

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Mawakeb School - Al Barsha

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Mawakeb School - Al Barsha

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.almawakeb.sch.ae
Telephone	04-3478288
Address	PO Box 35001, Al Barsha, Dubai
Principal	Naziha Nasr
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	2,649
Number of Emirati students	714 (27%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 23rd to Thursday 26th January 2012

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The context of the school

Al Mawakeb School is a private school located in Al Barsha. It provides education for students from ages three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,649 students on roll. Girls and boys were grouped together until Grade 5. Student attendance at the time of the inspection was acceptable. The school followed an adapted US curriculum.

Staffing levels were acceptable and the school reported that all classroom teachers were qualified while assistant teachers had at least a high school diploma. There was no separate staff to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. Students were admitted to the school in Kindergarten at age three years. Of the total number of students in the school about a quarter were Emirati. In the current academic year, 593 students had been newly registered. The nationalities of students varied considerably, with higher numbers coming from Iran, the US, Canada, and European and Asian countries.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Overall, the school's performance was acceptable. The school was attentive to the safety and welfare of its students, particularly with regards to transportation arrangements where its practices were exemplary. Students experienced a tri-lingual education with Arabic, English, and French lessons taught from Kindergarten to high school. All students had good civic, economic and environmental understanding; few took responsibility for their own learning as the school provided few opportunities for them to do so. There were more than a few students in all phases who displayed poor behaviours which interfered with their own or other's learning. There were acceptable relationships among teachers and students. There were no formal programs for students with learning needs. The school was in the early stages of tracking student progress, collecting data, and analyzing results.

The school had developed an action plan in response to last year's inspection. However, its capacity to evaluate its progress was undermined by an unrealistic view of its strengths and weaknesses. The school had few external benchmarks for attainment to measure student learning. However, it was in the process

of introducing new assessments for this purpose. The school had made some progress in two of the six recommendations: it had begun to analyze assessment data though it was not yet linked to improved teaching and learning, and it had further developed partnerships with parents.

Key strengths

- The school provided Arabic as an additional language in Grades 10 to 12 and Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language in Kindergarten;
- Students had a good understanding of healthy life-styles and made appropriate choices for healthy living;
- The attitudes of the girls in Grades 6-12 contributed to better learning;
- Bus arrangements to ensure the safety of all students were exemplary.

Recommendations

- The school should raise attainment in all key subject areas to at least good, as measured against international standards;
- The school should provide support for students to take greater ownership of their learning and the improvement of their behavior;
- School leaders should develop and communicate to all staff the vision and skills for effective teaching to meet the needs of all students;
- School leaders and the governing board need to compare their self-evaluation findings against international standards to help the school to improve;
- The school should improve the management of staffing, facilities and resources by:
 - ensuring all staff, including support staff, are actively engaged in supporting learning
 - Ensuring smooth transitions of students between lessons.
 - Reducing class sizes in Kindergarten to comply with the Ministry of Education requirements.
 - Providing a more extensive range of resources including information and communications technology to support learning in all subjects.

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

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

Attainment was generally acceptable in key subjects across all phases with some variations. In Kindergarten attainment was good in English and mathematics. In elementary, it was good in Islamic Education and in Arabic as an additional language. In high school attainment was good in Arabic as an additional language and in science. In Islamic Education, attainment weakened as students reached higher grades. In Arabic, students' listening and speaking skills were appropriately developed. Students could respond to teachers' questions. In all phases and all key subjects, extended writing was underdeveloped. In English, the majority of students had strong oral skills and middle school student reading comprehension was mainly at a literal level. In mathematics, elementary and middle students knew number facts and used algorithms well. Most students had a limited understanding of how mathematical concepts applied in the real world. In science, most students enjoyed learning about the natural world and some had developed good levels of knowledge. In the upper grades, girls performed better than the boys.

Across all phases, most students made acceptable progress with some variation. Students in elementary and high school made better progress than did students in Kindergarten or middle school. Elementary students made good progress in Islamic Education and Arabic while high school students made good progress in Arabic, mathematics, and science. Kindergarten children made good progress in English and middle school students made good progress in science. The progress of students with learning needs was not formally monitored. When comparing boys' and girls' progress, the girls generally made better progress in most subject areas.

