

The Apple International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 8

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 Apple International School was inspected in January 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 Quasais, Apple International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 8, aged three to 14 years. The school follows the English National curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1748 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. Parents praised the discipline in the school and said that staff expected students to work hard. They said their child was treated fairly, and most had confidence that the school would resolve any parental concerns. They believed that the school gave good attention to the health and safety of their children and was well led. Almost all said their children were making good progress in English and mathematics. However, only a minority thought they were making enough progress in Islamic Education or Arabic. A few, particularly those who had children at the primary stages, had concerns about the quality of teaching. A significant minority did not think that the school gave them enough information about how their children were getting on with their learning. Very few parents understood how the school had improved since the last inspection, or how it used links with the local community to support learning. A majority of parents added positive comments to questionnaires, but a significant minority raised concerns. These were mainly about the limited extra-curricular activities, the approach to learning in KG being too formal and lacking play, the lack of sports and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Apple International School provided an unsatisfactory standard of education. Attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory across the school. Progress over time was unsatisfactory in the primary grades since many students lacked a basic knowledge about The Holy Qur'an but, in the secondary grades, it was acceptable. Students' attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory in both the primary and secondary grades. Students' skills in listening and understanding spoken Arabic were not well developed, and most could only respond to questions in one-word answers. Students' attainment and progress in English were acceptable throughout the school. Students in all grades listened well for information and instructions and spoke clearly and confidently. In mathematics, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in KG and acceptable at the primary and secondary stages. In KG and the early stages of the primary phase, students made a slow start to developing key skills in number and calculation. Attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in science across the school. Children in the KG were only able to repeat simple facts without understanding what they meant. Students in the primary and secondary grades had not developed sufficient scientific enquiry skills. Attitudes and behaviour were good in the KG, and acceptable in the primary and secondary grades. Girls behaved particularly well throughout the school and in the older grades their keenness to make progress was exemplary. A few boys in the secondary grades did not always demonstrate respect for their teachers.

The quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory in almost half of the lessons observed. Unsatisfactory teaching was most evident in the KG and primary grades. Teaching was broadly acceptable in the secondary grades. One of the most significant weaknesses was at KG where teaching was not matched to the way young children learn. Although teachers had begun to use the outside areas and rumpus room for free play, staff did not support and encourage children to investigate and explore the world around them and follow their own interests. Teaching across all grades was dominated by teacher talk. The curriculum was, overall, unsatisfactory; it was not broad enough because it did not give students a full range of skills in each curriculum area. It was better planned in English and mathematics so children learned progressively more as they moved through the school. Arrangements to ensure the safety of students were good throughout the school. Bus routines in particular were disciplined and safety-conscious. The quality of support the school gave its students was acceptable. However, teachers did not tell parents regularly enough about what their children were learning and how they were getting on with their work. Staff student relationships were mostly positive.

Although the vision of the Principal was clear, with a strong focus on high standards, the middle management capacity was underdeveloped and unsatisfactory. As a consequence the arrangements for school self-evaluation were weak since they were at an early stage of development. The school had, though, taken account of parents' views when planning improvements and communicated effectively with them about the school's work. A few co-ordinators had given colleagues good support by producing plans and resources; others lacked leadership skills and education knowledge. The school's resources were sparse and teachers did not make imaginative use of freely available alternatives, including original stories or games.

