

Dubai International Academy Inspection Report Kindergarten to Year 13

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	5
How good are the teaching and learning?	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	7
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	7
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	8
Summary of inspection judgements	10
Next Steps.....	14
How to contact us.....	14

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Dubai International Academy 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 Emirates Hills, Dubai International Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,791 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. The responses indicated that almost all parents were satisfied with most aspects of the work of the school. A minority of parents expressed concerns about their children's progress in Arabic. Similar proportions felt they were not consulted enough about decisions which affect their children or provided with enough help in supporting their children's school work at home.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai International Academy provided a good quality of education for students. Attainment and progress in English were good across the school, and good in Islamic Education and Arabic in Years 7 to 13. Students were progressing well and reaching good standards in science in the KG and Years 12 and 13; their progress and attainment were acceptable in other years. In mathematics, students were making acceptable progress and reaching acceptable standards across the school. Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour. Relationships among staff and students were outstanding, with adults and children from a wide range of cultural backgrounds getting along extremely well. Students had good awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and they showed good understanding of and a respect for Islam. Students' economic and environmental understanding was good and they had initiated several recycling schemes.

The quality of teaching and learning in the KG, the primary and diploma programmes was good. Here teachers generally planned well to meet the needs of all abilities. Practical activities in the younger classes sustained students' interest and contributed to their understanding. The teaching was generally lively and lessons moved at a brisk pace. Teaching in the middle years was acceptable, overall. The specialist teaching was good and often highly effective but lessons in mathematics and science did not always take sufficient account of students' prior attainment. As a result, students often lacked motivation. The quality of learning in this phase was acceptable. In the upper grades, learning was good and teachers were able to capitalise on students' ability to work independently and co-operatively. Students were highly reflective, developing good research skills through exploring ideas, sharing information and presenting their findings, often using their effective computer skills in the process. Procedures for assessing the students' work were mostly good. Teachers kept detailed information of individual progress. They generally provided good feedback during lessons and through their marking and students were regularly involved in assessing their own work. The curriculum was good in the KG and outstanding in the other phases. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities contributed significantly to students' learning and personal development. The arrangements for the health and safety of the students were outstanding. All staff took their duty of care very seriously, and health and safety policies and procedures were followed with precision. The buildings and facilities were safe, secure and well-maintained. Healthy lifestyles were promoted, and child protection procedures were well-established.

The quality of leadership and management of the school was good. Senior leaders, with the support of the board and advisory council, shared a common determination to drive improvements and successfully ensured that the school fulfilled its promise to parents. Very good progress had been made since the previous inspection.

Key features of the school

- Excellent relationships through the school contributed to the exemplary behaviour and attitudes of all students;
- The outstanding curriculum which ensured a wide range of learning experiences supported effectively by technology and the extra-curricular programme;
- Outstanding relationships with parents and the local community;
- Outstanding arrangements for protection and support of students;
- Inconsistencies in the teaching and learning in the middle years programme;

Recommendations

- Accelerate progress in mathematics and science by ensuring that students at all levels are fully challenged;
- Identify best practice across the middle years so that all teachers adopt the most effective strategies in line with IB methods.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in Years 7 to 13, and acceptable in the lower grades. Most students in the higher grades memorised verses of The Holy Qur'an with few errors. They could discuss some of the Islamic principles such as the principles of marriage and causes and objectives of the battles in the early history of Islam. In the lower grades, the majority of the students memorised short chapters of The Holy Qur'an with few errors. The majority of students showed good understanding of the benefits of fasting. They knew the main events in Prophet's life, and they could perform prayers.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in Years 7 to 13 and acceptable in the lower grades. Most students studied Arabic as an additional language and in all grades they could speak common day-to-day phrases. In the higher grades, most could recognise and compose simple sentences and they could read paragraphs with few errors. In the lower grades, the majority of students could read and write words and simple phrases with few errors. The majority of Arabic students could write simple texts with good spelling; they could also read words, phrase and short paragraphs accurately and confidently.

Attainment and progress in English across the school were good. In the KG children made good progress in reading, writing and speaking and acceptable progress in listening. In Years 1 to 6, students were good in listening, speaking, reading and writing with students in Years 4 to 6 exceeding expected reading levels. They were able to express their understanding and their ideas clearly in their speech and in written sentences. Older students had a good capacity for literary analysis in poetry and plays. They used literary terms appropriately to add depth to their writing. Students on the diploma programme could interpret criteria, plan and complete their work and engage in peer and self-assessment.

