

American School of Dubai Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High

Report Published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report.....	3
Basic information about the school.....	3
How well does the school perform overall?	4
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?	6
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	9
Summary of inspection judgements.....	10
Next steps	14
How to contact us.....	14

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.

American School of Dubai was inspected in March 2011 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Barsha, The American School of Dubai is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to High School, aged four to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. The school had recently moved to new accommodation. At the time of the inspection there were 1375 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school overall and particularly in the areas of English, mathematics and science. A minority of parents had concerns regarding the quality and amount of instruction in Islamic Education and Arabic. They felt teaching and learning and their children's enthusiasm for learning were exceptional. Almost all parents thought the support and safety of their children were outstanding. Most commented favourably on the effective communication between the school and the home. Most parents reported that the amount and quality of homework was appropriate. However, a minority of parents stated that homework policy was inconsistent across the grades.

How well does the school perform overall?

The American School of Dubai provided a good quality of education overall. The leadership team had efficiently managed the transition to the new campus, while maintaining high academic achievement. Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good. However, the school had not addressed the recommendation regarding Islamic Education cited in the previous inspection report.

Students' attainment and progress were good in almost all subject areas and were outstanding in English in the elementary, middle and high schools. Attainment and progress in mathematics were outstanding in the middle school and high school. Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum was good overall. Health and safety arrangements were outstanding across all phases of the school. Leadership was outstanding with a clear vision and strong capacity for continued improvement.

Key features of the school

- The facilities and resources for learning were outstanding;
- The school was not compliant with government requirements regarding the time to be allocated for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- A high level of English literacy was evident across the school;
- Students were empowered to be reflective, critical learners in all parts of the school;
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was effectively integrated into teaching, learning and assessment practices;
- There was a high level of involvement in the local and international community;
- A strong commitment to professional development and growth was in place.

Recommendations

- Ensure that Muslim students receive the appropriate number of lessons in Islamic Education as required by the relevant authorities;
- Ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs all students;
- Raise attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Finalise child protection procedures and ensure all staff members are made fully aware of the appropriate procedures.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education across the school were unsatisfactory. Due to the lack of provision for Islamic Education, students across the school had very poor knowledge and understanding of the basic Islamic concepts. Only a few could recite short chapters from The Holy Qur'an and this was often inaccurate. They had very limited knowledge of basic facts about the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and could not talk about any of the Hadeeth. There was almost no progress in their understanding in any area of Islamic Education. Progress was limited due to the insufficient time allowance for Islamic Education, which did not fulfil the statutory requirements for this subject.

Students' attainment in Arabic as a first language was unsatisfactory across the school. Students' progress in the elementary school was acceptable, but unsatisfactory in the middle and high schools. Most students in the lower elementary school were developing their knowledge of the alphabet and were using simple sentences to express themselves. Most students had an acceptable understanding of spoken standard Arabic. They used colloquial Arabic to communicate and were learning to use standard Arabic correctly. In the middle and upper elementary grades, most could read and summarise a short story well. In the middle and high schools, the few students who opted for Arabic were working below international expectations.

Students' attainment in Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory across the school. Progress in Arabic was acceptable in the elementary school and unsatisfactory in both the middle and high schools. Students who were learning Arabic for the first time made good progress in listening, reading, and writing. They could identify letters of the alphabet in different parts of a word and could write familiar words confidently. Most students could identify three types of fruits and vegetables and the more able students could create simple sentences. In the upper grades, students were making unsatisfactory progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In English, attainment was good and progress was outstanding in the Kindergarten. Attainment and progress were outstanding in elementary, middle and high school. Almost all students exceeded international standards in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Children in Kindergarten could understand and follow directions and they were developing good phonics skills. In Grade 1 they read and illustrated stories. Grade 3 students used correct grammar, punctuation and extensive vocabulary in their writing. Grade 5 students conducted basic research, made oral presentations and read and analysed a variety of genres with ease. Middle school students were outstanding in writing reflective essays and poems and were able to link this learning to educational trips. High school students wrote in detail and with maturity, using cross-curricular links with history for example, while studying the Elizabethan Age and the plays of Shakespeare.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good at Kindergarten and elementary and outstanding in the middle and high schools. Throughout Kindergarten and the early years, children developed a secure foundation in their understanding of number and shape. As students progressed through the grades, they demonstrated above average investigative and critical thinking skills. For example, by Grade 5 students could solve numerical problems and comment on the efficiency of the solution strategy employed. Across the school, students confidently discussed their work using accurate mathematical terminology. In the middle school, students used computer software to support their learning in geometry and other areas. At high school level, students successfully utilised prior knowledge and oral skills to progress their learning in calculus.

