

# Greenwood International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 11

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.

Greenwood International School was inspected in January 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

## Basic information about the school

Located in Al Muhaisnah, Greenwood International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 11, aged four to 16 years. For the purposes of inspection, reporting is in four phases: Kindergarten, Elementary (Grades 1-4) Middle (Grades 5-8) and High (Grades 9-11). The school follows a US curriculum. The school had suffered a significant turnover in staff in the term prior to inspection, which had impacted negatively on consistency and continuity. The leadership team had worked hard to manage the staffing issues to minimise disruption to students. The school had also managed a period of absence of the Principal well. At the time of the inspection there were 700 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable but during the inspection and over time, it was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were very positive about the school and supportive of its leadership, which they held in high esteem. Almost all agreed that attainment and progress in key subjects were good and believed the school to be striving for the highest academic standards. They were happy with the relationships within the school and their children's behaviour and attitudes toward learning. Many commented on the strong Islamic values encouraged by the school and the welcoming ethos which enabled them to approach the leaders on a range of issues. A few parents had concerns over individual teachers but most indicated teaching was effective. A few parents were concerned about the lack of a final certificate or qualification. When interviewed, parents raised concerns over the lack of

international benchmarking of school examinations. Parents believed their children to be safe and well cared for and their beliefs were supported by the inspection.

## How well does the school perform overall?

Overall the school provided an acceptable quality of education and the inspection identified acceptable progress in response to the previous inspection recommendations. Attainment was acceptable to good in all key subjects, but it varied across grades. Attainment and progress were good in the elementary stage in Arabic, Islamic Education and English and progress and attainment in Islamic Education was also good in the middle school. Elsewhere both attainment and progress were acceptable in all key subjects. Progress was better in the lower part of the school and significant improvements had been made to attainment and progress in Grades 1 to 4. Students' personal and social development was good. Students showed positive attitudes toward school work. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school was generally very good. Students' civic understanding was good. They were responsible and showed respect for and appreciation of Islam. The few non-Muslim students had good knowledge and understanding of and respect and appreciation for Islam. Students' understanding of local traditions and cultures were strengths and were embedded in the ethos of the school. Similarly, students' economic and environmental understanding was good, with many able to discuss Dubai's economic situation and local and global environmental issues in some depth. Even the youngest children displayed good understanding of threats to the environment and how to address issues such as air pollution.

The majority of teaching was acceptable or good, with a few unsatisfactory lessons observed. However, there were too many text book based lessons in which teachers used a limited range of styles and strategies; these did not provide enough challenge to students. Assessment strategies to inform teaching and ensure students knew what to do to improve were inconsistent across the school. The curriculum followed the Ministry of Education minimum requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic and a US curriculum in other subjects. The school had enriched this with a range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities which the students enjoyed immensely but which were still too few in number. The quality of protection for students was good, with staff members taking responsibility to protect students. They knew and adhered to the policies for health, safety and child protection, and evacuation procedures were clear and well rehearsed. The quality of support provided to students was acceptable, overall. Tracking of student progress was in the early stages and not consistently applied across the school. The English department had good tracking systems which resulted in the early identification of vulnerable students who were then supported in their learning. Guidance to students was acceptable and the school was developing more comprehensive careers guidance for the older students.

The Principal was dedicated to improvement and very ably supported by leadership team members, who worked hard to address the issues arising from the previous inspection and manage the school. There were a few outstanding leaders who had significant capacity to support self-evaluation and improvement, notably in the English and Arabic departments. However, a stronger strategic overview of the school was needed to ensure that the good practices evident in some departments were used throughout the school. The school had made very positive attempts to improve the processes for self-evaluation with commendable success. However, many initiatives were new and had not yet become embedded in school life and thus lacked effectiveness. With the combined efforts of the existing leadership team plus the skilled subject leaders, the school had the capacity to improve further. The school delivered well on its promise to parents.

