

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Uptown School

Report published in April, 2014

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Uptown School

|                                       |                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Location                              | Mirdiff                 |
| Type of school                        | Private                 |
| Website                               | www.uptownschooL.ae     |
| Telephone                             | 04-2515001              |
| Address                               | Mirdif                  |
| Principal                             | Timothy Waley           |
| Curriculum                            | IB                      |
| Gender of students                    | Boys and Girls          |
| Age / Grades or Year Groups           | Kindergarten to Grade 9 |
| Attendance                            | Outstanding             |
| Number of students on roll            | 1052                    |
| Largest nationality group of Students | Emirati                 |
| Number of Emirati students            | 201 (19 %)              |
| Date of the inspection                | 24th to 27th November   |

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## The context of the school

Uptown school is located in Mirdif. At the time of the inspection there were 1052 students on roll aged between five and fifteen years, from Kindergarten to Grade 9. The school had been newly established in September 2013, when students and staff from the previous Uptown primary school relocated to a new site and the school admitted its first Grade 7, 8 and 9 students. There were 40, 22 and 14 students respectively in these grades at the time of the inspection. Inspectors took into account the amount of time these students had been in the school when judging their progress.

There were students of 70 different nationalities, with around a fifth who were Emiratis. About a fifth of the students had special educational needs. The school offered three phases of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme, which were the Kindergarten (KG), the Primary Years Programme (PYP) Grades 1 to 5 and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) in Grades 6 to 9. The school made provision for children in the early years in four Pre-Kindergarten classes.

## Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

### Key strengths

- Students' good learning skills, together with effective teaching, enabled them to progress well and reach good standards in most subjects;
- Students' highly positive attitudes and good behaviour contributed significantly to the harmonious climate within the school's multicultural community;
- The outstanding curriculum engaged and motivated students and was modified imaginatively to meet the needs of different groups;
- Students were kept entirely safe and all groups, including those with special educational needs, benefited from outstanding support and guidance;
- Outstanding, principled and insightful leadership resulted in an inclusive ethos within the high quality learning environment.

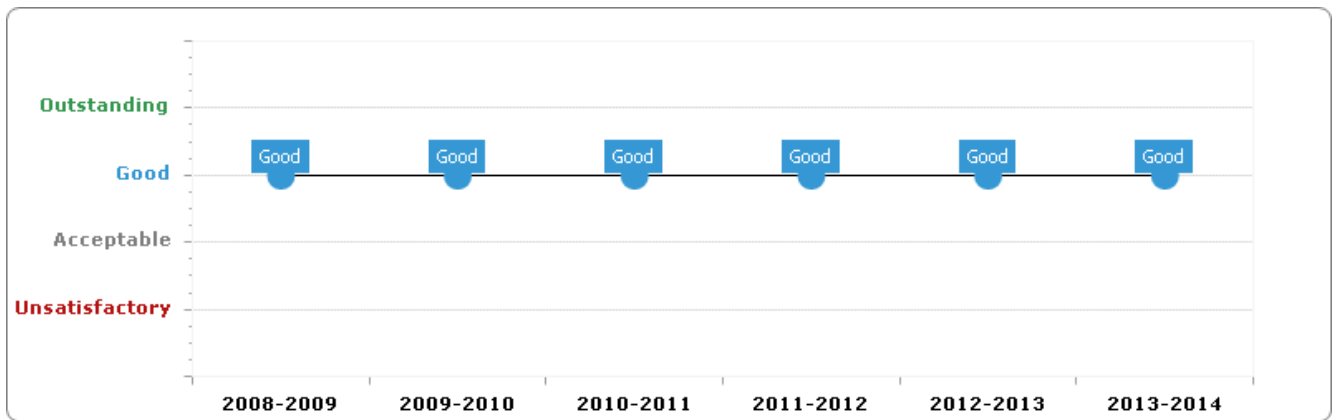
### Recommendations

- Sustain and accelerate the progress students make in the MYP to raise their levels of attainment in Islamic Education, Arabic, English and mathematics;
- Support teachers in further improving students' good learning skills by sharing the outstanding practice evident in many lessons.

