

**American School of Dubai**  
**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 American School of Dubai was inspected in January, 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 Jumeirah, the American School of Dubai is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged four to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 997 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the instruction their children were receiving and the degree to which the school cared for and protected their children. Most parents commented favourably regarding the open communications with the governing board and the leaders. Almost all parents agreed that the school helped keep their children safe and healthy. They also reported that inquiries to teachers were responded to in a timely fashion and teachers showed a great deal of interest in the success of their children. A parent organisation provided a two-way channel for communication between the home and the school leadership and governing board. Parents expressed satisfaction regarding the degree of support the governing board provided for the school.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The American School of Dubai provided a good education. Student progress and attainment were outstanding in English at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and outstanding in the KG in science. Students had a thorough understanding of Dubai and their potential roles in helping the emirate succeed. Environmental awareness was evidenced by the Global Awareness Inner Awakening (GAIA) program which was overseen by a fourth grade teacher but supported and facilitated by parent volunteers. Students demonstrated an understanding of Islam through integrated social studies classes. Students expressed appreciation for the multi-cultural society they experienced in Dubai.

Teaching and learning were good across the school. Teachers demonstrated extensive knowledge of effective teaching strategies, permitting them to develop sound bases for learning. A variety of teaching strategies engaged the students in active learning and addressed multiple learning styles. Teachers served as facilitators, permitting their students to be active participants in their own learning. Critical thinking skills were evidenced by students' classroom participation and work. Students were confident in explaining their ideas during classroom discussions. Students displayed confidence in evaluating their own learning and assessment results, making them full partners in the teaching and learning process. Systematic curricular reviews helped maintain good learning environments at all instructional levels. The curriculum for Islamic Education and Arabic did not meet Ministry of Education requirements.

The school was outstanding in its attention to students' protection and support. Security was evidenced at each school entry point. Arrivals and dismissals were orderly and overseen by monitors and teaching staff. Students' health was closely monitored by the medical staff. The school facility was well-maintained. The school planned to relocate to a new campus in the fall. Guidance counsellors worked with students on academic, career and higher education topics. Academic progress was monitored for all students from the KG through to the high school. Self-evaluation and improvement planning, parent and community engagement and staffing were each judged to be outstanding. Professional development for the instructional staff was determined by the use of data to assess strengths and areas of possible improvement. The vision for school improvement was arrived at through collaboration by leadership and the teaching staff. Governance supported the school community, allowing the shared leadership model to be effectively led by the Superintendent and the building principals. Principals were actively engaged in the personnel function, assessing the needs of their students and staff.

## Key features of the school

- High level of student engagement and independent learning within the school;
- Parental and community support including the GAIA club for enabling student growth and increased understanding of environmental issues;
- Positive school climate;
- High quality of library media centres and the high degree of student use.

## Recommendations

- Ensure compliance with Ministry of Education guidelines for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Refine the use of assessment data in order to identify attainment levels, review and modify the curriculum, plan teaching to meet all students' needs and support or challenge them accordingly.

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

Attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory. Arab students were only required to learn few Arabic words such as names of fruits though they did not use the Arabic script and this resulted in incorrect pronunciation. For example, few Grade 1 students were able to write the letter "b" in Arabic and students were not encouraged to speak or use the Arabic language at all.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were also unsatisfactory. Although the school had a substantial minority of Muslim students, no Islamic Education curriculum was in place to cater for them.

Progress in English in the KG was good with almost all students achieving at levels enabling them to transfer to Elementary school. Progress in the rest of the school was outstanding with most students progressing to proficiency as measured against the Delaware State Standards. High school students surpassed US national standards as measured by Scholastic Achievement Tests (SAT) in both critical reading and writing in 2009. Most Grade 12 students took Advanced Placements (AP) courses and almost all students went on to four-year college programs.

In mathematics, student attainment and progress at all levels were good. Students achieved above average scores in a variety of local and international assessments. Results were reviewed and analyzed to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses. Students were very keen to learn, were actively involved, served in teacher roles, and showed good mathematical knowledge and problem-solving skills. They used higher order thinking skills and understood and solved increasingly complex concepts thoroughly. Students were encouraged to ask for assistance, engage the teacher in dialogue and ask clarifying questions. Students were provided additional support as needed.

Students' attainment and progress in science was outstanding in the KG and good at all other stages. Students could explain scientific concepts clearly and could apply their knowledge to solve problems and in real life contexts. In KG, they were very knowledgeable and articulate in describing characteristics of penguins and in discussing hearing and sight in relation to the five senses. In Grade 4, students showed good investigative and critical thinking skills in gathering information about the human body. By Grade 5, students were producing individual hypotheses on how to ensure a fair test in studying the growth of plants. Overall, students at the middle and high school stages were making good progress in understanding key concepts in biology, chemistry and physics and in external examinations.

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

The students' attitudes and behaviour were good. Students displayed very positive attitudes around the school. Students were used to independent learning and worked well with peers. They looked after their school and were engaged in initiatives to make it a better place. They showed respect to their teachers and responded well to them in the lessons; they dealt maturely with peers and adults. Attendance was acceptable. Almost all students arrived to school and moved to classes in good time

