

Dubai National School Al Twar Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school.....	3
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	5
How good are the teaching and learning?	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	7
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	7
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	8
Summary of inspection judgements	9
Next Steps.....	13
How to contact us.....	13

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 Dubai National School Al Twar 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 Al Twar, Dubai National School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, ages three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,804 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents were very satisfied with the work of the school. Almost all thought that their children liked school and that staff showed concern for their care and welfare. They thought teaching was good and that there were good relationships in the school. Most parents agreed that the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. A few parents wanted a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement and a few also wanted the school to consult them more on decisions affecting their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai National School provided a good quality of education for its students. Inspectors judged the attainment and progress in the all the key subjects to be good, except for certain stages in Islamic Education and Arabic. Students' personal and social development was good throughout the school, although only acceptable among the middle school boys. Relationships in most classrooms were good. High school students were effectively involved in student council activities. Students' civic understanding was well developed and they appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Students understood the core values of Islam and felt they were important to their everyday lives. Economic and environmental understanding was good at all levels. Students understood the need for the protection of local, national and global resources.

Teaching throughout the school was good. In KG and the lower elementary grades, teachers planned a variety of activities that kept children engaged. In other grades, the teacher tended to dominate lessons more. Teachers did not always expect high enough achievement, particularly of the more able students. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was not fully exploited. The quality of learning was good overall and students worked well together in groups. Particularly in the higher grades, students conducted independent research. The assessment of students' work was good throughout the school. Teachers had a rounded picture of their students' performance and used this information well to plan the support of specific students. The school did not sufficiently analyse whole class performances. The quality of the curriculum was good at all levels. It was particularly good in KG and Grade 1 where children were given a very good foundation for their learning. Curriculum review was effective and had led to improvement. Lower attaining students with special educational needs received good support, but provision for gifted and talented students was not yet adequate. There was an insufficient range of extra-curricular activities. The school made a concerted effort to ensure the health, safety and security of all students. The health clinic was well staffed, with health records maintained for each student. Staff members promoted healthy lifestyles through classroom presentations.

The overall quality of leadership and management was good. The Principal was experienced and committed to the school. He was well supported by the Vice-Principal. He had set a clear direction for self-evaluation but overall, this required further development. The committed team of heads of department fulfilled their remits conscientiously. The supervisors played an important role in managing their sections but did not yet play a sufficient role in improving the overall work of the school. Links with parents were well developed and the school kept them well informed. The partnership between the Principal and the School Board was a positive one. However, the Board membership did not include a wide enough range of stakeholders. The accommodation and facilities provided a safe and well-maintained environment. The school was well-resourced and staffing levels were good. Some refurbishment was required throughout the school. Car parking facilities outside the school were inadequate.

Key features of the school

- The commitment of the Principal and teachers to high attainment by students;
- The good quality of children's experiences in the Kindergarten;
- Students' good command of English across the curriculum;
- Effective systems for monitoring, tracking and supporting student progress at subject level;
- The success of Heads of Department in improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- The school's positive links with parents.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve the attainment levels of boys;
- Ensure continuing improvement in the quality of students' learning by improving teachers' methods of instruction;
- Ensure appropriate levels of challenge for gifted and talented students;
- Increase the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation, with a clear focus on improving attainment.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education in the elementary stages was good. Young children made good progress in reciting short chapters from Qur'an and by KG2, most students had a good knowledge of the basic principles of Islam and of how prayers are performed. In the middle and high schools, attainment was good but progress was acceptable. Overall, girls were making better progress than the boys. A significant number of students were not making sufficient progress with the deep understanding of Islamic rulings. Most students made good progress with the Hadeeth and the chapters of Holy Qur'an they were learning. A significant number of boys did not memorise or demonstrate sufficient understanding of the verses they learnt from Holy Qur'an.

Attainment in Arabic was good in all phases of the school. Progress was good in elementary and middle schools and acceptable in high school. By KG2, most students could identify almost all letters and sounds. They could also identify, read and write a number of high-frequency words. In the elementary school, almost all students made good progress with their reading and oral skills in Classical Arabic and most could write well-structured sentences and short paragraphs. In the middle school most students, particularly girls, increased their range of vocabulary and wrote longer texts with good sentence structure. In the high school, boys'

progress was significantly lower, due to the low levels of expectation and challenge. In the high school, students did not develop their writing and critical thinking skills well.

