

Dubai American Academy

Inspection Report

Pre-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 American Academy was inspected in November 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 Barsha, Dubai American Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum to Grade 10, followed by the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD) course. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,138 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. Overall, the responses of the parents were positive, recognising the strong sense of community and quality of education as leading characteristics of the school. Parents also commented favourably regarding the International Baccalaureate Programme. Areas of concern to parents were the increase in class sizes at the school and the reduction in the number of teaching assistants. The traffic issue at the school during drop-off and pick-up and concerns regarding the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic were the areas most often mentioned in questionnaire returns.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai American Academy provided, overall, a good quality of education for its students. Attainment and progress were consistently good in English, mathematics and science. However, in Islamic Education and Arabic they were unsatisfactory. The school had only recently started to teach Islamic Education and this accounted for the low level of performance in the subject. Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. All students demonstrated a good level of understanding of the economy and environment.

The quality of teaching and learning were good overall and most parents reported in the survey and in interviews with inspectors that they were pleased with the progress of their children. The American curriculum was well planned and implemented using a textbook as the basis. However, teaching strategies went beyond the textbooks and broadened the opportunity for all students to learn successfully. Student progress was monitored effectively and guidance services assisted senior high students with college selections and applications. The school's attention to the well-being of the students was outstanding. A life skills programme from the elementary school onwards ensured each student was known and supported by an adult. Medical facilities and staffing were good.

The Superintendent had a thorough knowledge of the school and its programmes and worked well with section principals to assess student progress. Professional development was also planned according to needs identified in the school's informal evaluation process. Principals felt well-supported by the Superintendent and the governing board and they in turn gave good support to teachers. Parents reported high satisfaction with the Superintendent and principals and felt communication was good. Some concerns about the traffic patterns around the school were shared by both the leadership and the parents. Parents planned to submit a petition requesting that the RTA review the traffic flow around the school. A very strong parent group was present in the school, particularly in the elementary section. The governing board provided a safe and secure learning environment. All facilities were well-maintained, clean and safe and these expanded the range of possible student activities. Little progress had been made in the recommendation from the last inspection regarding widening stakeholder participation on the governing board. Nevertheless, the school leadership was held accountable by the governing board and governance was acceptable. The school's improvement plan addressed key aspects of teaching and learning in addition to facilities maintenance.

Key features of the school

- A caring attitude for all students in the multi-cultural school community;
- Strong parental support;
- Outstanding provision for health and safety;
- Enrichment of the school's curriculum through many out of classroom activities and the Life Skills programme;
- Shared common vision by the senior leadership for the school community;
- Provision for Arabic and Islamic Education failed to meet Ministry of Education requirements and students' attainment and progress in these key subjects required improvement;
- The leadership team had the capacity to help the school to improve further and offer additional enriching activities for the students.

Recommendations

- Comply with Ministry of Education requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Build systematically on the good practice of teaching and learning across all phases of the school;
- Ensure systems of governance include a wide range of stakeholders.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were unsatisfactory. Lessons in Islamic Education had begun two weeks prior to the inspection. All students at all grade levels were studying the same topics. Consequently, any knowledge that was demonstrated by students had come mostly from home experiences.

Overall, students' attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory. In comparison with international benchmarks, the grades of those students who took the IBD were below average. In Grade 9, students could translate short texts using glossaries in their books. By Grade 12, students could form sentences and read very simple familiar sentences though with some difficulty. Students' writing was determined by exercises in the textbook with very limited free writing.

Overall, attainment and progress in English were good across the school. However, they were inconsistent in middle school. Reading and listening skills were well developed. There were some very confident performances in speaking and good examples of analytical and creative writing. However, a few students displayed weaknesses in their grammar and spelling. By the end of KG, most children demonstrated good levels in speaking. By the end of elementary, many students showed confidence in reading and discussing books. By the end of high school, many could contribute effectively to in-depth discussion of a text, including literature, current affairs and philosophy.

In mathematics, students' attainment and progress was good at all stages. In KG and elementary classes, the students developed key skills in number and calculation which were appropriate to their age. By Grade 6 students explained the strategies used in solving simple algebraic equations. By Grade 9 they could apply their knowledge of basic algebra and demonstrated good understanding of geometry and handling data. By Grade 12 students demonstrated high levels of mathematical and algebraic skills and were able to work in groups and independently to apply trigonometry rules in problem solving.

Attainment and progress in science were good across the school. Results in the sciences in the IBD were above world averages. In KG, children used their senses to explore the world around them. Throughout the elementary school, students improved their knowledge and understanding of scientific topics. Grade 4 students had a basic knowledge of the internal structure of the earth and understood how the continents had moved throughout the history of the Earth. Middle school students had a good understanding of chemical bonding and could predict outcomes of reactions from their knowledge of the periodic table and the relative reactivity of metals. At this stage they made outstanding progress in developing their understanding of scientific investigation through practical laboratory classes. In the high school the older students were accurate and observant when carrying out practical work.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students throughout the school were well behaved and self-disciplined in classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds. There were no observed cases of poor behaviour. The good relationship between students and school staff was an outstanding feature of the school. Students were consistently punctual in coming to classes and attendance was good throughout the whole school.

A caring and sharing ethos characterised the whole school. Given a wide range of activities, clubs and organisations, students developed high-quality leadership skills and they were proactive in their roles and responsibilities in and out of the school. Among the many examples were the middle school students' fieldtrips to Thailand, Philippines and other countries to provide relief support after disasters. Students had a good understanding of the importance of Islam in Dubai as the source of legislation. They respected Islamic principles and celebrated Islamic occasions.

