

Al Ittihad Private School- Jumeirah Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 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.

Al Ittihad Private School - Jumeirah was inspected in November 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 Jumeirah, Al Ittihad Private School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to high school, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 1799 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Almost all respondents were satisfied overall with the quality of education provided. Most parents indicated that they felt progress was good or better in all key subjects, while a majority of comments expressed dissatisfaction with Arabic teaching. They stated that students were not interested because the teaching was insufficiently motivating. Almost all agreed that their children were kept safe and believed they were also treated fairly. Parent-teacher meetings were held regularly and were found to be informative. Communication and school leadership were rated highly and parents believed these to be key strengths of the school. Most agreed the school helped students choose healthy lifestyles. A majority of parents believed the last report was accurate and helped them select the right school for their child. A similar proportion felt that the inspection had led to improvements.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of Al Ittihad Private School - Jumeirah was acceptable. It had many good features. The school had responded effectively to the recommendations from the previous report but there were still areas that needed further review to allow the school to successfully meet the needs of all students. Consistency in teaching needed to be developed to match the best practice evident in parts of the school. The school leaders demonstrated a strong capacity for continuous improvement.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good at all stages. Students' attainment and progress in both Arabic as a first and as an additional language were good across all phases of the school. Attainment in English was good at all levels. Progress was good in Kindergarten, the elementary and high school levels and acceptable in the middle school. Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in Kindergarten, elementary and middle school and good in high school. Attainment and progress in science in Kindergarten, elementary, and middle school were acceptable and good in the high school. Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour. They were engaged in their work, attentive, exercised self-control and supported each another. Across all phases of the school, students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and cultures were good. Students had an age-appropriate understanding of the economy of Dubai and its progress. Teaching was acceptable, overall. The quality of students' learning was acceptable, but it was only in the best lessons that students took responsibility for their own learning. Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. The curriculum was acceptable across all grades. The health and safety aspects of the school were outstanding. The school consistently provided a safe and secure environment for all students. The quality of student support was good at all levels. Leadership was good at all levels and the work ethic of the leadership team was commendable. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The partnership with parents and community was good. Governance was acceptable, lacking a formal mechanism for stakeholder input. Staffing, facilities and resources were good, although a relatively high number of new teachers presented a challenge to the continued improvement called for in the previous report.

Key features of the school

- There was effective leadership and a whole staff commitment to school improvement;
- A strong commitment existed to promote the student's Islamic identity and cultural understanding;
- There was a clear commitment to professional development to improve teaching and learning;
- The "I Can Center" was successful in supporting students in the primary school;
- There were outstanding provisions for students' health and safety needs.

Recommendations

- Continue professional development focused on meeting the students' needs through a wide range of teaching strategies;
- Develop the capacity of students to be independent learners engaged in inquiry, research, problem-solving and critical thinking;
- Use available data in a more focused way to identify effective strategies for improving student attainment;
- Continue to use the curriculum mapping process to improve:
 - continuity and progression;
 - additional cross-curricular links;
 - students' economic and environmental understanding.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good overall. In all stages most students could recite and memorize verses and chapters of The Holy Qur'an with few errors. Students could explain the Prophet's sayings appropriately. Most elementary students could perform prayer after practice. Most students knew the Friday prayer ethics. They showed a good knowledge about the Prophet Moussa and the high status of women in Islam. In the middle school, most students understood the types and timings of Hajj and Omrah in the Islamic calendar. They recognized pillars, duties and sunan of prayer correctly. They also understood the conditions of marriage in Islam.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good across all phases of the school. Elementary students developed their reading and writing skills well and they started reading confidently in the lower grades. They were starting to use standard Arabic confidently at an early age. In the middle school, girls' attainment and progress were better than the boys'. In the secondary school, most students were confident users of standard Arabic in presentations, debates and discussions. However, students needed to develop their writing skills further to include writing for a wider range of purposes and audiences.

Attainment and progress of students learning Arabic as an additional language were good across all phases of the school. Elementary students developed their speaking, listening and reading skills quickly. In the lower elementary grades, most students could label a range of objects, such as household objects and used Arabic well in simple conversations to express their thoughts. They had good listening skills and could understand classroom instructions and simple dialogue in Arabic and enjoyed engaging in Arabic during the lessons. In the middle and secondary schools, students continued to develop their reading skills. They followed, understood well and responded to longer oral presentations. However, middle and secondary

students were less confident in writing independently and in spontaneously speaking using standard Arabic.

