

INSPECTION REPORT

Horizon School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Horizon School

Location	Al Safa
Type of school	Private
Website	www.horizonschooldubai.com
Telephone	04-3422891
Address	P O Box 6749, Al Wasl, Dubai
Principal	Marion C Sinclair
Curriculum	English National Curriculum
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Grades	3-11 / Kindergarten to Year 6
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	496
Number of Emirati students	0 (0%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 24th to Wednesday 26th October 2011

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The context of the school

Located in Jumeriah, Horizon School is a private school providing education for 496 boys and girls from Kindergarten to Year 6, aged three to 11 years. The school followed the English National Curriculum.

There were 22 full-time teachers, including the Headteacher and nine part-time teachers. All teachers had appropriate qualifications. They were supported by 9 teaching assistants. There were four Kindergarten classes; one class for Foundation Stage 1 and three classes at Foundation Stage 2. At this stage the number of children in each class varied from 19 to 24 and each class had a full-time teaching assistant. There were three classes at each stage from Year 1 to Year 5 and there were two classes at Year 6. The number of children in each primary class varied from 19 to 26. Forty-seven different nationalities were represented among the student population.

The Headteacher had been in post for 16 years. Seven new teachers, including the Deputy Headteacher, had joined the school this session.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Horizon School provided a good quality of education. Strengths of the school included high attainment in mathematics and a rich curriculum. Teaching was good with some excellent practice. The approach to learning helped to develop students' skills as learners and gave them a good foundation for the next stage in their education. The positive, caring, inclusive ethos helped to develop the personal and social skills of students. Considerable success had been achieved in helping students identified by the school as having special education needs to succeed. The students who had English as an additional language also made good progress. Many parents helped in classes and valued the positive ethos of the school.

The school had made good progress towards addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection. It had introduced a new course for Islamic Education. However, improvements were still required in the quality of teaching in this area. In Arabic, there had been improvements in teaching, but the quality was still too uneven. Throughout the school, teachers had observed other teachers in class, to spread good

practice and raise the overall quality of teaching. Senior leaders knew each child well and were aware of their achievements and progress.

Key strengths

- Outstanding attainment and progress in mathematics;
- The high quality staff-student relationships which successfully promoted students' personal development, their confidence, exemplary behaviour and their mature and responsible attitudes;
- High quality, rich curriculum with a strong emphasis upon the development of students' learning;
- The school's success in ensuring that students with additional learning needs access the curriculum and make good progress;
- The strong leadership of the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher in promoting the vision of the school.

Recommendations

- Further improve the quality of student's learning and attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic, drawing on the best practice from other subjects in the school;
- Improve the challenge provided, particularly for the more able students;
- When planning school improvements, make better use of attainment data to ensure that teachers focus specifically upon what needs to be improved.

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

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable. The majority of students had a basic knowledge of Islamic concepts such as the pillars of Islam but they did not have a deep understanding or a detailed knowledge about prayer. In Arabic as an additional language, students' attainment was acceptable. Their language skills were in line with expectations for the number of years that they had been learning the language.

There were weaknesses in both their oral and writing skills. Attainment in English and science was good throughout the school. In the primary classes, students were developing high standards of reading but their ability to use critical skills was more limited. In science, children at the Foundation Stage had a good knowledge of healthy food and they were learning how to make predictions which could be tested by carrying out experiments. Attainment in mathematics was outstanding in both Foundation Stage and primary phases. Students frequently displayed creative and critical thinking when solving problems.

In too many Islamic Education lessons, Muslim students did not build on their prior knowledge of Islam and, as a consequence, their progress was unsatisfactory. Overall, progress in Arabic was acceptable. Students made good progress in handwriting, but more limited progress in speaking. In English and science, students made good progress. They progressively developed their knowledge and skills across the key areas of each subject in the Foundation Stage and primary phase. Progress in mathematics was outstanding in both the Foundation Stage and primary phase. Children in the early years were progressing at an impressive rate beyond expectations.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

