

The Kindergarten Starters Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Year 5

Report issued January 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?	5
How good are the teaching and learning?	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	7
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	7
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	8
Summary of inspection judgements.....	9
Next Steps	13
How to contact us	13

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.

The Kindergarten Starters was inspected in November 2009 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 Al Garhoud area, The Kindergarten Starters was a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 5, aged from three to 11 years. The school followed the Indian National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,756 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents were supportive of the school and its leadership. Most parents felt that their children made good progress in English, mathematics and science but were less certain about progress made in Islamic Education and Arabic. They reported that behaviour was very good and that staff expectations of the students were high. Most parents felt that the teaching was good, students were treated fairly and that the school was approachable. Most agreed that a variety of activities was offered by the school, which helped their children to be independent and responsible. A minority of the parents felt the school could do more to develop good links with the community.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Kindergarten Starters was performing at an acceptable level with some good features. By the end of their primary education, students were achieving standards in line with those expected for their age. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good. In Arabic, students' attainment and progress were acceptable. In English, students made good progress and attained acceptable standards in both phases. In mathematics and science, progress and attainment were acceptable throughout the school. The students' behaviour and attitudes, from the youngest to the oldest, were outstanding. As parents said in the questionnaires, the school was a place where their children come to learn and apply themselves diligently each day. The students had a keen awareness of their responsibilities as young citizens of Dubai, and some of the Grade 5 students were able to express themselves confidently, when discussing the wider UAE economy.

The teaching was of an acceptable standard and in the best lessons teachers were able to share with passion their knowledge of a subject and how that knowledge could be applied in the wider world. Less effective teaching involved the teachers talking too much and the students taking too passive a part in lessons. Students learned most effectively when lesson outcomes were clear to them and when they were given the opportunity to reflect on what they had learned and carry out investigations. In the KG classes, while there was a warm and colourful environment, there were too few opportunities for children to learn on their own, using books and materials independently. Assessment was acceptable across the school, with teachers knowing their students' needs and abilities well. However, systems for tracking students' progress as they moved up through the school were underdeveloped. Marking in students' books did not offer good guidance as to how students might improve their work. The curriculum had a number of strengths, including the teaching of moral science, which helped students understand the strong values that permeated the school. All subjects promoted high quality speaking skills in English. The school was rightly reviewing how the needs of the more able students could be better met through the curriculum. Health and safety arrangements were good, with the building being a safe and secure environment in which to teach and learn. Advice and guidance in a number of areas were strong, but the school did not track academic progress effectively.

The leadership and management of the school were of acceptable quality. The Principal and Headmistress modelled the expectations and values of the whole school community, and knew the strengths and relative shortcomings of the school. They were pursuing a number of changes to ensure that the school became more rigorous in its self-evaluation and in its monitoring of teaching and learning. Distributed responsibilities amongst staff had not been adequately developed, nor had proper induction procedures. Governance was acceptable, although the involvement of parents was limited. Staffing, facilities and resources were generally fit for purpose. Some learning was adversely affected by a shortage of appropriate equipment and space, and professional development opportunities for teachers to see and share best practice were not fully in place. The school met the needs of most of its students and fulfilled most aspects of its promise to parents.

Key features of the school

- Students' good progress and attainment in Islamic Education;
- The promotion and celebration of students' English skills across all subject areas;
- The very good relationships between staff and students;
- Some of the teaching restricted the students' opportunities to learn independently because it was too directive;
- The school did not keep sufficiently close track of the students' progress;
- The effective management and supervision of this large school community;
- The way the core values permeated the everyday life of the school, leading to courteous, highly motivated students.

Recommendations

- Enable middle leaders to deliver fully their responsibilities, particularly in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning;
- Improve the analysis and tracking of students' progress so that all teachers meet the learning needs of all students;
- Continue current initiatives to make lessons less teacher-directed, in order to give students more opportunities for independent learning, particularly in Kindergarten;
- Develop the quality of induction and professional development for all teachers, in order to share best practice.

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

In Islamic Education, attainment and progress were good. Students attended two Islamic Education classes and a Holy Qur'an recital each week and had developed a sound understanding of Islamic values. Students' knowledge of the Pillars of Islam was developing and they could explain how the values of Islam were reflected through their behaviour. In Grade 1 students could speak confidently about the values of caring for others and obeying their parents. In Grade 3 almost all students knew the three most holy mosques. In Grade 5 all students had a good understanding of the concept of right and wrong in Islam (Halal and Haram) and were able to give and explain many examples of each, using examples from their everyday lives.

In Arabic, attainment and progress were acceptable. In Grade 1 a few students confidently acted out words and phrases. Most students accurately copied words and phrases from the board and, in Grade 2, students were able to use the magnetic letters to form many words and explained their meaning. Grade 4 students could explain the main point in the texts they read and were able to relate key words and ideas to their everyday life. Most students used their increasing knowledge of grammar to construct sentences. A few of them made grammatically correct sentences and had well formed handwriting. Writing in workbooks was generally neat, but for most students' independent writing was limited.

