

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai National School - Al Twar

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai National School - Al Twar

Location	Al Twar
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dnschool.net
Telephone	04 298 8555
Address	PO Box 20057, Dubai
Principal	Amjad Jubr
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2,103
Number of Emirati students	1,603 (76%)
Date of the inspection	Sunday 15th to Wednesday 18th January 2012

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The context of the school

The Dubai National School, Al Twar branch, was opened in 1999. At the time of the inspection, the school roll was 2,103. It had increased from 1,990 students at the time of the previous inspection in March 2011. The school provided education for students aged four to 18 years.

The school offered a curriculum which was broadly based on a US framework. It was in the process of seeking accreditation with the New England Accreditation Board. Students sat a range of international tests to benchmark their attainment against international standards. At high school, the range of subjects was restricted.

There were 170 full-time teachers with 25 per cent being new to the school. Teachers were suitably qualified to teach their subjects. They were assisted by 33 full-time classroom support staff mainly deployed in the Kindergarten and in the lower elementary phases.

There were 1,603 Emirati students, or 76 per cent of the school roll. Students came from 32 nationalities. The Principal had been in post for 13 years.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The school provided a good quality of education. The Principal and his staff were committed to achieving a balanced international and Arabic curriculum which was tailored to students' needs. They were still developing the US curricular aspect of the school. While this met students' current needs, it remained narrow in the high school phase. The specialist Easy Learning Section of the school provided high quality support for students with special educational needs. The school had generally maintained high quality student learning, attainment and progress. However, teaching approaches and classroom activities did not always meet the varying needs of students.

The school had developed leadership at middle management level but this required further development to ensure consistency and quality across the school. Girls' attainment, particularly in English, mathematics and science, was significantly stronger than that of boys. The school was not yet systematic in identifying this and addressing the relatively weaker progress of boys. The school had developed Arabic instruction

but was at various stages of addressing the other recommendations of the last inspection report. Child-centred learning was strong in the Kindergarten. Students' attainment had improved in Islamic Education in the high school and in Arabic as an additional language in the elementary and middle school phases where they were now good. During this inspection a number of judgements were found to have declined since last year and were now acceptable. These included attainment and progress in mathematics in the high school phase; the attitude and behaviour of students in the middle and high schools; assessment in the elementary, middle and high schools; and the partnership with parents and the wider community.

Key strengths

- The improvements in students' recitation of the Holy Qur'an across the school;
- Students' confidence and fluency in the use of English, particularly in the high school;
- Girls' positive attitudes to learning across the school;
- The impact of child-centred teaching approaches in the Kindergarten;
- The impact of the Easy Learning Section in supporting students with severe special educational needs from Grades 1 to 6.

Recommendations

- Address the slower progress made by boys in English, mathematics and science;
- Build on existing good practice, for example in English, to develop students' investigative, critical thinking and enquiry skills across all subjects;
- Continue to promote strategies to improve the punctuality of students;
- Improve the quality and accuracy of assessment to ensure greater consistency in students' learning;
- Ensure consistently high quality leadership in order to raise the skills of monitoring teaching and learning, self-evaluation and improvement planning across the school.

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

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

Students' attainment was good in all key subjects across almost all phases. Attainment in Arabic for middle and high school first language speakers and in mathematics at the high school phase was acceptable. Most students had good knowledge of Islamic concepts and of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his

companions. Most had excellent Holy Qur'an recitation skills. However, a minority of Arabic first language middle and high school students did not use standard Arabic well. Students were particularly fluent and confident in speaking and reading in English from Grade 1 onwards. Across all phases, students had good mathematical calculation skills and scientific knowledge. Their understanding of mathematical concepts and problem-solving skills were weaker in Grades 9 to 11. Across all subjects and at all phases, students' investigative, critical thinking and enquiry skills were insufficiently developed.

Students were making good progress across all key subjects except for mathematics at the high school phase where it was acceptable. Progress was faster when students, especially boys, were engaged in challenging problem-solving activities. Kindergarten children were making particularly good progress in understanding early mathematical and science concepts through their Arabic lessons. In English, mathematics and science, the progress of girls was significantly better than that of boys. As students moved through the school they spoke and read English with increasing confidence and fluency. Students progressively gained a secure understanding of life, earth and physical sciences. Investigational and key practical skills were less well developed. Students with special educational needs made good progress except in science where it was only acceptable.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

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

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the Kindergarten and were acceptable across the other phases. Almost all Kindergarten children and most other students were respectful to adults and were

caring towards their peers, particularly those with physical and educational needs. Most students chose a healthy life-style and ate healthily. The active Student Council supported the school well but some senior girls felt that their views were not listened to by senior staff. Attendance was good but around ten per cent of students were persistently late in coming to school and a few students were observed wandering around corridors during the last period of the school day. Students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and their civic, economic and environmental understanding were good across the school. Students showed respect and understanding of Islamic values and appreciated the impact of the economy on contemporary society in Dubai and the wider world. Most students had a clear understanding of their civic responsibilities in the high school but this was less developed at the elementary phase.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

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

Teaching was good in all phases. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and used well-written planning documents to inform their lessons. They shared learning intentions and made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to illustrate the topics being studied. Teachers provided tasks suited for relevant grade levels. However, many lessons in key subjects in the middle and high school phases were content-driven rather than focusing on the acquisition of skills or on applying understanding in other contexts. As a result, teachers' expectations, particularly in mathematics and science in the high school phases, were not always sufficiently high. Very effective teaching, particularly in the Kindergarten and elementary phases, incorporated more active learning and real-world links which ensured that most students were stimulated and engaged. Across the school, the level of challenge for more able learners and support for slower learners were not consistently appropriate, especially in the middle and high school phases. The use of critical thinking and enquiry was not routinely part of lessons.

