

The Central School Inspection Report

Pre-Primary to Secondary

Report issued February 2011

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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.

The Central School was inspected in October 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 Al Nahda, The Central School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from pre-primary to secondary, aged three to 18 years. The school follows an Indian (CBSE) curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 2805 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of education offered. Almost all stated that their children liked school and that it offered good opportunities for learning, especially in Islamic Education and Arabic. They felt their children achieved well in English, mathematics and science and that the school offered a good range of extra-curricular activities, but a significant minority disagreed. Most believed that teaching and learning were good and that there were good links between the school and parents, but only a minority thought that links with the community were good. Almost all indicated that staff expected their children to work hard and that behaviour was good. Most also said that their children were well cared for and that the school kept them healthy and safe, but a significant minority thought that the school did not actively help children to choose a healthy lifestyle. Most parents felt that they were involved in the work of the school. They said the school was good at consulting them, that they received good information about progress and that they felt

comfortable about approaching the school if they had a complaint. Parents were very satisfied with the way the Principal resolved any issues raised. Nearly all felt that the school was well led and had responded well to the recommendations of the previous inspection. Specific concerns raised through individual comments in the survey related mostly to aspects of transport and hygiene.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Central School provided an acceptable quality of education with a number of strengths. It had responded well to the recommendations from the last inspection report. Health and safety had improved, teaching of the younger children was better and the teaching and learning provision had been reorganised in the lower primary grades to reduce the number of teachers working with each class. The middle leaders had started to engage in a programme of monitoring and evaluation but this was not fully effective at the time of the inspection. Teachers were sharing and promoting good practice, but this had not completely eliminated over-directed teaching. A school board and advisory council had been created which was holding the school to account. The school demonstrated a strong capacity for further improvement.

Attainment was good in Islamic Education. Progress was good in Islamic Education and Arabic across all phases of the school. Attainment and progress was good in science at Kindergarten and in mathematics in Grades 9 to 12, progress was also good. In other subjects and across other phases, attainment and progress were acceptable. Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour and economic and environmental understanding. Islamic, cultural and civic understanding was outstanding. Students were supported by well developed systems to ensure safety and care. The quality of teaching and learning was good in Kindergarten and for secondary students and acceptable primary grades. The principal and the advisory board managed the school effectively and demonstrated a commitment to ongoing improvement.

Key features of the school

- There was strong provision for Islamic Education and students' knowledge of The Holy Qur'an was outstanding which reflected the vision of the Principal and the Advisory Council;
- The curriculum was very strong in the provision of lessons for home languages and for opportunities for students to excel in sporting activities, but it was weak in the creative domain;
- Students were happy and proud to be in the school. They were very well behaved, keen to learn and prefects took their responsibilities seriously;
- Teaching had improved in Kindergarten and Grade 1 since the last inspection but remained variable in the primary phase;
- Middle managers were involved in the development of school self-evaluation procedures, but needed more time, expertise and better strategies to ensure positive outcomes.
- Teachers were beginning to develop strategies to improve teaching and learning to make lessons more interesting and effective but they remained largely dependent on textbooks and questioning was frequently unchallenging and delivery too loud;
- There was insufficient progress since the last inspection in improving resources for learning, especially information and communication technology (ICT) and science facilities;
- Progress made in Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics and science from Grade 8 to 10 was good.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of evaluation by heads of department and supervisors by providing them with more training, more appropriate monitoring tools and time to carry out this aspect of their work;
- Ensure consistent high quality teaching, especially in the primary grades, by reducing over-directed teaching and promoting more active student involvement in lessons;
- Improve the resources available particularly in ICT and science laboratories;
- Ensure that students lead healthier lifestyles;
- Provide more effective support for students with special educational needs.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education was good. Most students across all stages could recite The Holy Qur'an and memorise chapters correctly. In lower grades the students performed ablution and prayer correctly in groups in an orderly manner. Most students understood Friday Prayer etiquettes and explained the structure of Friday Prayer. They understood Islamic behaviours in various situations such as etiquettes of eating. Most students discussed types of permissible and forbidden foods in Islam. In higher grades most students understood the prohibition of alcohol in Islam and its damaging effect on the human mind. After discussion most students understood the meaning of mercifulness in Islam. The majority of the students could name famous scientists and significant personalities in Islamic history.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable yet students made good progress in all stages. In the lower grades most students listened carefully to their teachers, and the majority of them could speak, read and write words and short phrases with few errors. They knew simple grammatical rules such as masculine and feminine making few errors. They could analyse words grammatically with the teachers' help. In higher grades most students listened to and read sentences making few errors. Most students could read and write short paragraphs yet extended writing skills were limited. The majority of students knew simple grammar such as types of verbs and they could summarise stories in their own words.

