

Rajagiri International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 3

Report issued January 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.

Rajagiri International School 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 Warqa'a, Rajagiri International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to seven years, from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The school offers a curriculum leading to that prescribed by the Central Board of Secondary Education. The school opened in April 2008, and is expanding rapidly. It currently has 17 pre-primary and six primary classes. At the time of the inspection, there were 505 students on roll. The student attendance rate reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Overwhelmingly, the parents were very happy with the school, all agreeing that their children liked attending. Almost all thought that the teaching was good, that their children were treated fairly and were being encouraged to become independent and responsible people. Parents liked the range of activities available to their children and almost all agreed that they were comfortable approaching the school with any questions or complaints. Most felt that the school would act promptly to address any issues. They felt that their children were well cared for and that the teachers were good at explaining what parents could do at home to help with their children's work. Parents were unsure about the quality of the school's links with the local community. All parents were very happy with their children's progress in English and almost all with their progress in mathematics. The majority felt that their children were making good progress in science, but a minority could not comment. Only a minority thought their children were making good progress in Islamic Education and Arabic; the majority were unable to comment.

How well does the school perform overall?

Rajagiri International School was a good school with some outstanding features. Inspectors judged the children's attainment and progress to be acceptable in Islamic Education and Arabic and good in science. In English and mathematics attainment and progress were good in the pre-primary stage and outstanding in the primary stage. For almost all students English was a second language, but by Grade 3 they could write for different purposes, in English, and use dictionaries proficiently. The students' progress in mental calculation was a significant strength. Their behaviour was good and they showed respect for each other and adults in the school. This showed in their positive attitudes to work and their willingness to take on responsibilities. Students were aware of their civic responsibility and demonstrated an understanding and respect for Islam. Younger children could identify local landmarks and older students were aware of the importance of tourism to the economy of Dubai. They were actively involved in conserving energy and recycling materials in the school.

The quality of teaching was good overall. Particularly effective teaching was noted in English and mathematics. Teachers used a range of strategies to maintain pace and involve students in their learning. They created opportunities for students to work together, which helped them to develop communication skills and to express ideas. Students were willing and enthusiastic learners and most seized opportunities to work independently. Procedures for assessment were mostly good, although not carried out consistently across the school. The curriculum was of good quality and designed to meet the needs of the students. From the pre-primary stage onwards the school drew on elements from the curriculum in England adapted to include the best of international practice. A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and effective use of the local community ensured that students extended their learning beyond the classroom. Arrangements for the health and safety of students were good. The premises were clean, regularly inspected and well maintained. Proper and effective provision was made for transportation and for students' health. A strength of the school was the attention paid by the staff to the development of the whole child. Consequently, the staff had good knowledge of the students' academic and personal development. Arrangements for monitoring attendance and punctuality were effective.

The quality of the school's leadership and management was good. The Principal provided effective leadership, which ensured that the school's aim to develop the whole child was delivered at classroom level. Roles within the organisational structure were well defined, with clear lines of accountability. Self-evaluation and development planning were good, but the school's priorities for improvement were expressed too generally for them to be monitored effectively. Very positive relationships existed with parents and links with the community were expanding. School governance was of acceptable quality because the governing body comprised representatives of only a limited range of stakeholders. The staffing, facilities and resources of the school were good and helped the students to make good progress in most subjects.

Key features of the school

- The personalised care that nurtured the growth of the individual;
- The commitment of teachers to the development of the school;
- All the children enjoyed school;
- The creative approach to developing the curriculum;
- The children's outstanding progress in English and mathematics;
- The capacity of the leadership team to ensure further improvement.

Recommendations

- Improve the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Use the outcomes of school monitoring processes, including lesson observations and performance management, more rigorously to improve further the quality of teaching and learning;
- Share good practice among the staff through co-ordinated professional development;
- Further develop the governance of the school to ensure wider representation and involvement by all stakeholders.

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

The students attained acceptable standards and made acceptable progress in Islamic Education. The majority of students showed a good knowledge of the basic facts of Islam, including the biography of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). Most students were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of key religious values and an ability to extend their learning to encompass the contexts of their daily lives. In the first year of study all students could recite the Prophet Hadith confidently and explain the purpose of ablution. In Grades 1 and 2, most students were inspired by a short play about prayer. In all grades the majority of students were able to recite chapters from The Holy Qur'an, but most were unable to do so with sufficient accuracy.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. As students progressed through the school they improved their vocabulary and were able to speak and read new words with acceptable fluency. The majority of students were able to build on prior experience and learn up to eight new words a lesson. For example, having learned words of salutation, students could then use them to greet others in their class. Older students could respond to questions in Arabic but answers were often short, due to their limited vocabulary. The fine motor skills required for Arabic writing were not developed sufficiently in the early years and students did not have sufficient opportunities for extended writing.

