

Dubai National School - Al Barsha Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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 National School – Al Barsha was inspected in January 2010, 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 Barsha, Dubai National School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2230 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents were satisfied with most aspects of the school's work. Almost all thought that their children liked school and that staff showed concern for students. Most thought that the teaching was good and that children were expected to work hard. A few parents felt that the school could be better at explaining how they could help their children with school work. A minority of parents stated that the school was not always good at consulting them on decisions which affected their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai National School Al Barsha was a good school with some clear strengths. It was successful in its stated aim of enabling students to maintain their Islamic values. Inspectors judged the attainment and progress in the five key subjects to be good, and achievement in English, mathematics and science compared well with international standards. Students' personal and social development was good overall. The behaviour of almost all students was good and they enjoyed good relations with their teachers. Attendance was good but a

significant number of students arrived late in the morning. Students' understanding of their civic responsibility and of Islam was good, as was their appreciation of local traditions and culture. They appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai but were aware of the importance of maintaining their own faith and identity. Students demonstrated good economic and environmental understanding.

Teaching was good throughout the school and relationships in the classroom were positive. Teachers had good subject knowledge and used this effectively in their explanations and questioning. However, too many lessons were dominated by teacher talk. There was insufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching methods. Higher attaining students remained under-challenged in some classrooms. The quality of learning was good and students were generally well motivated. Many students used computers to undertake research and construct presentations for the class. Research skills and students' enquiry skills were underdeveloped. Assessment was good, with regular testing throughout the school year which informed school improvement. However, teachers' ongoing assessment of students' work, with a view to offering focused feedback, varied across the school. The curriculum was well planned and regularly reviewed. In line with the school's philosophy, additional time was given to Islamic Education and Arabic. Cross-curricular links were good between mathematics and science. However, there were few opportunities for students to develop creative and practical skills and older students did not have sufficient choice in what they studied. A rich extra-curricular programme was available and this enhanced the main curriculum. The school ensured the health, safety and security of all students. The health clinics were well staffed, safe and orderly. Guidance counsellors dealt effectively with the general welfare of students.

The Director had established strong charismatic leadership in the school. With very good senior manager support, he had set a clear direction for self-evaluation and wished to empower leaders at all levels. The committed team of heads of department and co-ordinators worked well with their teachers to improve the learning experiences for students. Supervisors managed their areas competently. Senior managers were not yet rigorous enough in their overall evaluation of the whole school and in their planning systematically for improvement. The school identified closely with its community and parents felt well informed and involved in the life of the school. The relationship between the governing board and the school was a very positive one of partnership. Currently, however, the governing board did not have a sufficiently broad membership of key stakeholders. The school buildings included all the necessary components of a modern school and were very well-maintained. Staffing levels were good in both teaching and support staff. Some furniture and most ICT resources required replacement. All in all, the school was making good progress and had the clear capacity to continue to improve.

Key features of the school

- The vision of the Principal in promoting Islamic knowledge and culture and the personal interest he took in the whole school community;
- The commitment of senior managers to improving the school;
- The high quality of art which upheld the cultural ethos of the school;
- The school's very good start in using established international benchmarks to help judge overall levels of student attainment;
- The effective systems for monitoring, tracking and supporting student progress at subject level.

Recommendations

- Increase opportunities for all students to learn through enquiry and discovery and improve their research and investigation skills;
- Continue to focus on ensuring an appropriate challenge for gifted and talented students;
- Develop further the curriculum to address the broader needs and aspirations of all learners;
- Increase the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation, based on a broader, more rigorous evaluation of the whole school and more systematic planning for improvement.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good across the school. Progress was good from KG to middle and acceptable in high school. For almost all students, progress in the recitation of The Holy Qur'an and learning Hadeeth was good. Most students, including non-Arab Muslims, made good progress learning new vocabulary in, and understanding the meaning of, the verses of The Holy Qur'an they learned. From a very young age, almost all students made good progress in understanding basic Islamic concepts and the manners of a good Muslim. However, students, particularly in high school, did not demonstrate the ability to explore how their learning could be applied to new and unfamiliar contexts.

In Arabic, attainment for most students was good overall throughout the school. In most of the aspects of language, they made good progress in relation to their starting points. In Grade 1, all students could identify letters in different positions in words and their writing and pronunciation were good. In Grade 3, most students demonstrated their understanding in a lesson about happiness, through three role plays where they spoke with fluency and confidence. In Grade 9, all second language students could demonstrate their high level of understanding through their speaking. In writing, they produced good summaries of a story. However, a minority of students in Grade 11 did not have sufficient understanding of poetry and other genre.

