

INSPECTION REPORT

International School of Arts and Sciences

Report published in April 2014

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT International School of Arts and Sciences

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Location | Al Warqaa |
| Type of school | Private |
| Website | www.isas.sch.ae |
| Telephone | 04-2800459 |
| Address | Al Warqa – Dubai UAE PO Box 35901 |
| Principal | Muhieddine Soubra, |
| Curriculum | US |
| Gender of students | Boys and Girls |
| Age / Grades or Year Groups | 3-18 / KG 1-Grade 12 |
| Attendance | Outstanding |
| Number of students on roll | 912 |
| Largest nationality group of Students | Arab |
| Number of Emirati students | 255 (28%) |
| Date of the inspection | 24th to 26th February 2014 |

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The context of the school

The International School of Arts and Sciences (ISAS), located in Al Warqaa, has been in operation for seven years. At the time of inspection the school had almost reached its full capacity. It currently had 912 boys and girls in Kindergarten to Grade 12, a twelve percent increase in numbers from the previous year. Students came from a range of countries, including the United States and Canada, but most were Arab expatriates, with about a third being Emirati. Fifty students had been identified as having some form of special educational need. The school followed a modified US curriculum. There was some recent inclusion of Common Core standards as well as Lebanese and UAE Ministry of Education elements. In the senior school there was a diverse range of elective courses including pre-university sciences and arts subjects. Grade 11 students completed a practical work placement. At the time of the inspection, approximately 30% of staff were new. Almost all were qualified. The school had recently appointed coordinators of subjects and a part time School Development Manager.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

Key strengths

- Progress in all key subjects in the elementary phase.
- Attainment in elementary Arabic as an additional language;
- Personal and social development in all phases of the school;
- The quality of the curriculum across all phases;
- Outstanding provision for health and safety and the good quality of support across all phases;

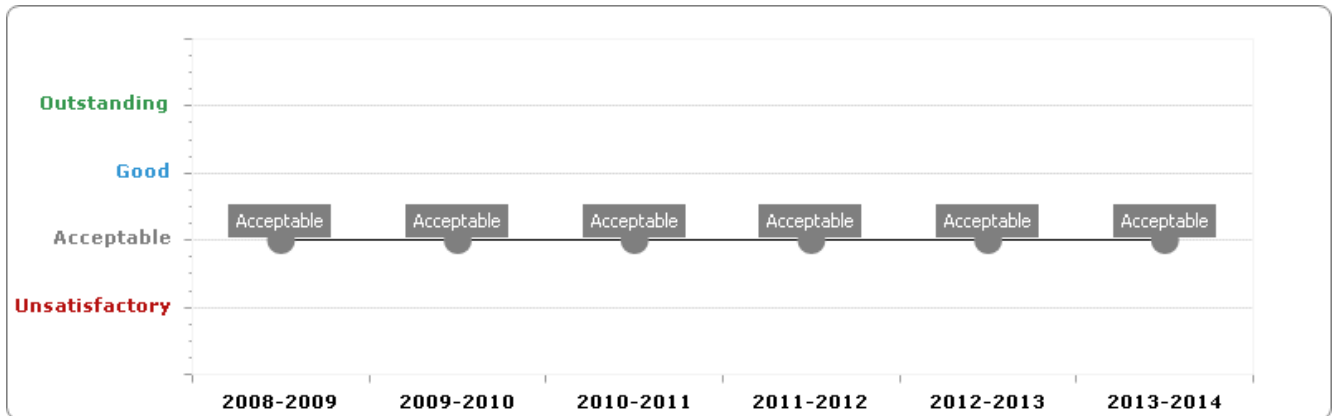
Recommendations

- Raise progress to at least good in all subjects and phases by improving the quality of teaching with particular emphasis on improved teachers' questioning and expectations;
- Make more effective use of assessment by setting individual learning targets using recognised curriculum standards;
- Use externally validated assessments to moderate the school's own assessments and to give staff, the students and their parents, a realistic view of students' attainment in an international context;
- Ensure that self-evaluation procedures include rigorous analysis and evaluation of learning outcome data on which to base focused improvement strategies;
- Improve students' independent learning skills by providing opportunities for critical thinking, research and enquiry, particularly in middle and high phases.

