

Dubai British School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 13

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.

Dubai British 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 Emirates Hills, Dubai British School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows English National Curriculum to the end of Year 11 followed by A-levels in Years 12 and 13. A new Principal took up his post in September 2008. At the time of the inspection, there were 976 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Overwhelmingly, parents were very pleased with the school. Almost all parents agreed that their children liked school, that the teaching was good, that their children were treated fairly and that they were being encouraged to become independent and responsible people. Parents liked the range of activities available to their children but wished more places were available on the popular activities. Most parents agreed that they were comfortable approaching the school with any questions or complaints and that the school would act promptly to address any issues. Parents were very pleased with the quality of teaching and almost all parents felt that their children were well cared for and that levels of health and safety were high. Links with parents were thought to be good. Parents confirmed that they valued being involved in a meeting regarding the last inspection report and that the school had responded well to its recommendations. Parents were very happy with their children's progress in all subjects with the exception of Arabic. Parents confirmed that the school was very well led.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai British School had made rapid progress since the last inspection and now provided a good quality of education. The stimulating and vigorous leadership from the Principal supported by a unified and perceptive senior leadership team meant that the school met its aim to identify, celebrate and nurture the talents and intelligences of students. A major success of the team was the development of a collegiate ethos so that responsibilities for students' development were widely shared by the whole teaching body. Inspectors judged students' attainment and progress as good in English, mathematics and science, throughout the school. In the Foundation Stage children made outstanding progress in developing their communication skills in English. In Islamic Education attainment was good throughout the school. Progress was acceptable in the primary phase but unsatisfactory in the secondary phase. In Arabic, attainment was acceptable, but students were capable of better progress at all stages. Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding and, through both curricular and extra-curricular activities, their understanding of Islam and civic responsibility was good. Students were well informed about the economic and environmental challenges for Dubai.

Learning and teaching throughout the school were good, an improvement since the last inspection. The youngest students benefitted from practical, experiential and collaborative learning and this was a particularly strong feature of the work of the school. Assessment had improved and was now outstanding in all phases. This resulted from a new structure for managing the tracking and monitoring of students' progress, which had led to more focused teaching and improved attainment by students. Relationships between students and teachers strongly supported the effectiveness of the educational experience and the atmosphere of the school as a whole. The curriculum had improved since the last inspection and was now good in all areas. However, the school needed to make an adjustment to the provision for Islamic Education to conform to the Ministry of Education requirements. The breadth of subjects was valued by students as a means of developing their education to the full and acquiring a range of skills. Outstanding support was given to those with particular educational needs, helping them participate fully in the life of the school. Flexibility of grouping in both the primary and secondary phases supported more targeted and challenging teaching. The curriculum was enhanced by a strong extra-curricular programme which the students enthusiastically supported. The good provision for the care and support of students, noted at the last inspection, had improved markedly and was now outstanding. Health and safety measures were fully in place and contributed to the well-being of the students. The key to the high quality of care was how well the teachers knew the needs of each student. This individual support, complemented by the tracking programme of academic and personal progress, helped students to develop into engaging, enthusiastic and confident young people.

The quality of leadership and management of the school had improved substantially since the last inspection and was good. Teachers had become fully involved in evaluation and development and were monitored more effectively to enhance their teaching. However, the school had not yet achieved the full integration of Islamic Education and Arabic into the curriculum as a whole. The school had successfully addressed the recommendation regarding staff recruitment and the staff team was both professional and forward-looking in their support of the school's vision. Parents were well engaged with the school and the governance of the school had been strengthened. Resources and facilities fully sustained the students' needs.

Key features of the school

- The care and support of students throughout the school;
- The progress made since the last inspection, particularly by the leadership, in ensuring responsibilities for student outcomes were widely shared by the whole teaching body;
- The high quality of assessment involving students in the understanding and evaluation of their progress and attainment through feedback and the detailed written and verbal responses to students' work;
- The development of comprehensive and effective systems of tracking and analysis of data to improve both students' progress and the curriculum;
- The good provision for younger students to work together in practical and collaborative learning;
- The supportive relationships between students and the mutually respectful relationships with their teachers;
- The excellent behaviour of students;
- The school had yet to fully achieve the planned integration of Arabic and Islamic Education into the education programme.

Recommendations

- Ensure compliance in Islamic Education and greater integration of Arabic in the education programme and improve students' progress in both subjects;
- Give students greater opportunities for independent and creative thinking whilst continuing to prepare them for examinations;
- Develop further the role of subject leaders and coordinators to spread the outstanding practice that exists within the school more widely among teachers and across all phases and subjects.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good and progress was acceptable in the primary phase but unsatisfactory in secondary. Students in primary classes could memorise verses from The Holy Qur'an. They were developing their understanding of Islamic values and their knowledge of the Pillars of Islam. Most students appreciated the behaviour expected of a good Muslim. Secondary students achieved good results in school tests. They knew about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and other Islamic characters such as Abu Baker and they understood about life before and after the Prophet (PBUH). However, older students did not make the progress they were capable of due to lack of challenge and poor progression in learning.