Attainment and progress in English were good by international standards. In KG2, some children could read, converse briefly and write sentences. By the elementary stages, students were able to study their curriculum in English. Elementary and middle school students built up a wide vocabulary and retained spelled and used increasingly difficult words. By Grade 9, most students could read challenging texts with understanding and answer questions on them. They acquired good grammatical skills, could write structured essays in various modes and commented constructively on each others' work. In the high school, most students expressed themselves confidently and their responses to texts and poetry were mature.

In mathematics, attainment and progress throughout the grades were good. Students consistently attained levels of attainment above those expected for students internationally. Mathematical skills and understanding were well developed throughout the school. By Grade 1, students were able to count, read and write whole numbers up to 100 and group numbers for addition by using cubes. Grade 2 students could apply the skills learned earlier to count money. Grade 4 students could divide, multiply and subtract and explain orally the procedures involved. Grade 6 students were able to make practical applications in measurement. Grade 8 students graphed co-ordinates accurately and, in Grade 10, students were able to plot right angle trigonometry concepts using graphic calculators. Grade 12 students were able to perform first year university level calculus functions with ease.

Attainment and progress in science at all grade levels was good. Students from KG to Grade 12 exhibited good knowledge and understanding of key concepts and theories in the sciences.

Almost all enjoyed science and could make effective links between their lessons and the real world outside the school setting. Although the older students were able to develop power-point presentations and present them to classmates, the level of research displayed was often at a rather superficial level. Students conducted investigations in the laboratory well, adhered to safety rules and collaborated well to observe results as a group. However, they did not have sufficient knowledge of, or skills in, the application of scientific method.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was good overall with the exception of specific aspects of attitudes and behaviour in the middle school. Students went about their day in a quiet, focused and purposeful way. There was great respect shown by students toward their teachers. Students got along well with each other and showed concern for their classmates, with the exception of a small incidence of poor behaviour amongst middle school boys. Students followed the school rules in classrooms and in the grounds. Attendance was good. Although a high percentage of students had good attendance, a significant number arrived late in the morning.

Students' understanding of their civic responsibility and their understanding and appreciation of Islam were good, as was their appreciation of local traditions and culture. Students participated in school activities such as the student council and clubs that provided opportunities to exercise leadership and civic responsibility. Most students could articulate a clear understanding of Islam and its teachings. They appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai, while at the same time knowing the importance of maintaining their own faith and identity. A few students could see their choice of careers as a way of contributing to the future growth and prosperity of Dubai.

Students had good economic and environmental understanding. They had detailed knowledge of the development of Dubai from its earliest days to the present and understood the current economic and environmental challenges facing the country with a few offering possible solutions. Environmental issues such as global warming, pollution and habitat destruction were well understood by students. Most knew how their actions could help alleviate these problems.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good through the school. Teachers had good subject knowledge and used this effectively in their explanations and questioning. Teachers shared what they would be doing during the lesson but these objectives were often activities rather than intended learning outcomes. Lessons were reviewed well in science and mathematics at the end of lessons but this did not happen in many other classes. In a minority of lessons, a wide variety of different activities and discussion kept students interested, especially where the teacher used resources in addition to the text book. However, many lessons were dominated by teacher talk. Most classrooms had data or overhead projectors but these were rarely used creatively, often limited to showing slides of what the students had in their books. Teacher - student

relationships were good and teachers supported weaker students to prevent them from falling behind. However, although different worksheets were prepared for different ability groups this did not always give sufficient challenge for the more able students and teachers often relied on the strategy of allowing these students to teach the weaker ones rather than addressing their needs through more challenging activities.

The quality of learning was good overall. Students were mostly enthusiastic about their learning and were motivated to do well. They collaborated well in groups and challenged one another to solve problems or to interpret a text, then to explain their findings to the group. Particularly in mathematics and science, students related what they learned to their lives in and out of school. However, research skills and students' curiosity and spirit of enquiry were underdeveloped. Many students used computers to undertake research and construct presentations for the class. These activities did not always explore the subject sufficiently. Independent research in Arabic or science was either lacking or not rigorous enough to impact on overall learning.

Assessment was good, with regular testing throughout the school year that took into account students' work in class, at home and in tests and quizzes. Teachers' ongoing assessment of students' work in class varied across the school. It was effective when students took part in evaluating their own and others' work and received instant feedback on their work. However, marking in books did not diagnose how and where students had made mistakes, or give them the next steps for improvement. Subject departments reviewed the test results and made adjustments both to teaching and to the curriculum in order to meet students' emerging needs. Teachers, heads of department and supervisors knew their students well and were ready with the support they needed to improve their work.