About one quarter of the students were Emiratis. Their attainment and progress was not significantly different from that of the rest of the students in most key subjects. In mathematics, Emirati students' attainment was noticeably lower than that of their peers. Emirati students made mostly acceptable progress, but higher achieving students were not sufficiently challenged and thus did not make the progress of which they were capable. The school had begun to collect data regarding the attainment and progress of Emirati students but had not yet fully analyzed the information.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

Student's attitudes and behavior varied but were generally acceptable across the school. Behavior deteriorated at transition times especially in the boys' section. Students were passive rather than active learners. They did not have sufficient opportunities to develop their leadership skills by taking personal responsibility for their learning. Relationships throughout the school were mostly cordial but there were some examples of rudeness in classrooms. Attendance was acceptable and punctuality had improved. Students had good knowledge of healthy lifestyles and chose healthy snacks from the canteen. Students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of local culture and tradition were acceptable in elementary and good across all other phases. Students had clear understanding of the impact of Islam on the local society. Students had good appreciation of the multicultural nature of Dubai. Elementary students had basic knowledge of the local traditions. Students' civic, economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. Students knew their civic responsibilities well. Older students participated in charity events. Students clearly understood major sources of income for Dubai. They displayed clear understanding of major environmental issues such as global warming and pollution.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The quality of teaching in key subjects was acceptable over all four phases of the school, and slightly weaker in the Kindergarten and stronger in the girls' section. Overall, there was significant variety in the quality of teaching for effective learning. A few lessons observed were unsatisfactory. Teachers generally demonstrated good subject knowledge but more than a few did not understand how students learned their subjects. Most teachers had detailed lesson plans, but a few did not. Teachers' use of lesson time varied in proficiency, as did their abilities to use resources effectively. Interactions between teachers and students were usually positive with some exceptions. Teachers' abilities to establish effective dialogue with students were mixed, as some teachers promoted good learning but others talked for most of the lesson time. Teachers' skills in questioning students were also varied, as some questions made students think but others only asked them to remember facts. Teachers generally did not employ a sufficient breadth of strategies to meet the needs of all students. Instead, they most frequently offered the same experience to all students regardless of their previous knowledge. Consequently, the learning needs of more than a few students were not met. Teachers rarely promoted critical thinking skill development by their students. Opportunities for students to learn independently were rarely provided. The quality of teaching in non-key subjects followed a similar pattern.

The quality of learning was acceptable across all four phases of the school. It was slightly better in the higher grades and slightly weaker in the Kindergarten. Most students had positive attitudes towards learning, particularly the girls. Students' engagement in learning varied a great deal. When appropriate tasks were set, students responded well and made good progress. In a significant minority of lessons the tasks set did not engage them and little or no progress was made. Opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning were infrequent. In most lessons students did what was asked of them, and all students did the same work. Students usually interacted together well and worked in groups when

asked, but groups were often too large to allow all students to participate. Students made connections with previous learning regularly in mathematics lessons and less frequently in other subjects. The application of learning to the real world was observed in all key subjects but less so in the higher grades in mathematics. Students' enquiry, research and critical thinking skills were underdeveloped in all subjects and phases of the school, contrary to the school's stated goal of promoting individual curiosity.

