of appreciation of capabilities within the team and a sharing of tasks that plays to the strengths of individuals within the team.

The only real concern expressed by members of the team related to workloads. The pressure of work at points in time was considered to be very demanding and challenging to manage.

The school undertook a comprehensive **Survey of Parents** which was well structured and received. The responses were generally very positive with the exception of school transport which received very significant negative scores. The school should look carefully at transport as it is a real and deep concern for parents and is the only blemish on an otherwise positive parental survey

Points for Consideration

- The need for additional support in the central management should be reviewed in the light of anticipated growth at the commencement of the academic year 2017/8
- The need for a full time Receptionist, located in the entrance to the Academy, should be considered. Control of access to the school and security relating to visitors are important factors that must be borne in mind.
- There is a need to plan for addition to the academic leadership of the school. The whole burden is currently falling on the Principal who has no Deputy. This is a vulnerability as the school grows.
- The school should undertake an urgent review of transport arrangements with a view to making significant changes to ameliorate the parental concerns in this area.
- Careful planning for the **expansion of the school** to meet increasing demand for places needs to be undertaken. This should include both facilities and staffing needs and should be conducted in a timely manner.

Teaching and Learning

General Observations

The relationship between students and teachers in REA is excellent. There is significant use of positive reinforcement by all staff which contributes to a constructive and supportive atmosphere. The children appear to be happy and appear to enjoy being in school.

Behaviour and movement of students around the school and in the corridors is generally good. There are notices which remind students of behavioural expectations in both classrooms and hallways.

The central team of managers is open and supportive in terms of the approach to teaching and learning in REA. Their attitude to the core values in terms of classroom practice is positive and constructive.

The Principal is thoughtful in his style and focused on methodologies and strategies that create effective teaching and learning in the classroom. He is considered in his decision making and is decisive. His staff appreciate his calm and measured approach and his ability to deal with pressured situations in a reflective manner.

Testing and Assessment

The Academy has implemented international summative assessments from CEM. The tests are independent, external, standardised and focused on ability levels and performance Maths and English language. The school is to be commended for implementing testing of this nature at such an early stage in the schools' development.

It is evident from the results of the CEM tests that, with very few exceptions, the students at all levels in REA are outperforming expectations and achieving results that exceed that which should be anticipated from the ability levels documented in the assessment. Further consideration of the CEM assessments will be given later in the report.

Findings

What the Academy does well in the classrooms

The lessons observed were of a good standard. There were no lessons which were unsatisfactory. It should also be noted that there were two excellent lessons which were a credit to both the teachers who delivered the lessons and to the school as a whole.

In general, the lessons were well organised and well managed. Teachers were appropriately prepared and were clear about the learning objectives both in the planning and execution of the lessons. Support materials were suitable in sustaining the learning and educational technology (interactive whiteboards) and the internet deployed effectively.

The positive characteristics of the teaching and learning observed can be highlighted thus:

- All lessons observed involved active rather than passive learning
- Relationships between teachers and student were respectful
- All teachers used positive reinforcement to encourage and motivate students
- Levels of student on task behaviour was high
- Levels of student engagement were good
- Most lessons were well paced
- Teachers monitored learning outcomes effectively with care
- Execution of lessons reflected planning
- Behaviour management in the classroom was generally good
- Teachers were well prepared for lessons
- Teachers used appropriate support materials
- Tasks were explained clearly

Learning Objectives

In most instances, the learning objectives were clear and appropriate and the execution of lessons followed the plans. A number of the classes observed (5) were engaged in revision for end of year tests. The points for consideration are thus:

- The learning objectives are different from activities that support the learning. Clarity in both the plans and explanations to pupils are important in differentiating the two aspects of the lesson. For pupils understanding of the learning objectives at the start of the lesson is important
- A clear initial explanation of the activity leads to higher levels of on task behaviour occurring quickly and saves the teacher from having to reiterate what needs to be done thus freeing them to support and monitor learning.
- A link to prior learning helps the pupils to put the lesson into context before the introduction of the new learning objectives
 - **Example**—‘last lesson we learned about
- Reminding students of what they are learning and why during the lesson helps to embed the learning as it occurs
- Leaving time at the end of the lesson to summarise what has been learned during the lesson is important as is linking to future learning, where possible
 - **Example** – ‘next lesson we will learn about

Again, the practices noted above were observed in lessons but not all lessons all of the time.