Attainment and progress in English were good in the pre-primary and outstanding in the primary years. Most children in the second year of pre-primary understood and spoke English well. They had a good awareness of letter sounds and were able to read and spell simple words. All students in Grades 1 to 3 could speak fluently and confidently. They could express themselves effectively as they had developed a rich vocabulary and the capability to identify detail. Students' attainment in reading and writing was higher than is usual for their ages. In pre-primary, children were making steady progress in learning new words and their uses. Students in Grades 1 to 3 made very good progress in

writing for different purposes and in learning to structure sentences correctly. Students in Grades 2 and 3 were making outstanding progress in becoming independent readers and writers; for example in learning to use dictionaries proficiently.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the pre-primary and outstanding in Grades 1 to 3. The youngest children's knowledge and skill in number were better than expected for their age; they could understand and use the vocabulary for comparing and ordering numbers and could identify, write, count and order numbers up to 50. Students in Grades 1 to 3 demonstrated capability well above the international age related expectations. By Grade 3 they handled numbers up to 10,000 and could apply basic mathematical operations confidently to solve problems involving two-step operations. In the pre-primary classes children were progressing well in their understanding of concepts such as measurement as longer, shorter, heavier and lighter. Outstanding progress was seen in Grades 1 to 3 in the development of number and the number system. The students' progress in using mental calculation strategies to solve number problems was particularly noteworthy.

Attainment and progress in science were good. In the pre-primary classes, children demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of simple scientific ideas. For example, they could identify healthy foods, name parts of a plant, and state key features of the weather during different seasons. Most children were inquisitive and observant and could connect what they had learned in different lessons. They were making good progress in applying their knowledge to real life situations. By the end of Grade 3, the students' attainment was higher than expected of children of that age and they had gained a broad range of scientific knowledge about, for example, living things and digestion. Most were making good progress in observing, explaining and recording their findings, although their progress in making hypotheses and carrying out investigations independently was less marked.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The personal and social development of students was good. They were self-disciplined and exhibited respect for each other and all adults in the school. They enjoyed being in school, had very positive attitudes towards their work and had developed a good rapport with their peers, juniors, and staff. Students made the most of opportunities offered by the school to develop leadership qualities, showing confidence and initiative; older students, for example, conducted school assemblies independently. The student council was making a significant contribution to the school's well-disciplined environment. Students demonstrated good behaviour and attitudes by being punctual for lessons at all times. All students interacted sociably among themselves, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Students had an understanding of Islam and Islamic culture appropriate for their ages. Festivals such as Eid, Ramadan, Diwali and Christmas were studied so that the students were developing international cultural understanding. Students were able to explain Dubai's importance as a tourist destination and its important features, such as the tallest building and the largest fountains in the world. The UAE national anthem was an integral part of school assemblies and was respected by all present in the campus, including the support staff.

Most students were aware of the need to conserve water and electricity. Monitors were appointed in each classroom to ensure that electricity was not wasted. All students could distinguish between the methods of disposal for different waste materials for recycling and they conscientiously segregated plastic cups and cans.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good overall and some lessons were outstanding, particularly in mathematics and English. Almost all teachers made sure that students understood what they had to do and engaged them actively and purposefully. Most teachers knew their subject well and found interesting ways of helping students to understand and develop their skills effectively. They used good questions to stimulate students' thinking and to develop their reasoning ability. They created opportunities for students to work in groups, which helped them build good communication skills and share ideas. Most teachers were well aware of the needs of all their students and paid good attention to their academic development. Lessons were well planned and equal emphasis was given to knowledge, understanding, skill development and the application of learning to real life. Most teachers made creative use of available resources and organised activities to have a positive impact on learning. The few less effective lessons seen were the result of inconsistent management of time and student behaviour.

The quality of learning was good overall. Almost all students enjoyed their lessons and had a positive attitude towards their class activities. Their collaborative skills were developing well as a result of working in pairs and groups. They learned from each other, often applying what they learned to their own experiences. In pre-primary classes, most children gained the confidence to work independently and this good start to their learning was continued in most lessons through the rest of the school. In Grades 1 to 3, many students could work independently, think critically and reason for themselves. They made outstanding progress and were well ahead of their years, particularly in mathematics and English. The quality of learning in English across the school was a major strength. Most students, as early as Grade 2, had learned excellent referencing skills and could use a dictionary with ease. A lot of highly productive learning took place during the activity hours, when students learned a variety of skills including puppet making, singing and swimming.