The assessment of learning was acceptable across the school. Students' progress was recorded and tracked accurately. Assessment information was used to identify students who were having difficulty and to intervene to help them improve. Most assessment data were collected, summarized and graphed but not analyzed to inform school improvement. Some teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses but a few teachers did not. Formative assessment of learning during lessons was of mixed quality, as some teachers knew how to pose questions to assess their students but others were less skilled. Marking of students' work was of inconsistent quality and individual learning targets were not identified. A few students assessed their own learning and that of their peers. Assessment of learning against external benchmarks was very limited.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was acceptable across all phases of the school. It was based on a clear rationale and generally broad and balanced across most subjects. The provision for three languages from Kindergarten to Grade 12 was a strength. Opportunities in the arts stopped after Grade 1. Progression and continuity were supported by detailed syllabi, pacing guides and plans but the curriculum was delivered mainly through textbooks. The curriculum was reviewed annually and some changes were made to improve provision. Although the curriculum was planned to meet the needs of most learners, it did not allow opportunities for students to demonstrate their existing learning as lesson outcomes were rigorously prescribed and followed. The Kindergarten curriculum did not offer children an appropriate balance between choice and prescription, restricting their opportunities to learn through investigation and discovery. Opportunities for research and the development of critical thinking were limited. Some educational visits had been planned to enrich the curriculum. The curriculum was further enhanced through a range of extra-curricular clubs. There were also limited links with the local community.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Health and safety arrangements were good. The school site was a clean, well-maintained, safe and secure environment for learning. Medical staff maintained a constant presence in all areas of the school and provided good health services and wellness screening. They helped to promote healthy living through advice and guidance to students. Healthy food options were offered by the school canteens and teachers reinforced this message through lessons and displays. Arrangements for transporting students to and from school by bus were exemplary. Fire evacuation procedures were effective with clear signage in every building and good records kept of incidents. Senior staff and teachers knew their responsibilities for child protection and students confirmed they felt confident in approaching staff with any problems.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. Relationships between staff and students were good overall, with some exceptions, and students' well-being was a high priority. The school had adequate strategies for managing student behavior which involved working closely with parents but this did not result in consistent school-wide good behavior. Support was given to students who were found to be falling behind with their studies. The school was at a very early stage of identifying students with a range of special educational needs, including gifted and talented and those with behavioral and learning difficulties. Sound advice and guidance were given to older students in preparing applications to college and records were kept of the destinations of school leavers. The school recorded student attendance and punctuality and made good efforts to improve both.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The two co-directors and the mid-level leaders were committed to the school and cared about its students; however, their understanding of the attributes of excellent teaching and learning were lacking or under-developed. As a result, expectations for teachers were uneven and resulted in a wide variation of teacher effectiveness, with more than a few lessons found to be unsatisfactory. As a result, learning expectations for student learning were sometimes low, with some classroom environments noisy and unproductive.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. The school made minimal use of external tests to measure its students' learning against international standards. It had begun to collect internal student performance data but was in the early stages of analysis. Students and staff were not wholly sure of what was required of them to improve, due to a lack of clear learning and attainment objectives. The school did not have a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses and little or no progress had been made on the recommendations from the previous report. Of the six recommendations made, the school had partially addressed only two: analyzing assessment data to improve the curriculum; and, developing further partnerships with parents. The school had not addressed: building independent and broader learning skills in students; addressing the needs of low and high attaining students; analyzing data to improve teaching and learning; and, using self-evaluation more systematically and rigorously.

Parent involvement and communication were acceptable, although links with the community were weak. Parents reported improved communication since the last inspection and that teacher-family communication about students' progress was strong.

Governance was acceptable. The governance board was newly established with membership consisting of the two school co-directors, a representative from the management company and two parents. Two meetings each year were scheduled and one had taken place. While one of the board's responsibilities was to ensure accountability, the majority of members were themselves school employees or

management representatives. The board had not ensured that Kindergarten enrolment met statutory guidelines; consequently all KG classes exceeded the regulation limiting each class to 25 children.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. The school usually ran efficiently although transition times were inadequately supervised especially in the boys' section. Most staff were suitably qualified and a program for staff development was in place. Not all staff were appropriately deployed. There was no dedicated support for students with additional needs. The facilities were well-maintained and tidy although there was an abundance of litter at break-times. Classrooms were overcrowded including Kindergarten, where there were about 20 per cent too many children in each class. Access to technology was limited. Resources, including the computer and science rooms, were adequate except for mathematics. The library was under used. Sports facilities were adequate.

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	214	15%
	Last year	519	19%
Teachers	106		54%
Students	283		82%

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

A minority of parents responded to the survey; fewer than half of last year's response rate. Most parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of education available at the school, but about a fifth were not satisfied. Most believed that progress was good in the key subjects, with the exception of Arabic as a first language where more than a few parents indicated that progress was not good. Majorities of parents, teachers and students reported that behavior was good at the school but about a fifth of parents and students disagreed. A majority of parents believed that their children enjoyed most lessons, but more than a few disagreed, as did more than a few students. About a third of parents and students believed

that the range of clubs and activities was too narrow. While a majority of parents believed that the homework given was suitable, about a fifth disagreed. A minority of parents indicated that they were involved in school improvement and an equal minority said that they were not.

What happens next?

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

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

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:
inspection@khda.gov.ae

Our work with schools

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

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

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

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