## Progress since the last inspection

Very good progress had been made since the previous inspection of the former primary school. The progress of primary students in Arabic had accelerated due to skilled teaching. Learners of English as an additional language were also making better progress due to improvements in provision. The quality of teaching and the MYP curriculum had also improved. Assessment systems had been refined and were being used well by teachers to plan work for different groups based on their existing knowledge, understanding and skills. Transition from the PYP to the MYP was improved due to close liaison between both phases.

## Trend of overall performance



## How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

|   | Kindergarten   | Primary Years | Middle Years   |
|---|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Islamic Education</b>                |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Not Applicable | Good          | Acceptable     |
| Progress                                | Not Applicable | Good          | Good           |
| <b>Arabic as a first language</b>       |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Not Applicable | Good          | Acceptable     |
| Progress                                | Not Applicable | Good          | Good           |
| <b>Arabic as an additional language</b> |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Not Applicable | Good          | Acceptable     |
| Progress                                | Not Applicable | Good          | Acceptable     |
| <b>English</b>                          |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Good           | Good          | Acceptable     |
| Progress                                | Good           | Good          | Good           |
| <b>Mathematics</b>                      |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Good           | Good          | Unsatisfactory |
| Progress                                | Good           | Good          | Good           |
| <b>Science</b>                          |                |               |                |
| Attainment                              | Good           | Good          | Good           |
| Progress                                | Good           | Good          | Good           |

[Read paragraph](#)

|                                      | Kindergarten | Primary Years | Middle YearsMYP |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Quality of students' learning skills | Good         | Good          | Good            |

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

|  | Kindergarten | P Primary Years | Middle Years |
|--|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Personal responsibility  | Outstanding  | Outstanding     | Outstanding  |
| Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness | Good         | Good            | Good         |
| Community and environmental responsibility   | Outstanding  | Outstanding     | Outstanding  |

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

|                                 | Kindergarten | Primary Years | Middle Years |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Teaching for effective learning | Good         | Good          | Good         |
| Assessment                      | Good         | Good          | Good         |

[Read paragraph](#)

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

|  | Kindergarten | Primary Years | Middle Years |
|--|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Curriculum quality   | Outstanding  | Outstanding   | Outstanding  |
| Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students | Outstanding  | Outstanding   | Outstanding  |

[Read paragraph](#)



## How well does the school protect and support students?

|                    | Kindergarten | Primary Years | Middle Years |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Health and Safety  | Outstanding  | Outstanding   | Outstanding  |
| Quality of Support | Outstanding  | Outstanding   | Good         |

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

|  | Whole school |
|--|--------------|
| Quality of leadership                                    | Outstanding  |
| Self-evaluation and improvement planning                 | Outstanding  |
| Parents and the community                                | Outstanding  |
| Governance   | Outstanding  |
| Management, including staffing, facilities and resources | Outstanding  |

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic Education, most students had good knowledge and understanding of Islamic concepts and worship. They used Qur'an verses and Hadeeth as evidence when answering questions. The application of Tajweed rules was less well developed. In Arabic as first language and of Arabic as an additional language, students had good listening skills. They responded appropriately to teachers' instructions and questions. Students' speaking and reading skills were well developed, particularly through the PYP. These were, however, inconsistent across the MYP. Independent writing was acceptable overall although better in the primary phase. In English, students had good reading, speaking and listening skills, although writing was weaker. Because of the influx of new students with lower starting points, attainment was acceptable in Grades 8 and 9 but there were examples of good attainment in Grades 6 and 7. In the KG and the PYP, attainment in number was a particular strength. Children were able to apply their learning to new contexts confidently. Skills in mathematical enquiry were also well developed. Almost all students analysed and undertook practical tasks such as measuring accurately. In the MYP, attainment in mathematics was below expectations because of the wide range of starting points of new students as they entered the school. In science, children in the KG had a good knowledge and understanding of how living things grow and what humans need to be healthy. They had good early scientific skills, such as close observation to identify similarities and differences. In PYP, students understood the water cycle, states of matter and the difference between chemical and physical changes. The majority of students had an exceptionally good understanding of a fair test. This was extended in the MYP when, for example, students used their knowledge and understanding of the periodic table to identify elements and the properties. A minority of students, new to the school, had gaps in their knowledge and understanding and a few were not skilled in planning and carrying out investigations.