Attainment and progress in English throughout the school were good. Children in the KG knew letters, recognizing and joining them together to form words. Handwriting was often neat and letters well structured. Students from Grade 3 onwards regularly gave presentations on topics based on their weekly journals and demonstrated achievement in all language skills. Boys in the lower grades showed good emerging skills in research and speaking. However, there were common speaking errors in subject-verb agreement and the use of prepositions. By Grade 12 all students were confident in public speaking and debating, showing good vocabulary and rhetorical skills. These high levels of skill in the English language were in line with recognized international standards.

Attainment and progress throughout the grades in mathematics were good. Students consistently attained standards above the norms for students in American schools. Mathematics skills and understanding were well developed throughout the school and students were able to explain mathematical concepts quite well in English. In KG-2 classes, students demonstrated understanding of multi-dimensional shapes. By Grade 3, students could apply multiplication skills to real life situations. Sixth grade students could subtract fractions from whole numbers with ease and solve problems involving higher-order thinking skills. Grade 10 students could graph complex number sets and find their absolute values. By Grade 12, students were performing advanced calculus problems at first year university levels.

Students' attainment and progress in science were good at all levels. Most students had good understanding, skills and knowledge in a wide range of science topics. In the KG, children understood healthy habits for life and in a role-playing assembly, they effectively demonstrated healthy foods. Elementary students could organise facts, and they could discuss cause and effect, the weather, the solar system, and environmental issues. Middle school students were able to analyse data and draw conclusions. They were able to calculate electrical power and determine energy according to Ohm's Law. Secondary students were able to link mathematics skills with science while learning chemistry conversions. Grade 10 biology students effectively discussed global issues. Students' science lessons in labs developed good co-operative and investigative learning skills across all levels.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was good, overall, throughout the school, with positive relations in most classrooms. However, the attitudes and behaviour of middle school boys was only acceptable. These students exhibited at times noisy and occasionally aggressive behaviour in the common areas of the school. The attitudes and behaviour of all other students were good. The school administration had developed an action plan which was addressing issues of boys' behaviour. Attendance was good, but punctuality needed to be significantly improved at the start of the day. All students enjoyed positive and respectful relationships with teachers.

Students' civic understanding, personal understanding of Islam and their appreciation for local traditions and culture were good. Some secondary students were involved in the student council, which offered them good opportunities to exercise leadership skills. Students recited verses from The Holy Qur'an in assemblies, sang the National Anthem, and visited prayer rooms during class breaks. The Islamic ethos in school and the core values of Islam were important to their everyday lives. Students appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good at all levels. Most students knew how Dubai had developed and secondary students were able to discuss their plans for their potential future contribution to the UAE. Older students understood the need for the protection of local, national and global resources. Students participated in cleaning the beaches and also contributed to raising funds for Red Crescent and projects which support less fortunate people in other countries.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching throughout the school was of good quality. Almost all teachers had good command of their subjects, although there were a small number of errors in speaking English that students picked up and copied. In the KG and the lower elementary grades, teachers planned a variety of activities that kept children engaged and learning well. In a minority of classes teachers dominated and set one pace of learning. However, there were good examples of teachers facilitating whole class discussion and collaboration. Although most teachers shared the purposes of their lessons with students, in a minority of cases these were activities rather than clearly defined learning objectives. Teachers' expectations, particularly of the more able students, were not sufficiently challenging. Most teachers reviewed the lesson at the end but often this concerned what had been covered rather than what had been learnt. There were many planned opportunities for students to give presentations or discuss topics in groups. Where teachers used the multimedia projectors, they brought enrichment to learning with immediate examples. However, the use of ICT was not fully exploited as a teaching and learning tool.

The quality of learning was good. Students worked well together and in group work; the more able students supported those who did not find their lessons easy. Particularly, but not exclusively, in the higher grades, students conducted independent research, often using computers to present their findings to their classmates. However, there was a lack of regularly planned use of ICT by students during lessons. In a few lessons, students were encouraged to think beyond the immediate task and to see relevance in their learning, but this was not embedded as a learning habit of all students.