Key features of the school

- The unsatisfactory attainment and progress in most key subjects;
- The limited range of teaching strategies leading to unsatisfactory learning;
- The lack of breadth and planned progression within most curriculum areas;
- The range of forums which gave parents an increasing voice in school policy making.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment in Islamic Education, Arabic and science;
- Improve the quality of learning and teaching. In particular, how teachers:
 - plan lessons which engage students in active learning;
 - use continuous assessment of students' skills and knowledge to plan lessons which teach them the next steps in their learning;
 - give students opportunities to work with others and find out for themselves by exploring and experimenting;
 - ask questions in ways that make students think, give extended answers and ask questions themselves.
- Improve the breadth of the curriculum by planning progressive courses and programmes in the key subjects;
- Give students more opportunities to exercise personal responsibility and choice in their learning;
- Change the approach to learning at Kindergarten to reflect how young children learn and develop;
- Develop the leadership and management skills of middle managers. Delegate responsibility for improvement and closely monitor progress.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory across the school. Progress over time was unsatisfactory in the primary phase and it was acceptable in the secondary grades. Most of the primary students lacked a basic knowledge about Islam, and they could not recite the required verses from The Holy Qur'an correctly. Their knowledge of the Sayings of the Prophet (Hadeeth) was weak. At the secondary stage, although overall attainment was below expectations, most of the students demonstrated an acceptable level of progress from lesson to lesson. Most of the students developed acceptable recitation skills and could memorise some of the Qur'anic verses they studied.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory in both the primary and secondary phases. Students' listening and comprehension skills were not extended as they were mostly asked to respond only to simple questions requiring one word answers. This, in turn, meant that their speaking skills in Arabic were restricted. Students' reading skills were better than their reading comprehension abilities which did not progress beyond being able to answer a few direct questions. Students' writing skills at the lower primary school were not well developed and, by Grade 3, a number of students were still copying the image of the word rather than writing it. In the upper grades, students' creative and extended writing was weak. Most students did not make sufficient gains in their understanding and in their ability to use the language.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in all sections of the school. Students exhibited good listening skills and had developed a wide-ranging vocabulary. Most spoke confidently and with expression. The youngest children could communicate clearly. They recognised key words and identified initial letter sounds as they built their early reading skills. They wrote accurately, using legible handwriting, with appropriate attention to spelling. A few had well developed skills in creative writing. Students' reading skills were acceptable and, as they moved through the school, they developed fluency and expression. Standards of comprehension were good and they were very familiar with their set texts.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in the KG and acceptable at the primary and secondary stages. In KG and in the early stages of the primary phase, students made a slow start to developing key skills in number and calculation. By Grade 3, students had developed key skills that were appropriate to their age and stage. By the end of the primary stage students could multiply and divide decimal numbers and were making good progress in geometry. In the secondary stage, students could calculate the area of a range of shapes including circles and apply their knowledge of basic algebra. They showed a good understanding of geometry and handling data but rarely applied their learning to solving practical mathematical problems within a real life context.

Attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in science in all grades. Children in KG were only able to repeat simple facts without understanding what they meant. They had very limited opportunities to learn about materials by exploring their environment freely. Students in the primary and secondary grades had no experience of scientific enquiry. As a result they could not design and carry out investigations or use measurement and observation to find things out for themselves. Only a minority of Grade 3 students could explain how the desert animals they were learning about were adapted to deal with high temperatures. Students in the secondary grades were making better progress in lessons. By Grade 8, students were developing their knowledge and understanding of life processes and living things.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in KG, and acceptable in the primary and secondary grades. Girls behaved particularly well throughout the school and in the older grades their keenness to make progress was exemplary. A few boys in the secondary grades did not always demonstrate respect for their teachers. Students worked well independently and, when given the opportunity, with each other. Almost all students were punctual for lessons and the school had improved its attendance which was at an acceptable level for the last reported school session.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good across the school. Most students were ambitious for their future careers and aware of their current responsibilities as members of their school and community. They showed good understanding of Islamic history, events and occasions. Students were familiar with the different nationalities in Dubai and the features of a multi-cultural community.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. They demonstrated good understanding of the economic development and changes taking place in Dubai. Students were aware of major attractions and industrial organisations in Dubai. They displayed a good level of understanding of the problems facing the earth and how to protect our local and global environment. They participated enthusiastically in active citizenship projects including a beach clean-up and seed-growing projects.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning were unsatisfactory in KG and primary grades and acceptable at secondary. Teaching in KG was not well matched to the way young children learn. Although staff had begun to use outside areas and the rumpus room for free play, staff did not support and encourage children effectively within these activities to develop their learning. Teaching across all grades was dominated by teacher talk. Students' contributions were often limited to repeating facts without understanding them. Teachers did not provide enough resources or organise varied activities for all children to take part in lessons. As a result, most students spent the majority of lesson time waiting for their turn. Teaching in the secondary grades was acceptable because teachers explained to students what they were expected to learn. Teachers at this phase used more varied techniques that appealed to students' interests and made them think.

Students were too passive in their learning and the majority did not find lessons sufficiently challenging. They had too few opportunities to find things out for themselves or share their ideas with one another. Most learning did not help students to understand by linking it to the world beyond school. Students in all grades had a good ability to recall factual knowledge, but limited skill in using their learning to solve problems. Most showed high levels of concentration, focus and application to their work despite the lack of stimulus in many lessons.

Assessment was unsatisfactory in KG and acceptable in the primary and secondary grades. Assessment in KG focussed on children's knowledge of facts, and did not monitor their personal developmental in line with the expectations in the curriculum. Students were tested regularly in primary and secondary grades and teachers helped them to understand where they had made mistakes in these tests. The majority of teachers, particularly in the secondary grades, used test corrections to revisit areas for development amongst the weaker learners. However, they did not use the students' achievements and knowledge to plan lessons which took students to the next stage in their learning. Exercise books were marked regularly but teachers did not provide feedback on how students could improve their work. Teachers used test scores to check that students were making progress over time in line with curriculum expectations.