### Key features of the school

- Leaders, owner and staff members dedicated to improving the school;
- Good personal and social development of students;
- Inconsistent assessment, reporting, tracking and data analysis which did not fully inform self-evaluation and improvement planning;
- Attractive premises providing a good quality learning environment;
- Specialist facilities such as laboratories were under-used;
- A lack of appropriate teaching resources, especially in the Kindergarten and elementary, such as sand, water, mathematics equipment, games and puzzles.

### Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching by identifying, sharing and monitoring best practices;
- Develop a school-wide assessment policy, including international benchmarks, to ensure all students know their strengths, weaknesses and how to improve;
- Review the whole curriculum to ensure that there are specific opportunities for students to learn in practical ways, especially in mathematics and sciences;
- Ensure that students have an internationally recognised award or certificate on leaving;
- Establish the planned consultative committee to ensure that all stakeholders contribute fully to providing guidance to the school and ensure accountability.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education in elementary and middle were good and acceptable in the high school. In elementary grades, most students showed good understanding of basic Islamic knowledge. They could read and recite the short chapters from The Holy Qur'an correctly. They could identify the behavior required from a good Muslim and how it should be displayed in his or her daily life. By middle school, most students demonstrated good basic knowledge about Islam. Non-Arabic students could read The Holy Qur'an as well as the Arab students. In high school students' recitation was acceptable. They demonstrated acceptable knowledge of the first history of Islam in Makah and Medina. They could read and discuss Hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. Students in the KG developed good listening and speaking skills. They could identify and read the Arabic alphabet. Most of the students in KG 2 could write their names legibly and accurately. Most of the students in the elementary showed good listening, speaking, and reading skills using classical Arabic. Most of the students in the middle and high schools developed good listening, reading and speaking skills and communicated well. Students could identify and apply the Arabic grammar rules in their speech and reading. However, they still lacked the skills necessary for extended and complex writing.

Attainment in English was acceptable at the KG level, good at the elementary level, and acceptable in middle and high school. Progress was good at the KG and elementary levels, and acceptable at the middle and high school levels. Kindergarten students demonstrated satisfactory attainment in listening and speaking and early reading and writing skills. Progress in learning English was rapid in the early years. Elementary students exhibited good writing skills, composing and writing fluently and accurately. Most elementary students demonstrated strong attainment and progress in listening, speaking, and reading. Middle and high school students composed stories, and essays that reflected acceptable progress and attainment. They read, understood and thoughtfully discussed grade-level texts. However, middle and high school boys typically wrote less well than girls, and their 2009 examination scores were substantially lower than those of the girls.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable overall. In school based tests, attainment was higher in the lower grades but attainment in lessons was in line with age-related expectations. At KG and elementary levels students were developing an age-appropriate understanding of number, calculation and shape. In Grades 6 to 8 they were able to use this knowledge and apply it to algebra, geometry and data analysis. Grade 10 students applied their knowledge to identify polynomial functions. Grade 11 students accurately and confidently solved quadratic equations. However, in most lessons in KG and elementary, students were not developing practical skills. In all phases students were not applying their mathematical knowledge to problem solving or investigative tasks.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in each phase. In the KG children could use a range of tools and resources carefully and work with a range of media. They could talk in simple terms about themselves and their families and they understood how plants grew. By Grade 4, students showed an acceptable level of understanding of how plants feed. They could give examples of how materials can be re-cycled or re-used and how waste can be reduced. By Grade 8 students had an appropriate understanding of the elements of the periodic table and could write and interpret simple chemical formulae. The oldest students demonstrated understanding of complex processes in biology, chemistry and physics. Throughout the school skills in practical investigations were under-developed. When solving problems, students lacked confidence to explain their answers orally.

