

Al Diyafah High School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 13

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.....	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	9
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	9
Summary of inspection judgements	11
Next Steps.....	15
How to contact us.....	15

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.

Al Diyafah High School was inspected in February 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 Quasais, Al Diyafah High School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 13, aged five to 18 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,445 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all the parents were very happy with the school, agreed that their child enjoyed being at school and that the school helped to keep their child safe and healthy. Similar numbers felt that behaviour was good and that the school encouraged their child to work hard and to do their best. Most parents agreed that their children were treated fairly and that staff encouraged them to become independent and responsible people. They also agreed that the school gave good information about their children's progress and that the school had good links with parents. They said they felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. Most agreed that the school was well led. A minority of parents said they were unsure of the extent to which the school had good links with the community or how well the school had responded to the previous inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Diyafah High School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. There were some features which had improved significantly since the last inspection. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in primary and acceptable in secondary phases. Inspectors judged the attainment and progress to be good in the secondary phase in English, mathematics and science and acceptable in the primary phase. However, in Arabic, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in all phases. Children made a good start in the KG, especially in their early reading, writing and numeracy skills, and attainment and progress were good in all these areas. By the time students reached Grade 11, they achieved above average scores in public examinations in English, mathematics and science. The attitudes and behaviour of students in all grades were good. Daily student assemblies, often run by students themselves, reinforced the ethos of the school in the recognition of the importance of hard work, commitment, respect for others and good relationships at all levels. Students demonstrated good understanding of Islam although older students did not fully appreciate the value of Arabic as a language. All students had a good understanding of Dubai's economic progress and current challenges. However, their understandings of local traditions and Dubai's culture were less developed.

The teaching was acceptable in the secondary phase but unsatisfactory overall in primary, particularly in Arabic, mathematics and science. Teaching in KG was good. In the better lessons, there was good pace and challenge and most teachers prepared well and had good subject knowledge. However, too often, in lessons there was insufficient independent and active learning. The quality of the curriculum was acceptable throughout the school. All students experienced a balance of academic, creative subjects and physical education. The activities programme, held twice a week, provided additional learning opportunities for students. In the KG, although exciting and stimulating, the planned curriculum offered too few opportunities for children to take responsibility for their own learning. Some cross-curricular links were evident with better examples seen in the primary grades. Planned school visits, and sporting activities enriched the students' experiences but curriculum links within the community were less well developed. Teachers knew their students well and shared with them outcomes from assessments. Although marking was insufficiently informative, students from Grade 4 onwards knew how well they were doing in their respective subjects. Progress information was maintained by students themselves and many felt this was helpful to them. The school had improved its approach to gathering and using assessment data since the previous inspection. Arrangements to maintain the health and safety of students were good, notably the support from the medical staff. Students were well supported both in their learning and through the welfare arrangements. There were good systems for monitoring and recording students' progress. Advice about future options for education and careers for senior students was good.

The quality of leadership was good. The Principal had generated improved team work and direction. Action planning provided clear priorities for addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. The Principal and her senior team had focused on the more urgent matters of assuring consistency across the school, including improving the curriculum and raising attainment. Progress in the school had improved considerably since the previous inspection and there was good capacity for leaders to take the school further forward in the forthcoming year.

Key features of the school

- The good quality of leadership demonstrated by the Principal, which had led to significant improvements in the work of the school over the past year;
- The good academic results in English, mathematics and science;
- The high quality assemblies that promoted positive attitudes and values amongst students and good relationships with their teachers;
- The unsatisfactory teaching, curriculum, attainment and progress in Arabic;
- The good support from parents and their praise for the work of the school especially the provision for the health, safety and welfare of students.

Recommendations

- Raise the attainment and progress of students in Arabic and improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum in this subject;
- Increase the proportion of good or better quality teaching, particularly in mathematics and science in the primary phase and across the whole school in Arabic;
- Further develop teaching strategies to take fully into account students' individual needs, so that:
 - all students are actively engaged in their learning;
 - the students are less dependent on their teachers and take more responsibility for their own learning;
- Continue to improve the facilities and level of resources available to students, particularly in the range of reading books and in physical education.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the primary grades and acceptable in secondary. They knew about the Pillars of Islam and understood the main ideas of a few short chapters of The Holy Qur'an. Students knew important facts about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and the verses of the first revelation in Heraa' Cave. They were also learning to perform daily prayers and ablution. In the secondary grades, students continued to develop a more detailed knowledge of the Islamic principles and of the meaning of the verses of The Holy Qur'an and the Hadeeth. However, only a few students made sufficient progress in developing a deeper understanding of how to link and apply what they learnt to everyday practices and real life situations.

In Arabic, students' attainment and progress were, overall, unsatisfactory. In Grades 1 to 3, although students made acceptable progress, this was not sustained. In the lower grades, students learned a reasonable range of vocabulary for their ages and knew the equivalent meanings in English. They also learned to read Arabic script. However, in Grades 4 and 5, most students were not able to use the words they had learned in meaningful contexts in writing or in speaking. In the secondary phases, where progress was also unsatisfactory, students routinely repeated, read aloud and copied words and phrases which they did not fully understand. They had difficulty remembering vocabulary and made very limited progress in utilising what they were taught in class. By Grades 10 to 12, most students were unable to communicate in Arabic at an acceptable level.