Attainment and progress were acceptable in English across all phases. By the end of Kindergarten most children were good listeners and could speak with confidence, reading simple phrases and forming letters accurately. In the primary grades the pace of progress in both reading and writing varied between classes but students built their vocabularies through frequent opportunities to use dictionaries. By Grade 8, students could demonstrate their understanding of texts through dramatisation and had developed a sound grasp of grammar. Secondary students spoke with fluency and could skim read texts for meaning and their writing was accurate but limited in its scope. The students' grasp of the mechanics of English was secure but opportunities to develop creativity were too few.

Overall, attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable. In the senior part of the school, particularly at Grade 10 and Grade 12, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. In Kindergarten children could recognise single-digit numbers and their quantitative value whilst the older children could understand the concept of 'less' and 'more'. In Grade 8 students learnt about the calculation of the surface area of cuboids and in Grade 10 the students were very secure in understanding the identification of segments and of major and minor sectors in circles. Students could confidently use the formulae relating to the calculation of the area of these aspects of circles, including using the common features of triangles and the use of Pi. The overall rate of attainment and progress accelerated the closer students came to the board examinations.

In science, students' attainment and progress in Kindergarten were good. Students were making better progress in Kindergarten than in the last inspection. They could successfully construct their own knowledge base from a wide range of stimulating activity-based learning. Progress in science was acceptable for students from Grade 1 to 8 and 9 to 11. Students from Grades 1 to 8 were able to work safely and skilfully in groups, or independently, on designated experiments requiring critical thinking and observational skills. Their rate of acquisition of scientific knowledge was acceptable but much of this was through passive rote learning. This was insufficient to enable most students to gain passes at international standards in separate sciences, as there were weaknesses in the more abstract concepts associated with physics. There was also an inadequate depth to the students' understanding of the processes of science such as scientific enquiry and hypothesis testing. The students' experience of practical work across the school was minimal until they reached the higher grades and their practical skills were underdeveloped; the majority were well below the international standard for their age in this aspect of science. Nevertheless, some of the older students were seen carrying out practical work in the laboratories, which they did with interest, care and enjoyment.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. Civic understanding and understanding of Islam were outstanding and economic and environmental understanding was good across all the stages of the school. Students' behaviour was generally good inside and outside of the class room. Relationships between teachers and students were positive. Students understood the need for developing healthy habits to keep fit but the school canteen did not offer options for healthy and nourishing food. Attendance was acceptable and had improved since the last Inspection. Most of the students were punctual.

A strong student council took on responsibilities for maintaining a high order of discipline right from the beginning of the day by conducting the assembly to managing the students' smooth dispersal at the end of the day. Almost all students displayed great understanding and respect for Islam which permeated throughout the school. All students performed and appreciated the national anthem of the UAE. Almost all students showed appreciation for the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and were proud to be a part of it.

