

INSPECTION REPORT

St. Mary Catholic High School-Dubai

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT St. Mary Catholic High School-Dubai

Location	Umm Hurair
Type of school	Private
Website	www.stmarysdubai.com
Telephone	04-3370252
Address	Oud Metha ST. P. O Box 52235, Dubai
Principal	Brother Joseph
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	5-18 / Grade 1-Grade 13
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1929
Largest nationality group of Students	Indian
Number of Emirati students	2 (1%)
Date of the inspection	27th to 30th January

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The context of the school

St Mary's Catholic High School is a not for profit school which was situated in Umm Hurair. The majority of students were from Indian backgrounds, with others of Pakistani, Philippino and Sudanese heritage. Just less than two per cent had special educational needs.

The school taught the English National Curriculum and students sat external GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. At the end of Year 12, students completed a one year Advanced Level course and sat the examination. Some returned for Year 13 to take further Advanced level qualifications.

There were three phases to the school: the primary section for students aged five to 11 (Year 1 to 6); the secondary section for students aged 11 to 16 (Year 7 to 11) and Post-16 for students aged 16 to 18.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- Good attainment and progress in most subjects with outstanding attainment in secondary English and mathematics;
- The good quality of students' learning skills;
- In Primary and Secondary, students' personal and social development was good. In Post-16 it was outstanding;
- Good quality teaching and assessment;
- Sustained good leadership that promoted a culturally harmonious and improving school.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Arabic;
- Further refine the use of assessment procedures to track students' progress more closely;
- Link actions in the school improvement plan to their impact on students' attainment and progress;
- Ensure that the school fully complies with MoE requirements in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language.

Progress since the last inspection

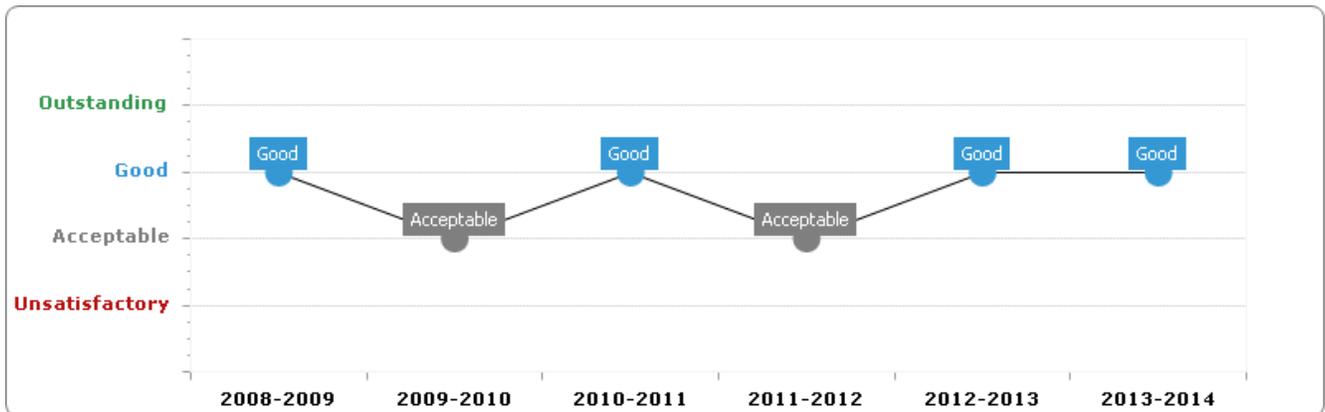
The school had improved the attainment of secondary students in Arabic as an additional language, the attainment of primary students in English and mathematics, and the progress of primary students in science;

It had raised the quality of students' learning skills in primary and in post-16 students, their understanding of Islamic values and their local culture and global awareness;

The quality and use of assessment had improved particularly in primary;