Students' attainment in Arabic was acceptable but progress was unsatisfactory. Most students in the primary phase made acceptable progress in listening and speaking and reading and writing. However, rates of progress for the majority of older students were unsatisfactory. By Year 6 most students demonstrated the ability to communicate in Arabic to an acceptable level but their reading and writing were poor. Most Year 7 students were unable to read, write or communicate in Arabic. A few students with Arabic as a first language were fluent in reading but unable to communicate orally to an acceptable level.

Students' attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school. Performance in tests and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations had been above UK averages. Students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills were well developed. Children in Foundation Stage listened well and responded to questions and almost all were confident in communicating with adults. Writing in the primary and secondary phases reflected good use of literary devices such as time connectives, simile and metaphor. Students spoke fluently using wide-ranging vocabulary and technical language. Students wrote with well-formed cursive handwriting, used figures of speech appropriately and wrote reviews of books they had read, identifying genres and justifying their own point of view. In the GCSE years and post-16 A-level work, students interpreted literary texts with insight and wrote well using appropriate literary vocabulary and reinforced their arguments with well identified quotations.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics were good throughout the school. Performance in tests and GCSE examinations had been above UK averages. Younger children were well grounded in number skills and the concepts of shape and space. They measured quantities and performed simple calculations appropriately. Older students showed good ability to manipulate and simplify algebraic and trigonometric functions and applied their good knowledge of mathematics to other subjects, such as science. At all stages, students built successfully on simple concepts, and extended and applied their knowledge to increasingly more complex situations. Students' problem-solving and investigative skills, particularly in the secondary phase, were underdeveloped, and many were not skilled at relating abstract number concepts to real life situations.

In science, students' attainment and progress throughout the school were good and had improved since 2008. Performance in tests and GCSE examinations had been above UK averages. Students had developed a thorough competence and understanding of the processes and methods of science. At Foundation Stage and in the primary years, they understood the importance of carrying out fair tests. In the secondary stages, students confidently undertook increasingly sophisticated experiments. They demonstrated good knowledge, as in the post-16 phase, where students had a mature knowledge of Newton's laws of motion. At times, students' acquisition of independent thinking was impaired by teachers' preoccupation with ensuring in advance that they came to the predetermined 'right' conclusions.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding throughout the school. Students had supportive and positive relationships with each other and the mutual respect between students and teachers was strong. Students exercised self-discipline and could work independently or in collaboration with others. They knew that they could always ask an adult for help if needed. Attendance was good as was punctuality to lessons.

Students had a clear understanding of ways in which they might contribute to the future of Dubai by becoming teachers, lawyers, bankers, doctors and by joining conservation groups. Students appreciated their responsibilities as members of the Dubai community, reflected in their involvement in civic service groups that assisted migrant workers and ships' crews. Younger students had age-appropriate understanding of Islam and older students had a good understanding, as demonstrated in classroom discussions and displays. All students had a good understanding of the multicultural diversity of Dubai.

Students were aware of how Dubai had developed to modern times. They were also aware of the global financial crisis and the current impact on Dubai and their families. Their keen awareness of local and global issues, such as water and energy conservation and pollution, was good and they cared for the environment by recycling and conserving energy. Students supported the school's commitment to environmental care and were aware that the new metro system would help reduce traffic and air pollution.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching throughout the school was good and more than a few lessons were outstanding. Teachers planned lessons thoroughly and included a wide and varied range of interesting tasks and activities. The good relations that teachers nurtured in class ensured that students made effective progress and behaved well. Learning tasks were well matched to the needs of students in almost all subjects. Most teachers used their good subject knowledge well to explain ideas, challenge students and present information in interesting ways. They stimulated highly effective discussions within lessons, and frequently encouraged students to play a full part in the learning process. In some A-level classes, teachers adopted a tutorial approach to discussion, which prepared students well for the demands of university life. In a few lessons, students did not receive a high enough level of encouragement to take the initiative for their own learning. During the preparation for tests and examinations, students sometimes lacked opportunities to think and work independently and creatively.

Students demonstrated good standards of learning at all stages. They showed effort, interest and a highly positive attitude to their work. When given the opportunity to do so, they willingly contributed to lessons, asked interesting questions and expressed their opinions in a natural and articulate way. When working in pairs and groups, they made very effective use of time and helped each other with their learning. As they progressed through the school, they built effectively on earlier knowledge and became familiar with more advanced concepts. For example, at the Foundation Stage, children were able to follow complex instructions accurately while, at A-level, students used their biological knowledge to predict the impact of climate change on the distribution of marine life.

The quality of assessment was outstanding at all levels and reflected the rapid progress made recently by the school. Comprehensive and effective systems had been created to measure and record the progress of students as they moved up through the school. Teachers and managers used assessment information very well to track the learning and progress of students and identify those who needed further support. They gathered much information to assess the performance of students against international standards. Students increasingly evaluated the quality of their own work and that of fellow students, and this was well used to set targets to identify the further improvements needed. Teachers used their strong questioning skills in lessons to assess what students knew and understood.

