

Our Own English High School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report issued February 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.

Our Own English High School 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 its 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 the Oud Metha area of Dubai, Our Own English High School was opened in 1968 as a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school followed a curriculum based on that of the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). There were 6,891 students on roll, the great majority of whom were girls. The reported rate of student attendance for the last academic session was acceptable, and it was significantly better during the week of the inspection.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Overwhelmingly, the parents were very positive and were happy with the school. Almost all agreed that their children liked the school and that they made good progress in English, mathematics, science and, to a lesser extent, in Arabic. A significant proportion did not know how much progress their children made in Islamic Education. Almost all parents agreed that the teaching was good, that their children were expected to do their best, that they behaved well and that the school encouraged them to become independent and responsible learners. Almost all agreed that the school helped keep their children safe and healthy and that it treated their children fairly. Most agreed that the staff cared and were concerned about their children's welfare. Most parents were happy with the information they received from the school about their children's progress and agreed that the teachers explained how they could help their children at home with school work. Most stated that the school was well led and felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or concern and that there were good links between them and the school. A minority of parents, however, did not agree that the school was good on consulting them on decisions that affected their children. However, discussions with parents indicated generally strong approval in this area. Most parents felt that the school offered a good range of activities, which their children found stimulating and

enjoyable. A few parents in discussions said, however, that the access to some popular activities was limited and that the range of activities did not always match the talents of their children. Overall, parents expressed very strong satisfaction with the extent of their engagement in the life of the school and strongly conveyed their recognition of the dedication and commitment of the school's staff.

How well does the school perform overall?

Our Own English High School provided a good quality of education with a few outstanding features. Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in the primary phase and good the secondary phase. In Arabic, attainment and progress were acceptable in both primary and secondary phases. In English, mathematics and science, attainment and progress were good in the Kindergarten and secondary phase and acceptable in the primary phase. The results achieved in the CBSE examination confirmed the levels of attainment and progress inspectors observed in classes and in the students' work. In other subjects, CBSE comparisons indicated attainment higher than both the Indian national averages and the average grade level for Gulf States. A few senior students regularly achieved exceptionally high standards in their CBSE examinations. The students' attitudes and behaviour, their understanding of Islam, their appreciation of local tradition and culture, and their economic and environmental understanding were all outstanding. They developed into highly responsible, caring, respectful and confident young people, with a genuine respect for others and the environment. Students left the school well rounded, successful and ambitious and were very well prepared for their future lives. They were very aware of their responsibilities as citizens of Dubai and the UAE and had an insightful understanding of Islam and its everyday application. They were acutely aware of the global financial crisis and its impact on Dubai. They gave excellent explanations of the planning involved in creating Dubai and enthusiastically engaged in environmental projects and raised environmental awareness in the community.

Teaching and learning were good in the Kindergarten and the secondary phase and acceptable in the primary phase. Kindergarten lessons included interesting and stimulating activities. In the secondary phase they were sharply focussed on engaging the students in good and challenging examination preparation, while promoting independent learning outside the classroom. In the primary phase, good quality teaching and learning were less evident. In all phases to varying degrees, teaching methods and learning activities were not sufficiently well matched to the needs and abilities of the students, particularly the higher achieving students. The quality of assessment was good in the Kindergarten, where the teachers made good use of the extensive data they collected to plan and modify lessons. This happened less in the primary and secondary phases, even though marking and testing were thorough. The quality of the curriculum was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. In the Kindergarten, a creative and child-friendly learning approach ensured that children progressed well. The primary curriculum was heavily dependent on textbooks and the secondary curriculum was heavily driven by examination syllabuses. The high number of short lessons each day weakened the overall learning of the students, particularly in the lower primary phase. There was a good range of extra-curricular activities that enriched the taught programme and UAE culture was well integrated in the work of the school. The quality of health and safety arrangements in the Kindergarten was good and, in primary and secondary phases, it was acceptable.

Most standard procedures were in place, including child protection but, in the primary and secondary phases, risk assessments were not undertaken and chemicals were not stored safely. The quality of support throughout the school was good. Class teachers provided individual support and students with particular needs benefited. Behaviour, attendance and punctuality were managed well but, apart from in the Kindergarten, the students' progress was not effectively tracked to promote improvements in individual learning.