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

The curriculum in the school was good. Throughout the school, it was well planned and regular reviews led to improvements, such as modifications to the reading scheme in KG. Continuity and progression were assured by the exchange of information between teachers and by teachers making full use of the textbooks. Teachers supplemented the text books by devising additional learning materials. However, not all students received a broad and balanced programme of study. There were few opportunities for students to develop creative and practical skills and older students did not have sufficient choice in what they studied. In line with the school's philosophy, additional time was given to Islamic Education and Arabic and students received personal and social development through additional lessons by the Islamic teachers and a series of lectures. Students up to Grade 6 received valuable health education in the science lessons. Computer studies courses did not consistently challenge students with more advanced knowledge and skills and technology was not used creatively within the subjects and across the curriculum. Cross-curricular links between mathematics and science benefited learning in both subjects and English supported other subjects effectively by

teaching their special curricular vocabulary. A rich extra-curricular programme was available, although not all students chose to participate. Students supported charitable activities locally and abroad and Young Entrepreneurs took part in business programmes in the community. There was insufficient provision for those with particular educational needs. Non-Arab speakers were well taught and the school was successful in its stated aim of promoting Islamic and Arabic culture.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Protection and support of students was good. The school made clear efforts to ensure the health, safety and security of students in all parts of the school. Entrance and exit doors were either guarded or locked. The school should consider the use of security doors (with crash bars) instead of locking doors. The KG area was especially well monitored with a number of staff circulating throughout the area to assure the safety of young children. Play areas were well supervised. Sports facilities were supervised by adults at all times when students were in attendance. The school was well maintained and cleaned frequently during the day by workers. Fire drills were regular. Traffic was very well managed at the start and end of the school day. Students had been taught about the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. The purpose built school was smartly designed with a large open courtyard available as a play area during breaks. Buses were well maintained and supervised. The health clinics were well staffed, safe and orderly and health records were diligently maintained for each student.

The quality of support given to students was also good. Guidance counsellors maintained effective and systematic records concerning the welfare of students and meetings with parents. Teachers, nurses, and ancillary staff promoted healthy lifestyles through classroom presentations. Staff-student relationships were observed to be very good. Pastoral care was provided by staff and supervisors and teachers dealt with behaviour issues promptly. The overall well-being of students was carefully monitored and parents were kept well informed. Tracking of students' progress in subjects was a strong feature of the school and ensured vulnerable students were well supported.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Director had a number of personal and professional strengths and had established a strong spiritual leadership in the school. He had maintained a very positive climate, encouraged good teamwork and fostered good relations with the parent body. With senior managers, he had set a clear direction for self-evaluation and empowered leaders at all levels. He was well supported by the other senior managers who demonstrated high levels of professional knowledge and skill. The committed team of heads of department and co-ordinators fulfilled their remits very conscientiously. Their work in developing their teachers and monitoring student progress was having a clear impact on standards. The supervisors played an important role in managing their sections and did so competently, offering guidance to students and teachers.

The school had instituted a number of strategies to monitor and evaluate the work of students and teachers. Heads of department and co-ordinators evaluated thoroughly the work of teachers using classroom observation and feedback to improve quality. The progress of students was very well tracked. Departments also kept the curriculum under review and modified subjects when necessary. There was a need to bring the components of self-evaluation together in a more systematic and rigorous way to focus on improving the whole school over time. The school did not sufficiently analyse examination data and the comprehensive findings of its self-evaluation to set clear priorities in its improvement plan. Teachers did not have sufficient opportunity to discuss methodology as a group. The school had made acceptable progress in addressing the main issues identified at the last inspection.

The school communicated well with its community and parents. Parents were well informed through ongoing communication and parents' evenings. Increasingly, they made use of the school's website to access up to date information. The parents' group felt they contributed to the school's development.

The relationship between the governing board and the school was a very positive one of partnership. The board felt well informed and held the school accountable. Currently, the governing board did not have a sufficiently broad membership of key stakeholders.

The well-designed and attractive school was of an appropriate size and included all the necessary components of a modern school. These included gymnasia, outdoor sports facilities, swimming pools, computer labs, libraries and a sufficient number of classrooms. The building was very well-maintained. There were science laboratories for all levels. Staffing levels were good in both teaching and support staff, including guidance counsellors. Libraries were in need of more focused learning materials and electronic resources. Student desks in some areas of the school were worn and needed to be replaced. Computers and software required updating throughout the school. The car park areas were satisfactory for the number of parents picking up children. Food service facilities provided good quality, healthy food.

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	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good	Good

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	Acceptable
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.

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