

Al Salam Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 11

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.

Al Salam Private School was inspected in October 2009 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Qusais, Al Salam is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 11, aged three to 16 years. The school follows the English National curriculum. Most students spoke English as an additional language. The school had grown very quickly and there were a greater number of students on roll in the secondary school than at the time of the previous inspection. However, the number of students on roll in the secondary school was very small in comparison to the primary school, and so, although students' outcomes at the end of Grade 11 were high, this was a very small sample of the total number of students. Overcrowding affected the quality of provision the school was able to offer. At the time of the inspection there were 1,016 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. The majority of parents were happy with the care and education given to their children. Parents thought that there were good links with the community. A minority of parents were unsure about the school's response to the recommendations from the previous inspection report. Although remaining overwhelmingly positive about the school, a minority of parents expressed concerns about the physical access to the school and the impact this was having on their child's welfare. Parents were confident that the school was safe and that their children were well looked after.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Salam Private School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. Attainment and progress were variable across subjects. Of particular note were the good attainment and progress evidenced in Islamic and Arabic Education. In English, students made acceptable progress in the primary school and good progress in the secondary. However, because of a limited curriculum that did not fully meet their needs, children in the KG made unsatisfactory progress in mathematics and science. The attitudes and behaviour from the youngest children to the older students were good. The students were courteous, charming and polite and their attitude to learning was exemplary in the secondary phase. Students had an awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and they showed an understanding of, and a respect for, Islam. The older students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding.

There was considerable variation in the skills of teachers and the quality of teaching. There were important strengths in some aspects of teaching within the staff, and some examples of outstanding practice but, in almost all cases, there were also important weaknesses. Teaching was acceptable in the primary and secondary schools but unsatisfactory in the KG. There was an over reliance on using textbooks and teachers talked for too long in a number of lessons. Consequently, students had few opportunities for practical work, although when given opportunities, they worked well, applying themselves diligently. Procedures for assessing students' work were acceptable. End of unit tests and examinations provided staff with some assessment information, but this was not used effectively to improve their planning. The curriculum was of acceptable quality, and was focused on students' academic studies, culminating in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). The curriculum for the youngest children did not provide sufficient opportunities for them to explore and be active in their learning. Arrangements for the support of students were good. The beginning and end of the day was very well supervised by security guards, bus drivers and classroom helpers. Relationships throughout the school were good between staff and students. Children in KG classes were well supported, although the support given did not always encourage children to be independent. The school provided very good career guidance drawing from a range of outside agencies.

The quality of leadership at the school was acceptable overall. The Headmistress, her team of coordinators and others had clearly defined roles, and were competent and committed to the school. The school had made an acceptable start to bringing about improvement based on the recommendations from the previous report. Further work was necessary in improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

Key features of the school

- The good quality of students' attainment and progress in Arabic and Islamic Education throughout the school;
- The good progress made by students in English in the secondary school;
- The outstanding attitudes of secondary school students;
- The students' extensive knowledge and understanding of economic and environmental issues in the secondary school;
- The weaknesses in the curriculum and provision for children in KG;
- The considerable variation in the quality of teaching across the school with some important weaknesses in KG.

Recommendations

- Develop the curriculum for science throughout the school to give students regular opportunities for hands on, practical experiences;
- Ensure that the practices of the school's most effective teachers are shared so that all staff understand and implement the best ways to help children learn;
- Ensure that the provision in KG incorporates enough practical activities to develop children's skills of enquiry and independent learning;
- Through further training, ensure that all staff working in the KG understand and implement best methods to help young children achieve and enjoy their education;
- Further develop school self-evaluation and improvement planning so that it has greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning;
- Establish a board of governors who will hold the school to account.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education was good overall, although they were only acceptable for the non-Arabic speaking students. Children in KG memorised short verses from The Holy Qur'an and had a good understanding of some of the attributes of Allah including, for example, Allah the Creator and the Provider. Students in Grades 1 to 4 could read and explain the meanings of short verses; they also compared good deeds and wrong deeds. They had an initial understanding of the ablution process and the steps of prayer. Most students in Grades 5 and 6 had good recitation skills. They had sound knowledge about the Prophet's life (PBUH). Older students were able to read correctly verses from The Holy Qur'an that was not in their prescribed books. They knew and understood expected Muslim behaviour, and that was reflected in most students' personal attitudes. Most students' knowledge and understanding of Islam were developing well. They were aware of their responsibilities as Muslims towards the wider community.