Progress in all subjects was good in the KG and PYP. This was a result of well-planned lessons which offered challenge and plenty of meaningful learning experiences, for example in Islamic Education. Students studying Arabic as a first language made good progress in the development of listening, speaking, and writing skills particularly PYP. Students were developing good writing skills in Grades 6 and 7. In Arabic as an additional language, progress in improving most language skills was steady for most students. They acquired new vocabulary quickly and the majority could use what they learned to make sentences or express ideas in a familiar context. In English, students made good progress in speaking, reading and comprehension, although their progress in writing was slower due to some weaknesses in spelling and handwriting, and a lack of confidence in extended writing. Progress in mathematics had accelerated due to skilful modifications to the curriculum that took further account of students' previous learning. In most grades, students were making at least good, and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points. This was especially so in their understanding of science and their skills of enquiry. In the short time many had been in the school,

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students in the MYP had made good progress. Progress in Arabic as an additional language was slower due in part to the variation in students' previous experiences before joining the school. As in other subjects, students in Grades 6 and 7 tended to make quicker progress than those in other grades because around half of them had transferred from the PYP.

[View judgements](#)

## Quality of students' learning skills

Students' learning skills were good. Most students enjoyed school. They were enthusiastic about learning and discovering new things. In a significant number of lessons they demonstrated a variety of the skills necessary for learning, and living and working in the 21st century. They enjoyed working in groups, sharing ideas and solving problems. They could identify things which they wanted to find out in school and at home and routinely used technology and reference books for research. They were not afraid to take a risk when answering questions and understood that making mistakes was an integral part of the learning process. Most students were confident in their explanations and in justifying their responses. They made links with what they had learned in other areas of the curriculum. They developed a deeper understanding when they saw a real purpose to their learning in their own lives and in the real world. In a minority of lessons, skills in listening and speaking, thinking and collaborating were underdeveloped. Students who were new to the school did not always demonstrate the same set of learning skills as those used to the enquiry-based programme.

[View judgements](#)

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Personal responsibility was outstanding across all three phases in this area. The IB learner profile provided a base for character development, goal setting, reflection and class essential agreements. Students worked collaboratively or independently as required in class settings and showed rigour and commitment when completing tasks. They were confident and reflected on their actions. The relationships between students and staff were outstanding. Especially noteworthy was the natural support provided for students with special educational needs by classmates. Students' commitment to a healthy lifestyle grew authentically out of the curriculum. They knew how to build positive relationships and resolve conflicts. Students' enjoyment of school was reflected in their outstanding record of attendance.

Students in all phases demonstrated a good understanding of Islamic values and could discuss how it affected life in Dubai. They showed good understanding of traditions and heritage of UAE. Although students

had clear awareness of the multi-cultural society of Dubai, knowledge and understanding of other cultures globally was less well developed.

Community and environmental responsibility was outstanding. Students actively contributed to the daily life of the school through the newly formed PYP and MYP student councils. The action component of PYP, and community and service in MYP, facilitated student-initiated involvement in activities beyond the school. Students school-wide supported their peers, especially those with learning needs. Students were creative in considering ways to raise funds and support others both within and beyond the school. They had a very secure awareness of environmental issues, such as climatic change and sustainability.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was good across the school. A significant number of lessons were outstanding and no lessons were unsatisfactory. Most teachers had excellent subject knowledge and were skilled in facilitating students' learning by creating an environment in which students could learn for themselves. They were excellent role models for their students and established positive relationships with them. They understood that young people learn best through play and practical activity and by having opportunities to share ideas and solve problems. In most subjects they used a range of strategies and high quality resources, including technology, to engage, motivate and enthuse students. Teachers provided ample opportunities for speaking and listening to enable students to express themselves and share their ideas. They were very skilled in asking questions to get students to think for themselves and to see a real purpose to their learning. Most teachers planned lessons which took account of students' earlier achievements and needs. In a few lessons, most noticeably in Arabic and some English lessons, teachers were not clear about what they wanted the students to learn and they did not enable students to utilise their well-developed learning skills. There was an overuse of English when teaching Arabic in a few lessons.