Attainment in English was good at all levels. Progress was good at the Kindergarten and elementary and high school levels and acceptable in the middle school. Students throughout the school had good listening abilities; they could express their opinions, facts and responses clearly and confidently. Reading skills were good; students enjoyed reading and could manipulate text efficiently and accurately. As they progressed through the school, students wrote independently at increasingly complex levels. In high school they were writing independently and imaginatively to a standard above expected international levels.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in Kindergarten, elementary and middle school and good in high school. By the end of Kindergarten, children had acquired a sound understanding of number, shape and measurement. Students in Grade 1 could subtract vertically and horizontally within 10 and understood key vocabulary. In Grade 3 students used calculators accurately to carry out addition and subtraction problems. Almost all students in Grade 6 could identify common prime factors using factor trees and Venn diagrams. Grade 8 students could reduce equations to their lowest terms and draw graphs accurately. In Grade 9, students explained the conditions applying to polygons and used geometric formulae accurately. However, problem solving skills were underdeveloped until the latter part of the middle school. Most boys in Grade 12 accurately used the product rule to solve problems related to average velocity. Progress across the school was variable with significant dips in progress at transition points such as in Grade 7.

Attainment and progress in science in the Kindergarten, elementary, and middle school classes were acceptable and good in the high school. In Kindergarten, age-appropriate scientific concepts were effectively integrated with other subjects. Students in the elementary and middle school showed age-appropriate skills in observing, discussing, recording and concluding. High school students were the most active in their own learning, especially in chemistry laboratory work. However, forming hypotheses and the student's own research work were not consistently evident in any grade. Biology classes were often over-directed and text-book based.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour. They were engaged in their work, attentive, exercised self-control and supported each other. Students moved about the school in a purposeful and disciplined manner. Most students were punctual to class and came prepared for work. Students showed courtesy and helpfulness to school visitors. Relationships between staff and students, inside and outside the classroom, were mostly warm and positive. Students behaved in respectful ways to each other and to all members of staff. Primary and secondary students showed maturity and awareness of the needs of others. Students showed good understanding and expressed positive opinions about healthy living. Attendance was good.

Across all phases of the school, students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and cultures was good. Students, especially in the middle and upper grades were able to engage in a range of fund raising activities that developed their civic understanding. Students used the school mosque regularly for prayers during the school day and applied their Islamic values and understanding well. Across the school, students had a good understanding of local traditions and cultures and expressed their appreciation of the richness of the UAE heritage.

Students in Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school had an acceptable and age-appropriate understanding of the economy of Dubai and its progress. Middle and high school students could explain the rapid progress in world-class buildings such as Burj Khalifa and Burj Al Arab, transportation changes, finance and tourism. They showed a limited understanding of Dubai's place in the UAE and globally. They also showed some understanding of the environment, but this was mostly limited to their school. The high school students could make links between Dubai's rapid growth and the growing problem of traffic jams and air pollution. They understood the problems of air and water pollution. All students took care of their school surroundings.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable overall, with as many good lessons as acceptable lessons and a few outstanding lessons. Recent workshops had led to a greater range of teaching strategies being used. Most teaching was characterized by strong subject knowledge and a developing understanding of how students learn. This was particularly apparent in Arabic as an additional language lessons in elementary classes, where activities were designed expertly to meet the needs of second language learners and promote communication. Lessons were mostly well planned and teachers provided adequate pace to the learning in most cases. A few teachers used resources such as whiteboards, video clips and data projectors well to enhance teaching but resources were not used enough by students to support their own learning. Positive teacher-student relationships and effective questioning enhanced learning. However, challenge was lacking in too many lessons and this prevented students from making the progress of which they were capable.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable, overall. In most lessons, students were well motivated, but it was only in the best lessons that they took responsibility for their own learning and collaborated well with each other. In a few lessons students made good connections to the real world and prior learning and this improved understanding. Opportunities for collaboration were lacking in many lessons, although teachers were beginning to understand the importance of students working together to solve problems. In a few lessons in the high school, critical thinking was a key strength and led to high quality understanding, but this was lacking elsewhere. Occasionally students used information and communications technology (ICT) in lessons to find things out, but again, this was rare. Overall, learning was too teacher-directed and students had few opportunities to take control of their own learning and find things out for themselves.

Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. The school had increased the range of assessment tools to evaluate knowledge and understanding at the end of a curriculum unit and this had provided valuable information relating to individual students. Similarly, the recent international tests had led to a more focused approach to target setting. A few teachers used assessment strategies within the lesson to monitor the achievements of students and suggest ways in which students might improve. However, this practice was inconsistent across subjects. Clear objectives were often not revisited at the end of lessons to evaluate progress. In a minority of lessons students were involved well in evaluating their own and each others' work, but this was not a strong feature across the school. There were organised procedures for record keeping which enabled parents to gain information about their child's progress in tests. Written feedback to students often failed to identify strengths and weaknesses or provide guidance on how to improve. The extent to which teachers knew individual students' strengths and weaknesses was variable, but improving with more reliable data.

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

The curriculum was acceptable across all grades. Now based on national standards, it included international benchmarks. A review of standards from Kindergarten to Grade 12 had been developed. This took into due consideration the developmental stages and conceptual understanding levels of students at each grade level. Benchmarks and rubrics for assessment have been agreed upon for some, but not all subjects and grade levels. The curriculum had a clear rationale which supported the wishes of parents. It was broad, balanced and challenging for most, but not all, students. The curriculum review document provided a logical progression from grade to grade. However, there were gaps that required attention. The impact of curriculum change on improved teaching and learning was most apparent in the English department and less so in mathematics and science. Secondary students were provided with course choices such as accounting, history, economics, physical education and art. However, opportunities for elementary and middle school students were limited. The curriculum was reviewed on a regular basis through the curriculum mapping process. Cross-curricular links in English and history and mathematics and science were beginning to be found in the curriculum. There were some examples of students connecting with the larger community, including the Young Entrepreneurs Program, Work Experience Program and the Eco-Rangers Program. There was variability in terms of curriculum improvement across grades and subject areas, with a broader array of courses and real world applications in place at the high school level.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The health and safety aspects of the school were outstanding. The school consistently provided a safe and secure environment for all students. The building and all of the equipment were well maintained and safe. Exercise equipment for both boys and girls was of the latest design

and available to students before and after school and during breaks. Student supervision was outstanding in all areas of the school, from arrival to dismissal. Parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the protection and safety arrangements as evidenced in their survey responses and during their interviews. Student-staff relationships were positive. Healthy living support was evident in the school medical facilities and promoted in the canteens and in displays throughout the school.

The quality of student support was good at all levels of the school. Student record keeping was well managed, although using it to track student progress was in its initial stages. Academic counselling was available for senior high students to facilitate appropriate testing opportunities needed for future educational goals. An informal counselling program was available for middle level students but this was limited in its scope. Students with special educational needs were well supported but there was no such provision at high school level.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was good at all levels and included co-ordinators, supervisors and the Director General. The team practiced ongoing shared leadership and collaboration on staff supervision and professional development activities. A clear sense of vision was shared for academic development. There was a clear ethos of caring for all children, which permeated the entire school. The work ethic of the leadership team was commendable.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school team had reviewed and effectively responded to a number of recommendations in the previous report, but there were still areas that needed further review to allow the school to successfully meet the needs of all students. Consistency in teaching needed to be developed to mirror the practice noted in the most successful lessons. The school leadership was aware of the need for continued effort and improvement to fully meet the suggested improvements in the previous report.. The school was responsive to suggestions and comments of parents and students, primarily in the areas of teaching and assessment.

The partnership with parents and community was good. There was a high degree of satisfaction with the school leadership and an active Mother's Council complemented the efforts of the school. The Parent-Teacher Organization represented the school effectively to current and prospective families.

Governance was acceptable. The owner's representative had a good working knowledge of the school and its processes. Compliance requirements were effectively met by the governing committee. The committee held the leadership accountable for the progress of the school, but it lacked the presence of a formal structure for parents and other school stakeholders to provide input. The family nature of the school provided opportunities for suggestions for improvement which were considered in the decision-making process.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. The school staff was appropriately certified in almost every instance. Adequate staff was hired for all key positions in the school, although a relatively high number of new teachers presented a challenge to the continued improvement called for in the previous report. The school libraries were acceptable, but they were not used as portals for students' research and exploration, which would prepare them for the demands of higher education. In classes, teachers did not use ICT well to provide students with sufficient opportunities for research or personal study.

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:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
95% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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