The number of hours that students learned Islamic Education and Arabic had increased to match MoE requirements but some lessons were taught outside of normal school time.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Good	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
English			
Attainment	Acceptable	Outstanding	Not Applicable
Progress	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Outstanding	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good
Science			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Personal responsibility	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Parents and the community	Good
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic Education, most students' knowledge, skills and understanding were above curriculum standards. Post 16 students had acceptable attainment in their knowledge of concepts, history of Islam and Holy Qur'an recitation. Students, especially in upper secondary, had strong higher order thinking skills. In Arabic as a first language, most students had acceptable listening skills and could communicate ideas orally using simple language. Reading skills met expectations but those of writing needed improvement. In Arabic as additional language, most students had acceptable listening, speaking, and reading skills. The majority of secondary students could speak sentences in a familiar context but writing was the least developed language skill. In English, the majority of primary students could hold conversations on a variety of issues. They listened well to stories and poems and read text extracts with expressively. Secondary students were articulate, read widely and could infer and analyse demanding texts. In mathematics, primary students attained best in number and applying their knowledge but worst in geometry. Secondary students achieved very high standards in GCSE examinations and, at Post-16, students could apply standard formulae well. However, across the school investigative skills were underdeveloped. In science, students' knowledge, skills and understanding were above expectations in areas such exploration of life cycles in primary, the study of forces and motion in secondary and self-directed practical work in Year 12.

In Islamic Education, most students made good progress in Islamic knowledge and values. They made appropriate links with daily life. Most students made limited progress in Holy Qur'an recitation skills. Post-16 students made unsatisfactory progress in Islamic Education and Arabic due to low attendance. In Arabic as a first language, students made acceptable progress in listening and in reading while speaking and free writing needed improvement. In Arabic as additional language, students made acceptable progress in improving their language skills except for writing which simply involved copying text. In English, primary students made good progress in writing persuasive texts. Secondary students made accelerated progress especially in extended writing. In mathematics, primary students made good progress in number and factual recall, but not when mentally estimating lengths. Progress accelerated during the secondary phase and, in Post-16, students progressed best in algebraic manipulation and its application. Overall, students' progress when deriving formulae was slower. In science, students' knowledge and understanding developed strongly in such topics as in Year 1's study of living things, to Year 5's experiments with seed germination, and in Year 12's investigation of the structure and function of skin. Students made good progress in other subjects, particularly in art and music. Students with special education needs (SEN) made acceptable progress.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of learning skills was good in all three phases. Students were positive about their learning and responded enthusiastically to teachers' questions. Learning was strongest in classes where students had the opportunity to work together, do hands-on activities and find out for themselves. Students collaborated well in some lessons in Islamic Education and to a lesser extent in Arabic as a second language. Most students displayed strong communication skills. Students in Islamic Education and science and students with SEN confidently used ICT to present their learning. However, students generally did not readily turn to ICT to complement their work or use it as an integrated learning tool. Primary students made more links across subjects and to the real world than they did further up the school. Independent learning was a feature of some classes, particularly in the secondary phase, and was very well-developed by Post-16. Here, students worked independently on research or worked well with their peers to produce presentations, for example.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Primary students had good attitudes towards their work and behaved well. These features in secondary and post 16 phases were outstanding. Secondary students had strong self-reliance and independence. They took responsibility for others and set them a good example. Overall, students worked cooperatively with one another and enjoyed excellent relationships. Most students had a good awareness of and attitudes towards healthy living. Attendance was good. Most students arrived in time for lessons and the start of the day.

Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness were good in Primary and Secondary and outstanding in Post-16. Older students in particular showed great respect for Islamic values and fully appreciated the impact these had on Dubai society and their own personal development. Primary and secondary students knew a range of Emirati heritage features. Post-16 students knew the significant changes in Dubai over time and successfully participated in art contests on UAE heritage monuments. They supported charitable work. They strongly appreciated local traditions while being proud of their own cultures. They valued the fact that the Dubai community had united so many people from different nations.