Assessment was good throughout the school. Students' progress was carefully assessed and recorded. Collaborative planning and moderation of tasks ensured that assessment was well understood, accurate and timely. Classes were relatively small, especially in the MYP and teachers knew their students' strengths and areas for development well. Initial, mid-point and end of unit assessments helped most teachers to plan work that was pitched at the right level and to identify and address underachievement rapidly. However, this was inconsistent in some lessons and did not match individual needs. Feedback in class was good. Students were given clear guidance and asked thought provoking questions which stimulated their thinking. In a majority of classes marking also provided constructive guidance on how to improve, with time allowed

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for students to apply the advice to their work. Clear explanations of criteria helped students to assess their own progress. However, in some classes marking was cursory and less helpful.

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

The curriculum was outstanding and very well planned. Regular reviews fully incorporated the school's mission statement of creating a dynamic environment in which all students and staff could flourish. There was a high focus on independent inquiry, research, critical thinking and global mindedness, ensuring that students were prepared for their next stages of education. The curriculum met all statutory requirements including provision for Arabic and Islamic Education. In the KG, there were outstanding opportunities for young children to learn through their senses and develop their natural curiosity, whilst at the same time developing their basic skills of reading, writing and number. Throughout the PYP and MYP, excellent cross-disciplinary links were made, such as linking art with science, which not only enabled students to deepen their learning but also provided opportunities for continuity and progression. A further strength of the curriculum was the link made to real life learning. For example, students in Grade 9 science were given opportunities to explore the reasons why the use of oxygen was important in medicine. An outstanding range of extra-curricular activities underpinned many aspects of learning and contributed significantly to students' personal development.

The outstanding implementation of the PYP and MYP with the focus on investigations supported the interests, learning styles and learning needs of a range of students. There was appropriate challenge to high achievers and opportunities for success for those with special learning needs. The provision of additional language choices in PYP and the development of a range of subjects in MYP to meet the growth in student numbers and future progression into the IB Diploma enhanced the curriculum.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for protection and support was outstanding. Regular and thorough safety checks ensured a well-maintained environment that was respected and valued by students. The first fire drill in the school year had been very successful. Students had medical checks every year. Detailed and regularly updated information on their medical records was kept securely. A full-time nurse dealt with minor injuries. These were recorded and analysed to identify any trends, for example to spot any areas around the school where students might be prone to tripping. Students' safety and welfare were given the utmost priority. This was evident in the high level of security and the excellent arrangements to keep students as safe as possible

when travelling on school buses. The curriculum included many opportunities for students to learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how to avoid risks, such as when using the internet. A revised child protection policy had been introduced. A training programme had been set up and staff were aware of procedures.

The rapport between all staff and students was outstanding and this resulted in a pervading culture of mutual understanding, respect and acceptance of differences. Teachers were fully aware of the individual characteristics and needs of their students. The use of essential agreements to develop shared, classroom expectations provided a framework for positive behaviour. Accurate records of attendance and punctuality were maintained. The school was inclusive and admitted students with a range of needs. Students were assessed prior to admission and throughout the year. Individualised planning was a feature and data was methodically tracked, shared and updated.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were outstanding. The principal played a key role in ensuring a common sense of purpose and shared vision. He was held in high regard by students, parents and staff. Staff felt valued and supported. Highly effective leadership by the leaders of the early years, primary, and secondary phases meant that this relatively new school had made an exceptionally good start. The strengths evident in the former primary school had been sustained and further embedded, indicating an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Rigorous self-evaluation by senior leaders of the school's performance provided an excellent basis for development planning. This was enabling leaders to drive improvements. The monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observations was highly effective. For example, additional staff training on setting tasks with various levels of challenge for different groups was followed up by focused visits, which provided leaders with evidence of its impact. Assessment data was analysed meticulously in order to identify trends, identify emerging issues and plan accordingly.

Excellent efforts were made to engage with parents and to elicit their support. Parents made very positive comments about the welcome they received from all staff, including administrative staff, support staff and security personnel. Parents appreciated the many opportunities for two-way communication between home and school. This included the use of a computer application and email, together with informal contact that was greatly valued by parents and staff. Detailed reports ensured they were kept well aware of how their children were getting on, and they were impressed by the speed with which any emerging weaknesses in

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their children's work were picked up and addressed. Links with the wider community were strong. The school was engaged in many community activities and initiatives generated from student-led community service programmes such as Pink Day, Dubai Cares, the Red Crescent and the Dar al Ber Society.