Learning was good across the school. Students were almost always motivated and enthusiastic learners. They were confident in sharing their learning with others but were not given frequent enough opportunities to do so. Students undertook very little independent research or enquiry. They responded effectively to the well planned e-learning tasks in the computing department but had insufficient opportunities to use ICT in their other lessons. Students' abilities to explain their understanding of key aspects of learning varied in quality across phases and within subjects and was often dependent on the opportunities provided by the teacher. Research, enquiry and critical thinking were not frequently featured in learning.

Assessment was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other three phases. Teachers used questioning in class well to assess students' recall and understanding of prior learning. Class work was regularly marked, and teachers had an appropriate knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses. However, from the elementary phase onwards, insufficient comment was provided in marking to help identify the next steps in students' learning. Substantial assessment data was collected by teachers to provide information on students' attainment and progress. However, assessment practices from the elementary to high school phases were inconsistent and variable in quality and this limited the effectiveness of data analysis to identify trends and inform practice. The assessment of students with special needs was good. More generally, however, assessment information was not used to good effect in curriculum planning in order to meet the learning needs of all students. Student self-assessment was encouraged in a few areas, but was generally under-developed.

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

The curriculum was good across the school. It had breadth and balance, and met the needs of almost all students, but its implementation had some weaknesses. Transition arrangements for new students, as well as between the phases were good. This ensured that the majority of students were well prepared for the next stages of their education. The curriculum was reviewed regularly to ensure good provision of most subjects. An annual departmental analysis identified areas for further development. However, the curriculum offered limited choice to the senior groups of students in both the science and commerce streams. Otherwise, it ensured that all students benefited from the provision of the subjects on offer and included a variety of enrichment activities for students' personal development. In particular, opportunities for independent learning, research and critical thinking were few and inconsistent across the grades. Cross-

curricular links enhanced learning, especially in the Kindergarten. A limited range of extra-curricular activities was offered to students including sports; however, there were too few opportunities for inter-school competitive sports or a wider activities programme of events to meet students' needs and interests.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good	Good

Health and safety arrangements were good. The school was a safe and secure place to learn. Medical staff provided good health and screening services. Healthy living was promoted through lectures, projects and displays. It was only partially supported through the food choices served in the canteens. Premises were clean and bus transport to and from school was safe, orderly and well supervised. Staff adapted the use of school facilities when required to meet the needs of those students with physical disabilities. Fire drills and emergency evacuation procedures were regular and effective. Staff and students were aware of the school's well-planned child protection arrangements.

Support for students was good. Their personal well-being was a priority for the school and staff-student relationships were positive especially in the Kindergarten. Students received effective guidance and support, and older students were given appropriate advice on career choices linked to the relatively narrow curriculum in the high school phase. The Easy Learning Section provided high quality support for students with identified additional needs. They worked closely with staff and parents to identify and address barriers to learning. Staff were informed about students' particular needs but limited strategies were used to meet these in classroom activities. Teachers and support staff did not always ensure that learning activities were sufficiently varied to suitably challenge more able learners or fully support those who were finding learning difficult. The school's arrangements to track and monitor students' attendance and punctuality were well planned. Almost all students attended school regularly. However, strategies to ensure student punctuality at the start of the day were not having a positive enough impact, especially with boys in the high school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

Leadership was good. The Principal and senior leaders had a broad overview of school priorities. Leadership roles at phase and departmental level had developed and staff met regularly to discuss progress against school priorities. Almost all leaders at middle management level fulfilled their responsibilities well. Consistent accountability of all levels by senior leaders was underdeveloped.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school used a range of approaches to evaluate its work. Middle leaders regularly monitored teaching and learning, and senior leaders occasionally visited classrooms. The lack of a suitably focused, systematic and consistent approach to evaluating teaching, learning and assessment meant that school leaders did not have a fully accurate picture of the learning outcomes in the classroom. This constrained the school's ability to provide fully evaluative information to measure the school's progress against agreed planning priorities. Similarly, the variations in assessing and recording students' work within and across departments meant that the rigorous approaches to recording and tracking students' attainment were not consistently accurate.

Partnership with parents was acceptable. The school was at a very early stage of meeting regularly with the Mothers' Council. The school had yet to define that the roles that parents could play in engaging in a more active role in learning within the school. The school communicated effectively with parents, mainly through newsletters, SMS and the school's web-site. They had made some attempts to involve parents more fully in supporting their children's learning but this remained underdeveloped. There a was good range of community links including opportunities for students to meet older members of the community.

Governance was acceptable. Governors supported and held the school to account and consulted parents on major areas affecting the school. While there was an educational representation on the governing body, there was no parental representative to help the school systematically gather the views of parents. As a result, some parents were unhappy that the only method of consulting with the owners was through the Principal.

The management of the school was good overall and outstanding in the Kindergarten. The timetable functioned well, except in science in the middle and high schools where lessons were too short and specialist resources were insufficient to ensure a suitably broad range of practical work. Staff, including teaching assistants, were effectively deployed and teachers benefited from appropriate professional development. The school provided a welcoming learning environment and accommodation. Resources, including specialist resources, were good; they were excellent in the Kindergarten. However, the room provided for Arabic as a second language was too small and its use as a corridor caused frequent interruptions to learning.

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 judgments. 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	88	8%
	Last year	85	8%
Teachers	11		6%
Students	42		8%

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

A small minority of parents, teachers and students responded to the questionnaire. Most parents were happy with the school and thought that it was well led. A significant minority of senior students were unhappy with subject option choices, extra-curricular opportunities and the amount of homework set. Almost all teachers were happy with the school and felt that they were having a meaningful impact on all students' learning.

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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