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

The curriculum was of a good quality. In the Foundation Stage, children received a thoroughly planned and integrated programme of the six Early Learning Goals. Whole language development, continued into the primary phase, was an especially strong curricular feature. Leadership had taken effective steps to remove the timetable clashes between Islamic Education and other subjects, so that full compliance had been achieved for primary Muslim students but not yet for secondary aged students. In all other respects, the curriculum for both the primary and secondary phases was broad, balanced and very well managed, with a good range of subject options for GCSE and A-level students in Years 10 to 13. It was exceptionally well organised to cater for different needs: mathematics and science were taught in ability groups and this was constantly reviewed to permit movement between classes as students' needs were identified. In the primary phase, higher achieving students were withdrawn from mathematics to be taught in a more advanced way. The quality and efficiency of support for children with learning difficulties or students with English as a second language were outstanding. Students were effectively identified, supported and their progress tracked. One department had established a very well conceived scheme for gifted and talented students, addressing a recommendation from the last report. The curriculum was supported by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, for which the uptake was high and carefully monitored. The management of the curriculum had been both highly effective and innovative, in ensuring planning, consistency and continuity between years and phases.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for protecting students were outstanding. All staff knew and adhered to the policies for health and safety and exercised utmost care for students. Arrivals and departures were well coordinated and supervised by conscientious security staff and vehicles were controlled effectively by traffic supervisors. Buildings and facilities, including transport and the swimming pool, were safe, secure and suitably maintained. Teaching areas were spacious, clean and well-ventilated. Procedures for emergencies, such as fire drills, were well established. All equipment was checked and staff had been trained to use it safely. Regular health and safety checks and clear policies and procedures ensured accidents were kept to the minimum, were generally minor and were dealt with diligently. Healthy lifestyles were promoted through the curriculum and after-school activities with additional support and guidance from the school medical staff who were pro-active in working with students and families. Child protection procedures were outstanding.

The quality of support for students was outstanding in the Foundation Stage and good with many outstanding features in the rest of the school. Teachers provided excellent role-models and relationships were positive. Students respected and cared for each other and the positive relationships, together with students' mature attitudes, ensured behaviour was outstanding. There were good systems for data collection, analysis and feedback but the impact of this across all subjects was inconsistent. Guidance and support for students with additional learning needs were highly effective. Attendance and punctuality were well managed. Students reported that they felt safe in school and that teachers provided outstanding support. There were effective and well-managed care arrangements across the school reinforced by the strong links with parents.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good throughout the school and had significantly improved since the last inspection. The senior leadership team was unified in its commitment to developing high standards in all areas of the school. It had revised the school's aims and had put in place detailed planning to match these aims and support the school's development. Planning included consultation with the staff, parents and students. The meetings and communications framework had been refined so that staff time was used more effectively. The performance management system was now clearly linked to effective continuing professional development (CPD). Alongside the formal CPD system the school should make more effective use of observation of the outstanding examples of teaching across the whole school and subject leaders and coordinators' roles could be developed to this end. All these developments had been given impetus by the energy and enthusiasm of the new Principal.

Development planning had improved and was good. Its main focus was on analysis and tracking of student data to improve students' learning. The school had made excellent progress in developing this new assessment system. In addition, the development plans for all phases of the school had been carefully revised to include agreed targets, review dates and the greater involvement of parents and students. Senior managers, with input from teachers, monitored the effectiveness of the improvement strategies and adjusted them accordingly. The monitoring of Islamic Education and Arabic, however, was not sufficiently robust and these subjects needed to be more fully integrated into the tracking system. The school had effectively addressed the recommendations of the last report and improvements in staffing, student tracking and engagement with parents were already evident in the outcomes for students.

The school fostered good parental links to help support children's learning. Parents in their questionnaire responses and at the meeting with inspectors confirmed that their children were happy at the school, enjoyed a good standard of education and developed as individuals. Parents showed concern about progress in Arabic. Communication with parents through the newsletter, students' planners and emails was effective. Reports to parents were clear, stating current performance, targets to be achieved and students' personal development and activities. Students were very engaged with the community, supporting charities such as 'Helping Hands' and 'Angels'. Support was not limited to donations as students engaged with community issues through assemblies, organised by students themselves, to raise awareness of the wider world. Older students benefitted from careers advice from professionals from the Dubai community. Students also understood more about the wider world through expeditions such as World Challenge and links with Bangladesh.

Good governance was provided by the Taaleem Foundation Board, senior Taaleem executives with input from staff, parents and students. The school and managing group had addressed the recommendation in the last report and involved more representatives in the development of the school, including parents' meetings, questionnaires and teacher and students' forums. Taaleem had appointed a Chief Education Officer with direct responsibility for the educational development of the school and, significantly, the school was about to set up a School Advisory Board with representation from parents, teachers and education professionals.

The school had a good number of well-qualified, experienced and committed teachers. The recommendation in the last report regarding staffing issues had been successfully addressed. Staff were effectively deployed, contributed to the positive atmosphere of the school and were fully involved in fulfilling the vision of the school. Facilities and resources were good with investment in information and communications technology benefitting students' learning. However, not all science lessons took place in the laboratory. There were no plans in the school's capital development scheme to include a dedicated performance area for school assemblies and the performing arts.

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:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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