



الهيئة الوطنية
للمؤهلات وضمان جودة التعليم والتدريب
National Authority for Qualifications &
Quality Assurance of Education & Training

Vocational Review Unit

Review Report

Kumon Bahrain

Manama

Kingdom of Bahrain

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The Vocational Review Unit

Vocational Review Unit (VRU) is part of the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (NAQQAET) that was officially set up in 2008 as an independent body governed and supervised by the Council of Ministers. Established to raise standards in vocational education and training, the VRU is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the quality of vocational provision, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, establishing success measures, spreading best practice and offering policy advice to key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education.

Reviews are based on the VRU's *Review Framework*, and carried out on providers' premises by teams of carefully selected and highly trained reviewers. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the planning of the review, and to represent them during review team meetings. Reviewers examine a range of evidence before arriving at a series of judgements and awarding grades for the quality of the provision.

Review grades are awarded on a four-point scale:

| Grade description | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1: Outstanding | This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least good in all aspects and outstanding in the majority. |
| 2: Good | This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least satisfactory in all aspects and good in the majority. There may be some particularly successful approaches or outcomes. |
| 3: Satisfactory | This describes a basic level of adequacy. There are no major areas of weakness which substantially affect what learners, or significant groups of learners, achieve. There may be some features which are good. |
| 4: Inadequate | This describes situations where major weaknesses in some areas affect the outcomes for learners and outweigh any strengths in the provision. |

Introduction

Description of the provision

Kumon Bahrain was established in 1999 as a franchise reporting to Kumon Europe and Africa (KEA) Headquarter based in the United Kingdom. It is licensed by the Ministry of Education, providing guided self-learning programmes in mathematics and English. Both programmes have progressive levels catering for pre-school to university entrance levels prescribed by the Kumon International Standards (KIS). These standards represent the average level of achievement of learners at each age. Learners who advance by the equivalent of six months, one year and more than two years above their equivalent KIS levels are recognised as being on the Advanced Student Register (ASR) in the bronze, silver and gold category respectively. The mathematics programme consists of 21 levels from basic counting at the lowest level to calculus at the highest level. The English programme consists of 18 levels beginning with pre-reading skills and the alphabet to elements of critique and text analysis. Approximately 57 per cent of learners do mathematics and the remaining 43 per cent do English. Most learners attend the Kumon centre once a week. However, there are around 14 per cent of learners who are from the Gulf region enrolled as correspondence learners. Enrolment in both mathematics and English at Kumon Bahrain reached approximately 1900 learners by the summer of 2012.

The centre has three branches: Mahooz, Janabiya and Sanad. Kumon Bahrain has five members on the Board of governors and is managed by a director, who leads a full-time team comprising a deputy director/correspondence branch manager, an administration manager, a human resources administrator, eight class managers (CMs) and a group of administration staff. They also employ 25 class assistants (CAs) on a part-time basis. The central KEA office provides continuous strategic support, monitors the quality of provision and provides local capacity building.

Scope of the review

This review was conducted over four days, by a team of four reviewers. During the review, reviewers observed sessions and other related activities, analysed data about the courses and qualifications learners achieve, examined learners' written and other work, examined documents and the materials provided by the institute and talked with staff including the class managers and class assistants. Parents' and learners' views were also considered and analysed.

In the previous review, overall effectiveness was judged as good as was learners' achievement, programmes, support and guidance and leadership and management. The

provider's capacity to improve was also judged as good. Effectiveness of teaching was not graded due to the nature of the provision and the specific nature of the learning process.

This report summarises reviewers' findings and their recommendations about what the provider should do to improve.

Table of review judgments awarded

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Overall Effectiveness | |
| How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the full range of learners' and stakeholders' needs? | Grade: 1 Outstanding |
| Learners' Achievement | |
| How well do learners achieve? | Grade: 1 Outstanding |
| Quality of Provision | |
| How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning? | Grade: 1 Outstanding |
| How well do courses meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders? | Grade: 1 Outstanding |
| How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes? | Grade: 1 Outstanding |
| Leadership and Management | |
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | Grade: 2 Good |

Review judgements

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?