Almost all students had developed a good understanding of how Dubai had developed through the last few decades. They were aware of the role of tourism and investment in Dubai's economy. They could present some proof that the recent economic recession had less impact on Dubai than on many other countries in the world. The green team, the environmental club and the Earth week were examples of projects that helped students to be proactive in protecting the environment. High school students were very well informed about environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, and the level of energy conservation in Dubai. They were very enthusiastic about finding alternative sources of energy, such as that of the Solar City in Abu-Dhabi.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good in most subjects, but unsatisfactory in Islamic Education and Arabic, where lessons were too teacher-led and over reliant on textbooks. All teachers were committed to improving the quality of learning. Most staff had created a positive learning environment. Teachers' knowledge of their subject was good. They generally shared clear learning objectives and used questioning effectively. There was some very well focused teaching at elementary and, at Grades 9 to 12, the quality of teaching was strong. Throughout the school, there was a sound emphasis on students working in groups, collaborating and presenting their findings to each other. The school had made progress in meeting the needs of a range of students through different types of activities and through giving additional support. However, teachers did not always work sufficiently closely with groups of students' to support or challenge them in their learning.

The quality of students' learning was good overall. Most students were motivated and responded well to the generally high expectations. They were developing a range of appropriate work habits and learning skills and were often encouraged to be reflective about their own development as learners. Many were becoming confident learners, able to explain and discuss. Students responded well when given the opportunity to collaborate in groups. They were beginning to make good use of feedback from teachers so that they understood where they needed to improve. In Grades 9 to 12, students were developing sound critical and higher order thinking skills. There was also evidence in a few elementary classes of the early stages of such skill development. In a few classes, students were not consistently involved in the learning process and were too passive. Learning in Islamic Education and Arabic lacked pace and had a limited focus on linguistic skills.

Overall, the school's assessment strategies were good. This year, the school had established a key question for all teachers: "How do we know that students are making progress?" Teachers made increasingly effective use of assessment data to help them identify areas of the curriculum and teaching and learning which required improvement. In the majority of classes, assessment was an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Regular assessments and the correction of assignments enabled teachers to have a good insight into individuals' strengths and weaknesses. Assessment information was recorded well. However, the marking of written work was not consistently helpful to the learner across all stages and subjects.

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

The quality of the curriculum overall was good but there were weaknesses notably in the time allocation for Islamic Education and Arabic across the school. The curriculum offered breadth and had a clear rationale. However, it was not well-balanced because it did not comply with the Ministry of Education requirements for the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic. The use of an electronic curriculum planner enabled subject leaders to keep the curriculum under continual review and curriculum development was good. Planning across the school was linked to internationally recognised standards. These were modified as appropriate to reflect the needs of the students and took into account the geographic location of the school and the local culture. However, occasionally, topics in science for example, were included in the elementary school that were not best matched to students' conceptual abilities. Each subject was fully reviewed every five years. Curriculum planning was linked, ultimately, towards a preparation for the IBD. It made very good use of teachers' subject expertise and experience of teaching methods, together with selective use of appropriate resources. Cross-curricular links were outstanding; science, mathematics and ICT were integrated into the elementary curriculum, and design technology in the high school brought together skills learned in other subjects. The life skills programme provided opportunities for students to improve their leadership and thinking skills and to develop their concepts of citizenship and values. Curriculum enrichment through the extensive range of extra-curricular activities was outstanding. It contributed significantly to the students' personal and social development and awareness of the wider world.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for the health and safety of students were outstanding. The school site was safe and secure. Measures to ensure the students' safety and welfare on the school transport were exemplary. In addition to the bus driver and conductor a senior student was designated to assist in the care and supervision of students on each bus. The premises, including sports facilities were excellent and were maintained to the highest of standards. Record keeping was meticulous and the high quality services provided by the medical staff ensured that any health related issues received prompt and effective attention. Very good guidance was given on the need to maintain healthy lifestyles. Child protection procedures were carefully thought out, implemented thoroughly and with great sensitivity.

Relationships between staff and students were good. Students felt safe and secure in the school. Teachers knew their students well and created a positive ethos for learning. Teachers managed behaviour effectively and lessons ran smoothly. Counsellors and nursing staff worked closely with parents and provided high quality support and guidance for students' medical, social and emotional needs. There was good provision made for guidance for future careers. Students with additional needs received very good support. Parents were actively encouraged to become fully involved in the life of the school. Student attendance and punctuality were monitored rigorously. Procedures for tracking academic progress were good overall. There was scope to build further on existing good practice and develop individual learning targets for students to ensure they attained to their full potential.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership of the Dubai American Academy was good. The team collaborated well to develop a vision for all levels of the school. This was shared with all staff through the senior and middle leaders. Leadership was focused on improving teaching and learning and maintaining the premises in order to provide a safe learning environment for all students.

Self-evaluation was good. Principals used the regular review of learning and teaching to identify and meet professional development needs. Each member of the staff had a personal professional development plan.

Parents were actively engaged in school activities and felt supported and confident in the school's role of educating their children. The Dubai American Academy Parents Association was consulted at all grade levels. Parents were informed of their children's attainment, in writing, in conferences and through the school's website. Parent volunteers offered to help with the Arabic instruction. Parental concerns over consistency at transition planning between each school phase were shared. Parents reported inconsistent utilization of the electronic communication system by staff.

Governance was acceptable and exerted a positive influence on the management of the school, holding it accountable for financial and accounting success. Representation of stakeholders on the governing board was not present and this had been indicated in the previous inspection report. Governors understood the traffic issue that was mentioned by parents, staff and the school leadership. Governance needed to work on compliance issues with the leadership team regarding Islamic Education and Arabic.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Classrooms were large enough to allow group work and different styles of teaching to be used. The safety features and plans developed by the school protected and supported student health, safety and learning. The library and ICT facilities were modern, accessible and inviting.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
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.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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