

Dubai National School - Al Twar Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High School

Report published May 2011

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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.

Dubai National School - Al Twar was inspected in March 2011 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Twar, Dubai National School - Al Twar is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to High School, aged four to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 1,990 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. Most parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school overall and particularly in the areas of Arabic as a first language and English. A minority of parents expressed concern regarding the quality and amount of instruction for learners of Arabic as an additional language. Parents rated both the quality of teaching and their children's enthusiasm for learning highly. Almost all parents reported that children's safety and support were good. Most parents made favourable comments about communication between the school and the home. However, a minority reported a lack of effective parental involvement in the school. A minority of parents thought the amount and quality of homework was inappropriate. A few requested that the website be more informative and kept up to date.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai National School Al Twar provided a good quality of education. The senior leadership team had responded to all recommendations from the previous report and the results were an effective work in progress. Continual improvement was a key feature of the school's priorities and was based on an in-depth analysis of its performance. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable.

Student attainment was good in almost all key subjects and progress was good across the curriculum, but especially so in English. The quality of teaching and learning was good and the curriculum was broad and balanced. Arrangements for health and safety were good. Leadership was good, with a clear vision and strong capacity for continued improvement.

Key features of the school

- Student's English fluency was of a high quality;
- The school reflected the values and culture of the local community;
- Positive attitude and self-discipline of girls was evident throughout the school;
- There was a high quality programme for students with special learning needs in Grades 1 to 6.

Recommendations

- Develop opportunities in Arabic instruction which include oral and written activities, particularly in middle and high school boys' sections;
- Implement a collective responsibility for establishing and monitoring proper student behaviour in all areas of the school;
- Continue improving teachers' understanding and skills, including the development of increased opportunities for investigative learning, particularly in mathematics and science;
- Increase the range and quality of extra-curricular opportunities for all students;
- Develop the role of subject leaders throughout the school.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good in elementary and middle schools, but only acceptable in high school. Students' progress was good across the school. Although the quality of recitation overall was acceptable, girls in Grades 6 and 7 achieved above expectations. The understanding of chapters of The Holy Qur'an was good across school. The application of the rules of Tajweed varied from one class to another and was mostly better in the girls' section. Most students had a good knowledge of Islamic history and beliefs and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary school. In middle and high schools, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Most elementary students in the lower grades gained good knowledge of grammar. In Grades 4 and 5, they were able to devise questions using different structures. They were able to read and analyse short stories and identify their key elements. However, in writing, students did not consistently use correct connectors or re-draft their work. Grade 8 girls could read texts fluently. Their comprehension skills were appropriate. Their understanding of poetry was good. Students' ability to apply grammar in their writing and write extensively for a wide range of purposes was limited.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable and progress was good in the elementary and middle grades. By Grade 3, all students were making good progress in all aspects of the language. Oral skills in elementary were better than in other phases. The majority of students could write grammatically correct sentences about familiar topics. However, there were significant discrepancies in students' attainment and rates of progress from year to year. In middle school, students' reading and speaking were good. Their sentences were structured correctly, following appropriate grammatical rules. Progress in elementary was significantly better than in the middle grades, with the exception of Grade 8 students, who made good progress overall. Writing skills were the least developed across the whole school.

Attainment and progress in English were good in all phases. Listening and speaking skills were above international expectations for additional language learners, particularly in Kindergarten, Grade 1 and the high school. Children started school with limited English and soon acquired a wide range of vocabulary. In the high school, students spoke confidently about globalisation and expressed feelings, ideas and opinions. Reading skills were developed well. Kindergarten children matched letter sounds to print. Elementary and middle school students could read sentences with correct pronunciation and intonation. They understood passages of text, but confused some words and this limited their progress across the curriculum, for example, in science. Students made acceptable progress in writing. Older students wrote poetry to a good standard. Across the school students wrote in a variety of genres, but independent fiction writing was less developed.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good across all phases. Kindergarten children knew and used simple mathematical terms. Grade 5 students had good number skills and could calculate the mean, median and mode accurately. Grade 9 students were able to use mental strategies effectively to estimate values in a variety of situations. Senior students worked independently to analyse problems logically, identify relevant factors and select appropriate mathematical methods. In most grades, students had not developed their investigative skills to a high level. Students did not develop their critical thinking and enquiry skills in a mathematical context.

