

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Dar Al Marefa Private School

Report published in April 2013

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dar Al Marefa Private School

Location	Mirdif
Type of school	Private
Website	<a href="http://www.daralmarefa.ae">www.daralmarefa.ae</a>
Telephone	04-2885782
Address	PO Box 112602, Dubai
Principal	Shirine Al Khudari
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades	3-16 / Kindergarten 1 to Grade 10
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	459
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	364 (79%)
Date of the inspection	28th to 30th January 2013

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## The context of the school

Dar al Marefa Private School is situated in Mirdif. The school opened in 2008. The school established a Grade 10 class this academic year. The school followed the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) in Kindergarten to Grade 5 and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) in Grades 6 to 10. The PYP programme was to be reviewed in March 2013 for its verification phase. The MYP programme still had 'interested' status. The curriculum was delivered through English in key subjects in Grades 1 to 10 and in Arabic and English in Kindergarten.

At the time of the inspection, there were 459 students on roll, aged between three and 16 years. Almost all students spoke Arabic as their first language. The majority of students were Emirati. Most other students were from other Arabic backgrounds.

The staff turnover was high, with 26 new teachers out of 55. Most teachers were well qualified. A dedicated administrative team supported the running of the school on a day-to-day basis. The teaching staff included a special needs support team who had identified and provided support to students with special educational needs.

## Overall school performance 2012-2013

Acceptable

### Key strengths

- The improved attainment and progress in the Kindergarten;
- Students' understanding of Islamic values, maintained since the previous inspection;
- The good teaching, learning and assessment in the Kindergarten;
- The outstanding arrangements to maintain robust health and safety procedures across the school;
- The continuing good relationship with parents and the community.

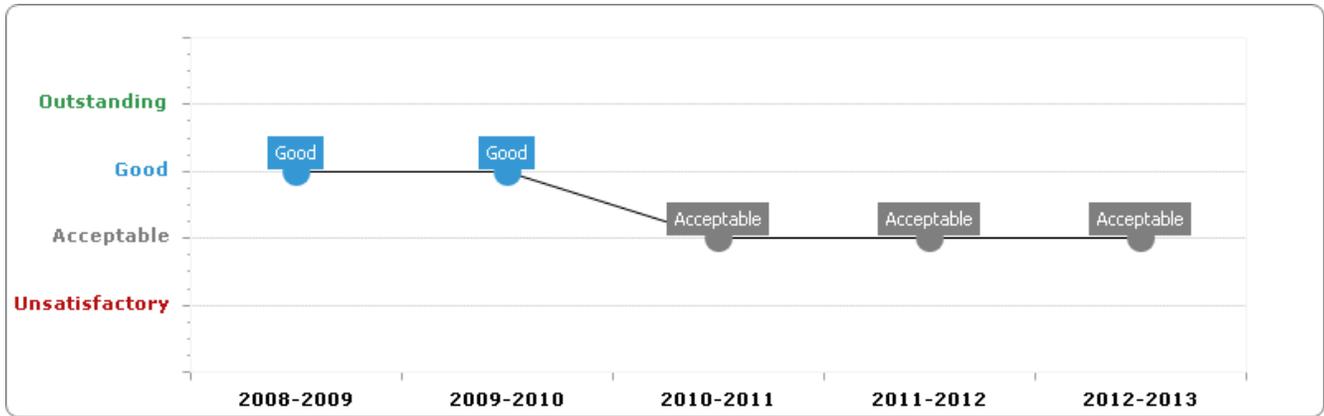
### Recommendations

- Raise expectations in lessons in order to improve students' progress in the majority of key subjects in PYP and MYP;
- Provide more opportunities for all students to learn through challenging inquiry;
- Ensure that all assessment data and information are consistently used:
  - to inform students' next steps in learning, and;
  - to identify and support students with special educational needs in MYP.
- Ensure the curriculum expectations are translated more consistently into classroom practice.
- Ensure that school self-evaluation processes are consistently accurate.

## Progress since the last inspection

- The improvement in attainment, progress, teaching, learning and assessment in Kindergarten;
- The decline in progress in mathematics in PYP, and in science in both PYP and MYP;
- The quality of support was broadly good but was acceptable in MYP.

## Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	PYP	MYP
<b>Islamic Education</b>			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Not Applicable
<b>English</b>			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Mathematics</b>			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Science</b>			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Outstanding	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	PYP	MYP
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

## How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment was broadly acceptable in PYP and MYP and it was good in Kindergarten. In Islamic Education, attainment was good. The majority of students had a good understanding of Islamic rituals and students in PYP listed the pillars of Islam correctly. However, in the MYP, students' ability to link concepts to their sources was less well developed. In Arabic as a first language, attainment was acceptable. Most students communicated their ideas appropriately. Writing skills were acceptable in PYP, but less well developed in MYP. In Arabic as an additional language, the majority of students had good listening and speaking skills. Attainment in English was good in Kindergarten. Children explored language well through reading, writing, speaking and listening. In PYP and MYP, attainment in English, whilst improving, was still below international standards, including those for second language learners. The majority of students in PYP and MYP engaged with more confidence when speaking or interpreting reading material. Attainment in mathematics was good in the Kindergarten where children identified numbers and counted up to 20 and beyond. In PYP and MYP, where attainment was acceptable, teachers' expectations for both high and low achievers were too low. In science, attainment was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable elsewhere. Scientific knowledge and the understanding of scientific concepts developed steadily in Grades 1 to 10. Students' practical skills were improving and they worked safely. Attainment was better in Kindergarten than elsewhere because children's investigative, critical thinking and problem-solving skills were good for their age.

In Islamic Education, the majority of students made good progress in improving their knowledge of Islamic values and etiquettes. Most students of Arabic as a first language made acceptable progress in improving their listening and speaking skills. Students of Arabic as a second language made more rapid progress in developing these skills. Progress in English was good in Kindergarten. It was acceptable in PYP and MYP because of low expectations in a minority of lessons particularly for more able and less able students. In mathematics, PYP and MYP students made acceptable progress. In Kindergarten, progress was good because teachers had consistently high expectations about what all the children should do. In science, progress was good in Kindergarten where children of all abilities and backgrounds confidently undertook challenging tasks. In Grades 1 to 10, the progress of the most able students and those with special educational needs was limited by the lack of challenge in the tasks set and an inconsistency in the quality of support for students. The Kindergarten had a more effective approach to meet individual needs and consequently, children made good progress.

[View judgements](#)

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students behaved well in lessons and when moving between classes. Most students enjoyed positive relationships with staff. They had positive attitudes towards healthy living and understood the impact it had on their life. This was less the case in the older MYP grades, particularly with the boys. Attendance was good in all phases. Kindergarten children had an excellent understanding of Islamic values, such as cleanliness and keeping their learning environment tidy, and linked Islamic values to their own lives. Students in PYP and MYP reflected well on the Islamic values of tolerance and co-existence. They had a good understanding of the UAE's heritage. Most students had good knowledge about their own culture but their global awareness was less developed. They demonstrated a positive work ethic when collaborating and were aware of their responsibilities towards their community. However, they rarely took a leading role in initiatives to further contribute to the community. Most students were environmentally aware. They understood and described the importance of recycling but also reflected well on the importance of conserving energy to reduce carbon dioxide and reduce pollution.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was good in Kindergarten, where children had frequent opportunities to collaborate, enquire and solve problems. Work presented children of all abilities and backgrounds with a good level of challenge. Skillful questioning enabled children to develop their thinking and language well. However, the use of teaching assistants was not consistently good enough to support learning. In Grades 1 to 10, teaching was acceptable. Teachers had good subject knowledge, and gave clear explanations, enabling students to gain knowledge at a steady pace. Planning had improved since the previous inspection, and an increased number of teachers planned effectively. However, in a significant minority of lessons, teaching did not fully meet the needs of all children, especially those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented. In these lessons, expectations of students' work were frequently too low. A minority of teachers used a narrow range of teaching styles, limiting opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, enquiry and investigative skills.

Kindergarten children were enthusiastic learners. Children of all abilities concentrated well on solving problems. They enquired, explored their environment and collaborated for extended periods. They discussed and answered questions about their work with confidence. In Grades 1 to 10, most students worked hard, concentrated well and listened attentively, if passively.

When provided with meaningful tasks, they collaborated well and with enjoyment. In a minority of lessons, for example with older students in science, they applied their learning well to the real world and communicated their findings clearly. However, critical thinking and investigative skills were underdeveloped. Despite the best efforts of the school, a small minority of older boys had negative attitudes, which slowed learning.

Assessment in the Kindergarten was good. Teachers consistently used good quality assessments to plan lessons that met the range of children's abilities. Progress was carefully monitored and provided a clear picture of achievements and areas for development. In Grades 1 to 10, monitoring systems were in place, but the use made of assessment information to inform lesson and curriculum planning and to target support was too varied. Assessment was not always accurate, and at times presented an over generous view of students' progress. Target-setting had been introduced recently. The use of targets to focus students' attention on their areas for improvement was variable throughout the school. The quality of written and oral feedback too was uneven and, in a minority of lessons, did not provide guidance to students on how to improve their work.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good in the Kindergarten, and acceptable in Grades 1 to 5 and MYP. It was reviewed regularly to ensure that the written curriculum had sufficient breadth. Indeed, in PYP, the curriculum was comprehensive and rigorous. In the Kindergarten, its breadth was reflected well in lesson planning, and it supported teaching well. However, learners of English as an additional language were not sufficiently prepared for the change to a curriculum conducted in English in most subjects from Grade 1. There were no concerns about other transitions. In Grades 1 to 5, the written curriculum was secure although but it was not consistently transferred to lesson planning. In MYP, the curriculum provided a sound platform for learning, but opportunities for independent learning, inquiry and critical thinking were inconsistent, as were links between subjects. A good range of extra-curricular activities and community links had had a positive impact on learning.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school protect and support students?

