

New Academy 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.

New Academy School was inspected in November 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 Bur Dubai, New Academy School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12 aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 710 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were supportive of the school, believing the school promoted good behaviour and the values of respect, honesty and responsibility. The positive interaction between parents and staff was appreciated. Almost all parents felt that the school had established good links with parents. They were positive about the leadership and management, and found the school approachable and responsive to their questions and concerns. While remaining supportive of the school, a significant minority had concerns about the lack of opportunities for extra-curricular activities.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school's performance overall was unsatisfactory. Its response to the recommendations from the last inspection was ineffective because the leadership of the school failed to address the areas of self-evaluation and improvement planning as recommended in the previous report. Subject leaders, without direction, had had a significant input in raising the level of teaching and learning from unsatisfactory to acceptable in Grades 1 to 12. Due to weaknesses in leadership and management the improvements in teaching and learning were not consistent across the school. Better teaching and learning were mostly observed in the high school but in Kindergarten, the quality of teaching and learning had deteriorated and was unsatisfactory. The curriculum was judged unsatisfactory at the previous inspection and little progress had been made. No progress was made with regard to governance. The school had continued to be unaccountable to parents and other stakeholders for its performance and quality. Serious weaknesses remained and therefore the school lacked the capacity to improve without considerable support.

Attainment and progress in all areas of the curriculum in Kindergarten were unsatisfactory. Attainment and progress in elementary, middle and high school phases was acceptable across most subjects. Students' personal and social development was acceptable. They were well-behaved and the majority of students had positive attitudes to their work. Teaching, learning and assessment in the Kindergarten were unsatisfactory. The methods of teaching were not suitable to meet the needs of young children. Teaching and learning were acceptable across the rest of school but there was insufficient attention paid to challenging the more able students and supporting the less able ones. The curriculum was unsatisfactory. Although it was reviewed annually and some improvements had been made since the last inspection, the curriculum rationale remained unclear in a number of key subject areas and was mostly dictated by the overuse of textbooks. The curriculum followed by the Kindergarten children failed to give them the basic skills for learning. The school's attention to health and safety was acceptable but some matters such as a policy for risk assessment and a systematic process for planned activities were insufficiently formalised. Students did not benefit from a formal programme of support and guidance and their progress was not tracked or monitored. Leadership and management of the school were unsatisfactory. There was no strategic planning to make improvements and raise standards and no governing body existed to offer support and act as a critical friend.

Key features of the school

- Attitudes and behaviour were good and students readily accepted positions of responsibility;
- Teaching and learning in Kindergarten were unsatisfactory;
- Although attainment and progress was acceptable in most subjects, students were not supported or challenged well in lessons and children in Kindergarten made unsatisfactory progress in all areas of their learning;
- There was a lack of attention to the different groups of students, particularly those with special educational needs;
- The curriculum was unsatisfactory and was dictated by the overuse of textbooks;
- Assessment arrangements were weak and information was not used effectively to inform planning, check progress or help students improve their work;
- Leadership and management exerted little influence over the way the school worked.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to meet the needs of all students, especially in Kindergarten, by ensuring that teachers;
 - plan lessons focused on what students will know and understand;
 - question students to develop critical thinking and enquiry skills;
 - make connections to previous learning and real-life situations;
- Establish consistent and effective assessments in order to have a clearer understanding of students' progress;
- Develop the curriculum in all phases, with a clear rationale to enable the school to move away from the over-reliance on textbooks;
- Ensure that there are arrangements in place to track and support academic progress over time;
- Improve the quality of leadership by;
 - providing a clear sense of direction for the school, involving all staff;
 - developing an effective system of self-evaluation that clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses;
 - establishing a governing body to provide guidance and accountability for the school.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education in elementary and middle schools was acceptable; it was good in the high school. Progress was good throughout the phases. Students in high school had good understanding and appreciation of Islam, particularly in the girls section. They were able to discuss in depth the impact of marriage and divorce on society. In Grade 9, students could explain the rituals of the pilgrimage (Haj). In Grade 7, students related their understanding of the Qur'an to their lives and could distinguish between Pillars of Islam and Pillars of Faith. They also could perform prayers and ablutions. Throughout all phases, students memorised the prescribed verses from The Holy Qur'an and could recite with proper Tajweed rules. Students used research to support and justify their ideas.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable in all phases; progress was good in the elementary school and acceptable in middle and high schools. In general, students had limited opportunities for conversational activities. Across the school, students demonstrated age-appropriate oral reading skills, and in the high school, students had good understanding of poems, but their analysis lacked sufficient depth. Across the phases, students' writings, including dictation passages, were often limited to familiar topics. In the high school, extended writing was often restricted in range and variety of genres. Students knew grammatical rules well, but did not always apply them to their speaking and writing.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable. Progress in elementary school was good and acceptable in middle and high schools. Overall, students across school could read age-appropriate texts correctly. Their skills in conversation were limited. Their writing skills were limited to familiar topics including dictation. In Grades 4 and 5, students made good progress in reading and writing. In the middle and high school stages, students developed good understanding of the poetic texts they studied but they lacked critical thinking skills. Students knew grammatical rules well. However, they did not apply these consistently in their speaking and writing. In high school, students' skills of extended writing were under developed.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in elementary, middle and high schools. In Kindergarten they were unsatisfactory with children not showing expected attainment and progress for their age. Learning was based on rote repetition with no independent or meaningful learning. By Grade 5, attainment in English in listening, speaking, reading and writing was acceptable and at expected levels with writing the least developed skill. Students mostly wrote single-word and short-sentence responses. Progress in Grades 1 and 2 was unsatisfactory and was acceptable in Grades 3 to 5. By Grade 9, students in the middle school demonstrated good speaking and reading skills. They knew the grammar rules and could use them appropriately. Listening skills were acceptable. Writing was acceptable though not sufficiently well developed. By Grade 12, attainment and progress were in line with age-level expectations.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were unsatisfactory in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the elementary, middle and high schools. Elementary school students demonstrated their understanding of place value to multiply and divide whole numbers and decimals by 10, 100 and 1000. In Grade 6, students were able to produce bar charts from experiments with coloured discs and could respond correctly to questions about their work. In Grade 8, students could simplify quadratic expressions and equate them to zero to produce two solutions from the resulting equation. In Grade 12, students could solve problems involving the addition and subtraction of definite integrals and understood their interpretation in terms of areas under curves.

