

Al Dhahrah Primary and High School Inspection Report

Cycles 2 and 3
Girls

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school.....	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	9
Summary of inspection judgements	11
Next Steps.....	14
How to contact us.....	14

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Al Dhahrah Primary and High School was inspected in February 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Hatta, Al Dhahrah Primary and High School is a public school providing education for girls from Grade 6 to Grade 12, aged 11 to 18 years. The school follows a Ministry of Education curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 434 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents felt their daughters liked school. Almost all thought that progress was good in Islamic Education, Arabic, English and mathematics; most agreed that progress was good in science. Most felt the teaching and behaviour of students was good and they were treated fairly and encouraged to work hard. The majority agreed that they found the school approachable but a minority felt the school was not good at consulting them about decisions that affected their children. Also, a minority felt they did not get good information about the progress their children were making or information about how they might help with school work. Most felt the school was well led and that their children were safe and cared for.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Dhahrah Primary and High School provided a good quality of education for its students. A significant feature was students' good attainment and progress in Islamic Education, Arabic, English, mathematics and science in comparison with international standards. A further strength of the school was the outstanding attitudes and behaviour of the students. They demonstrated maturity and self-confidence in many aspects of school life. Their attendance was exemplary. Almost all had a growing awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and had a good understanding of and a respect for Islam. They valued and celebrated their heritage. Students' economic and environmental understandings were acceptable. Most could speak about the relevant issues but lacked opportunities to apply their learning in school.

Students benefited from good teaching. Teachers had secure subject knowledge, planned their lessons well and conducted them with good pacing. Lessons almost always included a range of activities to help students make progress, but opportunities for independent learning and to develop analytical, creative and problem solving skills were limited. Students' learning was good. They had positive and enthusiastic attitudes towards their studies and seized the rare opportunities to work both collaboratively and independently. Assessment strategies were good across the school. Teachers had a good overall picture of how students were progressing, and in many subjects they used tests to analyse skill development. However, the information was not consistently used to plan the next steps in learning. Marking was regular but rarely informed students of how they could improve. The school curriculum was good and was reviewed regularly. Time was distributed well and students were offered opportunities to develop a range of skills both within and across subjects. This was complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and strong links with the community. Health and safety in the school was at an acceptable level. The school gave due attention to security and supervision. Effective provision was made for students' health and for emergency evacuation procedures. However, the number of students on buses exceeded their authorised capacities. Arrangements for child protection were not understood by all staff. The support for students' academic and personal development was good. Relationships across the whole school community were caring and supportive, students' welfare being a high priority for staff. Although there were secure systems for tracking student progress, they were not consistently used to guide future learning. There were effective systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality.

Leadership and management in the school were good. The Principal gave strong leadership, and a collegial approach to development ensured that the school aims were shared by all staff. The quality of teaching was monitored regularly but monitoring was not sufficiently linked with professional development to improve classroom practice. School planning and self-evaluation were good and the school had made significant progress on the recommendations from the previous inspection report. However, strategies for the monitoring of plans needed further attention.

Links with parents and the community were good. Parents were encouraged to be actively involved with the school and they were kept well-informed about their daughters' progress. The school was a focal point for the community and many beneficial links had been formed. Governance was unsatisfactory. The school lacked a body which could act as an advisor and hold it to account for its work. The staffing, facilities and resources at the school were good. Staff were well-qualified and deployed appropriately.

Key features of the school

- The good attainment and progress across all key subjects;
- The students' outstanding behaviour, attitudes and relationships;
- The school's culture of self-improvement and positive attitude to the inspection as a vehicle for development;
- The central role of the school in the community;
- The lack of a governing body to challenge and support the school;
- The weaknesses in the arrangements for students' safety on the buses and for child protection.

Recommendations

- Provide more opportunities for students to gain greater practical understanding of economic awareness and environmental issues;
- Improve the teaching and learning to enable all students to make further progress by:
 - sharing and applying the characteristics of an outstanding lesson;
 - providing a greater range of activities to meet the learning needs of all students;
 - providing greater challenges that will develop creative, analytical and problem solving skills in students;
- Address the health and safety issues relating to school transport and child protection as a matter of urgency;
- Put in place a governing body of stakeholders to support and challenge the school and to which the school is accountable for its work.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. In Cycle 2 most students made progress in their understanding and knowledge of Islamic concepts and they were able to give good examples of how they apply these concepts to their lives. By the end of Cycle 3, most students had good a understanding of Islamic practices and beliefs and their recitation of The Holy Qur'an had improved significantly. Across the school students could give examples from The Holy Qur'an and Hadith to back up points of view or illustrate concepts. Cross-curricular links with other subjects in Islamic Education contributed to the good progress in students' understanding and application.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic in Cycles 2 and 3 were good. Almost all students attempted to use classical Arabic when speaking; most used it well and were clear and confident in their presentations. Most students could hold good levels of conversation in classical Arabic and used a wide range of vocabulary to express their thoughts. Their reading skills improved as they moved up through Cycle 2 and by the end of Cycle 3 almost all students had good comprehension skills. Their writing skills had improved considerably and were no longer limited to filling in blanks in the textbook. Greater opportunities for extended writing had led to students beginning to write in different styles and for different audiences.

Attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school. Students demonstrated knowledge, skills and understanding that were in line with international age-related expectations. The majority of students in Cycles 2 and 3 were able to read aloud with expression and understanding. They were able to follow instructions and answer questions. Most were able to hold simple conversations but a significant minority were not able to always use the correct tense when speaking. By the end of Grade 9, students were able to take part in discussions and express opinions about articles they had read. By the end of Grade 12, most students were able to write for a wide range of different audiences.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good. Internal examination results had been high for several years. The overall quality of work was above average and showed good progress over time. In Cycle 2, for example, students developed computational and practical skills very well and used them confidently in geometry and the addition of fractions. However, a few students in Grade 6 had problems in solving equations which included fractions. In Grade 12 science-strand students developed algebra and analysis well and could rigorously derive results in integral calculus for given functions. In the commercial strand, students developed good understanding and skills in the context of personal and business finances. Problem solving throughout the school often included useful practical work, which strengthened students' understanding.

Attainment and progress in science were good in both Cycle 2 and Cycle 3. Across the school most students were achieving in line with international standards and frequently above. Students in Grade 6 knew that adding ice to water lowered its freezing point and confirmed this through practical work. By Grade 12, students' development in scientific understanding enabled them to appreciate the concept of resistance when investigating current through wires of different length and cross-sectional area. Theoretical knowledge was enhanced by regular practical work which students carried out safely, confidently and accurately. They made progress in understanding the notion of fair testing. Though there were opportunities for investigation work, these were often of a research nature rather than activities in which students could independently design an experiment to test their own hypotheses.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour in the school were outstanding. Students were well behaved, polite, courteous and respectful of one another and their teachers. Almost all students demonstrated high levels of self-discipline and were making excellent progress in developing their self-confidence and personal skills. As a consequence, students conducted themselves maturely at all times. All lessons started and ended promptly and students moved around the school in a purposeful and orderly manner. Almost all students arrived to school on time and attendance was outstanding.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in Cycle 2 and outstanding in Cycle 3. Across the school, students celebrated their local heritage and Emirati identity through a range of activities, art displays and exhibitions. Although most students in the school expressed desires to contribute to the development of Dubai, a minority in Cycle 2 were unclear about the impact they could have on Dubai or about the range of developments Dubai had made in the past few years.

Students' economic and environmental understanding in both cycles was acceptable. Most students had a good level of knowledge of some of the global and local economic and environmental issues through subjects such as geography. Although most students participated in some environmental events, such as the "Clean the World" day, the lack of planned and consistent opportunities for them to practice and apply their learning in school and in the community limited their appreciation of these issues.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching across the school was good. All teachers had secure subject knowledge, planned their lessons well and conducted them at a brisk pace. Lesson objectives, however, were not always expressed as specific learning outcomes. Teachers' questioning helped engage students well and provided a good challenge for most students. However, it rarely gave them the opportunity to develop their critical and higher order thinking skills. These included well-resourced practical work, applications to the real world, and well prepared and presented student-led learning. The latter was most consistently found in Islamic Education, Arabic, and social studies. Targeting support and putting individual questions to students helped meet some of their needs, but there was not a sufficient range of activities to meet the different needs of all students.

Learning across the school was also good. Students had very positive attitudes and were enthusiastic and keen to share their learning. They also responded well to the many opportunities to work collaboratively. However, group work was least successful when tasks were not sufficiently challenging or the more confident students took on the majority of the work. Students demonstrated they were able to work very productively without direct supervision, for example, when carrying out projects. However, they had insufficient opportunities to work independently in lessons and to apply knowledge in new contexts. Students made good use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support their learning, although little use was made of subject-specific software. Students developed good practical skills, were confident and safe users of equipment and apparatus, and made good connections to learning across subjects.

Assessment strategies were good across the school. In most subjects there was consistent use of skill-based assessments that included detailed comments on how each student could improve their work. This was in line with school expectations. However, although there was understanding of how well students were achieving, information was not used consistently by teachers to plan the next steps in learning. In lessons, informal assessments, for example questioning, worksheets and tests, added to the overall picture of students' attainment and progress. Students valued opportunities to assess their own work as well as that of their peers. Their work was marked, and even though teachers had some knowledge of individual students' strengths and weaknesses, there was little evidence of teachers making comments to help students improve.