Attainment and progress in mathematics across the school were acceptable. Numeracy skills developed satisfactorily throughout the KG and the elementary school. By Year 5, the highest attaining students' concept of shape was good. Students' abilities to collect and present data developed well. Year 6 students commented on the usefulness, accuracy and relevance of different graphs. Middle school students solved algebraic equations and recognised congruence in triangles. They also developed skills in using matrices and in geometry. In the Diploma years, higher level students made better progress and used computer graphics well to solve problems. However, lower attaining students demonstrated weak skills in basic numeracy.

Progress and attainment in science were good in the KG and the Diploma Programme and acceptable in the Primary and Middle years. A majority of KG children had good observation skills. They described well a simple experiment that demonstrated how different parts of the tongue were used for various tastes. Students in Years 1 to 6 gathered information well and had broad knowledge of topics such as animals, habitats and flight. Their understandings of the scientific method were underdeveloped. Middle Years students had acceptable knowledge of scientific topics. Their co-operative skills for undertaking experiments were well-developed but aspects of scientific inquiry were limited. Diploma students thought critically about their work and had good understanding of the structure of an atom and chemical processes such as photosynthesis.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The students' personal and social development was good overall. The attitudes and behaviour of the students was outstanding, as evident from the relationships between the students and staff, students' maturity, and their keenness to talk positively about their school. Classes began on time with very few latecomers. There was a high level of involvement in student-led initiatives and the school promoted student-organised activities. The highly popular Model United Nations was a prominent example. Students exhibited high levels of self-discipline, even in the absence of adult supervision. Attendance was at an acceptable level.

Through the work of the student council and the prefect system, students took on responsibilities, developed personally and honed their leadership qualities. They appreciated the contributions that they could make to the wider community and were proactive in this respect. Non-Muslim students had a basic understanding and appreciation of Islam. Motivational displays throughout the school successfully engaged students in meaningful reflection and emphasised value placed on the UAE national identity.

Students had good age-appropriate understandings of the features, history and development of Dubai and were aware of the recent challenges facing the emirate. The younger students had an appropriate knowledge of Dubai's place in the world and its economic activity. This understanding deepened the longer that they spent as members of the community. The students were mindful of the need to protect the environment and use resources wisely. There was much evidence of their re-cycling and other environmentally friendly activities. They were very proud of their school, took care of the building and used resources sensibly.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The teaching was acceptable in Years 7 to 11 and good in the rest of the school. Methods promoted by the Primary Years Programme (PYP) were apparent in the imaginative lessons planned by the teachers. These were enjoyed by the students, who were exposed to a range of inquiry-based learning opportunities. In the KG, the lessons were fun and well directed. In the Middle Years Programme (MYP), where teaching was acceptable, there was too much teacher direction and insufficient student enquiry and research. Good use of practical work in the sciences and English in Years 12 and 13, coupled with readily available on-line resources, enhanced the students' learning at the Diploma stage. Throughout the school, although there were examples of outstanding teaching, there were also lessons that were unsatisfactory. In the upper part of the school almost all teachers demonstrated that they had secure subject knowledge.

Learning was good except in Years 7 to 11, where it was acceptable. In the KG interaction between the children was encouraged and this collaboration helped their learning. The PYP students frequently demonstrated responsibility for their own learning through independent research. Learning across the school had improved as a result of a determination by the staff to implement recommendations from the last inspection report. While students in the MYP generally showed positive attitudes to their learning, they were not given as much opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning in the key subjects. Consequently, learning in the MYP was judged to be acceptable. However, some very good work, resulting in good learning, was observed in subjects such drama and music.

Assessment had improved throughout the whole school since the last inspection and was judged to be good, except in Years 7 to 11 where it was acceptable. There had been a significant effort to upgrade record-keeping and to make use of assessment information to benefit teaching and learning. This had resulted in the teachers having better knowledge of their students' strengths and weaknesses. A variety of assessment techniques were in use, including peer appraisal. Standardised testing had been introduced to help staff compare the students' attainment with that of other schools. Students were given useful feedback based on their teachers' marking of assignments and those who needed extra support were identified and their subsequent progress tracked. There had been a very significant reduction of the number of children in the MYP who were previously falling behind in their studies. High achievers had been identified and were given further challenges. In some cases, they were given special responsibilities requiring their particular talents.

