

INSPECTION REPORT

Universal American School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Universal American School

Location	Festival City
Type of school	Private
Website	www.uasdubai.ae
Telephone	04-2325222
Address	PO Box 79133, Dubai Festival City, Dubai
Principal	Dr. Gunther Brandt
Curriculum	US/IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Grades	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1,180
Number of Emirati students	115 (10%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 5th December to Thursday 8th December 2011

Contents

The context of the school.....	3
Overall school performance 2011-2012	3
How has the school progressed since the last inspection?.....	3
Key strengths	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?	7
How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?	8
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?	9
How well does the school protect and support students?	10
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	11
What are the views of parents, teachers and students?	12
What happens next?	14
How to contact us	14
Our work with schools	15

The context of the school

Universal American School is located in Festival City. It is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection the school had a total roll of 1,180 students. Approximately ten per cent of students were Emirati. Seventy nationalities were represented among the student population. An English Language learner program was provided for students up to Grade 10. A total of 14 specialist staff members provided learning support and counselling. Student attendance over the last term was good.

The school followed a US and International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (PYP) was provided in Kindergarten to Grade 6, a school-developed US based curriculum in Grades 7 to 10, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) in Grades 11 and 12. Students sat a variety of external examinations.

There were 126 teachers, all of whom had teacher qualifications. The staff also included a director, two principals, two assistant principals, curriculum co-ordinators including information and communication technology (ICT) co-ordinators, two librarians for two separate libraries and a data management specialist. There were 15 teaching assistants.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The Universal American School provided a good quality of education with outstanding features. There were a number of important strengths. These included the quality of leadership, students' personal and social development, the protection and support of students, partnerships with parents and the community, and the facilities and resources. Teachers and students demonstrated caring and respectful relationships and student behaviour in all phases was outstanding. Teaching and learning were good, though variable, across all phases. Students had an outstanding understanding of Islam, appreciation for local traditions and cultures. They demonstrated outstanding civic, economic and environmental awareness.

The school had made good progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report. The aim to make Arabic a living language and plans to develop cross-curricular links within the subject were realised for students of Arabic as an additional language, but less so for those students for whom Arabic was a first language. The improvement of English literacy skills was also noted in the elementary grades. The school was continuing its work raising the standard of Islamic Education. The school had developed a good system to collect and analyse data, particularly at the high school level. Staff were in the early stages using data to analyse student and program strengths and weaknesses and to inform daily instruction.

Key strengths

- The students' good attainment in English and science across all phases and students' outstanding progress in mathematics;
- The outstanding curriculum in the Kindergarten;
- Students' outstanding personal and social development and the positive relationships between students and teachers;
- The positive ethos which led to high levels of care for students at all phases;
- School leaders at every phase were dedicated to continuous improvement, resulting in higher student attainment.

Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education;
- Provide teachers in all phases with opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in other subject areas to further enhance teaching quality;
- Plan and deliver lessons that include active learning, explicit links between subjects and the development of higher order and critical thinking skills;
- Use assessment data that accurately reflects student achievement to improve lessons;
- Take immediate steps to ensure that Ministry of Education (MoE) requirements for Muslim students are met in Islamic Education in Grades 1 to 3.

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
English				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

Attainment in English, mathematics and science was good across all phases. Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable in all phases. Attainment in Arabic as a first language was good at the elementary stage and acceptable at the middle and high phases. Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable at the elementary and good at the middle and high phases. The school's analysis of student performance data in some cases did not accurately reflect their attainment, although this was improving. Attainment information was less available and less widely used at the Kindergarten and elementary phases than it was in middle and secondary phases. The performance of students on external assessments in the past three years showed improvement, with significant improvement in mathematics. In science, there was more variability of performance. In lessons, most students demonstrated knowledge at the expected levels, but higher order and critical thinking skills were under developed, except in the later high school years.

Progress in Arabic as an additional language, English and science was good and in Islamic Education it was acceptable. In Arabic as a first language, progress was good in the elementary phase and acceptable in the middle and high phases. In English, progress in the Kindergarten in all aspects of language acquisition was rapid. Progress in writing in English in Grades 6 to 8 was not as strong as other aspects. Progress in literary analysis and essay technique in Grades 9 to 12 was a notable strength. In mathematics, students were proficient applying mathematical routines to solve problems, but somewhat weaker in dealing with underlying concepts while solving more complex problems. In science, students showed greater progress in experimental skills in the high school with outstanding skills in some higher level classes. Progress in developing scientific skills and knowledge at the Kindergarten, elementary and middle phases was slow.

