

# The Sheffield Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Year 12

Report published May 2010

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## Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

**Outstanding** – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

**Good** – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

**Acceptable** – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

**Unsatisfactory** – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

The Sheffield Private School was inspected in October 2009 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 Qusais, The Sheffield Private School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Year 12, aged three to 17 years. The school follows an English curriculum. At the start of the new academic year, a significant number of recently qualified UK trained teachers joined the staff. At the time of the inspection, there were 1168 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last year was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents showed a high level of satisfaction overall, although about half of the responses expressed lack of knowledge or dissatisfaction with their children's progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. A minority of respondents said they wanted more information about how they could help their children at home with school work and a few considered that there could be better links and information dissemination to parents.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The Sheffield Private School was a rapidly improving school providing an acceptable standard of education. It had many strengths, including the outstanding leadership and management of the senior management team, which had been responsible for raising standards overall, including the quality of teaching and learning. However, there had been insufficient time for some of the changes and developments to have full effect and there were still weaknesses in some key aspects of the school's work. Attainment and progress in English and science across the school were good and acceptable in mathematics. In comparison to the 2009 International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) data, attainment in English and science was above average. Attainment was below average in mathematics but, in the lessons seen, students were making acceptable progress. In Islamic Education, attainment and progress in the primary school and for non-Arab Muslims in the secondary school were unsatisfactory, although Arab Muslims made acceptable progress. In Arabic as a first language, primary students made acceptable progress and attained acceptable standards. Secondary students made good progress and attained good standards. However, attainment and progress of students studying Arabic as a second language across the school were unsatisfactory. Attitudes and behaviour across the school, in lessons and around the school were good. Most students were respectful to their peers and school staff. However, a small minority behaved poorly in a few lessons and in corridors. Nevertheless, the majority had positive, enthusiastic attitudes towards learning. Attendance was good, although a significant number arrived late for school each day. Students' civic and Islamic understanding was acceptable; students enjoyed participating in projects relating to local culture and Muslim students' understanding of Islam was developing. Most students had an age appropriate understanding of Dubai's multi-cultural society and the impact of the rapid changes on the environment.

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall across the school. Most lessons involved the active participation of the students. The majority of teachers monitored progress well, although activities were not always matched well to the learning needs of all students. Although the quality of marking was inconsistent, there were good systems for assessing students regularly. However, this information was inconsistently used in planning. The quality of the curriculum was good in the Foundation Stage and in the primary school and acceptable in the secondary school. Breadth and balance was enhanced by a topic approach in the primary school but integration of cross-curricular links and skills in the secondary school was inconsistent. In Key Stage 3 there was unevenness in provision. The curriculum was reviewed regularly to ensure progression and continuity. Students' education benefited from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. A few opportunities were provided to involve the local community in the educational provision, for example through enterprise activities and work-related learning. There were good arrangements to ensure the health and safety of the students. The number of behavioural incidents on buses had been reduced by improved monitoring and the premises were clean and well maintained. School meals, however, contained several unhealthy options. The quality of care in KG and in the primary school was good and acceptable in the secondary school. The school provided a caring environment in which students felt safe. However, limited additional support was available to help meet the

needs of lower attaining students and those with English as an additional language. Attendance was monitored rigorously and parents were kept informed of absences.

The quality of leadership was outstanding. The Principal was ably supported by a senior management team and his vision for the school had given it clear direction towards a common goal. The process of self-evaluation was becoming embedded in the school procedures and there had been a major revision of the staffing structure. Parents were fully supportive of the school and were impressed by the rapid rate of improvement in all aspects. Plans were in place to create a new governance structure through which the school would be accountable for its performance. The impact of a significant number of newly appointed, trained staff was beginning to be seen in the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The school was well maintained and well resourced.

## Key features of the school

- Outstanding leadership and management;
- Good attainment and progress in English and science;
- Unsatisfactory attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Good teaching and learning but unsatisfactory use of assessment in planning to meet the needs of all students;
- Good curriculum in the Foundation Stage and primary school;
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school which contributed effectively to students' knowledge, skills and enjoyment of learning.

## Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic across all stages of the school and ensure compliance with Ministry requirements regarding the time allocated to these subjects;
- Monitor, review and evaluate the impact of assessment on learning to improve consistency of practice across the whole school;
- Review curriculum provision and timetabling in Key Stage 3 to ensure breadth and efficient use of available time;
- Implement plans to create a new and effective governance structure within the current academic year.

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

Attainment and progress overall in Islamic Education were unsatisfactory, although Arab Muslims in secondary and post-16 stages made acceptable progress. The majority of students could memorise small Surah of The Holy Qur'an. However, students in the primary stage did not have the range of knowledge expected for their age, such as memorisation of the Hadith. The majority of Arab Muslims understood and applied recitation rules with few errors. However, for the non-Arab Muslims there were weaknesses in their understanding of relevance of their belief to the ethics and morality of everyday life.

