

The International School of Arts and Science

Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

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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.

The International School of Arts and Sciences 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 Al Warqaa, The International School of Arts and Sciences is a private school providing education for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged from three to 18 years. For reporting purposes, the school phases referred to in this inspection were KG, elementary (Grades 1 to 5), middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 12). The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 400 students on roll. Students' attendance in the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed replies from parents who had responded to the on-line parent questionnaire. Parents were, in the main, happy with the school's provision. Almost all parents agreed that their children liked school, that the teaching was good, that their children were treated fairly and that the children were being encouraged to become independent and responsible people. Parents liked the range of activities available to the students and almost all agreed that they were comfortable approaching the school with any questions or complaints and that the school would act promptly to address any issues. They felt that the students were well cared for but several reported that teachers were not always good at explaining to parents what they could do at home to help with their children's work. A majority of parents were unsure about the quality of the school's local community links and they did not know about the school's response to the recommendations from the previous inspection report. Parents were generally happy with their children's progress in all subjects, except for Islamic Education where a majority were

unsure of progress. In Arabic, a minority of parents were not satisfied with their children's progress.

How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the school provided an acceptable quality of education. There were, however, some significant weaknesses. Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were unsatisfactory. This was partly due to the fact that the school did not fully comply with the time allocation required for the subject by the Ministry of Education. Students' attainment and progress in Arabic was, overall, acceptable. In the KG progress was good, but for the older students, for whom Arabic was an additional language, the standards were too low. In English and mathematics both attainment and progress were good across the school. Students became increasingly fluent English language users as they moved through the school and they demonstrated a good capacity to apply mathematics for problem solving. In science, attainment and progress were acceptable throughout the school. The students' practical and scientific skills were relatively weak, particularly amongst the older students. Students' attitudes and their behaviour were generally good, but there was a great deal of lateness and poor timekeeping in the secondary school. Students had an acceptable level of understanding of Islam and the local traditions of Dubai and they had some understanding of environmental, ecological and economic matters.

The teaching was broadly acceptable but there were wide variations in quality across the school. It was generally good in the KG and early grades, and in English and mathematics throughout the school. However, the teaching in Islamic Education, Arabic and science was often unsatisfactory. Arrangements for assessment were poor. Except in a few isolated cases, the school used no external benchmarks to track progress or external examinations to evaluate students' achievement in comparison with national and international standards. The curriculum did not comply with Ministry of Education requirements in respect of the time allowed for Islamic Education and Arabic. No art or music was present in the curriculum beyond Grade 8. The provision for science in the secondary school was unsatisfactory and students were not being well prepared for their next stage in education. The pre-vocational courses in Grade 12 lacked coherence and quality. These courses had no external accreditation. Arrangements to ensure students' health and welfare were generally good, but the tracking and supporting of students' overall well-being and academic progress were not consistent throughout the school, and were, overall weak.

The leadership and management of the school were, overall, acceptable but weaknesses in planning, monitoring and evaluation resulted in significant inconsistency in quality in different parts of the school. The school had been only partially successful in addressing some of the recommendations made in the previous inspection report. The school did not yet fully meet the ambitious aims which were shared with parents and other stakeholders.

Key features of the school

- The good attainment and progress in English and mathematics, and the high quality of teaching in those departments;
- The commitment and enthusiasm of the great majority of the teaching staff;
- The wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities;
- The good facilities and resources for learning.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment in Islamic Education, Arabic and science and ensure that the Ministry of Education requirements for time allocation are met in full;
- Focus the work of the management team, so that there is better monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, in order to achieve greater consistency and quality between the different subject departments;
- Improve teaching and learning so that the planning and delivery of lessons take account of the learning needs of all students in each class;
- Refine and develop the curriculum so that it meets the aims of the school, with respect to arts and sciences in the high school phase;
- Improve assessment arrangements so that :
 - the assessments provide students with regular feedback on their progress and attainment and include details for the areas for improvement;
 - Student attainment is benchmarked against objective standards, verified against international standards and recognised with qualifications of international validity.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were unsatisfactory across the school. Students in the high school phase did not study Islamic Education during the first semester, while the rest of the school did only one period per week, which was not sufficient for the students to develop their knowledge and skills. Generally, students had limited knowledge about Islam and they did not show sufficient understanding of how to relate Islam to their lives. Although the majority of students were able to recite short chapters from The Holy Qur'an, they did not show significant understanding and they could not discuss lessons to learn from those chapters.