Staff took health and safety very seriously in school and ensured that students developed an outstanding awareness of safety. This was particularly the case during fire safety drills and when travelling to and from home. Procedures related to travelling on the school buses were clear. There were well-signposted pick-up and drop-off points for those who did not travel by bus. The outside and inside of the building were extremely well maintained and suitable for all students including those with special educational needs. The clinic was effectively organised and suitably equipped. Many subjects promoted the importance of eating healthily and taking regular exercise. All staff and students were well aware of child protection arrangements.

Relationships between staff and students were positive in all phases. Behaviour was generally well managed. Students received good quality care. A newly appointed counsellor liaised effectively with students and parents. Good monitoring systems ensured most students attended regularly and arrived on time.

[View judgements](#)

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

There were appropriate systems in place to identify and support students who had special educational needs in Kindergarten and PYP. However, there was a few students in PYP and MYP whose needs had not been identified by the school and who did not receive the support they required. The parents whose children had been identified by the school were well informed about the support the school provided. A few students received full-time support from shadow teachers. Specialist teachers supported students both inside and outside the classroom. Detailed records were kept of their progress as they developed reading and spelling skills. Gifted and talented or higher attaining students were not systematically identified and sufficiently challenged; support in lessons was not provided.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. There was a positive working ethos in school and the distribution of responsibilities was clear but not always effective. The dedication of the leadership team to raising standards was clearly communicated to the whole staff. However, middle managers did not all have strong enough leadership skills to support their senior leaders effectively. Close monitoring of priorities, particularly at middle management level, was not always consistent. The key leaders of the school had the capacity to improve as demonstrated in the improvements in Kindergarten from the last inspection.

Self-evaluation in school was acceptable. School improvement plans were appropriate but priorities were not always clearly defined or were too broad. Progress reports from middle leaders were not clearly and systematically incorporated in the main school improvement plan. Evidence of impact was not always consistently measured in order to enable the leaders to identify ways forward. There remained an important gap between the continuous assessment data available in school and international benchmarks and expectations. A staff performance management system was in place but failed to hold teachers sufficiently to account for the quality of their practice, particularly to support the school IB philosophy. The way leaders measured the quality of teaching and learning was sometimes inconsistent, leading to difficulties in obtaining a true picture of the strengths and weaknesses linked to teaching practices in school. The school professional development activities were varied and not sufficiently focused on the key priorities identified in the school improvement plan.

The partnership and communication with parents was good. Parents were regularly informed about both the academic and personal development of their children through the school reporting system and regular meetings. In discussion and in response to questionnaires, parents were positive about the quality of education provided by the school. Some played a crucial and active part on the school board and through their role as mentors. Links with local businesses and the community were purposeful as they played a crucial part in the IB programme. They were less developed in the MYP section where older students would benefit from real-life work experience.

Governance was good. Governors played an active part in school improvement. For example, board members had advisory or quality assurance roles. They held the principal to account for the school performance. However, they were not sufficiently vigilant about students' underachievement in some subjects due to low expectations in lessons.

Staffing and resources were good. Teachers' qualifications were appropriate to the students' age range. The turnover of staff was high, which hindered the impact of the strategies for improvement the school had tried to implement. The buildings were modern, safe and clean. Resources such as information technology were of good quality. The science laboratories were well equipped but not always used effectively to develop students' research and critical thinking.

[View judgements](#)

## 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	96	35%
	Last year	94	44%
Teachers	45		83%
Students	18		100%

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

There was a slight decrease in the percentage of parents responding to the questionnaire from the previous year but they still constituted a minority. There was a higher response from teachers but only a few students responded. Overall, all groups were positive about the school. This was also reflected in their comments. The responses showed that students had a strong understanding of their heritage and local traditions. However, a minority of parents and students were not sure about the progress made in key subjects and said they did not receive regular feedback. A majority of parents and students felt that the school should provide more initiatives to involve students in community projects. Similarly, a minority of students and parents felt that they would benefit from more curricular choices such as an additional foreign language. A few teachers were overall very enthusiastic about the school but some commented about the lack of regular and bespoke professional development. A minority of students and their parents indicated that more could be done to support students with special educational needs.

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae)

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