

INSPECTION REPORT

Star International School - Umm Al Sheif

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Star International School - Umm Al Sheif

Location	Umm Al Sheif
Type of school	Private
Website	www.starschoolummsheif.com
Telephone	04 348 3314
Address	PO Box 51008, Dubai
Principal	Michael Henry
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-12 / Foundation Stage to Year 7
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	451
Number of Emirati students	(2%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 12th to Wednesday 14th March 2012

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The context of the school

Located in Umm Al Sheif, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 12 years from Foundation Stage to Year 7. The school had added Year 7 in September 2011 and had plans to continue to add additional secondary years in subsequent sessions. The school followed a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 451 students on the roll. Students represented 43 nations with the greatest number coming from the United Kingdom. There were 51 full-time teachers, including the Principal and a senior management team. All teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. A few students were Emirati. Approximately five per cent of students had been identified as having some form of special educational need. Staffing showed minimal turnover but there were many new appointments to accommodate the growing student roll and formation of a secondary department.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The school had made considerable improvement in a number of important aspects since the last inspection and continued to provide a good quality of education. The previous inspection had identified four areas for improvement. The school had taken each of these points very seriously. Good progress had been made in addressing each point. The school was building on the good work already done to address several of the recommendations fully.

Students' attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science were good across the school, with the exception of attainment in English in the secondary phase which was acceptable. Sufficient time was allocated to the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Education to meet statutory requirements. Attainment and progress in these subjects were at an acceptable standard. Students' Islamic, cultural and civic understanding was good in the primary and secondary. The quality of phases' teaching and of students' learning was consistently good across the school. Provision for the students in the new secondary phase, Year 7, was good overall. The school had a very caring, supportive and happy ethos. Students' personal and social development was outstanding across the school. Partnership with parents and the local community was strong. Leadership was good and internal procedures for evaluating the work of the school were also good. The school had a strong capacity for continuous improvement.

Key strengths

- Students' excellent behaviour, attitudes and desire to learn, their positive relations with teachers and their enjoyment of school life;
- The consistently strong teaching across most of the curriculum which enabled students to make good progress in English, mathematics and science at all stages;
- The highly effective steps taken to ensure students' safety and welfare;
- The efforts of the Principal and the leadership team to continuously improve the quality of education in the school;
- The strong and effective partnership with parents and the community, celebrating the rich international diversity of students.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Islamic Education and Arabic in order to improve students' progress and raise attainment;
- Ensure that assessment data is reliable and use it more effectively to improve teaching and learning;
- Widen the expertise and representation of stakeholders on the Board of Governors;
- Provide release time for all leaders to monitor and develop the quality of learning and teaching;
- Improve students' access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support day-to-day learning.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
English			
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good
Science			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Most students in primary years had adequate knowledge of the pillars of Islam and faith. Older students understood the concept of God's existence. Across the school, knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and Hadeeth were not well developed. The attainment of students studying Arabic as a first language or a second language was acceptable. Most students understood class instruction well and responded to teachers' questions using acceptable short sentences. They could read short passages and they understood main ideas appropriately. Their writing skills were underdeveloped. In English, attainment was good in Foundation Stage and primary years and acceptable in Year 7. Most students attained at or above expected standards in reading, writing, talking and listening. Students' speaking and listening skills were the strongest aspects. Overall, attainment in mathematics and science was good at all phases. Foundation students made a strong start, with their number work developing within real life learning situations. Primary and secondary students demonstrated good knowledge and skills across all areas of mathematics and their grasp of strategies for solving number problems was particularly good. At all stages, students showed enthusiasm for learning science and demonstrated very good enquiry skills, developing the scientific method as a way of thinking.

Most students across the school made acceptable progress in Islamic Education. They were improving their knowledge of the life of the prophet and the application of Islamic etiquette and values to their lives. Most students studying Arabic as a first language made acceptable progress developing their listening and speaking skills. However, the majority did not develop their writing skills sufficiently well. Students studying Arabic as an additional language made acceptable progress. They had improved their copying skills, although writing remained underdeveloped. Most students entered the Foundation Stage with acceptable English and by Year 7 the majority had made good progress in all four skills, especially in speaking and listening. Progress in mathematics and science was good across the school, with all groups of students making good gains in knowledge and skills as they tackled increasingly challenging work year on year. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress across most of the curriculum.

