

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai National School - Al Barsha

Report published in April 2013

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai National School - Al Barsha

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dnsalbarsha.com
Telephone	04-3474555
Address	PO Box 24060, Dubai
Principal	Mohd. R. El-Merabi
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	2,685
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	1,814 (68%)
Date of the inspection	13 th to 17 th January 2013

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The context of the school

Dubai National School is situated in Al Barsha and, at the time of the inspection, there were 2,685 students on roll, 68 per cent of whom were Emiratis. There were 34 nationalities present in the student community with most speaking Arabic as their first language. Fifty four students were on the special educational needs register and 141 identified as gifted and talented.

The school followed a US curriculum for English, mathematics and science. Students took the SATs in Grade 11. All students took the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) at Grade 11. The school was organized into four phases and for the purposes of this report. These were Kindergarten, elementary (Grades 1 to 5), middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 12).

At the time of the inspection, there were 204 teachers at the school, of which nine per cent were newly appointed. The school had accredited status with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Good

Key strengths

- Good attainment and progress across all key subjects and across all phases;
- Good student behaviour and outstanding attitudes to learning;
- Outstanding understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions;
- Outstanding leadership at all levels;
- A strong community ethos underpinned by Islamic values.

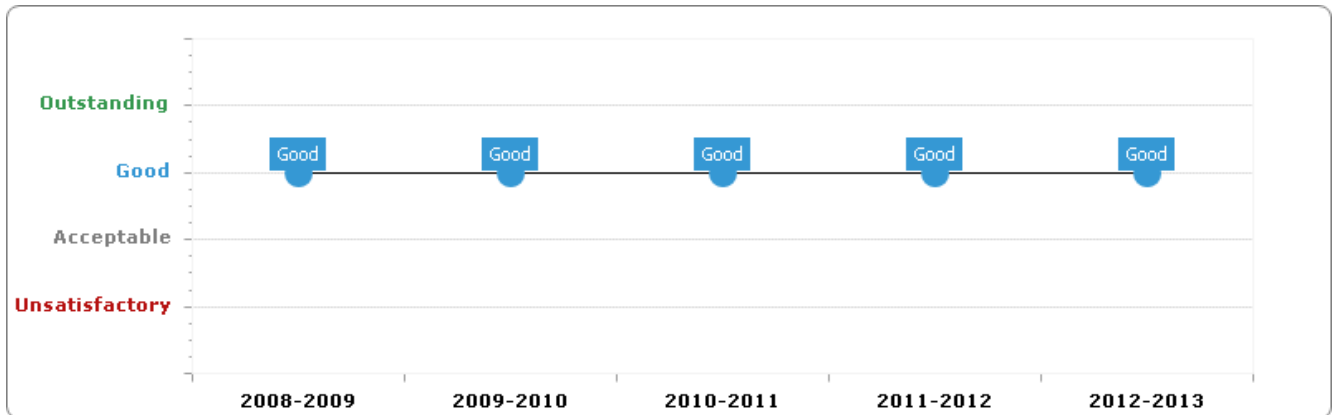
Recommendations

- Revise existing assessment processes to ensure that attainment and progress data is comparable between and within key subjects and data is more accessible;
- Clearly identify individual learning targets for students with special educational needs and monitor their progress;
- Develop systems to improve punctuality and attendance at the start of the school day;
- Improve the use of information and communications technology (ICT) from Kindergarten to Grade 9 to support and enhance learning.

Progress since the last inspection

- The school had made good progress towards meeting the recommendations from last year's inspection report;
- Improved consistency of teaching and learning resulted from improved teacher training;
- The curriculum had been reviewed to provide improved opportunities for gifted and talented students;
- Assessment criteria had been modified to include recognition of students' research projects and their use of critical thinking skills.

Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	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	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
English				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment was good in all subjects, across all phases of the school. The majority of students demonstrated strong prior knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices and had well developed recitation skills using Tajweed rules. In Arabic, the majority of students had good listening and speaking skills; they responded to teachers' questions using well-structured sentences. They were confident readers. However, their extended writing skills were underdeveloped. In English, students displayed enthusiasm for literature and for different genres. In mathematics, in the high school phase, the majority of students demonstrated strong knowledge of number and measures, and applied these within their algebra, calculus, trigonometry and geometry work. Skills such as estimation and prediction were less well-developed. In science, the majority of students increased their knowledge across the different disciplines. The skills of enquiry, prediction and scientific method were less advanced.