Students' community and environmental responsibility was good in Primary and Secondary and outstanding in Post-16. The oldest students sustained a strong commitment to the school community and environment and were purposefully involved in supporting it through recycling materials. Head Girl, Head Boy and prefects ensured the disciplined, smooth running of the school. Students' views had a significant impact on development in the school. Primary and secondary students willingly completed their work, Post-16 students

were actively engaged in personal academic projects. The 'Green Hope' group engaged in activities to spread awareness of environmental issues.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching and assessment were good. Most teachers' secure subject knowledge enabled them to make good use of resources, time, and encouragement to engage students well. A few teachers made best use of the available ICT. Lesson plans were very effective and learning objectives were often linked to assessment. Almost all teachers used questioning strategies to review and provide feedback on learning, and to promote students' engagement. A minority used open questioning skilfully to promote critical thinking, particularly in Islamic Education in upper secondary grades. Activities, questioning and challenge often matched the needs of individual students, particularly in mathematics, but not in all subjects. The most effective teachers had high expectations and regularly promoted independent learning. A few teachers sufficiently encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning but, on occasions, over-directed teaching prevented students' more active and independent learning. The teaching of Arabic was mainly didactic and provided activities that were often ineffective.

The school's assessment systems enabled teachers to monitor students' attainment well, particularly in the primary phase, by extensively using the English National Curriculum levels. Across the school, teachers provided good feedback to students through regular interactions, testing and reviews of learning. This resulted in detailed updated assessment records on each student. Students knew how to improve because teachers systematically identified their learning weaknesses and provided support or modified their plans accordingly. The best practice involved students identifying their own difficulties, but this was not a common feature. Weak areas identified in major testing were also reported to parents. Teachers had begun to track students' progress and had introduced targets for either individuals or for classes. However, this was not systematic, and students were largely unaware of them. The use of assessment data to modify teaching and the curriculum was limited, especially in Arabic, and teachers sometimes missed good opportunities for on-going assessment, such as structured peer and self-assessment.

[View judgements](#)

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

Curriculum quality was good in all three phases. There was a broad, balanced curriculum and teachers had comprehensive, curriculum documents from which to work. Students new to the school and others were supported by the counsellor if needed. Almost all students left from Year 12 or 13 to universities in the U.A.E

and around the world. Year level teachers met weekly to review the curriculum and it was reviewed annually by subject. Assessment criteria and essential questions had been added to curriculum documents to meet the needs of all students better. Cross-curricular links were still being developed and had been strengthened by an increase in field trips, such as an astronomy trip to Al Ain. Extra-curricular activities were offered from Year 5 to Year 10, and included drama, music, sports, environment and art/craft activities. There was a house system for sport competitions. Students did charity work and others had been involved in work experience. Inspirational daily assemblies promoted students' personal and social education very well.

The curriculum was well planned to engage most students. Those of differing abilities were well supported in most lessons. In withdrawal lessons, there were very good curriculum modifications to support those who had special educational needs. Curriculum modifications were evident in some but not all classes especially in English. There were font size adjustments and hearing apparatus to support individual students. There was also some challenge for gifted and talented students in key subjects. The curriculum for older secondary students was designed in three options, including scientific subjects and arts subjects. These gave students opportunities to make appropriate choices to meet their individual talents and needs.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school's arrangements to protect and support its students were good. Premises were secure and well maintained. The medical team kept detailed records and ensured that students received the required medical care. The canteen was regularly monitored and students made a healthy selection of food. Weekly physical activity sessions enabled student access to an active lifestyle. Regular fire drills kept students and adults aware of emergency evacuation procedures. Transport arrangements were orderly and were well supervised which ensured students' safety. A detailed child protection policy and reporting system was in place although new teachers had not undertaken child protection training. All staff took collective responsibility for students' safety and well-being. This made the school a safe place to learn.

A strong feature of the school was the excellent staff-student relationships. Staff knew students well and were aware of their individual needs. Mutual respect was evident throughout the school and behaviour rules were well kept. The school maintained accurate records of attendance. Parents were contacted immediately if a student failed to arrive when expected. The school had detailed assessment procedures to identify students with SEN on entry to the school. The very experienced SEN team led the assessment process and informed teachers to ensure students' personal and academic needs were met. Consequently, students were confident in class and made acceptable progress. Weekly 'class time' offered students opportunities to

discuss issues that concerned them. Staff members gave advice and guidance, in confidence, on a range of personal and academic matters.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Most aspects of leadership and management were good but management, including staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Parents, governors and staff agreed that the head teacher was building on the start he had made last year. He was leading the school forward and bringing about change. With dedicated senior staff, he has improved aspects of the school and maintained its good performance. Senior staff led teams to consolidate what had been achieved and to improve the school further. Their accountabilities were clear in the school improvement plan. Staff and students were bound by the school's purpose. Relationships were very positive and middle leaders were taking on their roles seriously.