Progress in Arabic was acceptable in all phases. Attainment was acceptable across the school. Most children in KG were able to identify sounds and write letters and write single words. Most Grade 5 Arab students had an acceptable knowledge about grammar and they were able to apply this knowledge to single sentences. Most Grade 8 students read poetry aloud, but few could read it expressively. Most Grade 12, non-Arab students were able to read aloud a short story and answered basic comprehension questions, but the level of the curriculum provided to those students was very low and not sufficiently challenging. The school was not fully compliant with Ministry of Education time allocations for Arabic in the elementary section.

Overall, attainment and progress in English were good across the school. Reading and listening skills were well-developed. There were some very confident performances in speaking and good examples of analytical and creative writing. However, speaking and writing required further development. By the end of KG, most children demonstrated a good range of vocabulary and could follow instructions well. By the end of the elementary phase, many students showed confidence in reading and discussing books. By the end of the high school phase, many were fluent in expressing their personal views on a range of topics and could discuss and write about literary texts. A minority of students needed to improve their grammar and spelling skills.

Students' progress and their attainment in mathematics were good from KG to Grade 12. In KG to Grade 4, students had a good grasp of basic skills. In Grades 5 to 8, students had developed their skills on such topics as the symbolic representation of expressions and equations and used logical reasoning to verify and prove theorems. In Grades 9 to 12, students showed an understanding of complex numbers and formulae and they could apply these to solve problems. An important characteristic of the department's problem-solving approach was that it could be used to encourage students to make generalisations about rules and concepts, a process central to mathematics.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across all phases of the school. Students were acquiring a satisfactory body of scientific knowledge as they moved through the school. In KG, children had a sound understanding of the five senses. In the elementary phase they knew about cells and what plants and animals needed to live. The knowledge was consolidated in the middle years of the school and, by the high school phase, students showed an acceptable level of understanding of the Periodic Table and the importance of electrons for chemical bonding. However, too much of the knowledge was not sufficiently contextualised; so many students had difficulty applying their knowledge appropriately. Moreover, in most cases students' practical science skills were weak. They did not observe perceptively, measure accurately and apply scientific principles to explain their findings.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable. In the best lessons, relationships between teachers and students were positive and based on mutual respect. There, students demonstrated maturity and self-confidence. However, in a number of classes, and notably in high school phase, the attitude and behaviour of some students disrupted learning. Attendance was good, but punctuality was not consistently acceptable. A number of students arrived late to school as the start of the day and there was a generally casual approach to timekeeping between lessons, particularly in the high school phase.

Students were aware of their responsibilities in the school and broader community. Regular student council meetings offered them some sense of involvement in planning extra-curricular activities. The school encouraged a whole school awareness of Islamic events and non-Muslim students demonstrated a basic knowledge of Islam, its beliefs and special occasions. Students were aware of the multicultural character of Dubai's society and felt that everyone was equal and equally respected. They retained a clear awareness of their own national identity but understood the importance of traditions and local heritage to the people of the United Arab Emirates.

Students had a basic awareness of how Dubai had developed. They could describe some of the important aspects of Dubai's economy and identify key recent developments in Dubai's infrastructure. They were able to discuss in simple terms the place of Dubai in the global economy and some of the effects of the recent world financial crisis. They were less sure of their own potential role in contributing to Dubai's future. Students had a good level of awareness of a range of environmental issues, both local and global, such as air pollution and the need for water conservation.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, the quality of teaching was acceptable. There was, however, considerable variation across the school with many good lessons, but an almost equal proportion of unsatisfactory lessons. Teaching was often good in the KG and elementary years and in English and mathematics, whereas in Islamic Education, Arabic and in science, many of the lessons observed were unsatisfactory. In the good lessons, the planning and pace were good, objectives were clear and students were engaged and challenged. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, teachers used a single mode of lesson delivery; they taught the class as a single unit and did not cater well for different students' learning needs. In the best lessons teachers were using resources for learning, including computers and interactive whiteboards, highly effectively to exemplify ideas and enliven the learning. In less successful lessons students were seen copying into their exercise books teachers' prepared text which had been projected onto the whiteboard. The best teachers used stimulating questions to check knowledge and encourage a response from students. In the least successful lessons the student voice was heard hardly at all and lessons proceeded with a teacher monologue.

The quality of learning closely mirrored the quality of teaching. Too often students' learning was limited to the acquisition of facts at the expense of consolidation. An exception was in mathematics where the good teaching was promoting the effective application of knowledge. In English too, the learning was of generally high quality, since students were actively engaged in their learning. In general, however, the quality of learning for the more senior students had not been developed sufficiently for the students to be well prepared for their progression to higher education.