Attainment and progress in science were good across all phases. Kindergarten children made accurate observations and learned about the ocean. Grade 1 and 2 students described simple concepts, performed experiments and constructed model forests, complete with plant life and habitats for animals. Grade 4 students knew the characteristics of microscopic organisms. Grade 6 students understood the processes required to purify water. Grade 10 students expanded their study of cells to include the causes, treatment and prevention of diseases. Almost all high school students made good progress in research and investigative skills when completing experiments and research papers. They were able to use scientific terminology, such as pathogens and antigens in biology, and identified their meanings and specific purposes.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school, except in elementary where they were acceptable. Almost all students displayed consistently high levels of engagement and commitment to their responsibilities and their work. Students were courteous, positive and proactive in their communication with adults and each other. Relationships with their teachers were almost always positive. They understood and promoted healthy living and spoke confidently about the ongoing work of ensuring healthy choices in the canteen. Attendance was acceptable and students were rarely late for classes but attendance during the inspection, following a recent short break was well below the semester average.

Civic and Islamic understanding was good across the school. Children in Kindergarten were involved in daily activities which enriched their understanding, such as songs, Islamic supplications and a variety of other activities. Students in higher grades were developing a good understanding of their responsibilities, both in and out of school. They described their understanding of the impact of Islam on Dubai. The regular use of the prayer rooms in the boys' and girls' sections enhanced students' understanding of their Islamic responsibilities. However, student's leadership roles and responsibilities required further development.

Economic and environmental understanding was good across all phases. Students had a well-developed understanding of Dubai's development and its current profile in the world. As they got older, their capacity to understand their potential contribution to the future was enhanced through their understanding of economics and environmental management. Students consistently showed care for their immediate environment and co-operated with the wider community to promote and manage greater environmental awareness. The school did not

provide sufficient recycling activities to support students' programmes and environmental growth.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching for effective learning was good. Most teachers had good subject knowledge. Where teaching was effective, there was planning to incorporate opportunities for independent learning, enquiry and critical thinking. Teachers were less reliant on the text-book and consciously used a broader range of learning resources. Where there was a combination of well-planned work, a variety of well-structured activities and good time management, students were engaged and challenged; for example in elementary school mathematics and Islamic Education. However, in less effective lessons a lack of focused planning meant that teachers did not meet the needs of all students appropriately. Teachers were inclined to dominate or over-direct, giving limited opportunities to the students to participate in their learning. Questioning strategies were not fully effective, for example in plenary sessions, because of the overemphasis on unspecific, closed questions.

The quality of student learning was good across the school. Most students worked well together, co-operating and collaborating, which ensured maximum gains in learning. The majority of students demonstrated good levels of perseverance and higher attainers, in particular, did not over rely on the teacher. Most students were willing to share their skills and knowledge with peers, recognising the value of the interactions. Almost all students responded well to activities and worked enthusiastically. In English for example, most students were eager to respond using their developing research skills to good effect. Whilst most students were respectful of others and responsive when the teaching was good, there were too many examples, in most subjects, of passive learning.