Grade: 1 Outstanding

The overall effectiveness of Kumon Bahrain is now outstanding, as are all other aspects of its provision except the leadership and management which is rated good. Despite the leadership rated good overall, the centre has highly effective day-to-day practices where the institute provides a very systematic, individualised self-learning experience in a safe and supportive environment. This is facilitated by highly trained staff who manage the well-structured courses exceptionally well enabling learners to become highly competent in mathematics and English and to develop as independent learners, who show an extremely high level of confidence and superior self-learning discipline. As a consequence, the vast majority of learners make outstanding progress given their prior attainment. The management team and staff have a clear and shared focus on raising learners' achievement and meeting their needs and aspirations. The centre has very rigorous assessment procedures and effective recordkeeping enabling learners and parents to accurately monitor weekly progress.

Kumon Bahrain has good capacity to improve, with effective support from the KEA office which provides continuous monitoring and development of the performance of staff and the sharing of the detailed analysis of learners' progress. Although the programme is centrally structured by Kumon at a global level, the management responds very well to local needs. A number of plans to expand the provision have been identified by the director of the centre or have already been initiated although these have not been detailed in a formalised strategic plan. These include aspects like expanding the premises and opening a fourth branch, updating the current policies and procedures, further training of staff, introducing achievement targets specifically for English learners following the public school syllabus and new updated mathematics levels for young learners. Repeat business continues to be high with more than half of the learners continuing to attend for more than one academic year and most parents keeping their children at the centre for a number of levels while some stay until completion. The enrolment in early 2012 has increased by more than 10 per cent compared with the same period in 2011, and Kumon Bahrain is now ranked the second largest Kumon centre in the world. Management and staff are highly dedicated but with the current rate of high staff turnover, deployment and retaining of staff remains an issue for the centre.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?

Grade: 1 Outstanding

Learners' achievement is outstanding overall. Learners develop very useful skills in mathematics and English and the vast majority of learners make outstanding progress given their prior attainment and perform particularly well during and over the levels. Learners know how well they are progressing and achieve their set targets in the required time and show very high levels of self-motivation and self-confidence. Nearly all parents acknowledged the development of their children's very useful self-learning, critical thinking and problem solving skills. Also, most learners were highly satisfied with their learning at Kumon and found the programmes helped them enormously with their school work. They enabled them to understand the school subject and its concepts in advance of their peers and to perform the tasks more accurately and faster.

As observed from the sessions, Kumon Bahrain's learners develop as independent learners with an extremely high level of confidence, have very effective time management skills and are able to reflect on their own learning. The outstanding progress learners make is clearly evident from the tracking of learners' marks. The majority of learners are 'group one' achievers who complete the set tasks in quicker than the target time and with high marks. Each student performance is plotted against the Kumon International Standards (KIS) chart, which reflects the average level of learners at each age internationally. A significant number of learners progress beyond the KIS by six months, one year or more than two years ahead of school age and are placed on the Advanced Student Register (ASR) with bronze, silver or gold awards respectively. The total ASR achieved by Kumon Bahrain in mathematics and English is 60 per cent and 26 per cent of the total number of learners respectively, which is in line with the total ASR achieved by Kumon centres in the UK. There are examples of learners who complete the whole programme at a level equivalent to the UK Advanced level at a much younger age than the school's graduation age.

Attendance is effectively recorded and analysed; punctuality is not applicable as the style of the learning mainly depends on a drop-in basis. From the records of attendance and discussions with learners, it is evident that learners are attending on a regular basis. The attendance rate is high for such long courses at 87 per cent on average for one year.

The quality of provision

How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?