The governing board played an active role in supporting the school and leading improvements. This highly effective body provided well-informed practical advice, at the same time encouraging autonomy and empowering senior staff. An advisory board, which included parents, teachers and a board member, provided an effective means for parents to communicate their views. The board took parents' suggestions seriously. For example, their ideas regarding the design of the building contributed to the outstanding learning environment that had been created. The board took care to provide ample resources, including personnel and educational equipment. This was seen, for example, in the excellent provision made for Arabic in the Kindergarten.

The school ran very smoothly due to the excellent administrative procedures that had been established from the outset. Staff were well qualified and their skills and expertise were used to good effect. Leadership responsibilities were distributed and this contributed to the efficient management and created career pathways designed to aid the retention of the most effective staff. The premises were spacious, extremely well resourced and immaculately maintained. They provided students and staff with an excellent environment in which to learn and work. The libraries were very well stocked and provided valuable resources, including a wide range of material to support learning in Islamic Education and Arabic.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students played a full part in all activities. They were secure in the knowledge that students, staff and parents respected their culture and appreciated their insights into Islam and Emirati traditions. The progress of Emirati students was tracked as meticulously as that of other students and the school's analysis of data indicated that, for the most part, they progressed at similar rates to their peers. Those with special educational needs benefited from the same effective support provided for all students and, as a result, these students generally made good progress from their starting points. Emirati students were among the highest attaining groups and there were ample opportunities for those with particular gifts and talents to develop them further.

## How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The dedicated special educational needs support team worked in collaboration with teachers, student assistants, external agents and parents and ensured that students in need of support were identified accurately and in a timely manner. Support for teachers was at the forefront of the programme. Teachers were provided with detailed checklists to help with identification and support. Additional back-up assessments confirmed students' specific needs. Individual education plans with specific strategies were designed and reviewed regularly by the learning support team to help all teachers who engaged with each student. These plans contained learning outcomes for the grade/subject, modified to accommodate achievable targets for each student. The learning support team provided support within lessons and worked closely with parents and with outside professionals to support the progress of each identified child. A team of student assistants who worked on a 1:1 ratio with individual students supported the programme well. The progress and attainment of students in the support programme were measured against the agreed learning outcomes. The curriculum was modified to meet the individual needs of learners. The inquiry elements of the PYP and MYP further enhanced this support, as students had opportunities to explore different perspectives and demonstrate their understanding in different ways. The progress of students with special educational needs was monitored through the comparison of results from the mid-year and end-of-year reports. This enabled staff to modify the provision for individual students as they moved through the school.

## How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

All teachers of Arabic as a first language demonstrated high levels of subject knowledge. Moreover, almost all of them used teaching strategies that reflected a good understanding of how students learn best. Teachers regularly planned for the lessons to include clear learning outcomes, activities, and opportunities for assessment by the students and the teacher. Most of the teachers effectively linked learning objectives to success criteria with sufficient levels of challenge. Most teachers used a reasonable range of activities and resources. In the MYP, however, the majority teachers did not promote independent learning. Students in the MYP had limited opportunities to take more responsibility for their own learning which hampered further progress, for example in reading.

The curriculum was based on MoE standards and teachers made appropriate modifications to enrich the curriculum. Curriculum expectations were shared with and explained to all teachers. A 'learning ladder',



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based on national standards, had been introduced. This encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning. Many enrichment initiatives were planned throughout the year, mainly aimed at improving speaking and writing through the provision of meaningful and balanced learning experiences. These had a positive impact on the progress students made.

## 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  | 121 | 16%        |
|                          | Last year  | 105 | 31%        |
| Teachers                 | 32   |     | 42%        |
| Students                 | There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school |     |            |

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

Around 15 percent of parents had responded to the survey at the time of the inspection. The views were overwhelmingly positive. Almost all were happy about the quality of education, including the effectiveness of the teaching and were very pleased with the way their children were guided towards the next steps in their learning. Most felt that their children were kept safe around school and when travelling on the school buses. Individual parents raised minor issues but these were not borne out by the inspection. Less than half of the teachers responded to their survey. Nevertheless, those who did were overwhelmingly positive, particularly in relation to how learning about the local culture features routinely in lessons and about the opportunities they had to review, modify interpret the curriculum in the light of their experience and students' emerging needs. They were confident that the school had students' well-being at heart and that staff did everything possible to ensure they were well-cared-for and happy.

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae)

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