Progress since the last inspection

- The positive improvements made throughout the school as a result of an improved shared vision;
- More purposeful participation in lessons by students due to an improving standard of classroom provision;
- The increasing use of computers such as iPad's by students to supplement their learning;
- The appointment of subject coordinators for English, mathematics and science to lead and coordinate development.

Trend of overall performance



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How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

| | KG | Elementary | Middle | High |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Islamic Education | | | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Arabic as a first language | | | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Arabic as an additional language | | | | |
| Attainment | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| English | | | | |
| Attainment | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Progress | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Mathematics | | | | |
| Attainment | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Good | Good | Acceptable | Good |
| Science | | | | |
| Attainment | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Progress | Good | Good | Acceptable | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

| | KG | Elementary | Middle | High |
|--------------------------------------|------|------------|------------|------------|
| Quality of students' learning skills | Good | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

| | KG | Elementary | Middle | High |
|--|------|------------|--------|------|
| Personal responsibility | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Community and environmental responsibility | Good | Good | Good | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

| | KG | Elementary | Middle | High |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Teaching for effective learning | Good | Good | Acceptable | Acceptable |
| Assessment | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable |

[Read paragraph](#)

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

| | KG | Elementary | Middle | High |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------|
| Curriculum quality | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students | Acceptable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Good |

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

| | Whole school |
|--|--------------|
| Quality of leadership | Good |
| Self-evaluation and improvement planning | Acceptable |
| 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 Islamic Education where attainment was acceptable across the school, most students had a basic knowledge of the key principles of worship in Islam. Recitation and memorisation skills and linking knowledge to real life situations were underdeveloped across all phases of the school. Attainment in Arabic as first and additional languages was good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school phases. In both subjects, the majority of students in elementary had well developed listening and speaking skills but, in middle and high, speaking and writing skills were weaker. In English, in all phases, students attained levels above curriculum standards. Most demonstrated good skills in writing, reading, speaking and listening. In high school they were confident speakers and writers. In mathematics and science attainment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable elsewhere. Kindergarten children in mathematics started to count confidently. Older students were able to use these foundations to understand algebra and geometry. By Grade 12 most students were able to use derived algebraic equations, though not always confidently. In kindergarten and elementary science there was a growing emphasis on practical investigations, which provided ample opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and understanding. In middle and high school phases, students developed their conceptual understanding of an increasingly complex range of science topics. However extended independent research skills were not developed well enough.

Elementary students made good progress during Islamic Education lessons and were able to explain what they had learned. Students made good progress in developing their knowledge of Seerah and understanding of the manners expected of a good Muslim. Less progress was made in Qur'an recitation. In Arabic as a first language and as an additional language, progress was good in elementary and acceptable in middle and secondary. Students of first language Arabic in elementary were making better progress developing their speaking than their peers in middle and secondary. Progress in developing writing skills were slow across the school. In Arabic as an additional language, progress in listening and speaking was significantly stronger than in reading and writing. Progress in English lessons was good across all phases. Most students entered school as learners of English as an additional language and made better progress than expected, given their starting points. In mathematics children started to build their foundations for understanding number and calculations as soon as they joined the school. As they moved through the grades, progress was variable because they were unclear about the connections between mathematical operations and concepts. In science students made rapid progress in Kindergarten and elementary where opportunities for investigation provided sound bases for the development of understanding and application. Progress in other phases was often restricted due to insufficient activities for solving problems and enquiry.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students' learning skills were good in Kindergarten and the elementary phase and acceptable in middle and high schools. Across the school students enjoyed learning and most were taking responsibility for their progress. In Kindergarten, students were improving their skills and understanding through the "free flow" sessions, where they were able to make personal choices for their activities. Most were also able to work with small groups collaboratively. In elementary classes, most students were able to discuss their learning, and relate new knowledge to real life situations. In middle and high schools, students had fewer opportunities to develop their collaboration and independent learning skills. They made few connections between new and previous learning. While a majority could conduct research using ICT and make power point presentations to their peers, hypothesising, problem solving and critical thinking were underdeveloped.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Across all phases students demonstrated good personal responsibility. Most had responsible attitudes and behaved appropriately in this harmonious community, although a small amount of low level inappropriate activity disrupted a few classes. Most students had a strong commitment to healthy living, through a balance of healthy eating and physical activity. Attendance in the school was outstanding and while punctuality was improving it was not at the school's expected level.