Grade 1 : Outstanding

Kumon Bahrain has a learning 'environment' which does not involve formal teaching; rather they have a sophisticated 'assessment of/for learning' system which promotes and supports individual learners. A very effective diagnostic test is used to accurately identify the appropriate entry level of each individual student and highlights the competency gaps to address. Instead of teachers, highly trained, highly effective class managers and class assistants plan and manage an individualised self-learning programme from Kumon's pre-prepared worksheets matching the needs of each student at each level. Learners are also provided with initial guidance and practice on completing assigned tasks on their own. Parents are also effectively guided on how to support their children, assess their work and record their scores and the time taken for each worksheet. Learners work at home on a daily basis, but attend once a week for a short session where they work under the expert supervision of a class assistant and the class manager. While in the classroom, learners work individually at various levels to answer the worksheets and take end of level achievement tests. Learners are encouraged to review their own mistakes and solve them on their own by referring to the guidance offered and their previous work. Learners' work is rigorously assessed by the class assistants and class managers and very effective feedback is provided to both learners and parents. After finishing their work in class, the class manager gives each student a set of worksheets and targets for the coming week. The programme is continually adjusted based on the student's weekly progress record which is well maintained and regularly updated.

How well do programmes meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?

Grade: 1 Outstanding

Programmes offered by Kumon Bahrain are comprehensive, meticulously planned and structured that very closely match learners' individual needs, aspirations and abilities. The scheduling of worksheets and assessments are carefully organised in a sequence that encourages a progressive acquisition of knowledge, skills and independent self-learning. Moreover, a team of experts affiliated with Kumon Europe, Asia and Japan regularly carry out a systematic, purposeful update and careful review of the course materials on offer.

Both the English and mathematics programmes offered by the institute are centrally prepared by the Kumon international team and set at a unified standard across all centres worldwide. The English language programme has 18 levels (with further sub-levels at some

stages) divided into the following blocks; pencil skills (2 levels), word building (6 levels), sentence building (6 levels), paragraph building (6 levels), summarisation (5 levels) and critique (3 levels). The mathematics programmes consist of 21 levels, divided into the following blocks; pencil skills (2 levels), counting (2 levels), number writing, mental addition and subtraction (4 levels), multiplication, division and vertical methods (3 levels), fractions (2 levels), basic algebra (4 levels), functions (3 levels), calculus (2 levels) and one advanced level in applied mathematics topics. Each level is designed to focus on core skills corresponding to school grade levels. Parents and learners are extremely satisfied with Kumon programmes which are very well planned for each individual student and informed by prior and continuing assessment of learners.

Within sessions, there is a variety of interesting additional engaging activities available to learners accompanying Kumon's original syllabus. While Kumon Bahrain is legally restricted by Kumon international policies, after negotiation with their regional office, they were allowed to adopt more non-class activities such as achievement ceremonies, competitions with prizes and summer events. By gauging and responding to local needs, in May 2012, Kumon Bahrain introduced a special achievement target scale called Advance Block Completion (ABC) for those following the public school syllabus as a first stage target to bridge the gap between learners' English language skills attainment and the ASR targets. Recent updates to some levels were also introduced earlier this year, which include two additional pencil skills levels, merging two mathematics entry levels and enhancing three other levels.

How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?

Grade: 1 Outstanding

Outstanding support and guidance are provided to all learners that enable them to achieve better outcomes. All learners and parents receive highly effective and very useful guidance about the Kumon system. Kumon Bahrain provides a comprehensive and very informative orientation programme in Arabic and English to parents prior to the registration. Through these 'parents' evening meetings', they are made fully aware of the Kumon concepts of self-learning, levels and methods of assessment as well as their key role in the process that integrates their role with the role of the learners and Kumon staff. Those parents who register their children are made fully aware of the outcomes of the diagnostic test including very specific analysis of their children's needs and proposed entry level. They are also provided with details of the homework marking and grading, weekly study plans, a very informative parents' guide book and solution books. Programme timing is flexible and agreed with parents and an effective correspondence mode is also available.