Attainment and progress in science were outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases of the school. Kindergarten 1 children applied outstanding observational and recording skills to the germination of seeds and had a sound knowledge of plants. Elementary students researched scientific facts well and used terminology accurately, but scientific concepts and progress of experimental skills were not fully developed in some grades. Students made good progress in conceptual development through middle school, so by Grade 8, all students knew the differences between plant and animal cells and could describe the parts of a cell and their functions. High school students made good progress across all aspects of science and had good attainment in external examinations.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding across all grades. Almost all students displayed a high level of maturity and self-discipline. Student-staff relationships were positive and were based on mutual trust and respect. Students related very well to each other and enjoyed the international dimension of their school community. They stated that they felt safe, secure and respected in school and around the grounds. Almost all had good attitudes towards healthy living, including making healthy food selections in the cafeteria. Attendance during the last school session, as reported by the school, was acceptable. Attendance levels were good during the inspection and students were punctual for classes and at the start of school.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and the local culture and heritage was acceptable in Kindergarten and good across the rest of the school. Students contributed positively to the life of the school in a range of areas, including the design of the new school buildings. They were very active in initiating, planning and implementing activities and projects that reflected their commitment to the ethos of the school. For example, students were involved in a range of community services including the 'Global Awareness Inner Awakening' and 'Week Without Walls'. Students could describe the different ways in which they should respect the culture and Islamic values in Dubai and discussed some of the ways the UAE had been successful in creating a multi-cultural society.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good at Kindergarten and outstanding in the elementary, middle and high schools. Students were able to discuss the major developments and landmarks of Dubai, including history and traditions and they

understood the economic impact of the recent global financial crisis. Older students were aware of local and global environmental issues and they participated in energy conservation projects. They promoted the school's recycling programme and were determined to make positive contributions to support future initiatives.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good across the school and had outstanding features in the middle and high school phases. Most lessons were good or better and more than a few were outstanding. The quality of teaching in English Language Arts was consistently high in all phases. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects was thorough; especially so in the high school. Lesson planning was consistently good and the management of time in lessons was usually skilful. The use of resources, particularly ICT, was very effective. Almost all teachers used a variety of resources effectively to engage students in their lessons. Teacher-student interactions were positive and productive at all times. Teachers' skills in asking questions were evident across most subjects, promoting deep thinking amongst students. Teachers employed many different strategies to meet the needs of their students, including those with special educational needs.

Students' engagement in and responsibility for their own learning was good across the school and had outstanding features in the middle and high schools. Students' interactions and collaboration were consistently respectful and productive, even when they disagreed on points of debate. The application of learning to the real world was a regular feature of teaching in Arabic, science, mathematics and particularly so in English. Planned connections between areas of learning were evident in students' work and in their oral contributions during classes. The development of enquiry and research skills was a priority and was evident across the school in all grades and subjects. Students' critical and higher order thinking skills were being developed well across the school; these were evident amongst the younger students and very well established by Grade 10. Overall, the school was successful in developing self-directed, independent learners at every phase.

The assessment of learning was outstanding, involving teachers, students and parents in a continual cycle of goal-setting and evaluation. The school's 'Falcon Dreams' programme established students as self-evaluators from the early grades, monitoring academic, personal and social progress in key subjects and in the broader school community. Assessment as part of the teaching and learning process was effectively done by almost all teachers, allowing students to be taught at the right levels of challenge for continual progress. A range of formative and summative assessment methods were used, including external assessments that measured attainment against US standards and that of other student populations. The collection, analysis and use of assessment information to inform teaching and learning were exemplary. Teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses very well and co-operated to set individual targets in both key subjects and some electives. Teachers' marked students' work regularly and included appropriate, challenging next steps in learning.