Attainment and progress in English were good in the KG, acceptable in Primary and good in Secondary. Results in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examination for 2009 were above international averages. Children in the KG had good listening skills, spoke confidently and could recite nursery rhymes. They joined in songs, read letters of the alphabet and a few could read short sentences and write simple words. Students in the primary grades spoke fluently with highly developed vocabularies. By the end of Grade 6, most students read textbooks and poetry with fluency and expression. However, writing skills were varied across the grades. Spelling was generally good though there was considerable variation in grammar and punctuation in creative writing. In Grades 7 to 11, students listened attentively and responded to questions with reasoned opinions and original ideas.

In mathematics, attainment and progress in the KG were good, acceptable in the primary and good in the secondary phase. Students performed very well in 2009 in comparison with international standards in IGCSE and Advanced Subsidiary (AS) examinations; the Advanced Level (AL) group was also reaching above average standards. In the KG, children developed good understanding of the value of single digit numbers and a few could count to twenty and beyond. Primary students developed skills in number, calculation, handling data and in shape, space and measure as expected. By Grade 11, students competently manipulated algebra, used formulae and understood key features of transformations using co-ordinates. By Grade 13, students confidently used trigonometry and applied calculus in a range of contexts. All students developed problem solving skills to Grade 10. However, investigative skills, exploration, and higher order thinking skills were less developed.

Attainment and progress in science in the KG were both good, they were acceptable in primary and good in secondary and post-16 phases. At IGCSE level, students achieved well above average standards compared with international results. Internal tests indicated that attainment in Grades 12 and 13 was improving. KG children showed good knowledge and understanding of the natural world through topics such as 'Day and Night'. The majority of primary students knew a range of scientific facts including the water cycle, and could name parts of the plants, although some did not understand their respective functions. By Grade 6, students could express their understanding in scientific terms. Secondary students acquired good knowledge of topics such as refraction and the scientific processes needed to enable them to handle chemicals when engaged in practical work, although investigative skills were less well developed.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. In all grades, students were courteous and helpful. Daily assemblies led by students always contained a moral message and promoted acceptance of others, kindness and self-improvement. Students felt safe at school but knew the adults they could speak to if they needed help. There were good relationships between students and staff. Attendance was acceptable and students arrived on time for lessons.

Students' understanding of Islam and of their civic responsibility was good. Student leaders assisted in classrooms, organised events and supervised corridors. Students participated in community service activities and identified professional choices that would contribute to the improvement of Dubai and the world. Students had good understanding of Islam and could compare the differences and similarities between religions. However, older students did not sufficiently appreciate Arabic as a language and had little motivation to learn and use it.

All students had good understanding of Dubai's economic progress, current issues and challenges and its multi-cultural nature. However, their understanding of local traditions and Dubai's culture were less developed. Their knowledge and understanding of environmental issues were good and students of all ages could identify the key issues and cite specific strategies for improvement. They applied their understanding to their own lives by using the metro, car-pooling, re-cycling and using the school's own designed jute bags. Bulletin boards, class lessons, student projects and special events promoted the conservation of resources and deepened their understanding of the solutions needed to meet some of the environmental challenges in Dubai and around the world.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable in the secondary grades and good in the KG. In the primary grades it was unsatisfactory overall but with examples of good practice. In the KG, teachers were enthusiastic and achieved good outcomes, although there was a tendency for them to dominate lessons rather than allow children to be independent learners. Throughout the school, most teachers had good subject knowledge, prepared for their lessons well and used strategies to engage students in learning but with varying degrees of success. In English, for example, teachers asked progressively probing questions that deepened students' understanding. In the secondary grades, their questioning promoted critical thinking. In science and mathematics, again in the secondary grades, good pace and challenge productively engaged students in their work. However, the unsatisfactory teaching, particularly in Arabic across the school and in mathematics and science in the Primary grades, was due to teachers' dominance of lesson time. Too few strategies for independent and active learning resulted in little progress being made.

Learning was acceptable in each school phase, except in the KG where it was good. Children in the KG enjoyed their learning and were keen to take part in activities, particularly in singing and speaking activities. Learning was least secure in the primary grades and unsatisfactory in Arabic. Generally, students made links to previous learning, most noticeably in some Grade 10 and Grade 11 mathematics lessons. Students collaborated and worked well. They were aware of their strengths and weaknesses and keen to achieve more. In English, for example, students readily answered questions and posed appropriate questions to teachers and other students. When learning was unsatisfactory, students made insufficient progress because they were passive and too dependent upon their teachers. Learning was also unsatisfactory, for example, when teachers were not secure in their subject knowledge.