Attainment and progress overall in Arabic were unsatisfactory. At this early stage the majority could repeat and copy Arabic letters and some words. In the primary stage, Arab students made acceptable progress because they understood and applied some of the simple rules of grammar and dictation. However, non-Arabs made unsatisfactory progress; less than half the students understood new Arabic words or recognised masculine and feminine forms of the words. In the secondary and post-16 stages, Arab students made good progress as seen in their understanding of Arabic grammar, such as use of verbs. However non-Arab students made unsatisfactory progress. Only a minority of students could accurately read a short text and explain its meaning.

In English, attainment and progress were good. Results in IGCSE were above average. Attainment and progress of the small group of post-16 students were also good. Most students expressed their opinions in class discussions and responded confidently and fluently to questioning. Well developed reading and interpretation skills were demonstrated in analysis of poems by older students. Students had good knowledge of poetic and literary devices and of different genres in writing, such as fantasy, mystery and science fiction, which they then applied in their own writing. They drafted and redrafted their writing in order to improve their work. A few students in the early stages of English language learning in Years 7 to 11, and a few less able students, struggled with reading and comprehension of complex texts and extended writing.

Attainment and progress in mathematics across the school were acceptable. The results in the 2009 IGCSE examinations were below the international average although, in the lessons seen, the majority of secondary students in Key Stage 4 were making the progress expected of them. However, students in Year 12 were not yet making acceptable progress in their A-level course. Children in the Foundation Stage recognised numerals and could recite numbers in order. They were making acceptable progress in counting and the majority understood the notion of 'one more' and 'one less'. Students throughout the primary school made good progress in developing their arithmetic skills. However, in the lower secondary the students' concept of number was under-developed. For example, they learned a process for multiplying simple fractions but their understanding of what a fraction is and of the process, were weak. Similarly, in geometry, primary students learned properties of quadrilaterals but in secondary school, when faced with problems involving parallel lines, many had difficulties in understanding why certain angles were equal.

Attainment and progress in science in all stages were good. The use of external benchmarks confirmed above average attainment at both Years 7 and 11. In Year 8, students understood the concept of density and were able to use the formula to solve problems. Students regularly undertook experimental work and used equipment safely and accurately, in confidently carrying out tests. Such practical work ensured that both the theoretical and empirical aspects of science were addressed. However, students did not form and test their own hypotheses.

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

Attitudes and behaviour across the school were good. Students behaved well in lessons and around school. They had respectful relationships with peers, teachers and school staff. A small minority of students behaved poorly in some lessons in Islamic Education and in corridors during breaks. The majority of students had positive and enthusiastic attitudes to learning. They showed commitment and effort in completing classroom tasks. They made good progress in developing collaborative and self-evaluation skills. Attendance was good, although punctuality at the beginning of the school day had improved, during the inspection a significant number of students arrived after the first lesson had started.

Students' civic understanding was acceptable. Students contributed well to the school through the work of the school council and fund-raising activities for charities. Most students showed care and consideration for others. They enjoyed participating in projects on local cultures. However, their understanding of Islam and its relevance to their own lives and local cultures was inconsistent.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Most students demonstrated an age-appropriate understanding of Dubai's multi-cultural society and its contribution to their lives. Older students knew about the unique advances made in the building of Dubai and of its landmarks. They had a good level of awareness of the problems caused by traffic pollution on the immediate environment but not of how this impacted globally. Although the students spoke of the recycling projects under way, their awareness was not reflected well in the amount of litter dropped in the playground at break times.

### How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching across the school was good. In most lessons, there was a good ethos for learning and good relationships between teachers and students. All teachers had good subject and pedagogical knowledge as seen for example in the use of songs and rhymes in the Kindergarten to help children learn the order of numerals. In the best lessons, the activities were challenging and matched well to the attainment levels of the students. The majority of lessons were well paced although, in a few, teachers talked for too long resulting in students losing interest. Students with English as an additional language were supported in their learning of English and appropriate extension work was provided for the higher attaining students. However, occasionally the pace was too fast for these students who then failed to understand their work. Most teachers made suitable use of interactive whiteboards and data projectors to focus learning. In the primary school there was good use of simple practical

equipment, such as cubes and 2D shapes to assist learning of mathematics. Generally, classroom assistants were deployed well to support learning. In less successful lessons, tasks were not well matched to the students' learning needs. The pace of lessons was too slow and lacked challenge. Although most classes were well managed, in Islamic Education and Arabic lessons behaviour management was unsatisfactory. Most classrooms were inviting and had interesting, informative and interactive displays that promoted learning. However, occasionally spelling and numerical errors were seen on the whiteboards and on the more permanent displays.

The quality of learning was good overall. In most lessons, students enjoyed learning. They undertook the activities willingly, collaborated in group work and communicated their learning to others. In the secondary school, good use was made of debate to develop thinking skills. In English, groups of students researched the topic of crime and punishment in different countries and used creative skills, such as drama and role play, to present their findings. Teachers used questioning well to promote higher order thinking. However, some students with English as an additional language struggled with tasks that required decoding and advanced skills such as redrafting written work.