The attainment and progress of Emirati students were similar to other students in the school. Participation and positive behaviour and attitudes led to good progress in learning and attainment. In English International Baccalaureate examinations, Emirati students showed good attainment. In all phases, Emirati students exhibited similar strengths and weaknesses as non-Emirati students: good listening and reading skills in the Kindergarten and elementary, with developing writing skills as they matured. Conceptual learning was weaker in the elementary and middle phases than in the high school. The development of higher order and critical thinking skills was evident in students' work in the high school more than in the earlier stages.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes to school and one another resulted in excellent behaviour. They were self-disciplined, took responsibility and resolved conflict in mature ways from an early age. Students' commitment to following a healthy lifestyle was well developed and attendance levels were good. All students' understanding of Islam was excellent and had improved; they spoke confidently on its relevance and impact on Dubai and the wider region. Both Muslim and other students understood and respected Islamic values. Students showed excellent understanding of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and discussed a wide range of cultural issues in depth. They enjoyed celebrating the diversity of the school and the local population. Almost all students demonstrated excellent understanding of Dubai's economic context and development, citing very relevant examples. Similarly, almost all students showed very good understanding of environmental sustainability. They provided good examples of how their behaviour impacted on the environment.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

Teaching for effective learning was good overall, with some inconsistencies in quality across subjects and phases. In most lessons teachers had secure knowledge of their subjects and how students learned, which led to students making good progress. Time was managed well in the majority of lessons, with plenaries used effectively to review and consolidate learning. Most classrooms provided interesting and welcoming learning environments where students could think, reflect, make mistakes and grow. Detailed lesson plans included clear objectives, expected learning outcomes and success criteria which were communicated effectively to students. In a few lessons activities were not effectively planned to ensure that all students made good progress. In the best lessons, the skillful use of targeted questions was instrumental in checking for understanding and challenging the more able students. In lessons where teachers facilitated learning rather than dominating with constant talk, students collaborated and supported each other effectively. The quality of teaching and learning in subjects other than the key subjects was good overall. A few examples of specialist teaching resulted in positive outcomes for students in art, music, physical education and social studies. In these lessons, teachers' expertise was high and students were actively involved in their learning. This resulted in high levels of enjoyment and good progress.

Students in all phases developed well as learners. They shared resources responsibly and supported one another. They were confident learners who knew when to celebrate achievements, how to evaluate the quality of their own and others' learning and to ask for support when needed. Good modeling by most teachers enabled students to develop strong collaboration skills, although these were better in the elementary grades than elsewhere in the school. As independent learners, students of all ages were able to discuss learning confidently with visitors and each other. Opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support research and enquiry were not well developed across all subjects.

The assessment of learning in all phases was good. The school used a wide variety of high-quality examinations and internal assessment instruments, including diagnostic tests. The use of scoring rubrics in most areas made assessment criteria clear to students. Students in some classes participated in self and peer evaluation, although less so in the middle and high grades. Assessment results were analysed and information was beginning to be used to improve teaching and learning. Formative assessment was well developed in some classes, but not throughout the school; teachers sometimes did not provide written feedback to help students improve their work.

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

The curriculum was good in all sections of the school, and outstanding in the Kindergarten. It was regularly reviewed and work was continuing to embed IB principles. The Kindergarten curriculum was varied and challenging. A developing conceptual curriculum was designed to bridge the gap for Grades 7 to 10 between the PYP and the IB Diploma Program. The curriculum was stimulating and diverse in most disciplines and it engaged most students. Arabic as a first language, however, lacked differentiation and did not meet the needs of all students. The time allocated for delivery of the Islamic Education curriculum for Arabic students in Grades 1 to 3 did not meet the Ministry of Education requirements. There were inter-disciplinary links in many subjects, although fewer in the middle and high school phases. Throughout the school, there was insufficient emphasis on developing enquiry and critical thinking skills. Integration of ICT to enrich and expand the curriculum was limited but growing. Boys and girls participated in a full extra-curricular sports program, but it was limited for students in the Diploma Program. The school made outstanding use of community resources to enrich its curriculum.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Health and safety arrangements were outstanding. The school had a 'safety-first' approach, ensuring student safety throughout. A large, attentive security staff was evident. Buses were well maintained and had monitors aboard. Safety routines in science laboratories were well established. A qualified nurse and assistants provided a high level of care in suitably equipped facilities and they maintained thorough records. Several staff members had received first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation training. The buildings were well maintained and safe. Emergency drills were held regularly. Students were well supervised at all times. Although there was some encouragement of healthy eating, a significant minority of students required further support to make healthy food choices. Physical education was not fully available to students in the Diploma Program. Teachers, counsellors, medical staff and administrators were highly attentive to students' care and welfare. Details for referral of child protection cases were set out clearly in the staff handbook. Staff members had taken a proactive approach to preventing incidents of bullying, including training students to use intervention strategies.