In KG the assessment arrangements were largely orally based and the children's progress was enhanced through regular feedback on their achievements often in the form of encouragement and praise. As the students matured and moved through the school, the assessment strategies were not being developed in a way which enhanced learning, or provided students with any independent objective measures of their performance. In science, for example, there was an excessive use of mini-quizzes and episodic random fact checks, which promoted only superficial knowledge acquisition. In the mathematics department, there had been a recent initiative to benchmark the students' performance against objective external standards, but this approach was absent elsewhere in the school. There was, therefore, no way of knowing, at any stage, the achievements of the students in relation to international standards. Except in English and in mathematics, assessment was not being used effectively to inform teaching and learning. Most teachers had only a weak awareness of students' individual strengths and areas for development.

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

Overall, the curriculum was unsatisfactory. Managers reviewed this area annually but had failed to match the curriculum to the school's stated philosophy or fully meet the needs of all students. The curriculum for KG provided a stimulating experience for young children. The curricula for English and mathematics had been reviewed and were good, but those for science, Islamic Education and Arabic were unsatisfactory. In particular, the school was not complying with the required Ministry of Education time allocations for Islamic Education and Arabic. The computing course was not effectively meeting students' needs. The science curriculum lacked balance over Grades 10 to 12, disadvantaging some in the area of physics. The pre-medicine, pre-business and other similar programmes offered in the high school phase lacked depth and relevance. The music programme, an important strand of the school's curricular philosophy, lacked suitable breadth, balance and cohesion. Neither art nor music continued beyond Grade 8. Cross-curricular links were generally very limited. In the broader context of preparing young people to contribute to Dubai's future, the curriculum did not provide clear contexts for encouraging, in its students, a wider range of skills, with an emphasis on creativity and independent thinking. The school offered its young people a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. These activities engaged a good cross-section of the school population and were well attended. They included many sports, charity drives, an art exhibition, science fair and talent show.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection provided to students was good throughout the school. The school was secure and uniformed security guards monitored the external gates. However, some corridor doors which led to stairwells were locked. The building and outdoor facilities were well maintained and clean. A doctor worked at the school two days each week and a full-time nurse was on duty from the beginning of the school day until the end of after-school activities. She kept accurate health records and communicated with various parents daily. A newly created written emergency evacuation plan was in place and successfully implemented with a practice evacuation being executed in a timely fashion. Students' safety and security on school transport was assured through the satellite tracking of the buses as well as the presence of adult monitors on those buses.

The quality of support provided to students was good, except in the high school phase, where it was acceptable. Students reported that their teachers were willing to help them and that they benefited from generally positive relationships with them. Students received advice and guidance on a range of matters, including educational progress and their future. The school usually dealt with students' questions, needs and concerns efficiently. Parents were alerted whenever any serious misbehaviour occurred. External agencies were used to support students and their families when necessary. The tracking and supporting of students' overall well-being and academic progress, however, were not consistent throughout the school. Student attendance was good and absences were followed up with telephone calls to parents.

However, there was a great deal of lateness to school in the morning, particularly amongst the older students. Moreover, the school was not vigilant in promoting punctuality to lessons. In the high school phase many students were often late to classes which disrupted the teaching and learning.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Overall, the quality of leadership and management of the school were acceptable. The vision for the school was an ambitious one which had yet to be realised. The senior management team had a strong commitment to students' welfare and well-being. However, attainment required improvement in certain areas and certain important statutory requirements in relation to the curriculum were not being met. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's work were not fully effective, resulting in a wide variance in the quality of teaching between departments. There was not a culture of high achievement in the secondary grades, ambitions were weak and students' attitudes were overly casual. The senior leaders had not been successful in developing team-working at all levels; the departments operated independently of one another and the senior management team was not yet able to monitor performance consistently and rigorously and share best practice.

The under-developed self-evaluation systems meant that the recommendations from the previous report had only been partially addressed in certain departments. In the English and mathematics departments the teaching quality, the assessment procedures and students' enquiry skills had all improved in line with the recommendations. Elsewhere in the school the school's post-inspection action plan had had little impact. The ambitious school development plan was not underpinned and informed by a detailed self-knowledge of the current performance and the areas of weakness and strength.

Links with parents were acceptable and two-way communication was readily available. Equally, the school had some effective links with the local community through educational visits and competitions.

The owners had ambitious plans to establish a board of trustees to oversee the work of the school. This board of trustees would have representation from all relevant stakeholders and it would operate independently of the commercial company board. At the time of the inspection the approval to establish this body had been received but it was not yet operational.

The staffing, facilities and resources were, overall, of acceptable quality. The facilities and the educational resources were of good quality. A significant number of teaching staff, although generally appropriately qualified, were relatively inexperienced. Many of these teachers brought energy, enthusiasm and creative approaches to the classroom. However, a few showed clearly their lack of experience in poor lesson planning and preparation which resulted in unsatisfactory learning outcomes. The facilities were extensive and of good quality. The resources for learning were extensive and they served to enhance the quality of education.

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?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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