Assessment was acceptable. In lessons, the majority of teachers monitored learning well and there were good systems for checking students' attainment and recording progress. Although some teachers made good use of this information to plan the next steps in learning, the extent to which this was happening across the school was variable. There was too much reliance on the course textbooks for planning the pace of delivery of the subjects. A few students who failed to understand the key concepts, particularly in mathematics, were being left behind. Marking was variable; it did not consistently inform students what to do to improve. The school had recently introduced an assessment guide and student attainment profile, although there had been insufficient time for it to have a significant impact on teaching and learning.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good at the primary stage and acceptable in the secondary and post-16 stage. Breadth and balance was enhanced by topic approaches in the primary stage and a range of option subjects was offered in Years 10 and 11. However, in Years 7 to 9, there was an unevenness of provision. For example, the modular delivery of art, music and modern foreign languages resulted in a lack of continuity. Moreover, period allocations sometimes resulted in several occurrences of a subject on one day. The leadership team ensured a coherent and regular review of curriculum planning and delivery, which was evident in all subject planning frameworks. These showed clear progression but whilst considerable time had been invested in staff training for planning work for different learning needs, not all students' needs were regularly met in the classroom. Students were well-prepared for the different stages of the secondary school. Extensive careers guidance was given through personal, health and social education, which helped to inform choices. Students' education benefited from an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. In the primary stage,



curriculum design assured good integration of cross-curricular links and skills but this was inconsistent in the secondary school. For example, students' Information Communications Technology (ICT) skills were used as a homework tool. Involvement in mini-enterprise activities and work related learning were good examples of how the community was used to enhance the curriculum but this was at an early stage of development.

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

Arrangements to ensure safety and security were good. The school responded promptly to issues raised during the inspection about access to premises. Fire safety drills were carried out termly in line with regulations. Students were well supervised during breaks and on school transportation. Improved monitoring of students on school buses had reduced the number of incidents of poor behaviour. The premises were very well maintained and provided a good range of facilities for curriculum activities. Medical information was updated and kept securely. Healthy eating and road safety guidance was provided in personal, social and health education. Arrangements for the care and welfare of students and child protection were followed rigorously. However, choices in school meals did not promote healthy lifestyles.

Teachers and other school staff shared an ethos of care, which was reflected in good relationships across the school, apart from a few incidents of poor behaviour in Islamic Education. Behaviour management was generally effective because of improved consistency in using routines, such as seating plans and lining students up outside classes. Attendance was monitored rigorously and parents were contacted promptly to follow up on absences. Students with learning difficulties and those with English as a second language were identified and received appropriate support from teachers and teaching assistants in the KG and in primary school classes. However, limited additional support was provided to meet the academic needs of less able students and those with English as a second language in secondary classes. These students often struggled to access classroom learning and were not always able to keep up with tasks.

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

The quality of leadership was outstanding. The Principal's vision was a driving force for change, and his energy inspired those around him. He was supported by a Vice-Principal and a recently-established management team. This leadership group had given the school a clear direction, and was working well with the staff and parents towards a common goal. This cohesive action was fully shared by the staff, who were united in their drive for improvement.

Self-evaluation was stringent, the monitoring of student progress was becoming systematic and staff development centred on improving teacher performance and student attainment. Innovations included a scheme of pastoral care based on a vertical 'house' system, a revision of the curriculum to reflect the students' needs better and greater provision of support in English for all. The action plan was clear, but it had not yet made an impact on student learning and performance. The school had addressed all the recommendations in the previous DSIB inspection report, and had made strong headway towards achieving its objectives, both

immediate and long-term. Senior managers monitored closely the work of teachers and students, thus providing evidence for further priorities in school improvement.

Parents were fully supportive of the school and the Principal. Information passed freely between Principal and parents, who had a regular flow of news via newsletters, e-mail and the internet. Links with other schools and the wider community still needed to be fully developed.

The school had no governing body. Nevertheless, it ensured that statutory requirements were met. Plans were in place for the formation of a governing body by June 2010.

A significant number of new teaching staff were appointed during the summer, and all were well qualified and appropriately trained. This had allowed the school to provide a curriculum of satisfactory quality for its students. There was a balance of experience among the staff, and their subject knowledge was sound. The teachers were supported by ancillary classroom and administrative staff who were deployed effectively for the needs of the students. The school was well resourced, with computers and ceiling-mounted projectors in most classrooms, good science laboratories and new text-books in many areas. The library was in need of new stock, but class libraries were adequate. However, the scope of developments in ICT was not fully explored in order to allow students to make more use of technology in lessons. The premises were clean, well-maintained, safe and bright. The space was suitable for the size of classes, and the staff had arranged notice-boards to enhance the teaching areas and make them both stimulating and attractive. Outside, a learning area for KG children had been created to good effect. There was a swimming pool, a large hall-gymnasium, a play area for early learners and sufficient space for extra-curricular activities.

## 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 is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good is the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

## Next Steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

**Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau  
Knowledge and Human Development Authority**

## How to contact us

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

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

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