Class managers and their assistants provide learners with highly effective and purposeful support during the class sessions which motivates them to reach set targets. Parents and

learners are constantly kept updated on the progress they make through extensive written comments, progress charts and individual verbal feedback. Parents also have direct access to class managers should they have any issues to discuss. Furthermore, Kumon Bahrain shares study tips and very relevant guidance to parents through their regular newsletter sent to parents. Staff-parents' meetings are also held bi-annually to discuss progress to date and future targets. Staff are very well trained and have a very caring, pleasant demeanour and, dressed in bright colourful uniforms, contribute to the highly supportive and productive learning environment. Kumon Bahrain has a highly informative, user-friendly website with a very useful section covering 'frequently asked questions'.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

Grade: 2 Good

Kumon Bahrain's leadership and management have a very clear focus on maximising the progress of each student and targeting their individual needs at a progressive pace and in a safe and conducive learning environment. The management of the programme is highly systematic and follows the Kumon prescribed methodology and plans. The centre's performance is regularly monitored by the KEA regional office which provides very useful recommendations and strategic support. The centre has an appropriate organisational structure and a suitable number of highly trained staff, although some of them have only recently been recruited.

The staff are selected using clear criteria and effective assessment activities. Once employed as class assistants or class managers, they are inducted well and continuously updated through internal workshops, their own self-development and structured training provided by the KEA regional manager leading to Kumon Quality Standard (KQS) certification for the centre. Staff performance is effectively monitored on a continuous basis as well as through the external quality audits by the regional manager who provides very comprehensive and informative feedback and targets. However, the high turn-over of staff is a continuous challenge facing the management and impacts on staff deployment.

The centre systematically keeps records of individual learners' progress where each worksheet and assessment is marked, verified and carefully recorded. The class assistants and class managers monitor this progress on a weekly basis and adjust the learners' study plans accordingly. Progression over levels is clearly marked on progress charts and compared with set targets. Very informative monthly and annual aggregated progress data

for each branch are also available and closely monitored by the management and the regional manager who further verify this data and produce useful recommendations.

Parents are always kept informed and effective communication with them is established from the beginning where they are provided with very useful written feedback highlighting the gaps in their children's skills from the outcome of the highly effective diagnostic test. Similarly, parents receive weekly written feedback on how their children are progressing. Parents' and learners feedback is collected through direct contacts and regularly through questionnaires. Issues are usually addressed immediately. However, the centre does not aggregate this data for further analysis. The learners are safe and supervised at all times and the premises are free from hazards. Health and safety measures are in place and appropriate procedures are available; a number of staff have received basic first aid training. Although the staff are made aware of how to handle emergency evacuations, formalised guidance is not provided to parents and learners. The external audit visit informs the centre' self-evaluation and the submitted SEF is reasonably informative and the grades are accurate.

The provider's key strengths

- The highly relevant skills and knowledge learners develop in mathematics and English as well as the development of highly disciplined self-learning abilities, independence, confidence and time management skills
- The outstanding progress learners make given their prior attainment and potential
- The rigorous assessment of learners' prior attainment and subsequent work and the very useful feedback provided to learners and parents
- Kumon's effective recordkeeping and weekly updating of learners' progress enabling learners and parents to accurately monitor weekly progress
- The very well structured and comprehensively and clearly planned programmes that meet learners' individual needs, abilities and aspirations
- The effective support and guidance learners and parents receive about Kumon's methods
- The very clear focus of the management and staff on maximising the progress of each student
- The comprehensive and regular analysis and verification of learners' achievement
- The extremely effective performance monitoring of class managers and class assistants and the highly relevant training and development provided for them.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Kumon Bahrain should:

- enhance health and safety guidance provided to parents and learners
- address the issue of high staff turn-over
- aggregate learners' and parents' feedback for further analysis.