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

Students' personal and social development was outstanding. They were well behaved, courteous and welcoming. Relationships between staff and students and between students throughout the school were positive. They enjoyed learning both independently and in collaboration with others. They knew the importance of a balanced diet and took advantage of the many opportunities for exercise during and after school. Attendance and punctuality were outstanding. Almost all students understood the importance of Islam in Dubai. They appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and put into practice what they learnt from studying Islam. Students showed respect for Islam and the local, traditions and culture. Students engaged in local community activities and contributed actively to social and cultural events in school and in the locality. They showed initiative and took responsibility for activities and projects within the school and in the wider community. Students had an outstanding awareness of the local environment in which

they lived. Their knowledge about a range of environmental issues was strong and students expressed well-reasoned personal opinions.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

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

The quality of teaching was good across the two phases. Teachers knew their subjects well and how students learned. They planned lessons well and used resources effectively to support learning. The rapport between teachers and students was strong and high levels of mutual respect were evident. Teachers planned a wide variety of interesting and stimulating learning activities. Most lessons related classroom learning to the real world. In the Foundation Stage, teachers made good use of space for a range of learning activities, including areas beyond the classroom. However, the quality of teaching varied too much both within and across subjects. The pace of learning in a few lessons was too slow, especially where teachers spent too long in giving explanations and examples. Teachers did not consistently challenge students to use critical thinking in activities and plenary sessions. Teaching in Islamic Education was acceptable. In Arabic as an additional Language, teaching was mostly acceptable with some good teaching. In English and science, most teaching was good. Teaching in mathematics was often outstanding. High quality teaching was also observed in specialist lessons for students with English as an additional language, physical education and music.

Learning was good in both the Foundation Stage and in the primary phase. Students enjoyed learning. They were usually fully engaged with their learning activities and showed an interest in developing their understanding. Students were aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the school they were learning to become more independent and to take more responsibility for their own learning. Students interacted well with each other and collaborated well in most lessons. Most students could connect what they learned in lessons with earlier work done in school and to their knowledge of the real world. However, in some lessons students did not progress because they already knew the subject matter of the lesson, for example in Islamic Education. The most able students did not have sufficient

opportunities to develop their critical and enquiry skills. In a few lessons, students developed knowledge but understanding was less well developed.

Assessment was good across the school. Teachers used a good range of assessment practices, including peer- and self-assessment, to monitor students' progress. The majority of teachers asked thoughtful questions to assess students' understanding. Most teachers knew the strengths and weaknesses of their students. In the best practice, teachers used their detailed knowledge of students' understanding to set appropriately challenging tasks. Most teachers provided effective and clear written and oral feedback to students. Teachers recorded and analysed assessment data but did not always use it well to plan appropriate learning opportunities in lessons. As a consequence, more able students were not always challenged sufficiently.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding in both Foundation Stage and primary, and was well designed to meet the needs of all groups of students. As well as setting out what students were expected to know and understand, it took into account the different ways they learn and promoted their confidence and independence as learners. In most subjects, there was an exceptional variety of learning experiences. The range of learning opportunities ranged from straightforward teacher exposition to investigations and research. By drawing together knowledge from across traditional subject boundaries in the themes they studied and by setting tasks in real life contexts where possible, students grasped the relevance of their work. Annual reviews took parents' suggestions into account and a wide range of extra-curricular activities and community links provided enrichment possibilities for all students. The curriculum was well resourced and ensured that students were well prepared for their next stage of education as confident and enthusiastic learners.

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were outstanding. Very high standards of cleanliness and hygiene were maintained around the school. The building was maintained to a very high standard. The swimming pools met all requirements. The premises were very secure. Medical provision was very good. Students were well supervised throughout the school day. Teachers promoted a healthy lifestyle throughout the curriculum. Risk assessments for off-site visits were good. Transport to and from the school by bus service was well supervised. The school's arrangements for child protection were clear and well known to all teachers.