In English, attainment was acceptable in both KG and primary, and progress was good in both phases. In KG, children developed initial reading skills and their listening was good. They correctly repeated words and phrases with teacher prompting. By the end of Grade 2 most students could read simple texts clearly and confidently, and comprehend well. They could construct simple sentences and could write in cursive handwriting. By Grade 5 most students had a rich vocabulary and could hold conversations confidently. Many students could write passages and compositions in different genres independently and with a high degree of accuracy. However, their skills of analysis and interpretation were relatively underdeveloped.

In KG, attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable. Most children could recognise simple shapes, compare and differentiate sizes and sort objects. By the end of KG almost all could identify and count numbers up to 30. In the primary phase attainment and progress were acceptable. Most students learned to use mathematical language with increasing confidence. In the upper grades most students performed all four operations with five digit numbers, could represent decimals on a number line and work out simple fractions. They could name and draw angles and identify simple polygons. Most could do simple word problems in mathematical operations but needed help in deciding which operation to use.

In science, attainment and progress were acceptable in KG and primary. In KG, children demonstrated basic understanding of living and non-living things and could name animals that live in water. By the end of Grade 1 most students could explain how they know air exists without seeing it and could list several uses of air by living things. By the end of Grade 5 most students were able to name the parts of the vertebral column, shoulder and pelvic girdle in detail and describe the function of these parts. All students understood the concept of a fair test. A few students displayed an impressive command of complex scientific terminology and word origins in science. However, investigative skills among most students were limited.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Almost all students were courteous and well behaved in the classrooms and around the school. They showed respect for one another and their teachers and followed school rules diligently. Most students enjoyed high levels of self-esteem, frequently greeting visitors and engaging them in intelligent conversations in English. Their attitudes towards schoolwork were particularly commendable, with the majority taking keen responsibility for their own learning from early in the primary phase. Almost all students were regular in attendance and punctual to school. Punctuality to lessons, in a large building, was exemplary.

Almost all primary students enjoyed a good civic sense, a sound knowledge of Islam and showed a keen appreciation of the culture of Dubai. Many shouldered responsibilities as class monitors, green monitors and power savers. Most students in primary demonstrated an acceptable understanding of and general awareness about Muslim culture and traditions and their impact on life in Dubai. They appreciated local customs, traditions and celebrations. Older primary students understood and appreciated traditional sports like falconry, sword dancing and camel racing, and they enjoyed local foods and customs.

Students' understanding of the Dubai economy and environmental challenges was good. Almost all students in primary had an age appropriate understanding of Dubai's development and the progress it has made. Some students were ahead of their years in being able to explain Dubai's position in the UAE, the importance of petrol in economic development and the impact of tourism. A minority of students reflected in fluent English on the effect of recession on the Dubai economy. All students took great pride in and contributed to the school's cleanliness; many actively participated in environmental events and had received external recognition for their conservation efforts.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable throughout the school. In particular, teachers took every opportunity across the age range to promote strong speaking and listening skills in English. Teaching worked well when it was carefully planned to meet the needs of all children in the class. In the best lessons, teachers shared lesson objectives with students and used time skilfully to ensure that knowledge, skills, understanding, and application of that understanding, were given equal emphasis. Many teachers shared their knowledge of a subject enthusiastically and demonstrated probing and insistent questioning. Less effective teaching was rooted in teachers being too didactic in style, presenting activities whose purpose was unclear to the students. In some lessons the management of the class was inconsistent. Teaching assistants in the KG were used well by a few teachers and there was potential for them to be used more effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

The quality of learning was acceptable in KG and the primary phase. Almost all students were keen and eager to participate in the lessons. Where teachers expected a high level of engagement, the students responded with contributions of high quality, particularly in their confident use of spoken English. However, where students were not encouraged to be active learners, their responses were limited to single word answers and their progress was slower. The work was not always well matched to the range of students' learning needs. In some subject areas a shortage of resources limited the students' opportunities for active learning. In KG classes there was insufficient space and opportunity for children to develop their interests and pursue any open-ended learning. Special sessions in the timetable provided good opportunities for many students to demonstrate higher order and independent learning skills: they made lively laptop presentations and acted out short plays with confidence and enjoyment.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. The school had made significant efforts to collect performance data but it had not yet organised that data in a form that proved useful for improving teaching and learning. The tracking of progress in English and mathematics in Grade 5 had started; the school had recognised the need to develop the tracking of progress so that it can be measured against international benchmarks. Teachers kept records of marks obtained in assessments but had not carried out an analysis of those assessments to modify future lessons. Grade 5 students sometimes enjoyed the opportunity to assess their own learning. Most students' books in different subject areas were marked regularly with ticks and short comments of praise, but did not typically include guidance to students on how work might be improved.