Almost all the students in the secondary stage were well versed in the history of Dubai and its progress. Most of the students actively participated in spreading awareness of environmental issues through a special committee, Central Environmental Force, formed for that purpose. Many senior students contributed to the community by actively participating in the 'Dubai Cares' programme, a project for conservation of water and electricity and the 'Go Green' campaign.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of the teaching at the school was acceptable in the primary stages and good in pre-primary and secondary. There was a wide variation in the quality of teaching across the school and senior staff had begun to respond to the issues raised in the previous report by improving teaching in Kindergarten, Grade 1 and the senior parts of the school. In the best lessons teachers were secure in their subject knowledge. They matched the challenge and context well to the students' abilities. They provided relevant practical activities, which required the students to work collaboratively. For example, when studying The Holy Qur'an, the teacher encouraged students to have group discussions to agree their answers and report back. In other lessons teachers' questioning skills were effective and had a focus on providing a good pace to lessons. In the weakest lessons teachers did not permit the students to experience a range of activities or failed to challenge them. This occurred in Grade 3 and Grade 7, in particular, and in some science lessons.

The quality of learning at the school was acceptable in the primary stages and good in pre-primary and secondary. In a Grade 10 mathematics lesson students were required to use their prior knowledge of formulae for triangles and segments to calculate sector areas. The best learning took place in lessons when students were active through investigations, discussions or responding to good questioning. For example, in Grade 12, students were encouraged to discuss a problem as a group and feedback to the teacher on their findings. Less effective learning took place when students were passive listeners or found the tasks too easy. Overall, levels of motivation were negatively affected in these lessons. For example, in one lesson there was excessive repetition of new vocabulary, which slowed the pace of learning.

The quality of assessment was acceptable at all levels. At the Kindergarten stage the teachers were well organised and children were doing what they needed to do to improve. At the primary level consistent and effective assessment practices were in place for monitoring students' progress. Staff used the data regularly to focus sharply on how students were doing. At the secondary stage, the school was undertaking the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system for assessment. There were two short-term assessments each term and one formal examination at the end of the term. Students' progress was therefore monitored throughout the year. However, the students' did little self-review. There was little regular feedback from teachers on the students' day-to-day class work other than occasional correction of written work.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable with some improved features in the Kindergarten section since the last inspection. The curriculum was effectively reviewed every year by the governing body. As recommended in the last inspection report, the number of subjects for Grade 1 students had been reviewed. Teaching and learning of Arabic, along with the home languages in Grades 1 to 10 was a positive aspect of the school curriculum though the selection of textbooks needed to be reviewed. There were limited opportunities for the development of the creative arts, independent learning and challenge for the more able students. In spite of having three separate science laboratories and one computer laboratory, the use of ICT as a means for independent learning by the students had not been ensured. A good range of co-curricular and sport activities extended the curriculum and provided opportunities for students to develop a positive and productive link with the community. Several students had been successful in a Qirat competition. Participation in the Central Islamic Festival and the Global Village Festival was a permanent feature of the work of the school. The school was also a member of Emirates Environment Group and organised events concerned with environmental issues.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the care and protection of students were overall acceptable. Fire drills were held regularly, evacuation plans were clearly in place to ensure efficient movement of students in corridors and stairways. Routine medical checks were carried out, records documented and an accident register maintained with follow-up action. To ensure that students were safe on school buses, drivers had been given training in first aid. A child protection policy was in place and procedures in the event of its violation were shared with staff and a discipline committee appointed to address incidents, as necessary. The range of food available in the canteen did not offer healthy choices. Nor did the school through its programme highlight the links between healthy living and academic and non academic performance.