In the Kindergarten, attainment and progress in science were unsatisfactory. Attainment and progress in the elementary, middle and high schools were acceptable. Most students achieved the levels required by the school in the internal assessments. In comparison with international standards, students gained scientific knowledge and understanding to a broadly similar level. However, the achievement of Grade 12 students was below international levels of attainment. Students in elementary school demonstrated a satisfactory knowledge of life processes. Middle school students understood different aspects of plant life. Grades 6 and 7 students were able to name the male and female parts of a flower. High school students were able to recall definitions related to aspects of chemical bonding. However, the development of the skills of enquiry was under developed.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good in all phases of the school. Good behaviour was observed in most lessons and during recess time in the recreational areas. Relationships between teachers and students were good. However, a significant number of students, mostly in the higher grades, were late for assembly each day. Students were aware of healthy eating and made appropriate choices in the school canteen. Students appreciated the need for taking regular exercise and looking after their bodies. Attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good overall. Although limited, students had opportunities to take on positions of responsibility in the school and responded positively to the challenges. Students could appreciate the relevance and impact of Islam on contemporary society in Dubai and how Muslim beliefs reflected on their own lives. Students valued the multi-cultural nature of the school, Dubai and the United Arab Emirates and the opportunities afforded by living in such a dynamic environment. However, opportunities for students to learn more about the civic amenities and heritage of Dubai were not covered in the school curriculum.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable overall in the school. Most of the students knew the basic history of Dubai and how it had developed. They were able to discuss sustainability issues relating to the future of Dubai and could discuss the economics of desalination and tourism at a basic level. However, students were unclear about how the economic successes of Dubai had come about and the contribution that the staging of world

class events has made to the development of the emirate. Some instances of disregard for litter in classrooms were noted.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable overall in the elementary, middle and high schools, but unsatisfactory in Kindergarten. Teaching strategies were narrow in the lower grades, for example, with overuse of rote learning and repetition. There were few opportunities for independent learning and learning by doing. Teaching was based on textbooks and did not meet all learners' needs. Resources beyond the textbook and enquiry-based activities were not commonly used to support learning. Most teachers showed adequate subject knowledge. Lesson plans showed lesson objectives and resources, but not the expected student outcomes. The pace of lessons was acceptable but teachers rarely checked for students' understanding. Many lessons were pitched below the level of the students' abilities, with little challenge. Effective teaching in the middle and high schools provided students with independent, enquiry and research-based work. The improvements in teaching had yet to impact consistently across all subjects and all classes.

Learning was acceptable in the elementary, middle and high schools. It was unsatisfactory in Kindergarten where children learned mainly through repetition. Elsewhere, students were often enthusiastic and involved in their class work, but were rarely given opportunities to connect learning with the real world or across subject areas. When collaboration and group work occurred in the middle and high schools, it significantly helped students' learning. Students in the high school were often allowed to take responsibility for their own learning through independent enquiry, research and investigation. Critical and higher-order thinking were seen in a few high school mathematics lessons. In high school, English lessons, research and independent thinking aided learning and higher attainment. However, in many classes students rarely worked without persistent direction from their teachers.

Assessment was unsatisfactory across all phases. Learning objectives were rarely discussed with students to evaluate learning and progress. Attainment was not evaluated against standardised norms. Teachers assessed learning through questioning which was of variable quality. Where teachers had a clear idea of students' strengths and weaknesses, they adapted teaching. Marking of students' work often did not have comments about how to improve. There was record-keeping of results but no school policy document and implementation. There was little analysis of internal test data to improve teaching and learning. Students had not been assessed to identify gaps in learning and did not know the level at which they were achieving so that they could set targets to improve. The school used only internal tests to gain information about students' attainment and progress. There was no international benchmark testing to show students standards and to help them apply for entry to tertiary institutes.