Emirati students made overall acceptable progress in Islamic Education, English, mathematics and science. Their attainment, however, remained unsatisfactory in much of the curriculum. In English and mathematics, they made good progress from lower starting points, especially in reading and writing. Progress was not good enough for them to reach the levels expected for their ages.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Acceptable	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Almost all students had excellent behaviour during lessons and throughout the school. They were self-disciplined, had a good work ethic, and enjoyed strong relations with teachers and peers. Attendance was good in the most recent term. Students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of the local traditions and culture were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and good in primary and secondary phases. Children in the Foundation Stage had adequate knowledge about local traditions and culture. Most primary age students demonstrated clear understanding of the effects of Islam on life in Dubai. They had good understanding of UAE's heritage, and described clearly the uniqueness of Dubai as a multicultural city. Students' civic, economic and environmental understanding was good. Most students could explain the main factors in Dubai's economy such as tourism and how major landmarks were attracting visitors to the city. Students also showed clear understanding of major environmental issues such as pollution and global warming.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching for effective learning was good across the school. Teachers' strong knowledge of their subjects allowed them to select relevant and enjoyable activities and resources, often imaginatively presented, which appealed to students and engaged their interest. Most teachers established a strong rapport with their classes and created a relaxed yet businesslike learning atmosphere in which full attention to tasks was expected. Teachers demanded hard work from students and most lessons featured independent learning activities. Questioning was often incisive and well directed to focus attention on key learning points. Planning was effective, with activities usually pitched at three levels of complexity to cater for most students. Those experiencing difficulties, such as learning in an unfamiliar language, were well supported by teachers and by their peers in most lessons. However, the needs of the most able students were not served by leaving their extra challenge activities until the latter part of the lessons. This reduced the scope for the critical thinking required of them.

Learning was good in all phases of the school. Students demonstrated responsibility in completing their tasks, either individually or with their peers. They benefited from being expected to discuss their work and ideas with each other, and to co-operate over activities, although there were limited opportunities for genuine collaboration. A strong feature of learning was the way in which new concepts were introduced with reference to their relevance to the real world, such as the 24 hour clock with its importance to travel timetables. Learning was also enhanced by logical connections between subjects, as when Year 1 students investigated the brightness of different light sources as they looked for the bear from their story book in its 'dark cave'.

Assessment of learning was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary and secondary years. Foundation Stage teachers gathered a useful range of information on children's progress and used it to

ensure that all were given the support or activities they needed to develop further. The school collected plenty of performance data from tests but their own assessments of the levels that students were achieving sometimes lacked accuracy. Data were used to help set targets in key subjects, but this process was not sharp enough to direct students' work effectively. Teachers observed students' progress in lessons carefully to ascertain their key strengths and weaknesses. They offered students constructive oral feedback. Marking of students' work was regular but inconsistent in the degree to which it helped students to improve.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good

The curriculum was of good quality overall. In the Foundation Stage, children learned effectively through structured play across the range of early years' developmental categories. Children were well prepared for transition to Year 1. In the primary years and Year 7, students were offered a good range of subjects each week. These developed their academic, athletic and aesthetic sensibilities and gave them opportunities to develop leadership skills. Most programmes of study provided good continuity and progression, but these were weaker in Islamic Education and Arabic. The review process had resulted in curriculum modifications for a few students, as well as extension, extra challenge and localisation of content to suit learning in Dubai. Enrichment of the curriculum included Thursday assemblies and workshops, field trips for older students, and many after-school sporting activities and clubs. The pre-school group 'Star Tots' provided a good opportunity for young children to experience a wide range of learning activities, including developing their social skills. The weekly timetable of 55 periods, each of 30 minutes, often adversely affected teaching and learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good