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

The curriculum was unsatisfactory in the KG and primary stages and acceptable at the secondary stage. Whilst the Principal had put in place arrangements to review the curriculum, these had not yet had any significant impact. The curriculum in KG did not provide an appropriate coverage of the different aspects of children's early learning and there was insufficient emphasis on a child-centred approach. Whilst teachers at the primary stage had planned for effective progression in English and in mathematics they did not provide for a full range of progressive experiences in other areas such as science, social subjects, art and physical education. The primary curriculum was broadened, however, by lessons in French,

Urdu and Hindi from Grade 2. The curriculum at all grades in Islamic Education and Arabic did not meet the needs of the students. There were insufficient opportunities for independent extended writing in Arabic throughout the school. Although there was a good range of visits and activities that enriched the curriculum, there was no meaningful development of cross-curricular themes and students did not have access to an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities. Students did not have sufficient access to computers to allow them to research and broaden the areas covered within their studies. The school had not made appropriate provision to cater for the educational needs of all students. Arrangements to support those students with additional learning needs were in place but courses did not yet provide sufficient challenge for gifted and talented students.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure the safety of students were good throughout the school. Children in KG were well supervised. The caring ancillary staff also supervised students on school buses. Premises and facilities were well maintained, safe and clean. The school was diligently building an extensive database of all aspects of the day to day running of the school, including emergency drill evacuations. Students' medical records were well maintained and included individual body mass indices (BMI) as part of the school's awareness about healthy eating habits. This was not reinforced with physical fitness and sports opportunities. Those students from KG to Grade 4 with learning difficulties were given support which enabled them to make progress in a few areas of their learning. Staff did not yet provide sufficient challenge for gifted and talented students.

The quality of support the school gave its students was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were mostly positive. Too many teachers in the younger grades did not take sufficient account of students' age and stage of development. The school had a clear behaviour policy that was shared with students. Weaknesses in classroom management or in teachers' expectations of students' behaviour led to a few instances of disruptive behaviour, especially in the boys' section. The school monitored students' attainment but did not identify their strengths or produce learning targets which could influence the planning to provide an appropriate level of challenge for all students.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was unsatisfactory. The Principal had a good understanding of effective practice in education and had won the confidence and respect of the staff. However, there was a lack of capacity in the senior team to manage a growing school of such complexity. The Principal had shared her vision for the school with staff, but she lacked the resources to monitor, review and evaluate initiatives successfully, and a majority of teachers did not understand how to put the vision into practice in their classrooms. The Principal had worked closely with the supervisors and co-ordinators to improve courses and learning materials but these interventions had yet to have an impact on attainment and progress. Curriculum supervisors and subject co-ordinators were not consistently effective. The Islamic Education and Arabic language learning sections, in particular, lacked effective leadership. The literacy and special needs co-ordinators had, though, made positive changes to a few teachers' approaches and attitudes.

The school's self-evaluation procedures had enabled the Principal to develop her understanding of the strengths and areas where the school needed to improve. These were not yet rigorous enough or in place at all levels in the school. The school's improvement plan was focused on an appropriate set of priorities. Progress had been slow in relation to teaching and learning due to the low level of teachers' existing skills. Self-evaluation and improvement planning was still seen as largely the responsibility of managers. The school has made significant changes and made some progress in addressing most of the recommendations of the previous report.

The school had appropriate arrangements in place to communicate with parents and good arrangements in place to consider their views. Staff sent parents helpful reports about their children's progress. Parents had not been given detailed information about the curriculum and what their children were learning. The school had begun to develop its links with the community. At all stages, students made visits to local places each year as part of their Discover Dubai topic.

Governance was acceptable. The owners took an active interest in the life of the school. They had a good understanding of the school's finances and an acceptable knowledge of its educational methods. Since the last inspection, the owners had established an advisory group, a parent advisory body and a forum of parent representatives. However, there were no systems in place to ensure that the owners, advisory bodies or parents had objective information about the school's standards, or held staff to account for their performance.

Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory. Teachers frequently did not provide sufficient resources for all the students in classes to take part in activities. They did not have enough access to art equipment, laboratories or computers.

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	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Secondary
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Unsatisfactory

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.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau will undertake a Follow-Through Inspection of the school within three months of the original inspection and report to parents regarding the progress made.

**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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