### How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across all phases. Students were polite, courteous and well behaved. They were committed to the supportive ethos which was at the heart of the school community. Students responded well to requests from their teachers. When given opportunities to work collaboratively they were enthusiastic and provided support and challenge to each other. They were confident, articulate and able to share their viewpoints in sensitive and mature ways. They showed tolerance and understanding of others' experiences and viewpoints. Students' attendance was good, but a few arrived at school too late to attend assembly, although they were on time for lessons.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good across the school. Most of the students were aware of their responsibilities in school and their communities. They had a well established students' council with an active role in the school. Most of the students had a good understanding of the history and changes in Dubai. Almost all students showed a good understanding of Islam and its impact upon their daily lives. Non-Muslims also showed good appreciation of Islamic values. Students had good knowledge of the multi-cultural society in Dubai and saw it as an opportunity to promote good understanding of others.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. Students were aware of the economic development and progress in Dubai. Students discussed the recent economic changes and crises in the world, their impact on Dubai and what might happen in the future. Students showed good knowledge of most environment issues such as the causes of pollution and how to protect the world. Students gave very mature solutions to protect the environment, such as increasing re-cycling everywhere, reducing carbon emissions from cars and factories, and increasing planting. They could explain how this would impact on Dubai and the UAE specifically.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in each school phase. Teaching in the KG classes did not provide children with sufficient opportunities to choose activities for themselves and to learn through practical exploration and play. In the best lessons in the elementary phase, there was a good balance of teacher talk and student activity, and students collaborated and explained their thinking to their classmates. From Grade 5 upwards some lessons were lively, proceeded at a good pace, challenged students' thinking and provided opportunities for them to work in groups and talk about their work. However, the majority of the teaching was characterised by the teacher talking to the class for lengthy periods and relying on the text book as the principal teaching resource. This resulted in a lack of student involvement in lessons and activities which were insufficiently challenging, particularly for the more able students. Teachers often used the class 'Smart boards' effectively to illustrate and explain concepts and processes, but students rarely used them.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable throughout the school. Although children in the KG rarely worked without close teacher direction and had limited opportunities to explore and to find things out for themselves, they had good attitudes to their work. In each of the other phases, students generally demonstrated good attitudes to their work and to each other. When given interesting, relevant and challenging tasks, students responded positively and enthusiastically, especially when they were asked to work together. Enquiry, research and critical thinking skills were developing in the best lessons. Other than in English lessons, where they often received good oral and written feedback, students were often unsure about how well they were doing and how to improve their work.

Assessment was acceptable in each phase of the school. Day-to-day assessment was good in English lessons, but this practice was not evident in other subjects. The school had established formal assessment systems to summarise students' achievements. It used this information to identify students who needed additional support and provide additional classes for them. However, the school had not analysed its assessment information to look at strengths and weaknesses in provision or to help to ensure that the needs of all students were sufficiently well met in lessons, especially the needs of boys and the more able students.

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

The curriculum was acceptable at all levels. The curriculum was based on UAE and US resources. With a few exceptions, the curriculum was soundly planned, broad, and balanced. The curriculum had continuity and progression. It was reviewed and modified in June of each year. The KG curriculum was well designed to prepare English language learners for the Grade 1 programme taught in English. However, the KG curriculum lacked elements of breadth such as experiential development of concepts and measurement skills through play, object manipulation and exploration. Additionally, the KG 1 curriculum as implemented restricted advanced students from progressing beyond basic skills such as counting objects to five and there were no opportunities for KG children to write independently. The curricula in Islamic



Education and Arabic were suitable for most students but lacked activities beyond the textbooks. There were few opportunities for extended, free writing in Arabic in the secondary grades. The English curriculum offered depth and breadth and supported strong development of language skills. The English curriculum in high school lacked provision for the study of complete novels. The mathematics curriculum was too focused upon the textbook. In the early years, mathematics activities were primarily focused on the development of number skills with insufficient attention to investigations, measurement, and problem-solving. The curriculum was not suitably adjusted to meet the needs of various students, including those with special needs, advanced skills, underachieving boys or KG children. Cross-curricular links were addressed through co-ordination of mathematics, science, and English. There were many opportunities for students to learn about the local community. Introductions to the world of work were provided, including a Career Day and participation in work-related exhibitions. An extra-curricular programme was offered to students but the students and their parents indicated that it could be further developed; the inspection team agreed.

### How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of students were good. The school had effective procedures in place for ensuring that students were safe at all times during the school day. Buses were fit for purpose and well supervised, as was access to the school. The school building was well maintained by support staff members who ensured high standards of hygiene. Comprehensive records were kept of fire drills and evacuation procedures. The school nurse maintained detailed medical records for all students and ensured medicines were safely stored. Teachers and support staff worked well together to ensure that students developed healthy eating habits. Child protection procedures were clearly defined and any issues were dealt with sensitively by adults and prefects.