The overall quality of leadership provided by the Principal, Headmistress and some middle-leaders was good. There was a strong focus on improving teaching and learning and, although some inconsistency occurred, all managers contributed to this drive, leading teams and sharing good practice. The Principal and Headmistress showed a good capacity to bring about further improvement. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good and well embedded. Senior leaders had a very good knowledge of the school's major strengths and weaknesses, which they used to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. The school's partnership with parents and the local community was good but parents' views were not always influential in defining the school's priorities for development. Governance at the school was acceptable. It provided accountability, high quality advice, guidance and training. However, there were no formalised plans to include parents in an advisory capacity on the governing board. The overall quality of the staffing was acceptable, but that of the school's facilities required improvement.

Key features of the school

- The exceptionally high standards regularly achieved by senior students in CBSE examinations;
- The students' outstanding attitudes and behaviour, understanding of Islam, appreciation of local tradition and culture, and economic and environmental understanding;
- The overall quality of education in the Kindergarten;
- The inconsistent quality of the teaching and learning, particularly in the primary phase;
- The care, commitment and dedication shown by the staff;
- The Principal's clear vision and direction, complemented by the Headmistress' very effective academic leadership;
- The good quality of the parents' involvement in their children's education.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and its consistency;
- Extend the use of assessment information to improve the teaching, track progress and set targets for individual students;
- Ensure that the curriculum provides a more coherent learning experience for students in the lower primary phase;
- Provide effective subject specialist leadership in all key areas of the curriculum.

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

The students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in the primary phase and good in the secondary phase. In the primary phase most students were able to recite The Holy Qur'an and memorize the Prophet's (PBUH) 'Hadeeth', with few errors. They demonstrated good knowledge of the examples they had learnt about compulsory and optional prayers. In the secondary phase most students had a good knowledge about the position of women in Islam and understood the meaning of crime and banishment. However, throughout the school, too few students could give examples of how to apply Islamic values to their lives or demonstrate good knowledge of the Prophet's (PBUH) life.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. All students studied Arabic as a third language and were achieving expected levels, overall. Across the school their skills in listening and reading were stronger than their speaking and writing. A majority of the students used an acceptable range of vocabulary. In the primary phase most students read well with few errors. By the early stages of the secondary phase, most students had developed acceptable grammatical knowledge and were able to identify noun and verb sentences when asked. Most students had insufficient opportunities to develop their speaking and writing in lessons. Their use of the language was mostly limited to sentences of only a few words.

Attainment and progress in English were good in the Kindergarten, acceptable in the primary phase and good in the secondary phase. By the end of Kindergarten, children could listen carefully and follow instructions. They spoke using a limited vocabulary, identified phonic sounds and read with some understanding. They wrote letters of the alphabet accurately with well-developed handwriting. In the primary phase, students showed progressive understanding in several areas of English. They could analyse reading and write with guidance, but their creative writing skills were limited by lack of opportunity. They successfully used grammatical structures in familiar contexts where procedure was repeated. Overall, secondary students exceeded expected levels of attainment within their CBSE course. They articulated complex ideas, carried forward discussions, thought independently and wrote competently on different issues. Their 2009 CBSE examination performance was significantly higher than the national average for India.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the Kindergarten, acceptable in the primary phase and good in the secondary phase. In the Kindergarten, children had a good sense of number and were developing a good understanding of shape, space and measures. Children worked collaboratively and were able to talk about what they knew and understood. During the primary phase, students could apply the rules of arithmetic and, by Grade 8, they could apply formulas and solve problems, but their deductive and evaluative skills were under-developed. In contrast, secondary students demonstrated strong analytical skills and could derive standard results well. By Grades 11 and 12, students solved difficult questions in three dimensions using coordinate geometry, applied and manipulated algebra, functions and graphs confidently in calculus and were able to solve equations and prove identities in trigonometry. Their 2009 CBSE examination performance was significantly higher than the Indian national average.