The quality of support for students was outstanding throughout the school. Staff-student relations were warm and respectful throughout. Each age-group had counsellors. Students were fully supported in their college applications and progression to the next stages in their education, beginning in Grade 9. A high number of English language and other specialist teachers supported students with a broad range of learning strategies. Student reports were monitored and a study team met weekly to ensure that students' learning needs were met. Students at risk were placed on academic warning or probation and received appropriate support and assistance with goal setting. Students with special educational needs made similar progress to their peers. Attendance and punctuality were managed through well-defined procedures.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

School leaders were highly skilled and had established an effective system of distributed leadership to support and improve student learning. All leaders demonstrated a high capacity to improve the school. Leaders shared a common vision for the school, which was communicated uniformly to teachers, students and parents. Teachers and leaders modeled trusting and caring relationships among each other and with students, using supportive language, humour and patience in their interactions. There was a strong ethos of collaborative responsibility and mutual support amongst all, especially to address daily issues quickly and effectively. Leaders at all phases were perceptive about students' needs and knowledgeable about effective management and instructional strategies. Some leaders at the elementary phase had insufficient time to monitor teaching. Overall, leaders' involvement in the daily work and celebrations of their students was undertaken with a strong commitment to student success and well-being.

Improvement planning was effective, with detailed, realistic and well-focused goals. Self-evaluation was good, with a need for more realistic assessment of the school's progress since the last inspection and a better knowledge of the presence, or lack, of effective instructional practices in classrooms. Implementation of significant changes was underway, with key personnel, such as an ICT integration coordinator and a data management specialist hired to assist the school. Changes in the leadership structure of the elementary phase were planned to allow better monitoring of classrooms.

Highly productive links existed between parents and the school leaders. Parents were able to communicate freely with staff and with school owners if needed. Parents demonstrated a great deal of respect for the school's leaders. They praised their transparency and approachability and appreciated the invitation to be involved in their children's learning. Parents described involvement in many areas, including extra-curricular activities, school celebrations, sports and well-being programs for students. There was an active Parent-Teacher Organisation, but it did not have a formal presence on the governing/advisory board.

The school was governed by representatives of the owner. There was an advisory group of which the director was a member. There was no parent or teacher representation on this group. Nevertheless, the owner representative and a company regional representative were on-site and parents reported open communication with both. The governor also sat on a faculty committee which met as needed. The director was held formally accountable by the governor and his advisory group at least three times a year, with detailed reports provided to them about all aspects of the school.

Management of the day-to-day life of the school was outstanding, with highly effective deployment of staff and resources. The premises were well suited for learning at all ages, with a celebration of student work and performances a mainstay of the school. This was evident in hallways and common areas, classrooms and libraries. A large number of teachers were dedicated to providing care and support, resulting in a student body that appeared happy, respectful of individual differences and eager to learn. The learning resources were of high quality and equally distributed for use by the youngest to the oldest. The investment in ICT was apparent throughout, although the teachers' skill in its effective use was varied.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	189	24%
	Last year	241	31%
Teachers	58		46%
Students	254		95%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A minority of parents responded to the survey, fewer than last year's response. Almost half of the teachers and almost all senior students responded to their surveys. Parents and students indicated overall satisfaction with the quality of education available at the school. Most parents believed that their children were making good progress in English, mathematics and science. A majority of parents believed that progress was good in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first or additional language, but a few parents

thought that progress was not good in these subjects. Parents held largely positive views about the school and its provision across a range of aspects. Most parents indicated satisfaction with communication and reported that they were involved in the life of the school. They also believed that the school was preparing their children well for the next stages of education. Teachers held largely positive views about the school. Most students reported that they enjoyed lessons, but a few reported that they did not. A majority of students indicated that they could choose from a good range of subjects, but more than a few students disagreed that this was so. A majority reported that school leaders listened to their opinions about the school, but more than a third indicated otherwise.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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