The provision for health and safety was outstanding across the school. Transport arrangements were well organised and a large number of adults ensured students' safe arrival and departure. The buildings were well maintained and clean. The school nurse and doctor meticulously kept school records up-to-date and played an important role in the healthy living aspects of the curriculum. Medicines were kept secure and medical information was shared with teachers when appropriate. Fire equipment was regularly maintained and smoke alarms were in place at regular intervals around the buildings. Evacuation procedures were clearly signed. The school provided very good advice to students and their parents on food choices and most lunch boxes contained healthy food. Students were well aware of the significance of healthy living and enthusiastically took part in the many programmes for physical education and sport offered by the school. Child protection arrangements were clear and understood by all.

The quality of support for students was good overall. Strong features included respectful and caring staff-student relationships and exemplary student behaviour and application to their work. Teachers at all levels were approachable and accessible, and were always available to give advice and support when necessary. The quality of support for students with special educational needs was acceptable, but the SEN co-ordinator did not have sufficient time to attend to them. These students were supported in lessons through differentiated group work but there were too few strategies to assess specific learning needs at an early stage. A few students with significant needs had detailed 'pen portraits' and several individualised educational plans were in place. Appropriate steps were taken to monitor students' attendance and time-keeping, and parents were contacted when students failed to arrive at the school on time.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

The quality of leadership was good overall. The Principal had a clear vision for the school and provided strong and effective leadership. The senior leadership team provided good support to the Principal and individuals worked well together. The new middle management tier was beginning to affect the work of the school. The scope for leaders to implement changes was limited by the small amount of time available to key individuals. The ability of the senior school managers to allocate budgets was restricted.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Leaders had taken steps to seek the views of students, parents and teachers. Self-evaluation procedures had improved, although Islamic Education and Arabic needed further review and action to match the good practices already present in other subjects. Teachers reflected on their own performance and could identify and share aspects for improvement. Good progress had been made in addressing each recommendation in the last inspection report.

Partnership between homes and the school was good. The school website, newsletters and students' diaries were effective channels of communication. Student progress reports, mid-year reviews and parent-teacher meetings were effective. Parents appreciated the open-door approach to dealing with any concerns. The school had not really considered how it could inform parents more effectively about what its improvement plans were and about what had been achieved. Staff members, parents and friends of the school met socially through regular school community events. Partnership with the local community resulted in various opportunities for students to learn outside the school and from visitors to the school.

Governance of the school was acceptable. The Board of Governors continued to be narrowly constituted but there were plans to widen its membership to represent all stakeholders. Board members listened to parents' views, were very supportive of the Principal and gave him several strategic powers. However, the

Board had not ensured sufficient funds were available to provide necessary resources, including ICT and library materials, or to accommodate the expanding secondary phase.

Management was good. The quality and stability of the teaching staff was a strength of the school, with several new appointments having made a significant impact on improving provision. The school had made preparations for the recruitment of additional specialised staff as the secondary school expands further to support students across the spectrum of needs. The recently introduced performance management scheme had been embraced by teachers and the school was aware of the need to provide sufficient resources to meet the raised performance expectations. A recent professional development day to consider teaching and learning had been highly successful. The training of teaching assistants was underdeveloped.

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	137	50%
	Last year	168	61%
Teachers	35		95%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

Half of the parents responded to the survey. These parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and were satisfied with almost all aspects of the quality of education provided. Almost all believed the school was well led, and that leadership and the quality of teaching were strengths of the school. Almost all believed that their children enjoyed school, were making good progress in their learning and that they had good access to a variety of extra-curricular activities. Almost all reported that the school kept their children safe and met their learning needs. Almost all thought that the behaviour of students was very good and that parents were involved effectively in the life of the school. Over a third did not know what the school had done to address the recommendations made in the last inspection report. Almost all teachers responded to the survey. They indicated that they enjoyed working in the school. Almost a third believed that provision for students with special educational needs needed to be improved and a quarter wanted greater attention given to their continuing professional development.

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

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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