Early Years

It was not possible to observe teaching in the Early Years as the children were rehearsing for their Graduation Ceremony. However, a meeting which lasted 45 minutes was arranged with teachers and leader of this section of the school.

Recommendations

- A parents meeting is arranged for all new parents at the beginning of the year to explain IEYC, the units that will be undertaken, how IEYC fits with literacy and numeracy and the approach to teaching English and Arabic. It is important to generate understanding and set expectations for all new parents.
- All the aspects of parent engagement in the IEYC should be fully utilized (letters to parents explaining each unit as they arise, invitations to exit points, engaging parents at home with projects relating to the units, etc) open mornings when parents can drop in and see what is happening in their child’s classroom and invitations to any classroom event that may be of interest.
- Consideration should be given to software specifically designed for the Early Years which enables teachers to communicate with parents and involve them in the learning process. A good example is Tapestry which helps Early Years teachers with assessment and enables parents to track learning in real time.
<https://tapestry.info/>

Assessment and Reporting

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It is evident from the results of the CEM tests that, with very few exceptions, the students at all levels in REA are outperforming expectations and achieving results that exceed that which should be anticipated from the ability levels documented in the assessment.

By way of explanation **general ability** is a measure of intellectual capacity to learn. It is sometimes referred to as IQ (Intelligence Quota).

The assessment of Maths and English are **measures achievement** - that which the pupil has learned or been taught.

General ability measures vary little over time. In test / retest situations with variations of +2 to -2 being typical. Schools and education have little impact on **general ability**.

In contrast schools can and do have a significant impact on **measures of achievement**.

The **comparison of ability to achievement standardized age scores** provides the basis for judging the 'value add' of the school.

The notable points from an analysis of the data generated are thus:

- In the Primary School the **achievement levels** in both Maths and English are higher than should be expected bearing in mind the ability levels in each year group
- The **ability levels** in the Primary School are below average in all year groups.
- The achievement scores in outperform the ability scores. This is particularly noticeable in both General Maths and Mental Arithmetic.
- Achievement levels in Reading are noticeably lower than Maths levels. This is not surprising as almost all the students are non-native English speakers and in their first year of bi-lingual education at REA
- There is a noticeable difference between scores in General Maths and Mental Maths
- The scores in Reading broadly match the ability scores with the exception of Year Four where there is an under achievement in Reading scores relative to ability.

Further Observations

The school is to be congratulated on implementing standardised assessment at such an early stage. Few schools are confident enough to do so in the first year of operation. The results also indicate that the students are outperforming in achievement relative to the ability levels of the cohort. This is a credit to the school and the teaching and learning.

There is an indication from the CEM data that the cohort in Early Years is of a higher ability level to the cohort in the Primary School. This is a tentative conclusion in that the assessment is not directly comparable and the results from testing children under 5 is less reliable.

Recommendations

- The school should continue using CEM iNCAS and BASE on an annual basis
- The school should implement CIE Checkpoint in the next academic year. This will provide further standardised data for the purpose of analysis of performance and achievement
- The school should make use of both InCAS Comparison Charts for each Year Group, Pupil Progress Charts to track progress and use Prediction Tables at the end of each Key Stage
- The school should focus on Mental Maths in the Primary School as a mechanism for improving achievement scores in this area
- The school should look at strategies for improving Reading in the current Year 4 (Year 5 next Year)

Conclusions

The achievements of the institution in such a short space of time are very notable. The Academy feels and functions as if it is a school that has been established for many years. Policies and practices are clear, embedded, shared and generally understood. All of those involved in this first year of operation should be justifiably proud of their achievements and heartily congratulated.

Work remains to be done but the reviewer is confident that the management team and staff have both the desire and drive to create the best possible learning experience for the pupils attending Rawabi English Academy.

What is most heartening is the fact that the school cares not only about the academic progress of its pupils but about the students as individuals in the most rounded sense of the word.

Values of truth, morality, honesty, ethics and community spirit were all observed during the visit. The school has made a great start and has the potential to become a beacon of great education in Palestine. Well done – all the hard work was well worth it!