Progress was good in all subjects and across all phases of the school. Generally girls made better progress than boys. The majority of students in Islamic Education developed a good understanding of modesty of conduct and dress and acquired a solid knowledge of the Prophet's Seerah and the traveller's prayer. In Arabic, the majority of students had developed their listening and speaking skills well and, in primary, the majority of students had improved their writing skills. Progress in English and mathematics accelerated as the students moved through the school. In science, the majority of students made better progress in physics, chemistry and biology than in general science and health science. For all students, overall progress was more rapid when they were provided with different ways to learn. Students, who were identified with special educational needs, made slower progress than their peers.

[View judgments](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of students were good across the school. Relationships between students and staff were courteous and respectful. A majority of students made healthy food choices and participated in daily exercise. They had a good awareness of healthy life styles. Attendance was good but a few students arrived late to school each day. Students' appreciation of Islam and understanding of local culture and heritage was outstanding in most of the school. In Kindergarten, students showed high levels of respect for The Holy Qur'an. In the elementary phase, students could explain clearly the purpose of mosques and the importance of Eid celebrations. They showed an excellent understanding of life in Dubai a century ago and could provide a clear description of some of the other cultures in the school. In middle and high school phases, students displayed an exceptional understanding of the role of Islam in their lives and how its values impacted on life in Dubai. They appreciated the cultural heritage of the UAE and demonstrated a deep respect for local and global cultures. Students' community and environmental responsibility was good in

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Kindergarten and elementary and outstanding in middle and high school phases. Students had a good awareness of their responsibilities towards the wider community. Older students demonstrated an excellent work ethic through the quality of their projects and studies. Across the school, most students had an excellent awareness of the major environmental issues and described in detail how recycling and conserving energy would help the environment.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

The quality of the teaching across all phases was good. Most teachers knew their subjects well, how to teach them and how their students learned. However, children in Kindergarten classes did not have sufficient opportunity to follow their own choice and interests. Teachers collaborated to plan and time management in most cases was good. Resources, such as information and communications technology, were used effectively in many senior classes. A strong feature of the middle and high phases of the school were the many opportunities for students to discuss and question. However, in too many classes there was an over-reliance on a text book. Too many teachers used questions to assess understanding rather than to develop thinking. Lessons were well planned by the majority of teachers to meet the needs of different ability groups. However, more able students were usually expected to complete more work rather than be challenged by tasks more appropriate to their abilities. The development of critical thinking skills was an on-going priority of the school.

The quality of students' learning was good across all phases. Students enjoyed and took responsibility for their learning. Almost all students were engaged in their studies and could work independently. Progress was most rapid when students knew what they needed to do to improve and what to do next. Most students collaborated well with each other, in a range of learning situations, to achieve common goals. The majority of students were able to make connections between their learning and real life experiences. Enquiry and critical thinking skills were a developing feature of lessons. For example, students prepared computer presentations independently and shared their learning with their peers.

Assessment practices were good across the school. Senior leaders effectively managed the school's information management systems to ensure data was accurate. Testing and target setting occurred at the beginning of each year. The progress of each student was monitored against these targets. There was, however, inconsistent analysis of data against international benchmarks at grade and subject level. The school did not identify how effective it was or the impact new teaching strategies were having. On-going assessment was used to guide lesson planning and to adapt teaching strategies. Teachers had secure

knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses and they provided some oral and written improvement prompts.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good across all phases of the school. It had a clear rationale based on the values of the school. Continuity and progression were an integral part of planning. Classes in information communication technology, home economics, physical education, art and social development provided breadth and balance. The curriculum included an emphasis on personal and social development, in addition to academic learning. High school students participated in two prescribed streams of study, science and business, but there were no elective courses. Transition arrangements particularly between the middle school and high school phases, were good. The curriculum was regularly reviewed and modified, based on an annual analysis of student performance data. It was effective in meeting the needs of most students. A full after-school activities programme, participation in competitions, relevant field trips and charity projects enhanced the curriculum and linked the school to the local community.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for health and safety was good in all phases. A comprehensive range of health and safety policies were in place and practices were followed thoroughly. Responsibilities were delegated to specific staff members, and students were well supervised in all areas of the school. The safe arrival and departure of students to and from school were well managed. Emergency evacuation drills were regularly carried out and results were recorded. School safety and maintenance contracts were up to date. The school nurses kept detailed records on students requiring specific care as well as the daily medical activities in the clinic. Healthy living was promoted within the school. The food served in the school canteen was generally nutritious and healthy choices were made by the students. A written child protection policy was in place and shared with appropriate personnel and parents via the school's website.