Teachers had very positive relationships and high expectations for children and students, including those they identified as having special educational needs. This created a caring, inclusive ethos in which students felt secure and developed self-confidence and a responsible attitude to learning. Teachers knew students well and monitored closely their welfare and development. The school had a well-considered, three-stage approach to meeting the learning needs of students with learning difficulties. In the first stage, any concerns of teachers were followed up by the learning support specialist who monitored the student concerned and identified where the learning difficulty occurred. Thereafter, the school used a number of strategies to address the issue. These could include extra support from a teacher or teaching assistant, or the class teacher adjusted the programme of work for the student. This approach could be enhanced further by the specialist teacher modeling good practice in the class for the class teachers. In the second stage of the strategy, students were withdrawn from class and given intensive one-to-one or small group tuition to address a specific need. This was very effective as teachers used well-chosen specific learning targets and strategies. For more pronounced learning difficulties, specialists from other agencies were used to provide individual help. Overall, the school was very successful in its approaches and the majority of students identified as having special education needs and those students with English as an additional language, made better than expected progress through the stages in the curriculum.

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	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

The leadership of the school was good. The Headteacher had promoted a clear vision of how children should be educated and this had forged the ethos and character of the school. The Deputy Headteacher joined the school this session and brought additional skills to the senior leadership team. The effectiveness of team leaders and subject co-ordinators in bringing about improvements within their own areas varied considerably. Strengths were evident in mathematics but a more consistent and effective drive was needed to bring about improvements in Islamic Education and Arabic. Teachers need to be more involved in the decision-making processes of the school.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had a systematic approach to monitoring the quality of its work. Managers evaluated lesson plans, observed lessons and gave teachers good feedback. They regularly checked students' work and reviewed the attainment and progress of students. The school's improvement plans addressed the recommendations of the last DSIB inspection and also included putting in place the staged approach to meeting students' special educational needs. Individual action plans varied in quality. The best ones linked the expected improvements in students' learning to the actions which the staff planned to take. This kept an important focus on improving the outcomes for students and also made it easy for staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their planning and implementation.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. A number of parents worked voluntarily in the school on a regular basis to assist teachers in class. This valuable contribution helped to improve their children's learning and ensured that these parents were fully aware of the school's approach to educating their own and others' children. The informal contacts between class teachers and parents, often on a daily basis, ensured that there was very effective communication. Other channels such as the 'class mum', the 'SOS Book' and the school's website helped to keep parents abreast of developments in the

school. Through weekly informal coffee mornings with the Headteacher and the social events organised by the PTA, new families to Dubai were helped to become part of the school community. Parent-teacher meetings and regular reports kept parents informed of their children's progress. Parents were often involved in the frequent visits by students to places of interest in Dubai. Students learned about the needs of others through taking part in fund-raising for local and international charities.

Governance was good. The board of governors had a positive influence on the school and was keen to maintain its character as a relatively small, family, friendly school which provided a broad and rounded education for its students. The board took a strategic view on the future development of the school and advised the owners accordingly. Through regular reports from the Headteacher, the board held senior managers to account for the performance of the school. The membership of the board included parents, staff, and community representatives. The views of stakeholders were gathered through informal means. Systematic surveys had not been carried out.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. The school provided students with an outstanding physical environment. The school operated very smoothly. The grounds were spacious. Classrooms were large and airy. Corridors were wide and open areas were very well used as teaching spaces for small groups. Resources were excellent. Every classroom had an interactive white board. More than eighty computers with an excellent suite of up-to-date software were available to students, including children in the Foundation Stage. A full-time technician ensured that they were working properly. The large library was very well stocked with over 13,000 books and was very well used. Staff were well qualified with a good range of experience.

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	69	19%
	Last year	101	29%
Teachers	6		20%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

A small minority of parents responded to the survey, down from last year's response. About a fifth of the teachers responded to their survey. Parents were generally satisfied with the quality of education available at the school and believed that their children were making good progress in the key subjects. Regarding progress in Arabic as an addition language, parents were less sure that it was good. Parents generally indicated that their children were safe at school and enjoyed their lessons. While a majority of parents believed that the homework given was suitable for their children, a significant few believed it was not. Similarly, a majority of parents indicated that school leaders listened to their opinions, but a few indicated otherwise. Most parents believed that communication by the school was good, but a few dissented from this view. About half the parents did not know if inspection had led to improvements at the school. The few teachers who responded to the survey held positive views about the full range of school provision.

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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