

Nibras International School 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.

Nibras International 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 the Green Community, Nibras International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten 1 to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 377 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses from parents who had completed an on-line questionnaire. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education available to their children. Most believed that their children were making good or better progress in English, mathematics and science, but only a minority said this about Arabic. Progress in Islamic Education was believed to be good by a majority of parents. Most parents believed that teaching was good or better at the school and almost all indicated that their children enjoyed lessons and had enthusiasm for learning. Although most parents were satisfied with the extra-curricular activities provided by the school, more than a few believed they were poor. Almost all parents believed that their children were safe and treated fairly at school. Only a majority of parents agreed that the school provided good support to children with special educational needs. A similar number of respondents also indicated that their children required a lot of additional help at home with studies. Most parents agreed that communication with the school was effective and timely, and that school reports were regular and informative.

How well does the school perform overall?

Nibras International School provided an acceptable quality of education overall, with some good features. The school had responded well to the previous inspection and had made progress addressing the recommendations. The school's leaders showed the capacity to improve the school further.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school grades. Almost all students had good knowledge and used it well. Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable at elementary level but unsatisfactory in middle and high school grades. Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in Kindergarten and good in the elementary and middle grades. In high school, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable across the school, except in the Kindergarten, where attainment was good but progress was unsatisfactory. In Kindergarten, attainment and progress in science were good. In elementary, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Across the rest of the school, attainment and progress were good. The attitudes and behaviour of students in all grades were good. The civic understanding, the understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions were acceptable across all levels. Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in all grades except in the high school where it was good. Teaching for effective learning, learning and assessment were acceptable across the school. Too many teachers lacked an awareness of how their subjects were learned. Activities in a few lessons kept students busy but were not challenging enough. The curriculum was acceptable. The needs of most students were met by the existing curriculum, but students with special educational needs were not well-served. Health and safety provisions were acceptable school-wide, but there was considerable variation among the key aspects. The quality of support was also acceptable. The school climate was positive. The quality of leadership overall was acceptable. The senior leaders were competent and committed to improving standards. Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good and the school's self- assessment report was comprehensive. Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Both leaders were considered approachable, good listeners by the parent community. Governance of the school was acceptable. A board of governors had been established but it had yet to impact positively in the school. Staffing, facilities, and resources were acceptable overall. The school had successfully reduced the unusually high staff turnover.

Key features of the school

- The positive climate of the school in all phases;
- Improvement of the school in some key aspects, including improved student attainment in mathematics and science, better policies and procedures and a broadened curriculum;
- Clear progress towards addressing previous inspection recommendations;
- Improving links with parents and the local community;
- New student leadership roles that effectively developed civic responsibility and understanding.

Recommendations

- Raise students' attainment in middle school Arabic as an additional language, Kindergarten and high school English, mathematics in all grades and elementary science;
- Focus professional development on improved teaching that is planned to match what students already know, particularly in Kindergarten;
- Broaden the use of external assessments and link their results directly to curriculum planning and teaching;
- Ensure that curriculum expectations are clearly communicated to teachers, students and parents;
- Improve support for students with special educational needs;
- Address the health and safety concerns identified in this report;
- Develop leadership capacity to ensure that subject co-ordinators and the kindergarten co-ordinator have sufficient time and resources to support teachers and students.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. All students in Islamic lessons had good knowledge of Islam and expressed their knowledge clearly. In their classes and daily lives they knew the impact of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) statements (Hadith). Almost all students made good progress in applying their learning to real life experience. Students explained their Islamic experiences well in their classes. Almost all students' attainment was in line with expectations, with a significant minority working at a higher level. Almost all students made good progress against their starting points.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school grades. Most students demonstrated good knowledge and used it well. They listened, spoke, read and wrote well and a few linked their learning with other subjects such as science. Almost all students made expected progress in the relation to their starting points. Most students could identify the different kinds of present verbs and other grammar rules when completing exercises. Older students did not form independent sentences, applying grammatical knowledge. Comprehension skills were underdeveloped in these grades.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in the elementary grades and unsatisfactory in the middle grades. Most elementary students had acceptable knowledge of the basic skills. This led to most students being able to meet the curriculum requirements. In Grades 6 to 9 only a few students were able to understand the teacher's explanations or respond in using correct Arabic. Reading and writing skills were well below expectations in these grades.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in kindergarten and good in the elementary and middle grades. In high school grades, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Kindergarten and elementary students developed their listening, speaking, reading, writing, skills at expected levels. By Grade 6 students wrote confidently and used grammar correctly. They read a wide range of fiction and non-fiction and had clear understanding of significant ideas, themes, events, characters, and plots. Middle school students could write original narratives using well-constructed paragraphs. High school students displayed extensive inquiry skills when writing coherent, persuasive research reports but their imaginative writing was underdeveloped.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable across the school, except in kindergarten, where attainment was good but progress in the development of key skills was unsatisfactory. More than a few kindergarten children did not display counting, sorting and number manipulation skills in line with expectations. Elementary students moved from number sequencing to counting by 10's, rounding, solving word problems with subtraction or division, and finding place values by Grade 3. In Grade 5 students could round five-digit whole numbers and find decimal fractions. Middle school students were graphing a range of linear equations and applying them well. High school students could calculate exponential and logarithmic functions and graph them, but these skills were not applied to relevant situations.