Attainment and progress in science were good in the Kindergarten, acceptable in the primary phase and good in the secondary phase. In the Kindergarten, the children's ideas about science and their observational and practical skills developed well and they understood the world around them. By Grade 8 students understood demonstrations and could explain some properties of light. Throughout the primary phase, students assimilated factual knowledge but their investigative skills were less well developed. In the secondary phase, the students achieved good CBSE results in all three sciences. Most Grade 11 students understood the production of alkenes and a few could express oscillation mathematically. Most students observed, recorded and drew conclusions in laboratory experiments but did not have the opportunity to develop these skills further through open-ended practical experiments.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. In almost all classes and around the school, students were extremely well behaved. Their attitudes towards learning were very positive and they were keen to engage in lessons. Student-teacher relationships were excellent and motivated students to do their best. Students enjoyed school and demonstrated exceptional development in the school's study of world citizenship, universal values, leadership qualities and forward thinking. Attendance last semester in the primary and secondary phases was acceptable but, during the inspection week, it was good. Students arrived to school on time and moved briskly and purposefully to their lessons.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were all outstanding. Students were very mature and aware of their responsibilities as citizens of Dubai and the UAE. They had an insightful understanding of Islam and its everyday application for a Muslim. They also demonstrated a strong appreciation of the multicultural nature of Dubai, respected the UAE national identity and demonstrated very good knowledge of national symbols and regional geography. Older students were able to explain confidently and in detail key aspects of local history, traditions and heritage. They understood very well the significance and importance this had for people in the UAE.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. They confidently explained how Dubai had developed and the impact this had on lifestyles. They were acutely aware of the global financial crisis and its impact on Dubai. They gave excellent explanations of the planning involved in creating a country from the desert and readily identified Dubai's modern key features and how the UAE was perceived globally. Students also demonstrated exceptional understanding of environmental sustainability and could describe ways in which government, and they themselves, could address environmental issues. They engaged enthusiastically in environmental projects and even the youngest children in the Kindergarten made significant contributions to Earth Day celebrations by, for example, planting trees and taking turns to take care of them. Through their Community Reporter in the Gulf News, students enthusiastically raised environmental awareness in the community.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The teaching was good in the Kindergarten and at the secondary phase. In the primary phase it was acceptable. All teachers had good subject knowledge and lessons were delivered authoritatively and at a brisk pace. Lessons were generally planned well, using a common lesson format. In the Kindergarten, teachers routinely used group work to promote cooperative learning, brought learning alive with a range of stimulating resources and activities and encouraged children to express themselves. Teaching was less effective when students moved to the primary school where cramped classrooms, less imaginative resources and teacher-centred delivery did not develop their independent learning or provide challenge and stimulation for the more able students. In the secondary phase, teachers delivered lessons that expertly matched the demands of the CBSE syllabus. Across the grades, teachers managed the students well and, in the most effective lessons, skilful questioning prompted effective discussion and encouraged student involvement in the lessons' activities. Teachers knew the strengths and weaknesses of students well but did not consistently adapt their teaching strategies and activities to cater for the full range of students' abilities, particularly in stretching and challenging the more able.

Learning was good in the Kindergarten and the secondary phase. In the primary phase it was acceptable. All students had a positive attitude to their studies and were keen to learn. In the Kindergarten, children discovered things for themselves and developed a range of study skills, such as cooperative learning and following instructions. Across the school, but particularly in the primary phase, students were rarely given opportunities in class to consolidate and reflect on their learning. They were rarely given tasks that developed their critical thinking skills. In the secondary phase however, students were developing as independent learners, particularly when undertaking research outside lessons. The more able students could apply what they had previously learnt to real world situations. Secondary students were aware of the required learning for their external examinations and worked effectively in and out of school to ensure they performed well.

The quality of assessment was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. Teachers closely monitored and evaluated the children's progress in the Kindergarten so that they could plan and adapt their teaching. Across the school, teachers kept comprehensive records of student attainment and were expected to use them in planning and delivering their lessons. However, assessment information was rarely used to plan activities and ensure that resources matched the range of needs and abilities in class. Written work was marked thoroughly, although this was invariably in the form of ticks for completed exercises rather than guidance on what students needed to do to improve. Regular feedback was given to parents on the performance of students, although parents stated that this was not always informative enough.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. The curriculum was broad, balanced and met most students' needs. In the Kindergarten, a range of creative activities helped develop the children's independence. This child-friendly learning approach