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?

The curriculum was good across the school with a balance in time allocated to subjects. Staff members understood the importance of developing a curriculum that provided challenging and interesting learning experiences. Students were given frequent opportunities to evaluate lessons, and as a result the curriculum was regularly reviewed in order to provide greater links between subjects. This helped students develop skills across a range of subjects and provided meaningful contexts and more interest in lessons. There were, however, limited opportunities for students to work independently in order to develop thinking and investigative skills. The curriculum provided opportunities for students to improve and tidy the local environment but students had little understanding of what they could do to preserve the environment. The use of competitions helped motivate and challenge students, as seen in a mathematics competition with the best student competing nationally. In a number of lessons, curricular provision included opportunities for active learning in order to engage students. There was a wide range of extra-curricular activities available, which allowed students to extend their learning. The school was aware of the importance of its place in the community and made very good use of the local facilities to enhance the curriculum. Visits and other activities were organised and integrated into learning experiences. For example, students regularly visited the elderly and had links with students with special educational needs.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of health and safety across the school was acceptable. The school site was secure and clean, although hygiene in toilets sometimes varied in quality. There were good levels of supervision and students felt safe. The nurse provided good medical and health care, and teachers had also been trained for first aid. Well-maintained records showed no serious accident had occurred at the school. Effective health education and promotion of healthy lifestyles resulted, for example, in improved food in the canteen and students' diets. There were regular fire drills and checks and all students were trained to use extinguishers. However, signs for evacuation routes were not permanently secure and did not include assembly points. There was some very effective handling of a few sensitive and serious issues concerning child protection, but policy and procedures were not sufficiently understood by all teachers. In the science preparation room, the storage of some hazardous chemicals was not secure and no risk assessments were undertaken. The school also exceeded the authorised capacity for some of its buses.

The quality of support for students across the school was good. Teachers had very good relationships with students. All members of the school community showed care and concern for the needs of others at all times. Students' educational and personal well-being was a high priority for the staff. For example, Grade 12 students were provided with well informed advice and guidance about future careers. Although the behaviour of students was exemplary, expectations of standards of behaviour were shared fully with parents. The school maintained effective processes for checking the academic and personal development of all students. Even though there were sound systems in place to track students' progress, they were not used to guide students in their future learning. The school recorded attendance and punctuality and worked closely with parents to ensure the safety and well being of all students.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership of the school was good. The Principal gave strong leadership to the school and her vision and passion for school improvement were evident. A commitment to team work throughout the school ensured that the aims of the school were supported by all staff. Subject leaders were empowered to lead their subject areas but they were also accountable to the Principal through monthly meetings. The quality of teaching was determined through regular lesson observation. Teachers received feedback and good practice was shared through peer observation within and across subject areas. This was supported by internal and external training. However, the outcomes of lesson observation and professional development were not sufficiently coordinated to ensure the greatest impact upon classroom practices.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school saw the inspection as a vehicle for improvement and had used the handbook as a basis for identifying improvement priorities. The views of parents and students were also taken into account through the use of questionnaires. Development planning was based on a sound model that defined tasks, responsibilities, timeframes and outcomes. This was delegated to teams within the school as part of a collegial approach. Considerable progress had been made on most of the recommendations from the last inspection. In particular, improvements in the tracking of student progress had led to a sophisticated level of analysis. However, the monitoring of school planning was underdeveloped because the expected outcomes were not described in sufficient detail.

Partnership with parents and the community were good. Parents, particularly mothers, were encouraged to be involved with the work of the school. The "open door" policy enabled them to approach the school with any problems. Whilst regular Parents' Mornings were held to discuss students' progress and welfare, a minority of parents felt they did not know how to support their daughters' learning. The school used many strategies to communicate with parents including SMS, phone, and newsletters. The quality of information in the progress reports sent out every semester was detailed and valued. The school was a focus for community activities. Furthermore, students benefited from extensive links with the community such as the Hatta Heritage Village, the police and the local hospital.

Governance was unsatisfactory. A governing body existed whose members included the Principal, the Vice-Principal and members of the Mothers' Union. However, they only met on a needs basis and had no role in holding the school to account. There was no other stakeholder group involved with the governance of the school.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teachers were well-qualified and deployed to meet the needs of the curriculum. Classrooms made attractive learning spaces and students benefited from a good provision of specialist facilities for science and ICT. There were adequate resources for the delivery of the curriculum. Whilst many rooms were equipped with data projectors and computers, these were underused as a teaching tool.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Unsatisfactory
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next Steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

Copyright 2010

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school. It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.