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

The curriculum was good in the KG and outstanding from Years 1 to 13. The school's vision and the philosophy of the IB provided a strong rationale for balanced curriculum development, with a broad range of subjects and considerable attention paid to personal development. However, library skill training was underdeveloped in the higher grades of the school. The academic programme was complemented well by community in-service and Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) programmes. Most curriculum units were reviewed annually. All subjects had clear scope and sequences and there was consistent implementation of active learning throughout most of the school. Steps were being taken to reduce the gaps between programmes. Curricular progression did not always pay sufficient regard to different ability levels. In the KG, for example, sounds and letters were taught in sequence, without due regard for children's different levels of competence. Cross-curricular links were widespread throughout the school. Connections between subjects in the PYP stage were widespread and integral to the programme. Students in the MYP had one cross-curricular project per year group, and a UAE National Week project had developed many interdisciplinary links. Technology was integrated well to support learning throughout the school. There was a broad and varied programme of extra-curricular activities, which had outstanding participation from students at all stages. There were several links with other schools in the area to support professional and curricular development. There was comprehensive programme of field trips and community links for each grade level. The CAS and community in-service programmes effectively supported the students' involvement in the local community and environment.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provisions for the health and safety of students in school and on school transport were outstanding. Safety procedures were routine in practical classes and students' arrivals and departures were well supervised. Students felt safe in the school. The school premises were very well maintained. Staff members provided very good supervision at all times. Health care was outstanding and records were kept securely. A full-time doctor and two nurses maintained a well equipped clinic and carried out regular health checks. Healthy lifestyles were encouraged through the curriculum. Fire drills were held regularly and students knew the emergency evacuation procedures. Teachers and students were well aware of child protection procedures.

The quality of the support was outstanding in the KG, MYP and in Years 12 and 13, and good in the MYP. Staff-student relationships were outstanding. The school maintained much data on students' academic progress and personal development. Very good tracking systems meant teachers knew how well students were progressing. However, this information was used less effectively to show MYP students how well they were doing and how to improve. Students at risk of falling behind were identified early and effective provision was made, involving parents as appropriate. Several students were involved in peer support through a 'buddy' system and

this had a positive effect on learning and personal development. The school successfully recognised a wide range of qualities in students, which were rewarded and celebrated. Good support was provided to help students make higher education choices. The clear discipline policy had a positive effect upon expectations. However, although the school did all it could to promote high attendance, the figure was only acceptable over the academic year, mainly as a result of families taking extended holidays.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good; senior staff knew the school well. There was a consistent drive for improvement underpinned by a determination to ensure that the school fulfilled its promise to parents. Staff, students and parents shared the same ambition, expressed succinctly in the school's motto '*Dream, Inspire, Achieve*'. Very good headway had been made in addressing the recommendations of the last inspection report and the school had moved forward in several key areas. Particularly good progress had been made in establishing a system of self-review, involving stakeholders in the process. This enabled school leaders to identify strengths and prioritise areas for development. Regular monitoring of lessons allowed senior staff member to gain insights into the effective teaching methods that could be shared, as well as where further training was needed.

A systematic process of self-evaluation involved discussions between many groups across the school. Central to this process was a thorough review of the school's mission statement. Staff and parents had met to share their views and some of the major changes had been those suggested by the students themselves. Development planning was well founded and detailed, setting out how progress was to be monitored, but some initiatives lacked precise success criteria. An increasing amount of assessment data enabled the school to track students' progress, although the analysis of this information to set the next steps in planning was at an early stage.

The partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding and parents felt extremely welcome in school. Individual parents provided valuable, voluntary help and a thriving parents' association played a significant role in the life of the school. A well-produced and accessible website included much useful information. The school was a focal point for many community activities. The school was a founding member of the Dubai Coast Conference, hosting inter-school sporting competitions since its inception. Local business provided sponsorship, such as funding for the annual 'Di@tech' technology fair and guest speakers.

Governance was good. The roles and responsibilities of the board, the recently formed advisory council, the Director and senior management team were clearly defined and understood by all parties. Board members were passionate about the mission of the school to provide a holistic, international education. Members of the academic council were representative of the stakeholders, including staff and parents. Contributions from students were welcomed and received through links with the student council. The advisory council was newly formed, but members demonstrated secure understanding of how they could contribute to accountability, self-evaluation and development planning.

There was a good range of expertise and experience across the teaching staff, including subject specialists. Suitable qualified teachers supported students with English as an additional language and those with learning needs. There was extensive classroom support by teaching assistants and teachers' aides. The premises and facilities were clean, bright and attractive. The school was very well equipped with modern technology, including high specification computers, data projectors and robotics. The facilities for sports were extremely good. The library was well staffed and had a good range of resources for younger students. Although resources for older students, including careers information, were adequate, they were somewhat limited.

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:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Attainment	Not applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Attainment	Not applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
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:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Curriculum quality	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Years 1-6	Years 7 -11	Years 12 - 13
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding

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	Outstanding
Governance	Good
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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