Students' civic development, appreciation and understanding of Islam and of local culture were acceptable. Students were provided with many opportunities to develop their civic responsibilities; however insufficient opportunities were available for all students to develop their appreciation and understanding of Islam and to engage in the local community. Students appreciated the cultural variety in Dubai and believed it was a positive feature of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understandings were good in the KG and outstanding in the other grades. Students understood the challenges facing Dubai in a changing economy. They knew the main sources of income and were familiar with the contributions of significant personalities in the UAE. Students were able to initiate mature ideas to make Dubai and the UAE better places. Students participated in environmental activities such as beach clean-up and investigating organic gardening in the new campus. The environmental club, GAIA, engaged the students in various activities to look after the environment. They measured the school's carbon footprint and worked to reduce it.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good. Almost all teachers used their good knowledge of each subject to effectively empower and support learners through well delivered teaching approaches. Across the school, there were outstanding examples of teachers developing students' critical thinking through active learning. Teachers were consistently skilled in clarifying what students were expected to learn and used a range of practical demonstrations and information and communication technology (ICT) to inform and engage learners. They had very positive relationships with students. Teachers ensured a brisk pace and strong focus on learning and, where appropriate, deployed classroom assistants effectively. In the best examples, teachers were successfully developing students' abilities to take responsibility for aspects of their learning to better reflect students' differing learning styles. Students were encouraged to investigate and research personal ideas. They made connections with other areas of study and tested out ideas through practical activities. The teaching of Arabic through the medium of English was a barrier to effective learning, and there was an insufficient focus in this subject on building upon students' prior learning.

The quality of students' learning was good. Almost all were eager to learn and listened attentively to their teachers. Students were skilled in talking about their studies and accurately recalled detailed information about what they had learned. They were particularly skilled in using ICT for a wide range of purposes. They worked well together in group discussions and showed good understanding of challenging concepts. Students were developing their abilities in making connections in their learning, across subject areas and in relation to the wider world. They showed growing abilities at all stages in using a range of independent learning strategies to develop their critical thinking skills.

Assessment of students' progress was good. Teachers effectively shared criteria for assessment with their students, regularly monitored their learning in classes and through end-of-semester examinations. Teachers used this information well to give more able students suitably challenging work and to provide those with identified needs with targeted support through course reviews and extra study activities. There was a growing focus on students evaluating their own learning and setting personal targets for improvement. Teachers were developing the use of assessment information to support their abilities to set consistent expectations for students' achievements. Teachers reported regularly to parents on their children's progress. They did not identify sufficiently how parents might help in supporting the next steps in their children's learning.

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

The curriculum was good. In the KG, there were rich opportunities for learning through play and rigorous expectations for age-appropriate understanding and skills development. The curriculum was regularly reviewed to select and align of programs of study, which were the Delaware State standards in the lower school and AP syllabi in Grade 12. Progress had been made since the previous inspection in reducing the reliance on textbooks, particularly in mathematics where the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO) mathematics framework was introduced to align mathematics teaching in the High school and the Middle school. However, the breadth and balance of the curriculum was adversely affected by the absence of Islamic Education. Arabic had been introduced since the last inspection but was not available as part of the formal curriculum beyond Grade 4. The Arabic curriculum lacked elements requiring the use of the language and was not effectively sequenced so that students built upon prior knowledge. The curriculum provided many and varied opportunities to build upon scheduled learning through visits to the desert, to other countries and many stimulating venues within the UAE. Parents and other community stakeholders contributed to the curriculum by working alongside teachers and by organizing regular curriculum enrichment activities such as the International Day.

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

Protection for the students was outstanding. Security guards were stationed at the main entrances to the school. Fire safety equipment was regularly checked and drills were conducted two to three times a year to maintain a safe, secure learning environment. Toilets were clean, well maintained and well resourced with soap dispensers, toilet paper and electric hand dryers. Electronic surveillance cameras scanned the entire perimeter of the walls surrounding the school. Most students were driven to school. After dismissal, pick-up procedures were well supervised and student safety was assured by the presence of school staff, crossing guards, and security guards. Two school nurses and a visiting doctor provided a range of services in accordance with Department of Health guidelines. Extensive medical records were maintained and medical staff advised students on healthy lifestyles recording statistics and nutritional habits in student files. Medications were administered with parental consent.

Support for students was outstanding. Guidance counsellors collaborated with the classroom teacher and learning support teacher to support students with academic, behavioural, or personal needs. Academic progress was effectively tracked and reviewed to guide student progress. Administrative support was provided to students and teachers as needed. Student attendance and punctuality were well managed and detailed records were kept.



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

The quality of leadership was good. There was a shared approach to school planning, demonstrating a thorough understanding of all aspects of the school's operation. The Superintendent and Principals demonstrated a working knowledge of current education trends and their records of success. Each level of leadership was fully engaged in the day-to-day and long-term activities of the school. The vision for the school was developed jointly by the governing body and the senior leaders, soliciting guidance from each group as required. School teams had input into solutions for situations that occurred.

The staff and leaders were engaged in on-going self-evaluation, which was outstanding. Teaching and learning were discussed regularly by leaders and appropriate staff personnel and action plans were developed to address necessary changes. This included the construction of professional development plans for each teacher. Recommendations from the previous inspection report had been addressed but not fully implemented.

Parents demonstrated an understanding of the school's mission and purpose. Representation on the governing board and governing board representation on the building level parent committee was a positive aspect of the school. Communication with parents was satisfactory regarding student progress and school activities. There was not a consistent communication network at each level to eliminate remaining or future misunderstandings. The school extended beyond the parents to include the greater Dubai community through the parent supported GAIA environmental awareness program and student outreach to charitable and environmental activities.

Governors were very supportive of the school and provided for its continued success. Planning for a new campus involved all constituencies. Membership on the board reflected the Dubai business and professional community and parents of American School of Dubai students.

Staff members were highly qualified and well-matched to students' academic and personal needs. Overall, the learning environment was very clean, safe and well resourced. The libraries in particular were a key resource for the school, extremely well used and staffed by professionals. The recruiting of highly qualified staff was a priority of the leadership team.

## 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 School
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 School
Attainment	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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