In kindergarten, attainment and progress in science skills were good. At the elementary level attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Across the rest of the school, attainment and progress were both good. Younger students were not developing a sufficiently broad range of investigative skills early enough. Students made good progress in their scientific thinking at all grades. When most students carried out investigations they drew conclusions from the data they collected. In the high school, students developed critical thinking and reasoning skills to a limited extent. They planned and carried out investigations and most were able to discuss the accuracy, reliability and validity of their results. Applications of science outside the classroom were limited in scope.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of students across all grade levels were good. Students interacted positively and respectfully towards each other and with staff members and an ethos of mutual respect existed. Elementary and secondary students spoke of their positive feelings and support for their school, its staff and their activities. Daily attendance was good, but punctuality in the morning needed to improve. Students reported they were involved in a "healthy living" program developed at the school, which promoted a better diet and more exercise.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions were acceptable across all stages. The majority of students understood and respected the practices and significance of Islam for Muslim students and families. Displays around the school illustrated, honoured and celebrated the traditional and multi-cultural events at the school. Students were aware of their responsibilities as part of a larger community. Senior students spoke of their commitment to become highly educated so they could give back to Dubai later in life.

Students' economic and environmental understanding across the Kindergarten, elementary and middle grades was acceptable and it was good in the high school. Students had an age-appropriate awareness of Dubai and its place in the world, but only the high school students could speak about the economic progress of Dubai in relation to the global economy. Most students in all phases had some knowledge of basic environmental concepts and had participated in recycling activities, tree planting projects, "Clean-up Dubai" days, and community fairs. The newly elected student council submitted their school for participation in "Clean Up The World Day". Their commitment to the school environment was evident through the litter-free school grounds and the lack of graffiti and vandalism.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable across the school and about half of the lessons observed were of good or better quality. Almost all teachers showed good subject knowledge but too many lacked an awareness of how their subjects were learned. This was especially evident in Kindergarten. Lesson planning across the school was generally oriented to topics rather than learning objectives. The timing and pacing of lessons varied; a few teachers moved too quickly through their lessons and the ends of lessons were often rushed, without summary or review. Most teachers used resources effectively, although a minority relied too heavily on simple text books. Teacher-student interactions were almost always positive, but teachers' questions to students frequently failed to promote critical thinking. Although teachers attempted to meet the needs of all students, they were not sufficiently supported in their

efforts to teach students with special educational needs. Kindergarten teachers were especially in need of support in teaching English to children as a second language.

Learning was acceptable across the school, with students engaged almost all of the time. Activities in a few lessons kept students busy but were not challenging enough. In the Kindergarten, children were both over and under-challenged. Although students were responsible learners, they were more compliant than independent in classrooms. They co-operated well but were not seen collaborating to accomplish common goals. Application of learning to the real world varied across the school; it was evident in all subjects but inconsistently so. Enquiry and research skills were limited; students did not have frequent enough opportunities to find things out for themselves. Critical and higher-order thinking was limited.

Assessment of learning was acceptable, overall. It was, however, inconsistently understood and applied across the school. Crucially, the use of assessment information did not always find its way into the preparation and delivery of lessons. Therefore, teaching was mismatched to what students had already learned. Ongoing assessment during lessons was also inconsistent, as more than a few teachers did not check for students' understanding before proceeding to new topics. Assessment information did not include discrete skills identified as next steps for students, and teachers' comments on written work did not consistently provide such guidance. The use of external tests had just begun at the school and, as a result, curriculum modifications had been made, most notably in mathematics.