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

The overall quality of the curriculum was acceptable throughout the school. It was generally broad based and balanced in its provision. Teachers had adapted the curriculum to ensure good quality support for those with special educational needs. In this large school there was clear evidence of the timetable being shaped to provide good subject coverage throughout the week and term. The KG curriculum was that offered by the Global Educational Management Systems (GEMS) group to all of its Asian schools and was activity based and child friendly. The primary school curriculum, based on the Indian National Curriculum Framework, included a wide range of subjects including art, physical education, music, library and the choice of several languages. All these contributed to giving students a sound social and academic grounding. The teaching of moral science, much valued by parents, was particularly effective in ensuring that all students had the opportunity to explore and reflect on the school's core values: Learn, Aspire, Be. Curriculum delivery was broadly effective, a mixture of textbook-led and activity-led learning, with assemblies and field trips adding a dimension that gave students self-confidence, improved communication skills and experiences in the wider community. Cross-curricular links and subject links with extra-curricular activities were few, although the zero period provided students with the opportunity to make connections between the subjects. The school had timely plans to review the curriculum in the light of a detailed analysis of students' performance. The needs of the academically more able students were not consistently met, nor did the curriculum afford sufficient opportunities for students to practise investigative and enquiry skills. Competition and cooperation were promoted through a variety of sports and inter-school competitions, with music and singing a strong feature of the school's provision.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of health and safety was good. Effective arrangements were in place to ensure that all students were safe and secure within school premises. The school buildings were well maintained and cleaned assiduously. Students' safety within the school and during bus arrivals and departures was a priority for all staff, greatly valued by parents. Health records were well maintained by the on-site medical team, and comprehensive medical check-ups for primary students took place through the school year. The school promoted healthy lifestyles by educating students about the need to eat a healthy diet. Fire procedures were in place; given constraints of space for assembly points, the school was in the process of reviewing the frequency of fire drills. The school had a child protection policy in place and the leadership team were engaged in ensuring all staff were aware of its detail.

The quality of support was acceptable. It had a number of key strengths. The staff knew their students well and showed great care and concern for them at all times. An atmosphere of mutual respect permeated the environment. Advice and guidance was freely given to students and parents regarding their future education. Students' behaviour in lessons and during the recess and dispersal period was excellent. Students with special educational needs were identified promptly and individual education plans were put in place with skill and sensitivity. However, transition records for students between sections and grades were managed inconsistently. The school did not have a secure system of record keeping to track and analyse the academic progress of every student, from

one phase to the next. The school has begun to make effective use of information and communication technology to improve its tracking procedures.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The Principal and Headmistress worked effectively together to set the ethos, expectations and direction of this large school. They were supported by an able administration team, who ensured careful supervision and management of the day-to-day running of the school. The school's middle leaders had appropriate job descriptions but their pastoral care commitments limited their ability to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and track students' progress. Consequently, the school did not have well-developed leadership of individual subjects. Performance management procedures were in place. All staff showed a strong commitment to the values and learning culture of the school and demonstrated that they have a strong belief in the school's continued success.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school understood what its key priorities were in relation to improving the tracking of students' academic progress. Staff had begun to explore how best practice could be shared by setting up opportunities to watch each other teach. Teachers reflected thoughtfully on ways in which their lessons could offer more opportunities for students' independent learning. Induction procedures for new staff, in the context of identified challenges in recruiting new staff, were in the process of being improved.

Partnerships with the parents and community were acceptable. Communication between parents and teachers was effective, which resulted in prompt actions to address any concerns parents had. Parents attended assemblies and helped out at special events, and parents reported that they were pleased with the end-of-year reports they received from the school. However, parents felt they needed more opportunities to find out about their children's progress each term. Links with the local fire department and road transport organisation helped enhance safety measures for the students, but wider links with schools, and other organisations in the UAE and internationally, were under-developed.

Governance in the school was acceptable. The board held the Principal and Headmistress to account for the standards of education in the school and had a clear understanding of the school's current priorities, within the resources available. Parents did not have ready access to the owners and parental involvement in the governance of the school was very limited.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. The school had sufficient qualified teachers and support staff to ensure the routine running of the school. Strong additional support was provided through the achievement centre and by the counsellor, doctors and nurses. There were adequate staff to maintain the premises and manage the home-school transport systems carefully. However, staff deployment and timetabling could have been more effective, so that middle leaders had sufficient time to carry out their management duties, and so have a more significant impact on students' learning. Most classrooms and their furniture were fit for purpose, but fewer resources for information and communication technology, sport, music and art had a limiting effect on learning. The school library was equipped with a wide range of age-appropriate books, although students rightly noted that some of the stock needed replacing and updating.

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.

The four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary
Health and safety	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
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.

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