The quality of support was outstanding in Kindergarten and good across the rest of the school. Student success and well-being were seen as priorities by all staff. Children in the Kindergarten benefited from having two teachers in each classroom. Across the school, there were positive relationships between students and staff members.

Student behaviour was well managed. The school had an effective system that promoted good attendance. Punctuality remained a problem at the beginning of the day.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The systems for identifying students with special educational needs in the school were underdeveloped; lower achievement was measured rather than specific learning difficulty. Those with learning difficulties made insufficient progress. The school had devised individual education plans for students with special educational needs. However, some of the support strategies suggested in the plans were not in place. Resources to support the students within classes were limited. There were withdrawal classrooms for English and Arabic support in the Kindergarten. Students received on-going support which helped their learning and this led to acceptable progress. Strong channels of communications between parents, the counsellor and Principal ensured that concerns and students' progress were regularly discussed. Monthly academic meetings and regular informal discussions also supported this. Modifications to the curriculum to support students with special educational needs were in the early stages of implementation. In a few examples, students with special educational needs were fully and effectively included in classes and this was the case particularly where teachers provided tasks specific to each student's needs. The result was that students' progress that was in line with the rest of the class.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership across all levels of the school was outstanding. A clear vision, which was regularly reviewed by parents, teachers and the Governing Body, permeated the school and influenced most decision making. Modifications were shared with the school community. Leadership was distributive and collegial. Most senior leaders had developed their expertise whilst at the school and this supported the school stability of leadership and a capacity to improve.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. All teachers were involved in the school evaluation process and the subsequent improvement planning. The school knew itself well and had accurately identified key priorities. School leaders had an extensive programme for monitoring learning in the classroom. However, follow-up discussions with teachers were not a consistent feature of this programme. All teachers participated in a peer observation programme involving students which offered helpful feedback on the

quality of teaching. Training of staff, linked to school priorities, was a regular feature of the work of the school. Actions from improvement plans were a result of careful analyses and had a positive impact on attainment and progress. However, success criteria were usually linked to the completion of the action taken rather than to improvements in students' outcomes. There had been good progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents had access through the school's information management system to a range of relevant information. The majority of parents attended special events arranged at the school. Further useful information was shared with parents through the four parent evenings arranged each year and the end of year grade reports. Personal and social development was not reported upon in the reports and there was no opportunity for students and parents to comment on progress. The school had appropriate and beneficial links with the community including an arrangement with the Canadian University of Dubai. Additionally, there was a regular programme of charitable fundraising activities. A Parents Council provided a further means by which parents could support and give advice to the school.

Governance was good in the school. The Governing Body included representation from many stakeholders and provided strategic advice to the school. Members were hard-working, competent and committed to the success of the school. They held the leaders of the school to account for its performance. Detailed information on the full range of the school's activities was shared with the Governing Body at the biannual meetings. Communication was frequent and regular and served to address issues as they arose. However, as yet, there was no process for the systematic gathering of feedback from parents.

The management of the school was good. The campus was generally clean and well-maintained. A large staff was appropriately qualified and facilitated learning, especially in the Kindergarten. The classrooms were of an appropriate size. Digital projectors were available for teachers in all classrooms and the computer laboratories were well equipped to meet the needs of the students. However, there was limited access to computers for students in Kindergarten, elementary and middle school classes. Resources to support other aspects of learning were sufficient apart from the school libraries, which were under-resourced. There was insufficient access to information and communications technology in order to facilitate research and the number of books available to the students was limited.

[View judgements](#)

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	222	16%
	Last year	340	27%
Teachers	129		48%
Students	53		14%

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

Around 16 per cent of parents responded to the survey. This was a reduction on last year. About half of the staff and a few students also responded to their surveys. Almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning. Students felt that they had a good understanding of Islamic values. Almost all parents believed the school to be well led. Most stated that they were well-informed about their children's education and that teachers made sure their children knew how to improve. Parents thought their children were safe at school. They were less assured about having a say in the decision making processes at school or being represented by the Parent Council. Teachers all felt students were valued and they were positive about the behaviour of the students. The number of students who answered the questionnaire was less than last year. Almost all were positive about student behaviour and most felt that there was an adult at school that they could trust. However, less than half thought the school listened to their opinions. Many students expressed a wish for a wider range of after-school activities.

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

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