Assessment was good. Almost all lessons included effective review sessions, in which questions were used skilfully to identify gaps in learning, enabling the teachers to provide the help that students required to move on in their work. During lessons, teachers gave good oral feedback to students so that they knew how well they were learning and what they needed to do to improve their work. Students did not receive such useful feedback on their written work: it was marked regularly, but mostly by means only of ticks and a few words of encouragement, rather than an indication of how it could be improved. Regular formal assessment allowed teachers to amend their lesson planning with, for example, differentiated worksheets. Parents were frequently involved in discussions following tests.

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

The school's curriculum was of good quality. Elements for the pre-primary curriculum had been drawn from the English Foundation Stage design, adapted successfully to provide the necessary range and balance of educational experiences for the youngest children, while ensuring that their learning progressed well from year-to-year. The curriculum had been designed by taking international standards into account and was regularly reviewed to ensure that the students' strengths and talents were further nurtured and their weaknesses remedied. The school carefully evaluated the success of activities in helping students to learn: when they were judged ineffective, they were changed. These regular reviews kept the curriculum well matched to the needs of students of all abilities. The curriculum design allowed the students to make useful links in their learning. Lessons in science, for example, were planned so that students developed their vocabulary and dictionary skills at the same time as learning important scientific facts. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities such as music, art and games enriched the curriculum. Moreover, the school had made highly effective use of the environment and the local community to add meaning to students' learning across different subjects. While studying shapes in Grades 1 and 2, for example, students could relate what they were learning to architecture in the local mosques. The Arabic curriculum was a weaker element: it did not always allow students to build effectively enough on what they already knew and could do.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection of students was good. The school site was secure and the students felt safe. They knew that they could approach teachers if they had any problems and were effectively supervised at all times. All school buses had appropriate safety equipment; arrangements for arrival and departure were well organised and orderly. The school premises were clean, hygienic and regularly maintained; all classrooms were bright, spacious and well ventilated. The fire equipment had been recently installed and evacuation procedures were in place, although a cycle of regular fire drills had only just started. The school was promoting healthy lifestyles effectively through assemblies, lessons and display boards. Students were taught, for example, which foods were sensible choices and necessary for good health. The care taken for students' health was good. A qualified nurse provided first aid and programmes for physical development and immunisation were in place. A policy for child protection arrangements had been drafted.

The quality of support for students was good. A significant strength of the school was the care shown by staff for students and the positive relationships that resulted. Staff provided advice, support and guidance of high quality for all students and those who required it received specialist help. The school had a good knowledge of its students' academic and personal development. Monitoring and tracking students' overall academic progress was done through the regular assessment of students' work and standards were referenced to the English Standard Assessment Tasks. Parents were informed frequently and in detail about their children's overall and academic progress along with any improvement required. The school recorded and monitored attendance and punctuality rigorously.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good. The school's mission to develop the whole child pervaded every aspect of school life; it was observed in assemblies, in the classrooms and in the strong caring relationships that existed between staff and students. As a result all students had positive attitudes to school and learning. Effective management was ensured through a clear division of academic and administrative roles, and both were represented on the leadership team. School leaders were empowered to deliver and develop school plans through the work of their teams, but were accountable to the Principal through line management and regular meetings. Consequently, their leadership had an effective impact upon school life and they demonstrated the capacity to devise practical strategies to secure further improvement.

Although the school had only been open since April 2008 a number of self-evaluation processes were in place. Lesson observation and performance management were established and the views of parents, staff and students had been sought. All teachers were involved in identifying the school's priorities for development through a series of staff meetings. The resulting three-year plan designated responsibilities, completion dates and success criteria and was fit for purpose. There was a need, however, in both evaluation and planning, to break down the desired improvements into smaller and more manageable steps.

The school had strong parental support for its work; almost all parents felt well informed and able to approach the school because of its open door policy. They were regularly updated about their child's progress through reports, the Open House meetings with teachers and the requirement for all teachers to make a 'positive' phone call home once a month. Since its inception a number of useful links had been forged with the community and these were expanding.

Governance of the school was of acceptable quality. The Rajagiri Province of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) managed the school. The Principal was directly responsible to CMI for the school's performance. In addition, three representatives from both CMI and the school owners constituted the governing body of the school. The Principal was held accountable to both parties through meetings and reports. No other stakeholder group was involved in school decision-making. A parent council had recently been created but it was too soon to have made an impact.

The school was fully staffed with suitably qualified teachers, who were deployed appropriately to meet the needs of the curriculum. Moreover, many classes benefited from additional support staff. The premises were bright, attractive and ideal for learning. They included a swimming pool, a large auditorium and audio-visual and computer rooms. The latter ensured adequate provision for developing students' computer skills, but classrooms lacked the necessary information and communication technology equipment to encourage independent learning.

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.

The four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Good	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Outstanding

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Good	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Outstanding

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Pre-Primary Kindergarten	Primary
Health and safety	Good	Good
Quality of support	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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