Students felt well supported by teachers and approached them for help when required. Career guidance and advice was provided to assist students in making study and career choices. While students with special educational needs were identified, there were no special educators to provide sustained support. Tracking of student progress was done only of a few students who were high achievers or of lower ability. The student personal profile system that had been introduced a year earlier had collected data but had not been used effectively to plan improvements in students' academic performance. Behaviour management was a shared responsibility. Students were supported to modify behaviour when the need arose. Parents were involved in the process and consulted before decisions were made. Attendance and punctuality were carefully monitored and followed up immediately in cases where concerns were recorded. Despite these measures, attendance records were merely satisfactory.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were acceptable. The Principal's leadership was good and he was committed to raising standards. Most middle managers needed to improve their monitoring work. Leaders had defined responsibilities. The school had a clearly shared vision based on Islam. Performance management procedures had been introduced but their impact was limited through lack of expertise. The leaders were aware that further improvement was needed in the quality of teaching in order to raise standards. They had identified professional development needs and had organised workshops and courses, but these had not brought about enough improvement in classroom practice. Since the last inspection senior students were empowered to participate in decision-making through the newly formed school council and also played an important role in supervision.

Self-evaluation arrangements were acceptable. The school analysed its performance and senior staff had developed an effective action plan for improvement. There was progress in health and safety and improved teaching of younger students. The response to the inspection report was only partially effective and further improvement was needed to ensure that all teaching was acceptable or better. The school was innovative in its approach to evaluation by involving Grade 12 students in assessing its effectiveness. The school analysed students' performance in tests and examinations and produced a large amount of comparative data.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. The school informed parents regularly about matters relating to their children, which supported students' progress and personal development. The school website was useful and senior and middle leaders were very accessible to parents by e-mail. Usually communication with parents was through regular circulars. Since the last inspection a parents' association had been formed. Systems for reporting on children's progress were good. The school had a good mechanism for contacting parents in case of absence or emergency. There were good links with the local community which included numerous inter-school sports competitions, charitable organisations, local universities and museums to extend learning.

Governance was good. The school advisory board and academic council exerted a positive influence on the life of the school and played a significant role in guiding improvement. The school was accountable to the board for its performance and quality. The board was involved in staff appointments, staff development, assessment and curriculum development. The membership of the board included representatives from owners, two parents, the principal, the principals of two other schools and a representative from the community and other stakeholders.

Staffing, facilities and resources were overall acceptable. The school had sufficient staff to cover most subjects and most teachers had sufficient subject knowledge, but there were too many examples of poor teaching skills. There were no teaching assistants in Kindergarten which impeded group learning and classroom management. There was only one laboratory assistant for all three laboratories. There was a high proportion of teachers without a specific teaching qualification and a large number who were new to the school. Most teachers had equitable teaching loads but some Heads of Departments did not have sufficient time to carry out their new monitoring duties. Most general classrooms were adequate, but a few were cramped. Facilities for PE and games were unsatisfactory. Access for those with additional physical needs was very limited. The resources available to teachers were insufficient, particularly in ICT.

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: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Good | Good |
| Progress over time | Not Applicable | Good | Good |

| How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 0% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language. | | | |
| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
| Attainment in Arabic as a first language | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Progress in Arabic as a first language | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Attainment in Arabic as an additional language | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress in Arabic as an additional language | Not Applicable | Good | Good |

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?

| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Attainment | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress over time | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?

| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Attainment | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress over time | Acceptable | Acceptable | Good |

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?

| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Attainment | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress over time | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |

| How good is the students' personal and social development? | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
| Attitudes and behaviour | Good | Good | Good |
| Islamic, cultural and civic understanding | Outstanding | Outstanding | Outstanding |
| Economic and environmental understanding | Good | Good | Good |

| How good are teaching and learning? | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
| Teaching for effective learning | Good | Acceptable | Good |
| Quality of students' learning | Good | Acceptable | Good |
| Assessment | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

| How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students? | | | |
|--|-------------|------------|------------|
| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
| Curriculum quality | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

How well does the school protect and support students?

| Age group: | Pre-Primary | Primary | Secondary |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Health and safety | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Quality of support | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

| | Overall |
|---|------------|
| Quality of leadership | Acceptable |
| Self-evaluation and improvement planning | Acceptable |
| Partnerships with parents and the community | Good |
| Governance | Good |
| Staffing, facilities and resources | Acceptable |

How well does the school perform overall?

| |
|------------|
| Acceptable |
|------------|

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.

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