Assessment across the school was acceptable. Records of students' attainment and progress were kept and monitored. Students' strengths and weaknesses were identified through regular and structured tests and projects. A recent initiative to locate students to one of four achievement bands was beginning to help teachers to modify lessons. It also helped students to set their sights on moving up an achievement band. Progress charts, maintained by students were helpful to them, and kept parents informed of progress made. Overall, however, these initiatives had not had sufficient time to impact on students' progress. In lessons, feedback, including marking, did not indicate to students the steps needed to improve further. In other lessons, particularly from Grade 4 onwards, students had a clearer picture of how well they were doing. The school had started to move towards the National Curriculum for England in order to validate assessment and to compare with international standards.

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

The curriculum was adapted from the English National Curriculum and was of acceptable quality. It was broad and balanced and offered older students opportunities to study a variety of subjects including Environmental Management and languages. The Arabic curriculum was not well-planned and did not enable students to make enough progress. Primary students studied a full range of subjects, including modern languages, creative arts and physical education. In addition, there was an activities programme held twice a week for students with a commendable variety of courses. Some of the courses were recreational and included games and karate, whilst others were artistic and included Western dance and glass painting. Whilst the programme was beneficial, it took a significant amount of curricular time and lacked the planning and effective monitoring to ensure consistency and quality. The curriculum generally showed continuity and progression and was subject to annual review. Suitable teaching materials supplemented the textbooks used. The integration into the curriculum of information and communication technology (ICT) was under-developed. In the KG, the curriculum, although lively and relevant, offered too few opportunities for children to take responsibility for their own learning. In the primary grades, there was a lack of challenge for the more able students and this led to a lack of progress. Similarly, the curriculum paid insufficient attention to the needs of the least able students. Some cross-curricular links were well planned for example, through the study of rainforests in the primary school but, at secondary level, links across subjects were less well developed. Extra-curricular pursuits took place within the activities programme and school visits, inter-school competitions, debating, sport and other activities enriched the students' experiences. Curriculum links within the community were less well developed.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety and the quality of support were good overall. Teachers knew their students very well; they showed commitment to their welfare and sought to promote a happy and purposeful working environment. Most students voiced appreciation for the care shown towards them by their teachers and they said they felt safe around the school. The school grounds and facilities were safe, clean and well maintained. The school transport was mostly well supervised, although a few students did not always wear seat belts. The school doctor and the two full-time nurses were very active in monitoring the health and well-being of students. Records and routines were clearly established in all areas covering the health and safety of students. An effective health education programme had been implemented with high quality follow up and support for all students with medical conditions. The school staff members were aware of the school's policy and procedures on child protection, although there was no written guidance on this.

Relationships between staff and students were good. Students respected their teachers and cared for each other. Staff ably and sensitively managed the rare instances of unacceptable behaviour. The dedicated student welfare team ensured that all students' behavioural and emotional needs were met. The school had recently made significant improvements and had introduced good systems for monitoring and recording students' progress and well-being. While good attention and support were given to students with special needs, systems did not always ensure that all individual students received appropriate guidance on how they could improve their academic performance. Advice about future options for education and careers for senior students was good. Attendance was well monitored.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership in the school was good. The leadership team, ably led by the Principal, had brought vision and direction to the school. This had enabled the school to prioritise improvements and raise outcomes. Good team work and clear direction had led to the establishment of an improved range of quality procedures and helpful policies. Much of the strategic direction and action planning had been linked with the recommendations from the previous inspection report, all of which had been addressed. Relationships in the school were good. Effective guidance for staff, including arrangements for their professional development, had been established to support teacher appraisal. There was good capacity in the school to build on existing achievements and thereby impact on standards and the progress made by students.

The school had begun to evaluate its own work and performance to an acceptable level. Assessment of students' academic performance was analysed and this had led to differences in work programmes for students. However, this information was not fully translated into lesson planning. Students themselves were involved in the monitoring of their own progress and this was shared with parents. The Principal and her senior team had focused on assuring consistency across the school, including improving the curriculum. However, there were still areas for improvement, including the provision in Arabic and some of the residual unsatisfactory teaching in the primary grades. Senior staff had monitored lessons and the students themselves have been engaged in evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching they received.

The school had developed good partnerships with parents. In their comments, parents were unequivocal about efforts taken by the school to communicate with them. Parents reported that the school was proactive in involving them especially if their children needed either personal or academic support. Reporting to parents on academic progress had also improved. Parents appreciated the bulk SMS texting facility which kept them informed generally. There were a few links within the wider community, for example, students were engaged in conservation and environmental projects, and they had supported the Dubai Municipality litter campaigns. Further afield, students supported charitable work in Dhaka. However, the school acknowledged that more development work was needed in this area.

The school had been family owned since its foundation and a member of the family worked as manager in the school, in partnership with the Principal. The owner had a positive influence on the school and was involved at all stages of major decision making, including appointments. The Principal was accountable to and shared information with the owners on student and staff performance. There were detailed plans to extend the representation of governance and to include improved accountability to parents and others in the community.

There were sufficient qualified staff and most had a good command of their specialist areas, apart from Arabic. Facilities were acceptable but space was limited. The library and ICT facilities were acceptable, although the KG lacked quality reading books. The playing field was well used but there was no sports hall for physical development of students during the hot summer months. However, existing space and other resources were used well. Staff members generally made good efforts to create purposeful learning environments for their 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:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	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:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
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	Acceptable

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.

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

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