Students had a good understanding of the importance of Islamic values and their influence on modern society in Dubai. They had clear respect and appreciation of Islamic and Emirati culture and traditions. They were able to discuss their understanding of Islamic values, friendship and respect. They could identify and describe the importance of local traditions and heritage. Most could talk confidently about key features of Dubai's multi-lingual, multi-cultural society. Students described their own cultures and traditions with pride.

Community and environmental responsibility was good. Most students understood their responsibilities towards their school. Students in Kindergarten put resources and classroom equipment away with limited direction and support from teachers. Older students participated in events such as breast cancer awareness. Good work ethics were often displayed by students when collaborating or through the quality of their completed work. This was particularly evident in the student work displayed around the school. Most students had a good knowledge of environmental issues and reflected well on how recycling conserved resources. A number of students felt their voice was not always influential on change within the school.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in Kindergarten and elementary and acceptable in middle and high. Teachers across the school had strong subject knowledge. In a majority of lessons, particularly in lower phases, they used this knowledge to plan lessons well to promote learning. They created cooperative situations but across the school the use of open-ended questions to encourage students to think and engage in dialogue to reflect on their understanding required development. Stronger examples, where learning was related to life outside of school and where planning provided a variety of practical activities, were evident in lower phases. In senior phases teachers did not regularly encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative. Too often they expected students to receive knowledge passively rather than promoting their curiosity and encouraging them to look for evidence and link concepts to real-life situations, events or objects. Across the school, not all teachers had sufficiently high expectations for all students, resulting in insufficient challenge for more than a few. Learning through inquiry and critical thinking were emerging aspects which required further development.

Assessment was acceptable in all phases of the school. Assessment methods had improved since the previous inspection but students' progress was not tracked consistently across the school. Tracking was stronger in English and mathematics than other subjects. The use of assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' learning was becoming stronger, although its use during lessons, to adjust teaching, was inconsistent across the school. The wider use of assessment to inform lesson planning, check progress and give feedback was underdeveloped within the school. Assessment was not matched to international standards in most phases of the school. As a result, not all assessments provided accurate information about attainment and progress. Marking in students' work, particularly in the high school phase was generally focused on quantity of work and presentation rather than giving students clear advice to help them learn more effectively.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of curriculum was good in all phases. The curriculum was reviewed annually. It had a clear rationale, made provisions for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs, and included cross-curricular links and enrichment opportunities. It was aligned with the US common core standards, and was designed to provide choice and opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds. Along with the regular high school subjects, a wide array of advanced courses were in place, including Advanced Placement, pre-medical, pre-engineering, robotics, and technology classes for those students who sought challenging courses of study. The curriculum also offered courses in music, art, foreign languages, forensic science, and physical education. Extra-curricular offerings included band, student council, drama, Lego club, Model U.N., public speaking, arts and crafts, a range of sports and martial arts.

Despite the comprehensive range of topics available to student, the curriculum lacked an organised programme of study for gifted and talented students.