Attainment and progress in Arabic was good overall, although they were acceptable for those studying Arabic as a second language. In KG, children could read and write letters and recognise and differentiate letters in reading. Students in Grades 1 to 3 had good reading skills. They read paragraphs confidently, demonstrated good writing ability and were beginning to develop the skills of comprehension. Students in Grades 4 to 6 had more developed reading skills and used correct intonation and pronunciation. They had sufficient knowledge of grammar and structure, applying the rules appropriately. Older students had good reading skills. They were reading for pleasure and beyond the textbook, and were able to use reference materials and resources to find things out for themselves.

Students' attainment and progress in English were acceptable in KG and primary. In the secondary school, attainment was acceptable and progress good. In KG, the children learned very quickly how to sit and listen and were able to respond to teachers' instruction. They could copy letter shapes and repeat a few letter sounds. By Grade 1, students could read age-appropriate texts independently and write sentences through dictation. Older students could read more complex texts and discuss characters. They could write in a range of genres and debate topics using a good knowledge of vocabulary. By the end of secondary school, the majority of students achieved above average results at IGCSE for additional language speakers.

Throughout the school, attainment in mathematics was acceptable. Students at all stages were working at a level which was comparable with their peers internationally. Children entered KG with average skills for their age. They had an acceptable understanding of number and most could assign labels to numbers as well as count to five with ease. By Grade 6, students had an acceptable knowledge of place value. However, students throughout the primary school were less successful when applying their knowledge to unfamiliar contexts and most struggled when asked to think logically to solve a problem. Whilst students made acceptable progress in Years 1 to 6, children in KG made unsatisfactory progress. Students reached Grade 7 with skills which were in line with international benchmarks and, by Grade 9, most had reached standards which were above those expected for their age. They continued to make good progress and attained high standards in Grade 11, as evidenced by the excellent IGCSE results in 2009.

In science, the attainment and progress of children in KG was unsatisfactory, as they were not acquiring age-appropriate science skills or concepts. In the primary school, attainment was acceptable but progress over time was unsatisfactory due to very limited development of practical and investigative skills. In the secondary school, both attainment and progress were acceptable and skill development was more widespread. In both primary and secondary sectors, students showed good knowledge of scientific terms and concepts. The older science students performed chemistry experiments, built molecular models, and cut plants open to learn about their functions. Most students attained well against internal tests, but only a small minority of secondary students did so against international benchmarks.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the primary and outstanding in the secondary schools. They showed enjoyment and enthusiasm and were able to conduct mature discussions. Attendance was acceptable. Students had good relationships with staff. Students' relationships with their peers were good and older students showed a sense of responsibility for young children.

Students at the primary and secondary stages had a good understanding of Islam and of civic responsibilities. The elected school council gave students a good sense of civic responsibilities. Most students knew the important events in the Muslim calendar and how those events were celebrated in Dubai. Muslim students had a strong awareness of their responsibilities towards the wider community. Through exploring and sharing personal experiences during school activities, students developed a strong appreciation for the traditions and cultures of Dubai and displayed extreme respect for the many nationalities and backgrounds in their school.

Students' economic and environmental awareness was outstanding in the secondary phase and good in the primary phase. The extra-curricular environmental club provided an excellent platform for students to demonstrate their substantial knowledge of environmental issues at an inter-school public speaking competition. Older students were using their studies in economics to, for instance, produce an historical account of commerce in Dubai from earliest times to the present day.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable in primary and secondary and unsatisfactory in the KG. Overall, whilst staff knew what students learned over time, they did not have clear expectations about how they learned. In KG, staff did not have a clear understanding of the effectiveness of active learning. Too many lessons gave insufficient opportunities for very young children to initiate their own learning so, despite carrying out practical tasks, children were not expected to think, make decisions, or be creative. In Grades 1 to 11, teachers' subject knowledge was variable. In the most effective lessons, teachers were more confident and actively promoted a spirit of enquiry amongst their students. As a result, students were able to take responsibility for improving their skills and leading their own learning. However, in the majority of lessons, teachers expected students to sit for long periods of time, were over reliant on the use of textbooks and missed opportunities to extend students' learning. Whilst teachers did not explicitly plan for the range of ability in their classes, the school met the needs of individual students well through an individualised coaching system undertaken during break times.

In Grades 1 to 11, learning was acceptable and unsatisfactory in KG. Students had positive attitudes to learning and worked with enthusiasm. When given the opportunity to do so, they worked collaboratively on complex tasks, including, for example, at the upper stages, using formula for quadratic equations to solve two and three step word problems. Most students were able to find things out for themselves and used their newly acquired knowledge to produce posters which helped to consolidate their learning. Whilst students had opportunities

to develop information and communication technology skills, they rarely used technology to enhance their learning of other subjects. Although some partner work was observed, students in the primary phase had limited opportunities to develop their independent learning skills or work collaboratively with other learners. This has changed little since the last inspection. However, they were keen to participate and gave positive responses in lessons; often asking questions as well as answering. They were happy to ask for extra help outside class time if they had not understood something.