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

The quality of the curriculum was judged unsatisfactory across all phases. Although the curriculum was reviewed annually and some improvements had been made since the last inspection, the curriculum rationale remained unclear in a number of key subject areas and was mostly dictated by textbooks. The curriculum followed by the Kindergarten children failed to give them the basic skills for learning in the elementary school and paid disregard to science. The mathematics curriculum, although linked closely to a series of textbooks, was progressive and, in the high school, challenging for the students. Continuity and progression in science and in English relied on texts rather than on the teachers' understanding of how an effectively developed curriculum directly impacts on students' learning. The English curriculum did not have enough breadth and depth in the range and scope of topics offered. In both science and English, there was some curriculum repetition year on year, particularly of grammar in English and in biological topics in science. Non-Muslims in the school were not following a clear programme of study alongside Islamic Education classes. There were limited opportunities for students to develop creative skills. Transition arrangements for individual students were not in place between the different phases of the school leading to discontinuities in the curriculum for different groups of students, particularly those with special educational needs. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities and cross-curricular work were extremely limited, although the opportunities afforded by the information and communication technologies that have been installed in the computer laboratories were beginning to have some impact in this area.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for the health, safety and security of students across the school was acceptable. Daily and weekly checks were carried out to ensure that acceptable standards were maintained. Records of regular fire drills and evacuation procedures were up-to-date. A policy for risk assessment was not in place and no systematic process was in use for planned activities. Medical staff carried out their duties effectively. The nurse and doctor had well-developed systems for holding and administering medicines. Incidents or accidents were recorded and reported, and parents were kept fully informed. The school nurse was active in the encouragement of healthy lifestyles. Not all staff and students were fully aware of the recent appointment and function of the child protection officer.

The support and guidance for students were unsatisfactory. Relationships throughout the whole school were good. Both staff and students were respectful of each other's roles in the school community. Staff advice and guidance to students about their academic performance and what progress they had been made was inconsistent. There was no arrangement in place for advising on career choices. However, students were given the opportunity to visit local universities and higher education conventions when considering the next stage of their education. Tracking of students' academic progress was not comprehensive and co-ordinated. The identification of and provision for students with special educational needs was

unsatisfactory. There was insufficient information available to teachers to enable them to plan effectively to meet all students' needs.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the school's leadership was unsatisfactory. Senior leaders provided insufficient vision for the school and delegated school improvement to subject leaders. Because there was no strategy for formal school discussions, any impact on school improvement was inconsistent. The Principal lacked understanding of how to review and evaluate initiatives successfully and a significant minority of teachers did not understand how to put ideas into practice in their classrooms. Some initiatives, for example in mathematics, had impacted on the overall quality of teaching and learning in Grades 1 to 12. However, the lack of monitoring by senior leadership resulted in unsatisfactory teaching and learning in Kindergarten and variable quality of teaching and learning in the rest of the school. Performance management of staff was not in place and there were no clear plans for professional development.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. The school had no formal processes of self-evaluation and there was no strategic plan in place. Records of examinations were not used to inform school improvement. The recommendations from the previous report were not fully understood or acted upon. The list of completed improvements provided no evidence of future actions. Leaders did not have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, there was no corporate understanding of what the school needed to do to raise standards or planning of steps to effect improvements.

The quality of partnerships with parents and the community was acceptable. There were some established links with parents to support students' progress and personal development but parents were not influential in the school's shaping of new policies. Parents were invited to attend school consultation events and received information about their child's results in school assessment. Comments about the quality of their learning and what they needed to do to improve were limited. However, parents said they felt welcome in the school and, when they had a problem, all of their concerns were satisfactorily addressed by the school. There were developing links with the community that made some impact on the quality of learning and students made visits to local areas when applicable.

Governance was unsatisfactory. There were no arrangements in place to help school leaders and stakeholders review and evaluate the work of the school and no arrangements to ensure that statutory requirements were being met by the school. The Principal was answerable to the owners but there was no regular monitoring of her performance or of the overall performance of the school.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Teachers provided sufficient resources for students to take part in activities. There was only one science laboratory which was insufficient for the number of students in 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 | Acceptable | Acceptable | Good |
| Progress over time | Not Applicable | Good | Good | Good |

| How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? | | | | |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 90% 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 | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress in Arabic as a first language | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Attainment in Arabic as an additional language | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress in Arabic as an additional language | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |

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

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

| 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 | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Economic and environmental understanding | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

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

| 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 | Unsatisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Unsatisfactory |

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

| How well does the school perform overall? |
|---|
| Unsatisfactory |

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 will undertake a Follow-Through Inspection of New Academy School within three months of the original inspection and report to parents regarding 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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