and imaginative lessons ensured that children progressed well. The primary curriculum covered an appropriate range of subjects including dance, music and art, and offered a choice of four languages. However, lessons were heavily dependent on textbooks and related worksheets. In the secondary phase students were well prepared for the next stage of their education, following optional streams in science, commerce or humanities in Grades 11 and 12. However, the high number of short lessons each day weakened the overall learning of students, particularly in the lower primary phase. The curriculum was regularly adapted, focussing more on overall content than on catering to the needs of individual students. The continuity of students' learning was largely dependent on the series of graded textbooks, with better continuity between the primary and secondary phases than between the Kindergarten and the lower primary phase. Opportunities for students to learn through links between subjects, for example through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) were better in the secondary than the primary phase. There was a good range of extra-curricular activities, but parents had raised concerns about accessing some activities. The school had forged healthy links with the community by participating in Dubai Cares, the Emirates Environment Group, Dubai Municipality programmes and through its Community Reporter scheme. The Environment Club involved students in activities for recycling and reusing from waste. UAE culture was well integrated in school assemblies, displays, extra-curricular activities and in some lessons.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school's arrangements for health and safety were good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Children in the Kindergarten were well supervised and their play and learning areas were secure, well maintained and hygienic. Transport arrangements were safe and orderly with bus drivers regularly up-dating registers. However, fumes from parked buses polluted the playground. A child protection policy was well known by staff and the clinic and records complied with Ministry of Education requirements. However, provision for sick students was inadequate for the size of school. Fire drills were conducted periodically and evacuation plans and assembly points displayed. The school carried out regular campaigns promoting healthy food, but options in the canteen were not always healthy. Risk assessments were not in place and contributed to unsafe storage of chemicals in the laboratories. These deficiencies were immediately rectified by the school when inspectors identified them.

The quality of support for students was good throughout the school. Teachers knew the needs of the students and responded to them with courtesy and consideration. In turn, students were unfailingly polite and respectful and spoke highly of their teachers and the contribution they made to their development. Class teachers provided individual support and students with particular needs benefitted from activities such as circle time. The school's behaviour policy provided a clear framework for dealing with problems but infringements of the code were very rare and, when they did arise, were dealt with by discussion with parents. Teachers monitored students' progress effectively but did not use the data to track the attainment, progress and development of individual students in order to set them personal targets. The systems for managing student attendance and punctuality were effective.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall quality of leadership of the school was good. The Principal provided a clear vision, direction and a unifying common purpose. The Headmistress was very successfully leading major developments that were improving teaching and learning. Leadership was well distributed among dedicated managers, although their effectiveness and leadership qualities varied. They led teams of teachers in bringing about improvement, although the coordination of some parts of the curriculum lacked an overview from a subject specialist. Teachers were able to share good practice by observing their peers. A professional development programme reflected both school improvement priorities and teachers' individual professional needs, mainly identified through staff appraisal. The Principal and Headmistress showed a good capacity to bring about further improvement.

The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning was good. Effective management was in place to structure, guide and validate self-evaluation. Senior leaders had a very good knowledge of the school's major strengths and weaknesses. Teachers were involved, parental surveys informed the process and students were also beginning to be formally included. Senior leaders acted upon views expressed, for example, peer assessment had been introduced as a result of students' views. Effective improvement planning resulted from self-evaluation and was raising the quality of teaching, an improvement confirmed by discussions with students. However, the monitoring of teaching was not yet sufficiently robust.

The school's partnerships with parents and the local community were good. Communication from the school was clear and regular and parents were consulted on some matters. Their views, however, were not always influential in defining school priorities when the school was planning developments. Community links were promoted well through charity work, supporting children with special needs, involvement in environmental projects and strong links with the Indian Embassy. Parents provided speakers and work experience opportunities, and inter-school sport and competitions in other fields also significantly enriched students' education. However, the few links with local businesses were under-developed, so that work experience, for example, was insufficiently provided for.

Governance at the school was acceptable. The Management Board had an accurate picture of the school's self-evaluation and validated the outcomes. It held the Principal and, through him, the senior leaders and other teachers to account and set performance targets. It promoted parental engagement with the school but there were no formalised plans to include parents in an advisory board.

The overall quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Staffing levels were sufficient and qualifications were appropriate. There was a good balance of expertise, age and experience among the teaching staff. Although few in number, the teaching assistants provided essential support for Kindergarten classes. Staff were loyal to the school and turnover was relatively low. Overall, school accommodation and facilities were barely acceptable for the academic needs of students. For example, there were too few science laboratories and ICT facilities, as well as small and overcrowded classrooms. These issues would be resolved when the school moved into its new premises as intended. Overall, learning resources were adequate, and in the science laboratories they were good.

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.

The four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 8	Grades 9 to 12
Health and safety	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good

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

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.

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

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