Assessment was good throughout the school. Teachers in all grades had recorded a good range of assessment data. The majority of teachers had a good understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses. The school used a variety of internal and external assessments to develop a clear picture of student attainment. However, staff did not use the data effectively to inform planning and ensure that the needs of all students were met. Assessment was used to identify underachievement and support programmes were produced for individual students. There were good examples of verbal feedback to students in science and English. However, there were only a few examples of written developmental feedback in workbooks, advising students of the next steps to take in order to improve.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in all phases. It was broad, balanced and reviewed annually. Aspects for development were identified and additional resources were obtained as necessary. Courses in business and economics, linked to labour market needs, had been introduced. Links with universities and with former students influenced curriculum

development as seen, for example, in the decision to increase the amount of time for independent writing. The curriculum was based on published materials, enriched by teachers to meet students' needs. There was a range of visits to improve students' awareness of the local community and the world outside school. Subjects, such as home economics, physical education, health education and information and communications technology (ICT), were included for all grades. Social studies encouraged students to think as global citizens. Additional support and extension projects were available for lower and higher attaining students. E-learning was included, such as in ICT, so students could study at home. Cross-curricular links were embedded in the commercial materials and a unit on mathematics for students studying physics had been introduced. Students organised a safety campaign and received an award from Dubai Police. Extra-curricular activities included chess, sport, book and science fairs, an environmental forum and university visits, although only a limited number of students took part. Older students were well prepared for employment and higher education. All school leavers completed First Aid certificates and were involved in fund raising for charities such as Dubai Cares and Red Crescent.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were good. The school provided a secure learning environment. Students stated they felt safe at school. They knew where to go if they needed advice or counselling. Fire and emergency evacuation procedures were known to all staff and students and these were practised in accordance with local guidelines. A full-time doctor and a nurse provided health services, which included wellness check-ups, administration of medications, BMI testing, counselling for obesity, dental referrals and general health care during the school day. There was a focus on healthy living and healthy food choices were offered in the clean, hygienic canteens. Bus arrival and departure was orderly and well supervised. Students wore seat belts and monitors rode with the students. Suitable modifications, such as ramps, provided access to the building for persons with physical disabilities. All staff were aware of child protection procedures.

The quality of support was good. Staff-student relationships were positive and based on mutual respect, particularly in the girls' sections. Supervisors, a social worker and a counsellor provided additional support services to students. Tracking of students' academic progress was good. Teachers knew their students and their progress. External data was available to track results in external exams. Education services were provided in a specific programme for elementary students with special educational needs such as autism, behavioural issues and other difficulties. A special education administrator kept up-to-date records, detailed individual education plans and progress reports on each student. Attendance and punctuality were managed effectively, but the students' attendance and punctuality were unsatisfactory during the inspection.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. The leadership team shared responsibility for staff development and supervision. They shared a clear sense of direction for the school and its academic mission. There was a clear focus on collegial work among staff, which was modelled by the leadership. A clear ethos of caring for all children and staff began with the leadership personnel.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Systematic and rigorous improvement planning addressed all the recommendations from the previous report. The action plan and devised strategies were clearly shared with all staff and systematically reviewed in subject area meetings. However, they needed to be further refined and implemented.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with school leaders and their responses to inquiries. A parents' association was being developed and beginning to work with staff and the student council. A minority of parents expressed concern regarding the quality and amount of instruction in Arabic as an additional language. Parents rated the teaching and their children's enthusiasm for learning highly. The school had well developed community links and used them effectively to support learning.

Governance was acceptable. The board of governors had a good working knowledge of the school and its programmes, including a good understanding of which external benchmarks were used to add value to the students' learning and assessments. Parents did not have formal access to the governing board through a Parent-Teacher Organisation, which represented the families of the school. The governance committee oversaw all compliance issues and developed the development plan with input from senior leadership staff and parents.

Staffing, facilities and resources were judged to be good and the instructional staff were appropriately qualified. Adequate staff had been hired for all key positions in the school. However, a language-arts Head of Department position was vacant at the time of the inspection. Professional development of staff supported their needs appropriately. School libraries were well supplied although additional Arabic and English titles were needed to support the students as the programmes continued to improve. ICT was used effectively in almost all classrooms and the campus was maintained and used effectively to support instruction.

Summary of inspection judgements

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

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 95% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Acceptable	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:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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

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