School self-evaluation processes included all the staff and governors in deciding how good their school was. Their evaluation was broadly accurate. Senior staff analysed the school's results and monitored the quality of teaching to bring about improvement and focus staff training. The improvement plan was based on the previous inspection report's findings and senior staff had responsibility for action on them. The plan had definite goals but these were not linked enough to students' progress and attainment. The school had made progress on all the previous report's recommendations.

Parents strongly supported the school and appreciated what the school did for their children's academic and personal development. Parents helped their children at home through the school's efforts and communications which included informative reports, and Parents' Forums. These latter events were important in taking parents' views into account. The school had good, often charity inspired, local links and benefited from close church links.

Governors were closely involved in school life. They helped set its strategic direction through its self-evaluation and improvement plan. One governor added to the school's leadership capacity by regularly helping it improve teaching. Governors received regular reports on the school's progress and actions related to improvement. They set the school's budget and had significantly reduced the deficit. They assured the school's legal status but had not resolved the school's non-compliance over the timings for Arabic and Islamic Education lessons.

The school day was well timetabled and prefects supported the school's smooth running. Staff worked well together to get the most from the buildings and equipment for the students' benefit. Staff turnover had been reduced and staff were properly qualified and deployed. The facilities enabled the curriculum to be

taught well. Resources had been updated in several subjects such as ICT according to school means. Extra shading had been erected to provide more sun protection but this was not enough for when students ate their lunches outside in the hottest weather.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

Students with SEN made acceptable progress in most subjects and made good progress in science. In almost all lessons they were supported by the teacher, or by a friend, and students knew what they were expected to do. The SEN team offered practical guidance on supporting students with SEN, but their detailed learning needs were not always met in lessons. A large minority of teachers provided suitable tasks but this was not always the case. Hence progress overall was acceptable. In withdrawal sessions, where Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were followed closely, progress was very good. Assessments were analysed to help devise IEPs and progress was monitored through assessments. Students could track their own progress. Parents of students with SEN were involved at meetings to discuss their children's progress and how there could be a consistent approach between home and school. The school identified students with SEN within a few months of admission. Ramps provided access, and reorganisation of classrooms to the ground level ensured full curriculum accessibility for all students. Teachers used amplification or enlarged print for those who needed it. The experienced leadership team had arranged staff training and guidance but there was still scope to train class teachers on more detailed curriculum modifications. The school was beginning to identify its gifted students using clear criteria.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

The teaching of Arabic as a first language was adequate and had improved slightly since the previous inspection. Most teachers regularly planned for their lessons. They set clear objectives. Most teachers had secure subject knowledge. They conveyed information to students well. They concentrated on dialogue between themselves and students. They occasionally gave students work to improve independent learning. They used the available resources to an acceptable level and occasionally used the library. However, although teaching was adequate, it did not use a wide enough range of strategies to help students make better progress. The school followed the curriculum standards of the Ministry of Education but in some grades the amount of time allocated for the subject was not as required. In addition, in a few upper grades, half of the classes were taught outside the normal school day. The curriculum was supported by students' researches and ICT programs but there were not many choices in the curriculum.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	501	47%
	Last year	580	52%
Teachers	89		70%
Students	460		92%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

Only about a third of the parents completed their survey. The majority of parents and about half the students responded to theirs. Parents highly appreciated the work of the school and both they and the staff expressed a high degree of confidence in its leadership and management. Parents valued the how they could air their views and were confident that their concerns were promptly addressed. Almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of education and believed that their children had made good progress, especially in the key subjects. Most parents agreed that their children had a strong understanding of Islam. They were regularly informed about their children's progress. A minority of parents and students wanted improved careers guidance to enable students to make informed choices.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

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