The quality of support for students in the KG was good and it was acceptable elsewhere in the school. In the KG staff focussed closely on the needs of young children to help them settle into school life. Systems for managing behaviour were well established and the rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour were dealt with firmly, fairly, and with clear sanctions. Students were encouraged to reflect on their behaviour. Older students were given guidance in making career choices through visits to careers fairs and exhibitions related to a variety of professions. Whilst relationships across the school were good, a minority of teachers were not fully aware of students' individual needs and how to meet them. The school was beginning to use regular assessments to identify students' progress but there were no robust systems for tracking individuals' progress. Parents were kept informed of students' progress but not enough information was shared about how their work needed to improve. Reports lacked information on personal and social development. Attendance was monitored well by senior teachers but similar systems were not yet in place for monitoring punctuality.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership of the school was acceptable overall and featured some clear strengths. The Principal was dedicated to improvement and was supported by her Vice-Principals. However, a clear understanding of how initiatives affected outcomes was lacking. Teachers shared the leaders' vision but the lack of consistently good practice in all subjects affected students' attainment and progress. A good example of this was early identification of learning needs together with intervention strategies in English, but not in other subjects. By combining the strengths of the whole leadership team, the school was well-placed to improve overall student progress.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The inclusion of all members of the learning community in surveys had provided insight to the schools strengths and weaknesses. The whole-school 'sustained silent reading' initiative had led to improved attainment in reading across the grades. The leaders were not yet analysing attainment data to monitor the impact of such initiatives upon students. Teaching and learning were monitored effectively in a few departments, but whole-school monitoring lacked focus and thus did not always lead to improvement. The monitoring process was not based upon analysis of results. The school had made acceptable progress toward the recommendations from the previous inspection, although learning objectives were still not evaluated effectively or consistently enough to judge progress in lessons.

The school had good partnerships with parents, who were very supportive. The school had actively sought to improve communication with parents and they reported satisfaction with the arrangements for reporting on students' progress. A few thought that report cards should include personal and social development comments. The programme of parent-teacher consultations was very well-received by parents, who appreciated more regular information on their children's achievement. The school had made some good links with the local community whereby students benefitted from educational visits, field trips and events. Older students attended careers fairs and students were involved in local community projects.

Governance of the school was acceptable. Although not yet in place, the school had firm plans for establishing an advisory group representative of the school community and the school context. The owner was dedicated to improving the school and keen to take advice on how to do so. He was responsive to the leaders' needs and committed to parental involvement in decision-making, advice and guidance. Whilst he left the day-to-day running of the school to the leaders, he was a regular visitor and took an interest in all aspects of the school's progress, including students' learning outcomes.

The staffing, facilities and resources at the school were acceptable. There were sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified teachers, but recent staff turnover had resulted in pressure on leaders to provide cover for lessons. Buildings were attractive, accessible, safe, clean and well-kept; and although space was at a premium, teaching rooms allowed for flexible seating arrangements in most cases. The school library was well stocked with attractive books appropriate to the ages of the students, which led to a strong desire among students to read for pleasure. Specialist facilities such as the gymnasium and science laboratories were under-used. Students' use of ICT across subjects was lacking. Several classes had interactive whiteboards, which were used by a few teachers but not by students. The lack of basic learning resources such as mathematics equipment, games, puzzles, sand, water and visual aids impeded learning, especially in the KG and elementary phases.

## 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       |
| Attainment   | Not applicable | Good       | Good   | Acceptable |
| Progress over time   | Not applicable | Good       | Good   | Acceptable |

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

| How good are the leadership and management of the school? |            |
|---|------------|
| Quality of leadership                                     | Acceptable |
| Self-evaluation and improvement planning                  | Acceptable |
| Partnerships with parents and the community               | Good       |
| Governance  | Acceptable |
| Staffing, facilities and resources                        | Acceptable |

| How well does the school perform overall? |
|---|
| Acceptable                                |

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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