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

The curriculum was good across all phases. Teachers planned the curriculum referring to Delaware State standards in English and the Alternative Education Resource Organisation framework for mathematics. The integration of ICT in all subject areas supported and extended opportunities for learning. However, the breadth and balance of the curriculum was adversely affected by the absence of Islamic Education. Senior staff met regularly to discuss curricular issues as part of the school's self-evaluation process. As a consequence, curriculum development was well planned and focused on the needs and interests of all students. Although Arabic was introduced into Kindergarten to 5 and as an elective course from Grades 7 to 12, it was not yet compliant with Ministry of Education regulations. Similarly, Islamic Education was not offered for Muslim students as a main subject in all grades. The school made very good use of curriculum mapping programmes to ensure continuity and progression in most subjects. Planning for transfer between phases helped prepare students well for the next stage in their education. The cross-curricular themes, particularly in Kindergarten and elementary, ensured that students' skills in a range of subjects were developed in interesting and meaningful contexts. A good choice of enrichment activities, including 'media in the Arab world', 'international relations' and 're-cycled arts and crafts', gave opportunities for students in Grades 6, 7 and 8 to extend their learning. School visits within the UAE and to other countries helped widen students' view of the world. The school made good use of the locality to enhance the curriculum and this helped promote students' strong awareness of the community.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were outstanding. The new building provided a safe and secure environment for learning. Security guards carefully screened all visitors and exemplary attention was paid to ensuring that ongoing building work did not create additional risks. Traffic around the school was well-directed by traffic marshals at the end of the school day. All aspects of school transport were well supervised. There were two medical rooms, which were both well equipped and managed. Students had periodic medicals and good records were kept of all medical needs and incidents. A high standard of fire safety equipment was in place and evacuation drills had been held and logged regularly. New parts of the building were checked thoroughly before being made available to students. There was wheelchair access to all parts of the building. Excellent provision was made for healthy living, including the provision of healthy options in the cafeteria, advice on health issues such as sleep deprivation and diet and the promotion of exercise. There was an exemplary drug awareness programme. All staff members paid close attention to their responsibility for student's welfare, but this was not formalised in a child protection policy.

The quality of support was outstanding. Transitions between sections were well managed. Students received extensive advice on high school course selection and on preparation for

further education and college life. Students' academic progress was monitored carefully and pastoral support was high throughout the school. Students with individual needs were well provided for. Student punctuality and attendance were managed well.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership of the American School of Dubai was outstanding. The leadership team effectively navigated the transition from the previous campus to the new facility, including operating a split campus for the first semester and effectively overseeing the integration into the new facility. The Director and senior leadership were dedicated to achievement of high standards for all students. The Superintendent and senior leadership demonstrated the capacity to manage further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Systematic and rigorous improvement planning had started to address the previous inspection report recommendation on the instruction of Arabic and progress on this had been made in the elementary school. The action plan and devised strategies were clearly shared with all staff and systematically reviewed in subject area meetings. The same level of analysis and commitment was needed in the area of Islamic Education to meet the needs of Muslim students and ensure compliance with the Ministry of Education requirements.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. In both interviews and surveys, parents reported a very high degree of overall satisfaction with the school. Productive links existed between the school, parents and the greater community; for example, the herb garden, the substance awareness programme and the student assessment programme. Outstanding opportunities existed for parent and community engagement in student activities and lessons, through the use of the website.

The governance of the school was good. The board of governors had a positive influence on the school in facility construction and school management. Meetings with senior leadership discussed action plans and areas of mutual concern on a regular basis. A formal process was in place for parent representation to the Board. The Board needed to address the issue of Islamic Education as a compliance requirement.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. Effective deployment of staff was in place to meet the needs of the students. All staff members were qualified and supported through focused and regular professional development. The new facilities were of an extremely high quality and were clean and well maintained. Completion of the facilities progressed and was effectively isolated from the student body. The libraries were bright and well resourced, with good access to ICT to meet the needs of the learners. ICT was accessible throughout the building and used very effectively for teaching and learning. Classrooms were exceptionally well resourced and equipped for instruction at all levels of the school.

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	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
5% 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	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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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