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

The curriculum was acceptable overall. The needs of most students were met by the existing curriculum, but did not meet those students with special educational needs. The school offered a sufficiently broad range of learning opportunities at most grades and provided for varied attainment levels in languages and mathematics in the higher grades. The timetable was balanced appropriately. There were sufficient opportunities for physical and arts education, various activities and co-curricular experiences outside the school. Expected outcomes were not clearly understood by all teachers and students. The development of the curriculum was underway, but it was not directly linked to the available assessment information. The curriculum had continuity, but there was poor progression in Kindergarten and in Arabic in the high school grades. This meant that students either repeated previous learning experiences or had gaps in their learning that were difficult to overcome. Cross-curricular links were evident in most subjects and the school had successfully linked the curriculum to several community organisations to enrich students' learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provisions were generally acceptable throughout the school. There was, however, considerable variation among the key aspects. The school had modern premises which were well-maintained and clean. Classrooms were of good size, allowing room for various learning activities. The nurse provided good care and promoted healthy living by students. She kept good records on students' health and controlled medicines they needed while at school. Some issues of concern were noted, such as the need for more frequent cleaning of the Kindergarten bathrooms. The easy access to the roof top presented a hazard to students, as did the condition of the playing field. Transportation procedures after school were not thoroughly controlled, resulting in a potentially dangerous mix of moving buses and children. The school's child protection policy was clear.

The quality of support was also acceptable. The school climate was positive, the result of caring teachers who were genuinely interested in student success. Progress had been made with the hiring of a part-time counsellor and classroom teachers had made individual efforts to support students with special educational needs. Additional support for these students, as well as those learning English as an additional language was needed at all grades. The infrequent behaviour problems were well-managed by the school, helping to maintain the positive school climate. Tracking of students' overall progress was not highly detailed, which contributed to inappropriate planning. There was no counsellor for younger students. Attendance was well-managed, but a more systematic approach to the improvement of punctuality was needed.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership overall was acceptable. The Principal and Assistant Principal were a competent, stable team who showed commitment to improving the learning of students. They were active in leading professional development for teachers and had established the new systems and structures required in a growing school. Positive relationships were being developed with parents through both organised activities and informal meetings. A teacher performance appraisal system was established, but required further development. Although there was a vision for the school's future, it was not widely understood by teachers, students and parents. The development of teams had begun, but the school required a wider leadership capacity to ensure continued improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school's self-assessment report was comprehensive. It provided data as well as in-depth analysis of seven key criteria. It formed a strong foundation for improvement planning, but enhanced validity of the data was necessary. The school's priorities for improvement were based upon the recommendations of the previous inspection report. These were well-known and understood by key stakeholders, but not teachers. The initiatives had all been implemented, with improved student learning in two key subjects as the most significant outcome.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Both leaders were considered approachable, good listeners by the parent community. Most parents recognised the evolving nature of the school. They participated in parent-organised school activities, embraced the principal's initiatives to improve home-school communication and they volunteered to improve facilities and resources for learning further. The school newsletter was effective in keeping parents informed. The school's website was up-to-date and useful, particularly the Grade 3 curriculum information. Community links had enhanced the experiences of students by broadening their perspectives on Dubai's society.

Governance of the school was acceptable. A board of governors had been established. A parents' representative had been invited to join the owners and the leadership team on the board and plans were being developed to incorporate a wider cross section of stakeholders. Formal board policy and procedures were also being planned but had not yet impacted on the school's stated mission of producing successful critical thinkers.

Staffing, facilities, and resources were acceptable overall. The school successfully reduced the previously high staff turnover. Co-ordinators had insufficient time to provide the necessary support to staff to further enhance learning. The school facilities were modern, clean and benefited from numerous displays of student work. The board of governors had provided a new swimming pool for the Kindergarten area and interactive white boards for senior classrooms. The library benefited from books sourced through parental fundraising, but was still under-stocked. The ICT lab provided good facilities for students but was not exploited to its potential for independent learning.

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?				
53% 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	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable

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

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

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

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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