The design of the curriculum to meet the individual needs of students was acceptable in most phases except high, where it was good. It was planned to cater for three levels of ability. A majority of teachers recognised in their planning the special educational needs of students. However, in practice, not all ensured that their lessons provided a range of appropriately challenging activities. Individual education plans were devised for some identified students, but these were not used to guide a modified curriculum. The gifted students and more able were often provided with the same activities as all students and were not sufficiently challenged. The curriculum for students in high school was well designed, offering them a wealth of subjects and opportunities to help them make appropriate choices to meet their individual talents and career needs.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Throughout the school the provisions for health and safety were outstanding. The school provided a safe, hygienic environment for students and staff. A security guard was present 24 hours daily, and cameras monitored the buildings and grounds. School evacuation drills were efficient, and were conducted regularly. Buildings, grounds and equipment were well maintained, including the buses which transported students safely and efficiently. Building adaptations were made to accommodate those with a physical disability. Healthy food choices were provided in the café, and healthy living was a priority throughout the school. Comprehensive health care was provided in two appropriately staffed clinics. Student health records were maintained and secure, and there were effective procedures for the storage and removal of hazardous materials. The child protection policy and procedures were known by all staff.

The quality of support was good across the school. A strong feature of the school was the excellent staff-student relationships creating a strong work ethic and welcoming atmosphere. Behaviour was well managed, with the school's sensible rules being adhered to. The school kept accurate records of attendance. Parents were contacted immediately if a student failed to arrive when expected. The school had assessment procedures to identify students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) on entry to the school. The experienced counsellor kept teachers informed to ensure students' general and personal needs were met. As a result, students were confident and comfortable in classes and made steady progress in the majority of subjects. Additional support in classes for students with a special educational need was limited. Senior students were offered good advice and guidance, in confidence, on a range of personal and academic matters, by an appropriately trained counsellor.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. Senior leaders and the Governing Board had high expectations for improving all key aspects of this growing school. They had clarified the vision and direction and had recently appointed subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, a dedicated guidance counselor, and a number of additional teaching staff. Leaders were becoming more skilled at ensuring the school's vision was implemented practically. The specific skills that each brought to the improvements were becoming more apparent. Where outcomes had not improved sufficiently, leaders had not accurately interpreted data. There were missed opportunities for improving teaching and learning. The school had utilised external support to strengthen its capacity for continued development.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. There was a broad distributive process of self-evaluation that involved leaders and other staff who had produced a comprehensive self-evaluation document. However, the lack of rigour in data analysis limited the school in its ability to prioritise areas for improvement. More realistic student achievement data was beginning to emerge as the school adopted an increased number of US common core standards and aligned assessment data with international benchmark results. The school's improvement planning included a long term strategic plan and an annual action plan, which was based upon previous inspection recommendations. There was a dual system of monitoring and evaluating teaching practice. However neither had evaluated the effectiveness of learning or had provided clear evidence for individual teacher professional development. There had been steady progress in addressing the recommendations of the previous DSIB report although some aspects had not been fully addressed.

Relationships with parents and the community were good. There were comprehensive methods of communication with parents which included newsletters, circulars, notes, diaries and electronic media. Heads of section regularly kept in touch with parents via the telephone. Parents expressed satisfaction with the regularity and quality of the school's reporting system. They could log onto the school's portal to check their children's progress and homework. The school surveyed parents to elicit their views of the school's operations and had an open door policy if they chose to visit. They were active in their support for school's activities such as breakfast with the kindergarten children, reading stories to children, sports days, as well as national and multicultural day celebrations. Local community entities shared their career knowledge with senior students, and students participated in community breast cancer awareness, diabetes "walkathons" and the Dubai Cares initiative.

Governance was good. The Governing Board was broadly representative of the stakeholders. It had a secure knowledge of the school's operations, including its strengths and areas for development and it held the school to account. It had been particularly proactive in its quest for an improved quality of provision

and educational outcomes from the school. Greater accountability of all levels of leadership was a clearly articulated agenda item. Missing was a broader parental voice at governance level which could act as a conduit between the parent body and board and which would ensure a more timely responsiveness to concerns. The board had been proactive in its support for an increased array of technological and other resources to support improved learning.