Assessment was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. It was unsatisfactory in KG where staff were not using the information gained from observations of children's learning to plan for their next steps. In the primary and secondary phases, teachers regularly marked exercise books with ticks and compliments, but rarely added comments to help students improve their work. End of unit tests and examinations provided staff with a limited amount of assessment information, but this was not used effectively to improve their planning to meet individual needs. Older students were aware of their examination results, and knew their strengths and weaknesses. They were able to discuss their targets, which were reviewed regularly. However, they were rarely evaluating their own work or the work of their peers.

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

The curriculum was of acceptable quality in primary and secondary phases, where it was focused on students' academic studies, culminating in the IGCSE. In KG, however, it was unsatisfactory. Although a good selection of equipment was provided, play activities were not part of the planned curriculum for independent learning. In the primary phase, the curriculum was textbook-based, which ensured curriculum coverage and offered good activities to develop knowledge, skills and understanding. However, the books did not provide links between subjects and, in the secondary school, analysis of textbook-related examination papers was an unsatisfactory system of reviewing the taught curriculum for the IGCSE. The curriculum included a sufficient range of subjects, along with some activities linked to the local environment. Students were involved in work experience programmes and members of the community brought a variety of skills into school. A good programme for extra-curricular activities included yoga, karate, drama and debating.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the health and safety of students were good in primary and secondary and acceptable in KG. The beginning and end of the day was very well supervised by security guards, bus drivers and classroom helpers. However, buses could not always park close to the hard surfaced area and, as a result; students had to trail heavy schoolbags across a sanded area. The length of journeys to and from school was a health issue for some students, especially the younger children. The school had good procedures for child protection. Although the school was overcrowded, facilities were, however, in the process of being developed. In some classes, school bags caused a safety hazard. Very good health care and advice was given across the school. Acceptable records were kept of fire drills, incidents and actions taken. Attendance and punctuality were acceptably monitored.

The quality of support was acceptable in KG and good in the primary and secondary phases. Relationships throughout the school were good between staff and students. Children in KG were well supported, although the support given did not always encourage children to be independent. Teachers gave willingly of their time in the primary and secondary phases to support students who needed extra help. Students appreciated and made full use of this facility. There were good systems in place to support children with special educational needs. The school had made progress in responding to recommendations of the last inspection report and had an acceptable tracking system in place to monitor students' academic progress and personal development. The school provided very good career guidance, drawing from a range of outside agencies.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership at the school was acceptable overall. The Headmistress, her team of coordinators and others had clearly defined roles, and were competent and committed to the school. They succeeded in providing many positive experiences for students as outlined in the school's mission statement. Leaders had worked collaboratively to improve the school since the last inspection and had succeeded in establishing new policies and procedures to enhance their awareness of students' overall progress. However, there were still gaps in leaders' knowledge of curriculum planning and delivery which meant that there remained a number of key aspects requiring improvement in the work of the school. Although the Headmistress had a vision for the future of the school, it had not been shared with other leaders at the time of the inspection.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable overall. The school had responded to the recommendations of the previous inspection report with an action plan that prioritised improved teaching and learning. This process had begun by monitoring lessons and conducting professional development sessions every week through an outside consultant. However, these first steps were yet to have a fully transformative effect upon a majority of teachers' classroom practices. The school's action plan lacked the specific roles, measurement tools and timelines necessary to be fully effective in fostering overall school improvement.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable overall. The school provided regular newsletters to parents in paper copy and on their website. Almost all parents agreed that the school was well led, that good links existed, and that they could approach the school with a complaint. The school's use of learning diaries ensured regular parent monitoring of students' academic progress. Notably, more than a minority of parents indicated that they did not know how the school had responded to the recommendations of the previous inspection. The school had links with the broader community, holding a variety of special events, field trips and charitable drives that engaged students in positive ways with people outside of the school.

Governance at the school was unsatisfactory. The school had no governing body and no plans to establish one. As a result the work of the school's leaders was not overseen and leaders were not accountable to any objective standard of overall performance.

Staffing was acceptable, as the school had sufficient qualified teachers to provide a broad curriculum for students. Teachers were deployed appropriately, but teaching assistants were too often under-used in the primary phase. Facilities were modern, safe and clean, but parts of the school building were too small to accommodate the number of students on roll. Although the school had a science laboratory and a library, these were not used to their full because they also functioned as home rooms for students. The computer laboratory was modern but it was not used as an integral part of students' learning experiences across the curriculum.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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