The assessment of students' work was good throughout the school. Teachers regularly recorded students' levels of attainment in class and for their homework assignments. Written feedback on work was often of high quality and led students towards final drafts of their assignments that were much improved. The results of regular tests and grades from class and homework gave teachers a rounded picture of their students' performance. At their regular department meetings, teachers used this information to plan for the remedial support of

students falling behind. However, there was no systematic and regular appraisal of the work of the more able students to ensure teachers' expectations were high enough. Although tracking of students' attainment on an individual level was good, the school did not have sufficiently rigorous analysis of whole class performance.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good at all levels, and was based on United States standards. These standards provided a natural scope and sequence of structured learning activities from year to year. It was enhanced with teacher-developed materials and supported by the use of online resources. The curriculum was particularly good in the KG and Grade 1, where children were given a very good foundation to their learning which prepared them well for later grades. The curriculum was balanced in the academic subjects and provided additional courses such as computer technology, art, physical education, business and home economics. Science offerings included strong courses in biology, chemistry, and physics at the middle and high levels. Field trips and excursions to museums, a zoo, the Dubai aquarium and other local sites enhanced curricular offerings. English courses included extended writing which was a strong feature of students' work. Curriculum revision by department heads and teachers was leading to clear improvements in students' learning experiences. Parents could access the curricular programme each day on the school's website. Students with special educational needs received good support, but provision for gifted and talented students was not adequate. There was an insufficient range of extra-curricular activities. Cross-curricular links were present in Islamic Education, science, English, and mathematics. The curriculum offerings were of substantial depth and helped prepare graduates for immediate entrance into universities.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school made a concerted effort to ensure the health, safety and security of students in all parts of the school. Entrance and exit doors were either guarded or locked, except when teachers, supervisors and other staff were present to open doors for students and visitors. The KG area was especially well monitored, with a number of staff circulating throughout the area to assure the safety of the young children in that wing of the school. Play areas were well supervised. Sports facilities, including the two swimming pools were supervised by adults whenever students were in attendance. The school was well maintained and cleaned frequently during the day. Students had been taught about the importance of cleanliness. The purpose-built school had been well designed with several open areas to allow light into the building. Buses were well maintained and were effectively supervised. The health clinic was well staffed, safe, clean and orderly, with health records diligently maintained for each student.

The social worker maintained effective records concerning the welfare of students and meetings with parents. Teachers, nurses and ancillary staff promoted healthy lifestyles, for

example through classroom presentations. Staff-student relationships were observed to be very good in most cases. A good level of pastoral care was provided by all staff and parents were kept informed of any areas of concern. Supervisors and teachers dealt with behaviour issues promptly. The work of students was monitored, with the support of a comprehensive electronic database system that had a positive impact on students' attainment.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall quality of leadership and management was good. The Principal was experienced and committed to the school and had a number of strengths, both professional and personal. He maintained a positive climate within the school, encouraged good teamwork and fostered constructive relations with the parent body. He had set a clear direction for self-evaluation which was supporting improvement in the work of individual teachers and the achievements of individual students. He was well supported by the Vice-Principal, whose work with electronic databases was enhancing the work of the school. The committed team of heads of departments fulfilled their remits conscientiously, supporting and developing teachers and monitoring students' progress. The supervisors played an important role in managing their sections but did not play a sufficient role in improving the overall work of the school.

Leaders had established a number of methods of evaluating the work of students, the teachers and the school. Heads of departments effectively monitored and evaluated the work of teachers, which was beginning to improve the quality of the classroom experience. Managers had not established a systematic approach to the year-on-year evaluation of the whole school. Few opportunities existed for all teachers to discuss teaching and learning methods. The school had made acceptable progress in addressing the main issues identified at the last inspection.

The school's links with parents were well developed and parents agreed that they felt welcome in the school. The school kept them informed through newsletters, students' reports and parents' evenings held four times a year. The school had set up good opportunities for parents to have access on-line to curriculum information on their child's learning.

The partnership between the Principal and the School Board was a positive one. The owner was well-informed through regular meetings and he held the school accountable on a wide range of the school's work. However, the Board membership did not include a wide enough range of stakeholders, including parents.

The school's facilities provided a safe, attractive and well-maintained environment. They included two gymnasia, outdoor sports facilities, two swimming pools, computer labs and libraries. The school was well resourced and teaching and ancillary staffing levels were good, with well-qualified teachers. Libraries were in need of additional resources and some classroom furniture was worn and required replacement. Teacher preparation rooms were not sufficiently resourced. The car parking facilities outside the school were inadequate, resulting in severe traffic conditions and potentially unsafe conditions for students.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
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
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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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