Management including staffing, facilities and resources was good. Day-to-day management was effective and efficient and included recent additional strategies to improve punctuality. There were sufficient, effectively deployed staff, including recently employed heads of subjects. The premises were suitably spacious and of a high overall quality. There was an impressive range of specialist rooms throughout the school with dedicated robotics, technology, pre-engineering, premedical, sciences, art and music rooms supporting the senior curriculum. Libraries were suitably stocked and senior students had access to the Internet in classrooms. Elementary students were beginning to use i-pads to support their learning. The school environment was attractively presented with many examples of student's work throughout the school. Included were notable examples of students' art work including murals, sketches, photographs and paintings.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

The majority of Emirati students had acceptable attainment and progress across key subjects. Their performance was better in other subjects. Students' progress was improving as students reached Grade 12. Most of last year's graduates enrolled into colleges and universities. Generally Emirati students' attainment and progress was equal to or slightly less than their peers, particularly in the upper phases of the school. One Emirati student scored maximum marks in an international benchmark test. Students felt happy and were well integrated in the school culture. They attended less often overall than other students.

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

Progress for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in English, mathematics and science was good. This was because teachers were guided by the counsellor and therefore most were able to support students in lessons. In Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language progress was no better than acceptable due to variable support. A majority of teachers were unclear about how students with SEN learn.

The counsellor devised individual education plans (IEPs) for some students and offered guidance on ways to address and support their needs in class. However, their specific learning needs, as identified on their IEPs, were not always planned for by teachers or met in lessons. Most teachers knew their students well, but the information was not used sufficiently to monitor their progress. Very few tasks were provided to match specific learning needs, therefore students with SEN were too reliant on adult support and unable to work independently. The school was just beginning to identify its gifted students. Parents were pleased with the provision offered and were involved at every stage of the process. Meetings and communications were regular and advice and guidance were shared. This ensured a consistent approach between home and school. The school had open enrolment and identified students with SEN on admission, using KHDA categories. Ramps and a lift provided access to those with physical disabilities. The enthusiastic counsellor was well qualified and experienced and had arranged some training and guidance for staff. However the school was aware that there remained scope to enhance teachers' understanding further and to review the curriculum to provide more detailed modifications to address special educational needs. There were too few specialist staff to support effectively all students with special needs during lessons.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

The quality of teaching in Arabic as a first language was improving although in the senior phases it remained inconsistent. Most teachers had secure subject knowledge and had sufficient teaching skill to support the broad development of the language. Teaching in the elementary school was more engaging with more effective questioning compared to higher phases. Lesson planning was similarly stronger in Elementary. There were more opportunities for students to engage which resulted in a more positive development of their speaking skills. In a few lessons, especially in the higher phases, teacher talk dominated lessons. Across all phases the level of challenge varied. Differentiated work was often provided to students with different needs and abilities but it did not consistently result in significant language development. The curriculum was compliant with KHDA requirements. The school provided modified classes for those who did not have sufficiently strong Arabic language skills. Appropriate enrichment arrangements were provided. For example, a range of texts were used to improve students' comprehension skills. However further modification was required to enhance speaking skills. Writing was the weakest aspect of the curriculum in the school, with only a few good opportunities planned for students to develop their extended writing skills.

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 judgements. 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 | 105 | 18% |
| | Last year | 120 | 25% |
| Teachers | 66 | | 88% |
| Students | 173 | | 75% |

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

A minority parents but most teachers and students completed their surveys. Almost all parents thought their children were making at least good progress in English, mathematics and science, a slightly higher percentage than the students. The majority of parents and students felt that progress in Islamic Education was good, but only a minority of students thought that progress in Arabic A was good. Most parents thought that their children received at least a good quality education that was interesting and challenging, and their children had access to a wide range of technology, subjects and activities. Almost all parents felt their children were safe and well looked after. Most parents felt that school leaders listened to their opinions, although only a minority of students were of the same opinion. Only a minority of students felt that school reports and meetings with teachers were helpful in supporting their learning or that the school dealt with bullying well. Almost all teachers were positive about the school including its operations and management.

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

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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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